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The Image of the Beijing Olympic Games as Constructed in Chinese Media

The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games were to show the new face of China after thirty years of transformation. The main purpose of this article is to analyze how this aim was achieved and how the Chinese mass-media were employed in order to display the impressive outcome. The Chinese mass-media are regarded here as one of the instruments employed by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in conducting its politics.

The transformations initiated by CPC pragmatists in the late 1970s led to profound changes in the economic and social spheres. While the middle class is growing in number, many social categories did not benefit from modernization to the same extent. It is difficult to overlook the disparity between the countryside and cities, especially the rapid economic development of east coast cities as opposed to the relatively backward western provinces. The citizens of China, a country officially called socialist, do not enjoy social benefits, free education, health care, or an efficient pension system. Corruption and nepotism constitute additional problems. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing number of demonstrations, protests and petitions against corrupt officials and the unfair state system. These protests represent a new challenge for the CPC if it intends to remain in power. The state needs soft power and a new ideology that could replace Maoism and maintain social unity and support for the party. Nationalism may be useful in achieving the government's political goals. Contemporary Chinese nationalism, which is a phenomenon co-existing with the policy of opening and reform since the late 1970s, has two concurrent aspects: bottom-up nationalism and state nationalism. The former manifests itself in the form of reactions, movements that

originate on the Internet and can be understood as a kind of safety valve for the common people to vent out their discontent. Top-down nationalism is used by the CPC to strengthen its legitimacy, both directly and indirectly, for instance in proving that it deserves to represent the Chinese people. The Communist Party of China is undoubtedly still in full control but is also under threat of losing the support of Chinese masses. And what the masses need is *panem et circenses* – rice and games.

For the purpose of this paper, I performed an analysis of selected Chinese media (Xinhua News Agency, *Renmin ribao*, *China Daily*, *Beijing Daily*, *Gongren ribao*, *Huanqiu shibao*, China Radio International) between March (as the torch relay began on March 24) and the end of August 2008. The key aspects of the Beijing Olympic Games depicted in these media were as follows:

1. an image of the Olympics “with Chinese characteristics”;
2. a display of Chinese power in the international arena (in terms of sports, but also, more importantly, of culture, economy and politics). It was important to present China as able to regain her rightful place in the international order and finally, in a symbolic way, as able to put an end to the “century of humiliation”;
3. an image of the CPC as capable of offering the world perfectly organized games and of bringing victory to the Chinese nation, which in turn can translate into strengthening the party’s legitimacy;
4. patriotic sentiment and the sense of a common identity – “one China.”

Before the Olympic Games

The Olympic Games were based on the assumption that they must necessarily be successful, which would serve as a proof that China had chosen the proper path of modernization three decades earlier. The Olympics stood for the symbolic end of “the century of humiliation” and the beginning of a new century that should belong to China. In his speech at the opening ceremony, Liu Qi, President of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the XXIX Olympic Games, stated that “the century-old dream for Chinese people has been fulfilled” (BOCOG President: Century-old..., 2008). In fact, China’s efforts to host the Olympics lasted much shorter than a century, although soon after the 1908 Olympics in London a Tianjin newspaper did pose the rhetorical question of when China would be able to organize a similar event. Liu Qi might have referred here to “the century of humiliation”. China’s subordinate position, which the nationalists perceived as an outcome of foreign aggres-

sion, was reflected in the history of China's participation in the Olympic movement. It was represented at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928, but the first Chinese athlete who participated in the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932 did not score any success. In 1958 China withdrew from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in protest against Taiwan's membership. In 1979 China returned to the IOC, but joined the boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow a year later. Chinese athletes won their first medals in 1984 in Los Angeles. As most Communist countries were not represented, the Chinese won fifteen gold medals, which gave them the fourth place in the Olympic medal classification. Gymnast Li Ning, who had been granted the honour of lighting the Olympic Torch in Beijing, won six medals including three gold ones. Since the 1990s, China was among the countries that won the largest number of medals.

In 1993 the Chinese tried to win the right to host the Olympic Games in the symbolic year 2000, which marked the beginning of a new century that was supposed to be the century of China. However, they failed: in the last round of voting, when only Sydney and Beijing were left, votes were divided in a ratio of 45 to 43. As it turned out, most Western countries voted for Sydney, while Asian and African countries gave their votes to Beijing. This event triggered anti-Western demonstrations in China and brought about an increase in popularity of the concept of Asian values. The idea of Asian values was used as a justification for the economic success of Asian Tigers on the one hand, and on the other – as a response to Western criticism of human rights violations. These values were mainly based on the social and cultural legacy of Confucianism.

Eight years later, China made another attempt at winning the competition to host the Beijing Olympics. China's representative argued: "Beijing, with its ancient past, dynamic present and exciting future, has the honor to present its second bid to host the Olympic Games" (The Beijing Organizing Committee for the XXIX Olympic Games [BOCOG], 2008c). July 13, 2001 proved to be a happy day, as Beijing achieved victory already in the second round of voting, beating Toronto, Paris, Istanbul and Osaka. The organizers promised "Green Olympics, High-tech Olympics and People's Olympics". One of the arguments put forward in support of Beijing's claim to be the ideal candidate was that China was a developing country, and the Olympic Games in Beijing would promote the Olympic spirit in China and the developing world. At the same time, Beijing, presented as "the city of dynamic growth, old history and rich cultural heritage", was supposed to guarantee perfect games.

Another asset for Beijing's candidature was significant support granted by the Chinese government, Beijing authorities and city residents. According to a poll conducted by Gallup, 95% of Beijing residents supported

the idea of the Olympics taking place in their city (BOCOG, 2008b). Chinese celebrities, such as Jackie Chan or Zhang Yimou, also endorsed the demand that the Olympics should be held in China. At the same time, Chinese television stations showed enthusiastic elderly Chinese citizens practicing sports (*tai-chi* in particular) in order to live long enough to see the Olympic Games held in their homeland. Olympic enthusiasm spread over the whole country, and was sometimes manifested in rather strange forms: a man placed on his head over 200 acupuncture needles with flags of various nations and regions attached at the end (Porcupine-style Support..., 2008); another man had the Olympic rings and “Beijing 2008” tattooed on his forehead, and the Olympic mascots on his neck (He, 2008). The great importance of the event for ordinary people was shown by the fact that almost sixteen thousand couples were married on August 8 in Beijing alone (i.e. 23 times the daily average). 314 couples were married across the country, which was a one-day record since the foundation of the PRC (China Sets Olympics Record in Weddings, 2008). Some other couples tried to plan the birth of their children for that date.

Efforts to organize the ideal Olympic Games, that would make the world gasp with amazement, were visible long before 2008. The Olympics were seen as an opportunity to show the modern face of China, its quick and efficient development, its openness to foreign investments and friendliness to foreigners. Beijing and other cities where the Olympics were held had to be prepared for a worthy representation of the entire country. They did so by commissioning new architectural designs to internationally renowned architects. The National Stadium (the so-called “Bird’s Nest”) was designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron in collaboration with Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. The Grand National Theatre project was drafted by Frenchman Paul Andreu. The third terminal of Beijing Capital International Airport was designed by the British firm Foster and Partners. Another building designed by a famous architect (Rem Koolhaas) is the futuristic headquarters of China Central Television.

Beijing was supposed to become a model of a “civilized city” (*wenming chengshi*) that works to improve life quality by showing appropriate manners before foreign guests. Beijing districts organized competitions for “exemplary civilized streets”. Learning foreign languages was promoted by means of programmes broadcast on television and radio channels, and even in the public transportation system. The city provided information boards in English, restaurants removed dog meat from their menus, and some of them offered separate smoking rooms for their patrons. The media, shoulder to shoulder with city authorities, took up the fight against spitting, going out in pyjamas, and destroying urban greenery. There were also efforts to develop the habit of standing in lines. Beijing

residents were even persuaded that they should not wear more than three colors at the same time – probably in order to display more harmony in their looks (Beijing Spectators to Behave Well for Games, 2008). Creating the “civilized city” also meant expelling from the city people who did not fit into the image of a “New China”: people without a residence permit (*hukou*) for the capital, especially migrant laborers from the countryside, including construction workers who actually prepared the city for the Olympics. Beggars, homeless people and street peddlers were also deemed unsuitable for the new Olympic city image.

Newspapers, posters and billboards were full of information on how to behave in the presence of foreigners. *Savoir-vivre* had almost become a matter of national significance. One of the political leaders, Zhai Weihua, was quoted in the media: “Tens of thousands of reporters will come to China to cover the Games next year, which means both China’s positive and negative sides will be amplified. Once bad impressions are made, they last” (Yan, 2007). The desired behavior of volunteers was also described: they were supposed to smile, but also to be prepared for answering tricky questions of political nature, asked by foreigners (Liu, 2008).

Preparations for the Olympics were astonishing and their cost was enormous – the 2008 Olympics were four times as expensive as the Olympics in Athens. The expenditure on venue construction for the Olympic Games was estimated at 13 billion *yuan*, and total investment in Olympic-related infrastructure at about 280 billion *yuan* (US\$ 41 billion). It is interesting to note the explanations provided by the media for the high cost of Olympic preparations. In order to alleviate the impression that this amount could make on ordinary people, it was said that “more important than the fund spent in the preparation is the endeavor of ordinary workers, who work extra hours to guarantee the operation of the city. They deserve our gratitude and attention” (No More Than..., 2008).

Olympics “with Chinese characteristics”

The Olympics were fashioned as having “Chinese characteristics”, which means that national symbols were displayed everywhere. In the light of Michael Billig’s banal nationalism concept (Billig, 1995), those symbols can be understood as building an imagined sense of national solidarity for everyday use.

National elements have appeared in the new Beijing architecture. The National Stadium was nicknamed the “Bird’s Nest” by the Chinese, as it resembles a swallow’s nest, a traditional Chinese delicacy. The new ter-

minal of Beijing Capital International Airport was designed to look like a Chinese dragon. China's national symbols were included in each element associated with the Olympics. Red was a dominant color. The official Olympic logo was "Dancing Beijing", with the character 京 *jing* in small seal script dancing on a red background. *Jing* means "capital" and refers to Beijing (北京, whose literal translation is "Northern Capital"). The shape of the character *jing* in the Olympics logo also reminds of a runner crossing the finish line. Similarly, the symbols of the various sport disciplines were modeled on Chinese characters. The Olympic medals were made using traditional Chinese ornaments: jade rings and carving. It was also emphasized that the torch was designed, tested and manufactured in China. The Olympic hostesses' costumes borrowed elements of the Chinese *qipao* and combined them with the western skirt. The Olympic torch was designed in the shape of a traditional scroll, used for painting and calligraphy. It was decorated with clouds, which also adorn the Forbidden Palace and other imperial buildings as symbols of good luck. The representatives of the Organizing Committee stated that all those elements definitely had Chinese character and demonstrated "the artistic and technical level of China" (Artistic and Technical Features..., 2008). A real explosion of elements with national connotations was displayed during the opening ceremony.

The Chinese Olympic mascots (counterparts of "Sam the Olympic Eagle" of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles) have used up their national symbolic potential. In Beijing, there were five mascots, and therefore far more symbols. Each of the mascots had its own name, and all five names put together formed the slogan: "Beijing welcomes you!" (*Beijing huanying ni!*): Beibei, Jingjing, Huanhuan, Yingying, Nini. Each of them represents one Olympic ring and one of the five elements in Chinese tradition. The main mascot, named Huanhuan, was red and symbolized the Olympic torch and the Olympic spirit. Its design was taken from paintings in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas in Dunhuang. Beibei, whose dominant color was blue, was associated with water and water sports. Among the ornaments of her head we can find elements of a fish, symbol of happiness and abundance. The style of ornamentation referred to artifacts from the Neolithic Yangshao culture, found at the archaeological site of Banpo. Beibei was also associated with the endangered species of Chinese sturgeon (*Acipenser sinensis*). Jingjing resembled a giant panda, China's national animal, and stood for the element of "wood". The orange mascot Yingying was inspired by the endangered endemic Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsonii*) and Tibetan and Uighur ornaments. Yingying represented the element of earth, and stood for athletics. The last mascot, Nini, was green, associated with the element of metal. Her

design was inspired by swallows and also by kites, the latter being very popular especially in northern China. Nini was closely connected with Beijing, as the character 燕 *yan* (“swallow”) can be found in the former name of Beijing – Yanjing. All mascots were to present the diversity and richness of China. The inclusion of Tibetan and Uighur elements emphasized the idea of the Great China. These mascots were widely used in marketing the Olympics: Olympic merchandise with their images was sold in many stores, and an animated television series was created, entitled *The Olympic Adventure of Fuwa*. One article stated in its headline that mascots will be “Spreading Traditional Chinese Blessings Wherever They Go” (Olympic Mascots, 2005).

Presentation of Chinese power in the international arena

The Beijing Olympics were used as an opportunity to demonstrate the power of China in terms of sports, but also of culture, economy and politics. As a matter of fact, sports were employed as a pretext for a show of power. The games should be considered as part of China’s soft power policy, which has been intensifying in recent years. During the Olympics, China displayed before the whole world the overpowering glamour of several thousand years of culture. The excellent organization of the Olympics and Beijing’s infrastructure improvements also convey an important message on the economic achievements of the last three decades of modernization and opening policy. According to a survey conducted by Synovate just after the games, the Chinese themselves acknowledged that the above goals had been fulfilled. For 60% of respondents, the most important legacy of the Olympics was that the rest of the world had learned about China. For 12% of respondents, the most important was that they could feel pride in being Chinese and share this pride with their compatriots (Gin, 2008).

Success in the athletic arenas was also extremely significant. Mao Zhixiong, professor of sports psychology, who believed that winning Olympic medals will increase China’s international prestige, was widely quoted in the media: “If you win a lot of medals, then it shows you have advanced as a country. It means the economy is growing, that living standards are improving and that there is better technology” (in: Eimer & Freeman, 2008). Indeed, in Beijing the Chinese team won 51 gold medals (while the Americans won 36). What is more, in most final medal counts published in the Chinese media, the column showing the sum of all medals was removed (as it was less favorable for China, who altogether

won less medals than the US). Some Chinese media emphasized that had it not been for one athlete (Michael Phelps), the Americans would have won eight medals less. They also mentioned that China occupied the first place in terms of weight given to individual medals (using the ratio of 5 points for gold, 3 for silver and 2 for bronze, as the proportion of award prize money at the US Olympic Committee) (Tuggle, 2008).

In the race for medals, hurdler Liu Xiang's performance was a huge disappointment. Liu was the first Chinese gold medalist in athletics. In Athens, he proved that the Chinese can also be successful in other fields than their crown disciplines, such as table tennis or diving. In Beijing, however, Liu suffered an injury and withdrew from the 110 metre hurdles, where he was supposed to win the Olympic championship. He left the stadium, to the great despair of his fans. As one of Chinese journalist put it: "if only it were possible to replace the tendon just before the race, each one of the Chinese fans would give his own without hesitation" (Make, 2008). In newspapers, there were headlines such as: "We are always with you", "Liu Xiang is still a hero", but journalists were also tracking the possible causes of national disappointment (Li, 2008, among others). One of them could be the huge hope invested in Liu Xiang, and the pressure it translated into – his starting number was 1356, meaning 1.3 billion people, 56 nationalities, which he represented. The media response shows just how important Chinese athletes' success was for the common citizens. The failure of one man means failure of the whole nation.

The success of athletes was associated with patriotism: their victory was depicted as important for the entire nation. The athletes were supposed to fulfill their fatherland's expectations. This kind of attitude was visible in the congratulatory letter written by the CPC Central Committee to the Chinese athletes, quoted by the media, in which China's first place in the medal count was deemed a great historical turning point, as well as an important step in building a society of prosperity, in the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics and in the socialist modernization of all ethnic groups in the country. According to the letter, "their performances have allowed the world to open its eyes to the virtues of China's daughters and sons, to the constant struggle for improvement of the Chinese nation, the spirit of unity and peaceful progress" (CPC Central Committee, 2008).

Apart from sports achievements, other objectives were also achieved. The political power of China was displayed in the effective preventing of international boycott of the opening ceremony and demonstrations in Beijing. The most important challenge for the Chinese organizers was to ensure the participation of major world leaders. Those leaders who joined the boycott caused by the situation in Tibet (Polish leaders, for

instance) were not even mentioned in the media. The presence of those who did attend the opening ceremony, even of dignitaries representing smaller countries, was scrupulously emphasized. Among the present dignitaries were US President George W. Bush and his father, former president George H.W. Bush (it is worth mentioning that G.W. Bush's previous warnings on human rights issues in China were passed over in complete silence by the Chinese media). Also present at the opening ceremony on the "Bird's Nest" tribunes were the representatives of over a hundred countries, including French President Nicolas Sarkozy (contrary to previous announcements), Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, and Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda (Guests across World..., 2008, and other).

After the Olympics, the Chinese media informed that Canada's former prime minister warned the current prime minister that his boycott of the Olympics opening ceremony (Canada had been represented by its minister of foreign affairs) was a grave political mistake, which would eventually turn against himself (Canadian PM Flayed for Skipping Beijing Games Opening, 2008; Jia qian zongli..., 2008).

Political meaning of the Olympics within China

The political importance of the Olympics was also reflected in China's internal affairs. The presence of world leaders could be understood not only as their recognition of the PRC's global status, but also as proof of the political efficiency of the CPC, which was thus able to ensure symbolic support for its policy. Internally, the CPC managed to avoid protests and social unrest. Chinese media did not keep silent about potential unrests, as the Beijing authorities tried to encourage a certain degree of freedom of speech. There were designated areas in three Beijing parks (the World Park, the park by the Temple of Heaven and Zizhu Yuan), where "peaceful assemblies and demonstrations" were allowed during the Olympic Games. However, before any protest could take place, its organizers had to obtain permission from the Public Security Bureau. Xinhua News Agency, followed by other media, reported that the authorities received 77 applications for demonstrations, most of them concerning workers' rights and insufficient medical and social protection. None of the applicants was actually granted permission – 74 applications were "withdrawn by the organizers themselves" when the problems were "submitted to the competent authorities for approval". Two further proposals were rejected as incomplete, and one as unlawful (Beijing bayue..., 2008).

This situation was fully accepted by the authors of the article, who did not raise any further questions.

Despite those difficulties, the Communist Party of China was able to strengthen its legitimacy. Successful games showed the Chinese people that the party continued to develop the potential of a nation that had won its first olympic medals only 24 years earlier. Successful Olympics could maintain in the Chinese people the belief that the CPC effectively managed the country and that only the CPC was able to ensure dominance over the West in any field, not only in sports. Chinese people should have no doubt that the party was the main creator of the Olympic success, from the very moment Beijing was granted host city status. The CPC's success in carrying out this task has undoubtedly become a significant source of legitimacy for its maintaining power at present and in the future.

Strengthening patriotism

The year 2008 brought many unprecedented opportunities to strengthen the patriotic sentiment and sense of community in the Chinese nation, and also to emphasize the national unity of "one China". However, in 2008 Chinese nationalism was not only about pride in the Chinese Olympics. Three months before the games, Sichuan province suffered the tragedy of a catastrophic earthquake that strengthened national unity – nothing but a common trauma can do so more efficiently. During the Olympic Games, chauvinistic sentiments were not widespread; however, a certain feeling of injustice caused by Western societies could be sensed before the games. In March 2008, the pro-independence demonstration in Tibet erupted, as well as torch relay protests. Success of the Olympics was taken for granted, beginning with the relay march. Meanwhile, the "journey of harmony" turned into a struggle between pro-Tibet and human rights activists on one side, and Chinese who wanted to protect the image of the Beijing Olympics on the other. Although during the international torch relay route there were many protests and attempts to extinguish the flame, the Chinese national media showed a different picture. Certain information was omitted, such as disruption to the torch lighting ceremony in Olympia caused by Reporters Without Borders. There was also no information about those torchbearers who withdrew from the event. Whenever the Chinese media covered demonstrations, protesters were presented as lunatics inflamed with blind hate, or as isolated small groups supporting secessionists who tried to break up China, violate the Olympic spirit and sabotage Olympic ideals (Yan, 2008a; Yan, 2008c).

Instead of in-depth coverage of demonstrations abroad, media in China preferred to focus on counter-demonstrations defending the Chinese Olympics, often initiated by the local Chinese diaspora. Photos of Jin Jing, the “angel in a wheelchair” who heroically defended the torch from a violent demonstrator in Paris, became iconic, as an allegory of China attacked by its enemies. The boycott of Carrefour stores in China in response to torch relay protests taking place in France, was also widely covered. Media also quoted the opinions of international sports activists and ordinary people who denounced the “sabotage”. Responsibility for inciting hatred towards China was attributed to the “Dalai Lama clique” (Yan, 2008a). Xinhua argued that violent protests were condemned not only by International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge, but by the whole world: “Netizens worldwide have stormed the Beijing Olympic Games’ website to condemn the violent protests that occurred during the recent Olympic torch relay in Paris and London” (Yan, 2008b). Officially, the Chinese media did not oppose all protests, but only the “violent” ones, led by “a few Tibetan separatists and their supporters” (*Ibid.*). Western media, on the other hand, were presented as guilty of misleading and stirring up protests by spreading a distorted image of China. The ambassador of the PRC in the United Kingdom, Ms. Fu Ying, mentioned in “Daily Telegraph” that the torch holders had to face violent attacks in Europe, and put the blame on unreliable media coverage of events in China, and the false picture of Tibet they presented (Fu, 2008). The Chinese media could not persuade human rights defenders to change their views, nor could they change the Western journalists’ attitudes, but they did not even intend to undertake such goals. What they set out to do was to unite the Chinese in China and the Chinese diaspora around the idea of defending China’s “face”. This campaign was a logical extension of the popular belief that western media are anti-Chinese and therefore not trustworthy.

Torch relay protests were not the only problem connected with the relay route. There was also the question of whether Taiwan should be listed on the international torch route (according to Taipei), or rather on the national one (according to Beijing). PRC President Hu Jintao proposed that the Olympic torch go to Taipei between the stop in Korea and the one in Hong Kong. For Taiwan’s politicians, that meant the symbolic inclusion of Taiwan into the “one China”. In the end, the Olympic relay team did not visit the island. However, it was hosted by two Special Administrative Regions: Hong Kong and Macau. Within the People’s Republic of China, the relay team visited all provinces, autonomous regions and province-level municipalities. A visit to Tibet aroused international controversy and the Lhasa route was shortened from three days to one. The idea of

bringing the Olympic torch to Mount Everest also resulted in numerous protests. For the Chinese, it was a full success, because despite the difficulties, the torch was taken to the top of the highest peak on Earth for the first time in history. On the other hand, it showed that Tibet belonged to the Chinese state. Media were filled with pictures of the ascending torch, with Chinese and Olympic flags, and Tibetan prayer flags in the background (Mankind Brings Olympic Flame..., 2008). The climber who took the Olympic torch to the summit was a Tibetan female mountaineer, Tsering Wangmo; her ethnic identity was emphasized by the Chinese media, which also pointed at the equal status of ethnic Tibetan and Han Chinese mountaineers, as well as the educational background of the Tibetan climbers and team members (Wang & Painba, 2008).

The opening ceremony of the Olympics, as well as references to Chinese culture discussed earlier in this paper, also placed strong emphasis on the ethnic diversity of China while maintaining the principle of “one China”. The Chinese flag was carried by children dressed in costumes representing various ethnic groups in the PRC (although it turned out later that those children, members of Galaxy Children’s Art Troupe, were all of Han ethnicity). The national anthem was sung by a choir that included representatives of ethnic minorities wearing traditional ethnic costumes. China’s unity was also manifested when the national teams were entering the stadium. Apart from the PRC team, the biggest round of applause was received by the Hong Kong and Taiwan teams, as Taiwan appeared under the compromise name of Chinese Taipei (*Zhonghua Taibei*), accepted by the International Olympic Committee in 1980, and under the Olympic flag (Chinese Taipei Parade..., 2008).

Not only the opening ceremony, but the whole Olympic Games were filled with Chinese symbols. The multitude, splendour and ubiquity of national symbols had the desired effect in building a sense of pride. The Chinese media quoted students, artists, scholars: “I’ve never felt so much love for our homeland, as in this glorious moment” (Zhang, 2008). “I sang the national anthem weeping with emotions, a great love of country and national pride”, “China has astonished and surprised the world”, “the opening ceremony was one hundred percent Chinese, and spread a wonderful picture of Chinese culture” (*Ibid.*). There were also voices coming from the Chinese diaspora: “For a hundred years our country followed a bumpy road, but now we can share the same feelings in a thousand hearts. As a Chinese I feel pride in our fatherland” (Xiao, 2008). According to Chinese media, the games were well received, even among the victims of the Sichuan earthquake: “during the Olympics we held unspeakable joy in our hearts”; “this wonderful celebration shows that our country is getting stronger, so we don’t need to fear such natural di-

sasters as earthquakes. We support the party and government, which will certainly rebuild our houses". For earthquake rescuers, "the delight in the Olympic Games became a motivation to better combat the effects of earthquakes" (*ibid.*).

Chinese media repeatedly quoted praise from world leaders, such as Nicolas Sarkozy's statement that Beijing itself deserves a gold medal. Chinese newspapers reprinted reviews of the opening ceremony from Western media: "awesome", "China is powerful, and the opening ceremony was wonderful", "the fireworks and visual effects were amazing", "by watching China's ancient history today, I noticed how rich Chinese civilization is, how huge China is", "China's multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism have opened my eyes", "The Beijing Olympics gave China an opportunity to show the world its culture, and judging from today's ceremony, I am deeply convinced of the latter's richness" (Zhou, 2008a). After the Olympics, media quoted enthusiastic statements of foreign journalists that China had indeed fulfilled its promise to organize Olympics that were green, technologically advanced and dedicated to the people. "The world will remember the Olympic involvement of Chinese, and the fire of warm hospitality will never go out" (Zhou, 2008b).

The picture of the Beijing Olympic Games depicted by the Chinese media was a clear one: China managed not only to win gold medals in sports, but also to present to the world that image of itself which had been planned by its leaders.

Conclusions

In summary, as expected, the XXIX Summer Olympic Games in Beijing became an arena for celebrating Chinese greatness. China opted for a positive nationalism, more associated with "cold" manifestations of national pride rather than with aggressive actions. Hence the ubiquity of Chinese national and cultural symbols throughout the Olympics. It is also important to consider exactly which elements of China's history were chosen: the wealth of the Chinese tradition in the imperial era and the economic success of the last thirty years.

The Olympics can be seen as an element of Chinese soft power. Despite some difficulties, thanks to excellent organization, China managed to present itself to the world as a power which should not be underestimated. By contrast, the Russian intervention in South Ossetia, launched at the opening of the Games, clearly showed the opposite ways of displaying power and the difference between the paradigms of *wu* (military

force) and *wen* (culture, civilization), employed by each of the two countries. This contrast served to alleviate Western criticism of human rights violation in China. The Beijing Olympic Games can be seen as a Chinese success in all fields. According to a survey conducted by Nielsen Institute in sixteen countries, the games actually improved China's image, at least in the assessment of technological advancement. Seven out of ten respondents believed that China was more technologically advanced than they had suspected. In Hong Kong, such positive comments were expressed by over 80% of respondents (Fowler, 2008). Internally, the Chinese authorities also obtained the expected results, confirming their effectiveness and ensuring their legitimacy in the coming years. China's press and broadcast media played their role efficiently as well. They created an appropriate image of the Beijing Olympic Games, pictured enthusiastic support from within the country and from abroad, and trumpeted the full success of Chinese sportspeople and the whole society.

In 2012, during the London Olympic Games, China proved that success in 2008 was not achieved by accident, and managed to maintain its leadership in the international sport arena. In London, Chinese athletes won 38 gold medals, which gave them the second place in the medal count. London was no Beijing, and did not need to be.

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