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“同一个世界，同一个梦想”还是“同会异梦”？

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“One World, One Dream” or “One Game, Different Dreams”?

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By James Farrer

A “silver medal” for the Beijing Olympics from the Japanese media

Mo Bangfu, a Chinese columnist writing for the liberal *Asahi Shimbun*, used his weekly column the day before the closing ceremonies to award the Beijing Olympics a symbolic “silver medal” for its overall organization (Aug. 23, 2008, p. B3). Despite accusations of fakery, the opening ceremonies and the Olympic volunteers both deserve “gold medals,” as do the ordinary Beijing residents and migrant workers who had to put up with massive everyday inconveniences.

The government, however, deserves a “disqualification” for not allowing any demonstrations in the designated demonstration areas, for restricting the access of normal citizens to the Olympic venues, and also “poor marks” for the large numbers of empty seats at events. As a whole, Mo suggests, the Beijing Olympics deserve a “silver medal,” perhaps summing up the generally positive appraisal of some of the more liberal media voices in Japan. Conservative papers, however, gave the Beijing Olympics much lower marks.

Seeing the Olympics as a watershed event, Japanese commentators have speculated about a “post-Olympic” China, and their prognoses are generally darker than the more optimistic views in the U.S. media. Influenced by Japan’s own postwar experience, columnists ask whether the Beijing Olympics will serve the purpose of integrating China into global society, in the same way achieved by the former Axis powers in the postwar Rome, Tokyo, and Munich Olympics, and later by Seoul in 1988. Most answer negatively. Despite a consensus “silver medal” for a brilliant (if somewhat flawed) show, the Olympics were regarded as a political failure by most Japanese commentators, at least when judged by democratic norms. More darkly, some conservative papers suggest, the Olympics should be seen as a great “success” for the legitimacy of authoritarian rule in China.

In a front-page summary of the impact of the Olympics on China, the conservative *Sankei Shimbun* suggested that the Olympics were a celebration of dictatorship and the effectiveness of totalitarian government, “a celebration turning its back on democratization” (Aug. 25, 2008, p. 1). The article suggests that the Beijing Olympics should be compared to neither the 1964 Tokyo Olympics nor the 1988 Seoul Olympics, both of which led to greater democratization and the integration of Japan and Korea into the club of democratic states. Rather, the editors conclude, China’s Olympics may in retrospect look more like the 1980 Moscow Olympics, which signaled political isolation and the internal disintegration of the Soviet Union. Like many conservative voices in Japan, the *Sankei* emphasizes the fragile state of the Chinese economy, predicting much bigger troubles, even a “hard landing” for China’s “bubble economy” (Aug. 25, 2008, p. 1, “After the Olympics: a mountain of problems for China’s economy”).

Even the more liberal *Asahi Shimbun* described the opening ceremony as a “political show for the party leadership,” (Aug. 9, 2008, p. 2) pointing to the important role played by Communist Party leaders in every public event leading up to the Olympics. The article claims that in every city passed through on the torch relay, the first torch bearer was always the local Party secretary. As the Games opened, *Asahi* guest columnist and liberal academic Fujiwara Koichi judged Zhang Yimou’s elaborate opening ceremony as a “vacuous” political exercise. He writes, “It’s a sad sight to see this brilliant director expending his talents on this exaggerated display of tradition and political propaganda.”

Despite the emptiness of its political slogans, Fujiwara continues, it was important that the world participated in the Games in order to build bridges with the Chinese people, who can bring about real change in their government (*Asahi Shimbun*, Aug. 24, 2008, p. 27, "Vacuous, but engagement is important"). The closing Olympic editorial in the *Asahi Shimbun*, although more moderate in tone, also called for political reform in China and asked the Chinese state to give some substance to the "One World, One Dream" motto by joining the global society in the fight against global warming (Aug. 25, 2008, p. 3 "Make steps toward political reform").

Much of this criticism mirrors the English-language media, but there are some differences. Japanese media reports seem at the same time more critical and less condescending than their U.S. counterparts. Japanese seem to expect more of their giant neighbor but are also far more fearful and skeptical of it. This dynamic is especially evident in the profound mistrust in Japan's mainstream media toward Chinese political leadership and the insistence by some conservative Japanese commentators that China is headed for a severe economic downturn. These pessimistic economic predictions are significant if only because Japan is the largest foreign investor in China, which is now Japan's largest export market. Of course, Japan's reports also say a great deal about Japan's own obsessions, including concerns about Japan's declining vitality and status in comparison with its increasingly powerful and affluent "neighboring country" (a term frequently used in Japanese media).

"One World, One Dream" or "One Games, Different Dreams"?

The motto of the Chinese Olympics was "One World, One Dream" (*tongyige shijie, tongyige mengxiang*). But it might be more appropriate to have named the Olympics after another expression, "one bed, different dreams" (*tongchuang yimeng*), a Chinese idiom used to refer to two people sharing a bed but dreaming different dreams. Looking at the hypernationalist coverage of the Olympics in the United States and China, Olympic historian David Wallechinsky describes "parallel games," in which Americans and Chinese were essentially watching their own teams perform in highly selective national media coverage. But this "one games, different dreams" phenomenon is not limited to the hypernationalistic U.S. and Chinese media. Japan's media also focused almost exclusively on the events that featured participation by Japanese athletes.

The Olympics seen on Japanese television were fundamentally Japan's Olympics. Just as the Olympics seen by Americans and Chinese were fundamentally nationalist versions of the same global event. It seems that even small countries are not immune to Olympic nationalism. A report in the *New York Times* documents the "gold medal fever" in several countries around the world, including Mongolia, India, Indonesia, and Jamaica. Of course, some of the superstar accomplishments—such as Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt breaking records—were truly global media events, but for most viewers in the world, including those in Japan, this Olympics was a case of "same games, different dreams," in a televised experience characterized by highly selective media nationalism.

Can fulfilling the "100 year dream" mean an end to "100 years of national humiliation"?

It's clear from the nationalist narratives and folkloric themes of the opening and closing ceremonies that the "dream" that concerned the Beijing Olympic organizers was not a generic dream of "one world" but rather the much more specific dream of China's place in that world. This "one hundred year dream" of a Chinese Olympics is tied to another story of a "hundred years of national humiliation," a story in which China interprets its modern history as an underdog struggle against foreign aggression, beginning with the Opium Wars and punctuated by a series of invasions.

In what might signal an important revision of this story of national revival, state media giant Xinhua's [reporting](#) narrates the Olympics as the culmination of 30 years of "reform and opening," suggesting that 1978 be recognized as the new key turning point in Chinese history, in a new narrative of Chinese history based not on the mythology of national humiliation and resistance but on

a myth of national self-renewal and openness to the world. If this story sticks, it signals a constructive revision of Chinese national identity.

Mirroring this official story, the *New York Times* suggests that China's newly won confidence might represent the beginning of the end of a pattern of "aggrieved nationalism" based on the story of national humiliation. The *Times* article cites the positive and welcoming attitude of Beijingers toward foreign visitors as evidence that the Olympics bestowed a new confidence on China that can lead to the diminishment of China's aggrieved nationalism. The article quotes Fudan University Professor Shen Dingli, who suggests that the success of the Olympics will allow China to become a "normal country" that can more objectively view its strengths and its weaknesses.

The sense of grievance at the base of Chinese nationalism may be hard to overcome. Media in Japan, which is undoubtedly the country most closely associated with China's "century of humiliation" and also the most common target of China's nationalist grievances, seemed to show a much greater skepticism about the potential for Chinese people to use the Olympics to overcome the politics of national humiliation.

Despite the positive spin surrounding the Games, Japanese media tended to interpret the nationalist imagery of the opening ceremonies and China's single-minded pursuit of Olympic gold as yet more signs of China's potent mix of populist nationalism and authoritarianism. Japan's conservative newspapers interpreted China's Olympic-fueled nationalism as a useful strategy for solidifying political control and legitimating political dictatorship by the Chinese Communist Party.

The conservative *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Japan's most widely circulated daily, suggested that problems such as a slowing economy, declining real estate prices, and greater income inequality will necessitate a resort to hard-line political tactics (Aug. 25, 2008, p. 2 "A return to the hard line"). Not all Japanese commentators were so pessimistic. One *Asahi* commentary suggested that the relatively neutral and normal diplomatic exchanges between China and Japan could be the sign of a new "adult relationship" (Aug. 24, 2008, p. 4, "The sprouting of an 'adult relationship' between China and Japan").

It is troubling that mainstream media in the one nation that could do the most to help China overcome its "aggrieved nationalism" seem the least optimistic about this possibility. American media have been quicker to embrace 1978 as the new starting point for contemporary Chinese history, with the Olympics as a 30th anniversary celebration of the opening and reform that began that year.

Faking the Olympics

"Fakery" was perhaps the most unfortunate theme of the Beijing Olympics. An editorial in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* reflected on Chinese Olympic "fakes," such as the use of computer-generated imagery and voice-overs in the opening ceremony, suggesting that, like the obsession with winning gold medals, these practices also reflect the methods of a totalitarian government in which ends justify means (Aug. 25, 2008, p. 3, "As the festival ends, the real trials begin"). Even the more liberal media suggested that the Chinese were "trying too hard," resulting in a less than authentic celebration of the Olympic spirit.

As in the West, Japanese media also reported on Chinese media censorship, but with some twists that were not common in U.S. reporting. The *Asahi's* coverage of media censorship focused not only on censorship but also on the concrete methods of Chinese authorities in constructing an approved Olympic message. Reporters from Xinhua and CCTV dominated the Chinese corps, with very few slots remaining for local and regional Chinese media. Some well-known investigative reporters were simply told not to work during the Olympics. The Chinese state wanted no independent media scoops in this Olympics. The worry expressed in these stories is that Chinese popular attitudes are easily manipulated by a still-powerful state which is able to micromanage media messages ("Chinese domestic media restrictions" *Asahi Shimbun*, Aug. 15, 2008, p. 2; "Chinese media" Aug. 25, 2008, evening, p. 1).

This emphasis on the state construction of media messages may sound exaggerated in China's Internet age, but Hong Kong-based media expert [Rebecca MacKinnon](#) makes a related cautionary point in her [discussion](#) in the *Wall Street Journal* of Internet reporting during the Games. While Internet sources might be expected to provide different perspectives on the Olympics, unauthorized critical comments about sensitive Olympic topics were quickly removed from the Internet. At the same time, media reports from official agencies were released quickly. The point of Chinese censorship now is less to stop the flow of sensitive news than to shape a dominant message.

Japanese papers also contrasted the rhetoric of "harmony" in the Chinese media with the "reality" of ongoing troubles in the Western regions of China and problems faced by ordinary residents on the day after the closing ceremonies. An *Asahi* article entitled "'Successful' Olympics, a different reality" (Aug. 25, 2008, p. 2) described the continuing repression of the Tibetan and Uighur minorities, as well as restrictions on the movement of ordinary Beijing citizens. The *Yomiuri* also reported on the Beijingers' ironic appropriation of the political slogan "harmonious society" through the creation of a new verb "to be harmonized" to describe situations in which people are forced to move their homes or otherwise sacrifice their self-interests for state-imposed goals such as the Olympics ("Increasing Patriotism" Aug. 25, 2008, p. 4).

Although not always negative, Japanese editorial voices in general seem unconvinced of Chinese sincerity and thus especially sensitive to stories of Chinese "fakes." While the Western media frequently reported on the "friendliness" of the Beijing residents, Japanese media reported on better "manners" (such as waiting in line), implying that these improvements in public behavior, like improvements in air quality, might not last beyond the state-sponsored spectacle of the Olympics. Man-made good weather and manipulated positive media coverage are all represented as troubling signs of a neighbor that is "trying too hard" and is thus untrustworthy.

It might surprise Western critics to read Japanese commentators positioning themselves as champions of democracy and individualism in China, but this focus on Chinese "fakery" and "collectivism" can also be seen as part of Japan's long history of positioning itself as a modern enlightened nation in a Western-dominated global society. Ironically, Japanese criticisms of Chinese fakery, authoritarianism, and collectivism closely resemble Western criticism of Japanese "copying" and a state-dominated "Japan Inc." during its rapid growth period of the 1970s and '80s. These obsessions tell us as much as about Japanese sensitivities as about the state of Chinese society. Indeed, one of the questions Japanese commentators ask is whether Tokyo really has an authentic vision for the 2016 Olympic bid, or more broadly, whether Japan has any viable vision for its future at all.

"One World" (revisited): Flexible Olympic citizenship

One story covered on the front page of all major Japanese dailies the day after the closing ceremonies was a tribute to the Japanese background of Kenya's Samuel Wanjiru, who was awarded the gold medal for the marathon during the closing ceremonies. Wanjiru began his serious training as a high school student in Japan, and thus could be hailed by the Japanese media as a Japanese success story as well as a Kenyan success story. In a similar fashion, Japanese media also hailed the success of the Japanese coach Imura Masayo, who led China's synchronized swimmers to a bronze medal—the team's first.

Japanese and Western media have provided numerous stories of mobile athletes and coaches swapping national affiliations all over the world. America's silver medal in volleyball was led by China's former star player Lang Ping, who was wildly cheered by Chinese fans. Russia's bronze medal-winning women's basketball team was led by American, and naturalized Russian citizen, Becky Hammon. Georgia's beach volleyball team hailed from Brazil. America's women's gymnastic coach Liang Chow hailed from the host city of Beijing. Fans are getting used to the mobility of athletic careers.

Extensive media coverage of these mobile sports figures belies the nationalist mythology that most media reporting exalts (including Japanese media). The cross-border movements of Olympic athletes and coaches are a better expression of the fluid conditions of modern transnational citizenship than

the hard nationalism of mainstream media coverage. And despite the simple-minded nationalism of sports coverage, audiences throughout the world have also become willing to embrace the forms of “flexible citizenship”—as anthropologist Aihwa Ong calls them—exhibited by mobile athletic stars. As more athletes and coaches cross borders, perhaps the hypernationalism of sports will be undermined by the multinational self-representations of the athletes themselves, offering a much more progressive vision of a true “one world” that allows individuals to pursue their cross-border dreams regardless of their place of birth.

“One Dream” (revisited): Olympic Eros

When asked about the Beijing opening ceremony, Tokyo’s conservative governor Ishihara Shintaro, who is not known for circumspection, said: “I suppose it’s a happy occasion, something you can be proud of. But it was also like passing around the same Chinese dish for three people. It was a bit boring and too long” (*Asahi Shimbun*, August 19, 2008, p. 32, “The words of the mayor”).

Ishihara may have been one of the few in Japan who were underwhelmed by the beauty of the opening ceremonies, which he labeled “mass games.” Such inopportune comments can be taken as further evidence of his disregard for global public opinion, including a statement on the same day that visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine by the Tokyo governor also would have no effect on the Olympic bid. His well-known nationalist rhetoric aside, when describing his response to the sporting events Ishihara also revealed his more literary side: “Actually, [sports] are not about Logos, or language, but the world of Eros. They are about physical beauty.”

Although Ishihara’s comments about “Logos” seemed directed at Zhang Yimou’s highly textual imagery in the opening ceremonies (based on the metaphor of a scroll and the advent of printing), Ishihara’s larger point seems to refute his casual dismissal of the opening ceremony as “boring.” After all, it was the extraordinary visceral beauty of the opening and closing ceremonies, rather than their simplistic narratives, that made the Games such a huge success in the eyes of the global audience, including the thrilled NHK announcers. And it was the vicarious ecstasy of the athletic performances experienced on high definition television that inspired such large global audiences. Discussions of the physical beauty of the athletes themselves were also one of the most non-nationalistic global discourses on the Internet. Eroticism, in its more direct sense, was also part of the experience of the Games for many athletes, who apparently engaged in a great deal of [cross-national bed hopping](#). For some, at least, the private experience of the Olympics was not at all a case of “one bed, different dreams,” but rather of the victory of Eros over Logos.

To return then to idea of “one dream,” when Ishihara suggests that the Olympics involve a fundamentally aesthetic vision, perhaps he should also remind himself that the fact that the Chinese state was willing to spend seven years and \$40 billion on an essentially aesthetic experience is itself a reassuringly peaceful expression of a shared human dream. Perhaps the legacy of the Beijing Olympics will be primarily aesthetic, not political, and that’s not a bad legacy (especially, as Thomas Friedman points out, when compared to the legacy of [America’s past seven years](#)).

Whether Beijing’s expensive spectacle of Olympian Eros was purchased at the cost of other more fundamental human needs is obviously debatable within China. But whether Tokyo can offer an equally compelling alternative vision for 2016 remains doubtful for most Japanese. When asked whether the ceremonies in Beijing gave him any ideas for Tokyo’s bid, the mayor said, “Not really, we want to do something totally different, if given the chance.” What that difference will be is still unclear to most Japanese.

Tokyo is obviously a great global city, with the best urban infrastructure, public safety, and global cuisine in the world. It is deserving of a second Olympics, but it is also deserving of more progressive global representations from its media and politicians. Ishihara is clever, charismatic, and quotable, and clearly a relief from the leaden boredom of most Japanese political voices, but with such a figure at the helm, Tokyo’s Olympic bid faces an uphill battle for global recognition.

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