

Culture Card: The Beijing Olympics and the Politics of Mega-Events

By Helen Li

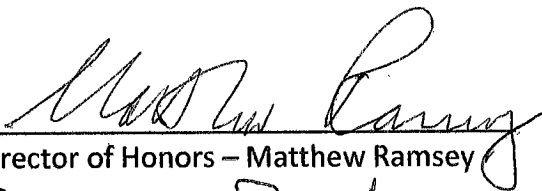
Culture Card: The Beijing Olympics and the Politics of Mega-Events


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On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on April 26, 2013
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Introduction

In 1894, Baron Pierre de Coubertin began his speech at the Congress on the Revival of the Olympics Games by saying, “I raise my glass to the Olympic idea, which has crossed the mists of time like a ray from the all-powerful sun and is returning to shine on the gateway to the twentieth century with the gleam of joyful hope.”¹ Considered the father of the modern Olympics, Coubertin spearheaded the movement to bring the Ancient Greek Games back to the contemporary world. The Congress also saw the establishment of the International Olympic Committee and the beginning of preparations for the 1896 Games, to be held in Athens, Greece. Beginning with a modest 14 nations and 241 athletes to compete in 43 events², the Olympics grew to 204 nations and 10,500 athletes in London in 2012³, truly a mega-event.

Defined as a large-scale event with global publicity and far-reaching impacts, the concept of a mega-event became integral to the globalization narrative with Maurice Roche’s 2000 work *Mega-events and Modernity*. Roche writes about the potential for mega-events to “project the city to the world and... re-position the city in the world of global inter-city comparisons and economic competition.”⁴ Globalization, the process of extending social relations across world space, has generated increasing interest by scholars in all fields. Gone were the days when the Olympics were events only for the individual tourist. With the advent of television broadcasts, mega-events became international spectacles and could play an increasingly manipulative role in

¹ Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympism: Selected Writings*. Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000, 532.

² Official Website of the Olympic Movement, “Athens 1896,” Olympic.org, <http://www.olympic.org/athens-1896-summer-olympics> (accessed November 11, 2012).

³ Official Website of the Olympic Movement, “London 2012,” Olympic.org, <http://www.olympic.org/london-2012-summer-olympics> (accessed November 11, 2012).

⁴ Maurice Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* London: Routledge, 2000, 10.

global relationships. Olympic Planning Committees could count on a world-wide viewing of the show they chose to put on and needed to consider a wide variety of audience members with multiple backgrounds and pre-established impressions.

For many host countries, the Opening Ceremony broadcast would be the first or most significant look at the nation overall. The study of international mega-events, despite their one-off nature, can prove particularly fruitful in understanding transitions and movements in culture and politics. In many cases, expos and Olympic Games (the latter more so because of increased broadcasting) are the primary vehicle through which a nation or city's image is translated to the outside world, making mega-events an important object of study. Many people tend to base their conceptions and generalizations about an unknown arena around a fast, high-impact, highly filtered mega-event. This phenomenon provides a unique opportunity for nations to put their best foot forward. Indeed, the potential for manipulation by host countries and other bodies of power presents a fascinating topic for study. Despite this significance, mega-events have drawn relatively little research attention. Writing again in 2006, Roche asserts, "Reference to international sport and the Olympics is notably absent from many major analyses of globalization and of global culture."⁵

Mega-events are powerful image-making tools, creating a frame of reference around which a nation, culture, political system, and so on, can be judged in past, present, and future narratives. As Roche asserts, "International and supranational cultural events helped to create a fragile space, something of an 'international public culture', in which 'official' versions.... were asserted and recognized in an international 'world of nations'." These "official versions", both of a country's history and potential, are particularly important factors to consider in evaluating the

⁵ Maurice Roche, 'Mega-events and modernity revisited: globalization and the case of the Olympics,' *Sociological Review* (2006): 29.

history of mega-events such as the Olympic Games. In the span of sixteen or so days, how does a National Olympic Committee represent itself to the rest of the world community? How does this representation change prior associations as well as influence future assumptions?

No Olympics organizer works with a blank slate. And neither is it a predictable one. Utilizing the power of mega-events is fraught with the danger of negative representation. Just as host countries can benefit greatly from a successful Games, so can they suffer from an unsuccessful one. The event has always been marketed as a world gathering meant to benefit international cohesion. And yet the politics of the Olympic Games always lurk in the shadows of the usual pomp and circumstance. How individual regions face their political demons will be a central theme in this work.

At the end of the 1912 Stockholm Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin looked to the future and expressed his dearest wishes for the 1916 Games. “May it contribute like its illustrious predecessors to the general welfare and to the betterment of humanity! May it be prepared in the fruitful labor of peaceful times. May it be celebrated, when the day comes, by all the peoples of the world in gladness and concord!”⁶ Four years later, the Games in Berlin would be canceled in the midst of World War I. Striving for excellence, demonstrating respect, and celebrating friendship are the three Olympic values as proposed by the International Olympics Committee (IOC).⁷ Yet, one can look to the 1980 Moscow Olympics boycotted by the United States of America, or the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics boycotted by the Soviet Union to see that the Olympic values are better on paper than in practice. Indeed, the history of the modern Olympic Games has been fraught with political tension and economic rivalries. From the 1936 Berlin

⁶ Coubertin, *Olympism*, 448.

⁷ Olympic Museum, “Hope: When Sport Can Change the World,” http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Olympic_Museum/Education/DPHOPE/DP_Hope_EN_web.pdf (Accessed May 8, 2012), 3.

Games, where Hitler used sports to demonstrate the power of Nazi Germany, to the 1972 Munich Games, where a Palestinian terrorist group kidnapped and killed eleven Israeli athletes, political agendas have often interfered with an event dedicated to international harmony. Many assert that, during the Olympic Games, “the usual political and economic structures that divide the world are supposed to be forgotten.”⁸ The unfortunate reality is that politics often sneak into the arena, turning sports into what George Orwell famously declared to be, “war minus the shooting.”⁹

This element of international sports presents itself as a problem to all participating nations, but none more so than the host country. For two weeks, it receives the world’s undivided attention, as journalists, commentators, and tourists arrive, intending to pick apart every element of the country’s politics, culture, and economy. Mega events such as the Olympics can be a great boon for nations hoping to enter or solidify their place in the global community, but it can also be a great detriment should increased international attention turn negative. Host countries need to keep the ugly elements of their past and present from manifesting into sour impressions. In many ways, the Olympics represent a nation’s one and only chance to reach certain demographics and showcase its national vision. For Asian host nations, newly emerging onto the international scene, the pressure to present their best face and to host an Olympics free from political controversy is even greater.

Asian countries have hosted the Summer Olympic Games a total of three times: Tokyo 1964, Seoul 1988, and Beijing 2008. Japan in the 60s, South Korea in the 80s, and China in the

⁸ Limin Liang, ‘Framing China and the world through the Olympics opening ceremonies, 1984-2008’, in *Documenting the Beijing Olympics*, ed. D. Martinez (London: Routledge, 2011), 75.

⁹ George Orwell, "The Sporting Spirit" quoted in W. Tsutsui, ‘Introduction’, in *The East Asian Olympiads, 1934-2008: building bodies and nations in Japan, Korea, and China*, eds. W. Tsutsui and M. Baskett (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2011), 8.

new millennium experienced periods of tremendous economic growth. The Olympics provided them with the chance to parade a newfound modernity and prosperity in front of an international audience. At the same time, each country faced immense pressure to fulfill the history of exoticism expected by their spectators and viewers.

In this context, John Urry's *Tourist Gaze* and Edward Said's *Orientalism* are particularly important frameworks to consider during the East Asian Games.¹⁰ The Tourist Gaze is the idea that tourists view a foreign nation with certain prepackaged stereotypes and expect to see those stereotypes fulfilled. Orientalism is the concept of a Western-imposed archetype on Asia as weak, feminine, and backward. Viewers of the East Asian Olympics wished to see the exoticism found in National Geographic magazines. Organizers of the East Asian Olympics wanted to avoid centuries-old visions of their modernizing countries, yet had to in some part fulfill the Tourist Gaze. The back-and-forth push and pull of these influences and considerations comes sharply into focus in the present study.

In addition, the organization of the East Asian Games was affected by the need to play down the host countries' recent, particularly virulent political issues. From assassinations to environmental concerns, Tokyo, Seoul, and Beijing each had to contend with unfortunate current events marring their political landscapes. Hosting a mega-event such as the Olympics posed the danger of humiliation and even greater stigmatization should politics play too great a hand in the proceedings. For its Olympics to be a success, each country needed to accentuate its new economic achievements, while presenting its political themes in muted ways and addressing the cultural expectations of outsiders.

¹⁰ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*. London: SAGE Publications, 2011. Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

One way of achieving such a result was through the concept of “invented traditions.” Developed by Eric Hobsbawm, the concept lays forth a context with which to evaluate many of the cultural icons long considered timeless.¹¹ Nations have a lengthy practice of distinguishing themselves based on “ancient” history that is in fact very recently conceived. With the mega-event, an entirely new country can be placed onto the television screen; host nations can, in essence, “invent” their own international conception through the vehicle of the Olympic Games. The East Asian Olympiads had a particular advantage in the relative strangeness of their cultures compared to the non-Eastern world. They were able to mold and shape many of their “traditions” directly for international consumption.

This thesis analyzes how the East Asian Olympic hosts attempted to balance all the important factors that could potentially detract from as well as contribute to a successful Games. The first chapter, “Forces at Play,” discusses the differences between eastern and non-eastern hosts of the Olympics through case studies of Tokyo 1964, Seoul 1988, Munich 1972, and Moscow 1980. An examination of the contrasting goals and obstacles of these roughly-delineated parties leads to the establishment of an “Eastern Model” for hosting a mega-event of Olympic caliber. The Eastern Model involves three parts: 1. International prestige as the ultimate goal, 2. Obstacles of political instability, Orientalism, and the Tourist Gaze, and 3. The advantage of exoticism. The second chapter, “Making the Play,” focuses on the Beijing 2008 Games as the primary topic of study. In this chapter, the theory of “Two Chinas” is forwarded in order to demonstrate the Beijing Organizing Committee’s adherence to the “Eastern Model.” China, in the international consciousness, is sometimes represented as two entirely different

¹¹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions”, in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

spheres. Communist China faces many negative associations, whilst Historical China contains benign and sterile connotations. Special attention in this chapter is dedicated to China's position of power vis-à-vis the international community, heightening the importance of the Beijing Olympics as Roche's "symbolism of authority."¹² The third chapter, "Photo Finish?" examines the actual staging of the Games. The chapter focuses primarily on the Opening Ceremony, perhaps the most visual element of each Olympics, as well as the most controversial stories during the event.

This analysis of the East Asian Games and the "Eastern Model" illuminates the cultural image-making quality of the Olympic Games. Through the event, political leaders have "the opportunity to reshape the city's desired image."¹³ This reshaping plays an important role in the concept of soft power. A term coined by Joseph Nye, "soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others... It is leading by example and attracting others to do what you want."¹⁴ The Beijing Olympic Games represented a direct attempt by the Beijing Olympic Committee to influence the soft power capacity of China. By following the Eastern Model, the organizers could present a modern, unique, and open nation, one that could be trusted to lead and help shape the world.

¹² Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity*, 228.

¹³ Paul Close, David Askew, and Xu Xin, *The Beijing Olympiad: The Political Economy of a Sporting Mega-event*. Routledge: New York, NY, 2007.

¹⁴ Joshua Kurlantzuk, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World*. Grand Rapids: Yale University Press, 2007, 5.

Chapter One

“The Seoul Olympics, a festival for the harmony of mankind where both East and West joined together for the first time in 12 years, will thus go down in Olympic history as the biggest ever Olympiad and one that helped bring the Olympic Movement firmly back on track.”¹⁵

Forces at Play

The ostensible goal of the Olympic Games has remained unchanged since the revival of the movement in 1896: “to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”¹⁶ This lofty language has come to define the Olympic spirit, one dedicated to creating a better world for all citizens. Though the motivational ethos behind the Olympic Charter has kept its principles throughout the years, each Olympic Games has had its own flavor, its own character, and its own goals that ride the undercurrent of Olympic idealism. All the calls for world harmony, trumpeted by officials and diplomats across the globe, go hand-in-hand with planning committees that labor over cost benefit analyses, trying to determine how much the Games will benefit their country.

Though many deride the exploitation of the pure Olympic spirit for national gain, such an assessment takes an unnecessarily idealistic view. This chapter is intended not to condemn these backroom sessions; they are to be recognized as realistic and reasonable. Rather, this chapter will investigate the dynamic nature of the Olympic Games. Each host country approaches its monumental task with differing sets of goals, obstacles, and strategies. These contrasts make each Olympiad unique, as both internal and external forces come into play. Perhaps, one would

¹⁵ Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee. *Official Report: Organization and Planning Volume 1*. Seoul, Korea: Korea Textbook Co., Ltd., 1989, 31.

¹⁶ International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter,” Olympic.org, http://www.olympic.org/Documents/olympic_charter_en.pdf (accessed August 12, 2012).

consider any attempt to categorize multiple Games under one heading to be foolhardy. The Olympics naturally resist being placed into collective narratives. This chapter intends to do just that by investigating the motivations and obstacles that separate the East Asian host countries from their non-Eastern counterparts. No such generalized theory will ever be complete, nor should it be, but perhaps 'Forces at Play' will begin a dialogue on the differences, some internalized, by those on either side of the divide.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the multitude of motivations for hosting the Olympic Games, placing them under the general umbrellas of financial and political goals. The chapter then proceeds to illustrate the major obstacles facing host countries, the East Asian Olympiads in particular. Finally, using the concept of Judo ("the gentle way"), the chapter demonstrates the contrasting techniques available to East Asian countries compared to their non-Eastern counterparts. This chapter focuses primarily on Tokyo 1964 and Seoul 1988, in order to create an Eastern Model and pave the way for a deeper discussion of Beijing 2008.

Getting Gold

In 2008, London mayor Boris Johnson countered claims that London's bid for the 2012 Olympics was, in hindsight, a mistake. According to Johnson, "This unprecedented level of investment will deliver iconic buildings, major improvements in transport infrastructure, crucial housing and beautiful parks – all of this in a part of the city neglected for decades."¹⁷ The mayor's words reflect an inherent goal that has accompanied every modern Olympiad. The public support and investment generated by the mega-event provide the opportunity for economic growth and infrastructural improvement. (Note that opportunity does not always lead

¹⁷ Simon Hart, "London is fortunate to be hosting Olympics, says Mayor Boris Johnson," *Daily Telegraph*, November 13, 2008.

to the intended results.) Indeed, without the impetus created by absolute deadlines, media interest, and the influx of monetary resources that accompany the Olympic Games, one might imagine that many urban renewal projects would never have come to fruition.¹⁸

Since the 1960 Games in Rome, host countries have come to see the Olympics as potential investment opportunities. Prior to 1960, such mega-events were rarely touted as profit-generating measures.¹⁹ With the advent of international broadcasts, increased international tourism, and commercialization, however, hosting the Olympics Games could lead to new financial advantages in the world market. Using the push given by the 1972 Summer Games, the city of Munich constructed a new north-south subway network, 145 miles of expressways, and new underground parking near the Olympic sites.²⁰ Barcelona's 1992 Games saw only 17 percent of the monetary allotment given to the actual sporting events, with the remainder devoted to urban renewal projects.²¹ In 1984, Los Angeles made an unprecedented \$225 million profit, demonstrating the vast economic potential of hosting the Olympic Games.²² Even without a profit, hosting the Olympics could provide much needed building and rebuilding in the world's

¹⁸ Stephen Essex and Brian Chalkley. "Olympic Games: catalyst of urban change," *Leisure Studies* 17 (1998): 204.

¹⁹ John R. Gold and Margaret R. Gold, "Introduction," in *Olympics Cities: City Agendas, Planning, and the World's Games, 1896-2016*, ed. John Gold and Margaret Gold (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 3.

²⁰ Munich Olympic Organizing Committee. *Die Spiele*. Munich: pro Sport München, 1972. 324-330.

²¹ Gold and Gold, "Introduction," 3.

²² John R. Gold and Margaret R. Gold, "From A to B: The Summer Olympics, 1896-2008," in *Olympics Cities: City Agendas, Planning, and the World's Games, 1896-2016*, ed. John Gold and Margaret Gold (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 43.

largest cities; in addition, the international attention could generate future tourism, one of the fastest growing elements of the world economy.²³

The primary motivation in hosting the Olympic Games in non-Eastern countries can thus be linked to its financial benefits. If one, however, turns to the East Asian Olympiads, a different narrative emerges. As John and Margaret Gold state, “Seoul’s decision to seek the 1988 Games was less inspired by the thoughts of financial benefit – which had yet to re-emerge when the city gained the nomination in 1981 – than by the success of Tokyo 1964, which the Koreans believed had altered perceptions of the Japanese and helped Japan join the ranks of the developed world in the cultural, social, diplomatic and economic fields.”²⁴ Though Tokyo and Seoul achieved great infrastructural growth through the Olympic Games (one need only look to the *shinkansen* bullet train that has now come to epitomize Japan’s economy), the East Asian Olympics were mainly a “coming-out” party for Japan and South Korea. A traditionally Western-driven phenomenon, the Olympics and the sports tradition were relatively new conventions in East Asia. Thus, the aims of Tokyo in 1964 and Seoul in 1988 were primarily political ones. As countries little known or understood beyond their wartime activities, Japan and South Korea could use the Olympics as vehicles of demystifying the country, elevating their standing in the international community, as well as increasing their prestige and strength both inside and outside the country.

Though non-Eastern countries had politicized aims as well in hosting the Olympics (notably Berlin 1936), none has had as much at stake in presenting a strong face to the world; none used the Olympic Games as their *introduction* into the international community. For Japan and South Korea, becoming the host country would be their first major moment in the world

²³ Charles H. Heying, Matthew J. Burbank, and Greg Andranovich, “World Class: Using the Olympics to Shape and Brand the American Metropolis,” in *Tourism, Culture, and Regeneration*, ed. Melanie K. Smith (Cambridge, MA: CAB International, 2006), 102.

²⁴ Gold and Gold, “From A to B,” 43.

spotlight unconnected to World War II or the Korean War. Enormous pressure was placed on their National Olympic Committees to leave a deep impression and legacy through the staging of the Games. During the preparations for the Tokyo Games, media outlets even designated the event a *seisen* (sacred war), meant to comment on the fervor with which Japan threw itself into establishing a foothold in the world arena.²⁵ Though financial motivations were of course important in staging such an immense event, the political goals of the East Asian Olympiads necessarily led to different mindsets and manifestations of their Games.

Sprints and Hurdles

The build of athletes and their subsequent training regimes differ depending on whether their goal is a gold in the 400 meter or the 100 meter sprint. The same can be said for athletes running sprints or hurdles.²⁶ Just as the eventual goals differ between the two camps, so too do the obstacles each group must face. Thus, like Olympic hurdlers, the preparation for Eastern Olympics necessarily diverges from their non-Eastern counterparts. Three primary difficulties confronted the Tokyo and Seoul Olympic Games, each of which required different methods of defense on part of the Olympic Planning Committees: political tensions, Orientalism, and the Tourist Gaze.

The first of these lies in the political situations of each Olympiad. Volatile tensions within the countries threatened the stability of the ruling parties, and political stigmas affected their reputations abroad. Tokyo in 1964 still felt many consequences of Japan's World War II loss. Following defeat, Japan fell under American occupation, and remained tied to their

²⁵ Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, 143.

²⁶ Training for hurdlers is focused on hip flexors, calves, and lower back. Training for sprinters is focused on hamstrings, abdominals, and obliques. See livestrong.com for more athlete spotlights.

American counterparts until the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Even then, tendrils of American control remained in the country, as the simultaneous US-Japan Security Pact gave the US military great leeway in Japan, while at the same time providing no responsibility to protect Japan in event of an attack. This fact, coupled with the stipulation in the Japanese Constitution that made war illegal, led to a very lopsided relationship between the two countries.²⁷ Though significant changes were made to the treaty in 1960, Japan was still defined primarily as a US military outpost. Enraged by Japan's continued inferior position, thousands of protesters gathered on June 4, 1960 in Tokyo to protest Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, surrounding his home, the Diet building, and the American Embassy. Millions across the country likewise participated in condemning the national government.²⁸ The political atmosphere in the nation was marked by historical tension; participant Shimizu Ikutarō commented, "Looking back, everybody's past was filled with anxiety, fear, rage, hunger, and humiliation."²⁹ Such were the dangers that the Olympic Planning Committee needed to steer through and keep from the international gaze during the Games.

In 1988, Seoul was much the same. Following the Korean War, South Korea went through a series of brutal regime changes, none particularly democratic. In 1979, shortly after the decision to bid for the 1988 Olympics, President Park Chung Hee was assassinated in a military coup led by General Chun Doo Hwan, destroying all pretenses of democracy. According to the *New York Times*, Chun and his military followers gained control of "the police, the party, the

²⁷ The Japanese Constitution was an American-led, American-drafted endeavor.

²⁸ Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, 133-135.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 138.

army, the intelligence network, and the Olympic Games.”³⁰ Using martial law, Chun immediately closed the National Assembly, arrested opposition leaders, and banned political activities and demonstrations. These repressive actions reached a high point in 1980, when, on May 18, he sent special forces into the city of Gwangju to put down a student demonstration, resulting in hundreds of deaths in what would become known as the Gwangju Uprising³¹. On September 1, 1980, Chun Doo Hwan was officially inaugurated as the president of South Korea, beginning a regime marked by oppression and political fury toward the nation’s citizens. Protests continued in South Korea all the way up to 1987, when Doo Hwan was forced to turn over power to a more democratic system. For the Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee, these political realities would need to be circumvented to avoid an Olympic legacy similar to that in Mexico City 1968, where the event was marred by the Tlatelolco massacre of regime protesters.

In addition to these political issues, Japan and South Korea faced the discourse of “exotic weakness.” In his famous 1979 work, philosopher Edward Said coined the term “Orientalism” to describe the historical process whereby Eastern nations gradually took on the reputation of being weaker, more feminine than their Western counterparts.³² According to Said, “men have always divided the world up into regions having either real or imagined distinction from each other,” and from these invented separations arose a dialogue where the relationship between the West and East was one “between a strong and weak partner.”³³ The ancient authors of Herodotus, Hippocrates, and Aristotle set the foundation for many main themes of Orientalism, stating that

³⁰ Manwoo Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy*. London: Praeger, 1990, 66.

³¹ Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *South Korea since 1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 31.

³² Said applied his theory primarily to Middle Eastern countries, but he and other scholars have since extrapolated to other countries east of Europe, including Japan, Korea, and China.

³³ Said, *Orientalism*, 39-40.

“Asians are faceless hordes of people who live in conditions of servitude.”³⁴ Aristotle promoted the concept of Oriental despotism as one where the master could exploit the servile nature of his subjects for his own benefit. This mindset not only validated colonial trends, but also persisted and permeated twentieth century interactions between the two regions. New discoveries about the Orient in anatomy, philology, and history were added and molded to the Orientalist mindset, creating an imagined, self-perpetuating stereotype that could lead to very concrete, very damaging policy decisions on a grand scale.

This distinction took on a particularly potent form in the discussion of sports culture, long associated with the masculine “West” and kept beyond reach of the feminine “East.” Many fundamental stereotypes of Orientalism have revolved around the physical body. Because accounts of sports rarely appear in the historical texts of Eastern nations, many scholars attributed this absence to a lack of interest in improving the body, a dislike of physical exertion. Orientalist dialogue took the Chinese Imperial Examinations to be the equivalent of the Ancient Olympic Games, using them as the epitome of each region’s mindset. One was inherently drawn to sedentary, physically inferior activity, the other to sport and the powerful, masculine spirit. For the East Asian Games, such notions of weakness were obstacles to be confronted, and eventually overturned.

Beyond the historical reputation of the East Asia’s physically weak body also lay the discourse of East Asia’s “unusual” and “exotic” spirit, countries still steeped in centuries-old traditions and out of touch with the modern world. From a long tradition of works (such as Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly*, based on the short story by John Luther Long), came the 1957 Academy Award Winning *Sayonara*. Starring Marlon Brando, *Sayonara* provides perhaps

³⁴ Susan Brownell, *Beijing’s Games: What the Olympics Mean to China*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008, 24.

a perfect example of how Japan was consistently portrayed in the international community. The movie begins with a montage of typical Japanese imagery: shrines, women in kimonos, quaint creeks, and stone bridges, accompanied by traditional *koto* music. Major Gruver's first introduction to Japan is by a friend who states, "They got kabuki there. All men no dongs."³⁵ His time spent with a Japanese entertainer is full of tea ceremonies and craft shows to which he responds, "Well that's the cutest thing I ever saw, honey," demonstrating both his fascination for and underlying mockery of "traditional" Japanese culture. His love interest, Hana-ogi (the name of a famous courtesan in Japanese history) expresses her inability to marry him with assertions that she must bring honor back to her family, another trope that alludes to ancient familial roots and ties. The movie ends with the double suicide of Major Gruver's friend and Japanese wife, an act which the Japanese women call beautiful, "floating always together, like water lily," and which the American men view with a healthy degree of disbelief. These were the dominant images of Japan prior to the Tokyo Olympics: a country both beautiful and quaint, stuck in tradition and the tropes of ancient society.

Similarly, *National Geographic* published an article on South Korea in August 1988 in order to provide an illustration of the country before the Games. To write this article, journalist Cathy Newman traveled to a remote village in Kyongju in order to capture the essence of Korea. Through her commentary, one receives the sense that South Korea was a country unchanged for thousands of years. She speaks to an elderly, traditional artist and reports his words.

American line is sharp, unyielding: the Washington Monument, the tail fins of a car." He sliced the air with a chopstick to illustrate. "Korean line," he said, "is a curve: the softness of a woman in her *hanbok*, the green waves of mountains surrounding Kyongju, the jade ornaments that dangle like ripe pears from the gold Silla crowns."³⁶

³⁵ Marlon Brando. *Sayonara*, DVD. Directed by Joshua Logan. (United States: Warner Bros, 1957).

³⁶ Cathy Newman. "Kyongju, Where Korea Began," *National Geographic*. August 1988, 265.

According to this dialogue, America is harsh modernity, South Korea is gentle tradition. Newman moves on to document the lives of the Cho family, among whom rigid customs prevail, and Confucianism encourages the Korean conscience to follow the ideal of obedience to authority.³⁷ The article ends with an assertion that seems to apply to the country as a whole. “Their descendants keep faith with nature, living in a magical enclave bounded only by the Korean line that shimmers between reality and legend.”³⁸ Such language invokes a feeling of a nation that is entirely different from the United States, one driven by tradition and stagnancy, rather than by modernity and progress.

Yet, these narratives of East Asia did not fit with the economic realities of the time. Japan in the early 1960s was experiencing an upswing of unbelievable economic growth. Historians would call this period Japan’s “economic miracle” (though later scholars would question this term at the collapse of Japanese economy in the last decades of the 20th century). By the 1960s, Japan’s real economic growth stood at an average of ten percent per annum.³⁹ This recovery from a postwar economy where production capacity had fallen to thirty percent of pre-war levels was remarkable, a phenomenon worthy of exhibition in the international community. Improvements in infrastructure and transportation systems epitomized Japan’s growth, as Tokyo was transformed into a truly modern city.

South Korea in the 1980s exhibited a similar economic model to Japan in the 1960s. The country experienced a period of extraordinary growth. In 1975, the country’s GNP was 44.3 billion US dollars. By 1980, it had risen to 63.1 billion and in 1983, 77.4 billion dollars. At the

³⁷ *Ibid*, 267.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 268.

³⁹ CIA World Factbook, “Japan,” Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ja.html> (Accessed 8 May 2012).

same time, per capita income rose from \$1,207 in 1975, to \$1,586 in 1980, and finally to \$1,870 in 1983. Korean exports, valued at 55 million dollars in 1962, increased to 24 billion by 1983.⁴⁰ South Korea was fast becoming one of the world's most important new economies, as well as one of the most urban. Dialogue on South Korea's unchanging society was detrimental to a country that could become a major economic power in world affairs.

The natural reaction to this challenge of Orientalism seems obviously to commit to the full expression of modernity in the East Asian Games. One final obstacle, however, made such a course of action a difficult one. Through popular images disseminated by the likes of *Sayonara* and *National Geographic*, one can see the dominant impressions of East Asian nations constantly shown to the majority of the international community. Not fulfilling these impressions during the Eastern Games could hurt the host country's cause, as shown in the concept of the Tourist Gaze.

Coined by John Urry, the concept of the Tourist Gaze holds that "looking is a learned ability and that the pure and innocent eye is a myth."⁴¹ When tourists travel to or observe a foreign country, they do so through predetermined lenses, colored lenses if you will, that naturally affect the act of viewing and processing. These lenses are created by the media world which a tourist originally inhabited, and is influenced by such sources of information as television, movies, and news reports. From these sources, a tourist develops the distinct signs of a country in their cognitive landscape, much like a map. Just as a traveler in Paris would situate himself in the city by a signpost for the Champs-Élysées, a tourist in Tokyo would look for *kabuki* and geishas to feel that they are truly in Japan. Tourism, then, is based on the collection

⁴⁰ Jarol B. Manheim, "The 1988 Seoul Olympics as Public Diplomacy," *The Western Political Quarterly* 43 (1990), 281.

⁴¹ Urry and Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*, 1.

of preformed signs, as visitors look for typical behavior and typical images. Tourists are the collectors of places.⁴²

A tourist who finds that the exotic location he wished dearly to visit was just the same as home would find himself thwarted. As Urry states, "If the particular place does not convey appropriate cultural meanings and display memorable visual features, the quality of the specific service may be tarnished."⁴³ The tourist, who goes to great length to leave the familiar and experience the unknown, does not wish to see more of the same. Even viewing the Seoul Olympic Ceremony on television and finding it indistinguishable from Los Angeles would diminish future attraction, restricting future impulses to visit South Korea.

Tourism in the last few decades has become the world's largest industry. National tourism sources compete to advertise the individual nature of their country, something no other nation can provide. As sociologist Tim Edensor asserts, each country tries "to carve out a unique niche that might attract the 'golden hordes'."⁴⁴ To deny the visitor or the viewer the expectations they came equipped with would be to commit a grave error in a country's promotion. Despite Malcolm Crick's assertion that tourism is "a manufactured, trivial, inauthentic way of being, a form of travel emasculated, made safe by commercialism," the practical effects of such packaging cannot be denied.⁴⁵ Such attention would be greatly sought by countries with the cultural and historical capital to accomplish the goal of economic growth and international prestige. Thus one sees that the obstacles facing the East Asian Olympics were, like the events

⁴² *Ibid*, 73.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 49.

⁴⁴ Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2002, 39.

⁴⁵ Malcolm Crick, 'Representations of International Tourism in the Social Science: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings, and Servility,' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 308.

themselves, highly complex. The East Asian Olympiads needed to reconcile the backlash against Orientalism with the need to accommodate the Tourist Gaze, all within the context of political tensions and instability.

Judo – The Gentle Way

The instant nature of the Olympics Games and the international attention focused upon a single city for 16 days present many obstacles for host countries, but at the same time many opportunities. Anthropologist Don Handelman asserts that “information in the modern state commonly is transmitted as images of images, copies of copies.”⁴⁶ Ideas of tradition are constantly changing, constantly in flux, and cannot be pinned down by those within or those outside the culture. Yet, mega-events and television provide a chance to grasp at these ideas, take hold of them and make them whole, or at least make some version of them whole for public consumption. Handelman goes on to state that media events, in their singular form, can mark turning-points in the history of metanarrative.⁴⁷ The tank man image of Tiananmen Square is still used to illustrate one of the Chinese Communist party’s worst moments. The increased connectedness of the global community makes these defining moments all the more important. Regardless of a country’s previous history, if it can present its version of culture and history in a persuasive media event, it has the potential to change future dialogue. Through events such as the Olympics, history is, in essence, made. The unknown is made known; culture, tradition, and history are molded into digestible forms.

⁴⁶ Don Handelman. *Models and Mirrors: towards an anthropology of public events*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 266.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 268.

This capability affords the host countries of the Olympics a great deal of power in the planning of their Games. Indeed, rather than submit to the forces of the Tourist Gaze, a host nation can conform to the gaze, and at the same time use it to fulfill their own needs. Mega-events are thus distinct from ordinary tourism, where the controlling powers have relatively no influence over where a tourist wanders, or what a tourist sees. The Olympic Games are truly a packaged, staged phenomenon where the host nation can create the history and culture it wants others to internalize. Indeed, Handelman acknowledges that “copies of phenomenon enter domains into which the originals could not go.”⁴⁸ For the millions of viewers of the Eastern Olympics, what they see in the stadium or on the television screen can become their new ideal of the foreign nation. The sixteen days of television can replace historical texts and first-hand experience. The Olympic Planning Committees have the chance to create their performed copy for international consumption.

In the staging of the East Asian Games, cultural concepts were sponsored and engineered by the Olympic Planning Committees for a specific purpose. Culture has the ability to circumvent many political and economic public relations thorns. This facility was, in many ways, unique to the East Asian Olympiads. Not only did non-Eastern countries not necessarily desire enhanced political standing, preferring economic gains to international grandeur, but also, in many ways, their cultures were not sufficient distractions for evading political topics. The primary audience for most Olympic Games centers on the non-Eastern world. For them, seeing the Los Angeles or London Games would be much the same as their own everyday lives, neighbors in a sense both geographically and culturally. The Eastern Olympics could truly present a felt experience of transformation and separation.

⁴⁸*Ibid*, 267.

The 1972 Munich Games and the 1980 Moscow Games provide useful comparisons with the Tokyo and Seoul Games. At the time, Munich, like Tokyo, faced the tremendous task of proving its complete divorce from its Nazi Germany past. Then, the kidnapping and subsequent killing of Israeli athletes on September 5 by the Palestinian terrorist group Black September marred the Games' reputation. Turning to the Official Reports, published in the aftermath of the Olympic Games by their respective Organizing Committee, one sees no attempt by the Munich Committee to avoid the topic of September 5-6, 1972. Political events were acknowledged, though blame was redirected in whatever way possible. In justifying the security system, the Munich Organizing Committee said only that "these [Olympic Villages] should be no enclosed fortress with walls, barbed wire and watchtowers. There had never been such a completely enclosed village at previous Olympic Games."⁴⁹ Similarly, in the Moscow Official Report, the boycott of the Games by the United States and other Western countries was mentioned, but blame was once again diverted to the opposing party. "For no reason at all some Western political leaders and mass media accused the USSR of violating "human rights" and demanded under this pretext that the Games be transferred from Moscow to another place."⁵⁰ The non-Eastern Games represented here had no choice but to address these political issues in their self-assessments. Their only defense was to redirect blame rather than avoid it entirely.

On the other hand, the Tokyo and Seoul Official Reports largely ignored the political realities of their time. The Seoul Official Report offered a lengthy discussion of the country and the city's history. Their history seemingly ended with Korea overcoming the tragedies of the Korean War, presenting themselves as martyrs and victims at the hands of the Chinese and

⁴⁹ Munich Olympic Organizing Committee, 32.

⁵⁰ Moscow Olympic Organizing Committee. *Games of the XXII Olympiad*. Moscow, USSR: Fitzkultura Sport Publishers, 1980, 334.

Japan. The recent regime changes received no mention. Indeed, the spotlight commentary on Gwangju as one of the most important cities in South Korea contained no allusion, however subtle, to the massacre of protestors that occurred just a few years prior to the Olympics.

Instead, special attention was paid in the East Asian Official Reports to the unique cultural tradition of Tokyo and Seoul. In describing the elaborate stadiums for the Games, the Official Report endeavored to demonstrate how the designs invoked ancient tradition. Budokan Hall, used during the Tokyo Olympics to house judo, “was constructed along the traditional Japanese architectural lines, and is said to have been designed after the form of an ancient temple hall, and together with the stone wall, of the Imperial Palace, presents a unique atmosphere in the surrounding area.”⁵¹ The Main Olympic Stadium in Seoul was designed so that its lines followed the curves of a Chosun Dynasty porcelain vase. The swimming pool imitated the iron turtle ships of the 16th century.⁵²

Nearly every element of the East Asian Games was coordinated to provide a unifying sense of a cultural Game. In Seoul, every detail of the torch ceremony from torch design to runner uniforms was designed domestically to reflect South Korea’s 5000 year-old cultural tradition.⁵³ Accompanying each group of runners were performers who would demonstrate Korean dance and song at each city stop. Red ginseng, considered a distinctly Asian plant known for its uses in alternative medicine, was given its own exhibition hall where visitors received samples and learned about its ancient history.⁵⁴ The twelve cultural posters designed to promote

⁵¹ Tokyo Olympics Organizing Committee. *Official Report of the Organizing Committee Volume 1*. Tokyo, Japan: Organizing Committee for the Games, 1966, 130.

⁵² Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee, 162-164.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 62.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 248.

the games featured iconic scenes from Korea's ancient history, and carefully placed artwork in the Olympic stadiums "called for Korea's traditional patterns such as multicolor stripes, hunting scenes and embroidery to be included with a slightly modern interpretation [such as brighter colors and minimalistic designs] to display Korea's true image."⁵⁵

During the Tokyo Opening Ceremony, 28.8 kg of chrysanthemum perfume, a flower and scent native to Asia, were released into the stands to invoke a sense of exoticism.⁵⁶ The Committee for the arts programs decided at an early date that only traditional Japanese art works would be included in services and displays. No international participation need take place in the cultural program.⁵⁷ Included amongst these traditional arts were *bugaku* (classic court music), *bunraki* puppet shows (one of the oldest and most tradition-bound arts), *kabuki* and *noh* (famous Japanese dramas), and Japanese painted screens and porcelain dishes. The services provided in the Tokyo Olympic Village included showings of Japanese movies, folk songs and dances, and an international club that taught the basics of such traditions as tea ceremony, *koto*, and calligraphy. (Figure 1)



"Not as easy as it looks"—the Japanese melodious "Koto"

Figure 1

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 656.

⁵⁶ Tokyo Olympics Organizing Committee, 227. (It is important to note that the chrysanthemum is also the imperial flower, considered personal property of the Emperor.)

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 270.

In his work *Inventing Traditions*, Eric Hobsbawm begins a dialogue on the concept of real, original culture; one that he does not believe necessarily exists. Many traditions that purportedly stem from centuries of practice are actually quite recent phenomenon.⁵⁸ Hobsbawm goes further to state that some nations and cultures use “ancient materials to construct Invented Traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes.”⁵⁹ In the case of the Tokyo Olympics, “traditional” arts such as the tea ceremony were ripped out of their very specific historical context in order to suit a commercial need. Through this creation of tradition, which seems an inherently contradictory experience, mega-events can serve to create a space where the official versions of a nation’s culture enter into international consciousness.⁶⁰

In many ways, culture is chosen rather than inherited.⁶¹ It can be molded to fit the needs of every generation, as well as to establish a priori a distinct, unified characterization of a nation. Ideas of Englishness, of *Volksgeist* (People’s spirit), of *nihonjinron* (the discourse of being Japanese) come to define and separate an entire group of people from the Other, in the process sometimes delineating “essential” qualities that are foreign to the people themselves.⁶² Yet these constant attempts to generate ideal images of nationalism are part of history in themselves, and pertain closely to the staging of mega-events. Invented Traditions quickly became an advantage for the East Asian Olympics. The Olympic Planning Committees understood the power of

⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions”, 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁶⁰ Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity*, 22.

⁶¹ Stephen Vlastos, “Tradition: Past/Present Culture and Modern Japanese History,” in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions in Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (London: University of California Press, 1998), 12.

⁶² Keizo Nagatoni, “Perception gaps: An Introduction,” in *Japan and the West: The Perception Gap*, eds. Keizo Nagatoni and David W. Edgington (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 4.

staging their Games in a way that matched the Tourist Gaze and yet demonstrated a type of exoticism that was unique, rather than backward.

Conversely, national tradition or culture was not significant in the creation of the Munich and Moscow Games. Rather than a national approach, these Games took an international approach. The cultural program of the Moscow Games included a special dedication to the German composer Handel.⁶³ The design section of the Moscow Official Report was relatively short and had no specific attention or emphasis on demonstrating the cultural heritage of the Russia. (In contrast, the corresponding design section of the Tokyo and Seoul Olympics occupy a large part of the overall Report.) The only German-centered program commissioned by the German Organizing Committee was entitled “100 Years of German Excavation at Olympia”, in order to demonstrate Germany’s role in bringing the Olympics back to the modern world.⁶⁴

The journalist Richard Mandell covered the Munich Olympics in great detail. After his experience, he made the following assertion on the cultural element of the Games.

Aicher and Daume, both of them up-to-the-minute Germans of our time, also opposed traditional design elements that might be single-outable as Bavarian or even folk-German in any way. German cosmopolitans now sneer at folksy art. A position paper early in the planning stages of the design department stated that anything “Teutonic” must be shunned. The souvenir *waldis*, the *dirndls* of the hostesses, and some of the grander sports facilities are all monuments to battles that Aicher lost. All the same, one did not find pretzels, beer steins, sausages, cuckoo clocks, or *lederhosen* at the Munich Olympics. All of this and comparable stuff were forbidden to those having access to the communications media.⁶⁵

In addition to a rejection of *lederhosen* and cuckoo clocks, the Munich Games had the distinct motivation to avoid culture and tradition because of its inherent, unchanging tie to its political past. Not a hint of red or neoclassical design that could be linked to Nazi Germany

⁶³ Moscow Olympic Organizing Committee, 404.

⁶⁴ Munich Olympic Organizing Committee. 240.

⁶⁵ Richard D. Mandell, *The Olympics of 1972: A Munich Diary* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 155.

dotted the landscape of the Munich Games. The Olympics stadiums in Moscow were built for “efficiency” (perhaps one can say cheaply to avoid huge financial costs).⁶⁶ In Munich, the overall impression of the Olympic Games was subdued by turning to grey tones. The buildings, rather than rising to monumental heights, instead grew out of the landscape and stayed “at a human level”.⁶⁷ If one thinks back to the 1936 Berlin Games and the monuments built to showcase Nazi power, one can indeed see that history pushed the buildings down. Unlike the benign cultural traditions of East Asian countries, many non-Eastern countries have cultural histories that, because of their familiarity, offer no sterile, safe haven from politically charged themes. In many ways, the dialogue of Orientalism presents some small mercy as East Asian countries could focus on ancient thousand-year histories that depict them more often as victims than as conquerors.

The use of culture also allows East Asian host cities to influence many of the Orientalist stereotypes facing their nations. Rather than feminine and backward, clever manipulation of culture and special attention to staging can gradually change the meaning of “exotic.” Taking away the connotation of stagnant, cultural displays can simultaneously demonstrate modernity and tradition, fulfilling the expectation of the Tourist Gaze, as well as erasing age-old conceptions of weakness. Historian Sandra Collins brings into play the phrase “modern hybridity” to describe the East Asian Olympics, an amalgamation of modernity coupled with ancient culture.⁶⁸ The ‘Olympic Campanology’ (bell ringing) that played as Emperor Hirohito entered the stadium for the Opening Ceremony was a mixture of modern electronic music and

⁶⁶ Moscow Olympic Organizing Committee, 404.

⁶⁷ Munich Olympic Organizing Committee, 296.

⁶⁸ Sandra Collins, “The Fragility of Asian National Identity in the Olympic Games,” in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, eds. Monroe Price and Daniel Dayan, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 186.

cultural resonances.⁶⁹ During Seoul's bid for the 1988 Games, their display in Baden-Baden featured their time-honored culture using advanced slide presentations. Korean Air stewardesses representing one of the most modern and advanced industries in Korea served visitors in traditional Korean costumes.⁷⁰ This mix of old and new, co-existing side by side came to define East Asian countries, until the very idea of modern exoticism became a dominant trope. The "dialectic which has not yet reached synthesis, a harmony of many voices" has become something that is "utterly unique."⁷¹

By making distinctions between multiple Olympics Games, an "Eastern" model for the Olympics can be established, one whose goals are primarily new international prestige, one whose obstacles are political instability, Orientalism, and the Tourist Gaze, and one that has the distinct advantage of culture to avoid political topics and to enhance modernity. It is important to note that an avoidance of political topics is political in and of itself. Perhaps one can consider the Eastern Olympiads to be pursuing a type of cultural politics, using their ancient traditions as an alibi, as a front. The end goal remains highly politicized.

Judo, a Japanese martial art form created in 1882, translates literally to "The Gentle Way." A particularly important maxim of the sport, *ju yoku gou o seisu*, means "skilled softness overcomes brawn."⁷² In many ways, Judo represents the perfect sports metaphor for the foreign policy technique taken by the East Asian Olympiads. By using their cultural strengths to redirect

⁶⁹ Tokyo Olympics Organizing Committee, 221-222.

⁷⁰ Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee, 40.

⁷¹ Greg Sheridan, *Asian Values Western Dreams: Understanding the New Asia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 215.

⁷² Politics on the Other Side: Opposition in Japan, "'Soft' Power," <http://oppositioninjapan.blogspot.com/2007/02/soft-power.html> (accessed April 8, 2013).

negative attention rather than using brute force to combat it, Japan and South Korea could employ a soft power approach for their own benefit.

In his 2004 work, political scientist Joseph Nye asserts that “Asian countries also have impressive potential resources for soft power.”⁷³ Since their respective Olympic Games, Japan and South Korea have provided excellent models for China’s soft power goals. Today, we see Japan as the land of animation and robots. Scholar Koichi Iwabuchi forwards that Japan’s contemporary culture has reached a level of significance capable of threatening the assumed hegemony of American mass culture.⁷⁴ Japanese videogames have a world-wide market. Sushi and ramen noodles extend into international households (and arguably most college dorms). South Korea has also managed to achieve cultural prestige without much political attention. Samsung Electronics was the world’s largest handset maker in 2012, beating out Apple and Nokia.⁷⁵ South Korean pop music has global appeal. (As a rather unorthodox example, take legendary American rapper Snoop Dogg, who recently stated that Korean pop was his guilty pleasure on blogging website reddit.⁷⁶) Though perhaps the approval of Snoop Dogg is not required for soft power, China needs to find some ground with which to attract international support. Whether or not the Beijing Olympics added to China’s “cool” factor remains to be

⁷³Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Cambridge: PublicAffairs, 2004, 83.

⁷⁴ Koichi Iwabuchi. *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, 30.

⁷⁵ “Samsung beats Apple, Nokia as world’s largest handset maker,” *Fox News*, April 27, 2012.

⁷⁶ Reddit, “I’m Snoop Lion! Ask me Anything!” http://www.reddit.com/r/IAMa/comments/14cb0c/im_snoop_lion_ask_me_anything/ (accessed April 1, 2013)

seen.⁷⁷ The following chapters will employ the Eastern model to investigate the political and cultural themes of the 2008 Beijing Games.

⁷⁷ Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy* (2002), 5.

Chapter Two
Train the body!
Study diligently!
Train the body!
Bravely scale the peaks!
Train the body!
Carry out the Four Modernizations!
Train the body!
*Defend the Nation!*⁷⁸

Making the Play

Orientalist tradition had long characterized China as a country that shunned physicality, using ancient proverbs such as “esteem literacy and despise martiality”⁷⁹ Chinese reformers in the twentieth century criticized this trend, arguing that it affected outsiders’ opinions as well as national self-representations. They disparaged the assumption that Chinese avoidance of physical culture led to their physical weakness, and by extension, national weakness (exemplified by the title “Sick Man of Asia” to characterize the Chinese nation). To combat these assertions in the modern era, the Republic of China turned sports into a national project. An organized physical culture was a novel concept for imperial China when the modern Olympics began in 1896. (The Mandarin phrase for sport, 体育 (*tiyu*), did not become part of the vocabulary until the late 1890s.⁸⁰) By 1955, Communist China established a state sports system that remains today.

The creation of a sports culture began when China was still maintaining its crumbling dynastic institution. With the end of the disastrous Opium War in 1842, revivalist movements across the country took place with a specific emphasis on the traditional martial arts (*gongfu*, or

⁷⁸ Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People’s Republic* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 4. [Brownell was at the 1986 National College Games in Beijing]

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

⁸⁰ Guoqi Xu. *Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895-2008*. London: Harvard University Press, 2008, 12.

kung fu). They trained with Taoist alchemical and Buddhist meditation techniques, as well as with the long spear, the broad sword, and the rake.⁸¹ The ultimate defeat of the Chinese during the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901) ended this martial arts tradition as a means of rebellion, but saw the emergence of a new convention of body culture. Through Western-run schools, military discipline and sports began to influence the next generation of Chinese students.

The subtle change in Chinese society toward an organized sports culture can be seen in the transition of attire and bodily comportment of the Chinese elite. Elite men of society in the Qing Dynasty society wore long restrictive gowns that hid their hands and feet. Elite women were expected to bind their feet, in effect crippling them and preventing them from engaging in physical activity. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, many Westerners themselves commented on the change in Chinese society toward a more Western approach to clothing and sports. In ordinary attire, modern business suits and dresses replaced long gowns. And Eugene Barnett, director of the Hangzhou YMCA commented, “The spectacle of mandarins, department chiefs, and clerks, tearing in scanty attire after a basket or volley ball over the *yamen* law, persuades me that Old China is passing away.”⁸²

China’s participation in the Olympics mirrored many elements of their change in attitude toward physical activity. Baron Pierre de Coubertin first issued an invitation to attend the Games in 1894 to the Qing government. Their invitation was turned down. By 1910, China began to hold its own National Olympics, followed in 1913 by its participation in the Far Eastern Olympics. In 1932, runner Liu Changchun became China’s first Olympic athlete, participating in the Los Angeles Games. In both 1936 and 1948, China sent competitors to the Olympics Games. Though they did not return with any medals (in the latter instance, the delegation had to borrow

⁸¹ Brownell, *Training the Body for China*, 38.

⁸² *Ibid*, 40.

money to return home), the experience allowed the Chinese government to see the transformative power of sport.⁸³ Mao Zhedong in 1952 laid forth a sports slogan to replace the ancient “esteem literacy and despise martiality.” “Develop physical culture and sports, strengthen the people’s physiques” became the byword for China’s physical ascendance.⁸⁴

Yet this physical prowess did not begin its international stride until 1979. The separation of Taiwan and the People’s Republic led many outside nations to insist that Taiwan participate separately, even solely, in the Olympics Games. After boycotting the 1980 Moscow Games, China sent its long-awaited delegation of 353 members to the Los Angeles Games in 1984. Xu Haifeng, a sharpshooter, won China’s first gold medal. Altogether, the Chinese delegation took home 15 gold, eight silver, and nine bronze medals.⁸⁵ After several centuries of dialogue on China’s physical inferiority, the country began to assert itself in the international community as a force to be reckoned with. In 1984, China was fourth in the gold medal ranks. In 2008, as host nation, China was first, and earned 15 more than the next highest contender (the U.S.).

China’s aspirations to be host nation for the Olympics began as early as the 1940s when Chinese gymnasts rallied for the country to host the 1952 Games. China made its first official bid in 1991 for the 2000 Games. (They lost by a narrow margin of two votes to Sydney). In 2001, China won the bid for the 2008 Games, to be held in Beijing. With this achievement, China could be said to truly have begun its ascent to the peak of sporting prestige. Hosting the best Olympic Games the world had ever seen would be the crowning moment in China’s sports history.

⁸³ Li Xiao, “China and the Olympic Movement,” *Beijing 2008 Olympics Official Website*, January 5, 2004. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/olympic/211765.htm> (accessed February 24, 2013).

⁸⁴ Brownell, *Training the Body for China*, 57.

⁸⁵ Xiao, “China and the Olympic Movement.”

More than just sporting prestige, hosting the Olympic games presented an opportunity for China to demonstrate its overall prestige as a rising economic and political power. As historian Xu Guoqi suggests, “Nothing can bring the world closer than modern sports.”⁸⁶ The International Olympic Committee has more members than the United Nations; each mega-event has the ability to draw record-breaking numbers of viewers and spectators. The Games represent a chance for a nation to project its ideal image to the world community through the relatively benign and safe avenue of sports competitions.

When China hosted the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, huge portions of the national budget and the country’s human resources were dedicated to the event. The result was a “truly exceptional Games” as stated by the IOC president Jacques Rogge during the Closing Ceremony.⁸⁷ Like most of its predecessors, however, the Beijing Olympics had its fair share of difficulties underneath the polished exterior of the Games. The following chapter details the goals of the Beijing Olympics, the obstacles encountered during the run-up to the sixteen-day mega-event, and the way in which these obstacles were overcome.

The chapter begins with a discussion of China’s position in the world and its ability to influence the world community rather than simply to join as a member. It then sets forth the “Two Chinas Theory”, demonstrating the two dominant discourses and narratives about China: one politically-charged and negative, the other historically-based and positive. Finally, it concludes by showing how the Olympics Organizing Committee sidestepped one of the Two Chinas in favor of the second, a technique distinctively available to East Asian nations as illustrated in the previous chapter by Japan and South Korea’s adherence to an Eastern Model.

⁸⁶ Xu. *Olympic Dreams*, 39.

⁸⁷ Wang Hongjiang. “IOC chief: Beijing Olympic Games “truly exceptional Games”,” *Xinhua News*, August 24, 2008.

World Record

China's economy took off in the second half of the twentieth century. Since 1978, when the country moved from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy, the country experienced an economic growth rate of nearly 9.5 percent each year.⁸⁸ In 2001, the year China was awarded the 2008 bid, the nation surpassed Japan to become the second-largest economy in the world based on purchasing power parity.⁸⁹ Though China remained behind the United States in GDP, its extraordinary economic success in the last few decades brought the nation considerable international attention.

Though similar to the economic boom experienced by Japan in the 1960s and South Korea in the 1980s, China's progress was not just fast; it was the fastest in the world. In 2005, after decades of growth, the Chinese economy showed no signs of slowing down. Analysts had predicted a drop from 9.5 percent growth in 2004 to 8.5 percent in 2005. They were forced to raise their forecasts when the figures in the third quarter stayed steady at 9.4 percent.⁹⁰ From 1989 to 2001, China's GDP increased from 1.69 trillion *yuan* to 9.59 trillion; its average growth rate of 9.3 percent far exceeded the international average of 3.2 (2.7 percent for developing countries, 5.2 percent for developed).⁹¹ The Chinese government had to consider measures to artificially slow the economy out of fears of inflation or overheating. As not only the fastest but also one of the strongest economies in the world, China was thus different from Japan and South

⁸⁸ Gregory Chow, *China's Economic Transformation*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, 9.

⁸⁹ CIA World Factbook. "China," Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html> (Accessed 8 May 2012).

⁹⁰ David Barboza. "China's Economy Surges 9.4% in 3rd Quarter," *New York Times*, October 21, 2005.

⁹¹ Ye Zicheng, *Inside China's Grand Strategy: The Perspective from the People's Republic*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011, 47.

Korea during their respective Olympics. With the 2008 Games, China had the opportunity to demonstrate its ability to be a powerful pacesetter in the international community, not just an emerging member.

“China is the world,” said Mohammed, an Egyptian trader in Guangzhou.⁹² This statement stems from the fact that China’s economy and fewer visa restrictions than Europe or the United States make China a prime place for future investment. Increasingly, countries in the Arab world see China as the future. And it is not just developing countries such as Egypt or Syria that increasingly see China as the best option for profit. As the recent U.S. presidential debates have highlighted, more and more American jobs and capital are being shipped over seas. In 2008, China surpassed Japan as the largest foreign creditor of the U.S. government, owning nearly 10% of the U.S. public debt.⁹³ The amount has only continued to rise since the Olympics. American firms are more likely than ever to place their business centers outside of the United States in cities such as Shanghai and Beijing.⁹⁴

China is not only attractive in the economic sense, but also in the political sense, especially for countries such as those in the Arab world. As economist Ben Simpfendorfer asserts, “The China Model has captivated Arab governments in two ways. First, it promises rapid growth without regime change... Second, the China model also promises independence from the West.”⁹⁵ One can also extend this observation to countries outside the Arab world, Africa for

⁹² Ben Simpfendorfer. *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 1.

⁹³ Anthony Faiola and Zachary A Goldfarb. “China Tops Japan in U.S. Debt Holdings; Beijing Gains Sway over U.S. Economy,” *New York Times*, November 19, 2008.

⁹⁴ Reed Hundt, *In China’s Shadow: The Crisis of American Entrepreneurship*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 50.

⁹⁵ Simpfendorfer, *The New Silk Road*, 162.

example, that might see the precedent set by China as superior. Indeed, in the recent Arab Spring uprisings, Syria under Bashar al-Assad was able to resist many United Nations resolutions due to the combined effort of Russia and China.

With such political and economic potential, China in 2008 faced even more pressure than Japan and South Korea to stage a conflict-free Games, as well as to emphasize its ability to shape world politics and culture in a positive way. As Professor Ze Yicheng contends, China could and should begin to establish itself as a world power, not just simply as a member of the international community.⁹⁶ A successful Olympics would “mark the return of the Middle Kingdom’s reputation for acting as a proud host to the rest of the world.”⁹⁷ The positive staging of the Games would emphasize China’s position as a leader in the world community. It could thus begin moving out of a “century of humiliation and shame,” dating from the first Opium War in the mid-19th century.⁹⁸ Though China’s loss of sovereignty to Western and Japanese forces had long been recuperated, China could now fully leave behind its shameful history. With the Games’ characteristic as a universally legitimate way to pass along national goals to an international audience, China stood to gain much from a triumphant Olympics.⁹⁹ This drive to establish itself in the first-class of international powers represents the first element of the Eastern Model: the goal of international prestige.

⁹⁶ Ye, *Inside China’s Grand Strategy*, 73.

⁹⁷ Monroe Price, “Introduction,” in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, eds. M. Price and D. Dayan (Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 5.

⁹⁸ Xu. *Olympic Dreams*, 6.

⁹⁹ Xin Xu, ‘Modernizing China in the Olympic spotlight: China’s national identity and the 2008 Beijing Olympics’, in *Sports Mega-Events: Social Scientific Analyses of a Global Phenomenon*, eds. J. Horne and W. Manzenreiter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 91.

Achilles Heel

China's biggest obstacle in realizing its political goals lied in its own political system; the People's Republic of China has had a largely negative reputation internationally. Similar to Japan and South Korea, the environment and human rights record of the economic giant are often under scrutiny, and take precedence in many discussions about China. Prior to the Olympics, National Geographic published a special issue titled "China: Inside the Dragon" that covered many of the issues facing the "dragon."

The environmental degradation occurring across the country was a running theme in many of the articles of the issue.

Welcome to northern China, where desertification—land degradation caused primarily by human activities—is wiping out close to a million acres of grassland a year (an area nearly as large as Rhode Island). Striving to feed 20 percent of the world's population, the Chinese have overgrazed, overfarmed, and created new deserts in the process. Since 1949 the country's 425 million agricultural workers have lost one-fifth of their arable land, and dust storms—the result of topsoil loss—now buffet Beijing.¹⁰⁰

Later in the issue, another article covers the pollution rampant in China's waters. In "Bitter Waters," journalist Brook Larmer details the drying of the Yellow River, once China's heartland, and the poisoning of what water remains.¹⁰¹ In "Inside the Dragon," the environmental status of the nation is once again a key component of its narrative. This time China is identified as the world's leading emitter of carbon dioxide, and the nation with the highest number of annual deaths caused by air pollution.¹⁰² China's major effect on its own and the world environment has become one of the main ramifications of its growth as well as one of the defining characteristics of the regime. As the international community becomes increasingly concerned with the state of

¹⁰⁰ Jarrett Wisley. "Unjust Deserts," *National Geographic*, May 2008.

¹⁰¹ Brook Larmer. "Bitter Waters," *National Geographic*, May 2008.

¹⁰² Peter Hessler. "Inside the Dragon," *National Geographic*, May 2008.

the environment, China's contributions to the problems often attract negative comments. Indeed the poor air quality of the city and the potential effects on athletes were often cited as rationales for Beijing's failed 2000 bid for the Olympics. As the historians Cook and Miles assert, "...Beijing was still a severely polluted city at that time, with relatively poor infrastructure. It was certainly no surprise to most observers that the 1990s bid was unsuccessful."¹⁰³ Beijing faced the monumental task of demonstrating its progress in the previous ten years.

China's reputation also suffered from the political status of its Communist party. The nation's lack of rule of law and human rights offenses were often at the forefront in the run-up to the Olympics. A December 2007 *The Times* article asserted, "China's Communist regime remains troubling. Taiwan is continually threatened, dissidents remain in prison, the Internet is censored, intellectual property rights infringement and corruption are rampant."¹⁰⁴ During the torch relay earlier in 2008, actress Mia Farrow's denunciation of China's role in Tibet led to Steven Spielberg's eventual withdrawal from producing the opening and closing ceremonies.¹⁰⁵ Huge protests over the matter caused a great deal of commotion in London, Paris, and San Francisco, where the torch relay had to be halted multiple times. The torch's journey through London was called the "caged torch procession" by BBC News, guarded as it was by Chinese and British security forces.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ian Cook, and Stephen Miles. 'Beijing 2008', in *Olympics Cities: City Agendas, Planning, and the World's Games, 1896-2016*, eds. John Gold and Margaret Gold (London: Routledge, 2011), 346.

¹⁰⁴ Can MacMurchy. "Chinese put prosperity before democracy; The Western push for speedy reforms will fall mostly on deaf ears here," *The Times*, December 2, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ John Horne and Garry Whannel. 'The 'caged torch procession': celebrities, protesters, and the 2008 Olympic torch relay in London, Paris and San Francisco', in *Documenting the Beijing Olympics*, ed. Dolores Martinez (London: Routledge, 2011), 19.

¹⁰⁶ Horne and Whannel. 'The 'caged torch procession', 20.

“Free Tibet” for many in the international community was an impetus for a boycott of the Games. The movement, established in 1987, aimed to end Chinese occupation in Tibet, citing many human rights violations (torture, religious oppression, the taking of political prisoners) against the Tibetan people.¹⁰⁷ The Communist Party’s stance in Tibet is perhaps the most visible of its relationships with ethnic minorities, which has long been one of the most controversial elements of the government. Tibet and other border countries became a part of China during the Qing Dynasty (a unification by conquest). At the height of Qing power, the emperor’s relationship with its dependencies was stable, though unbalanced in favor of the Qing. As Qing power waned, many of these dependencies (Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang, etc.) sought independence from China. But with the Chinese Revolution in 1911, Chinese revolutionaries tightened their sovereignty over all Qing territories.¹⁰⁸ Communist People’s Republic of China continued this restriction of minority identity. Between 1953 and 1980, Chinese officials used census data and interview responses to officially recognize ethnic minority status. Out of the more than four hundred minority groups recorded by the census, only fifty-five were recognized. In Yunnan province, where half the names came from, only twenty-five were ultimately recognized as distinct entities.¹⁰⁹ Armed with this knowledge, a viewer might feel some trepidation at watching as children from China’s “fifty-six” ethnic groups were paraded across the screen in the Beijing Opening Ceremony. The fact that all fifty-six children were ethnically Han, found by talent searches in Beijing, makes the showcase seem even more dishonest.

¹⁰⁷ Free Tibet, “Human Rights in Tibet,” Freetibet.org, <http://www.freetibet.org/about/human-rights-tibet> (accessed March 19, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*. University of California Press, 2011, 3.

This background of the Chinese Communist government drove CNN reporter Jack Cafferty to call the Chinese ‘thugs and goons’ during a report on the torch relays.¹¹⁰ Though Cafferty later apologized and retracted his statement, the Beijing Olympic Planning Committee would need to find some ways of addressing this sort of commentary through the staging of the Games.

The government’s suppression of media dissent and free information also represented a major complaint prior to the Olympics. Internet bloggers such as 34-year-old Hu Jia, were forcibly placed under house arrest for writing about China’s human rights cases, peasant protests and other politically touchy topics.¹¹¹ Earlier that year, Chinese authorities placed a ban on video and audio files on the Internet, allowing only state-sanctioned companies to broadcast. The Chinese government’s reputation as an oppressor of free speech put it directly at odds with the values of the Western world. These were the major criticisms of China in 2008, ones that needed to be overcome to present the nation in a more positive light.

Yet, floating somewhere beneath this version of China, which presented an economic threat and included human rights abuses and environmental degradation, rests another China. This China is steeped in history, culture, and tradition. The very same National Geographic issue that previously highlighted China’s political problems presented an article called “Village On the Edge of Time” detailing the lives of the Dong people on the outskirts of modern China. (Figure 2)

¹¹⁰ Christopher Finlay and Xin Xin, ‘Public Diplomacy games: a comparative study of American and Japanese responses to the interplay of nationalism, ideology and Chinese soft power strategies around the 2008 Beijing Olympics’, *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 13 (2010), 881.

¹¹¹ Jim Yardley. “Building up to Games, China cracks down on dissent,” *International Herald Tribune*, January 30, 2008.

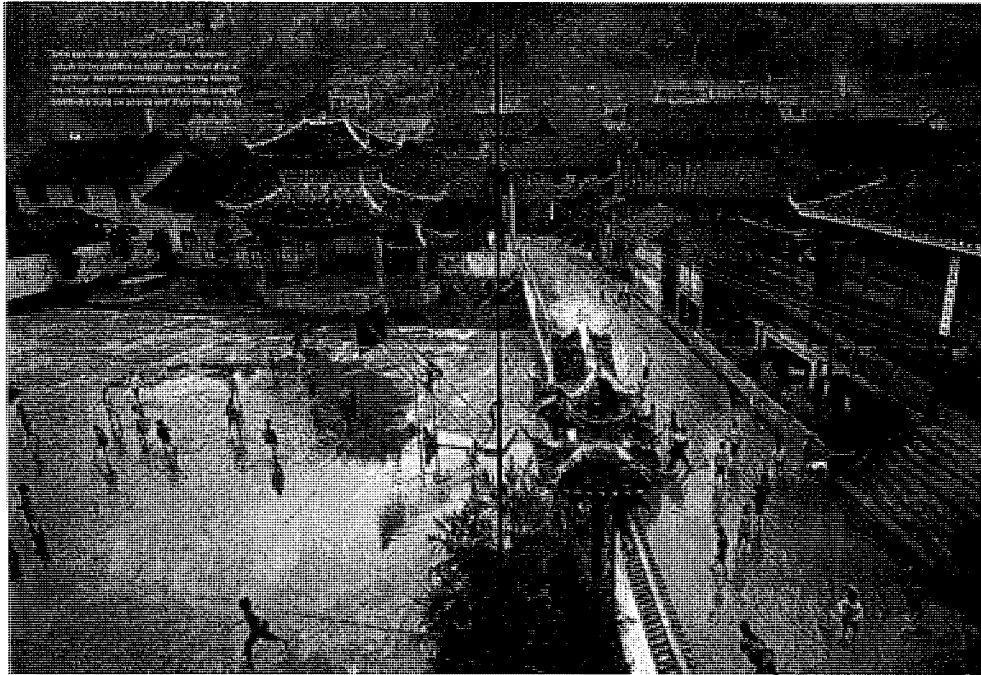


Figure 2

In this village in southern China, “songs are the record of traditions and a mythic history that is a thousand years old.”¹¹² Crossing through the land, the journalist comments on the structure of the village, “The bridge was as formidable as a dragon, with a scaly roof for its body and cupolas for its head and spine. I viewed it with the awe of a child who has just seen a fairy tale place jump out of a book.”¹¹³ Despite China’s increasing modernity, most international audience members think of the Dong people when they imagine the Eastern nation. This element of the Tourist Gaze remains a dominant typecast of China.

This vision of China is not confined to magazines and news article, but also occupies the entire spectrum of visual media. Action stars such as Jet Li and Jackie Chan are popular throughout the world, propelling Chinese music, martial arts, and philosophy to the forefront of

¹¹² Amy Tan. “Village on the Edge of Time,” *National Geographic*, May 2008.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

international recognition. Movies such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and *Hero* (2002) have sparked a fascination with Chinese martial arts and historical films. The former earned more than \$200 million worldwide, (\$128 million in the US), becoming the most successful foreign-language film in U.S. movie history.¹¹⁴ The “Chinese” experience provided by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is an indirect one. Director Ang Lee states, “In some ways, we’re all looking for that old, cultural, historical, abstract China—the big dream of China that probably never existed.”¹¹⁵ Lee attempted to bring an ideal China to the big screen, a China still captivated by the virtues and philosophies of justice, one held together by the “martial arts hero” (*wu xia*) tradition. In many ways, Lee provided a selected rather than reflected reality. He portrayed a China that he hoped could transcend cultural boundaries and find a place in Hollywood cinema, creating an image of China for the benefit of an international audience.¹¹⁶

These trends illustrate the emergence of the “other” China, one that remains somehow separate from the Communist regime. The duality of perspective has separated the country into two tracks: one dangerous and unwholesome, the other benign and ancient. When dialogue takes place about one, it might seem almost as if the other does not exist, or does not represent the same geographical area. Communist China must be combated because of its belligerent and negative influence on world affairs. The China represented in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, however, is inherently benevolent, steeped in tradition. Though some Chinese may dislike this somewhat backward and Orientalist representation of their nation, as previously shown in the case of Japan and South Korea, ancient history and culture represent a safe haven for East Asian

¹¹⁴ Christina Klein. “‘Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon’: A Diasporic Reading’, *Cinema Journal* 43:4 (2004), 18.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 23.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 31.

politics. Beijing in 2008 faced many of the same dominant discourses as Tokyo in 1964 and Seoul in 1988. They shared similar obstacles of political instability, Orientalism, and the Tourist Gaze. Yet, at the same time, the Beijing Olympic Planning Committee could also draw on China's cultural past to create a nonthreatening spectacle.

Taking Sides

In deciding on the description of Beijing in the 2008 Games, the Beijing Planning Committee made one of their first changes of policy in order to safely host the Olympic Games. Originally, China's growth on the international stage was to be termed, "peaceful rise." This was changed to "peaceful development" prior to the Olympics, since many foreign affairs officers in China considered the term "rise" to be too belligerent.¹¹⁷ One of the mottos for the bid process, "New Beijing, Great Olympics," was originally to state, "New Beijing, New Olympics."¹¹⁸ The organizers, however, thought the original version would come across too much like China's attempt to change the world. From these precise policy changes, one can see the conscious efforts of the Beijing Olympic Planning Committee to avoid conforming to the belligerent China model often associated with the nation. Instead, they attempted to highlight the benign China. This move aligns closely with the idea of "The Gentle Way." China, through the Beijing Olympics, intended to influence, rather than force a positive impression of the country.

The manifestation of this technique, conscious or not, can be seen in many elements of the Games' planning. Beijing in 2008 committed to a cultural politics in which China's cultural image was disseminated and its political reputation was sidestepped during the Olympics.

¹¹⁷ Weixing Chen, "The communicative gesture of the Beijing Olympic Games," in *Documenting the Beijing Olympics*, ed. Dolores Martinez, (London: Routledge, 2011), 70.

¹¹⁸ Collins, 'The Fragility of Asian National Identity in the Olympic Games', 188-89.

The Beijing Olympic Games would promote the mutual enrichment of the Olympic spirit coming from time-honoured Western cultural traditions and the concept of harmony from the Chinese civilisation with a history of more than 5,000 years, bring into effect the Western and Eastern philosophies in sports and other fields, and deepen understanding and friendship between the peoples of the world.¹¹⁹

The bid documents continue: “The Beijing Olympic Games would help display splendid Chinese historical heritages and Beijing’s innovative, open and inclusive cultural environment.”¹²⁰ The language present in the bid documents for the 2008 Games illustrated China’s dedication to remaining one with the world, rather than seeking to overtly influence it. In the Beijing Official Report, the word “harmony” is mentioned 34 times, compared to 3 times in the Los Angeles Official Report. Also apparent in the previous statement is the Olympic Committee’s emphasis on distinguishing the individuality of China, this time in order to highlight the East-West divide in a good way and to demonstrate how Beijing differs from previous Olympics. As one Chinese journalist asserts, “Beijing [is] more appealing to others because we have such a long history. We have something you have never seen, something very native, something very Oriental.”¹²¹

In preparation for the Games, the Chinese government attempted to address many of the negative perceptions of the nation. Environmental protection was one of the major remedies committed to by the Olympic Planning Committee. As something tangible and capable of quick implementation, environmental safety measures took on a leading role in the Official Report. Environmental campaigns were undertaken to transform “Beijing into a garden city with blue

¹¹⁹ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Bid Documents and Analysis: Passion behind the Bid; Official Report of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Volume I*. Beijing, China: LA84 Foundation, 2011, 23.

¹²⁰ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee, *Bid Documents and Analysis*, 24.

¹²¹ Heidi Haugen, “‘A Very Natural Choice’: The Construction of Beijing as an Olympic City during the Bid Period”, in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, eds. Monroe Price and Daniel Dayan, (Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 154.

sky and clean water.”¹²² The Bird’s Nest was covered with Tetrafluoroethylene panels to help save on the lighting of the stadium. Rainwater collection systems promised to save 60,000 tons of water over the course of the Olympics.¹²³ Large sections of the official report were dedicated to address this major concern.

In many ways, however, these examples do not entirely convey the extent of the problems. The solutions to China’s environmental issues were presented in very stark technological terms; the cause of the degradation was mostly ignored. From the statements by the Planning Committee, one receives the impression that China’s environmental issues were the same as in all other countries across the world, ignoring the dire condition of China’s water and air. The policies adopted during the Olympics would not necessarily lead to long-term improvement. Spending thousands on lighting in the stadiums while ignoring the major air pollution concerns in the city and the countryside would be akin to giving a flu vaccine to a cancer patient. The steps taken for the sake of the Olympics were meant merely to appease an international audience lamenting China’s environmental record, rather than making any lasting or real change.

Not mentioned in the report were the temporary city-wide measures taken to provide a momentary image of recovery. In 2001, when the IOC visited Beijing, the government shut down factories and limited driving in order to create an illusion of blue skies and quiet streets for the bid committee. Most factories in and around the outskirts of Beijing were ordered to close for months and many residents of the city encouraged to take vacations during the seventeen days of the Games. Chinese technological research companies experimented with seeding clouds in order

¹²² Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Ceremonies and Competitions: Celebration of the Games; Official Report of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Volume II*. Beijing, China: LA84 Foundation, 2011, 13.

¹²³ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Ceremonies and Competitions*, 17.

to control the rain over Beijing, both to wash the pollution out of the skies prior to the event and also to stop inclement weather during the Opening and Closing ceremonies.¹²⁴ A resident of the city joked that she saw blue skies in the city for the first time during the Olympics.¹²⁵ The images projected to the international community during the seventeen days of the Games demonstrate an avoidance rather than remedy; after the end of major media attention, Beijing's traffic, water, and air pollution limits were lifted. The Olympic Planning Committee thus left many of its visitors and viewers with an impression of a China full of blue skies, ignoring the long-term political and environmental ramifications of its growth policies.

One can see this blue-skies China in many of the promotional videos presented prior to the Olympics. In "Beijing Olympics – One World One Dream", viewers are shown a progression of images of multicultural athletes in Beijing's most famous sites (runners crossing the Great Wall, basketball players in Tiananmen Square, a weightlifter in the Forbidden City, tennis players in Beijing's office districts). The dominant impressions of Beijing presented by this promotional video are of international harmony, fine weather, and the coexistence of modernity and ancient history. From the sterile qualities of the video, one would imagine Beijing to be devoid of all people and pollution.¹²⁶ Figure 3 portrays the clear skies of Beijing reflected through the modern glass and steel façade in Beijing's financial center. This was the impression selected for international consumption.

¹²⁴ Jacques Delisle, "One World, Different Dreams" The Contest to Define the Beijing Olympics', in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, eds. Monroe Price and Daniel Dayan, (Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 24-25

¹²⁵ Li Xiaoling, interview by author, Beijing, China, August 3, 2010.

¹²⁶ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. "Beijing Olympic Games :One World One Dream." 2006. Youtube Web site. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xhxx3expV10> (accessed June 2, 2012)

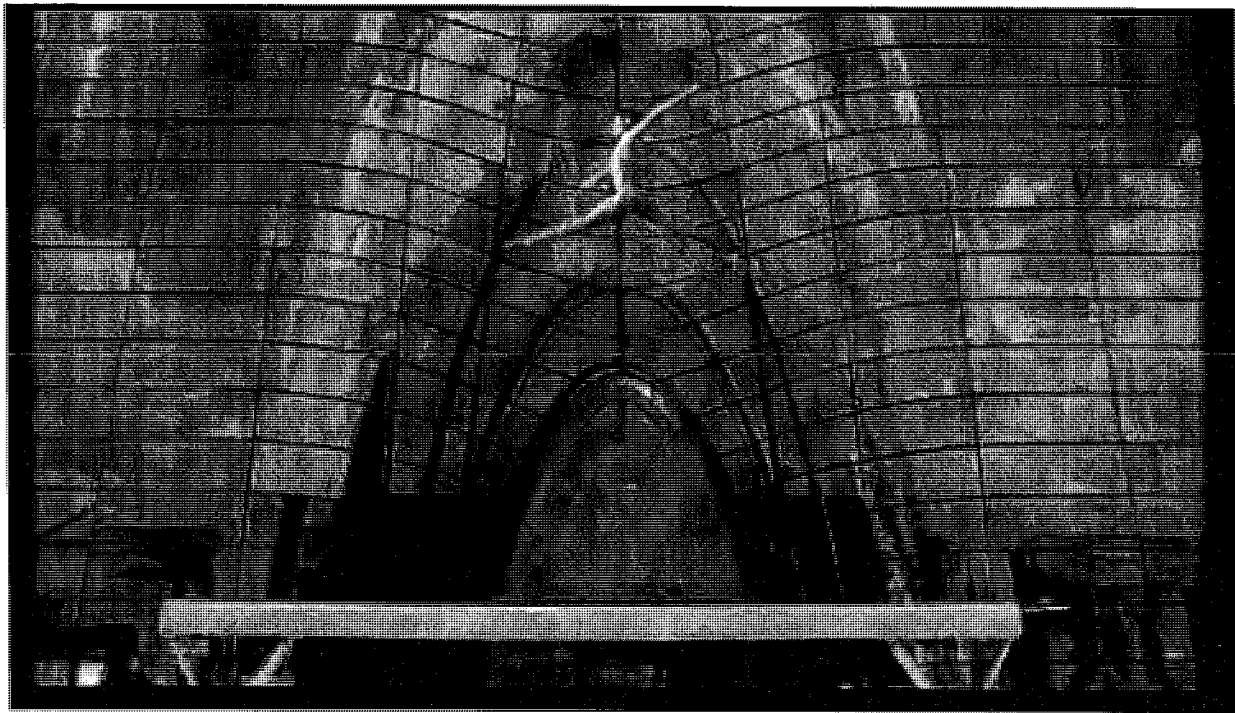


Figure 3

Similarly, on viewing the promotional film, “Welcome to China—Beijing 2008”, the historian Nicholas Cull asserts, “The message is that China is friendly and somehow empty. It clearly aims to be an antidote to pictures of streets teeming with blue-suited cyclists familiar from the 1970s.... One of the film’s final images is of two young Tibetan monks jumping for joy in slow motion.”¹²⁷ The last remark is perhaps the most fascinating, since the Free Tibet movement marred so much of China’s progress to the date of the Olympics. By including images of China’s minority groups, the media producers could present their own version of events to the public.

Through carefully-constructed media, the Beijing Olympic Planning Committee was able to provide a China apparently devoid of the controversies it faced in the twenty-first century. The

¹²⁷ Nicholas Cull, ‘Public Diplomacy of the Modern Olympic Games’, in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, eds. Monroe Price and Daniel Dayan, (Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 136.

pollution, human rights offenses, and tight government regulation of the country were glossed over in national and international broadcasts. These videos sought to highlight the traditional and culturally-complex China, while ignoring the Communist China condemned for such acts as the oppression of the Tibetan people. One can also see this avoidance of human rights concerns in the official report. During the entire section on the torch relay, not a single mention was made of the protests in London, Paris, and San Francisco that characterized the controversial relay. Yet, special care was taken to assert that the city of Lhasa, Tibet presented the Organizing Committee with a special gift of 2,008 boxes of mineral water from the Himalayas. The Mayor of Lhasa was then quoted saying, "The people of Tibet are cheering on Beijing's bid."¹²⁸

Indeed, according to the Official Report, the major issues facing Beijing's bid had nothing to do with environmental degradation, human rights concerns, or media oppression. The major challenges for Beijing's bid were 1. Exceedingly fierce competition, 2. Beijing's advantages yet to be recognized, 3. Difficulty in communicating with IOC members due to new regulations¹²⁹, and 4. Weak points in infrastructure and city management.¹³⁰ The first three points were outside of Beijing's control; they were problems that the outside world placed on the city, not internal challenges. The fourth was shown to be easily addressed with the monetary capital and passion of the Chinese people. This conscious selection of detail and omission of international accusations against China followed a trend established in Tokyo and Seoul, one that avoided political issues and was able to successfully do so by turning to cultural topics.

¹²⁸ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Bid Documents and Analysis*, 91.

¹²⁹ These difficulties were not elaborated upon in the official report.

¹³⁰ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Bid Documents and Analysis*, 16.

Like the other East Asian case studies, Beijing's staging of the Games demonstrated a complete adherence to the idea of cultural display. Every element of the Games was tailored to fit some aspect of Chinese tradition. The torch named *xiangyun*, or lucky clouds, was designed to resemble a paper scroll (one of China's great inventions) and sported a millennium-old graphic.¹³¹ (Figure 5) At the victory ceremony, winners were presented with jade-inlaid medals, inspired by the *huang*, an ancient Chinese ceremonial jade piece decorated with a double dragon pattern and reed mat pattern.¹³² (Figure 6) The logo of the Games was meant to invoke calligraphy and the traditional Chinese seal to transform the character *jing* (capital) into a human figure running through the world with open arms.¹³³ (Figure 7) The mascots for the Games (collectively known as *fuwa*), Beibei (北北) the carp, Jingjing (京京) the panda, Huanhuan (欢欢) the child of fire, Yingying (迎迎) the Tibetan antelope, and Nini (你你) the swallow represented Chinese folk art and the concepts of prosperity, happiness, passion, health and good luck, respectively. (Figure 4) The combination of the characters for their names revealed one of the slogans of the Games, Beijinghuanyingni (北京欢迎你), or Beijing Welcomes You. In addition, these mascots represented traditional Chinese elements of nature (Fire, Earth, Sea, Sky, and Forest), as well as drew from iconic animals in all of China's minority regions (including the Tibetan antelope).¹³⁴

¹³¹ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Bid Documents and Analysis*, 33.

¹³² Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Preparation for the Games: New Beijing Great Olympics; Official Report of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Volume III*. Beijing, China: LA84 Foundation, 2011, 275.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 265.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 267.



Figure 4

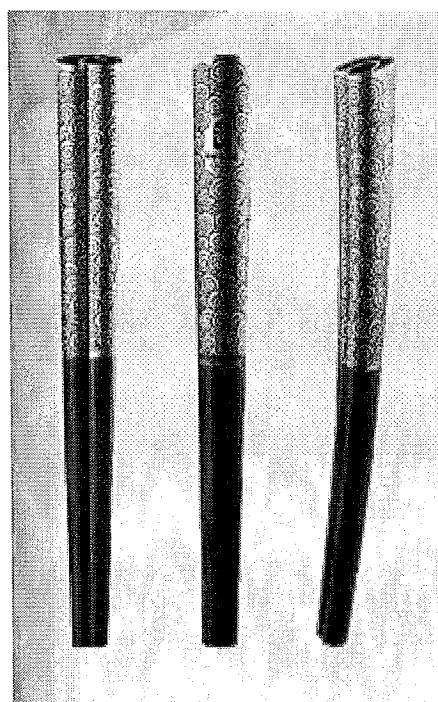
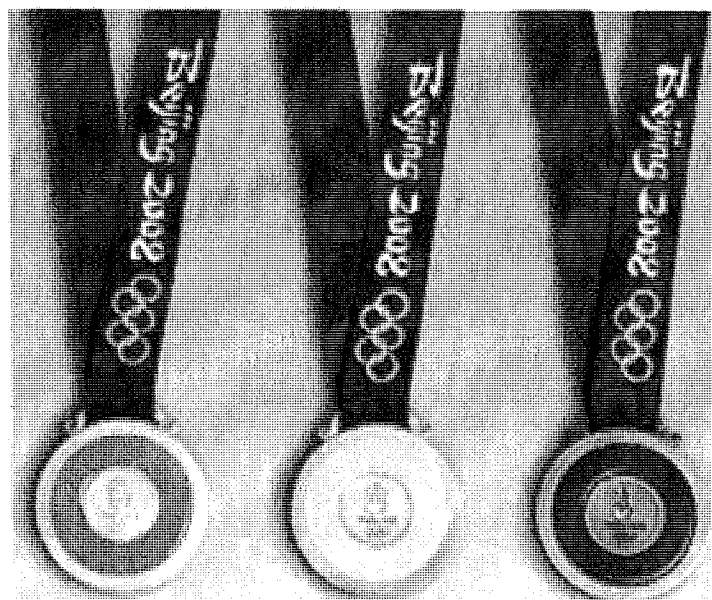


Figure 5



Medals of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games

Figure 6

Even the stadiums received their own personal Chinese characteristics. The Bird's Nest and Water Cube, though designed by international architects, both exhibit very traditional concepts. The two placed side-by-side conform to the principles of *fengshui*, and balance and harmony. The round Bird's Nest and its element of air contrasts with the square Water Cube and its element of water.¹³⁵ (Figure 8)

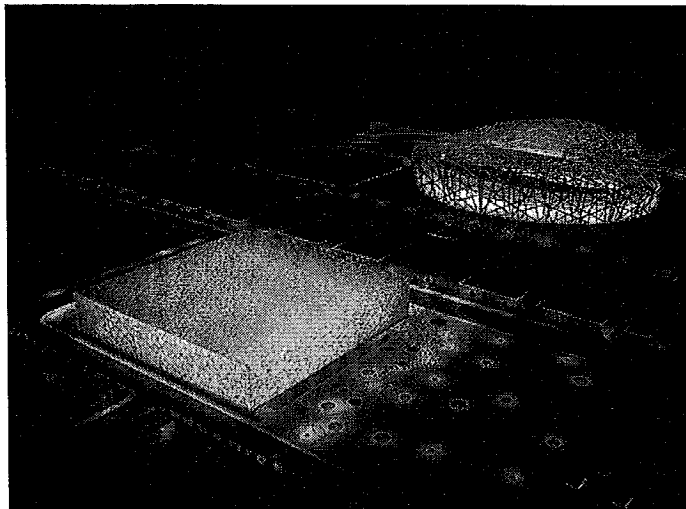


Figure 8

The Beijing Olympic Committee took the concept of staging spaces even further in the organization of the Olympic Village. Divided into four areas, the Village was configured according to allusions to Chinese tradition. Area A's theme featured the Rosefinch, a God of ancient legend, and was designed in the wooden porch classical style of southwestern China. Area B's theme was the *pixiu*, a mythical wild animal said to repel the devil and bring happiness and good fortune. Area C's theme was the double fish, and was filled with small bridges and

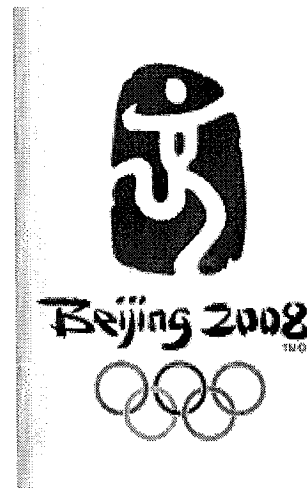


Figure 7

¹³⁵ John Horne, 'Sports Mega-Events and the Shaping of Urban Modernity in East Asia', in *The East Asian Olympiads, 1934-2008: building bodies and nations in Japan, Korea, and China*, eds. William Tsutsui and Michael Baskett, (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2011), 191.

running brooks typical of southeastern China. And finally, Area D's theme was the dragon, and was designed along the lines of the white mountains and black water of northeastern China.¹³⁶ Every effort was taken to present a unified and cohesive cultural showing to the athletes in the Village, those most likely to present a positive impression of China to the international community. In the Village, too, athletes could view traditional performances everyday at 8:00 PM, and take Chinese language classes or courses on tea art, *gu zheng*, and Chinese chess. According to the Official Report, "Anyani, an athlete from Amoa, was fascinated to learn how to paint brush characters," while Koji Ueno, the coach of the Japanese swimming team, "found the environment in the Village the best in Olympic history."¹³⁷

Through these investigations of the preparation for the 2008 Games, one can see how closely the Organizing Committee attempted to align with the Eastern Model established in the first chapter. 1. China in 2008 wanted to step into a more prominent role in the global community. 2. China faced the obstacles of political instability, Orientalism, and the fulfillment of the Tourist Gaze. 3. China tried to overcome these difficulties by sidestepping rather than confronting their political demons, using culture as a powerful marketing tool. The staged effort of the Beijing Olympics can perhaps be demonstrated in no better way than through the analysis of the Opening Ceremony. Chapter Three brings the grand show into sharper focus.

¹³⁶ Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. *Ceremonies and Competitions*, 213.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 223-224.

Chapter Three

“The splendid lights will allow us to remember the image of the Olympic rings in Beijing’s night sky, will let the world remember the Olympic rings carved with China’s legend and heritage.”¹³⁸

Photo Finish?

On August 8, 2008 at 8:00 PM, the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony began in the Bird’s Nest National Stadium, jumpstarting the 29th Olympic Games. In 2001, when the IOC made a preliminary visit to Beijing, officials recommended the cooler, dryer September for the important event.¹³⁹ Beijing courteously sidestepped this advice, deciding on one of the hottest and most humid months of the year. Throughout the Ceremony, commentators consistently referred to the stifling heat inside the stadium, uncomfortable for the athletes and spectators. (One NBC commentator even noticed that George W. Bush had chosen to take off his suit jacket.) One can surmise that this decision occurred based on typical cultural lines. Eight (八) is a traditionally auspicious number because of its similar sound to the Chinese word for generating prosperity or wealth (发). Deciding even the date of the Olympics (08/08/08 at 8 PM) proceeded based on culture, tradition, and heritage, a solid marketing point for the Beijing Games and a demonstration of how culture can trump even practicality.

This chapter focuses on the actual staging of the twenty-ninth Olympics Games. The first section looks at the first half of the Opening Ceremony, arguably the most widely viewed aspect of the Games. A general survey of China’s grand history, the first half of the Ceremony demonstrated a sensitivity to the Tourist Gaze. The second section covers the rest of the

¹³⁸ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, CCTV, August 8, 2008. (translated by author)

¹³⁹ International Olympic Committee, *Report of the IOC Evaluation Commission for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad in 2008*, [Lausanne, 2001], 59.

Ceremony, bringing the political themes of China's recent past into perspective. By focusing on China's enhanced modernity, the government avoided its most contentious political themes. In addition, the Parade of Nations provides the most illuminating example of how the national commentators for BBC, NBC, and CCTV tended to couch the events passing before their eyes. Following the analysis of the Opening Ceremony, the third section moves onto the most controversial topics of the Games themselves, for example the replacement of the girl singer for the National Anthem and the age of Chinese gymnasts. Special attention will be paid to how the international media tended to present these controversies in order to shed some light on the overall impression of China as a host nation.

The Artistry Factor

The Opening Ceremony of each Olympics Games is perhaps the most obvious vehicle for transmitting ideals to the international community. Seventy percent of the global population watched the Beijing Opening Ceremony.¹⁴⁰ With over 215 million people tuning in for the Opening Ceremony, NBC's coverage became the most watched event in American television history.¹⁴¹ The Beijing Olympics Planning Committee's ability to harness this raw media power represented its best chance to affect the world's opinion of the Chinese nation. The public diplomacy expert Nicholas Cull called the Beijing Olympics "the ultimate distraction story," deflecting away from its political present toward its cultural past.¹⁴² The evidence of this statement can be seen keenly in the Opening Ceremony, as 5000 years of Chinese history and culture were presented in a filtered form for foreign consumption.

¹⁴⁰ Finlay and Xin, 'Public Diplomacy games', 876.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 876.

¹⁴² Cull, 'Public Diplomacy of the Modern Olympic Games', 133.

Preparations for the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony began two years earlier, employing more than 10,000 people for its planning and execution. Zhang Yimou, famous for his Chinese martial arts films *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*, directed the Opening Ceremony, which featured such stars as world-renowned pianist Lang Lang and Phantom of the Opera singer Sarah Brightman. The Opening Ceremony was highly praised by the international audience. As the historian Jialing Luo stated in her analysis of the Beijing Olympics, “Overwhelmed by a distinctively Chinese feel, and by the ‘cinema in real time’, both Chinese and non-Chinese audiences were, at least temporarily, captivated by a sense of history, identity, friendship and openness, as well as by the ambitious Chinese Olympics vision of ‘*One World One Dream*’ that the government meant to communicate.”¹⁴³

In an event full of cultural symbols and representations, the Beijing Opening Ceremony, which incorporated 5,000 years of Chinese history, 10,000 performers, and a reported 100 million dollar budget, was truly a spectacular event. Through the Opening Ceremony, one can see the special attention paid by the Beijing Planning Committee to coordinate every element of the Olympic Games in accordance with cultural modes of presentation. Zhang Yimou demonstrated in directing the Opening Ceremony his film-making ability to create a codified show that catered in many respects to the expectations of an international audience. The performances featured similar trends to his movie productions: high-flying actors, martial arts, and colorful costumes.

The first “act” of the Ceremony featured 2008 drummers beating the countdown of the Olympics on *fou* drums. (Figure 9) The drummers placed the Chinese character and Arabic number side by side in a fashion that demonstrated “the precision, the sheer artistry, the limitless

¹⁴³ Jialing Luo, “Betwixt and between’: reflections on the ritual aspects of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic’, in *Documenting the Beijing Olympics*, ed. Dolores Martinez, (London: Routledge, 2011), 30.

energy” of the performers, according to the BBC commentary.¹⁴⁴ Following this combined display of modern LED lights and ancient musical instruments, the 2008 drummers recited the Confucian proverb “Welcome friends that have come from afar, how happy we are,” providing a rousing start to the Opening Ceremony. Already, one can see the emphasis on bringing the full force of China’s cultural tradition to bear. There is a clichéd exoticism in the mix, but one that emphasizes strength (*fou* drums) and openness (the specifically-chosen Confucian proverb). The Beijing Opening Ceremony presented its fair share of Chinese stereotypes, catering to the Tourist Gaze, but also shaped and remade common tropes. When viewers recall the first act of the ceremony, they will remember perfectly-coordinated, intense drumming, accompanied by rows of smiling faces.

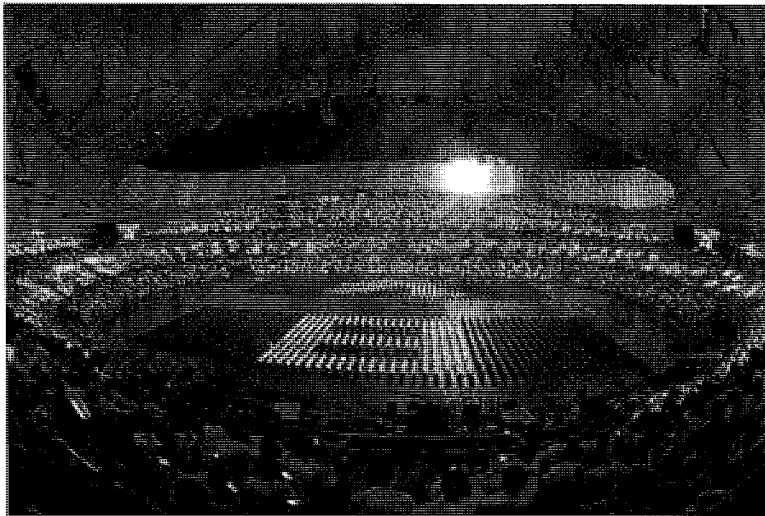


Figure 9

At the conclusion of the countdown, the broadcast switched to a pre-made CGI vision of fireworks in the form of giant footprints crossing the north-south axis of Beijing, from Tiananmen Square to the Bird’s Nest Stadium. Twenty-nine footprints to symbolize the twenty-nine Olympics Games. In the behind-the-scenes footage of the Opening Ceremony, the

¹⁴⁴ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

coordinators stated that, “if he [invisible giant man] walks on our earth planet, national borders mean nothing to him.”¹⁴⁵ In order to create the footprints, special fireworks technology had to be developed to keep the lights from burning out too quickly. Despite considerable success in the project, the real fireworks were not shown in the international broadcast version, a demonstration of the Planning Committee’s fear of failure in a live broadcast. As the last footprint arrived in the Bird’s Nest, a stunning fireworks show filled the Stadium and the surrounding city. Once again, in the Giant’s Footprints, audience members were treated to a spectacle of openness, crossing national borders, and creating a truly international community. At the same time, the act showcased China’s great technological and innovative strength; it is important to note, however, that this was a modern revival of an ancient Chinese tradition. With the emphasis on fireworks and more importantly gunpowder, the Opening Ceremony began a running theme of the “Four Great Inventions” of Chinese history: gunpowder, paper, printing, and compass. Each would play an important role in the performances, demonstrating China’s importance in the history of the modern world.

The next segment featured the Buddhist figures of the apsara, celestial nymphs, that also glowed with bright LED lights. The fusion of ancient and modern cannot be stressed enough, truly a redesigning of centuries-old culture. Based on drawings discovered on the walls of caves found in northwestern China dating back to the Tang Dynasty, the apsara filled the Stadium in a display that was “not so much House of Flying Daggers as House of Flying Stars,” as a BBC commentator raved.¹⁴⁶ Along with the display of ancient religious tradition, the segment also brought fifty-six children dressed in the costumes of the different ethnic groups in China onto the

¹⁴⁵ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony Behind the Scenes Documentary*, CCTV, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=QxUKf6W6wI8.

¹⁴⁶ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

Stadium floor. This ostensible version of China's diversity glosses over some of the most controversial elements of China's history. Tibet is currently the most pointed topic, but China relationship with other minorities began with conquest and remains to this day a difficult diplomacy issue. It was also later reported that all fifty-six children were Beijing natives, and not actually taken from China's minority population. Representing the future of China, the children then transferred the Chinese flag to a squad of soldiers, a message that the NBC commentators translated as one demonstrating to the Chinese population that the "state is the guarantor of the safety of those children."¹⁴⁷ The raising of the Chinese flag would later generate much controversy as the original child singer was replaced by a different girl; rumors abounded that the switch occurred because the singer was not attractive enough to be the center of international broadcasts. The Planning Committee's obsession with perfection once again caused changes to the program. That neither the NBC nor BBC commentary mentioned this switch at the time was a blessing for the Beijing organizers, as the media storm that raged after did not mar the live broadcast of the evening.

As the Opening ceremony progressed to the next segment, the BBC commentators would go on to say, "That's [Chinese flag] about all we're going to see about China's communism... We're going to see a lot more of this image. The traditional, the calligraphy, the culture and sophistication of ancient China."¹⁴⁸ (Figure 10) This subtle acknowledgement demonstrated the awareness of the international broadcasters. The Beijing Planning Committee preferred an outright avoidance of political themes, diverting attention instead toward its great cultural tradition. The segment featured a giant scroll on the floor of the Bird's Nest to represent papermaking, another of China's "Four Great Inventions." Dancers dressed in black became the

¹⁴⁷ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, NBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁴⁸ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

brushes, creating an artistic 山水 (mountain water) tapestry on the scroll using modern dance moves. Accompanied by the *gu zhen*, perhaps the most famous of traditional Chinese instruments, the dancers created “new images to replace images the Chinese people want to leave behind.”¹⁴⁹ The juxtapositions in this scene were highly apparent: modern dancers recreating a traditional art form to traditional Chinese music; the ancient paper scroll created by the most advanced technology of the age. The Chinese people wanted to leave behind its most recent history, replacing the images of Tiananmen and Free Tibet with Ancient China infused with high technology and the obvious strength of China’s economy.



Figure 10

The third of “Four Great Inventions,” printing, was featured in the next segment of the Opening Ceremony. As Confucius’ 3,000 disciples¹⁵⁰ circled the Stadium floor chanting his most famous proverbs (most pointedly “the virtuous leader can pass across subjects with the ease of

¹⁴⁹ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, NBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius was said to have 3,000 disciples at his peak, a number that the BBC commentators seemed very skeptical of. Active in the 5th and 6th centuries BCE, Confucius laid down the most fundamental edicts of Chinese ethical and philosophical doctrine.

the wind.”)¹⁵¹, rows of movable print blocks rose from underneath the electronic scroll. One by one, the different versions of the word “harmony”, beginning with the most ancient and ending with the simplified 和, were created with the blocks.

Following this sequence, the Great Wall, perhaps the most famous image of China, took form on the floor. (Figure 11) When it symbolically collapsed, plum flowers, the Chinese symbol for openness, sprouted from within. It was then revealed that the beautifully precise and fluid movement of the heavy movable blocks was created by human performers within the blocks. The

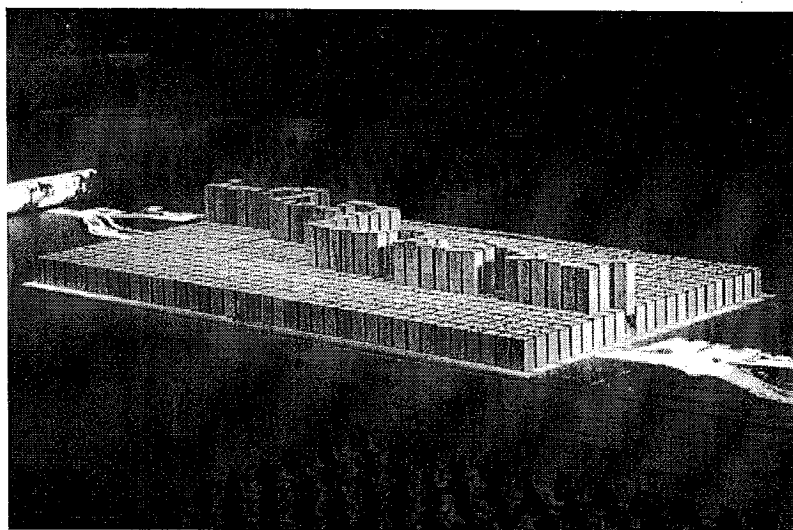


Figure 11

NBC commentary on the display cited China’s desire to replace one image of China with another using the fall of the Great Wall, meant for centuries to keep foreign elements out of the country.¹⁵² This fall would take place at the hands of the people, not with robotics or computers. For any foreign viewer, any montage of China’s culture and history would be incomplete without a reference to China’s most famous landmark. (How could a tourist say that he visited China

¹⁵¹ Confucian proverbs such as this have often been used by the Chinese government as a call for loyalty from the subjects.

¹⁵² *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, NBC, August 8, 2008.

without seeing the Great Wall?) The Planning Committee brilliantly alluded to this staple of the Tourist Gaze, while at the same time using it to demonstrate China's new entrance into the international community.

The following segment, skipped by the NBC broadcast, featured China's ancient music and arts. It began with a traditional puppet show and a performance of *Journey to the West*.

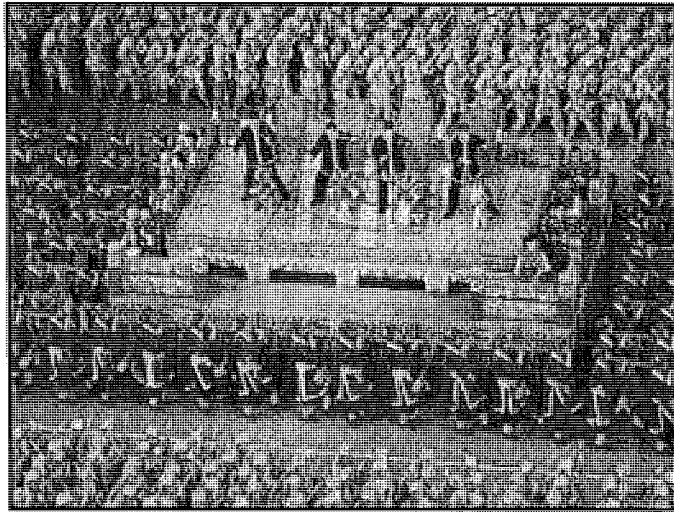


Figure 12

One of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature, *Journey to the West* is instantly identifiable by any Chinese citizen or any interested in Chinese culture. (Figure 12) The story follows Buddhist monk Xuanzhang on his voyage toward enlightenment as he atones for past sins. The segment demonstrated a “China playing to its strength: the mobilization of epic numbers of people... enormous discipline and perseverance.” According to the BBC broadcast, “We haven’t seen this drill discipline, the fantastic precision of movement from so many people on this grand scale since Seoul... The Olympics have come to perhaps the least westernized country of them all [East Asian Olympics], China... This is an older image of China.”¹⁵³ From this comment, one can see the natural tendency to group the East Asian Olympics into one

¹⁵³ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

category and assign specific characteristics inherent in all three. The specific emphasis on Seoul being the last Olympics to show such disciplined movement provided a great example of the sort of stereotype directed toward the East Asian Olympiads.

This tendency certainly has precedents. As the sociologist Jonathan Friedman asserts, “the “foreigner” and the “fungible” (racial lumping) stereotypes transmogrify Asian Americans into a faceless, deindividualized horde.”¹⁵⁴ Orientalist dialogue about the differences between East and West have often focused on the differences between Western liberating individualism and Eastern strict discipline. In 2012, when reporters compared the London Olympics to its Beijing predecessor, the language used to describe London heavily featured terms such as “individual” and “joyous”. Zhou Libo, host of “China’s Got Talent”, asserted, “2008 Beijing was solemn, 2012 London is humour. Solemnity and stateliness tells the world you are strong. Humour lets the world feel you are strong; it’s about confidence.”¹⁵⁵ In London 2012, performers marched around the Olympic National Stadium in Stratford in seemingly unrehearsed, freeform movements. It felt an almost pointed move to separate from the perfect, rehearsed patterns of Beijing 2008. Mayor Boris Johnson derided the idea of spending Britain’s defense budget on pyrotechnics and pageantry.¹⁵⁶ (One could perhaps assume that the emphasis on freedom and individuality in the London Games came about as a result of London’s inability to front the enormous cost of a spectacle like the Beijing Games.) As a result, many around the world found adequate material to continue years of generalized West/East divisions. For example, a Weibo

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Friedman. *Performing Difference: Representations of “The Other” in Film and Theatre*. University Press of America, 2008, 129.

¹⁵⁵ “London 2012: What the world thought of the opening ceremony,” *The Telegraph*, July 28, 2012.

¹⁵⁶ Sarah Lyall. “A Five-Ring Opening Circus, Weirdly and Unabashedly British,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2012.

(China's main microblogging website) user stated, "The opening ceremony for Beijing was splendid but London's was more individual."¹⁵⁷

Yet, one must question whether the label of "discipline" is really such a bad thing. The mass mobilization and utter discipline of the Chinese performers was viewed with awe and amazement by the non-Eastern commentators, a trait that the Planning Committee would perhaps like to keep and continue as a defining characteristic of the Chinese people. Instead, the Planning Committee's "judo" techniques once again come into play, as they chose to cement the traits of discipline and hard work, while subtly changing the tone. For example, in the opening act with the rows of *fou* drums, called "awe-inspiring" by the NBC commentators, the drummers were asked to smile more during rehearsals to lessen the intensity of the performance.¹⁵⁸ When the movable print blocks were opened to reveal that humans had created the precise movements, the performers waved, smiled, and shouted to a delighted crowd.

The segment featuring China's musical and fashion tradition showcased rows of identically-dressed performers, but in such elaborate and beautiful designs that one can hardly fail to be impressed by the sight. (Figure 13) Beijing 2008 was indeed full of performers marching to the same tune, but the Planning Committee chose a tune both extravagant and welcoming. A Huffington Post writer commented after the London Games, "What was reflected in both was the very nature of their past culture: China is harmony working together while the West celebrates innovation out of chaos."¹⁵⁹ Such a "best of both worlds" designation could hardly be considered a negative distinction.

¹⁵⁷ "London 2012: What the world thought of the opening ceremony," *The Telegraph*, July 28, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, NBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁵⁹ Justice, Lorraine. "London Olympic Opening vs. Beijing Olympic Opening: Controlled Chaos vs. Controlled Order," *The Huffington Post*, July 30, 2012.



Figure 13

In many ways, this showcase hearkened back to the Cultural Revolution era in the 1960s. A performance of the song, *Dong Fang Hong* (Red is the East), in 1964 featured 3,000 workers, peasants, and soldiers in the Hall of the People. The song told the story of the CCP's ultimate victory in the Chinese Civil War.¹⁶⁰ One can see echoes of the employment of elaborate showcases to demonstrate a propagandistic point. But in 2008, the rows of dancers were meant to avoid Communist China and all the connotations of the Cultural Revolution.

The mass mobilization of people also played a heavy role in the next segment, which featured the Great Invention of the compass. The audience was treated to a little-known part of Chinese history in the voyages of Zheng He, who went to see the world in the early fifteenth century. The BBC commentary asserted that Zheng He was unable to continue his voyage because China turned inward after that period. It is important to note that this is only one interpretation of Zheng He's sudden return to China. Economic difficulties were also rampant in China during the time, and the government might simply not have been able to afford the cost of

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2012, 103

exploration. As for the element of Chinese history that spans the 18th century through the Opium Wars, civil war, and Communism, the audience “won’t be seeing [it] in the Opening Ceremony.” Instead, the audience would be presented with “the 5,000 years that all Chinese are so proud of” from the Song to Ming Dynasties.¹⁶¹ Once again, the self-conscious exploration by the commentators themselves demonstrated to a certain extent the understanding of political avoidance.

The Four Great Inventions, so directly and eagerly displayed in the Opening Ceremony, have interesting historical backgrounds. The concept itself is a Western one, originated by the British in mid-19th century. Joseph Edkins, a Protestant missionary in China for 57 years, created the theory of China’s Four Great Inventions, which was later internalized by the world and indeed the Chinese people themselves. Today, the concept is taught in Chinese elementary schools, a fine example of Invented Traditions for the purposes of historical relevance. Though gunpowder, papermaking, printing, and the compass did indeed originate in China, the list places many equally and perhaps even more important Chinese inventions in the shadows. As Chinese historian Deng Yinke writes, “The four inventions were regarded as the most important Chinese achievements in science and technology, simply because they had a prominent position in the exchanges between the East and the West and acted as a powerful dynamic in the development of capitalism in Europe.” The list of inventions often overshadowed by these Four is extensive: farming, iron and copper metallurgy, exploitation of coal and petroleum, machinery, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, porcelain, silk, and wine making.¹⁶²

The use of the Four Great Inventions as a guide for the Opening Ceremony helps demonstrate the Beijing Planning Committee’s commitment to fulfilling many elements of the

¹⁶¹ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁶² Deng Yinke. *Ancient Chinese Inventions*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2005, 14.

Tourist Gaze, employing an international language in their national display. The Four Great Inventions, along with the Great Wall, would perhaps be the most recognizable Chinese elements for a foreign audience. That both played such an integral role in the Opening Ceremony clearly aligned with the expectations from international viewers. And yet the Planning Committee was able to convert these dominant images into something with a modern Chinese flair. The opulence and showmanship which defined each segment of the Opening Ceremony displayed the cultural richness and economic might of the country. Similar to Tokyo and Seoul, Beijing provided a brilliant display of “Judo – the gentle way.” The Planning Committee was able to cater to the Tourist Gaze with its many Orientalist leanings, but turned a backwardly exotic impression into a forward-moving marvel. For audiences unaware of China’s heritage, this would be their first glimpse of a technological powerful and culturally benign China. For audiences already familiar with China, perhaps these spectacles would be the first step towards changing global conceptions of the nation.

Cavalcade

Following the final extravagant display of China’s cultural past, the Opening Ceremony then moved on to the “modern” half of the performance. The first segment showcased internationally-renowned pianist Lang Lang and several hundred performers with costumes covered in bright green lights. The performers moved fluidly into organic and free form shapes around the piano, eventually finding the form of a dove, the international symbol for peace and goodwill. (Figure 14) The transition to the modern flair, according to the NBC broadcast,

demonstrated China's move from brown Mao suits to the "vivid colors of a people deciding for themselves how they want to live their lives."¹⁶³

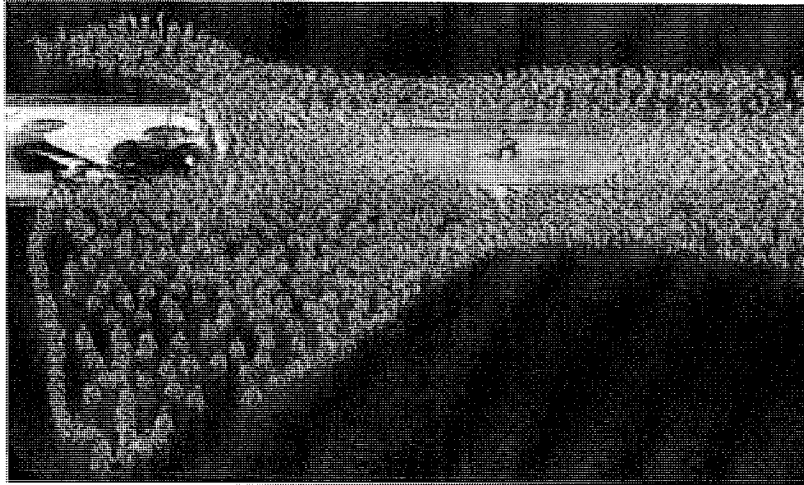


Figure 14

As a young child flying a giant kite floated above the brightly illuminate performers on the floor, the BBC commentary asserted that China was representing itself as a "country with the confidence to do everything on the big scale."¹⁶⁴ The praise from international broadcasters would reach each country's national audience. China was opening its doors; the people themselves had the confidence and inspiration to make big changes to their lives. Regardless of the legitimacy of these observations, the Planning Committee's ability to generate such a response surely must be a testament to their self-promotional skill.

The next segment starred one of the official themes of the Beijing Olympics, "Green Games." The section began with a group of schoolchildren sitting on the reinstated drawing of 山水. As they drew, they recited a poem that condemned global warming, the melting of the ice caps, and the vanishing of the world's birds. Around the children, 2008 tai chi martial artists

¹⁶³ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, NBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁶⁴ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

created perfect concentric circles, performing a fighting style that was “a special combination of hardness and softness.”¹⁶⁵ (Figure 14) This segment was not met with very much enthusiasm by either the NBC or the BBC broadcasts. The BBC commentators brought the audience’s attention to China’s position as having sixteen of the world’s most polluted cities, falling water tables, and desertification, while the NBC commentators found the image of schoolchildren surrounded by martial artists performing fighting moves very disconcerting.¹⁶⁶ Yet, the NBC broadcast brought some optimism to the segment by commenting on the movement of tai chi as one that progresses by beginning with a very subtle move in the opposite direction. This pointed remark would have been greatly welcomed by the Planning Committee; it could in many ways justify the current impression of the Communist party in the eyes of the international community as overly strict and oppressive. Things must become worse before they can become better. Despite the direction taken by the government that is currently criticized by the international community, the world can expect a better China to arise after the condemnation.



Figure 15

¹⁶⁵ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, NBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁶⁶ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

The segment was unable to convince the commentators to recognize the environmental changes planned by the Chinese government (perhaps nothing would), but many negative comments were redirected from environmental issues to the precision of the display, and the faultlessness of the circles. Both BBC and NBC commentators mentioned that there were no markers on the ground to designate a performer's position. All movements and placements were learned by heart, a brilliantly coordinated effort. The American and British broadcasts both repeatedly referred to the amount of training that each performer had to undergo. Preparation and training for the Opening Ceremony spanned two years, resulting in many comments on the dedication and hard work of the Chinese people. It can be argued that the perfection of the display distracted attention away from the commentator's cynical views of Chinese environmental progress, a clever combination by the Planning Committee of culture and grandeur to mask political uncertainties.

The final segment prior to the Parade of Nations demonstrated China's hope for the future. As astronauts floated in the National Stadium (signifying China's successful placement of a man in space in 2003), internationally-famous Sarah Brightman sang the official Olympics song "You and Me" with Chinese singer Liu Huan on top of a globe. This union of international and national stars might be construed as demonstrating China's hope for a more neighborly relationship with the global community. As the artistic section of the Opening Ceremony came to a close and the Parade of Nations began, images of children from all nationalities were projected across the highest electronic membrane of the Bird's Nest stadium. The constant reference to children as representative of the future, requiring the protection of the present, became a theme through the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony, a symbol for China's enthusiasm in creating One World, One Dream. Children, arguably the most innocent of demographics, certainly played

an important role throughout the ceremony. Using children from across the world provided a safe place to end the performance section of the Opening Ceremony.

Another method of demonstrating the Chinese Planning Committee and government's adherence to political avoidance can be found in a comparative study of the broadcasts, using the CCTV version as a baseline for comparison. The scenes on the screen constantly flashed between the Opening Ceremony and the seated Chinese leadership, as if trying to imply that the grandeur of the Opening Ceremony and China's new position in the world came from their authority and great efforts. A rather sterile, scripted commentary prepared weeks in advance contrasted sharply with the off-the-cuff banter employed by the NBC and BBC versions. When comparing the few minutes before the countdown to the Ceremony, the widest differences can be observed. The Chinese commentators presented a well-rehearsed speech to the viewers.

This is the capital city of the People Republic of China, Beijing. This is the 29th Olympic Games host city, China, Beijing.... Tonight, we are going to see a show magnificent in size and witness the birth of the concept of One World, One Dream, a 100 year old dream with 7 years of preparation.¹⁶⁷ Soon, the Beijing Olympics will be kicked off. Olympians from the 205 countries around the globe are going to make the historic gathering under the Olympic rings. It will be the first time in 112 years that the Olympics have entered the world's most populous country. The Opening Ceremony that symbolizes the unity, peace, and friendship of humanity in Beijing is the conclusion of the 100 year dream and also 5000 years of Chinese civilization embracing the world civilization. This will enable peaceful development and lasting world peace and will contribute to a harmonious and equal world.¹⁶⁸

In contrast, the BBC broadcast began with the comment that "not since so many years has sports and politics have such an uneasy balance."¹⁶⁹ The past few Olympics had been held in stable, Western countries (Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney, Athens), with little controversy beyond the usual budgetary issues and doping allegations. Asked to put the Games into a political context, a

¹⁶⁷ Since the beginning of the Modern Olympics.

¹⁶⁸ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, CCTV, August 8, 2008. (translated by author)

¹⁶⁹ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

commentator quipped, “We haven’t developed hacking coughs just yet, I’m happy to say.” The NBC broadcast began with a discussion of the many Chinas. One where half a billion people live on \$2 a day, while 100 million live in modern prosperity in another China that is constantly racing to the future. It also spoke of the two Great Walls, one tourist attraction and one that surrounds the ruling class. The differences between the Chinese approach and the international approach can be seen in the absolute absence of any political content in the Chinese version. Intent on avoiding any controversial statements, the commentators were provided scripts to follow throughout the broadcast. As sociologist Limin Luang asserts, “the rehearsed nature is strongly felt.”¹⁷⁰

This disparity can be particularly seen in the Parade of Nations. The Parade, originating with the 1928 Amsterdam Games, was long meant to bring together athletes from every nation in the National Stadium. Over the years, it slowly became bigger, longer, and more affable. The Tokyo Olympics featured straight, separated lines of athletes, while the Beijing Games sported a great melting pot as athletes from every nation mingled and met. Yet, the Parade of Nations is still a very obvious mode of transmitting a nation’s political opinions, both in the Parade itself and in the broadcast. Sociologist Limin Luang, in an in-depth study of the Parade of Nations, remarked that, “Chinese commentary tended to be highly repetitive and more serious in nature compared to the humorous bantering among the western anchors.”¹⁷¹ The CCTV coverage managed to introduce almost all the nations, and had “hardly any trivializing or marginalizing techniques.”¹⁷² By comparison, the NBC version often cut to commercials whenever a large

¹⁷⁰ Luang, “Framing China and the world through the Olympics opening ceremonies,” 81.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 76-77.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 81.

stretch of small countries was about to occur, giving these nations a few seconds of introduction upon resuming coverage. This comprehensive and politically neutral coverage could potentially work for China's advantage, as nations without national broadcasts would see themselves represented faithfully.

What the Chinese presenters focused on and how they presented each nation differed greatly from their international counterparts, demonstrating an emphasis on avoiding political commentary completely. While the CCTV broadcast never deviated from a strict sports commentary on the athletes and their performance chances in the next fifteen days, the NBC and BBC broadcasts often infused their commentaries with observations on the political and economic situation of the country. The BBC commentators focused particularly on the Asian countries surrounding China, such as Japan and Taiwan, and their tense history. Often too, countries such as Zimbabwe became the center point of political conversation for their political and economic leanings toward China. The BBC broadcast mentioned that the Chinese are often "accused of being toxic for democracy in Africa."¹⁷³ No punches were pulled by the international broadcasters. With the arrival of the U.S. representatives, a BBC commentator stated, "These are the visitors the Chinese want to see most of all. The admiration for the American culture, American power in the world knows no bounds."¹⁷⁴ That the flagbearer for the U.S. was Lopez Lamong, a Sudanese refugee, did not escape the notice of the BBC commentators, and special attention was paid to the tension between the two nations during the torch relay. Yet, one

¹⁷³ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁷⁴ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

commentator stated, “However many qualms, this is the relationship, economic and military that defines our world.”¹⁷⁵

The NBC broadcast of the Parade also contained many political comments, especially as the Chinese national team entered the Stadium. The NBC commentators stated, “China, one of the reasons it’s so hard to explain this place to people is it’s not only a place of great success like Beijing and hundreds of millions of people lifted out of poverty, but also the country facing unbelievable challenges in the future.”¹⁷⁶ The commentators paid special attention to the Chinese hero

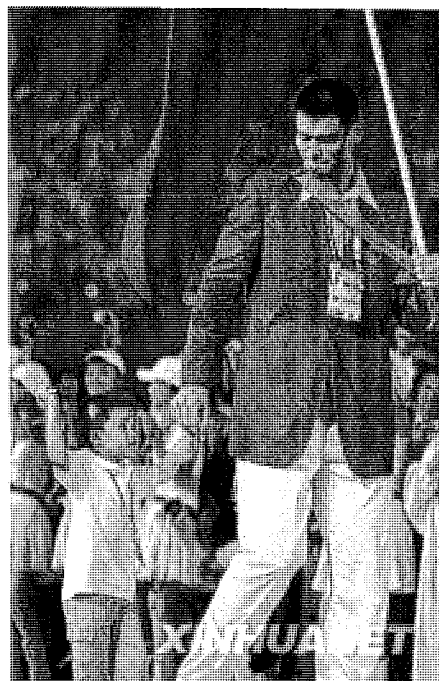


Figure 16

Yao Ming, who walked through accompanied by nine year old Sichuan earthquake survivor Lin Hao. (Figure 15) During the devastating disaster that occurred just a few months before the Olympics Games, Lin Hao narrowly survived the destruction of his school, singing in the rubble to keep his classmates’ morale high. Once rescued, he returned to save several of his classmates, because “I am a hall monitor. It was my job.” Compared to the American broadcasters who waxed lyrical about incident and the balance between tall and short, hard and soft, light and dark, the Chinese broadcasters made little mention about the significance of Lin Hao’s position in the Parade. The broadcast avoided extended commentary on the great demonstration of Chinese perseverance represented by Lin Hao, a move that Luang views as a marked reluctance to go anywhere near to

¹⁷⁵ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁷⁶ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, NBC, August 8, 2008.

politics. For the broadcast to brag about the determination and loyalty of Lin Hao would be too obvious a marketing ploy. CCTV thus cleverly created a scene allowing the NBC and BBC commentators to explain the importance of Lin Hao to an international audience that might not know the story.

And yet, despite the many rather cautious takes on the mega-event, the NBC and BBC broadcasts both left a very positive impression of the Opening Ceremony, one that would resonate with the international viewers. The sheer sensory element, size, and grandeur generated an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response from the commentators. Bob Costas, a veteran of eight Winter and Summer Olympic Games stated, “This is the finest Opening Ceremony I have ever seen.”¹⁷⁷ As the camera panned to the athletes gathered on the Birds’ Nest Stadium floor, one commentator asserted, “You can talk about politics intersecting with the Olympics, but if you look at what is happening on the infield... this is what it’s supposed to be about. Though it’s an ideal after all, sometimes it is *magnified* and *captured*.”¹⁷⁸

The impact of the commentators’ words cannot be underestimated. Studies undertaken in the past have shown a positive correlation between media commentary and public opinion. One test completed by sociologists in the 1980s demonstrated the influence of news commentary with multiple surveys taken before, during, and after major media moments. The researchers found that a single “probably pro” commentary by a news anchor correlated with a more than four percent change in public opinion. By analyzing short-term and medium-term effects, the researchers attributed ninety percent of the variance to the television broadcasts.¹⁷⁹ Particularly

¹⁷⁷ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁷⁸ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008. (italics added by author)

¹⁷⁹ Benjamin Page, Robert Shapiro, and Glenn Dempsey, “What Moves Public Opinion,” in *Media Power in Politics*, ed. Doris Graber, (CQ Press: Washington D.C., 2011), 91-96

important was the commentary by those categorized as “experts,” whose credibility was crucial to the change in public opinion.

This study, completed even before the media had the massive, international viewership it possesses today, demonstrates that media events can change public opinion. The mingling of nations as athletes flocked to take pictures with Kobe Bryant and Roger Federer will be an image forever etched in the minds of the international audience, with the Beijing Olympics as a facilitator of cross-border connections. As Michael Johnson, famed American athlete and special guest at the BBC broadcasting studios stated, “This just blew away anything I’ve ever seen before.”¹⁸⁰ This dominant impression by famous non-Eastern names hints at the success of the Beijing Olympics in following the Eastern Model. Through the Opening Ceremony, many political controversies took a backseat to the cultural showcase and extravaganza.

Line Calls

Yet, even before the applause died down for the 2008 Beijing Opening Ceremony, several controversies about the spectacle began to crop up in international media. The Beijing Organizing Committee could not entirely sidestep major political controversies. The exchange of the girl singer for the National Anthem was discovered and criticized. Lin Miaoke replaced singer Yang Peiyi, because, according to Chinese officials, Lin had the better face and could better represent the nation.¹⁸¹ Yang Peiyi’s voice was played for the crowds as Lin Miaoke lip-synched to the song. As soon as the story broke several days after the Opening Ceremony, news outlets around the world condemned the Beijing Planning Committee for their treatment of both

¹⁸⁰ *Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony*, BBC, August 8, 2008.

¹⁸¹ Michael Bristow. “China Olympic Ceremony star mimed,” *BBC News*, August 12, 2008.

girls. The Chinese government overall came under fire because the decision reportedly filtered down from the highest level of the Politburo. The national newspaper, *China Daily*, justified the switch by referring to the argument of IOC executive director Gilbert Felli, one of the few non-Chinese defenders, "You have to put it into the context of the opening ceremony and the complexity of 15,000 performers... Of course all of them have to change roles on the preparation."¹⁸² Yet many, including Chinese bloggers, argued against the apparent superficiality of the act, questioning the ethical judgment that this exchange presented to the Chinese people and the next generation.

Two trends can be discerned from this story. First, the Planning Committee and the government's absolute attention to a beautiful and perfect appearance came heavily into play. Such an extreme move on part of the organizers demonstrates the importance of the event and the lengths to which they were willing to go in order to make it truly magnificent. Lip-synching had occurred before in major international live events; during the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, the final performance of Luciano Pavarotti was revealed in 2008 to be pre-recorded. Though controversial, this sleight of hand was not condemned nearly as much as the Beijing Olympics' incident because Pavarotti, sick and aging, could not have completed the song in below-freezing temperatures. The voice heard by the audience, however, was his own.¹⁸³ To replace the singer, based on purely aesthetic reasons, demonstrated a much higher level of self-consciousness and precaution.

Second, the incident illuminated the international media's use of events such as the singer exchange to characterize the Beijing Olympics' treatment of the Games and the country itself. In

¹⁸² "Games organizers say girl's vocal lip-synched to ensure "best voice, best performer"," *Xinhua China Daily*, August 13, 2008.

¹⁸³ Tom Kington. "Pavarotti mimed at final performance," *The Guardian*. April 6, 2008.

the aftermath of the Opening Ceremony, China was labeled as “image-obsessed.” An article published by *The Guardian* stated, “The switch may reflect underlying cultural preferences as well as the incredible attention paid to Olympic preparations.”¹⁸⁴ From this casual assertion, one can see how distinctions between China and the rest of the world were held up and constantly reinforced. The “cultural preference” could link to many preconceived ideals of the Chinese state: absence of individuality, forced social harmony, and lack of creativity. Even in the 2000s, sociological studies often attempted to highlight and perpetuate such stereotypes of the Chinese country. The sociologist Elisabeth Rudowicz’s 2004 article titled, “Creativity among Chinese People: Beyond Western Perspective,” sought to demonstrate that Chinese adherence to Daoist traditions meant following a predetermined path rather than trying to discover anything new.

Bearing in mind that elements of *invention* and *novelty*, a willingness to *reject tradition*, orientation on *self-actualization*, celebration of *individual accomplishment*, and concentration on the *future*, are almost inherent to Western conception of creativity we can easily notice that these elements are foreign to the traditional Chinese ideals of respect for the past, and maintaining harmony with the forces of the nature.”¹⁸⁵

These thoughts, applied to the girl singer during the Beijing Olympics, demonstrate one major stereotype perpetuated about the Chinese people. The social currency employed by the Chinese people relied on group cohesion rather than person freedom, joint effort rather than individual creativity.

Another major media storm followed the artistic gymnastics events. According to the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique, female gymnasts must be at least 16 years of age. (Younger gymnasts benefit from being lighter and more flexible. In addition, young gymnasts

¹⁸⁴ Tania Branigan. “Olympics: Child singer revealed as fake,” *The Guardian*. August 12, 2008.

¹⁸⁵ Elisabeth Rudowicz, “Creativity Among Chinese People: Beyond Western Perspective,” in *Creativity: When East Meets West*, eds. Sing Lau, Anna Hui, Grace Ng, (World Scientific: London, 2004), 59.

may face medical problems if trained too harshly at too young an age). The Chinese team was accused of institutionalized cheating, and the IOC began an investigation into the ages of five of six of the team's gymnasts, with special attention paid to He Kexin and Deng Linlin. He's birth date on several national registries made her fourteen years of age during the Olympics.¹⁸⁶ These allegations came after an announcement by former Olympian Yang Yun, who won two bronze medals at the 2000 Sydney Games, that she had been underage at the time.

According to their passports, none of the gymnasts' were underage. International reports immediately questioned the legitimacy of the passport checks. As sports writer E. M. Swift stated, "Cheating is cheating. The IOC spends millions of dollars trying to ferret out drug cheats. Yet they ignore allegations of institutionalized cheating by an authoritarian government that has the ability to alter the dates on a passport anytime it wants."¹⁸⁷ The verdict from most newspapers was that the IOC's checks were too lenient and that the Chinese gymnasts, based on appearance, must have been underage. Despite the argument by Chinese officials that Chinese children look and age differently compared to their Western counterparts, many sources from around the world saw the Chinese gymnasts as a clear-cut example of the audacity and corruption of the government. Famed gymnastics coach, Bela Karolyi, asserted, "She [Deng Linlin] is a baby! How can the Chinese get away with cheating the world? They are backed by their government and doing this in front of our faces."¹⁸⁸ Regardless of the truth or falsity of the

¹⁸⁶ Juliet Macur, "China Cites Paperwork Error in Age of Gymnast." *The New York Times*, August 24, 2008.

¹⁸⁷ E.M. Swift, "The IOC's handling of the underage gymnast controversy is a shame," *Sports Illustrated*, August 20, 2008.

¹⁸⁸ Juliet Macur, "I.O.C. Asks for Inquiry of Chinese Gymnasts," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2008.

statement, this story would haunt the Beijing Olympics as well as the Chinese government for years to come.

The story of the men's gymnastics team also generated some reservations from the international community. Some resentment was felt about the supposed manipulation by the Chinese team of the new scoring system. No longer revolving around achieving a perfect ten, the new system was said to favor difficulty over artistry, turning gymnastics into mere acrobatics.¹⁸⁹ No team received this accusation more than the Chinese team. Again comments hearkened back to the idea of creativity and artistry, or rather the lack of in Chinese society. Juliet Macur, a journalist for the New York Times, wrote, "The Chinese national team has routines with very high difficulty — so high that the team is already ahead of every other, on paper, before the Games begin, said Ron Brant, the United States men's national team coordinator."¹⁹⁰ The underlying accusation seems to be that the Chinese team, eschewing creativity for pure physical force, abandoned some pure artistic element of the sport for a gold medal.

Another constant controversy that followed the Communist Party of China concerned the state training system and immense pressure placed on the nation's athletes. In particular, Liu Xiang, the hurdler who won gold in the 2004 Athens Games, came under considerable criticism for pulling out of the Games in the opening heats. As Liu Xiang, the product of China's great training regime, left the stadium, the crowd of 91,000 watched in stunned silence. Citing an Achilles tendon injury, Liu could not fulfill the immense expectation placed on him by the

¹⁸⁹ Similar comments are still being made. See Brian Homewood, "Olympics-Gymnastics needs fewer acrobatics, more artistry," *Reuters*, June 19, 2012.

¹⁹⁰ Juliet Macur, "A 10 Isn't Necessarily Perfect in New Scoring System for Gymnastics." *New York Times*, August 5, 2008.

government as well as the nation.¹⁹¹ Many Chinese bloggers questioned whether Liu left the competition not because of an injury, but because of the fear of failure. In *China Daily*, Liu's coach was quoted saying, "Officials from the State General Administration of Sport once told us that if Liu cannot win another gold medal in Beijing, all of his previous achievements will become meaningless."¹⁹²

The Chinese government has historically followed very extreme measures to extract the greatest number of victories from its national athletes. Joseph Capousek, a German canoeing and kayaking coach hired to train the Chinese team, was fired after conflicting with the Chinese sports system. (*The Los Angeles Times* article labeled the difference between the Western and Chinese models a "culture clash"). His sign-on contract stated the condition that he guarantee a medal for the 2008 Olympics, which was stated as simply a goal in the German translation.¹⁹³ Often repeated by athletes and coaches, the Communist slogan, "Don't retreat from the front lines with light injuries," came to encapsulate the state training system.¹⁹⁴

Story after story about the harsh conditions for China's athletes filled the international press. Yang Wenjun, a gold medalist in flatwater canoeing, trained for the Beijing Olympics 250 miles away from home and saw his parents only once in three years.¹⁹⁵ International media particularly stressed the fact that Chinese state training did not prepare athletes for anything else, gave no consideration to the quality of their lives after sports or in the advent of not making the

¹⁹¹ Clifford Coonan, "Heartbreak for China as hero limps out before first hurdle." *The Independent*, August 19, 2008.

¹⁹² Howard French, "China Presses Injured Athletes in Quest for Gold." *The New York Times*, June 20, 2008.

¹⁹³ Mark Magnier, "Foreign coaches are a tough fit in China." *The Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 2008.

¹⁹⁴ French, "China Presses Injured Athletes in Quest for Gold."

¹⁹⁵ Juliet Macur, "In China's Medal Factory, Winners Cannot Quit," *The New York Times*, June 21, 2008.

cut. Zou Chunlan, former champion weight lifter, was quoted saying, “There are many athletes like me who never get the help. We are left uneducated, unable to have children and destroyed by a system that told us it would take care of us forever.”¹⁹⁶ This difference came to characterize not only the harshness of the Chinese sports system, but also the Chinese standard of living as a whole.

There is a special sort of duality to consider when judging the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The euphoria following the Opening Ceremony was full of bright language directed toward the Planning Committee and the Chinese people. The Opening Ceremony showed a China that was strong and happy (*fou* drummers), open and willing to enter the global community (fall of the metaphorical Great Wall), extravagant and faultless (the precision of the acts). Yet, this image vacillated between negative and positive throughout the Games themselves. The many techniques of the Beijing Planning Committee were all directed toward stemming the criticism and changing the dominant stereotype of the nation. The success of their actions, as well as their soft power achievements, remains to be determined.

¹⁹⁶ Macur, “In China’s Medal Factory, Winners Cannot Quit.”

Conclusion

Examining the immediate reactions following the Beijing Olympics presents a very mixed picture. Scholars and audiences studying the 2008 Games in the coming decades will find opinions on opposite sides of the approval spectrum. The 2008 IOC Final Report on the Beijing Olympics stated:

Beijing and China were enormously deserving hosts of the Games, and they used this opportunity to demonstrate to the world the richness of their culture, the outstanding capabilities of their population, their will to build a better, more sustainable, future, and also, their openness.¹⁹⁷

Xinhua, the national Chinese newspaper, was naturally inclined to mention only the multiple favorable reviews given by ambassadors and the leaders of foreign governments. Covering countries from Brunei and Cambodia to Sudan and Bosnia Herzegovina, the Xinhua reports did not stint on the praises officially heaped on the Beijing Olympics and the Planning Committee.¹⁹⁸

Other reception, however, was not all favorable. Journalist Katie Thomas condemned the IOC praise for the Beijing Games after a series of interviews. “I think the IOC’s fact sheet is missing a lot of salient facts,” said Minky Worden, the media director for Human Rights Watch, “What is missing in this document is the extent to which the IOC lowered its standards on human rights around the Beijing Olympic Games.”¹⁹⁹ Additionally, journalist Jere Longman also criticized the lack of fun during the Games, stating, “These Olympics will be remembered for the

¹⁹⁷ International Olympic Committee, *Final Report of the IOC Coordination Commission: Games of the XXIX Olympiad, Beijing 2008*, [Lausanne, 2010], 5.

¹⁹⁸ “Foreign leaders hail successful Beijing Olympics,” *Xinhua*, August 26, 2008.

¹⁹⁹ Katie Thomas. “Assessment Praising '08 Games Is Criticized,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 2008.

friendly embrace of the people and the stunning efficiency of the organizers, but also for the strict control that left the Games feeling devoid of playfulness, passion and restive spirit.”²⁰⁰

In many ways, the intent of the Beijing Planning Committee did not translate perfectly to the international audience. The Games did, however, provide a new hope for improvement amongst the world community. In an article entitled, “Melting Pot Meets Great Wall,” journalist Thomas Friedman comments on the new expectations of the Chinese people following the Olympics, “It’s hard to drive around Beijing these days and not enjoy the thinned-out traffic and blue sky – which are largely the result of China ordering drivers off the roads and closing factories – and not wonder how these can be sustained after the Olympics. Many Chinese I have spoken to have asked: How can we keep this? Now that we have seen how blue the sky really can be, we don’t want to give it away.”²⁰¹ Though perhaps the Chinese government will continue to exert the same amount of control on the population, the existence of commentary rekindling a belief that China is on the right road is already a good sign for China’s foreign policy relationships.

In addition, the increased visibility of China after the Olympics has also led to greater interest in the country as a tourist destination. Despite the 2008 economic crisis, numbers of outbound tourists rose from 126,476 in 2009 to 135,423 in 2011, with notable increases amongst travelers from the Americas and Europe.²⁰² Those interested in architecture flocked to Beijing to see its many innovative projects, such as the Bird’s Nest. The 2008 annual Fall Travel Trends Survey illustrated a jump of seven spots for Beijing to number 16, and Shanghai rising thirteen

²⁰⁰ Jere Longman, “Friendly and Efficient? Yeah. But Spontaneous? Uh-Uh,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 2008.

²⁰¹ Thomas Friedman, “Melting Pot Meets Great Wall,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 2008.

²⁰² World Tourism Organization, *Compendium of Tourism Statistics dataset* [Madrid, 2012].

spots to number 20 amongst international destinations. The same year, travel guides by Zagat and Mobil were first released for Beijing in the United States. The World Tourism Organization predicted that China would be the most popular tourism destination in the world by 2015.²⁰³ Even if the Beijing Olympic Games were not as successful in achieving its policy goals, the tourism generated by the elaborate staging of the mega-event would have a positive impact on the nation as a whole.

On March 17, 2013, newly elected President Xi Jinping gave his inaugural address in Beijing. In the address, Xi claimed that the world would see a “great renaissance of the Chinese nation.”²⁰⁴ China would once again return to its position at the center of the world.²⁰⁵ Five years after the 2008 Olympics, China’s status as a world power is undisputed. A recent US intelligence portrayal of 2030 predicted that China would surpass the United States as the world’s largest economic power.²⁰⁶ (Other sources estimate China will overtake the U.S. as early as 2018)²⁰⁷. In a recent Gallup Poll, a majority of Americans would name China as the top economic power (in 2000, Americans overwhelmingly chose the U.S., in 2008, Americans were evenly divided).²⁰⁸ This economic preponderance means China influence in world affairs is increasingly vital. For

²⁰³ Hilary Howard, “Games Bolster China’s Great Leap in Tourism,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 2008.

²⁰⁴ Malcolm Moore, “Xi Jinping calls for a ‘Chinese Dream’,” *The Telegraph*, March 17, 2013.

²⁰⁵ The Chinese name for China, 中国, directly translates to Center World.

²⁰⁶ Chris McGreal, “China’s economy to outgrow America’s by 2030 as world faces ‘tectonic shift’,” *The Guardian*, December 10, 2012.

²⁰⁷ “A Point of View: What kind of superpower could China be?,” *BBC News*, October 19, 2012.

²⁰⁸ Jeffrey Jones, “In U.S. Majority Still Names China as Top Economic Power,” *Gallup Economy*, February 26, 2013.

example, China's reach has extended into the mineral mines in Africa, the US Treasury, and the oilfields of the Middle East.²⁰⁹

But, as David Shambaugh in *China Goes Global* asserts, China is still a partial power. It lacks much of the political and cultural capital that other countries, such as the U.S., possess. In 2006, two years prior to the Olympics, the Chinese State Council created the *Outline of the National Plan for Cultural Development During the 11th Five Year Plan*. This process siphoned tremendous amounts of money into China's "cultural industries" (i.e. heritage goods, audiovisual media, and performing arts). By 2010, the total value of these industries reached \$170 billion dollars.²¹⁰ In President Hu Jintao's 2007 keynote address, the leader stated, "The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accompanied by the thriving of Chinese culture... We will further publicize the fine traditions of Chinese culture and strengthen international cultural exchanges to enhance the influence of Chinese culture worldwide."²¹¹ What better way to publish China's traditions and culture than through a grand mega-event holding a majority of the world's viewership?

Every four years, the Olympic Games generates a great deal of international attention, much of which focuses on the state of the host country. In 1964, 1988, and 2008, the world turned its eyes to three East Asian nations: Japan, South Korea, and China. Each had a story to tell and a story to hide about its current political system. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate the method these countries, China in particular, used to reach their goals. Chapter One described how Japan and South Korea deflected and reflected outsider stereotypes to their benefit, at the

²⁰⁹ David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*. Oxford University Press, London: 2013, 4.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 209.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 210.

same time comparing the Eastern strategies to their non-Eastern counterparts. Chapter Two covered the dominant stereotypes facing China in the 21st century, as well as the preparations the Beijing Olympic Planning Committee made to address these concerns. Chapter Three ended with coverage of the Games themselves, focusing on the Opening Ceremony and the most controversial headline stories during the following two weeks. By examining all three chapters as a whole, one can see China's adherence to the Eastern Model established by the Tokyo and Seoul Olympic Games.

When Baron Pierre de Coubertin was asked about the Olympics meant to be held in 1940 in Tokyo, he stated, "I consider the arrival of the Games in Asia a great victory. In terms of Olympism, the only thing international rivalries can be is fruitful. It is good for every country in the world to have the honor of hosting the Games and to celebrate them in their own way, according to the imagination and means of its people."²¹² The arrival of the Olympics Games in Beijing has produced mixed reviews in the short-term. Scholarship, limited by time span and interest, has not yet assessed the long-term impacts of this mega-event. Yet, the words spoken by the Opening Ceremony commentators and the seamless acceleration of tourism all seem to point toward significant gains in China's soft power. Beijing was able to play the "culture card" in hosting the 2008 Olympics, integrating its foreign policy goals into the history and politics of sports.

²¹² Coubertin. *Olympism*, 521.

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