ONE WORLD, ONE DREAM? IMAGE BUILDING AND BRAND CHINA IN THE

2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of International Studies
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

December 2008

"One World, One Dream? Image Building and Brand China in the 2008 Beijing Olympics," a thesis prepared by Christopher Patrick Hagan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of International Studies. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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An Abstract of the Thesis of

Christopher Hagan   for the degree of   Master of Arts

in the Department of International Studies   to be taken   December 2008

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        This project investigates how iconic images from the Beijing Olympics—e.g.,

logos, venues, and scenes from the Opening and Closing ceremonies—form a visual

narrative in which Chinese history and identity are configured to meet the political

economic goals of the Central Communist Party. I draw on semiotics and discourse

analysis to suggest projected national images (Wang 2003) that are embedded within visual

data collected primarily from the Beijing2008 website. Furthermore, I apply current

theories in identity politics to these visual data to problematize the social construction of

what the nation branding literature refers to as "brand China." I argue that the symbolic

and emotive content of the visual imagery from the Beijing Olympics attempted to position

China as a non-threatening, legitimate power in the Western cultural imaginary.

Ultimately, I argue that the Party's lack of political credibility challenges the potential

success of its Olympic image building efforts.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dedicated to my parents, for their unconditional love and support, and to my grandfather, who taught me the value of optimism, perseverance, and hard work.

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INTRODUCTION

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people,
mediated by images. . .The spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and
the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real
world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society.
In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct
entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present *model* of socially
dominant life.

- Guy Debord (1967), *Society of the Spectacle*: Theses 4,6.

This project investigates how iconic images from the Beijing Olympics—e.g.,

logos, venues, and scenes from the Opening and Closing ceremonies—form a visual

narrative in which Chinese history and identity are configured to meet the political

economic goals of the Central Communist Party. I draw on semiotics and discourse

analysis to suggest *projected national images* (Wang 2003) that are embedded within

visual data collected primarily from the Beijing2008 website. Furthermore, I apply

current theories in identity politics to these visual data to problematize the social

construction of what the nation branding literature refers to as "brand China." I argue

that the symbolic and emotive content of the visual imagery from the Beijing Olympics

attempted to position China as a non-threatening, legitimate power in the Western

cultural imaginary. Ultimately, I argue that the Party's lack of political credibility

challenges the potential success of its Olympic image building efforts.

Limiting this discussion to "visual texts" produced directly by the Central Communist Party (the Party) and the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) provides a narrative that is relatively unfettered by the ideological lens of Western media. As the Party's Olympic marketing campaign is highly visual, it provides a rich source of visual data from which to begin an understanding of the image(s) that the Party projected to the international community during the Olympics. Such *projected national images* comprise a visual narrative that includes graphics (such as posters, emblems, and logos); mascots, advertisements, and merchandise; it manifests in a variety of media, such as print, television, and digital; and it includes Olympic venues and Olympic ceremonies, rituals, and games. By deconstructing this visual narrative and its recurring themes I show how Chinese national identity and history are configured to meet the political economic goals of the Party.

For the purposes of this project I consider the Party as the primary actor responsible for the projected national images embedded within the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics. Yet, it is inaccurate to consider the Party as a monolithic block of uniform interests and objectives. Susan Brownell (2008) in particular raises the important point that the Party's external "presentation of self," as it were, belies the often contentious identity politics and competing interests that characterize its internal reality, such as the politics between Beijing city leaders and Central Party officials or between the Party and the disaffected artists who consulted on the design of visual elements for the Beijing Olympics. With respect to image building and nation branding during the Beijing Olympics, it is important to keep in mind that the Party's internal political divisions necessitated an external projection of uniformity and

harmony. In this sense, it is an unlikely coincidence that harmony and uniformity are projected national images that clearly manifest in the Party's Olympic visual narrative, as I show below. Nevertheless, there are a few instances from the Beijing Olympics in which actors involved in the production of the images that comprise the visual data I investigate in this project express their individual opinions about the Party or about the Beijing Olympics. I include their comments and individual expressions because they point to the complexity involved in the construction of projected national images such as those that manifest during the Beijing Games. Lastly, the importance of recognizing that the Party is not a uniform or harmonious block of interests points to future research that could move beyond the focus on decontextualized images as representations of national identity into the richer, more robust terrain of the actual on-the-ground processes involved in the cultural production of knowledge and national identity.

While maintaining a critical stance towards my subject, I want to avoid reifying dubious, stereotyped "East - West" categories of cultural identity. Therefore, in addition to making clear that my vantage point to the Beijing Olympics was mediated through NBC and its St. Louis and Chicago affiliates, I take steps to rely upon, whenever possible and to the greatest extent, the Party's own images, words, and explanations—mainly from the www.beijing2008.com website—and those of other ethnic Chinese involved in the design of the elements that comprised the Party's Olympic visual narrative.

Framing the Party's Olympic imagery as a narrative that tells a story about "brand China" lays a framework for a comparative analysis of how other host cities have used the Olympics to engage in their own image building and nation branding work. Later, I briefly discuss the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, as they are often cited as one of the most

successful examples of how the Olympics can positively transform a city and nation's brand reputation (Kennet and de Moragas 2006). By comparing the unique historical and political economic circumstances between Beijing and Barcelona, I emphasize the role of idnentity politics in the social construction of brand China and the importance of political credibility in achieving the Party's image building and political economic objectives.

Statement of the Problem

The problem I am addressing in this project concerns the social construction of national identity-as-national brand image. Whereas there has been much scholarship concerning the mechanics of how nation-states go about *internally* constructing national identity as a category of cultural identity, relatively little social scientific research has considered how actors—in this case, the Party state apparatus—construct national brand images for *external* consumption. I argue that current theories from identity politics, such as *constructivism* and *instrumentalism*, are potentially useful frameworks for critically examining the place of class, history, and identity in the construction of China's Olympic national brand image.

Research Questions

Ultimately, this project is a way for me to engage my interest in the challenges China faces with regards to class, social justice, and identity construction. In the context of the Beijing Olympics, my interests can be phrased as a series of questions: "How are competing discourses about identity, class, and history resolved in the Party's visual representation of brand China, a narrative constructed specifically for a non-Chinese, *external audience*? How can theories from identity politics help problematize the social construction of brand China? How do visual representations of Chinese national identity

and history function in the Party's Olympic visual narrative? Put simply, what do we learn about contemporary Chinese culture by looking at iconic images from the Beijing Olympics? How is what we learn intended to build up China's external, international image?

Research Goals

The fundamental goal of this project is to consider how the 2008 Beijing Olympics provided Party leaders with a global platform for the construction and representation of Chinese national identity-as-national brand image. In this way I hope to make sense of the storm of controversy that surrounded the Beijing Olympics and to identify some of the identity politics that fueled this debate. I believe that visual representations of Chinese national identity-as-national brand images and the projected national images embedded within the Party's Olympic visual narrative offer a unique opportunity to consider "brand identity" as a category of socially constructed cultural identity. In doing so I hope to better understand what is happening to history, class, and identity in contemporary China. This project also points to the prominence of image, representation, and visuality in postmodern societies—a fruitful avenue for future research.

Literature Review

Recent theorists have made it possible to understand the central role of ideology and power in the discursive production (Foucault 1977, 1980) of categories of cultural identity such as ethnicity, gender, and nationalism. Competition between ideologies and power relations gives rise to dominant and subordinate discourses through which political and economic processes operate on the body to generate categories of cultural identity

(Escobar 1995, 1992; Ferguson 1994; Said 1979). As the dominant and subordinate discourses are dynamic and constantly in flux, so too are categories of cultural identity; that is, identity and meaning are symbolically constructed in everyday life interactions and as such are flexible and context dependent (Bourdieu 1980; Melucci 1988; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Volosinov 1986).

The theoretical trajectory outlined above has influenced *constructivist* theories of identity politics and international relations. With respect to national identity, constructivism is exemplified most famously by Anderson (1983), Habermas (1992), and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). More recently, their problematization of national identity has been fruitfully extended to examine nationalism in China (Brownell 2008; Callahan 2004; Zheng 1999). Constructivist theory is important to this project because it provides a conceptual framework and a language to operationalize how a national brand such as brand China is a socially constructed category of cultural identity.

In this project I also draw on *instrumentalist* theories from identity politics to explain the pragmatic and rational character of the projected national images embedded in the Party's Olympic visual narrative. Instrumentalism was heavily influenced by the philosophical works of John Dewey (White 1943; Eldridge 1998). More recently, Bates's (1983) application of instrumentalist theory to identity politics in contemporary Africa revealed how identities are flexible and can be discursively reconfigured to suit the political economic goals of cultural or political elites.

Maurice Roche's definition of a "mega-event" informs this project: mega-events are "large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (2000: p.1).

Additionally, Roberts highlights the ability of mega-events "to transmit promotional messages to billions of people via television and other developments in telecommunications" (2004: p. 108).

A growing number of social scientific studies recognize the cultural and political-economic significance of staging mega-events (Horne and Manzenreiter 2006; Simson and Jennings 1992; Tomlinson 2000). Of particular interest to this study are investigations into the relationship between sports mega-events and national identity (Brownell 1994, 2008; Pi-Sunyer 1995; Tomlinson and Young 2006; Xu 2006). Scholars interested in the transnational sports-media industry and globalization (Maguire 1999) have observed the fierce competition among cities to acquire the symbolic capital accrued by hosting sports mega-events (Gaffakin and Morrissey 1999) and the profound socio-spatial transformations to urban geography that characterize these competitions (Harvey 1989; Sassen 2001). It is in this way that competition among cities to host mega-events is located within the "economy of appearances" (Carter 2006) and relates to Guy Debord's neo-Marxist arguments about "spectacular accumulation" and the "society of the spectacle." As Carter (2006: 152) explains, "The drama of 'spectacular accumulation' essentially makes the city a commodity, bought and sold, torn down, speculated upon, and fought over, in which "that which appears is good, that which is good appears" (Debord 1995[1967]: 5)." Debord's ideas point to avenues of future research into the role of image and representation in the cultural production of brand China and national brand images in general. I return to this line of thinking in the conclusion.

Furthermore, Guy Debord's concern about the subordination of history, class, and social justice to the prerogatives of the "economy of appearances" (its prerogative

being, namely, spectacular accumulation) is echoed in the works of contemporary scholars concerned about the unequal distribution of social benefits that a city gains by staging sports mega-events (Horne 2007; Zhang and Silk 2006; Lowes 2002). A few authors have applied a similar line of Debord's neo-Marxist theory to these areas of study (Harvey 1989; Broudehoux 2004, 2007).

Nation branding is a commercial practice in which governments contract branding consultants to help raise the international competitiveness of the country's products, services, tourist destinations, cultural capital, political objectives, and overall image and reputation (Olins 2002). In many respects nation branding is the application of brand marketing to public diplomacy. An important distinction between nation branding and traditional public diplomacy, however, is that while public diplomacy is explicitly *political* in its aims, nation branding is explicitly *commercial*. Furthermore, "image building" does not necessarily mean the same thing as nation branding. One can do image building by doing public diplomacy or some other form of international public relations but that does not mean one is doing nation branding. Nevertheless, nation branding and image building share an overriding concern for the reputation and image of the nation in question (or "client," in the case of nation branding). For this reason I use the term image "work" to convey the general activities, tactics, and goals shared by image building, nation branding, public relations, reputation management, public diplomacy, and so forth.

Nation branding's growing appeal to politicians and government leaders signals to some the conflation of political interests with commercial, market economics within contemporary neoliberal international relations (Kunczik 1997). Van Ham (2001, 2008),

for instance, argues that the *external* focus of nation branding is transforming

international relations. Nation branding's focus on the *external* projection of national

images presents an alternative to the constructivist understanding that national identity is

constructed for *internal* solidarity and cohesion. In the "new brand world,"

> Those states that successfully fictionalize themselves to others, rather than those
> states that fictionalize themselves to themselves, will prevail. Old-style
> nationalism, in which the focus was on telling stories internally (*our* history, *our*
> bloodlines, *our* manifest destiny), will take a backseat to branding, telling you
> story to others (What can we do for you? Where do you want to go
> today?)…Image and reputation are thus becoming essential parts of the state's
> strategic equity (Twitchell 2004: 293-294).

A few academics have explored specific nation branding campaigns in Latvia

(Dzenovska 2005), Iceland (Gudjonsson 2005), and Estonia (Gardner and Standaert

2003). Of particular relevance to this project is Sue Jansen's (2008) critical

deconstruction of the neoliberal assumptions underpinning the commercial practice of

nation branding. Her essay helped to operationalize how the Party's Olympic visual

narrative configures identity and history to meet market expectations.

    With the importance of reputation and image in mind I return to the nation

branding literature that inspired this research (Aronczyk 2007; Wang 2003; Wang 2008;

Anholt 2002, 2006, 2007; Berkowitz, *et al* 2007). Joshua Ramo's essay, "Brand China,"

(2007) is foundational to this project. He contends that China suffers from an "image

emergency" problem and that "China's greatest strategic threat today is its national

image" (Ramo 2007: 12). In Chapter II I describe China's image emergency in more

detail and emphasize the importance of the Beijing Olympics in addressing this image

emergency.

Methodology

Fabienne Darling-Wolf's (2005) semiological-discourse analysis of the 2002 Tokyo World Cup is a model of the method I intend to utilize in this project. Her study examined how the visual narrative constructed in support of the World Cup on sites of popular culture in Tokyo "located [Japan] visually in relation to the rest of the world and managed to turn this 'foreign' sporting event into a specifically Japanese cultural phenomenon" (Darling-Wolf 2005: 184). By extending Darling-Wolf's method of semiological-discourse analysis to the visual narrative surrounding the 2008 Beijing Olympics, I investigate how the Party attempted to visually and discursively construct brand China in relation to the rest of the world. Semiological method is useful because it provides a framework for explaining how denotive, surface level meanings of images are transformed into deeper, connotive symbolic meanings. For instance, a surface level reading of the symbol for the IOC acknowledges a simple representation of five interlocking multi-colored rings. Semiological method is a way of tracing the movement of this surface level reading into a symbol of the world's largest sports mega-event and all of the institutions, ideas, and actors that surround it. Through application of semiological method to the Party's Olympic visual narrative I will trace how the images in this narrative connote notions such as newness and innovation.

Discourse analysis is a method well suited to this project because it is concerned with the discursive construction of knowledge and therefore extends to my interest in the social construction of brand China. Discourse analysis makes it possible to understand how the totality of the Party's Olympic imagery is part of a discourse that reflects the dominant ideologies and relations of power in China today—essential for understanding

how the Party dealt with history and identity in its efforts to construct brand China in particular ways during the Beijing Olympics. Furthermore, applying discourse analysis methodology to the Party's Olympic visual narrative emphasizes that discursive production is not a one-way street. Although it is beyond the means of this project to measure if Euro-American audiences to the Beijing Olympics understood or took up the connotive meanings of what they were watching, it is enough to acknowledge that the audience is an active participant in the social construction of identity and knowledge. Future research might address this shortcoming by investigating the audience as the site of cultural production of knowledge and the audience's role in the social construction of national identity – as national brand.

Significance of Research

This project is a way for me to engage my interest in the social, political, and economic transformations occurring in China today. It is a way for me to make sense of how and why the China that I witnessed in the summer of 2007 (and the one that I recognized in the Party's Olympic visual narrative) did not synch with the China that I read about in Western media when I returned to the United States.

By framing the elements in the Party's Olympic visual narrative as signifiers about what brand China stands for and where China is going, I can better understand how Party leaders are attempting to resolve what Joshua Ramo calls China's "image misalignment" or "image emergency" problem. In this way, this project sheds light on the complex identity politics that surrounded the Beijing Olympics and therefore the identity politics that are implicated in the broader context of U.S. – China relations.

Furthermore, this project sheds light on the increasingly important role that image, reputation, and visual communication play in contemporary neoliberal international relations. As outlined above, the intersection between international sports mega-events, identity politics and identity construction, and nation branding has received sparse attention by academics. This project is significant because it addresses this shortcoming.

CHAPTER II

中国的国家形象紧急事件 和北京奥林匹克

CHINA'S IMAGE EMERGENCY AND THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS

In this chapter I briefly present some of the historical and contemporary political circumstances surrounding the 2008 Beijing Olympics. These circumstances reflect what Chinese policy analyst Joshua Ramo calls China's "image emergency problem." In this chapter I discuss this image problem and how the Beijing Olympics provided a platform for the Party to challenge many of the negative perceptions and stereotypes that plague China's international image. In this chapter I also outline some of the broader political economic goals of the Party and emphasize the importance of the Beijing Olympics in the Party's efforts to achieve those goals. By adopting Joshua Ramo's frame for understanding China's image problem as a branding problem, this chapter sets the stage for my analysis of how the projected national images embedded within the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics function in the Party's attempts to reposition brand China in the "nation brand market."

The roots of China's image emergency problem lay on both sides of the Pacific and can be traced to historical misperceptions, stereotypes, and racist "otherizing" discourses that have manifest between China and Euro-America at least as far back as a century (Brownell 2008; Wang 2008). I follow Joshua Ramo, however, in situating the primary locus of China's image problems within the incredible changes to have occurred

there in the last 30 years. It is now almost a truism to point out that the "reform and opening" (改革开放 *gaige kaifang*) policies that Deng Xiaoping initiated in 1978 have enabled China to develop faster than any country in history. The results of these economic reforms are indeed worthy of praise: hundreds of millions of Chinese have been lifted out of poverty, nearly half the population (800 million people) has transitioned to urban lifestyles, and a new generation of Chinese is engaging with the world economy in a way that "would have been unimaginable 30 years ago" (Ramo 2007: 12). In this respect China follows a global pattern in which economic reforms and modernization have lead to profound socio-spatial transformations. What is different in China's case is the astonishing speed with which these socio-economic and, to a more limited extent, political transformations have occurred.

Given the speed at which China has changed in the last 25 years, it is perhaps not surprising that China's internal image of itself is sharply divergent from its external reputation. Joshua Ramo argues "The world's view of China is too often an unstable cocktail of out-of-date ideas, wild hopes and unshakeable prejudices and fears," (2007: 12). Furthermore, "China's view of herself often teeters between self-confidence and insecurity, between caution and arrogance. Chinese officials and intellectuals struggle to project a clear image of what the country is and what it hopes to become" (12). A relevant example of the consequence of this "image misalignment" between China's internal self-perception and the way it is perceived abroad is the storm of controversy that surrounded the Beijing Olympics. For instance, many ethnic Chinese considered pro-Tibetan independence protests at the Olympic Torch relays, calls for boycotts of the Olympics by activist groups such as Dream for Darfur, and Western media's sympathetic

coverage of the March 2008 riots in Lhasa, Tibet as personal attacks on the Chinese

nation and national identity. The result was an explosion of large, indignant "anti-CNN"

protests and displays of Chinese nationalism—especially among China's so-called "angry

youth" population (Barboza 2008; Yardley 2008). Western activists' method of

protesting and vociferously attacking the Party—tactics that may work well in Western

societies—revealed their lack of sensitivity to the importance of "saving face" in Chinese

culture. As IOC chief Jacques Rogges said, "You don't obtain anything in China with a

loud voice. That is the big mistake of people in the West wanting to add their views. To

keep face is of paramount importance . . . only one thing works – respectful, quiet, firm

discussion" (AFP 2008). It would seem neither side in this argument properly understood

the motivations of the other or the important cultural differences between them.

Images of Brand China

A compelling reason for why Ramo's argument that China's image problems can

be considered a branding problem is that he grounds his argument in extensive

quantitative marketing research. He reports on the way that Chinese perceive their

country and then compares this data to the images that non-Chinese use to characterize

China. His findings indicate a number of misperceptions about China that are common

among many foreigners (Ramo 2007: 13-14):

- ◆ "China is seen as either a land of Mao-suited citizens . . . or as a mix of "Fu man chu" and gong-fu stereotypes with more modern authoritarian images."
- ◆ "Chinese products are seen as low-tech and poor quality."
- ◆ "Chinese labor is seen as "sweat-shop" cheap . . . [foreign] consumers and businesses are more likely to reach for the phrase "copycat" than "innovative.""
- ◆ "Positive views of China tend to be associated with the country's rapid economic growth as an opportunity for money making . . . Appreciation of

the cultural, social, and spiritual changes underway in China register with only a handful of people outside of China."

Ramo's data corroborates the claim that outside of China, knowledge about contemporary Chinese culture and the social changes it is experiencing are abysmal—people may know China is old and complex, but few people understand what makes China dynamic and different or why this dynamism is relevant.

The stereotypes and images of China listed above are important to keep in mind throughout this paper. They represent the pre-conceived notions with which many Westerners approached the Beijing Games and thus they are implicated in the social construction of brand China. Although in this project I do not investigate the role of the audience in the construction of brand China, their role in the process is undeniable and points to possible directions for future ethnographic research. In any case, what is important to keep in mind is that surmounting the negative perceptions listed above is one of the primary goals of the Party's image "work."

Image Objectives of the Central Communist Party

My understanding of the importance of China's image and representation in the political economic goals of the Party impacts how I view the function of the projected national images embedded within the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics. There are numerous instances of Party leaders explicitly stating the strategic imperative of improving China's image. For instance, when Hu Jintao addressed the 10th Conference of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad, he told them:

> The fundamental task and basic goal of China's diplomatic work at present and a certain period in the years to come is to maintain the important development period featured by strategic opportunities and strive for a peaceful and stable international environment, a good-neighborly and friendly surrounding

environment, an environment for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation, and an objective and friendly publicity environment so as to build a fairly well-off society in an all-around way (People's Daily 2004).

As stated, continued economic development is the Party's number one priority. More specific to the realm of public diplomacy and foreign policy are the five primary objectives of the Party's public diplomacy as identified by Chinese political scientist Wang Yiwei. These objectives parallel the political and economic goals expressed by Hu Jintao above (Wang 2008: 268; Zhan 1998):

◆ "More strongly publicize the Chinese government's statements and assertion to the outside world."
◆ "Form a desirable image of the [Chinese] state."
◆ "Issue rebuttals to distorted overseas reports about China."
◆ "Improve the international environment surrounding China."
◆ "Exert influence on the policy decisions of foreign countries."

These five goals of Chinese public diplomacy reinforce the importance of image and representation in the Party's image building goals. And Hu Jintao's above statement serves as an official proclamation of the political and economic goals of the Party. Together, they underscore the importance of the image building and nation branding potential of the Beijing Olympics. Finally, it is worth quoting Zhang and Silk for their description of how sports in China discursively function as an arm of Party policy:

> Among these tactics [to maintain power and social control] adopted by the Chinese nation-state, hosting international sporting events has become a classic technology to win recognition in the global sphere, reshape urban space, promote nationalism, and discursively reconstitute disciplined, functional, and productive Chinese citizens (and thereby, simultaneously, expose the abject other) (2006: 445).

Brand China: Newness, Innovation, and *dan* 淡

Ultimately, Ramo argues, China's image emergency problem manifests because the world lacks a framework with which to understand the contradictions inherent in

contemporary China. Lacking such a framework, the misperceptions and stereotypes mentioned above inform how people outside of China engage with the country. Ramo advances the metaphor of "brand China" as a way out of the country's image misalignment problem. Just as commercial brands connote certain images or ideas and evoke certain feelings or emotions (Mercedes = prestige, Google = innovation), Ramo argues that brand China needs to remake its image according to the two adjectives that he feels best describe the country: "newness" and "innovation." In place of tired clichés about Confucianism, tea, or martial arts, Ramo suggests that newness and innovation offer the most useful framework with which both sides of China's image misalignment problem can engage in fruitful dialogue and understanding.

In fact, newness and innovation are already hallmarks of contemporary Chinese culture. The problem, however, is that people outside of China do not have a framework within which to place newness and innovation in their imagination about the country, nor do they typically see signs of newness or innovation coming out of China. The reason for this, Ramo argues, is twofold: first, China's leaders have heretofore failed to consistently and *credibly* project newness and innovation in their dealings with foreign publics (2007: 16). As I show in the following chapter, however, newness and innovation are two of the most visible and recurrent themes in the Party's Olympic visual narrative, suggesting a conscious effort by the Party to remake China's image along these lines.

Second and equally important are a Western hegemony over global media discourse and a lingering Cold War-era distrust of communist regimes in Western political circles. Both serve to obscure the reality that today's China is a dynamic and changing place, albeit one often characterized by a seemingly contradictory blend of "old

China" traditions and signs of "new China," such as bourgeoning working and middle classes and the new identities that are forming in response to the economic reforms initiated in 1978. Finally, when considering the complex identity politics involved in constructing brand China during the Beijing Olympics it is important to keep in mind the Western preoccupation with defining Chinese identity in order to determine where China is going in the future. Like all national identities, China's has been constructed as much by internal discourses of "invention" as it has by its engagement with the cultural "Other," particularly the United States (Zheng 1999).

In addition to proposing newness and innovation as the flagship themes of brand China, Ramo suggests Westerners can better understand the country by accepting the "Chinese idea of *dan* (淡), an adjective which might be translated as a kind of clarity coming from the combination of opposites" (2007: 18). The character *dan* (淡) reflects a traditional Chinese value emphasizing the harmony of opposites and the unity of seemingly contradictory forms—a familiar example of this is the symbol for *yin* and *yang*. "China needs a *dan*-like national image," argues Ramo, "one that harmonizes opposites, that contains both the wealth of China and its poverty . . . Honesty of this sort can help foreigners understand that the contradictions they see in modern China are not always signs of dishonesty or weakness, but rather signs of change" (2007: 19). In my analysis of the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics I describe how the concept of *dan* and the related notion of *duilian* (anti-thetical couplets in Chinese poetry) are prominent themes in the design of some of the Olympic venues as well as in the performance sections of the Opening and Closing ceremonies.

As important as the Beijing Olympics are to China's image "work," Ramo cautions against viewing them as a singular instance by which China will be able remake its international reputation. This is because of the crucial role that *credibility* and the audience play in any brand marketing campaign—whether for a corporation or country, audiences must believe the story is credible if they are to accept the brand's pitch (Twitchell 2008). In marketing the importance of credibility and audience perceptions relates to the country-of-origin effect and it is certainly applicable to brand China's negative international reputation. Without sufficient credibility, the projected national images in the Party's Olympic visual narrative may fail to inspire the desired changes in China's image. As Ramo warns:

> [China's leaders] must avoid the temptation to paper over China's real identity with politically palatable, saleable images that don't correspond to reality . . . To think old-style "broadcast" propaganda campaigns can work anymore is an out of date idea. Chinese who pin their hopes on the 2008 Olympics to remake the nation's image are similarly making a miscalculation. The only single events that remake national images tend to be bad ones. And positive events, no matter how large, can only impact the image of a nation if there is a framework for people to fit that image into (2007: 18).

In this project I argue that the Beijing Olympics made a positive step forward in constructing the kind of framework Ramo advocates. Furthermore, nation branding practitioner Simon Anholt *does* believe that staging international mega-events such as the Olympics can raise a nation brand's profile. But he agrees with Ramo that they are not a means by which countries can "whitewash" the problems afflicting their brands—again, credibility is key (Anholt 2006).

In this chapter I have emphasized the complex identity politics that surround China's image in general and the Beijing Olympics in particular. China's image

emergency problem cannot be blamed solely on the Central Communist Party. Western fears about communism and stereotypes of Chinese identity are also a factor behind the negative images used to characterize China by non-Chinese. In the following chapters I consult other nation branding research to consolidate the perceptions of China discussed above into three main images of the country: China is a place of sweatshop cheap labor and shoddy, possibly dangerous manufactured goods; it is considered a dictatorship, heedless of human rights; and it is a place of tremendous environmental degradation and pollution.

In this chapter I also introduced the concept of brand China in terms suggested by Joshua Ramo. Ramo's emphasis on newness, innovation, and the Chinese concept of *dan* (淡) as the flagship themes of brand China return in my analysis of the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics. In the following discussion it is important to keep in mind the political economic goals of the Party mentioned above—while sustained economic growth and a peaceful international political environment are central to these goals, improving China's image is perhaps the most pertinent political and economic objective in this discussion. In the following chapter I build on the frame established here to investigate how visual imagery from the Beijing Olympics functioned simultaneously as signifiers of Chinese national identity, emblems of brand China, and projected national images that reveal policy and economic goals of the Party.

CHAPTER III

PROJECTED NATIONAL IMAGES IN THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS

Browsing the Beijing2008 website reveals images, graphics, and text related to the three concepts that organized the Beijing Olympics: the People's Olympics, High-Tech Olympics, and Green Olympics. In the following three sections I focus on the primary, iconic images that correspond to each Olympic concept. I then discuss how the Opening and Closing ceremonies also fit within this visual narrative. In the subsequent chapter I contextualize the visual elements described below within the nation branding literature that forms part of the theoretical foundation for this project. By demonstrating how symbols of Chinese national identity displayed during the Olympics are also symbols of brand China, I emphasize their function in the Party's attempts to reposition brand China in the global national brand hierarchy.

People's Olympics

China's Olympic emblem, "Chinese Seal, Dancing Beijing" and its slogan, "One World, One Dream," provide useful illustrations of the projected national images embedded within the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics. Figure 1 below is a graphic for the Beijing Olympics slogan:

同一个世界 同一个梦想

One World One Dream

Figure 1: Official slogan and emblem of the 2008 Beijing Olympics[1]

At the top of the graphic is the Beijing Olympics emblem, "Chinese Seal, Dancing Beijing" (described below); although small, the Olympic Rings anchor the graphic to the Olympics institution. Below the emblem are Mandarin characters that pronounce, in the romanized system of *pinyin*, tóng yī ge shìjiè, tóng yī ge mèngxiǎng. This literally translates as "same world, same dream." "One World, One Dream" appears in English below the Mandarin characters.

A more elaborate explanation of the connotive meanings behind the slogan can be found on the Beijing2008 website:

> It reflects the values of harmony connoted in the concept of "People's Olympics", the core and soul of the three concepts – "Green Olympics, High-tech Olympics and People's Olympics". . . It expresses the firm belief of a great nation, with a long history of 5,000 years and on its way towards modernization, that is committed to peaceful development, harmonious society, and people's happiness. It voices the aspirations of 1.3 billion Chinese people ("Slogan for Beijing Olympics" 2008).

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[1] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/graphic/n214068253.shtml

China's ancient historical roots (its "long history of 5,000 years") onto its recent modernization and reform efforts. Harmony is central to this vision—reflected in, among other things, the use of the phrase *"harmonious society"* (和谐社会 héxié shèhuì). "Harmonious society" is an oft-heard political maxim used by Hu Jintao and other Party leaders. Likewise, *"peaceful development"* (和平发育 hépíng fāyù) is another motto frequently used in Chinese political discourse. They are (at least nominally) guiding principles in contemporary Chinese politics. As Ramo points out, however, the original translation and wording of "peaceful development" was "peaceful rise" (和平 崛起 hépíng juéqǐ), a slogan that created controversy and anxiety among Western watchers of Chinese foreign policy. "Peaceful rise simply wasn't credible," explains Ramo. "It ran counter to decades of Western images about China and, as a result, felt more like propaganda than honest, resonant insight into Beijing's intentions" (2007: 10). Later, I return to this example, as it illustrates the critical factor that credibility plays in the Party's image building and nation branding efforts.

The centrality of unity and harmony in the underlying, connotive meaning of "One World, One Dream" reflects a historical trend in Chinese political philosophy that distinguishes it from "Western" political discourse. Yiwei Wang, a prominent scholar in Chinese foreign policy, explains that, "Chinese political thinking first asks, "Who are we?" creating the concept of the "whole world as one family," and emphasizing the creation of harmony" (2008: 262). Wang compares this to the Western political-philosophical trend that asks first, "Who are you?" and "is concerned with the problem of identity, with distinguishing and making friends and enemies, exploring 'us' and 'others'" (Wang 2008: 262). Wang's lesson underscores the long standing tradition of

philosophical trend that asks first, "Who are you?" and "is concerned with the problem of

identity, with distinguishing and making friends and enemies, exploring 'us' and

'others'" (Wang 2008: 262). Wang's lesson underscores the long standing tradition of

conceiving of the "whole world as one family"—albeit with China at the center—and the

importance of harmony and unity in Chinese culture.

Figure 2 below is China's Olympic emblem:

Figure 2: "Chinese Seal, Dancing Beijing," official emblem of the 2008 Beijing Olympics[2]

The image is called "Chinese seal, Dancing Beijing." The white figure, posed on a red

tablet in a dance-like or running gesture appears graceful, open, and flowing. The font

used for "Beijing 2008" is calligraphic in style, suggestive of movement and flow. The

Olympic rings, situated at the bottom of the image, anchor the emblem to the Olympic

institution.

The white figure is actually a calligraphic depiction of the character jīng:

Jīng means "capital" in Mandarin and it is the second component of China's

capital city, Beijing (北京). "Chinese seal, Dancing Beijing" emphasizes the centrality of

Beijing to the Chinese nation and signals Beijing's increasingly important role as an

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[2] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/graphic/n214070081.shtml

international hub of commerce and culture. "'Dancing Beijing' is a kind invitation," the

website author(s) write. "The open arms in the emblem say that China is opening its

arms to welcome the rest of the world to join the Olympics, a celebration of 'peace,

friendship and progress of mankind'("The Olympic Emblem" 2008). As the description

suggests, the second-level or *connotive* meanings of China's Olympic emblem are ideas

such as openness and an inviting, welcoming spirit; the emblem connotes dance,

movement, grace, and flow.

     Figure 3 below maintains the projected national images of movement, grace, and

flow.

Figure 3: Graphic for the Cultural Olympics[3]

Figure 3 is the emblem for the Cultural Olympics, a secondary initiative subsumed under

the broader campaign of the People's Olympics. Note the absence of the Olympic rings

in this graphic—it is intended to highlight the uniqueness of Chinese culture. The

flowing, dancing figure beneath the large red lantern is consistent in form and style with

the "Dancing Beijing" figure from the Olympic emblem. This is, as the website reveals,

a deliberate measure:

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[3] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/graphic/n214070879.shtml

The design of the Cultural Festival Symbol shows a human being and a lantern dancing joyfully. Lantern is used (sic) at every traditional Chinese festival. It symbolizes reunion and other happy occasions, and assembles the soul of the traditional Chinese culture . . . Chinese unique artistic form – calligraphic art is adopted in the beaming design of the secondary mark, which sets off against the Olympic Emblem "Chinese Seal, Dancing Beijing" ("Beijing Olympic Cultural Festival Symbol" 2008).

Elements of traditional Chinese culture are encoded in the emblem for the Cultural Olympics. The color red is associated with good fortune and good luck in China; lanterns are, as mentioned, used at traditional Chinese holidays such as the Lantern Festival on the final day of the Chinese New Year. The prominence of calligraphy reiterates the themes of movement, grace, and flow.

Figure 4, shown below, is a graphic depicting the *fuwa,* mascots of the Beijing Olympics. Fúwá is the romanized word for "blessed child" or "good luck dolls" and links the character *fu* (福), meaning "good fortune," with *wa* (娃), a popular term in southern China for baby (Macartney 2006). Each *fuwa* represents a color associated with an Olympic ring. The *fuwa* also express elements of Chinese history and culture.

Figure 4: The Five *Fuwa*, official mascots of the 2008 Beijing Olympics[4]

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[4] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/37/03/column211990337.shtml

The website for the 2008 Beijing Olympics explains what each of the *fuwa*

represent. The story behind *Beibei*, the blue *fuwa* on the far left in Figure 4, is explained

in detail:

> In China's traditional culture and art, the fish and water designs are symbols of prosperity and harvest. And so *Beibei* carries the blessing of prosperity. A fish is also a symbol of surplus in Chinese culture, another measure of a good year and a good life.
>
> The ornamental lines of the water-wave designs are taken from well-known Chinese paintings of the past. Among Fuwa, *Beibei* is known to be gentle and pure. Strong in water sports, she reflects the blue Olympic ring ("The Official Mascots" 2007).

Thus the *fuwa* are more than just appealing, whimsical mascots. Their very

form—down to the lines and strokes that comprise them—encodes an essence of

"Chineseness." While on the surface the *fuwa* are whimsical and playful, the description

of *Beibei* reveals that each *fuwa* communicates important aspects of Chinese history and

culture.

It is worth noting that Chinese artist Han Meilin designed the Olympic emblem

and the *fuwa* mascots. Han Meilin's role as one of the lead artistic figures behind the

visual narrative for the Beijing Olympics reminds us that the Party is not the only actor

responsible for the production of visual representations of Chinese identity during the

Olympics. In an interview with Mary Carillo, a sports journalist for NBC, Han expressed

his desire for his Olympic art to build China's image by contributing to China's "export

of culture." "I would like to export culture," he said, "to help people understand our

[Chinese] traditional way of life."[5] Han Meilin is not a Party bureaucrat—he was even

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[5] http://www.nbcolympics.com/video/player.html?assetid=0821_maryhealer_ja387andchannelcode=aboutbeijing.

imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution. Yet, he is clearly sensitive to China's image emergency problem and hopes his work contributes to a more positive international perception of China.

Elsewhere, however, Han Meilin expressed dissatisfaction with the Party for what he felt was micromanagement over his creative and artistic license. In an article for the Times Online, journalist Jane Macartney claims, "Even the designer, the artist Han Meilin, has made remarks that show he is less than delighted with the five dolls [the *fuwa* mascots]. He said that it was as if officials guided his pen and, while they may have a correct view of the world, their view of art was not necessarily correct" (Macartney 2006). Han Meilin's open criticisms of the Party's involvement in the design of the *fuwa* mascots reflect the complexity at the site of production of the images that surrounded the Beijing Games. Although Han Meilin designed the Olympic emblem and the *fuwa* mascots, his comments assert the Party's influential role in deciding upon the content and form of the images investigated in this project. This is an important point because it strengthens the connection of the images in this discussion—decontextualized from their original site of production as well as from the site of the audience's reception—to the Party and its political economic goals.

What kinds of projected national images can we "read," semiologically speaking, from the above graphics? They portray China as a graceful, flowing, and welcoming civilization. They reflect elements of ancient Chinese culture, such as calligraphy, the color red as a symbol of good fortune and prosperity, and the prominence of lanterns in Chinese festivals. They celebrate Beijing's role as the capital of an ancient civilization— and thus with all of the wisdom and benevolence associated with ancient civilizations.

And the *fuwa* emphasize playfulness and a whimsical, childlike spirit—an image that certainly challenges the notion of China as a heavy-handed, oppressive, authoritarian state.

The two primary visual elements in the above narrative—the slogan "One World, One Dream" and the emblem "Chinese Seal, Dancing Beijing"—are both anchored by the presence of the Olympic rings. By situating the Olympic rings beside visual representations of Chinese national identity, Party leaders signal that by hosting the Olympics, Beijing (and by extension, China) is a fully modern and legitimate player in international world affairs. This parallels Darling-Wolf's analysis of the visual narrative surrounding the 2002 World Cup in Japan. "The visual discourse surrounding the World Cup," she wrote, "served to locate Japan assertively as an important player in a world event that was until recently heavily dominated by non-Asian nations…Japan visually claimed its place as a participant in the global culture created by transnational capitalism" (2005: 189). Likewise, the presence of the Olympic rings raises awareness that China is a part of the modern world order upon which the logic of the Olympics is predicated.

High-Tech Olympics

Recall that Joshua Ramo argues that *newness* and *innovation* are the most compelling and useful images that the Party can use to change its external reputation. "The first, important step" in China's image building efforts, Ramo argues, "is to make a decision that China's constant newness is the most useful framework for understanding the country" (2007: 43). As described above, China's international image and reputation problems revolve around the fact that "most people in the world already know China is

an old and complicated culture" but they do not understand or see newness and innovation as hallmarks of today's China (2007: 43).

Newness and innovation are certainly reflected in the many feats of monumental architecture that emerged in Beijing ahead of the 2008 Olympics. Party leaders rightly understood the Olympics were an opportunity to demonstrate China's capacity for technological innovation to the billions of viewers watching worldwide. The images below are just a few examples of the tremendous efforts that Party leaders took to build Beijing's image—not only as the capital of a resurgent China, but also an international capital of high-tech engineering and innovation.

The National Stadium is perhaps the premier icon of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Its appearance is at once striking and awe-inspiring, its size daunting. Below are a graphic (Figure 5) and a photograph (Figure 6) of the National Stadium (also called the "Bird's Nest" for the way its crisscrossing steel beams resemble a bird's nest).

Figure 5: Graphic of the National Stadium (Bird's Nest)[6]

Figure 6: Photo of the National Stadium (Bird's Nest)[7]

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[6] Source: http://photo.beijing2008.cn/news-214078095-214047920.html

[7] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/cptvenues/venues/nst/headlines/n214260875.shtml

Designed by the Swiss architectural firm, Herzog and DeMeuron, China Architecture Design Institute, and Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, the 91,000 seat National Stadium is a marvel of modern architecture and design. It is the world's largest steel structure. Thanks to manufacturing innovation, it was made from 42,000 tons of a unique type of steel produced entirely in China ("High technology" 2008). It covers an area of 258,000 square meters and cost 423 million US dollars to build. A semiotic reading of the Bird's Nest would emphasize how its crisscrossing, steel beams suggest innovation, strength, and size; at the same time, its porous exterior (a membrane made from a similar material as the National Aquatics Center, below) evokes feelings of openness and transparency (Eaton 2008).

Ai Weiwei is one of China's most famous contemporary artists. He was involved in the planning and design of the National Stadium but subsequently divorced himself from the project because of feelings similar to those of Han Meilin. Ai referred to the image of China projected during the Beijing Olympics as a "pretend smile." After working on the National Stadium design team, he openly criticized the Party's use of the Olympics to establish greater control over media and social life in China. In an article for the New York Times, Ai questioned, "When these new security rules and restrictions are put in place, how can one smile and perform, cheer and pose?" (Zhang 2008). Ai's scathing comments about the Party's handling of the Olympics challenge China's image as a land of harmonious, "Mao suited citizens"; furthermore, his comments reinforce the claim that an often contentious politics of identities and interests converged around the production of visual representations of Chinese identity for the Olympics. The National

Stadium also merits mentioning because it was one of the only venues designed by a Chinese architecture firm—non-Chinese, international architecture firms designed almost all of the rest of the Olympic venues.

Eugene Wang, a professor of Chinese Art History at Harvard University, deconstructs some of the meanings behind the National Stadium. The metaphor of a bird's nest "suggests certain upward aspirations," explained Wang. "The use of the word 'bird' suggests flying, loftiness. It speaks to the Chinese at this time of anxiety and eagerness to take off." Furthermore, its open outer frame expresses China's stance on modernization and globalization. "Now the country is opened up," Wang said, "made more susceptible to modernization. It's no longer this old, walled city" (Eaton 2008). Delin Lai, a Beijing born architectural historian, echoes Wang's sentiments. Lai believes the design of the National Stadium testifies to the commitment of the Party to emphasize *openness* in its projected national images. "Undoubtedly," Lai said, "the design demonstrates the desire of the Chinese government to portray the open image of contemporary China—a country that would actively join the international community and confidently accept global culture" (Eaton 2008). Certainly in terms of an external marketing device, the Bird's Nest succeeds in imaging China as innovative and high-tech; the Bird's Nest may perhaps also connote ideas such as "lifting off" in economic prosperity or that China is opening up to and welcoming in "global culture."

The National Aquatic Center (the Water Cube), pictured below in Figure 7, is another architectural marvel constructed for of the Olympics. Its futuristic look helps build China's image as a center of high-tech architecture.
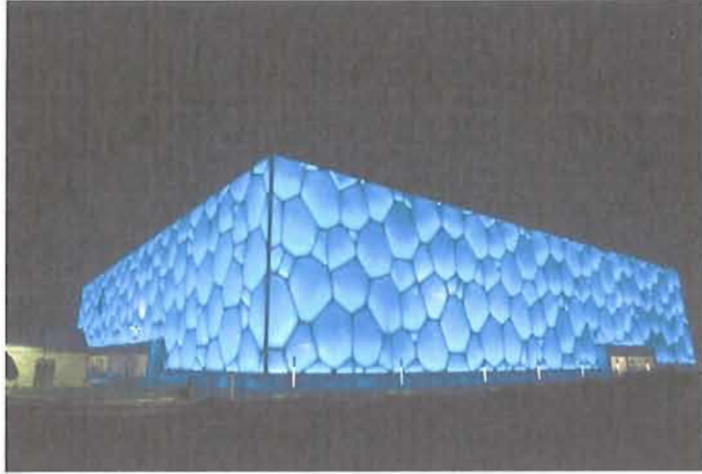
Figure 7: The National Aquatic Center (Water Cube)[8]

Like the unique, flexible steel of the Bird's Nest, the Water Cube is also made of a high-tech substance. The "bubbles" in its outer membrane are made of ETFE (ethylene tetrafluoroethylene), originally designed for use in the aviation industry. Not only is this the first time ETFE has been used in China, but also the Cube's massive size (110, 000 square meters) makes it the world's largest and most complicated membrane structure ("Magical ETFE membrane" 2008). The ETFE membrane for the Water Cube was produced in China through a joint venture at a considerable savings than its manufacture would have cost elsewhere. Moreover, just as construction of the National Stadium required engineering ingenuity and innovative thinking, manufacture of the ETFE material and construction of the Water Cube advanced China's architectural and engineering capabilities ("National Aquatics Center" 2008).

Among other advanced, high-tech features, the Water Cube can:

- ◆ Clean itself by virtue of the coefficient of friction of its ETFE membrane, which is less than that of dust, meaning that as long as it rains it will remain clean ("Magical ETFE membrane" 2008).

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[8] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/cptvenues/venues/nac/headlines/n214241555.shtml

- ◆ Regulate humidity and keep a comfortable temperature with no steam ("Water Cube keeps comfortable humidity" 2008).
- ◆ Illuminate the night sky with a 16.7 million color exterior LED system ("Water cube is unveiled" 2008).
- ◆ Each "bubble" can resist the weight of a car ("Magical ETFE membrane" 2008).

For these reasons, BOCOG and the Party assert that the Water Cube is the world's most high-tech swimming facility.

Although not directly related to the Beijing Olympics, Terminal 3 at Beijing International Airport and the MAGLEV train in Shanghai were both constructed and premiered in time to be displayed during the media spotlight accompanying the Olympics. China's leaders scored another "world's biggest" with the opening of Terminal 3 at Beijing Airport in February 2008. At 1.8 miles long and 10 million square feet of floor space, Terminal 3 is the largest airport in the world. It cost nearly US$4 billion to construct, required the relocation of 10 villages, and took 50,000 workers only four years to build (Spencer 2008). In keeping with Beijing and Party leadership's penchant for combining high-tech, innovative design with signs that evoke traditional Chinese culture, Terminal 3 is fashioned in the shape of a dragon, complete with scale-shaped vents, red and gold paint, and a long body with a tail at one end and a large, wide head at the other. In Chinese mythology, dragons represent wisdom and vitality. The red and gold colors of Terminal 3 represent the colors of the Forbidden City (Spencer 2008).

The MAGLEV (magnetic levitation) train in Shanghai represents another step the Party took to boost China's image as a leader in high-tech innovation. Capable of speeds up to 300 miles per hour, the MAGLEV is the fastest train in the world (Berkowitz, *et al* 2007: 173). Japan's introduction of the bullet train during the 1964 Olympics had a

similar effect: it helped raise awareness that Japan was no longer a copycat producer of technology, but an innovator as well (Fishman 2005).

In fact, there is a strong parallel between what the 1964 Tokyo Olympics did for Japan and what the 2008 Beijing Olympics could do for China. The 1964 Olympics were a watershed moment in Japan's reconstruction efforts—both physically and psychologically—signaling to the world its progress twenty years after World War II (Pempell 1998). Darling-Wolf explains how "The 1964 Olympics hosted by newly reconstructed Tokyo represented another symbolic shift in Japanese cultural and global identity from defeated to prosperous nation" (2005: 185). Likewise, the Party hopes that by showcasing high-tech, modern infrastructure such as Terminal 3, the MAGLEV train, or Beijing's improved subway system ("Beijing subway" 2008) it will change people's minds about China as a copycat, low-cost manufacturing center.

One of the more interesting aspects of China's overall visual narrative is the frequent juxtaposition of opposites. Harmonizing opposing forms reflects the principle of *duilian* or "antithetical couplets" in Chinese poetry and closely parallels the concept of *dan* described in the previous chapter. Delin Lai explains how the cube shape of the National Aquatic Center sets off against the circular shape of the Bird's Nest, embodying *duilian* or *dan* as commanding principles in Chinese culture: "One uses steel," he said, "the other plastic; one is heavy, the other light. Other contrasts include masculinity and femininity, perforation and solidity, movement and static. Most important are the circle and square, which symbolized heaven and earth [respectively] in traditional Chinese cosmology" (Eaton 2008). The theme of harmonizing opposites is also expressed in the

shapes, colors, and patterns utilized during the Opening and Closing ceremonies (discussed below).

It does not require deep application of semiotic theory to the visual narrative surrounding the High-Tech Olympics in order to conclude that it projects newness and innovation as national images that represent China. Semiotic theory does reveal, however, how the visual elements described in this section signify important elements of Chinese mythology, such as dragons, the colors red and gold, and the principle of *duilian*. *Duilian* unites the opposition between the circular Bird's Nest and the square form of the Water Cube—signifying the importance of harmony and unity in the Chinese cultural imaginary. The porous membrane of the Bird's Nest connotes openness and transparency, connecting with many of the connotive meanings behind the visual elements in the People's Olympics. In addition to *duilian* and important signs from Chinese mythology, the High-Tech Olympics projected national images such as size, strength, innovation, and high-tech engineering.

Green Olympics

China's breakneck economic development has come at a severe cost to the environment. Air pollution, water pollution, and desertification are just a few of the many environmental crises facing China today. As China has become the world's leading emitter of greenhouse gases, pollution has moved beyond a domestic issue to become an international concern. Environmental degradation is even challenging the Party's hold on power by threatening to derail development and instigating mass environmental protests (Kahn and Yardley 2007).

As noted above, China's environmental degradation has a negative impact on its international image. In fact, pollution concerns were one of the main reasons why China's bid to host the 2000 Olympics was unsuccessful. Therefore, in their bid to host the 2008 Olympics, Party leaders promised the Beijing Games would be the "most environmentally friendly games ever" (Hildebrandt 2003).

Their commitment to this promise seems to have been sincere: more than US$16.8 billion was invested into environmentally related projects, making the Beijing Olympics a catalyst for infrastructure development and other projects to improve Beijing's environment. Beijing's Olympics bid touted the Olympics as an opportunity to promote the development of clean energy sources such as geothermal heat, wind farms, and solar panels. For example, energy and water conservation were central to the design of the Water Cube. According to the Beijing2008 website, the Water Cube collects and recycles 10,000 tons of rain water; it can save 140,000 tons of recycled water a year; and it utilizes an ingenious air-conditioning and humidity regulation system that minimizes energy use (making it a showcase of high-tech environmental technology as well as high-tech engineering) ("'Water Cube': green architectural wonder" 2008). Likewise, sustainable development principles featured prominently in the design of the National Stadium. Among other environmentally friendly features, the lighting for the Bird's Nest was powered by a 130 kW photovoltaic system ("UNEP: Green energy" 2008).

Prior to the start of the Beijing Games, air pollution was one of the major concerns of the IOC and foreign athletes. Beijing took drastic steps to curb sources of air pollution by shuttering polluting factories, limiting the number of cars allowed on the road for two months prior to the Games, and even banning the use of spray paint outdoors

(Jacobs 2008). The Party literally took to seeding the clouds with silver iodide particles in an effort to ensure rain did not fall on the National Stadium during the Opening Ceremony (Demick 2008). It appears their efforts to curb air pollution during the Olympics were successful, as reports from Beijing indicate that air quality was good except for a mild "mist" that was present at the start of the Games ("Beijing registers eighth day" 2008).

Figure 8 below is the Environmental Symbol of Beijing 2008. By its nature, it lends itself more readily to semiotic analysis than the environmental improvements and efforts to "green" Beijing mentioned above.

Figure 8: Graphic for the Green Olympics[9]

The Environmental symbol portrays the dancing figure from the Cultural Olympics and other Olympic graphics beneath a canopy of figurative green leaves. At the first-order or denotive level the symbol is rather straightforward: it is simply a dancing figure underneath several green ovals, anchored by the words "Environment" and "Beijing 2008."

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[9] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/graphic/n214070883.shtml

In the more detailed description from the Beijing2008 website we again see an emphasis on *harmony* and *unity*, themes highlighted in the People's Olympics and in the architecture featured in the High-Tech Olympics. The symbol "represents harmony and unity between human beings and nature. Just like swinging coloured strips that encircle and cross each other, the green lines form a luxuriant crown of a tree and recall flowers in full bloom, embodying the sustainable development of nature" ("Environmental Symbol" 2008). The image of a flower in full bloom also suggests China's opening up and reform: a blooming flower is a metaphor for China's receptiveness to new markets, new identities, and new flows of capital and investment.

History and Identity in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies

The Opening and Closing ceremonies, directed by acclaimed Chinese moviemaker Zhang Yimou, are rife with semiotic significance. Because of their performative, expressive content, the Opening and Closing ceremonies provide some of the clearest examples into what happens to history and identity in the construction of brand China during the Beijing Olympics. A thorough semiotic analysis of the ceremonies could comprise an entire thesis project in and of itself. Therefore, here I am only able to touch on some of the most salient (to me) and significant moments from the Opening and Closing ceremonies.

The Opening ceremony featured an hour-long "history and culture" performance piece in which Chinese dancers and actors performed seminal events from Chinese history, such as the invention of the movable type printing press, paper, the compass, gunpowder. The latter half of the performance emphasized the economic achievements of the past thirty years reforms and the technological, social aspirations Party leaders

have for the future of China—e.g., the space walk section in which two Chinese

tàikōngrén 太空人 (astronauts) "space walked" down from the top of the National

Stadium to open a chamber on the floor, out of which emerged a large globe covered by

dancing, racing people. Among its many other visually spectacular moments, the

Opening ceremony featured CGI fireworks (that sparked, literally, some minor

controversy), flying dancers covered in tiny lights, 2008 Chinese drummers precisely

arranged in the shape of a square, a massive human-powered Chinese printing press on

which the characters for the word "harmony" (和) emerged, and an immense *shan-shui*

山 水 (mountain-water) painting constructed upon one of the world's largest LED

screens. The LED screen, pictured in Figure 9 below, was an impressive feat of

technology on display during the Opening Ceremony. At 230 feet long by 70 feet wide,

it eventually covered nearly the entire stadium floor.

Figure 9: Screenshot of the LED screen unfolding during the Opening Ceremony

It is worth noting that Joshua Ramo, a primary source for this essay, was Bob

Costas's co-host during the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. As the LED screen began

to unfold, Ramo commented, "We begin here with something highly symbolic: a blank

sheet of paper, expressing the wish of the Chinese for people around the world as they

look at this country over the next seventeen days to fill a blank sheet of paper with new images and maybe to replace images that the Chinese themselves are, in many cases, eager to leave behind." In all, the Opening ceremony highlighted two aspects of Chinese culture: its 5,000-year history (with an emphasis on Confucian principles, such as harmony and unity) and the economic, technological progress of the past thirty years.

One of the most glaring gaps in the culture and history section was the complete absence of any reference to the Chairman Mao Zedong and the events that took place in China during the tumultuous Mao-years (1949 – 1976). Not even a nod to the historic founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was included in the Opening ceremony—a rather obvious gap in the country's history. Although Zhang Yimou directed the Opening ceremony, decisions about its content ultimately rested with Party leadership (Magnier 2008). Thus, from the perspective of an external marketing campaign, it is not surprising that Party leadership would shy away from signs that reference Mao Zedong or China's communist past. Party leaders may have worried that reference to the Mao-years would stir unease and anxiety among Western audiences, ever fearful and distrustful of communism and images of "Red China."

A less externally focused explanation for why there were no images from the Mao-years during the Opening ceremony reflects the exigencies of internal Chinese identity politics. Projecting images that reference its own sordid history and past failures does little to serve the political economic goals of the Party—especially when survivors of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution remain alive. In any case, the absence of the Mao-years from the Opening ceremony is a clear example of how the

Party modified Chinese history to project a more positive image of China during the Beijing Olympics.

The Closing ceremony was an equally phenomenal display of technological wizardry, logistics, and Chinese cultural values. Contrasting colors, such as yellow and red, featured prominently (in Chinese culture, yellow is associated with royalty and prosperity; red is associated with good luck). However, in contrast to the Opening ceremony, in which the performers arranged and rearranged themselves in square forms, the performers in the Closing ceremony repeatedly arranged themselves in a series of concentric circles. Figure 10 below is a photo from the Opening ceremony; Figure 11 is a photo from the Closing ceremony.

Figure 10: Square Forms during the Opening ceremony (Photo credit: Xinhua)

Figure 11: Circular forms during the Closing ceremony (Photo credit: Xinhua)

In Chinese mythology, circular shapes connote heaven; square forms connote earth. Their juxtaposition during the Opening and Closing ceremonies embodies the emphasis on harmony and the reconciliation of opposites in the principles of *duilian* or *dan*.

EastWestNorthSouth, a popular Chinese-English language blog accessible in the PRC, collected some of the reactions to the Opening and Closing ceremonies expressed by Chinese in various other blogs and forums. Although their reactions cannot be taken as objective indicators of how a majority of the Chinese population viewed the Opening and Closing ceremonies, their responses illustrate the complex identity politics involved in the social construction of brand China ("Chinese Internet Reacts" 2008).

It happens that at least some Chinese were disappointed at the lack of individual, human faces during the ceremonies. At the Strong Nation forum, a typically pro-government community,

> [T]he number of detractors exceeded the number of supporters by a lot last night. After viewing the performance, one Strong Nation commentator wrote: "What does China have except people?" Another commentator replied: "That is truly a unique Chinese characters. We have 1.3 billion people." "This kind of opening ceremony is possible only in China, because nobody else has that many people."

> But some netizens thought that there was too much lighting and not enough persons made of flesh and blood. The most acerbic criticism at the Strong Nation forum is about the "emptiness" and "vacuity." They described this as a work that represents this "ostentatious, flourishing era" and characterized the work as: "First-rate techniques, second-rate performances, no ratings for the content."

> At the more 'liberal' Tianya forum, the criticisms were even more blunt. Many people thought that the Beijing opening ceremony was inferior to Athens 2004 because the performance lacked a main theme, it used too many techniques and the content was incomprehensible to foreigners.

A Chinese at another popular blog and forum portal was more conciliatory in her reaction:

> Since this was a mass event, it was mainly about mass performances . . .In the one-hour performance section, [Zhang Yimou] expressed the aesthetics of nationalism thoroughly. In those dances, the dancers had no individual faces because they only mean something in the context of the group. In other words, in this group dance, the individual is unimportant and everybody has to follow the group and consider the overall situation. The effects from these thousand-strong

performance are so stunning. To make an inappropriate analogy, this is like an army moving in formation.

At a different blog, one Chinese proudly defended the ceremonies, dubbing them "perfect":

> I understand that mainland Chinese netizens are condemning it [the Opening ceremony] for not having flesh-and-blood persons.
>
> This is what amateurs might say.
>
> The Opening ceremony is the only ceremonial rite that all of human kind takes part in. Supposedly, more than 4 billion people will be watching this event on television. The only way to present to people of different cultures is to use audiovisual effects (such as light, color, sound and so on) to showcase Chinese civilization and to delight people.
>
> What is the point of looking at flesh-and-blood persons? If you want to look at them, just go outside and sit by the roadside. You will be able to see plenty of them. At the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, they had small trucks with some cowboys on them. What is so good about that? If the street view does not please you, you can go home, take off your clothes and check out your flab in the mirror. . .
>
> Director Zhang Yimou used colors, lights and flames to let the world come into contact with Chinese culture while enjoying the stimulation of the senses. It was done perfectly.

A final example from the Opening ceremony illustrates the importance of image and representation in the Party's image "work." A minor controversy developed after revelations that Party leaders instructed Chen Qigang, the ceremony's music director, to have gap-toothed and chubby faced Yang Peiyi stay backstage to sing the Chinese anthem, "Ode to the Motherland," while the more camera friendly and "picturesque" Lin Miaoke lip-synched onstage (Magnier 2008). Although I personally feel this incident was vastly overblown—it was immediately seized upon by critics of the Party to support their claim that China cannot be trusted—it does reinforce the argument that the Party takes its image and representation very seriously. Furthermore, Chen Qigang's

admission to the international media that Lin Miaoke was lip-synching to Yang Peiyi's voice provides another reminder of the multi-sited and complex identity politics that characterize the production of the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics.

My analysis of the Opening and Closing ceremonies has necessarily glossed over many other instances that could illustrate the national images that the Party attempted to project to foreign audiences. Nevertheless, my analysis indicates that both the Opening and Closing ceremonies maintained an emphasis on China's ancient civilization and the Confucian values of harmony and unity. Both ceremonies emphasized *dan* and the reconciling or harmonizing of opposites. And both ceremonies emphasized the economic and technological accomplishments of the past thirty years' reforms.

Projected National Images in the 2008 Beijing Olympics

The goal of this chapter has been to consider what kinds of projected national images the Party embedded within the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics. The idea has been to emphasize that the signs described above are more than just emblems or logos unique to the Beijing Olympics: they are signs that connote Chinese history and identity in particular ways and evoke particular, recurring themes, motifs, and emotions.

The graphics, emblems, and slogan for the People's Olympics connoted ideas such as grace, flow, and movement. They projected China as open, inviting, and welcoming. The slogan "One World, One Dream" has roots in historical Chinese philosophy and political discourse and it reflects contemporary Party rhetoric, such as in the use of "harmonious society" and "peaceful development" in its description on the Beijing2008 website. The *fuwa* mascots suggest the qualities of whimsy and playfulness.

Visual materials supporting the People's Olympics were also anchored by the presence of the Olympic Rings, reminding onlookers that the Party has gained the respect and trust of the International Olympic Committee, and that, by extension, China is a fully modern, legitimate member of the international community.

The High-Tech Olympics also emphasized the importance of harmony and unity in the Chinese cultural imaginary. The opposition between the circular shape of the Bird's Nest and the square form of the Water Cube is an example of the Chinese principle of *duilian* and the related character, *dan* (淡). The porous structure of the Bird's Nest suggests openness and transparency. Lastly, the High-Tech Olympics embodied the adjectives "newness" and "innovation."

The Green Olympics also stressed the importance of harmony and unity in the Chinese cultural imaginary. The architects employed by the Party designed many of the Olympic venues to utilize "green" energy sources. BOCOG and the Party also constructed a number of parks and green spaces throughout Beijing for the Green Olympics. The graphic for the Green Olympics connoted the idea that China is in harmony with nature and that it is opening up to new ideas and to the international community.

The Opening and Closing ceremonies highlighted certain aspects (but not others) of Chinese history. A conscious effort to project the principle of *duilian* manifest in the contrasts between opposing shapes, colors, and levels of ambient lighting. The Opening and Closing ceremonies also demonstrated the incredible economic gains made during the past thirty years and signaled the Party's hopes for continued economic growth. There were very few individual faces during the Opening or Closing ceremonies—one of

the only individuals was, ironically, the lip-synching Lin Miaoke. There was also a conspicuous absence of any Mao Zedong or PRC related history from the Opening ceremonies, suggesting Party leadership is concerned with how ethnic Chinese as well as critical Euro-American audiences might view such controversial images.

The symbols and images in the above visual narrative are signs that represent Chinese national identity. They tell stories about Chinese history and they illustrate important values in Chinese culture. Their form, content, spatial relationship, and underlying meanings are stylized, symbolic representations of Chinese history and identity. In the next chapter I describe how they are also logos, symbols, and marketing devices for brand China.

CHAPTER IV

BRAND CHINA AND THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS

In this chapter I situate the visual elements described above and the ideas and

emotions they connote more fully within the context of the image building and nation

branding literature that I have drawn upon in this project (Aronczyk 2007; Wang 2003;

Wang 2008; Ramo 2007; Anholt 2002, 2006, 2007; Berkowitz, *et al* 2007). In doing so I

illustrate how the projected national images embedded within the visual narrative of the

Beijing Olympics can be viewed not only as representations of Chinese national identity,

but also as rational choices in accordance with the political economic goals of the Party

as defined in Chapter II.

To emphasize how the Party's projected national images can be viewed in terms

of a brand China marketing campaign, I bring the Anholt Nation Brands Index (ANBI) to

bear on the findings from the previous chapter. The ANBI is a quarterly brand value

assessment survey that provides quantitative data concerning the perception of nation

brands among 25,000 survey respondents from 35 countries. The ANBI measures nation

brand performance across six variables: 1) *Tourism*; 2) *Exports*; 3) *Governance*; 4)

Investment/Immigration; 5) *Culture/Heritage*; 6) *People*. Figure 12 below is a graphic

of the National Brand Hexagon and is a visual depiction of China's ANBI ranking for
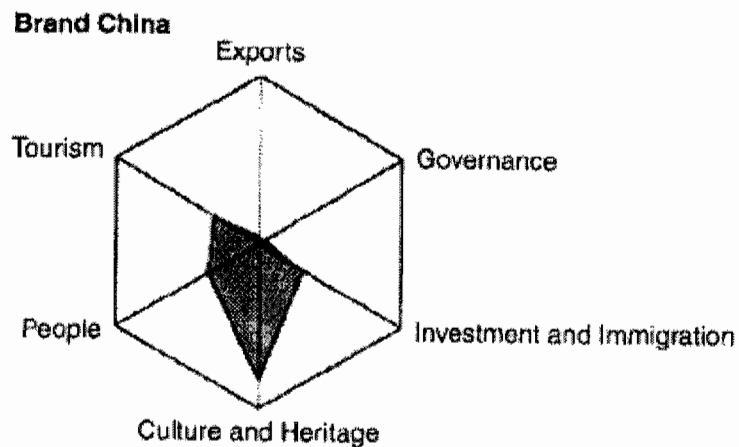
2007:

Figure 12: ANBI Hexagon from Berkowitz, *et al* 2007: p170

China's overall rank in 2007 was 22nd out of 40 and its overall score had

decreased by 3% over the previous 12 months (Anholt 2007). Although China showed a

strong ranking for *culture/heritage*, it ranks in the bottom third for all other aspects—

governance and *exports* being two of its lowest-scoring categories. Anholt claims that

> Despite China's economic progress, its overall score in the ANBI is falling
> because of the unpopularity of its style of governance around the world . . .
> [However,] improvements can be brought about by governments through
> coordinated and comprehensive brand strategies, and sometimes by well-
> marketed and managed global events, such as the summer Olympics or even the
> soccer World Cup (2007: 4).

Thus, according to Simon Anholt, the Olympics *do* offer the opportunity for China to

improve its national brand image—but as illustrated in the peaceful rise – peaceful

development example in Chapter III, China's dearth of political credibility means it faces

an uphill battle in improving its international image.

Berkowitz, *et al* follow Ramo and Anholt by pointing out that a successful

branding strategy cannot focus on only one or two of the ANBI performance variables—a

successful strategy must strengthen all six. They also echo Ramo and Anholt in arguing

that China's low rating in the *governance* category is the gatekeeper preventing it from

improving in other areas. "In order for the world to see a better China," they write, "the

country must start by improving the governance image that it projects. Many in the West

still believe that China is an oppressive regime" (2007: 171). Figure 13 below is an

indelible image from the 1989 Tian'anmen Square protests. This image, often seen in

U.S. media reports on China, is perhaps one of the dominant ways many Westerners view

China's government and would characterize its governance style.

Figure 13: Tian'anmen Square 1989 – An image of China's governance?

As discussed in Chapter II, the nation branding literature pertaining to China

broadly agrees that outside of the country there are three perceptions that are the most

prevalent and most damaging to its reputation: 1) China's government is viewed as

oppressive, authoritarian, and generally lacking in respect for human rights (reflecting the

ANBI variable *governance*); 2) China is the "factory of the world," a center of low-

quality manufacturing of other countries' goods (reflecting the ANBI variable *exports*);

and 3) China is a country with an abysmal environmental record (while this cuts across

all ANBI variables, Berkowitz, *et al* suggest it most directly impacts China's *governance* and *investment/immigration* ratings) (Berkowitz, *et al* 2007: 172; Anholt 2007; Ramo 2007).

BOCOG's three Olympic concepts directly address the negative perceptions that characterize China's international image. This is no coincidence, as Yiwei Wang explains: "China plans to use both the Olympic Games in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 as opportunities to carry out public diplomacy and promote the China Brand" (2008: 264). Specifically, the People's Olympics build on brand China's already positive *culture/heritage* ranking to challenge the view of China as an oppressive country that lacks respect for human rights. The High-Tech Olympics challenges brand China's image as a location for sweatshop-cheap manufacturing and its reputation for low-quality goods. And the Green Olympics challenge brand China's image as a brand ravaged by environmental degradation.

In the following discussion of brand China (and in the subsequent discussion of brand Barcelona) it is useful to recall that brands are fictitious narratives that promise the consumer an experiential effect. Thus, the projected national images discussed above and related to brand China below should be considered the types of experiences or emotions one can expect by interaction with or consumption of brand China.

People's Olympics

We might think of "One World, One Dream" as brand China's slogan and the Beijing Olympics emblem, "Chinese Seal, Dancing Beijing," as its logo. Viewed in this light, brand China stands for openness, friendship, and unity; it connotes ideas such as "harmonious society" (和谐社会 héxié shèhuì) and "peaceful development" (和平发育

hépíng fāyù); and it emphasizes the wisdom and benevolence associated with an ancient civilization such as China's. These are all ideas that run counter to the image of China as a center of human rights violations. Furthermore, connecting the "People's Olympics" initiative to the globally esteemed narrative trope associated with the Olympic Movement ("peace, friendship, and progress of mankind") promotes a more positive image of the Party as an internationally responsible and respected actor (at least by the IOC). The visual narrative for the People's Olympics builds on brand China's *culture/heritage* ranking in the ANBI and, at the very least, distracts from its poor performance in the *governance* category (Berkowitz, *et al* 2007: 172).

High-Tech Olympics

The High-Tech Olympics is a powerful visual narrative promoting brand China as innovative and new. It connects directly with Joshua Ramo's argument that newness and innovation provide the most useful framework for understanding contemporary China. China's Olympic venues and supporting infrastructure visually signal that brand China has reached a level of technological proficiency on par or beyond that of many Western nations. Like Japan in 1964, the High-Tech Olympics visually construct brand China as a technologically savvy and modern country. By bolstering its image as a center of high-tech engineering, China can improve its *exports* and *investment/immigration* ratings (Berkowitz, *et al* 2007: 173).

Green Olympics

In his Nation Brands Index report from Q1 2007, Anholt notes "there appears to be a growing "green" consciousness among some sections of the world's population, benefiting those nations—such as Sweden—that have a good reputation for

environmental responsibility" (4). The money and energy devoted to the Green

Olympics suggests Party leadership takes seriously the negative impact that

environmental degradation and pollution have on brand China's performance. By

constructing parks and other greenspaces in Beijing and utilizing sustainable design

practices in the construction and operation of the Olympic venues, Party leaders hoped to

give brand China a "greener," more environmentally friendly image. A lack of smog and

air pollution during the Olympics broadcast projected an image of brand China as one

that is, if given the time, resources, and incentive, capable of improving its environmental

condition. Although viewers may not have seen the "green" infrastructure that the Party

built in Beijing, audiences likely *did* notice the many days of clear skies that occurred

during the Beijing Games. Berkowitz, *et al* conclude that China's Green Olympics

initiative can improve its ratings in the *governance* and *investment/immigration* category

(2007: 174).

Brand China: Moving Forward, Projecting *dan* 淡

As described in Chapter III, the concept of *duilian* is one of the primary symbolic

themes embedded within the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics.

Furthermore, *duilian* is closely related to the concept of *dan* (淡). Ramo proposes *dan* 淡

as a way for brand China to move forward out of its image emergency problem:

> It [淡] helps express one of the most challenging problems in explaining China:
> how can you let people understand China is a land of great opposites, held
> together, often with tremendous tension? . . . China's opposites are also what
> defeat any attempt at a simple explanation of the place—and thus reinforce the
> country's reputation as untrustworthy . . . Westerners in particular struggle with
> the idea of opposites existing at the same time (2007: 42)

Ramo suggests that although Westerners may struggle with the idea of *dan* (淡), they are more than comfortable with newness and innovation. Thus *dan* (淡) provides a middle ground on which both Chinese and non-Chinese can come together for mutual dialogue and understanding. Ramo's argument about *dan* (淡) is, I believe, one of the reasons that makes his argument compelling. *Dan* (淡) reconciles the cleavages and contradictions in contemporary China—especially with respect to the socio-spatial transformations that have occurred as a result of economic reforms and modernization. China's bourgeoning migrant laborer population is one example of a contradictory image that does not serve the political economic goals of the Party. As with the missing Mao-years from the Opening ceremony, the absences and gaps in the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics point to the identity politics that converged around the Beijing Olympics.

To fully understand how the Party configured Chinese identity and history for image "work" during the Beijing Olympics, we must ask the questions, why *dan* (淡), and why the other projected national images uncovered in Chapter III? Why harmony, grace, and flow? Why openness, transparency, and high-tech innovation? Why not other symbols of Chinese identity? For instance, why not the Chinese peasant? Mao Zedong once said China's greatest strength, that which defined China and made it distinct from other nation-states, was its "peasant power." Clearly, we do not see any Chinese peasants, rural-to-urban migrant laborers, or even representations of Mao Zedong and China's communist history anywhere in the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics. Instrumentalist and constructivist theories of identity politics can help explain how and why this might be so.

CHAPTER V

IDENTITY POLITICS AND IMAGE "WORK" DURING THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS

Underlying this project is an assumption that national identity is a socially constructed category of cultural identity. The literature about national identity can be roughly divided into three schools of thought: primordialism (Geertz 1973; Isaacs 1975), instrumentalism (Bates 1983), and constructivism (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In this project I am particularly interested in the latter two theories. The instrumentalist theory can help answer the question of *why* we see certain projected national images (and not others) in the visual narrative of the Beijing Olympics. The constructivist school of thought can help explain *how* the particular emotive and symbolic themes investigated in Chapters III and IV are implicated in the process of the social construction of brand China.

Instrumentalism and the Party's Olympic Visual Narrative

Essentially, the instrumentalist framework argues that cultural identity groups rationally will select or highlight those identities (race, gender, class, ethno-linguistic family) available to them that can maximize the potential for that identity group to achieve its economic, political, or social goals. In a seminal essay on the politics of cultural pluralism, Crawford Young (1994) explains how instrumentalist theory "nurtured the notion that ethnic groups were calculating, self-interested collective actors, maximizing material values through the vehicle of communal identity" (1994: 23). From

the perspective of instrumentalism, "The task of analysis was to identify the political factors which might activate it [in this case, signs of national identity], to discover the cultural entrepreneurs who supplied its doctrine, and the activists who exploited such solidarities" (Young 1994: 22).

I argue that we can view China's image emergency and its image misalignment problems as the political factors activating the particular emotive and symbolic forms of national identity discussed in this project. We can view the Party as the primary cultural entrepreneur supplying the doctrine behind China's image "work." As for the "activists who exploited such solidarities," I argue the Party should be considered the primary activist in this case, as it was to their benefit, first and foremost, that the IOC awarded Beijing the 2008 Olympics and it is the Party that will accrue the international prestige from staging the Beijing Games. This is not to dismiss the agency of ordinary Chinese or the benefits they will receive from an improved international image of China, but rather to emphasize the power of the Party-state apparatus to exploit nationalist sentiments and, as it were, to decide on the symbolic and emotive content of the projected national images embedded within the Olympics visual narrative.

In light of the instrumentalist theory of identity politics, the projected national images underlying the Party's Olympic visual narrative seem quite rational. Instrumentalist identity politics suggests that the Party selected harmony, movement, innovation and the other emotive qualities discussed above precisely for their market appeal and for their explicit challenge to many of the negative perceptions about China that afflict its international reputation.

Instrumentalist theory privileges the agency of elites in their ability to decide what is allowed and what is to be excluded from the discourse of identity. The instrumentalist emphasis on elites as "cultural entrepeneurs" and decision makers relates Jansen's (2008) critique of the methodology of nation branding to Broudehoux's (2004, 2007) critiques of development in post-Mao Beijing. Jansen points out the profoundly hierarchical and undemocratic methodology of nation branding, tending as it does to eliminate subordinate ways of knowing and unsavory "social facts" from the branding discourse and to privilege the desires and goals of the "brand management" class over other, less powerful interest or identity groups (2008: 134). Likewise, Broudehoux makes a compelling argument for how the encroachment of neoliberal discourses into Beijing's socio-economic, political culture has resulted in the enhancement and consolidation of power among a handful of wealthy elites, furthering the social cleavages and contradictions manifest in post-Mao Beijing. Incidentally, both Jansen and Broudehoux's arguments relate to Guy Debord's concerns about the subordination of history and class consciousness by the postmodern valorization of visuality, representation, and brand image (Debord 1967, 1990). Debord's work on the *spectacle* as a totalizing discourse mirrors the totalizing logic of nation branding (Jansen 2008) and suggests a fruitful avenue for future theoretical and empirical investigation.

Ultimately, instrumentalist theory leads to the suggestion that brand China—like brand America, brand Germany, or brand Japan—is another type of socially constructed category of cultural identity, one that conflates national identity with neoliberal, market values. These values determine what are strategic national images to project as well as what images may be detrimental to the national brand—and therefore these values imply

what should be excluded from the public's view. This explains why we do not see images of China's "peasant power" or Mao Zedong and communism in the Party's Olympic visual narrative.

Furthermore, instrumentalist theories of identity politics connect to a strong parallel between the findings of Fabienne Darling-Wolf's semiotic-discourse analysis of the 2002 Tokyo World Cup and the results of this study. In her analysis, Darling-Wolf describes how visual representations of soccer and Westerners in general were "both visually and symbolically integrated within the Japanese cultural environment in a non-threatening manner" (2005: 189). My analysis of the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics suggests that it functioned in a similar way. By projecting images such as openness, friendliness, and innovation the Party visually positioned China in a non-threatening, even inviting manner to the rest of the world. Instrumentalist identity politics supports the claim that the projected national images embedded within the Olympics visual narrative are rational choices taken by Party leaders in response to China's negative international reputation. Of course, without access to Party members involved in the design of the Beijing Olympics imagery, I cannot verify the accuracy of this claim. Nonetheless, instrumentalism makes a compelling connection between China's image emergency problem and the symbolic, emotive content of the projected national images embedded within the Party's Olympic visual narrative.

The Social Construction of Brand China

Instrumentalism is vulnerable to the criticism that its emphasis on rational choices of elite "cultural entrepreneurs" obscures other sites of discursive and cultural practice that are equally important in the construction of Chinese national identity-as-national

brand image. That is, whereas instrumentalism and primordialism take the concepts of national identity and "national brand" as unproblematic givens, constructivism problematizes the two and focuses on the *processes* involved in the social construction of identity. It is in this way that constructivism can shed light on the processes involved in the social construction of brand China.

Constructivism emphasizes that identity is constructed in day-to-day, routine social interaction and lived experience. This restores the individual to the picture. "The process of social construction," explains Young, "proceeds at an individual as well as group level; in the innumerable transactions of daily life, individuals are engaged in a constant process of defining and redefining themselves" (1994: 24). In his book, *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig (1995) argues that the banal and routine practices of everyday life create spaces in which national identity is (re)constructed and (re)constituted. "Thinking along the lines of banal nationalism," argues Melissa Aronczyk, "allows us to imagine how rhetoric" (One World, One Dream), "symbol, image" (*fuwa* mascots, "Dancing Beijing" emblem; Bird's Nest stadium) "and ritual" (Opening and Closing ceremonies) "display the nation in seemingly innocuous ways" (2007: 112-113). The parallel between the projected national images investigated in this project and Darling-Wolf's conclusions about the function of visual imagery in the 2002 Tokyo World Cup seems relevant here again: by displaying Chinese national identity in "seemingly innocuous ways"—harmonious, ancient and wise, innovative and new—the visual narrative for the Beijing Olympics functioned to ameliorate Westerners' anxieties about China's "peaceful rise."

Thinking about the identity politics implicated within the visual construction of brand China during Beijing Olympics creates space for a brief discussion of how similar issues played out during the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Comparing the unique historical and political economic circumstances between the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and the 2008 Beijing Olympics demonstrates the complex discursive practices involved in the identity politics of staging an international sports mega-event such as the Olympics or soccer World Cup.

CHAPTER VI

IMAGE "WORK" AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE 1992 BARCELONA OLYMPICS

In keeping with my interest in the function of visual representations of national identity in image "work," I examine the 1992 Barcelona Olympics in much the same way as I have done for the Beijing Games. In this chapter I illustrate some of the iconic images from the Barcelona Games and reinforce their role as signifiers of national identity-as-national brand image. I also discuss Spain's unique historical political circumstances and the identity politics that operated behind Spain's external image "work." This discussion of the Barcelona Olympics is intended to highlight the challenges—as well as potential successes—that Beijing faces in repositioning its international image along the lines suggested by the projected national images embedded within the Party's Olympic visual narrative.

Whose Games? Catalan National Identity and the Politics of Identity

It is important not to overstate the uniqueness of the Party's use of the Olympics as a vehicle to build Beijing and China's international image. All countries that host the Olympics use the opportunity to project positive images of their nation and national identity to a global audience. As such, the visual narrative surrounding the Barcelona Olympics functioned in much the same manner as that of the Beijing Games: the goal was to raise Spain's international profile and reputation. Kennet and de Moragas explain how

The central Spanish government was interested in leveraging the Games in the promotion of Spain's image . . . The aim was to reposition Spain internationally and to overcome some of the tourist stereotypes of siestas, bullfights, and manana. Spain was to be redefined as a land of passion, closely linked to the sun, but also as a country of possibilities and opportunities, highlighted in the slogan "everything under the sun" (2006: 182).

Kennet and de Moragas go on to argue, "This combination of passion, sun, and dynamism was captured in the Games' logo" (2006: 182). Figure 14 below is the official emblem from the Barcelona Olympics:

Figure 14: The emblem of Barcelona 1992 (Credit: IOC / Olympic Museum Collections)

The Barcelona section of the IOC website explains the some of the literal as well as connotive meanings of the Barcelona emblem. Figuratively, it represents a human form in motion, perhaps jumping an obstacle, such as the five Olympic rings below it. It is comprised of one blue dot for the head (representing the blue of the Mediterranean) and two simple, flowing lines for the arms and the legs. The yellow line represents the arms of the figure, curved upwards as if in a welcoming, open, and inviting gesture; yellow also connotes the sun and references the Barcelona Olympics slogan, "Everything

under the sun." The red color for the legs is meant to convey the passion and dynamism

to be found in the "new," post-Franco Spain. It is in this way that the central Spanish

government configured brand Spain's national brand image along the lines of passion,

sun, and dynamism.

Many Catalans, however, viewed the Barcelona Olympics as an expression of

Catalonian identity first and foremost, and not necessarily as representative of *Spanish*

national identity. "For most Catalans," explains the ethnic Catalan and anthropologist

Oriol Pi-Sunyer, "there were two questions of particular importance. One was the issue

of proprietorship (whose Games?); the other being the related matter of what

representations of Catalonia and Catalan society should, or could, be developed" (1995:

36). The goal of the Generalitat—the governing body of the Catalonian autonomous

region—to distinguish Catalan identity as distinct from Spanish identity contrasted

sharply with the commercial and economic goals of the central Spanish state.

In addition to dispelling many of the tourist-based stereotypes about Spanish

identity, the Spanish government in Madrid viewed the Games as a way to legitimate

Spain in the community of "first world" nations. "The lead editorial in the Madrid daily

ABC could proclaim that "this '92 was Spain's final exam (*revalida*) for membership in

the First World of rich, democratic and organized countries . . . these Olympics . . . can

be characterized by three aspects: organized, elegant, and cheerful" (Racionero 1992)"

(Pi-Sunyer 1995: 37). Likewise, legitimation in the eyes of the international community

was a primary impetus behind Beijing's Olympic bid.

Aronczyk makes a similar conclusion in her discussion of Spain's nation brand

logo, a visual representation of Spanish national identity designed by Catalan artist Joan

Miro. As can be seen in Figure 15 below, the logo's form and colors evoke an image of a

sun. This parallels the symbolic and emotive themes of the Barcelona Olympics emblem.

"The logo and the impact it came to have on the national imagination are widely

considered to have been instrumental in the "repositioning" of the country," Aronczyk

writes. "Once an impoverished and isolated nation emerging from dictatorship, the

country now put forward an image of an effective democracy and a cultural and

cosmopolitan destination. Indeed, *the logo symbolizes Spain's entry into modernity*"

(Aronczyk 2007: 108; emphasis added).

Figure 15: Spain's Miro Logo[10]

Aronczyk goes on to explain the identity politics implicated by the logo:

> Spain's Miro logo is considered emblematic of the Spanish nation. But we are
> not surprised to learn that the unity conveyed by this symbol is in many ways
> disconnected from the country's political and social realities . . . Today the federal
> boundaries of the Spanish nation-state contain seventeen "autonomous
> communities," each with its own rules and desires of self-governance (2007: 122).

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[10] Source: http://www.vivianvrusselltravel.com/images/spain_miro.gif

In fact, Miro himself was less confident and nationalist about his Catalan heritage;

most of his art is not even in Spanish museums (Aronczyk 2007: 122).

With respect to the identity politics surrounding the Barcelona Olympics, of

particular salience here are the ways in which the Generalitat deployed symbolic

representations of Catalan identity to distinguish it from Spanish national identity.

"Much more subtle leverage [of the Olympic Games] by the Generalitat," describe

Kennet and de Moragas, "came in the use of symbols of Catalan identity . . . the presence

of Catalan flags at the Olympic venues, the use of Catalan as one of the official languages

of the Games, and, perhaps most importantly, the use of the ceremonies as a cultural

display (2006: 182)." One example of how this conflict of interests and identities

manifested in popular acts of creative, visual assertions of Catalonian identity was the

overt display of the Catalonian flag or *senyera* without also displaying the national

Spanish flag. "Most citizens were perfectly content to hang out the Catalan flag quite

alone, a choice that elicited negative comment by much of the Spanish media" (Pi-Sunyer

1995: 45). Oriol Pi-Sunyer details another example of how Catalans asserted their unique

identity during the Olympics was what happened to Cobi, pictured in Figure 16 below,

the canine mascot of the Barcelona Games.

Figure 16: Cobi - mascot of the 1992 Olympic Summer Games[11]

> Young [Catalan] nationalists strolled through Montjuic with the starred Catalan
> flag emblem of the independence movement . . . They mounted a "Freedom for
> Catalonia" campaign in English . . . And they "kidnapped" (or recruited?) Cobi,
> the amiable canine mascot of Barcelona '92. Foreign visitors were given fans,
> stickers and other souvenirs with cheerful Cobi figures calling for Catalan
> independence—and there was very little that the authorities could do about it"
> (1995: 46).

Beijng 2008 and Barcelona 1992

The Cobi mascot example illustrates an important distinction between the

Barcelona and Beijing Olympics: while freedom of expression and popular acts of

resistance to "official" politics of identity occurred throughout the Barcelona Olympics,

the same kinds of assertions of identity were all but unthinkable in Beijing's "One World,

One Dream" discourse. Beijing's "One World, One Dream" slogan left no room for

competing meanings of what it means to be "Chinese." The Party made it extremely

difficult if not impossible for disaffected Chinese (or international activists) to mount acts

of resistance, protest, or assertions of ethnic identity, such as by Tibetans, Uyghurs, Falun

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[11] Source: http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/symbols/mascots/

Gong practitioners, or other identity groups within China that often bear the brunt of the Party's scrutiny.

In spite of their differences, there are a number of important parallels between the image "work" objectives of the Barcelona Olympics and the Beijing Games. The goals of the Spanish state clearly parallel many of the Party's reasons for staging the Beijing Games, such as the chance to showcase the country's economic achievements and organizational capacities. For both nations the Olympics provided a chance to acquire legitimacy as a modern, developed country and full member of the "first world" nations. Second, both the central Spanish government and the Party hoped for their Olympics to dispel lingering and inaccurate cultural stereotypes regarding their identity. Third, both Beijing city leaders and Barcelona city officials used staging the Games as the justification to embark on a massive urban modernization and image construction campaign (Broudehoux 2004; Kennet and de Moragas 2006: 185).

The most significant difference between the two Olympics and the most revealing for this project concerns the historical, political circumstances surrounding each nation at the time they hosted the Olympics. First, Spain is a Western European country—it is already "safe" and "familiar" in the Western cultural imaginary. Furthermore, Spain staged its Olympics in Barcelona shortly after emerging from the authoritarian rule of the Franco dictatorship. Thus Spain was already positioned in a favorable light in the Western political cultural imaginary—it was a newly emergent democracy, struggling valiantly to implement a free market system and to integrate a number of distinct identity groups into one functioning nation-state. Because of its favorable political circumstances (and in spite of its contentious identity politics), the projected national images embedded

within Spain's Olympic visual narrative succeeded in constructing Barcelona (and Spain) as a land of "sun, passion, and dynamism."

China, on the other hand, obviously faces much more challenging historical and political circumstances. In the Western cultural imaginary, China faces a historical distrust of communist regimes. Furthermore, it labors against a hegemony of Western media discourse that seeks out negative stories and images of China first and foremost, adding to its tarnished global reputation (Brownell 2008). The earlier discussion about the unpopularity of the Party's governance style and its lack of political credibility is relevant here again. It is this dearth of political credibility, I argue, that poses the greatest challenge to the success of the Beijing Games as image "work."

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Importance of Political Credibility

Although "One World, One Dream" expresses the goal of peaceful development

and harmonious relations with other countries, its success in repositioning brand China in

the coming years depends largely on the ability of the Party to cultivate greater political

credibility with the Western international community. As the above example concerning

the "peaceful rise" (和平 崛起 hépíng juéqǐ) – "peaceful development" (和平发育 hép

íng fāyù) controversy reveals, "One World, One Dream" and its subtexts must be seen as

credible if it is to be an effective image building trope for brand China. This is a key

point that Ramo, Anholt, and Chinese political scientist Sheng Ding emphasize: without

sufficient political credibility—exemplified in the *governance* category of the ANBI—

China cannot improve its national image. Sheng Ding relates the Party's shortage of

political credibility to the concept of soft power:

> Without strong political credibility—defined as efficient governance, respect for
> democracy, and a commitment to improving human rights—China's other soft
> power resources cannot successfully contribute to the project of constructing an
> image of the country as a peaceful and responsible great power. China's
> widespread corruption and reluctance to pursue real political reform have
> hindered Beijing's efforts to establish its national image in the liberal-democratic
> world (2008: 644).

In the end, the conclusion seems to be not so much that people are unwilling or unable to view China as innovative or new, for example, but rather that its style of *governance* is so unpopular that it becomes extremely difficult to cultivate a more positive reputation in other respects. The unlikelihood that the Beijing Olympics will usher in sweeping political reforms in China suggests its *governance* rating will not tremendously improve. This calls into question the likelihood for success of many of the other projected national images embedded within the Party's Olympic visual narrative.

Steps to Future Research

Jing Wang's *Brand New China* (2008) is an ethnography of corporate media, branding, and advertising in China. It points to the shortcomings in this project and the value that ethnographic research can contribute to the fields of cultural studies and identity politics in contemporary China. Wang admits that one of the most challenging goals of her book was to "move those in the discipline of cultural studies from a focus on the ad as an authorial "text," flattened out for content analysis, to a focus on the ad as a "product," an assembly line output whose dynamics can only be capture through onsite fieldwork" (2008: xi). Wang's mission applies to directly to this study. "This methodological emphasis [on ethnography]," she argues, "is crucial if we want to explore the possibilities of moving advertising research and, by extension, pop culture studies in general beyond the staple question of representation into the domain of cultural production" (2008: xi).

Wang (2008: 136) cites the ten thematic, emotive meanings of brand China that Kevin Roberts, CEO of the transnational advertising and branding company Saatchi and Saatchi, proposed in 1998:

- ◆ Wisdom
- ◆ Mystery
- ◆ Spirituality
- ◆ Harmony
- ◆ Invention

- ◆ Energy
- ◆ Vitality
- ◆ High intelligence
- ◆ High craft
- ◆ Industriousness

These themes *clearly* parallel many of the projected national images embedded within the Olympic visual narrative described in this project. Yet, Wang points out that many of the suggested images for brand China simply do not match the reality of Chinese culture, nor have they ever. "Harmony?" she asks. "This Taoist value was never really prevalent in China even in imperial times" (2008: 137). She considers the images on the right to be "a cluster of contemporary virtues which, in Roberts's mind, justifies the rise of China as the most exciting emerging market in the world" (137). Robert's list suggests another example of how ethnographic research into contemporary identity politics in China might explore the lines of thought opened up in this project. Ethnography would be well suited to investigate how average Chinese understand their "Chineseness" and could therefore test the relevancy or accuracy of the projected national images suggested in this project. Fieldwork that investigates the cultural production of brand China would support my underlying argument that the socially constructed nature of brand China makes it an invented tradition very much in the same category as national identity.

It is also important to keep in mind that the visual narrative constructed for the Olympics has different meanings depending on the audience doing the looking. This relates back to Jing Wang's admonition not to consider one's data—be it visual or otherwise—in isolation from the cultural contexts of its production. China's external image building and nation branding efforts must be considered in light of the overarching

priority of the Party to maintain its internal legitimacy, and future research would investigate this more fully. In terms of foreign policy, future research might follow Wang Hongying's (2003) analysis of image building and Chinese foreign policy behavior by testing to see if the images and themes underlying the visual narrative of the 2008 Beijing Olympics have a *constraining* or *constitutive* impact on both China's domestic and foreign policy behaviors.

Finally, one of the most interesting possibilities for future research would be to more thoroughly problematize the role of images and representation in contemporary social life—particularly in China's booming, post-Mao corporate media and branding industries. This line of research relates back to Guy Debord's (1967) *Society of the Spectacle,* quoted at the beginning of this paper, and the "economy of appearances" referenced in Chapter I. Debord's concept of *spectacle* as a distinct mode of ecnonomic organization cannot be understood solely in terms of mass media saturation or even grandiose displays of cultural performance such as occur during the Olympics. To Debord, the *spectacle* is a totalizing discourse, and as such the *spectacle* not only structures but completely obscures how knowledge and class consciousness are socially constructed. "The spectacle is not a collection of images," explained Debord, but rather is "a social relation among people, mediated by images" (1977[1967]: thesis 4). It is in this way that the "society of the spectacle" relates to the "economy of appearances": both are predicated upon image and representation serving as social mediaries. "Considered in its own terms," Debord wrote, "the spectacle is *affirmation* of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance" (1977[1967]: thesis 10). This raises the question: If, in the *spectacle,* "that which is good appears, and that which

appears is good" (Debord 1977[1967]: thesis 5), then what happens to identities and histories that are silenced or erased from the *spectacular* discourse, such as China's migrant labor population, the urban poor, ethnic Uyghurs, or Chinese homosexuals?

Furthermore, thinking about the relationship between Debord's *spectacle* and the "spectacle" of the Olympics as a visually mediated international sports mega-event suggests a role for more robust application of theories of visual communication in the projection of national images. The complex web of relationships between visuality and visual communication in postmodern societies, the "economy of appearances" and urban image construction (and the socio-spatial transformations such image construction campaigns typically signify), and Debord's concept of the *spectacle* suggests possibilities to understand how concern for image, representation, and visual sensations impact the social construction of everyday life—or even, in the case of staging mega-events, the impact of visual representations of national identity on foreign policy and international relations. Again, visual ethnography would seem well-suited to take up the task of this line of research.

Final Remarks

My research indicates that Party leadership was acutely aware of the brand marketing potential of the Olympics and consciously designed images and visual elements that would suggest alternative, more positive images about China—and thereby reposition brand China in the nation brand marketplace. The semiotic-discourse analysis above revealed the projected national images embedded in the visual narrative for the Beijing Olympics: China is open and receptive (e.g., the open and porous design of the Bird's Nest stadium); China is "lifting off" and rising up (like a bird); China is whimsical

and soft (e.g., the "bubbles" of the Water Cube, the *fuwa* mascots); China is graceful, ancient, and wise (the calligraphic rendering of the dancing figure stylized in the Olympic emblem, which is also the character 京 *jīng*, Mandarin for "capital"); China is innovative and new (especially in the high-tech architecture epitomized by Olympic venues such as the Bird's Nest and Water Cube); China is an environmentally friendly power (alternative energies, the "greening" of Beijing, shutting down factories before and during the Games); and perhaps most interestingly, that *dan* and *duilian* are essential concepts in Chinese culture and, as Ramo argues, should therefore be emphasized when considering the cleavages and contradictions in contemporary Chinese society. Such are the images and themes projected in the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics.

The Beijing Olympics provided the Party with a global platform on which to visually represent Chinese national identity and configure brand China in terms of the above mentioned projected national images. Following Joshua Ramo, "brand China" is a useful metaphor that captures the importance of political credibility and the value that newness and innovation (as well as the harmonizing principle embodied in *dan* 淡) may bring to brand China's global reputation.

In order to consider more fully the role that visual representations of Chinese national identity played in marketing brand China, I adopted a nation branding point of view and brought the ANBI hexagon to bear on the elements of the Olympic visual narrative considered in this project. This allowed a framework in which to situate the different elements of the Party's Olympic imagery and to consider, using the vocabulary of nation branding, how the Olympics may improve brand China's reputation in the international community.

I utilized instrumentalist and constructivist theories from identity politics to argue that, as with Fabienne Darling-Wolf's conclusion about the function of the visual narrative surrounding the 2002 Tokyo World Cup, the emotive and symbolic content of the Party's Olympic imagery positioned China in the Western cultural imaginary as a whimsical, open, inviting, harmonious, and innovative "rising" power. In short, the visual imagery from the Beijing Olympics constructed China as a non-threatening and peaceful country. Many of the themes and motifs in the Party's Olympic imagery can be viewed as direct challenges to the cultural stereotypes and negative images that afflict China's international reputation.

In order to stress that all countries use the Olympics as an opportunity to do international image "work" and also to highlight the challenges China faces in its image "work," I briefly discussed the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. I considered the projected national images embedded within Barcelona's Olympic imagery, the identity politics that converged around the Barcelona Games, and the reasons why many observers have deemed Spain's image building efforts a success. My research supports the conclusion that the Barcelona Olympics accomplished the image building objectives of the various interest and identity groups because of the favorable political and historical circumstances in which Spain found itself. These circumstances are fundamentally different than those surrounding the Beijing Games.

First, China faces a lingering distrust and anxiety about communism that Barcelona did not encounter. Second, China faces a hegemony of media discourse that perpetuates its already negative image by focusing on China's sordid human rights

records, its difficulties managing the quality control of manufactured goods and in

securing intellectual property rights, and its pollution and environmental degradation.

In the end, the Party's lack of political credibility diminishes the possibility that

the Beijing Olympics will substantially improve China's global image outside of the two

or three areas from the Anholt Nation Brands Index discussed in Chapter IV. It is

possible that the projected national images in the Beijing Olympics will improve brand

China's performance in the *exports* and *investment/immigration* categories—but it is too

soon to tell if the Games will improve China's *governance* rating.

My research describes how the emblems, logos, and venues surrounding the

Beijing Olympics can be considered projected national images that reflect Chinese

history and identity. By looking at the visual narrative surrounding the Beijing Olympics

and by semiotically "reading" the elements in this narrative we learn about Chinese

history and the kinds of images that Party leaders hope the international community

associates with China. Yet, in this project I have pointed out several instances that

implicate the complex identity politics and conflicting interests that characterize the

Party's internal political culture. The Party is not a monolithic block of uniform

identities and interests. These examples revealed the Party's willingness to enlist

Chinese artists and international architecture firms in the production of Olympic imagery

and venues. Han Meilin, the designer of the Olympic emblem and the *fuwa* mascots,

expressed his dissatisfaction with the Party for what he felt was its micromanagement

over his artistic license; Ai Weiwei, who consulted on the design of the National

Stadium, criticized the Party for using the Olympics to establish tighter controls of media

and social life in China. Furthermore, the visual data assembled above are implicated in

the social construction of brand China. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to speculate about whether or not audiences "decoded" (Hall 1980) the narrative elements in a way that matches the goals and intentions of the Party, their role in the social construction of brand China is undeniable and suggests a fruitful line of research for future investigation.

China must now embark on its next, more challenging period of reform. This phase requires transforming the image of brand China from the polluted, oppressive "factory of the world" to an innovative creator of products, brands, and ideas (Ramo 2007: 27). Although it is unlikely that the 2008 Beijing Olympics will usher in sweeping political reforms—as the 1988 Seoul Olympics did for South Korea—it is likely they will be remembered as a catalyst inaugurating the next phase of reforms (Black and Bezanson 2004). Will the ideas connoted by China's Olympic visual narrative—China is ancient and wise; China values harmony, unity, and environmentally friendly development; and China is new, innovative, and high-tech—be compelling enough to overcome people's anxieties about China's "peaceful rise"?

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