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## The politicisation of the Beijing Olympics

Since the beginning of the modern Olympic movement in the late nineteenth century, the Olympic Games has been used by politicians, religious groups, nationalists, extremists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments and alliances of states to launch their political activities. In the twentieth century, the Olympics were involved in almost every major political event including the Irish Independence Movement, the Second World War, the Suez War, racial segregation in South Africa, the territorial disputes between Palestine and Israel, and the Cold War between the socialist bloc and the capitalist bloc. John MacAloon, a distinguished Olympic historian, concluded, ‘All Olympic Games are, of course, highly politically charged and sensitive in some regions of the world. How could they not be?’<sup>1</sup>

The Beijing Olympics was no exception. The Chinese government hoped that the Games could strengthen national unity and facilitate cultural and economic exchanges in order to stimulate China’s integration with the world. But the high visibility of the Games also exposed the country to political criticism. The Beijing Games became one of the most politicised Games in Olympic history.

### International political campaigns and riots against the Beijing Games

A international campaign to boycott the Beijing Games started when Mia Farrow, a Hollywood star, began to criticise China’s support of Sudan’s Islamic government. She argued in March 2007 that China should pressure the Sudanese government to stop the civil war in Darfur. She criticised corporate sponsors of the Beijing Olympics including Coca-Cola, General Electric and McDonald’s and denounced the Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, artistic adviser to the Beijing Olympics, as ‘the Leni Riefenstahl’ of the Beijing Games.<sup>2</sup> She called for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently Steven Spielberg announced that he was withdrawing from his capacity as artistic adviser to the Beijing Olympics on 12 February 2008.<sup>4</sup> Spielberg’s withdrawal was praised by activists and by the Sudanese rebel leader as a noble move<sup>5</sup> and a lesson to the rest of the world.<sup>6</sup> Activists in many Western countries began to use the Beijing Games for political purposes.

In New York, a letter to Chinese President Hu Jintao was delivered to the Chinese Mission from the United Nations (UN) in February 2008. It was signed by Nobel Peace Prize winners, American politicians, Olympic medallists and Hollywood stars. In the same month, activists protested outside the Chinese embassy in London while waving banners stating ‘China: help protect Darfur’.<sup>7</sup> Former Olympic badminton player Richard Vaughan joined the campaign and urged the British athletes to add pressure on China to end the civil war in Darfur.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, a powerful political campaign was launched by the exiled Tibetan government, the Free Tibet Campaign and the Tibetan Youth Congress. The purpose was to use the international visibility of the Beijing Olympics to increase the visibility of the Free Tibet Movement. Tibetan separatists and their supporters protested, almost simultaneously, outside Chinese embassies in the USA, the UK, Germany, France and other European countries. Some Western pro-Tibet activists travelled to China to facilitate the Free Tibet Movement. They displayed Free Tibet banners on the Great Wall and in the Forbidden City, in Beijing, and in Shanghai and other major cities in China from February to August 2008.<sup>9</sup>

Against this international political background Tibetan monks began to plan for a big demonstration on the anniversary of the Tibetan Revolt which had happened on 10 March 1959. The demonstration took place on the morning of 13 March 2008. Hundreds of Tibetan monks marched in Lhasa. They were joined by a large group of young Tibetan nationalists in Barkhor Square in protest against Chinese rule and they called for independence. They shouted 'Long live Tibet', 'Independence for Tibet' and 'Long live the Dalai Lama'. A Chinese National flag in the middle of a main road was pulled down. Clashes broke out between protesters and security forces and in the afternoon, the demonstration turned violent.<sup>10</sup> It was reported that 'Mobs controlled the Tibetan quarter of the city, burning and looting as they pleased'.<sup>11</sup> The riot turned into violence targeted against 'two ethnic groups, primarily ethnic Han Chinese living in Lhasa, but also members of the Muslim Hui minority in Lhasa'.<sup>12</sup> Han Chinese and Muslim Chinese including children and women were attacked. Their shops were looted and burnt down by mobs.<sup>13</sup> More than 10 civilians were beaten or burnt to death during the riot.<sup>14</sup> In the late afternoon, more and more heavily armed riot police were deployed to try to regain control over the city. Tear gas and cattle prods were used to quell the riots. In the following days, the riots spread to Tibetan autonomous counties in Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan provinces.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, pro-Tibet, anti-China<sup>16</sup> and anti-Beijing Olympics protests took place internationally. In India, home to the Tibetan exiled government, a group of 50 exiles tried to storm the Chinese embassy in New Delhi. In Australia, on 18 March 2008 about 100 Tibetan immigrants protested outside the Chinese Consulate in Sydney and clashed with police.<sup>17</sup> On 1 April 2008, some 500 pro-Tibet protesters attacked the Chinese embassy in Washington. They 'chanted slogans and waved flags and placards supporting "Tibetan independence."' Many of them turned violent, throwing stones at the embassy building, and trying to break into the embassy'.<sup>18</sup> By April 2008, more than 18 overseas diplomatic missions of China had been attacked.<sup>19</sup>

Simultaneously, organisations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Committee to Protect Journalists, released reports denouncing China as failing to honour its Olympic obligations on human rights.<sup>20</sup> They joined forces with the Free Tibet Campaign and the Falun Gong,<sup>21</sup> to protest against the Chinese government and called for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Olympic torch relay – a mirror of world politics**

The flame lighting ceremony of the Olympic torch took place at Olympia on 24 March 2008. It began the 130-day Olympic torch relay – one of the most highly politicised events in Olympic history.<sup>23</sup>

The purpose of the torch relay was to celebrate the Olympic spirit of friendship, honour, fair play, peace and glory and to publicise the Games. Outstanding athletes, political elites, social celebrities and role models from all walks of life from each chosen city and country would be invited to participate as torchbearers. The torch relay would pass through 134 cities and 19 countries to spread the Olympic ideal and spirit all over the world.

When the torch relay started in Greece, the birthplace of the Modern Olympic Games, on 24 March, it was 'disrupted by a protest by three members of a French press-freedom lobby, Reporters Without Borders. A Tibetan woman lay on the ground blocking the torch-relay route'.<sup>24</sup> Several pro-Tibet demonstrators and Falun Gong supporters tried to interrupt the Olympic flame handover ceremony. They shouted 'Free Tibet' and blocked the torch runner from entering the stadium where the ceremony was to be held. More than ten protesters were arrested by the police.<sup>25</sup> The Olympic torch relay then went to Beijing, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Russia. It went, in general, peacefully except for disruption by a small group of Uighur Muslim demonstrators in Istanbul.<sup>26</sup>

### **In London and Paris**

When the torch relay reached London on 6 April 2008 a very well organised protest began. About 1,000 pro-Tibetan and pro-human rights demonstrators in Europe gathered in the city to launch a big strike.<sup>27</sup> Hundreds of pro-China supporters also took to the street to support the Beijing Games. They waved Chinese national flags and had their faces painted in the colours of the Five-Star Red Flag. More than 2,000 police officers were deployed to prevent violence during the event.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the heavy security presence, anti-China demonstrators managed to turn the parade into a chaotic scene. The torch relay was 'brought to a temporary halt five times in its first few miles as anti-China protesters made repeated attempts to breach security'.<sup>29</sup> One protester tried to snatch the torch from the former BBC presenter Konnie Huq whilst she was about to pass the torch to the next runner.<sup>30</sup> Five minutes later another protester reached for the torch. Later, a man tried to block the parade by letting off a fire extinguisher on the street.<sup>31</sup> Finally the torch relay route had to be changed to avoid more conflicts and violence.<sup>32</sup>

Chinatown was one of a few places where the parade went without conflict. With the strong support of the local Chinese community, the Chinese ambassador Fu Ying carried the torch through the area and was welcomed by drummers, lion dancers and warm applause.<sup>33</sup> The torch then reached Number 10 Downing Street and was met by Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister. Under political pressure, Brown did not touch the torch. However, his appearance at the torch relay was criticised by some British politicians as 'wholly inappropriate'.<sup>34</sup>

Trafalgar Square was the final stop of the parade where the pro-China and anti-China protesters met. There, a large number of pro-China supporters were waving the Chinese national flags and shouting 'China! Olympics!' and anti-China protesters were shouting 'Free Tibet' and 'No Olympics in China'. A pro-Tibet protester climbed up to the top of the fountain in the middle of the square and displayed a Tibetan flag.<sup>35</sup> The police arrested more than 35 demonstrators that day. The next day, *The Times* pointed out that 'The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games torch relay was reduced to farce and ignominy yesterday as ugly scenes of protest disrupted the London leg of the tour that was billed as a journey of harmony and peace'.<sup>36</sup>

Paris was the next stop for the torch relay. The torch relay ceremony was held there on 8 April 2008. Considering the chaotic scenes in London, massive security was deployed. However, in the course of its 28-kilometre route through the French capital, pro-Tibetan protesters forced the torch guards to extinguish the Olympic flame five times.<sup>37</sup> It was reported,

Throughout the day, protesters booed trucks emblazoned with the names of Olympic corporate sponsors, chained themselves to railings and hurled water at the flame. Some unfurled banners from the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame cathedral depicting the Olympic rings as handcuffs. Others waved signs reading 'the flame of shame'.<sup>38</sup>

During the relay, Jin Jing, a 27-year-old wheelchair torchbearer, was attacked by anti-Beijing protesters. They tried to wrench the torch away and she suffered some minor injuries. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) president condemned the attack: 'What shocked me most is when someone tried to rob the torch off a wheelchair athlete, a disabled athlete who was unable to defend the torch. This is unacceptable'.<sup>39</sup>

The torch relay could not continue on the ground and was finally put on a bus to the relay's finishing point, Stade Charléty after the day of chaos.<sup>40</sup> Protesters then turned to attacking the vehicle with eggs, bottles and cans.<sup>41</sup>

The protests against the Beijing Olympics were supported by the French government and politicians who were in favour of the Free Tibet Movement. French officials hung a banner at Paris City Hall declaring support for human rights and forced the torch relay to change its planned stop.<sup>42</sup> Some French Parliament members organised a protest outside the National Assembly. All political parties in Parliament joined the protest. They displayed a banner 'Respect for Human Rights in China' and shouted 'Free Tibet' when the torch passed the National Assembly.<sup>43</sup> To make matters worse, French President Nicolas Sarkozy publicly announced that he would boycott the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics unless Beijing negotiate with the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists and head of the Tibetan exile government, to settle the Tibet issue.<sup>44</sup>

### **In San Francisco, California**

The Olympic torch relay continued in San Francisco, California on 9 April. Two days before the arrival of the Olympic flame, protesters climbed up the Golden Gate Bridge and tied two giant banners reading 'One World, One Dream' and 'Free Tibet' to the suspension cables of the bridge. They also displayed a Tibetan flag in the air.<sup>45</sup> Overseas Chinese in San Francisco organised pro-China rallies. They hired two aeroplanes on 9 April 2008 to display huge slogans stating 'Tibet will always be part of China' and 'Go Beijing China! Go Olympics!'.<sup>46</sup>

Learning from the chaotic events in London and Paris, in order to avoid violence San Francisco officials changed the route of the relay without informing the public. At the same time, 'Extraordinary precautions' were taken by the local authority and there was a large police presence.<sup>47</sup> The whole torch relay finished in just two hours. It was reported, 'Rather than furious clashes between protesters, there were mostly screams of support and delight at seeing the torch go by'.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast with the French politicians, the local authority adopted a supportive stance on the torch relay. Before the arrival of the Olympic torch, the Mayor of San Francisco Gavin Newsom met with the Chinese Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong on 7

April and they both agreed to try to limit the possible chaos.<sup>49</sup> Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California, pointed out that he, on the one hand, would defend the protesters' right to 'show how displeased they are with what China is doing with Tibet', but, on the other hand, would not support a boycott of the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games. He claimed, 'Sports should not be used in order to go and start to do diplomacy'.<sup>50</sup>

### **In Buenos Aires, Argentina**

The torch relay's South American leg began in Buenos Aires, Argentina on 11 April 2008. The local authority was optimistic about the event and there was a relatively light security presence. Government offices, banks, and businesses took a half-day off work to celebrate the Olympic torch relay. People showered the parade route with confetti. Mauricio Macri, Mayor of Buenos Aires, held the torch and opened the relay ceremony.

Small groups of pro-Tibet and anti-China demonstrators were present. However, they were overwhelmed by a huge number of pro-China supporters. More than 500 overseas Chinese and Chinese students studying in Buenos Aires and Argentina took to the streets to show their support for the Beijing Olympics. Chen Shaolong, a Chinese immigrant explained, 'we are proud that the Olympics is going to be held in Beijing and that the torch is passing through Buenos Aires'.<sup>51</sup> A student from the Universidad de Buenos Aires told the journalists:

We have been preparing for this moment for a long time and nearly every Chinese student in the university took part in preparing national flags and banners. The most important thing is to prevent anti-China protesters from disturbing the torch relay. If something happens, we will do our best to protect the torch'.<sup>52</sup>

Along the 8.5 mile route, local spectators welcomed the torch with warm applause. Argentine former tennis player Gabriela Beatriz Sabatini, one of the torchbearers of the relay, said: 'I'm supercharged with emotion. It's so impressive to see how people have experienced this'.<sup>53</sup>

### **In Dar Es Salaam**

Dar Es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, was the only stop of the Olympic torch in Africa. The torch relay took place on 13 April 2008. There was only a small group of police officers there to keep order and there were no barriers and roadblocks on the route.<sup>54</sup> The ceremony started at the Tazara train station, the starting point of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, which symbolised the good friendship between China and Tanzania.<sup>55</sup> Mohamed Shein, Tanzanian Vice-President, lit the torch and stated: 'I am excited that Tanzania is the only country out of 53 African nations to host the relay. Tanzania unreservedly supports the Beijing Olympics. It is the occasion of a lifetime'.<sup>56</sup> He then passed the torch to the first torchbearer Mohamed Seif Khatib, Tanzanian Minister of State for Union Affairs. Eighty runners took part in the relay.<sup>57</sup>

Tanzanian people showed enormous enthusiasm for the torch relay. They stood by the side of the street, waving Chinese and Tanzanian flags and cheered loudly when the torch passed by. Many of them ran beside or behind the torchbearer along the route.<sup>58</sup> The final stop of the relay was the National Stadium, a new foreign aid project undertaken by China. Thousands of local people gathered in front of the

stadium to celebrate the event. They shouted ‘Go China!’ in Mandarin Chinese.<sup>59</sup> The last torchbearer was Anna Tibajuka, United Nations Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT. She commented after the ceremony: ‘I am very proud that Tanzania is celebrating this moment. We have been given a great honour. This is a moment of solidarity for Tanzania, Africa and the world in the spirit of the Olympics’.<sup>60</sup>

### **In Muscat**

Muscat was the only city in the Middle East selected for the torch relay. The torch arrived in the capital city of Oman on 14 April 2008 and was received by Ali bin Massoud bin Ali al-Sunaidi, Oman’s Sports Minister, at the airport. The parade was kicked off at local time 5 p.m. to avoid high temperature. The starting point was Al Bustan Palace Roundabout, where lies the Sohar dhow – a duplicate of an ancient Omani ship that sailed to China in the eleventh century.<sup>61</sup> It symbolised, as the Omani media pointed out, ‘The deep-rooted and distinct relations between Oman and China’.<sup>62</sup> A brief ceremony was held in front of the ship. Sayyid Al Mutassim bin Hamoud Al Bousaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, lit the Olympic torch in front of more than 1,500 people.<sup>63</sup> Eighty people including athletes and government officials then acted as torchbearers running the 20-kilometre-long route through the capital city.<sup>64</sup> The atmosphere was festive.<sup>65</sup> Hundreds of local residents, including children, lined the street, waving flags of Oman, China and the Oman Olympic Committee. Many of them joined the run. It was described as one of the best events during the torch relay.<sup>66</sup>

### **In Jinnah Stadium, Pakistan**

The Olympic torch returned to Asia on 16 April 2008. Pakistan was the first stop. Because of the traditional friendship between the two countries, there was no fear of disruption by anti-China protests among the public.<sup>67</sup> However, the parade was at risk from the terrorism from which the country has suffered for decades. There were several incidents of violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims; Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba; and secessionist movements. In 2007 and 2008, more than 1,500 Pakistani people had been killed in suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks on civilians.<sup>68</sup> One month before the torch relay, a bomb attack killed one Turkish woman and injured four US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents.<sup>69</sup>

Facing the danger of possible terrorist attacks from the Taliban and other extremist groups, the ceremony was closed to the public.<sup>70</sup> Instead of taking place in the capital city Islamabad, the parade was held in the Jinnah Stadium. Heavy security measures were adopted by the local authority.<sup>71</sup> Audience and foreign journalists were not allowed to bring mobile phones, cameras or any other electric products into the stadium. Vehicles were banned from parking outside the venue. Paramilitary troops and police guarded the event from beginning to end. Arif Hassan, Chairman of the Pakistan Olympic Association, explained, ‘Keeping in view the law and order situation which was experienced in the past one year and the blasts and explosions ... we had to re-schedule the programme to ensure full security to the torch relay and its participants’.<sup>72</sup>

The ceremony began at 4.30 p.m. President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Yusuf Gilani received the Olympic torch from Jiang Xiaoyu, Executive

Vice-President of the Beijing Olympic Committee, and passed it to the first torchbearer. The participation of both the president and prime minister of Pakistan at the ceremony symbolised the extraordinary relations between the two countries. The parade was then conducted by 65 Pakistani and Chinese athletes at the Jinnah stadium, with more than 8,000 cheering spectators and waving flags.<sup>73</sup> There was not a single incident.

### **In India**

Pakistan's neighbour India was the second stop for the torch's South Asia journey. Both the Chinese and Indian governments were concerned about the security issue since India is home to 150,000 Tibetan exiles, as well as the headquarters of the 'Tibetan Government in Exile'.<sup>74</sup> The Indian authorities admitted that the event faced possible disruptions: 'Potentially, because of the size of the Tibetan exile community, we have far bigger problems here than anywhere else in the world and will take appropriate action to ensure adequate security'.<sup>75</sup> The torch relay turned into an important diplomatic event between the two Asian giants who have carefully managed their relationship since the Sino-India border conflict in the 1960s. A special Chinese security delegation was sent to New Delhi on 11 April 2008 to discuss the issue. Fearing trouble from Tibetan protesters and in consideration of Sino-Indian relations, the route of the torch relay was finally shortened from 8 km to 2.3 km.<sup>76</sup>

The Tibetan exiles, who had staged almost daily protests in India since March 2008, believed that the torch relay in New Delhi was a perfect opportunity to make their voices heard again by the world.<sup>77</sup> On 16 April 2008, led by the Tibetan Youth Congress, more than 100 Tibetan protesters tried to storm the Chinese embassy by breaking through security cordons. They waved Tibetan flags, shouted slogans against China and displayed banners saying 'Free Tibet' and 'No Olympics in China'.<sup>78</sup> Some leaders in the exiled community warned that they would douse or steal the Olympic torch.<sup>79</sup>

The torch relay was scheduled to begin at 4.30 p.m. local time on 17 April 2008. By midday of 16 April, the police had closed the torch route to cars and pedestrians and had begun installing barricades and metal detectors. Subway stations around the torch route and government offices in the area were closed in the afternoon of 17 April.<sup>80</sup> Altogether, 15,000 police officers were in the city to keep order. Suresh Kalmadi, President of the Indian Olympic Association, lit the torch at Raisina Hill and about 70 torchbearers from all walks of life took part in the 45-minute relay through the centre of New Delhi.<sup>81</sup>

The Olympic flame was overshadowed by politics. Neither the Chinese nor the Indians enjoyed the torch relay. A commentator concluded after the ceremony: 'The real winners were surely the Tibetan protesters who, with just the threat of causing disruption, managed to clear the centre of this noisy, chaotic city and cause gridlock everywhere else'.<sup>82</sup>

### **In Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta**

After heavy security in India the Olympic torch went through Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, and Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, peacefully and with light security. Both the politicians and local residents supported the torch relay and they created a party atmosphere in both cities.<sup>83</sup> Thailand's Prime Minister Samak



Sundaravej announced publicly: 'Whoever tries to destroy the flame is crazy and unreasonable. . . . This is a good thing for Thailand. Thai people should be proud'.<sup>84</sup> Imran Jaafar, President of the Olympic Committee of Malaysia, also stated, 'Malaysians are largely supportive of the Olympic Games and the torch relay. It is a festive atmosphere here . . . and shows the good relationship we have with Beijing'.<sup>85</sup>

The torch travelled from Kuala Lumpur to the Indonesian capital Jakarta. Due to the relatively low-key Sino-Indonesia relations and the long-lasting anti-communist sentiment since the fall of the Sukarno regime in 1965, most of the local residents showed little interest in the torch relay.<sup>86</sup> However, the parade was very important for local Chinese communities in Indonesia who had suffered discrimination, violent ethnic attacks and government repression in the late 1960s and the late 1990s.<sup>87</sup> They strongly supported the event. Considering possible conflicts between pro- and anti-China protesters, Jakarta deployed 2,500 security personnel to safeguard the event. The local authority also urged anti-China protesters not to mix sport with politics. The original plan of a parade through the capital city was replaced by an invitation-only torch relay at the Bung Karno Sports Complex. About 5,000 guests, including the State Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, the President of the National Olympic Committee and the Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia, as well as hundreds of Indonesian ethnic Chinese, attended the event on 22th April.<sup>88</sup> Taufik Hidayat, former Olympic badminton champion, joined the relay as a torchbearer.<sup>89</sup> Outside the venue, about 100 pro-Tibet activists gathered in front of the entrance of the national stadium, waving banners stating 'Free Tibet' and 'No human rights, no Olympics'.<sup>90</sup>

### **In Canberra**

The Australian leg of the Olympic torch relay went peacefully in Canberra on 24 April 2008. Eighty runners, including five-time Olympic gold medallist swimmer Ian Thorpe, carried the torch through the 16 km relay route. The parade became a festival for thousands of overseas Chinese in Australia and they travelled to Canberra for this 'big day'. A reporter from CNN (Cable Network News) commented that 'All along the route, and in a large crowd at the lighting from the cauldron, red Chinese national flags vastly outnumbered Australian flags or banners from any other nation along the route'.<sup>91</sup> The security could be described as low-key. About 350 police officers were there to keep order and avoid possible clashes between the pro-China supporters and anti-China protesters.<sup>92</sup> Nothing serious happened during the parade but there were a few minor skirmishes between the two groups. Only seven protesters from a crowd of 20,000 were arrested by the police.<sup>93</sup>

### **In Nagano**

The torch relay in Nagano, Japan was carefully handled by the Japanese government due to the historic tensions between Japan and China. Thousands of police officers and three helicopters safeguarded the torch relay on 26 April 2008. More than 100 security personnel ran with the torch along the 18.7 km route.

Hundreds of pro-Tibet demonstrators, human rights activists, Japanese nationalists and Japanese right-wing extremists joined forces to counter pro-China supporters. The two sides shouted 'Free Tibet' and 'China, go for it!'.<sup>94</sup> Two protesters who tried to steal the torch were stopped by the police. Another man was

arrested for throwing eggs at the flame.<sup>95</sup> A Chinese student was attacked by a small group of Japanese nationalists and was sent to hospital.<sup>96</sup> Except for the above minor incidents, the torch relay went on peacefully. After the parade, a commentator concluded, 'Japan emerged from the Olympic relay with its honour intact and its relations with China unscathed'.<sup>97</sup>

### **In Seoul and Pyongyang**

After Nagano, the Olympic torch travelled to South Korea. The parade in Seoul on 27 April became another show of Asian politics. Thousands of Chinese students and immigrants assembled in Seoul on 27 April and began to prepare for the parade in the early morning. Yang Hui, a Chinese student explained: 'The torch relay is being used for anti-Chinese protests. This has provoked a lot of anger inside China and caused people like myself to come out here to defend our country'.<sup>98</sup> Liu Yen, member of the Chinese Resident's Association Seoul Korea, stated that Chinese emigrants would show their support for the Beijing Olympics: 'We'll hold welcoming placards and wave our national flags high'.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, anti-China protesters planned to disturb the relay. The North Korean Defectors Group, which consisted of North Korean stowaways who used to be deported back to North Korea by China,<sup>100</sup> announced that they would block bridges on the relay route and 'try to stop the relay at all costs'.<sup>101</sup> Some America and Europe based human rights groups and pro-Tibet supporters also gathered in Seoul to protest against the torch relay.

In order to prevent possible disruptions, the National Police Agency warned that 'Those who attempt to stop the relay will surely be arrested on sight?? and sternly punished'.<sup>102</sup> Altogether, 8,300 police officers were deployed along the 24 km relay route. The torchbearer was surrounded by 120 police runners who were backed by police vehicles and helicopters.<sup>103</sup> Despite the tight security, several incidents happened during the relay. A 45-year-old North Korean defector tried to set himself on fire but was immediately stopped by the police. A clash broke out between 500 Chinese supporters and about 50 demonstrators who carried a banner which read: 'Free North Korean Refugees in China'.<sup>104</sup> Five people, including one Chinese student, were arrested for the clash.<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, the torch went on to receive a warm welcome in Pyongyang, the capital city of North Korea on 28 April, as expected.

### **In Hong Kong and Macao**

Hong Kong and Macao, China's special administrative regions, were the last two stops of the torch relay outside mainland China. In Hong Kong, there was overwhelming support from the public. A number of cultural activities had been held since late April 2008 to drum up the festive atmosphere. Many local companies gave their employees one day off to attend the torch relay on 2 May 2008. On the day of the relay, about 200,000 people lined up the street to welcome the torch relay. Many of them wore red to support the event.<sup>106</sup> Polly Tsang, a local 24-year-old student explained:

Hong Kong was a colony for many years, and for Hong Kong people, this is one of the first chances we can express our national pride, You can't separate the two - it's like asking me if I'm my father's daughter, or my mother's daughter. I'm both.<sup>107</sup>

Chief Executive Donald Tsang kicked off the event at 10 a.m. by handing the torch to the first torchbearer Lee Lai-shan, former Hong Kong's Olympic gold medallist. Altogether, 120 torchbearers, including athletes, film stars, politicians and Hong Kong businessmen, carried the Olympic flame through the city without any disruption. In order to keep public order and safety, the organisers created special zones along the route to accommodate protesters. The anti-China demonstrations were led by the Hong Kong Alliance and a pro-democracy NGO. Hollywood actress Mia Farrow delivered a public speech on the conflict in Darfur near Hong Kong's government headquarters.<sup>108</sup> However, their voices were overwhelmed by torch relay supporters.

The torch relay's Macau leg was held peacefully on 3 May 2008.<sup>109</sup> The parade started from the Macau Fisherman's Wharf and was conducted by 120 torchbearers including civil servants, athletes and representatives from companies, NGOs, sports associations, local schools and academic groups.<sup>110</sup>

### **In China**

The protests in some foreign countries, especially in London and Paris, had been witnessed on television and had hurt the feelings of most ordinary Chinese and the younger generation, in particular. They united behind the Olympic torch and determined to show the world their pride and their national unity. Furthermore, for most Chinese people, the Games were an opportunity to show the world a new China – open, prosperous, united and internationalised.<sup>111</sup> The torch passed through 113 cities across 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in China in May and June 2008. For most of them it was a wonderful moment to experience participation in the International Olympic Movement.

### **The boycott of Carrefour**

Two major protests happened largely within China before and during the Olympic torch relay and symbolised the rise of Chinese new nationalism in the twenty-first century. The first one was a national 'Boycott Carrefour' campaign to protest against the attitudes of the French government and French society towards China and the Beijing Olympics. The second one was the public protest against the Western media in general and CNN in particular for its perceived biased reports about China.

The chaotic torch relay in London and Paris and the British and French politicians' pro-Tibet stance enraged many in China. They initiated a nationwide campaign to fight back. Nationalism is a 'political creed that centres the supreme loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the people upon the nation-state'.<sup>112</sup> Territorial boundaries are the most important building blocks of a nation state. Maintaining territorial integrity is the major element of 'loyalty'. For most Chinese people, Tibet is part of China. Claims for a 'Free Tibet' were considered as a separatist movement. The Free Tibet Campaign was supported by many Europeans and Americans and it brought back painful memories of the 100 years of humiliation and intervention by Western and Eastern imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It sparked China's new nationalism. It was further fuelled by public anger over French president Nicolas Sarkozy who threatened to boycott the Beijing Olympics' opening ceremony and by the news and visual images of the disabled torchbearer Jin Jing who had been attacked by anti-China protesters in Paris on 13 April.

Therefore, in response to the hostility in Paris, ordinary Chinese people initiated a campaign to boycott French retail giant Carrefour and French products including Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Citroen and Peugeot. Carrefour, Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior were accused of providing financial support for the Free Tibet Campaign.<sup>113</sup> Text messages, internet blogs and forums were used by the Chinese nationalists to mobilise their countrymen. A widespread text message stated:

May ... is exactly three months before the Beijing Olympics. During this period nobody should shop at Carrefour. ... This is because its main shareholder has given massive amounts of money to the Dalai Lama, many people in France support Tibetan independence and even its President has spoken of boycotting the Olympic Games. Forward this message to all your friends and relatives. Let Carrefour be empty for 17 days.<sup>114</sup>

Thousands of Chinese people in Beijing, Wuhan, Chengdu, Xian, Zhengzhou, Qingdao, Kunming and Xuzhou where Carrefour has its branches joined this nationwide protest<sup>115</sup> (see Figure 1). Most of the Carrefour stores were closed down.<sup>116</sup> Although Carrefour repeatedly declared its support for the Beijing Olympics, anti-Carrefour demonstrations continued to spread throughout China. According to an opinion poll conducted by Xinhua.com, 66% of interviewees in China supported the boycott.<sup>117</sup> A further nationwide boycott of Carrefour was planned on 1 May.

Worried by the growth of the social unrest the Chinese government tried to calm down national resentment of the West, especially France. The *People's Daily* urged that a 'rational patriotism' was needed. It stated:



Figure 1. People protested outside a Carrefour Supermarket in Hefei on 18 April 2008. The banner says 'Boycott France, Boycott Carrefour'.

Source: World Hall of Fame Network. Available at: <http://www.famehall.com/hefei/2008/20080419230036.shtml> (accessed 13 March 2011).

As citizens, we have the responsibility to express our patriotic enthusiasm calmly and rationally, and to express patriotic aspiration in an orderly and legal manner. . . . The more complicated the international situation is, the more calm, wisdom and unity need to be shown by the Chinese people.<sup>118</sup>

Government officials went on television to remind the people that Carrefour's 112 stores provided more than 40,000 jobs and that boycott of Carrefour and French goods would cause social unrest and harm the Chinese economy.<sup>119</sup>

French politicians also worried about the endangered Sino-French relations and Carrefour's business. Led by Christian Poncelet, President of the French Senate, the French paid a diplomatic visit to China. They arrived in Shanghai and delivered President Sarkozy's letter to Jin Jing on 21 April at the Shanghai Disabled Persons' Sport Training Center.<sup>120</sup> In the letter Sarkozy apologised:

I would like to express to you my deep feeling towards the way you were shoved in Paris on 7 April when you were holding the Olympic flame. You showed an outstanding courage, which honours you, and (through you) all your country. . . . I understand that the Chinese people's feelings were hurt by what went on that day, and especially by the intolerable attack you suffered and which I condemn with the utmost force. What happened in Paris on 7 April has engendered a feeling of bitterness in your country. I want to assure you that the incidents that were brought about by a few people on this sad day don't reflect the feelings of my fellow countrymen for the Chinese people.<sup>121</sup>

Poncelet also stated: 'Although something unhappy happened, we should make efforts to strengthen Sino-France friendship. . . . We believe the Beijing Olympics would be a successful Olympic Games. The French people expect its complete success. Every one of us should exert efforts for that'.<sup>122</sup>

Finally, with both the Chinese and French governments' efforts, the anger towards France began to calm down. The planned May Day protest did not happen and most of Carrefour's outlets around China began to open normally in May. However, some anti-Carrefour and anti-France protests continued in Xi'an, Chongqing, Shenyang, Changsha and some other cities until August.<sup>123</sup>

One of the major characteristics of the protest was the participation of many young Chinese who were born after the 1980s. This so-called post-80s generation enjoyed the fruits of China's opening up, economic reform and globalisation. In their eyes the whole world, East and West, was a happy family. While they enjoyed McDonald's food and Kentucky Fried Chicken they worshipped the 'advanced' Western culture, wealth and its so-called 'democracy, freedom and equality'. They often dreamed of studying abroad and westernising China. The Western hostility towards China expressed during the Olympic torch relay shocked them, opened their eyes, and stimulated their growing sense of national identity and patriotism.

### **'Don't be too CNN!'**

If the torch relay in Paris had evoked China's patriotism, the behaviour of CNN and some other Western media before and during the torch relay greatly enhanced Chinese understanding of world politics, especially among the post-80s generation.

Soon after the riot in Tibet in March, Internet users in mainland China and Hong Kong accessed CNN, BBC and other Western media websites and formed opinions that news materials such as photos and quotations were carefully biased and edited by some Western news agencies to support a story of a 'massacre of Tibetans' by the Chinese government. CNN's news report with the title 'Report: 100 dead in Tibet

violence' portrayed the violence as Tibetans rising up against Chinese rule but it overlooked the story of brutal ethnic attacks on Muslim Chinese and Han Chinese civilians by mobs in Lhasa.<sup>124</sup>

They also noted an article on the front page of the Fox News website on 17 March 2008 titled 'Riot Round Up' with the caption 'Chinese Troops Parade Handcuffed Tibetan Prisoners in Trucks'. In fact the photograph showed six Indian police officers dragging a Tibetan protester in New Delhi, India.

*The Washington Post* published an article on 18 March 2008 titled 'Far-Flung Tibetans Find Unity in Protest' which used pictures of the clashes between Nepalese police and Tibetan protesters in Kathmandu, Nepal. However, this had the caption 'Chinese Government Cracking Down on Tibetan Protesters Who Took To the Streets To Protest Chinese Rule of the Province. Police Rounded Up Hundreds of Tibetans Suspected of Participating in an Outburst of Violence in Tibet Capital Lhasa'.<sup>125</sup> Germany's *Morgenpost*, *Bild*, N-TV and RTL TV also used pictures of the Tibetan protesters in Nepal in their reports but claimed that the protests happened in Tibet.

Unimpressed by the biased reports of some Western media, Rao Jin, a university student in Beijing, documented Western media biased coverage of the riot in Tibet and of the Beijing Olympics and published it on the website Anti-cnn.com. The website was soon supported by tens of thousands of Chinese Internet users.<sup>126</sup> A Chinese student stated, 'I used to believe that the Western media were fair. But how could they turn a blind eye to the killing of and arson against the Han and Muslim civilians by the mobs?'<sup>127</sup>

CNN's reputation was shattered again in China on 9 April 2008 when its news commentator Jack Cafferty made anti-Chinese comments. While the torch relay was on its way in San Francisco, Cafferty was making his comments in the 'Situation Room', a television programme, on Sino-American relations:

We're in hock to the Chinese up to our eyeballs because of the war in Iraq, for one thing. They're holding hundreds of billions of dollars worth of our paper. We are also running hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of trade deficits with them, as we continue to import their junk with the lead paint and the poisoned pet food and exports, you know, jobs to places where you can pay workers a dollar a month to turn out the stuff that we're buying from Wal-Mart. So I think our relationship with China has certainly changed, I think they're basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they've been for the last 50 years.<sup>128</sup>

These insulting and discriminating comments offended many Chinese. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu urged Cafferty and CNN to apologise to the Chinese people on 10 April. She stated: 'We are shocked by and strongly condemn the malicious attacks on the Chinese people by CNN's Cafferty. We demand CNN and Cafferty himself take back his vile remarks and apologize to all the Chinese people'.<sup>129</sup>

In China, the disillusion about and outrage towards CNN spread across countless blogs, instant messengers and forums. Mu Rongxuan, produced a music video containing examples of Western media biased coverage of the riot in Tibet, of the Olympic torch relay in Paris, using screen grabs from the websites of the CNN and BBC. The video was called 'Don't be too CNN'. It was posted on YouTube and other video-sharing websites on 14 April 2008.<sup>130</sup> In the following days, 'Don't be too CNN' became a popular phrase in China meaning 'don't tell lies'.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, overseas Chinese in America launched an online protest against Cafferty and

the CNN on 11 April 2008. A petition was created by the Legal Immigrant Association (LIA) to demand an official apology from the CNN:

As a leading organization of legal immigrants mainly comprised of people from China, we strongly condemn Jack Cafferty's racist remarks and urge the CNN to take immediate action against him... We also demand an official apology from the CNN to all Chinese people.<sup>132</sup>

CNN issued a statement on 16 April 2008: 'It was not Mr. Cafferty's nor CNN's intent to cause offence to the Chinese people, and we would apologize to anyone who has interpreted the comments in this way'.<sup>133</sup>

Overseas Chinese were dissatisfied with the CNN's arrogant statement. They argued,

... the CNN must understand it is not only about how many facts they reported, but also about how many facts they ignored, as well as what words and phrases they deliberately and carefully select, all of which can be used to manipulate public opinions and mock China ...<sup>134</sup>

On 19 April 2008, about 8,000 people protested in front of CNN headquarters in Los Angeles, waving Chinese national flags and shouting 'CNN Liar'.<sup>135</sup> (see Figure 2). On 26 April 2008, thousands of Chinese launched another anti-CNN protest in San Francisco.<sup>136</sup> Demonstrations also took place in Seattle, New York and other major cities to support the Beijing Olympics and protest against CNN. At the same time, pro-China, pro-Beijing Olympics and anti-CNN demonstrations were carried out by



Figure 2. Chinese-Americans and others rally outside CNN's Hollywood office in Los Angeles on 19 April 2008.

Source: [www.news.cn. http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2008-06/11/content\\_8345559.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2008-06/11/content_8345559.htm) (accessed 20 March 2011).

overseas Chinese in many other Western countries including the UK, Ireland, Germany, Netherlands, France and Australia.<sup>137</sup>

The Chinese Foreign Ministry and the Chinese Embassy in the United States urged CNN to apologise for Jack Cafferty's hostile commentary. Under the pressure of the Chinese government and Chinese people both home and abroad, CNN President Jim Walton finally apologised on 15 May 2008. He stated:

CNN has the highest respect for Chinese people around the world and we have no doubt that there was genuine offense felt by them over the Jack Cafferty commentary. On behalf of CNN I'd like to apologize to the Chinese people for that.<sup>138</sup>

The protest against France and Carrefour in China and the protest against Western media especially CNN, both within and outside China, showed the awakening of the new generation of Chinese and their new nationalism in the twenty-first century.<sup>139</sup>

### **The threat of terrorism**

The Beijing Olympics was also under the new threat of terrorism by the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a terrorist organization identified by China, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, the United States and the UN. ETIM was formed by Muslim extremists and separatists from Xinjiang province. It planned to attack the Beijing Olympics in November 2007. The objective was to win support from Muslim extremists and lead to a Muslim regime in south-central Asia. In early 2008, both the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the U.S. Department of State warned of possible attacks against the Beijing Olympics from ETIM.<sup>140</sup>

The threats came in early 2008. In January an anti-terrorist unit in Xinjiang province raided a group of ETIM members who were plotting an attack on the Beijing Olympics. Gunpowder, detonators, bombs, weapons and propaganda materials for a 'Jihad (struggle)' against Beijing were discovered by the police.<sup>141</sup> Two months later on 9 March 2008, a China Southern flight out of Urumqi for Beijing was forced to make an emergency landing in Lanzhou, Gansu Province when a female Muslim extremist smuggled three containers of gasoline onto the plane, hoping to light the fuel and crash the plane. However, she was apprehended by the air police.<sup>142</sup> In late March, another terrorist group, which was preparing for suicide bomb attacks in Urumqi and other major cities in China, was raided by the police and 35 suspects were arrested.<sup>143</sup>

Instructed by ETIM, Muslim Uighur extremists launched a terrorist attack in Kashgar, Xinjiang province on 4 August 2008 and killed 16 police officers and injured 16 others outside the gate of the Kashi border police division.<sup>144</sup> Days before the opening of the Games, ETIM warned Muslims in China not to attend the Olympic Games because of possible attacks.<sup>145</sup> On 8 August 2008, the day of the Olympic Opening Ceremony, a Japanese office of Air China received an email message stating: 'We are telling Air China: immediately suspend operations of all flights. ... Otherwise we will bomb the planes. We will crash the airplanes into the site of the Olympics'.<sup>146</sup> Air China immediately ordered all its flights not to land in Beijing but to return to Japan.

In order to secure the Games from terrorist attacks, the Chinese government and the Beijing Olympic Games Organizing Committee (BOGOC) had introduced a massive security scheme.<sup>147</sup> Altogether, 300,000 surveillance cameras were installed at street corners, railway stations, shopping malls and hotels in the host cities to



watch for potential danger.<sup>148</sup> Identity checking was extended to all Olympic venues and the Olympic village.<sup>149</sup> Anti-aircraft missiles were deployed next to the National Stadium where the opening ceremony of the Games was to be held.<sup>150</sup> It was reported that ‘People who give police detailed evidence of a “major security threat” to the games could receive a reward of between 10,000 and 500,000 RMB’.<sup>151</sup>

### **Let the political games begin: the opening ceremony and its impact**

Despite all the criticism, protests, boycotts and violence, the 29th Summer Olympic Games moved forward as planned. From the very beginning attendance and non-attendance of state leaders at the opening ceremony became a closely watched issue. In some Western countries, people urged their leaders to boycott the opening ceremony in support of the Free Tibet Campaign, protest against China’s human rights record and the Chinese government’s policy in Sudan. In China, after all the dramas from March to July, people believed that those who boycotted the opening ceremony opposed the rise of China and marked them as ‘unfriendly’ and ‘hostile’.<sup>152</sup> The absence of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, German President Angela Merkel, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Czech President Vaclav Klaus and their support of the Free Tibet Campaign were criticised by many Chinese. At the same time, the attendance of George W. Bush and Nicolas Sarkozy was reported by some Western media as being shameful.<sup>153</sup>

A few hours before the opening ceremony, a banquet was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. More than 80 world leaders, royal family members, top IOC officials and their spouses attended (see Figure 3). Hu Jintao and his wife Liu Yongqing received the guests one by one at the entrance hall. There were nine tables at the banquet – the number ‘nine’ (sounds like the Chinese character 九) symbolised unification and long-lasting friendship according to traditional Chinese culture. The seating arrangement was based on the map of world politics. President Hu Jintao,



Figure 3. President Hu Jintao, together with world dignitaries, enters the banquet hall in the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, China, 8 August 2008.

Source: Photo by Fan, Rujun, [www.People.com](http://www.People.com), <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1024/7634912.html> (accessed 23 March 2011), 2.

IOC President Jacques Rogge, US President George W. Bush, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, Brazilian President Lula da Silva, Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev, Philippine President Gloria Arroyo, Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf were seated at the top table. Putin, Rogge and Bush were the most important guests as they occupied the seats on both sides of Hu Jintao.<sup>154</sup> Members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee including Premier Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin, Xi Jinping, Wu Bangguo, Li Changchun, Li Keqiang, He Guoqiang and Zhou Yongkang were the hosts at the other eight tables, making the banquet an international diplomatic event.<sup>155</sup>

President Hu Jintao gave a welcome speech. He emphasised the role of the Beijing Olympics in building a peaceful and prosperous world:

Today, the international community faces both development opportunities and grave challenges unprecedented in history. There has never been a greater need for us to understand, accommodate and cooperate with each other. The Beijing Olympic Games is an opportunity not only for China but also for the whole world. By participating in the Olympic Games, we should carry forward the Olympic spirit of solidarity, friendship and peace, facilitate sincere exchanges among people from all countries, deepen mutual understanding, enhance friendship and rise above differences, and promote the building of a harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity.<sup>156</sup>

The gathering of world dignitaries and CCP leaders at the banquet was regarded as a diplomatic success for China. Xinhua News Agency reported: 'The banquet set a new record in China's diplomatic history with its high level and the number of participants'.<sup>157</sup> Japan's *Daily Yomiuri* noted: 'World leaders waited in line to shake hands with Chinese President Hu Jintao. This symbolised the rise of China as a leading economic and military power in the 21st century. This is a landmark in China's diplomatic history'.<sup>158</sup>

The opening ceremony was staged at the Beijing National Stadium at 8.08 on 8.8.08 pm which symbolised luck and prosperity in traditional Chinese culture. The show focused on China's long history, diverse cultures and distinctive traditions and presented a dream for world peace and future progress. *The Times* commented 'And this is a time when China wanted to be a friend to the world'.<sup>159</sup>

Altogether, 91,000 spectators filled the Beijing National Stadium. The show was kicked off by fireworks and drummers. Fifty-six young children representing China's 56 ethnic groups then marched into the stadium under the national flag and sung a famous patriotic song – 'Ode to the Motherland'. The national flag of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was raised and the national anthem was sung by a group of singers who represented China's 56 ethnic groups. Musicians, acrobats and trapeze artists performed a 50-minute show of Chinese history and culture. A huge Light Emitting Diode (LED) paper scroll, which symbolised the unfurling of Chinese history, rolled open on the floor and displayed animated graphics. The performers displayed China's great inventions including paper, printing and the compass. Afterwards, the LED scroll on the ground showed illustrations of the Silk Road – through which the country opened its doors to trade with foreign countries.<sup>160</sup> The show then began to reflect the modern era. 'On the infield, thousands of dancers performed. In the air, trapeze acrobats soared majestically'.<sup>161</sup> A giant globe emerged from the floor, with acrobats running

around the gyrating sphere. On its top, Britain's Sarah Brightman and Chinese idol Liu Huan introduced the theme song of the Beijing Olympics, 'You and Me'.<sup>162</sup> At the same time, a video screen on top of the stadium showed pictures of smiling faces of children around the world.<sup>163</sup>

The parade of the athletes began after this performance. Greece, the birthplace of the modern Olympics, entered the stadium first. Other countries/regions paraded by stroke order of the Chinese translation of their names. There were enormous cheers from the crowds when the Chinese Taipei delegation, the Hong Kong delegation and the Macau delegation entered the stadium as they were seen by the Chinese spectators as members of the Chinese nation. When the PRC delegation entered as the last of the 204 delegations, the stadium rose to its feet. The delegation was led by National Basketball Association (NBA) superstar Yao Ming and Lin Hao, a 9-year-old who had survived the Sichuan earthquake. The athletes waved their small red flags at the audience. *USA Today* commented that 'The more they waved, the more the Chinese spectators chanted'.<sup>164</sup>

The president of the organising committee Liu Qi and IOC president Jacques Rogge addressed the audience. Liu Qi welcomed the participants and explained the diplomatic mission of the Games: 'Sons and daughters of China hosting the Olympic Games is the dream of a century...The important mission of the Beijing Olympic Games is to promote cultural exchanges between the countries of the world'.<sup>165</sup> Jacques Rogge made a speech after Liu. He congratulated Beijing and thanked everyone:

For a long time, China has dreamed of opening its doors and inviting the world's athletes to Beijing for the Olympic Games. Tonight that dream comes true. Congratulations, Beijing. You have chosen as the theme of these Games 'One World, One Dream'. That is what we are tonight.<sup>166</sup>

In his speech, Rogge also emphasised the role of the Olympics in promoting world peace and friendship:

Remember that they are about much more than performance alone. They are about the peaceful gathering of 204 National Olympic Committees - regardless of ethnic origin, gender, religion or political system. Please compete in the spirit of the Olympic values: excellence, friendship and respect.<sup>167</sup>

Chinese president Hu Jintao declared the Games open and the Olympic flag was then raised. Li Ning, China's 'Prince of Gymnastics' in the past and now successful entrepreneur, lit the Olympic flame with unexpected style. He was lifted to the sky and ran towards the Olympic cauldron against a dazzling backdrop surrounding the top of the stadium. At the final moment, he touched the torch to a channel and the flame lit the gigantic cauldron on top of the stadium.<sup>168</sup>

The opening ceremony attracted an estimated 4 billion television viewers around the world.<sup>169</sup> According to the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in the USA, the opening ceremony was the biggest audience ever for an Olympic opening ceremony, aside from the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. In Australia, the event drew an average audience of more than 3.3 million viewers, making it the second most watched event ever. In Germany, 7.7 million watched the ceremony on the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Öffentlich-Rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ARD). In France, 4.4 million tuned in on France 2. In UK, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) recorded 5

million viewers and in Italy, 5.5 million watched on the Radio Televisione Italiana (RAI).<sup>170</sup>

The show impressed the global audience and had a huge impact on the world's view of China. After the ceremony, major news agencies around the globe published editorials and articles commenting on the show. The *Chicago Tribune* argued that the ceremony 'bent the mind and stretched the imagination'.<sup>171</sup> It praised it as 'a floor show that made the most spectacular revue in Las Vegas look like a church picnic'.<sup>172</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* commented,

No country ever has – or surely will – match the Chinese in the effort, human power, synchronicity, ingenuity and, it has to be said, money they were willing to put into what was once a little show to start a big sporting event. Now it is an enormous show and a gigantic event.<sup>173</sup>

*The Daily Telegraph* commented: 'With thunder and lightning and a tender plea to humanity, Beijing amazed the world last night. ... Reverence was the order of the day. And awe will be the lasting memory'.<sup>174</sup>

The political and diplomatic legacy of the event was examined by the world. The Agence France-Presse (AFP) noted, 'The press was united Saturday in declaring the spectacular Beijing Olympics opening ceremony the best ever and a stunning display of China's new-found confidence'.<sup>175</sup> *The Times* commented:

The world saw China as it sees itself and as it wants to be seen by the world. ... The show focused on moments that China sees as defining its journey through history, culminating in its current status on the brink of becoming a world superpower. ... And this was a time when China wanted to be a friend to the world.<sup>176</sup>

*The Guardian* argued that the ceremony 'outdid all of its predecessors in numbers, colour, noise and expense, demonstrating to the world that the new China intends to make its presence felt'.<sup>177</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* concluded: 'This was history set to music and dance, every step reminding Bush and assembled world leaders that Beijing stands at the centre of a universe every bit as legitimate as those born of Greece and Rome'.<sup>178</sup>

Chinese media also noticed the political impact of the opening ceremony. An article entitled 'Tear Down the Wall and Build a Bridge' argued,

There is a thick wall between China and the West ... the Olympics offered us an opportunity to tear down this wall and build a bridge ... the world will change its view on China. The [Beijing] Olympics is the beginning.<sup>179</sup>

Another article entitled 'Touch the Real China' stated,

Today, the Beijing Olympics has built a bridge of understanding ... at this very moment you entered China and experienced the passion of this great nation. China is ready to embrace the world. We welcome the foreign friends to touch and feel the real China.<sup>180</sup>

### **Who was the real winner at the games?**

A total of 11,028 athletes from 204 countries and regions took part in the Beijing Olympics. The Chinese team topped the gold medal tally for the first time with 51 gold medals and 100 overall. The Americans finished second with 36 gold and 110 overall. Russia dropped to third with 23 gold medals and 72 overall. The British team, which ranked 10th at the 2004 Athens Olympics, climbed to 4th

with 19 gold medals, followed by Germany, Australia, South Korea, Japan, Italy and France.

Altogether, 639 Chinese athletes competed in all 28 Olympic sports. It was the first time that Chinese athletes were represented in every sport at an Olympics. They continued to dominate in diving, weightlifting, shooting, table tennis, badminton and gymnastics, but also won their first Olympic gold medals in archery, rowing, boxing, trampoline and sailing. They also won their first medals in beach volleyball, synchronised swimming, rhythmic gymnastics and field hockey and this made China the winner of a wider range of sports than any team in Beijing.<sup>181</sup>

After the Games, Chinese people celebrated the country's sporting success. They believed that by defeating the USA in terms of gold medals, China had become the number one world sports superpower. This achievement coincided with China's economic success and was regarded as one of the most powerful evidences of 'the rise of China' and the 'revival of the Chinese nation'.<sup>182</sup> Once again, sport demonstrated China's capability and position in the world. As Chen Zhi, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress, concluded,

The Beijing Olympics successfully composed a brilliant new chapter for the Chinese nation. The Chinese National Squad competed hard at the Games. They ranked No. 1 on the gold medal table and won great honour for the country. We will never forget the moment of the raising of the national flag and the echo of the national anthem at every medal award ceremony, when 1.3 million Chinese, with tears in their eyes, were cheering for the athletes who made them feel so proud!<sup>183</sup>

However, there was a different reaction in the USA. Many Americans believed that China's medals were from less popular sports – such as badminton, diving, weightlifting and table tennis – that did not always capture the public's imagination. They were convinced that the USA dominated the so called 'real' sports, such as track and field, swimming and team sports. The conclusion was that China was still far away from catching up with the USA's superiority in sport.<sup>184</sup> Mark Dyreson's essay entitled 'Hold Your Head Up, High, USA! USA!' reflected this sentiment:

The USA still proved to the world, the best overall athletes still wear the red, white and blue and hold their hands over their hearts while standing on the podium and listening to the Star Spangled Banner.<sup>185</sup>

So, who is the real winner? IOC Jacques Rogge put it diplomatically:

China has won the most gold medals and the United States of America won the most total. I believe each country will highlight what suits it best. One country will say, 'Gold medals.' The other country will say, 'The total tally counts.' We take no position on that.<sup>186</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Beijing Olympics showed the close relationship between sport and politics, reflected changes in world politics and the economy, and represented how international sporting events were linked to international relations and the power and image of a country. It demonstrated that as long as conflicts and confrontation exist in society, then sport and politics will be inseparable. The hosting of the 2008 Olympics had a great importance, not only for the consolidation of China's national unity and the establishment of the country's international image, but also for the development and transformation of Chinese society.

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