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Mass Media and Representation: a Critical Comparison of the CCTV and NBC Presentations of the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Summer Games

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Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Summer Games

by

James R. Schiffman

Under the Direction of Michael L. Bruner

ABSTRACT

A critical comparison of the CCTV and NBC broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics demonstrates how two sets of narratives that on the surface glorify China and the long Chinese cultural and historic tradition offer very different ideological projections about China's rise as a power and engagement with the wider capitalist world. For CCTV, China has finally righted a longstanding historical injustice and established itself as a co-equal nation among nations. For NBC, ambivalence about China is the watchword, and further reforms that by implication will help clear China of its non-democratic, totalitarian, and economically mercantilist sheen are needed if the country is to be fully embraced. The ideological construction is more hidden in the NBC broadcast, but both depend on massive erasures of history and blurring of contemporary issues, causing both sets of narratives to fail tests of narrative coherence. Discursive struggles over the authorship of the Opening Ceremony underlie both media texts and expose their ideological positioning.

INDEX WORDS: China, Olympics, Mass media, Representation, NBC, CCTV, Orientalism, Occidentalism, Post-colonial, Ideological criticism, Ideological critique, Media spectacle

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the members of my immediate family: my daughter Jessica, my son Daniel, and most of all to my wife, best friend, and life partner Carolyn Schiffman. This work would never have been done without their loving support and kindness.

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Note on Transliteration

There are two main systems to romanize the Chinese language: Pinyin, which was developed in China, and Wade-Giles, which preceded it. I have used Pinyin in my text, but in some cases, authors I cite use Wade-Giles. Some confusion may arise from this combination. For example, I write about the Song Dynasty (Song being the Pinyin transliteration) while Sung appears in some titles (Sung being the Wade-Giles spelling). A similar situation arises with the Tang Dynasty (Pinyin) and T'ang Dynasty (Wade-Giles). Whatever the spelling, in these cases the renderings come from the same Chinese original.

Chapter One: Introduction

“East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.”

--Rudyard Kipling¹

“In the sky, there is no distinction of East and West; people create distinctions out of their own minds and then believe them to be true.”

--Prince Gautama Siddharta, a.k.a. the Buddha²

There is little question that mass media are central communicative forces in our age of globalization. The reach and potential impact of mass media are evident virtually everywhere one goes, even in a world of increasingly fragmented media channels and audiences. Twenty-four hour news channels beam their programming at international and regional audiences, with new networks in English and vernacular languages springing up in rapid succession. Movies from Hollywood and Bollywood are eagerly watched from the cineplex to the remotest corners of the globe. Latin American telenovelas have gained a worldwide following.³ American hip-hop music is popular in Japan, while K-pop has become a sensation in large parts of Asia.⁴ In all of these mediated genres, stories of nation, history, and culture are told.

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- 1 Rudyard Kipling, *Collected Verse of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1918), <http://books.google.com/books?id=Q8BEAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA136&dq=kipling+the+ballad+of+east+and+west&hl=en&sa=X&ei=3M9DT7H5F5C5twfU8bHHBQ&ved=0CFMQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
 - 2 Dwight Goddard, *Buddha, Truth and Brotherhood* (Kessinger Publishing, 2010), <http://books.google.com/books?id=2ho8RQCA5qIC>; Brian K. Graham, *Think, Believe, Receive* (Bloomington, Indiana: Balboa Press, 2011), <http://books.google.com/books?id=xKCC16C8RIUC>.
 - 3 Samantha Joyce, “Telenovela Consumerism as Empowerment,” in *Conference Papers -- National Communication Association* (presented at the 94th Annual National Communication Association Conference, San Diego, California, 2008), 1; Daniel Mato, “The Transnationalization of the Telenovela Industry, Territorial References, and the Production of Markets and Representations of Transnational Identities,” *Television & New Media* 6, no. 4 (November 2005): 423–444; Jade L. Miller, “Ugly Betty Goes Global: Global Networks of Localized Content in the Telenovela Industry,” *Global Media & Communication* 6, no. 2 (2010): 198–217; Marina Vujnovic, “The Political Economy of Croatian Television: Exploring the Impact of Latin American Telenovelas,” in *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association* (presented at the 56th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, Dresden, Germany: International Communication Association, 2006), 1–30.
 - 4 Beng Huat Chua and Kōichi Iwabuchi, eds., *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (Hong Kong, London: Hong Kong University Press, 2008); Ian Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); David Morris, “Sound, Affect, and Social Change: The Case of Hip Hop in Japan,” in *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association* (presented at the 59th Annual International Communication Association Conference, Chicago, 2009), 1; Doobo Shim, “Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia,” *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 1 (January 2006): 25–44; Ubonrat Siriyuvasak and Shin Hyunjoon, “Asianizing K-pop: Production, Consumption and Identification Patterns Among Thai Youth,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 2007): 109–136.

These developments put front and center a myriad of questions about how mass media construct narratives of nation, history, and culture in an age of globalization. What kinds of discursive practices go into producing such narratives? What ideological interests are served by them? How do industrial structure, corporate history, and national policy help frame and constrain the production of such mediated narratives? How do narratives draw lines between sameness and otherness? Is globalization helping to reinforce or break down dividing lines that characterize nation and culture? To what extent does mediated representation contribute to each of the diametrically opposed views of East and West expressed in the quotes that begin this chapter? From a more abstract, theoretical angle, what is the relationship between mediated representation and ideology in a globalized world where information courses around the globe at light speed?

The study undertaken herein opens a window into these broad questions by examining two sets of narratives of nation, history, and culture about China that emerged from one of the most widely circulated mass mediated events of recent years: the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Summer Games in Beijing in August 2008.⁵ The study critically examines and compares narratives offered by televised broadcasts for the Chinese audience by China Central Television (CCTV) and for U.S. viewers by NBC. Because CCTV and NBC each had sole broadcast rights for the Opening Ceremony in China and the United States respectively, focusing on these two presentations allows a forensic examination of narratives about China that were presented to mass audiences in both countries.

Three specific scholarly benefits accrue from critically comparing these two media texts. First, it enables a focus on mediated representation of China, which is an understudied field.⁶ Narratives that China's state broadcaster projects to the people of China matter. Narratives about China that are

5 "840 Million Opening Ceremony Viewers in China," *The Official Website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, August 10, 2008, <http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/official/ioc/n214525000.shtml>; Nick Harris, "1,000,000,000: Beijing Sets World TV Record," *Times Online*, May 10, 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/olympics/article6256063.ece>.

6 Qing Cao, "Western Representation of the Other," in *Discourse as Cultural Struggle*, ed. Shi-xu, Studying Multicultural Discourses (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 106.

presented to the American people likewise matter. Understanding how narratives that purport to be matter-of-fact accounts of China's history and culture actually are ideological constructions with far reaching consequences likewise is of great importance.

Attending to China could be justified by its sheer size as the world's most populous nation, by the fact that it encompasses roughly one-fifth of the world's population, and by the fact that it boasts of the world's oldest continuous civilization. But beyond that, China arguably is and will continue to be one of the most important nations on earth in the twenty-first century. Contemporary China is in the spotlight by virtue of its breathtaking economic development of the last thirty years and its increasing international political, social, and cultural stature in the world. Much attention in the West has focused on the emerging Chinese authoritarian capitalist development model, which features a market economy that incorporates a large role for state-run enterprises, a disciplined, one-party political system in which Communist Party officials and the People's Liberation Army are intimately tied to business interests, repression of political dissidents and controls on the Internet even as certain forms of expression are allowed to expand, a developing military and an assertiveness in foreign affairs, widespread corruption at all levels of society, an accelerating gap between rich and poor, a rising urban middle class, an emerging consumer society, and a population of hundreds of millions of rural migrant workers who are treated as second-class citizens, just to offer a short list of salient characteristics. The managed but rapid insertion of a capitalist, market economy in the context of an authoritarian, at times brutal, political system has created new demands within China for cultural narratives that can manage new subjectivities arising from such a dramatic, historic change. Increasing integration with the wider capitalist world likewise has created new challenges for Westerners trying to make sense of China. Material circumstances in the world today, in other words, demand more scholarly attention be paid to narratives of China in all their dimensions.

Second, examining narratives emerging from the two Opening Ceremony broadcasts also opens the door to the analysis of, and theorizing about, the cross-cultural dialectics of representation and their relationship to ideology. CCTV, China's official national television broadcast entity, was aiming its message-making at the vast domestic audience in China, but questions about China's place in the world and how foreigners viewed China were very much embedded in the presentation. NBC, as a corporate American, for-profit broadcaster, was interpreting a vitally important “other” culture for viewers at home. The notion that they were simply explaining what the Chinese producers were trying to project was front and center for the NBC commentators. Each of these cases opens the question of cross-cultural, ideological discursive struggles involved in the interpretation of mass mediated national, historical, and cultural narratives.

Third, situating a study in an Olympic context forces close scrutiny of how the culturally specific and the universal are defined and constructed. Modern Olympics are showcases for national stories set against the backdrop of an Olympic ideology that sees athletic competition as a means of reducing conflict, bridging cultural gaps, and emphasizing our common humanity. The dialectic between the culturally specific and the human universal is on particular display.

The Opening Ceremony was a singular event, a four-hour, self-conscious presentation of China, its history, culture, place in the world, and future prospects produced under the direction of the noted Chinese director Zhang Yimou at the behest of the Chinese state and Chinese Communist Party. The ceremony took place on August 8, 2008 inside Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium constructed for the Games. It consisted of a series of performance vignettes that, taken as a whole, displayed a sense of Chinese-ness. The ceremony featured a cast of thousands, meticulous choreography, elaborate displays of pyrotechniques (some of which turned out to be computer generated) and giant video screens, one of which appeared to unfurl on the stadium floor like a Chinese scrollwork of old and another that

wrapped around the upper reaches of the stadium above the grandstands. It was seen in person by more than 90,000 people, by official count, and was beamed to mass television audiences in China and around the world.⁷

The program was divided into sections, starting with historical scenes and transitioning to contemporary vignettes. The ceremony began with a countdown by 2,008 male drummers who beat on replicas of ancient *fou* drums. Scenes that followed illustrated Chinese ink brush painting, Confucian scholars, the evolution of the Chinese written language, the invention of moveable type and the compass, the splendor of the Tang dynasty and the silk road, China's ancient sea voyages of discovery, and Chinese traditional music and opera. The modern portion of the performance opened with famed pianist Lang Lang playing a contemporary piece with a five-year-old girl that segued into a scene featuring hundreds of green-clad "messengers" outfitted with points of light all over their bodies. They formed and re-formed, first into stars, then into a "peace" pigeon and following that into a replica of the Bird's Nest itself. Also in this section was a modernist performance of the Chinese martial art *taijiquan*, a scene in which school children used crayon-like instruments to make a painting, and a vignette showing Chinese taikonauts⁸ floating around a rising blue planet. One top of the planet were Chinese pop singer Liu Huan and English star Sarah Brightman, who performed a duet of the event's theme song, "You and Me," while umbrella like posters with pictures of smiling children from all over the world were displayed by 2,008 children on the floor of the stadium. Dancers and singers welcomed the athletes, who made a triumphal appearance, team by team. Following Olympic tradition, the Chinese athletes were the last to enter the stadium. In a highly emotional moment, the Olympic Torch appeared in the hands of a Torch bearer. A succession of runners, all former Chinese Olympians, made the last

7 Michael Bristow, "Spectators Awed as Games Begin," News, *BBC News*, August 8, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7550283.stm>.

8 Taikonaut is an English-language word derived by combining the beginning part of the Chinese term for space traveler (the *tai* in *taikong ren*, or literally space person) and the last part of the American word astronaut.

series of jaunts with the Torch until Li Ning, China's most celebrated Olympic gold medalist, took it on its final laps, eventually lighting the Olympic Flame high above the stadium in a finale that had all the earmarks of a high-tech acrobatic act.

Theoretical Framework

The critical comparison of the CCTV and NBC presentations begins with the notion that mass mediated narratives of nation, history, and culture are products of discursive struggles and shaped by ideological demands.⁹ They are inflected by political and economic power relations that change over time, and, in contemporary visual mediated representations, shaped and constrained by the demands of mediated narrative. Stories of nation serve current ideological and disciplinary needs both for China and the United States, and those needs are in many senses different. CCTV's narratives are tied to the Communist Party's ideological project but address profound questions about China's transition to modernity. Western representation has the function of discursively managing China as a cultural and ideological "other."¹⁰

Stuart Hall's work on encoding and decoding offers a theoretical starting point for understanding cultural narratives as discursive struggles. Hall views mediated representation as a dialectic between producers who "encode" material and audiences who "decode" the products presented to them through their own frameworks of reference. He sees three general possibilities emerging: the dominant or hegemonic view, the negotiated or compromise view, or the oppositional, counter-hegemonic view.¹¹ This study focuses on the production of mediated representation and not on audiences; therefore, I am concerned only with the forces that go into Hall's encoding and not with

9 Shi-xu, ed., *Discourse as Cultural Struggle* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), Shi-xu emphasizes discourse in framing the work as Discourse as Cultural Struggle; I prefer to turn the tables and focus on culture as discursive struggle.

10 Cao, "Western Representation of the Other," 105–122.

11 Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 197–208.

decoding. The producers in my study are CCTV and NBC respectively, which interpret the narratives of China and Chinese-ness in the Opening Ceremony according to their respective production codes.¹²

Hall takes a materialist stance about the production of mediated representations: producers draw on codes that result from material conditions of production. CCTV uses production codes of a state broadcaster that has been ordered to fund itself through market mechanisms, subjecting the network to the push and pull of competing forces. CCTV seeks to create programming that is attractive to audiences and advertisers, but it also must promote a view of the past, present and future that articulates the Chinese Communist Party's official line. In the case of NBC, the presentation of the Opening Ceremony draws on codes that are familiar in late capitalist mediated discourse in that they combine discourses of entertainment and information. As a corporate media entity, NBC employs entertainment values aimed at keeping viewers engaged in order to deliver the largest possible audience to advertisers, but it also purports to set in context the "real" China while at the same time presenting an entertaining view of the unfolding spectacle, which is in part fantasy and in part a symbolic depiction of actual historical events and cultural attributes.

Representations of one's own culture and that of an "other" culture are necessarily influenced by power relations that shift from one era to another. This is perhaps easiest to see with historical perspective. In the mid-1930s, China was poor, weak, and exploited both from within and without. The United States was a rising power, even if it was in the throes of a terrible depression. Imperialism and racism were norms, as was a widespread sense among citizens in the United States that it was their noble, Christian duty to aid and enlighten the heathen Chinese, perhaps because they were historical emissaries of a rich and vibrant culture that had fallen on hard times. In terms of the ability to influence representation, America held the upper hand, but China was not without influence. Madame Chiang

¹² The discursive struggle that went into the making of Zhang's program is a matter for another study, one that would have access to empirical data on the interactions involving key Communist Party officials and Zhang, coupled with an analysis of Zhang's own artistic and political history.

Kaishek's charm offense in the United States during World War II arguably helped generate sympathy for the suffering of the Chinese people.¹³ Still, the result was a series of mediated representations of China and Chinese-ness that we see with contemporary sensitivities as grossly paternalistic, racist, distorted and stereotypical.¹⁴

Understanding that narratives of nation and culture are historically contingent – in other words subject to forces that change at different moments in time – comprises a foundational theoretical insight. To move to another step and grasp the ideological functioning of such narratives, it is useful to turn to Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined community of nation as a building block for cultural identity.¹⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein adds the notion that the construction of a nation requires a story of the primordial origins of a people. There is an inherent paradox in the process because the shape of the primordial origin changes to suit the needs of the present.¹⁶ Critical theorist Homi Bhabha adds complexity to the process by arguing that stories of nation comprise an “impossible unity.” He says that this stems from an “ambivalence” generated from a gap between the historically constructed origin of a nation and its culturally particular and changeable social reality.¹⁷ Anthropologist Ann Anagnost elaborates by saying narratives of nation must be constantly reworked in an always tenuous and unstable attempt to achieve this “impossible unity.”¹⁸

13 Karen J. Leong, “Communicating Diplomacy: Eleanor Roosevelt and the U.S. Visit of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, 1943,” *White House Studies* 8, no. 2 (2008): 167–178; Chih-yu Shi, “Madame Chiang and the Nature of China’s Nationalism: Construction of a Latter-day Colonial Male-dominant Culture,” *Research on Women in Modern Chinese History* 3 (1995): 167–199.

14 Karen J. Leong, “Foreign Policy, National Identity, and Citizenship: The Roosevelt White House and the Expediency of Repeal,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 3–30. The U.S. Army’s wartime “How to Spot a Jap Handbook” was based on Milton Caniff’s extraordinarily popular comic strip “Terry and the Pirates,” which told stories about the adventures of two young American males in China before and during World War II and in pre-war years depicted Chinese people as either sinister characters or harmless buffoons.

15 Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983).

16 Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, “The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity,” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, eds. Etienne Balibar & Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 78.

17 Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha. (London: Routledge, 1990), 1–7.

18 Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 4–6.

Postcolonial theory, beginning with Edward Said's foundational work *Orientalism*, helps to address these questions from the point of view of Western representation. Said argues that the West discursively framed the Orient (today's Middle East) as an exotic land of sensuous mystery in order to achieve domination. He calls it a strategy of "flexible positional superiority."¹⁹ The tropes used to describe the Orient, Said argues, "are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a European equivalent."²⁰ For Said, Orientalism locks the "other" forever in a position of subjugation. Although Said was writing primarily about the Middle East, his theoretical framework is useful in the context of China, which encountered the West at the very historical moment when Western, imperial capitalism was on the rise and the Chinese dynastic system was beginning a long and irreversible decline. The result was not formal colonization of China but a period when the Western powers in the nineteenth century forced China to accept certain trade conditions and carved out enclaves and spheres of influence where extraterritoriality ruled. In contemporary official Chinese discourse, this is often referred to as the hundred years of humiliation.²¹

Said argues that, in the case of the Middle East, Orientalism was a discursive system that unfolded in historical stages and was given shape by scholars and writers of literature. One of the insidious things about Orientalism, for Said, was the fact that many of these writers had a deep understanding of Middle Eastern cultures and contributed valuable, specialized cultural knowledge. In the end, however, the discursive system they had a large hand in producing always served the interests

19 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

20 *Ibid.*, 72.

21 William A. Callahan, "The Cartography of National Humiliation and the Emergence of China's Geobody," *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 141–173; William C. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (May 2004): 199–218; Paul A. Cohen, "Remembering and Forgetting National Humiliation in Twentieth-Century China," *Twentieth-Century China* 27, no. 2 (April 2002): 1–39; John W. Garver, *Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993), 4–15; Peter Hays Gries, "Narratives to Live By: The Century of Humiliation and Chinese National Identity Today," in *China's Transformations: The Stories Beyond the Headlines*, ed. Lionel M Jensen and Timothy B Weston (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), xli, 334 p; David Scott, *China and the International System, 1840-1949: Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

of the Western colonizers. The example of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt brings this point home with stunning clarity. Napoleon not only sent armies to Egypt; he also dispatched scholars whose job was to rediscover the Egypt of the French imagination – the ancient Egypt that no longer existed, the civilization that had nothing to do with the people who lived in Egypt at the time. Napoleon's goal was to rediscover an imaginary ancient Egypt so that the light of its civilization could radiate out to the rest of the Middle East.²²

Said's insights suggest that extracting Orientalist discourses in NBC's presentation of the Opening Ceremony would be useful in understanding notions of Chinese history and culture on offer for the American audience. Essentialism, or the idea that there is an inherent, fixed, set of characteristics that describe a people or a culture, is the currency of Orientalist discourse, and extracting a sense of how it evolves historically can be helpful in denaturalizing this kind of discourse. Qing Cao, a leading scholar in the field of Western representation of China, points to ten essentialist features in discourses that appear, disappear and reappear at various times. Cao's ten features are: Confucian wisdom, Oriental despotism, resilient civilization, heroic Chinese, ungrateful wretches, evil Communists, peaceful communitarian society, excessive revolution, modernizing nation, and unrepentant Communist state.²³ Kent Ono and Joy Yang Jiao call this this kind of framing of Chinese characteristics historical Sinoptics.²⁴

22 Said, *Orientalism*, 80–88. This impulse was part of the ideological justification for the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq.

23 Cao, "Western Representation of the Other," 111.

24 Kent A. Ono and Joy Yang Jiao, "China in the US Imaginary: Tibet, the Olympics, and the 2008 Earthquake," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 5, no. 4 (December 2008): 406–410.

Essentialist discourses also do more than just come and go in different periods. They change in character over time as well. One example: in the 1930s it was perfectly well accepted in the West to depict Chinese people in racially demeaning ways.²⁵ Today, race is “spoken about” through silence and innuendo. It is a subject that is not discussed overtly but is implied by what is not said.

When it comes to the specifics of Western representation of China, there are two major theoretical points of view. On one side is the reflective view and on the other is the constructivist position, according to Cao. The reflective view holds that there is a real China that can, theoretically at least, be uncovered, much like a reflection is observed in a mirror. Representation succeeds when the reflection is accurate and fails when it is not. The constructivist view, on the other hand, holds that representation is not a simple process of reflection but is always filtered through cultural and personal perspectives and subject to Foucauldian discipline that makes certain discourses permissible and others off limits.²⁶ Cao provides an extensive bibliography of Western accounts of China written variously from the reflective and constructivist perspectives.²⁷

Cao is firmly in the constructivist camp, but he points out problems with both of these theoretical positions. The reflective view, he argues, breaks down over the impossibility of establishing a means of making a truth claim about what is and is not an accurate representation. What passes for objectivity is largely personal judgment.²⁸ The constructivist view falters over the theoretical impossibility of reconciling competing versions of reality. If everyone necessarily sees things

25 Milton Caniff, *Terry and the Pirates*, ed. Maurice Horn (Franklin Square, N.Y.: Nostalgia Press, 1970). Read by millions of American newspaper readers, *Terry* featured a Chinese character named Connie, who had buck teeth, spoke in pidgin English, and ineptly tried to help the two young, white, male main protagonists of the strip.

26 Cao, “Western Representation of the Other,” 106–109.

27 Cao, “Western Representation of the Other.” See pages 107–109 for Cao's breakdown of authors into reflective and constructivist camps. Among those in the constructivist camp is Colin Mackerras, who ties changing historical images of China in the West to power relations. See Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, Rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1999); Steven Mosher writes from the reflective orientation, arguing that an academic discourse favorable to China fueled a euphoria about the country by the American press corps that, in covering Nixon's visit in 1972, failed to describe the objective Chinese reality of despotism. See Steven W. Mosher, *China Misperceived: American Illusions and Chinese Reality* (New York: BasicBooks, 1990).

28 Cao, “Western Representation of the Other,” 108.

differently – if Westerners and Chinese always look at China through particular cultural codes – there can be no agreement on the nature of truth. However, Cao argues that scholarship from the reflective point of view has made large contributions toward understanding Western representation of China, and constructivism does not mean reducing history to a language game or a projection of one’s subjective views.²⁹ Cao seems to be saying that scholars in both camps operate from an identifiable, common, potentially wide empirical base of social and historical facts. The argument is over which facts are emphasized, for what purposes, and for whose benefit.

A common constructivist perspective holds that Western representations of China should be understood as much for what they say about Western political orientations, power relationships and identities as what they reveal about China. The discourses, images, and ideas conveyed about China are not primarily evaluated for the degree to which they match an overall sense of what is actually happening in China, as would be the case in the reflective view. Dan Schiller, for example, argues that selective representation on the part of the U.S. news media has resulted in a failure to emphasize that China is in the process of creating the largest working class in the history of mankind. Schiller uses representation of China to make a case for a pro-capitalist bias in the American news media that prevents the possibility of a neo-Marxist point of view becoming dominant – something that has more to do with the nature of American society than it does with China.³⁰

There is great value to this kind of approach, as it can highlight discourses that are dominant and those that are left out; it offers a starting point for explaining the relationship between a discursive regime and power relations in a society. But it also leaves much to be desired. It uses China as a foil to explain the West, and offers no theoretical mechanism for a comprehensive explanation of China itself. It likewise makes no normative judgment about what the West should know about China or about what

29 Ibid., 109.

30 Dan Schiller, “China in the United States,” *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 5, no. 4 (December 2008): 411–415. Schiller may or may not be correct in his assessment of the U.S. news media's coverage of the development of a vast Chinese working class. He offers no evidence to back up his claim.

one culture should do to understand another, and it puts the power to craft representations of China entirely in the hands of dominant media powers in the West. What is missing in this theoretical position is a sense of the discursive struggles involved in cross-cultural representation.

If those struggles are reflected through Orientalism in Western representation, they translate into what Xiaomei Chen describes as Occidentalism and Arif Dirlik calls self-orientalism in Chinese representation.³¹ For Chen, Occidentalism can be both oppressive and liberating. It can originate from officialdom or from the people and can be done consciously or unconsciously. Official Occidentalism is seen in how the Chinese state uses essentialized rhetoric to describe Western nations as a means of bolstering Chinese nationalism. Unofficial Occidentalism can come into play in the way Chinese intellectuals make use of Western ideas to push for reforms that would be unpalatable to the authorities. Chen cites the example of Chinese writers appropriating and reconfiguring the Orientalism in Ezra Pound's work. Occidentalism also can be seen in the practice of deciding to consciously play to the West's Orientalist expectations by offering essentialized representations of Chinese characteristics. This is a cultural and political negotiation in which one side (China) appears to give the other side (the West) what it wants, through an elaborate cultural shadow dance.

Chen asserts that Occidentalism “has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others.”³² Director Zhang Yimou, in fact, addressed this very point about the Opening Ceremony when he said that elements of Chinese culture presented in the ceremony must be easy for

31 Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Arif Dirlik, “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism,” *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 98–118.

32 Chen, *Occidentalism*, 2.

foreigners to understand.³³ He also spoke about the Opening Ceremony being remembered for the one picture that would be printed the next day in *The New York Times*. He said he wanted to provide foreign journalists with eight possibilities for that one picture.³⁴

Occidentalism also can encompass a strategic privileging of Western perspectives for oppositional political purposes within China. As an example, Chen discusses a documentary called *River Elegy* that aired on Chinese state television in the mid-1980s, several years before the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989. It was a thinly veiled attack on the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese state, arguing from a point of view that could be seen, both in China and in the West, as fetishizing and idealizing Western liberalism. While such a perspective might be criticized in some quarters in the West as a colonial intrusion or a naïve idealizing of Western values and institutions, it was liberating in a Chinese context, Chen argues.³⁵

In addition, Chinese authorities engage in their own “othering” project -- the othering of their own national minorities. Dru Gladney explains how the People's Republic has worked to establish the idea that China consists primarily of the Han ethnic majority and a variety of relatively unimportant minorities, masking a picture that is far more diverse and multicultural, even within the Han ethnic group. The marginalization of China's subaltern, disenfranchised groups, in fact, is part of the project to represent the Chinese nation as a unified whole.³⁶ Mette Halskov Hansen points out that the Chinese education system professes equality among all ethnic groups, but at the same time education of minorities is promoted as a way to cleanse people of presumed backwardness.³⁷

33 Xia Chen, “Zhang Yimou Reveals Olympic Opening Ceremony Secrets,” *China.org.cn*, November 1, 2007, http://www.china.org.cn/entertainment/2007-11/01/content_1230436.htm.

34 Ibid.

35 Chen, *Occidentalism*, 23–42.

36 Dru C. Gladney, “Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1 (February 1994): 92–123.

37 Mette Halskov Hansen, *Lessons in Being Chinese: Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China* (University of Washington Press, 1999).

Anthropologist Anagnost argues that one of the narrativizing tasks of Chinese cultural discourse for the last hundred years or so has been to come to grips with the notion of the “people” and how to discipline them into becoming a modern citizenry.³⁸ In official, contemporary terms, part of that is presenting a certain aesthetic conception of the people that revolves around notions of beauty as exemplified by the Han ethnic majority.³⁹ For this purpose, China's own national minorities are “othered,” an aspect that came to prominence when it was reported days after the fact that children in the Opening Ceremony who wore the costumes of China's fifty-six officially recognized national minorities were mostly Han Chinese⁴⁰ and that the young girl heard singing “Ode to the Motherland” as other “minority” children carried the Chinese flag into the stadium was not allowed to be seen because she was not deemed pretty enough. Another girl – one who fit the aesthetic requirements – lip synched the song from the floor of Olympic Stadium, apparently unaware that her voice was not actually the one that was heard.⁴¹

38 Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, 1–15.

39 Gladney, “Representing Nationality in China”; Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994). These are two studies that delve into the “othering” of China's minorities.

40 James Fallows, “Their Own Worst Enemy,” *The Atlantic*, November 2008, <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200811/chinese-progress>; Lisa de Moraes of *The Washington Post* wrote that the children were child actors, members of the Galaxy Children's Art Troupe comprised mostly from China's Han ethnic majority. “They're like the white people of China,” she said. See Lisa de Moraes, “Something Else at the Olympics Rings False,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2008, sec. The TV Column.

41 “Another Olympic Secret: Who Was Actually Singing as the National Flag Entered the Stadium? (Updated),” *China Digital Times*, November 22, 2008, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/08/another-olympic-secret-who-was-actually-singing-as-the-national-flag-entered-the-stadium/>; Ariana Eunjung Cha, “Pretty Face and Voice Didn't Belong to Same Girl,” *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/12/AR2008081201567.html?hpid=topnews>; Paul Farhi, “Revelation About Singer Leaves That Syncing Feeling,” *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2008, sec. Style, C01; Jane Macartney and Hannah Fletcher, “New Fakery Scandal, as China's ‘Ethnic’ Children Actually Come from Han Majority,” *The Times Online*, August 16, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/olympics/article4540907.ece>; Mark Magnier, “China Abuzz over Lip-synching Singer,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/aug/13/world/fg-lipsync13>; John Vause, “Olympic Girl Seen but Not Heard,” *CNN.com*, August 12, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/08/12/oly.kids/index.html?iref=allsearch>; Jim Yardley, “In Grand Olympic Show, Some Sleight of Voice,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2008, sec. Sports / Olympics, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/13/sports/olympics/13beijing.html?scp=1&sq=yardley+sleight+of+voice&st=nyt>.

For an understanding of the major elements employed in Orientalist and Occidental discourse – analytical categories that help define cultural sameness and otherness – the work of critical theorist Homi Bhabha provides valuable tools. Bhabha explicates two such categories that are specifically relevant to analyzing the ideological positioning and discursive struggles that underlie the Opening Ceremony – namely, mimicry and the stereotype. Bhabha describes mimicry as colonial desire for an other that is “almost the same but not quite.”⁴² Difference must be maintained, but there is an ambivalence in the process that produces slippage. Representations of an other in this theoretical framework are tension filled, always subject to a dialectical push and pull, never able to rest in a fixed position.⁴³

Bhabha sees the stereotype as a major discursive strategy in colonial discourse, a central feature in the dialectical struggle between colonizers and the colonized, or, by extension, dominators and the dominated. Stereotypes can be highly effective in establishing essentialist notions about groups of people; however, they are anything but stable and fixed. Stereotypes must be nervously and incessantly repeated to maintain their effectiveness.

By delving into the deep psychological workings of mimicry and stereotypes, Bhabha offers insights into how colonial and postcolonial people – the “others” who are the object of Western representation – can themselves have agency and influence how they are represented. In this sense, Bhabha offers a corrective for Said’s relentless fixing of the position of the West relative to the Orient and offers possibilities for a theoretical underpinning of Chen's Occidentalism.

The next theoretical frontier is to understand the possibilities of, and constraints imposed by, mass mediated narrative itself. In tackling this area of theory, I reject the notion offered by some post-structuralists that the use of mediated narrative for the creation of profit in capitalism undermines the

42 Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

43 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. See in particular the chapters titled “The Other Question,” “Of Mimicry and Man,” “Signs Taken for Wonder,” and “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern.”

idea that narrative is innate to humanity.⁴⁴ Indeed, for as long as people have been speaking or writing, they have been communicating through narrative, through storytelling. The oral tradition is steeped in narrative.⁴⁵ Roland Barthes was emphatic on the centrality of narrative in human history. He wrote that narrative “is present in every age, in every place, in every society.... there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative.”⁴⁶ Walter Fisher built a theory of narrative rationality based on the idea that man is a storytelling animal.⁴⁷ Fisher's narrative paradigm holds that humans are by nature storytellers, that “good reasons” in human communication vary depending on situations, genre and media, that history, biography, and culture dictate how “good reasons” are produced and practiced, that humans have an inherent awareness of what constitutes a coherent story and are constantly testing such narrative fidelity, and that humans see the world as a set of stories that are constantly being created afresh.⁴⁸

This does not mean universal rules or structures govern narrative. I accept the post-structuralist notion that there are no deep, underlying structures that dictate rules of engagement for narrative. However, specific historically and culturally contingent forms of expression have identifiable codes of narrative that have a bearing on how cultural narratives are produced. I also accept the idea put forward by Mark Currie that narrative structure is something projected onto a work by a reader, but with one significant caveat based on Hall's work.⁴⁹ Just as Hall posits that there are dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings of a text, I would argue that there are narrative elements within texts that push readers toward perceiving them in one way or another. As Helen Fulton points out, Western novels and films exhibit a certain logic that informs their storytelling techniques.⁵⁰ Narrative used in television

44 Helen Fulton, “Introduction: The Power of Narrative,” in *Narrative and Media* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–8.

45 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

46 Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill & Wong, 1977), 79.

47 Walter R Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, Studies in Rhetoric/communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 5, 18, 24, 58.

48 Ibid., 64–65.

49 Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 2–3.

50 Helen Fulton, “Novel to Film,” in *Narrative and Media*, by Helen Fulton et. al. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge

news as practiced in the West displays textual features that arguably have changed in recent decades, resulting in noticeable differences in narrative production.⁵¹ These differences influence how viewers understand narrative structure, to relate back to Currie's idea. The picture can be complex, however. "A narrative text is not like a house with clearly demarcated floors but more like a horizontal and often cluttered conglomerate of the most diverse narrative elements," say Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck.⁵² The ensuing chapters identify particular features in both the NBC and CCTV presentations that shape the emerging cultural narratives.

Scholarship in visual rhetoric can aid in understanding the functioning of narrative codes in the two televisual presentations. In his work on visual literacy, Paul Messaris explains how certain film editing techniques can be used to motivate a narrative or indicate a change of time, location, or scene.⁵³ Point-of-view editing, for example, is a common technique used in Hollywood films to promote continuity. The idea here is that a shot that shows a character looking in a certain direction should be followed by one that displays what the person is looking at. But Messaris argues that narrative and cultural context, and not adherence to any particular filmmaking code, is the most important determinant in an audience member's ability to make meaning. For example, he discusses a film made by novice Navajo filmmakers who violated classical Hollywood principles in the making of a movie about a medicine man. The filmmakers deliberately used jump cuts – the juxtaposition of shots without smooth transitions so as to make the scenes seem to jump from one to the other. A character who is sitting down might suddenly be seen standing up. The jump cuts bothered neither the filmmakers nor

University Press, 2005), 97.

51 Ibid., 140–152.

52 Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, Frontiers of Narrative (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 109.

53 Paul Messaris, *Visual "Literacy": Image, Mind, and Reality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 71–112.

their Navajo audiences, precisely because they all understood the cultural background and the narrative sequence involved in the medicine man's work. Cultural and narrative context overrode what might in another cultural realm have been seen as a herky-jerky distraction.

Another reminder of the importance of cultural and historical context in analyzing the signification of images comes in Cara Finnegan's work on the reception of a photograph of Abraham Lincoln that was published for the first time in 1895. Finnegan argues that beyond attributing characteristics to Lincoln based on his historical image at the time, readers of the photograph drew their interpretations from discourses such as phrenology and physiognomy, which were considered scientific at the time.⁵⁴ The rhetoric of the period laid the basis for what became taken-for-granted notions that head size and shape seen in photographs could reveal deep character traits. This kind of analysis may seem far afield from the Opening Ceremony, but it serves as a reminder that, to the extent possible with a contemporary event, an awareness must be maintained that elements that go into the making of narratives are culturally and historically contingent.

Narrative is intertwined with ideology and myth, both of which are evident in the Opening Ceremony. For purposes of the study, I use the term ideology broadly, in a modified Althusserian sense, as Rosemary Huisman does: ideology amounts to a worldview – a set of values or an articulation of a cultural narrative – that is naturalized as unproblematic, masking things that might otherwise come to the fore.⁵⁵ Ideology also can be thought of as a system of values and beliefs that a state wishes to impose. Myth has a Barthesian sense as stories that support values, truths and beliefs that comprise ideological positions.⁵⁶ Myth in the Opening Ceremony operates in another register -- literally as

54 Cara A. Finnegan, "Recognizing Lincoln: Image Vernaculars in Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 31–57.

55 Rosemary Huisman, "Narrative Concepts," in *Narrative and Media*, by Helen Fulton et. al. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11–27; Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Marxists.org*, 1970, <http://marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>.

56 Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 109–159; Roland Barthes, "Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today," in *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill & Wong, 1977), 164–169. Barthes' views on myth evolved in the fifteen years between *Mythologies* and *Image Music Text*.

fantastical stories about Chinese history and culture. As such they can be cross-referenced against various historical understandings for a greater appreciation of their ideological content and function.

In the Opening Ceremony myth is also intertwined with a sense of realism. Within a presentation that is fantastical, a production meant to dazzle and entertain, is an appeal to realism not functionally unlike the classical realism that Catherine Belsey describes.⁵⁷ The stories in the Opening Ceremony at one level purport to tell a “real” story of the evolution of China, from the time of Confucius to the present and into the future, and as such serve as an ideological antidote to whatever real problems may be bubbling outside the confines of the Olympic Stadium in Beijing.

Hayden White makes some cogent observations about the nature of historical narrative and its relationship to the real and the imaginary. He says first of all that narrativity is a universal human metacode.⁵⁸ We not only understand history by telling stories, but we also use narrativity to separate the real from the imaginary.⁵⁹ At least two versions of events are necessary for the emergence of a historical narrative; otherwise, there would be no reason for a historian to write a purportedly true account of history in the first place. Historians construct plots that in the end work as historical narratives because they reveal a story that we come to believe was there all along and not simply manufactured because of the demands of narrativity itself. This gives reality “the odor of the ideal,”⁶⁰ and allows us to fulfill a desire to have real events “display the coherency, integrity, fullness and closure” that can exist only in the imaginary.⁶¹ However, if the structure of narrative becomes too visible, it loses its potency. A historical story demands closure, but that demand is really a call for moral meaning.⁶²

57 Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

58 Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 6.

59 *Ibid.*, 10.

60 *Ibid.*, 23.

61 *Ibid.*, 27.

62 *Ibid.*, 24.

By suggesting that historical narrative infuses the “odor” of the ideal, the imaginary, into the explication of the meaning of real events, White raises questions about the difficulties of maintaining closure in narrative. To reiterate, Bhabha and Anagnost address the point, suggesting nation is an “impossible unity” that requires narration, but closure is resisted.⁶³ Anagnost argues that narrative activity can never be final because narrative is about the performativity of language, which disrupts closure, making unity “impossible.” Narrative bridges gaps in the story of nations, but full, lasting closure is never possible, and gaps can be reopened at any time. Attempts to close these newly reopened gaps call for telling new stories about a nation’s past, which again resist closure. The cycle goes on and on.⁶⁴ Together, White and Anagnost raise questions that suggest the analyst should be on the lookout for moments of disjuncture, when narrative resists closure. Indeed Anagnost’s project focuses largely on finding critical moments in China’s modern history when national narratives have been “radically reorganized.”⁶⁵ The Beijing Olympics arguably qualifies as one of those moments.

Analyzing the narratives of China and “Chinese-ness” offered by CCTV and NBC requires contextualization. Media texts are not written on a blank slate. Each of the networks were operating in an industrial/cultural milieu, in a contemporary context influenced by the themes raised by the dominant journalistic discourses at the time of the Games. Further theoretical tools are needed to understand the structural framework in which their presentations were created. As Nitin Govil points out, “Media industries play an important role in assembling the technologies of interconnection associated with the imagination and narration of the national.”⁶⁶

63 Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, 1–4; Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (Routledge, 1990), 1–7.

64 Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, 1–15.

65 *Ibid.*, 3.

66 Nitin Govil, “Thinking Nationally: Domicile, Distinction, and Dysfunction in Global Media Exchange,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 133.

Theoretical insights and tools from critical/cultural studies can be applied to this portion of the study. NBC, as a corporate broadcaster with a primary goal of generating profit, and CCTV, a state entity that was required to transmit state and Party messages and seek revenues, were operating in very different milieus and serving different functions in their respective societies. Yet both were immersed in and subject to forces emanating from the ongoing globalization of media, even if the degree of immersion and type of globalizing forces were different in each case.

Critical/cultural studies theorizes connections between culture and communication and demands attention to the political economy of media, as Douglas Kellner notes. One specific avenue of investigation is the relationship of media spectacle to corporate agglomeration of media.⁶⁷ The next chapter undertakes the task of explaining the relationship of CCTV and NBC to their respective industrial and governmental structures. We will see in the case of CCTV how the network balanced its dual roles as official purveyor of Communist Party narratives and commercial broadcaster facing increased competition domestically and internationally. We will also see how NBC's evolution both as an entertainment and an information network forced it to weave both discourses into the Opening Ceremony broadcast.

Critical/cultural studies offers a number of complementary theoretical frameworks for viewing media production in the current age of globalization. Joseph Straubhaar makes a powerful argument that rebuts previous theories of media dependency and calls for viewing the media landscape in more nuanced terms. Rather than understanding the world as a place where powerful, mostly U.S. media conglomerates are imposing their products and processes on an unsuspecting world, Straubhaar sees a continuum from dependency to independence, which he calls asymmetrical interdependence. He argues for examination of structural factors such as intervention of the state, conflicts between domestic and

⁶⁷ Douglas Kellner, "Media Industries, Political Economy, and Media/Cultural Studies: An Articulation," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 101–104.

international elites, interests of key national elites, entrepreneurial competition, technological change, and agendas of key production personnel.⁶⁸ Michael Curtin, in moving away from dependency theory, highlights what he calls sociocultural variation in media texts. Curtin says national and local institutions exert great power in media production, despite the globalizing trend toward production and distribution of content from central production hubs (Hollywood being one of them).⁶⁹ Straubhaar and Curtin's insights speak to the power and capability of CCTV to absorb production techniques from the West and still project narratives that articulate and disseminate Chinese Communist Party policies.

Hong Zhang, while remaining unsatisfied with the Western-oriented approaches outlined above, suggests that global transformation theory can help elucidate what he calls China's particular configuration of media industries.⁷⁰ Global transformation theory makes a case that is similar to that made for sociocultural variation in Curtin's rubric. Media globalization takes on difference forms in different places based in particular historical circumstances and the relative power of each particular nation-state as it relates to forces impinging from outside. As an example, Zhang raises the case of China's about-face and lifting of a media cover-up in 2003 about the extent of the SARS problem when faced with outside pressure. The point is that permission for the Chinese media to report relatively freely about SARS stemmed from outside pressure but was short-lived, and restrictions were reimposed once the crisis passed. Global transformation theory helps explain this kind of development by moving away from the notion that the forces of globalization are overpowering the nation-state. But Zhang also

68 Joseph D. Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Assymetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity.," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, no. 1 (March 1991): 39.

69 Michael Curtin, "Thinking Globally: From Media Imperialism to Media Capital," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 112–115.

70 Hong Zhang, "Media Imperialism and Its Revisionist Approach Revisited: Toward a Synthesized Analytical Framework of Television Globalization in China.," *China Media Research* 7, no. 1 (January 2011): 112–124.

notes a limitation that stems from this shift: the theory focuses on policy making at the macro (national) level and inadequately explains the dynamics of policy implementation at lower levels that are so crucial to understanding media dynamics in China.⁷¹

Taken together, these theoretical approaches offer a rich vineyard to pick approaches that will help illuminate the location of NBC and CCTV within the global media industry. Setting the cultural/industrial/journalistic context for the NBC and CCTV texts, which is accomplished in Chapter Two, will help provide a richer understanding of the narratives of China and “Chinese-ness” that emerge, the discursive, dialectical relationships in their production, and the ideological functioning of the discourses.

Method

The theoretical orientation selected for the close readings of the CCTV and NBC presentations calls for an interpretative, qualitative approach informed by methods used in text, discourse, and semiotic analysis, coupled with historical research and the deployment of analytic tools used in visual rhetoric and narratology. This involves a methodological approach that suits the goals of the study, which seeks to expose the narratives of China, Chinese history and Chinese cultural attributes emerging from each presentation, explain how they are significantly similar or different, examine how each portrays the relationship between Chinese particularity and universal human values, explicate how Chinese history is re-narrativized in each presentation, and importantly how broad ideological discourses underlie each text.

A methodological bricolage suits the questions under study and the theoretical orientation aimed at answering them. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln see the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur who uses whatever combination of methods is appropriate to the research questions under study. The bricoleur is like a quilt maker, montage filmmaker, or jazz musician who improvises and moves

71 Ibid.

through various styles to create a work. Call it triangulation or crystallization, bricolage brings different methods together. Example of bricolage would be experiences of a native village told through fiction, field notes and scientific articles.⁷²

The close examinations of the broadcast presentations draw on a textual analysis method outlined by Anssi Perakyla. This technique calls for reading and rereading of texts “to pin down their key themes and, thereby, to draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which the textual material is a specimen.”⁷³ As a first step, a detailed, complete transcript of both broadcasts was produced, using commercially available DVD recordings of each broadcast.⁷⁴ For the CCTV broadcast, a transcription in Chinese was rendered into English.⁷⁵ Analytical insights were separately recorded during the transcription process, as Rosalind Gill suggests.⁷⁶ A thick description of the commentary of both the NBC and CCTV narrations and the visual elements that go with the commentary in each presentation was developed.

Care was taken to forensically scrutinize the entirety of both texts. Every scene was examined and re-examined as a safeguard against selecting elements that appealed strictly for subjective reasons. Data were aggregated by theme, and new categories suggested themselves inductively in the course of the data collection process.⁷⁷ Analyzing a text that is by nature audiovisual means the unit of analysis must combine images and audio commentary from the presenters. The analysis operated under the

72 Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005), 6.

73 Anssi Perakyla, “Analyzing Talk and Text,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005), 870.

74 CCTV, *The Opening Ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, Ma Runsheng, exec. producer, DVD, 2 vols. (Beijing, 2008); *NBC Beijing 2008 Complete Opening Ceremony*, Dick Ebersol, exec. producer, DVD, 2 vols. (Beijing, 2008).

75 The translation and transcriptions are my own, but I was assisted by my wife, who is a native Chinese speaker and professional interpreter and teacher of the Chinese (Mandarin) language. I have been a student of the Chinese language for more than 30 years and did my own interviews in Chinese and my own reading in Chinese when I was a Beijing-based correspondent for *The Asian Wall Street Journal* from 1986 to 1988.

76 Rosalind Gill, “Discourse Analysis,” in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, ed. Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell (London: SAGE Publication, 2000), 177–178.

77 Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, eds., *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2002), 214–215.

principle that the smallest unit of analysis should concern a particular, identifiable theme in the text.⁷⁸ At times that was a single sentence uttered by a commentator together with the visual elements on display during that sentence. At other times, it was an extended, multi-sentence description and the corresponding visuals. At still other times, it involved a dialogue with more than one commentator about an identifiable narrative theme. In the forthcoming chapters, portions of the dialogue are extensively quoted to provide a flavor of the presentations and to ensure that a fully nuanced account of the narratives on offer is discussed. The narratives are what Rosemary Huisman calls “master stories... dominant in a culture. These are stories, or myths, through which a culture tells itself its ideology, its idea of what is natural in its social order.”⁷⁹ Susan Chase notes that narratives are “socially situated interactive performances – as produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes.”⁸⁰ In this case, there is one performance and one setting, with commentaries aimed at two distinct and very different audiences.

The study accepts Gill’s key features of the epistemological basis of discourse analysis (DA). She argues that DA is skeptical about the idea that observations of the world unproblematically reveal truth. DA posits that common understandings of the world stem from historical and cultural views that

78 Rosemary Huisman, “Aspects of Narrative in Series and Serials,” in *Narrative and Media* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 153–171; Diana Rose, “Analysis of Moving Images,” in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, ed. Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell (London: SAGE Publication, 2000), 246–262. Rose provides an example in which the smallest unit is the individual shot while Huisman argues for using the segment in the analysis of a television series.

79 Huisman, “Narrative Concepts,” 16.

80 Susan E. Chase, “Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005), 657.

change over time, that knowledge is socially constructed, meaning that social processes and not things inherent in nature shape human understandings, and that exploring knowledge is linked to action and practice.⁸¹

The study also accepts Gill's four themes about discourse analysis:⁸²

--The concern is for discourse itself. All forms of talk – conversational or textual – are encompassed under the term discourse. Concern is focused on texts themselves and how they operate and are organized.

--Language is constructive, meaning that it is manufactured using linguistic resources such as narrative forms and tropes. Language mediates reality – it is our window into understanding, but that aspect of understanding is hidden from view. We may think we see the world in an unmediated, direct way, but looking at discourse in this way explains why we need narrative to understand our own lives and the world around us.

--Discourse is a social practice and has certain functions. In the case of the texts of the Opening Ceremony presentations, the discourses offer narratives and ideological positions about China, placing before audiences a reading of events that seems natural. In other words each text suggests what Hall might call a dominant, hegemonic reading. Actual audience readings are not involved in discourse analysis or in the study.

--Discourse is organized rhetorically, meaning texts suggest readings that can be compared to other possible readings, including those that are imagined or unsaid. In this view, rhetoric mediates the conflicts in social life by suggesting a certain version or interpretation of events as compared to others. This idea dovetails with Hall's notion that texts offer hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional reading possibilities.

81 Gill, "Discourse Analysis," 172–190.

82 Ibid., 173–176.

The discourse analysis undertaken in the study has a critical edge but cannot be classified as critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the sense developed by Gordon Fairclough and Teun van Dijk.⁸³ CDA is concerned with how texts reproduce power and inequality and is focused on actively attempting to overturn and subvert structures of inequality. Van Dijk, for example, in discussing discourse and manipulation, uses CDA to unmask abuse of discursive power.⁸⁴ My study is critical to the extent that it is concerned with cultural narratives and the ideologies that underpin them, but it is not focused on the moral and worthy principle prominent in CDA that seeks not just to unmask but to promote change for the benefit of the marginalized and oppressed.

Semiotic analysis is a useful supplement to narrative and discourse analysis, particularly since the object of study is a visual text with a stunning array of points of reference that conjure up ideas and images woven into the fabric of Chinese cultural narratives. The study accepts the post-structuralist insight that the line between subject and object is not clear and that signifiers always already come with chains of signification built into them. A picture of a Confucian scholar viewed in August 2008 in Beijing does not emerge from a clean slate; it already has multiple levels of signification built into it, based on complex historical, cultural and social discourses.

On one level, the work of semiotic analysis is aimed at bringing to the fore the cultural knowledge necessary to understand a particular scene or set of images. But it also has the goal of unmasking the taken-for-granted nature of understanding by showing, through an explanation of the working of signification, how those ideas are constructed.⁸⁵ Semiotic analysis also can be useful in discussing what is not said, what does not need to be said, and what cannot be said. Semiotic analysis can be particularly helpful in analyzing moments when the commentators fall silent and nothing but visual imagery is transmitted. Likewise, visual images that are laden with sedimented significance but

83 Perakyla, "Analyzing Talk and Text," 871.

84 Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse and Manipulation," *Discourse & Society* 17, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 359–383.

85 Gemma Penn, "Semiotic Analysis of Still Images," in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, ed. Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell (London: SAGE Publication, 2000), 231–232.

are accompanied only by spartan verbal commentary likewise can be understood more deeply using this technique. Semiotic analysis is necessarily selective. The analyst chooses the array of images that is needed to answer a specific question. The analysis stops when sufficient evidence is brought to bear to answer the question.⁸⁶

The selective nature of semiotic analysis and the lack of reliability leave the method open to searing criticism. If each analyst of a certain set of images comes up with different results, is this not an example of a strictly idiosyncratic method? Semiotic analysis has failed to achieve status as a valid, scientific method precisely because this question cannot be answered adequately. However, a powerful counter-argument is that in any image or series of images there are items that analysts generally find salient, that demand explanation. Analysts may differ on interpretation, but the differences will be about the same material.⁸⁷ Anyone conducting a semiotic analysis of the Opening Ceremony, for example, would be required to consider the Confucian scholars and the drummers. In any event, the study makes use of semiotic analysis as a supplemental method, in that way mitigating criticism that might stem from its exclusive use.

A wide variety of communicative disciplines makes use of semiotic analysis. Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin, for example, use the method to explain how stylistic features, pose, gaze, and even building materials in World War I monuments in Britain were selected to evoke connotative meanings that fit the ideological requirements to cast suffering in the war in a certain way.⁸⁸ Jonathan Matusitz

86 Ibid., 237–239.

87 Ibid., 239–240.

88 Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin, “Analysing the Language of War Monuments,” *Visual Communication* 9, no. 2 (May 1, 2010): 131–149.

uses the technique to link an iconic song by Cui Jian, arguably post-Maoist China's first rock superstar, to the rise of postmodernism and youthful rebellion, at least in urban China.⁸⁹ Semiotic analysis is used to analyze gay-bashing in a U.S. Senate campaign in the state of Montana.⁹⁰

At the most basic level, semiotic analysis has obvious value for the study in explaining an event that makes extensive use of symbols: moveable type symbolizing the Great Wall and its collapse signaling the opening of China to the outside world, or the use of lights to indicate the historical moment of Chinese modernity when the country linked to the world economy. But semiotic analysis also can help illustrate some of the deeper levels of signification at work when signs of one historical period are juxtaposed and transformed into signs of another period. For example, the technique helps in understanding how the Chinese character for harmony is used in the CCTV presentation to link a traditional Confucian idea to a central element in current Communist Party ideology.

Analyzing film editing techniques is a useful methodological supplement to semiotic analysis in further understanding the CCTV and NBC presentations of the Opening Ceremony. Messaris offers an overview of techniques aimed at providing continuity from scene to scene and at bridging gaps in time, space, and situations.⁹¹ Point-of-view editing provides continuity while other editing techniques can be employed to change location, time, or type of reality.⁹² Film editing also can be used to suggest ideas. Messaris uses as an example a 1984 Reagan campaign commercial that showed the president taking the oath of office in 1981 interspersed with shots of Americans going about their morning business. Among images shown were construction workers on a crane, a cowboy shoeing a horse, and workers arriving at a factory. The clear intention was to associate American renewal with Ronald Reagan's presidency. (In semiotic terms, the idea was to use Ronald Reagan's inauguration to metonymically signify American

89 Jonathan Matusitz, "Semiotics of Music: Analysis of Cui Jian's 'Nothing to My Name,' the Anthem for the Chinese Youths in the Post-Cultural Revolution Era," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 1 (2010): 156–175.

90 Philip D. Dalton and John R. Butler, "Getting Clipped: Denial and Masculinity Politics in the 2002 US Senate Race in Montana," *Western Journal of Communication* 74, no. 3 (2010): 226–248.

91 Messaris, *Visual "Literacy,"* 71–112.

92 *Ibid.*, 93.

renewal though the association with signs of economic resurgence and spiritual rebirth.) Various editing techniques are evident in the Opening Ceremony; my study analyzes them only when doing so can illuminate the broad questions under study.

The final methodological stage in the study involves examining structural elements in both texts that help shape and constrain the narratives that emerge. The point is to expose narrative structural and stylistic elements that have a bearing on meaning that emerges from the CCTV and NBC texts. One of the most salient examples that will be discussed in the upcoming chapters involves the question of authorship of the Opening Ceremony. The CCTV commentators never mention director Zhang Yimou, enabling the network to indicate that the real author and speaking subject of the ceremony is the Chinese Communist Party itself. NBC, on the other hand, goes out of its way to emphasize that the ceremony is the brainchild of Zhang himself. The ideological effect of this move is to submerge the role of the Party and emphasize the supposed prominence of individuality in contemporary China.

The chapters ahead also examine the question of narrative closure and features of each text that work against it. This is a key methodological test of whether and to what extent elements of each presentation meet the standards of narrative rationality laid out by Walter Fisher, with particular attention to narrative fidelity. In Hayden White's terms, the test might be whether a particular narrative contains enough of the "odor" of the imaginary to make comfortable sense. Portions of the commentaries that erase history and therefore fail these tests provide clues to their ideological positioning. In neither presentation, for example, is Maoism and Maoist rule discussed. The omission of even a mention of the leader of the Communist revolution and founder of the People's Republic of China has different ideological implications for each presentation.

Outlined above is a methodological bricolage, to be sure, but the specific approaches were selected with care in the pursuit of understanding how two mass mediated presentations aimed at very different national audiences constructed national and cultural narratives about China as a result of

discursive struggles shaped by ideological demands. Beyond detailing the narrative themes offered by the two networks, the chapters ahead discuss the ideological implications of those narratives and analyze the narrative techniques employed that resulted in their emergence. Before launching into the close reading of each presentation, however, the context in which the networks went about their work will be laid out.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two sets the context for the close analysis in three related ways. First, the two networks are located in the industrial/cultural media nexus in which they operate. Next, the chapter discusses the issues that were prominent in media coverage both in China and the U.S. around the time of the Games in order to juxtapose them against interpretations emerging in the CCTV and NBC broadcasts. Finally, Chapter Two provides historical background on themes in the Opening Ceremony as a means of cross-referencing the CCTV and NBC interpretations against historical fact and interpretation.

The industrial/cultural context in which CCTV and NBC function provides a broad outline of their production codes and offers a deeper framework to understand how the narratives about China emerged. CCTV's evolution from a crude propaganda arm of the Communist Party to a network that attempts to serve an entertainment as well as a propaganda function helps to explain how Western techniques of mass communication were employed in doing the bidding of the party-state. Setting CCTV in context requires a look at a media environment that is arguably without parallel or precedent. Although CCTV is the broadcast arm of the Chinese Communist Party and operates under the supervision and guidance of the Party apparatus that regulates messages for ideological purposes, it also, like the rest of the Chinese media, has been pushed into the neoliberal realm of operating on a commercial basis with the idea of generating profit. This has forced CCTV to pay close attention to audience tastes as well as the requirements of the Party for content that supports ideological purposes. To explicate this context, I draw from a number of scholarly studies that discuss the evolving media

landscape in China in terms of both journalism and entertainment.⁹³ Attention is paid to the major analytical categories that Kellner and Straubhaar lay out: the relationship of the state to media industries, economic forces, and media competition that set the structural framework for the operation of the two networks.

NBC's development from a network that at one time strictly separated information and entertainment to the television broadcast arm of a media conglomerate that fuses information and entertainment discourses is also explained in Chapter Two. NBC's history and corporate practices led the network to offer a program that would make use of entertainment discourses to attract a large audience and also employ information discourses in an effort to explain an "other" culture of great importance to the United States. An understanding of this context lays the basis for analyzing how the use of both discourses contributed to ideological message-making and led to narrative disjunction and incoherence in the NBC presentation.

Having explained the industrial and cultural background, the chapter moves on to discuss the journalistic context in which the Opening Ceremony broadcasts were produced, both in China and the United States. Issues that were prominent in the journalistic discourse around the time of the Olympics are explored, providing reference points so that later chapters can explain how each broadcast addressed – or did not address – those issues. In China, the party-state closely controls messages in the

93 Xu Hua, "Morality Discourse in the Marketplace: Narratives in the Chinese Television News Magazine *Oriental Horizon*," *Journalism Studies* 1, no. 4 (November 2000): 637–647; John Jirik, "The AOL Time Warner CCTV (China) Television Exchange: Guanxi in Globalization Theory," in *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association* (presented at the International Communication Association, San Diego, California: International Communication Association, 2003), 1–28; James Lull, *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1991); Normandy Madden, "How China Buys and Sells TV," *Advertising Age* 77, no. 19 (May 8, 2006): 26; Peter C. Pugsley and Jia Gao, "Emerging Powers of Influence: The Rise of the Anchor in Chinese Television," *International Communication Gazette* 69, no. 5 (October 2007): 451–466; Jingrong Tong and Colin Sparks, "Investigative Journalism in China Today," *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 3 (June 2009): 337–352; Xiao Wang, "Entertainment, Education, or Propaganda? A Longitudinal Analysis of China Central Television's Spring Festival Galas," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 54, no. 3 (July 2010): 391–406; Yong Zhong, "CCTV 'Dialogue' = Speaking + Listening: a Case Analysis of a Prestigious CCTV Talk Show Series Dialogue," *Media, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (November 2004): 821–840; Yong Zhong, "Competition Is Getting Real in Chinese TV: a Moment of Confrontation Between CCTV and HSTV," *Media International Australia*, no. 124 (2007): 68–81; Haiqing Yu, "Dwelling Narrowness: Chinese Media and Their Disingenuous Neoliberal Logic," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 25, no. 1 (2011): 33.

official media, which means that CCTV was expected to mirror what was reported in the run-up to the Games. We shall see how in large part, Chinese media coverage established themes for the CCTV broadcast, such as how the Chinese tradition unproblematically informs Chinese modernity. We will also see how the CCTV broadcast, influenced by the need to attract audiences and not resort to the crude propaganda of the past, avoids narratives on politically sensitive issues that had been in the Chinese media, such as how protests against Chinese policies in Tibet were nothing more than anti-China expressions. Reporting by the American media in the weeks before the Games likewise established themes, such as China's poor human rights record and the country's role as a major polluter of the environment, that NBC, as an information network, had no choice but to address in its presentation. We will see how NBC, in applying both the discourses of entertainment and information, alternatively hits hard and downplays such criticisms of China, creating narrative disjuncture.

To set the journalistic context in China, summaries of representative articles from the official Xinhua News Agency, the *People's Daily*, and the English-language *China Daily* are offered in Chapter Two. The American journalistic context is established using offerings from newspaper and television outlets that comprise the mainstream national media: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and Fox News.

The historical section of the chapter lays the groundwork for understanding the ideological implications of the CCTV and NBC texts as they relate to interpretations of China's long political, economic, social, and cultural history. An understanding of how Confucius and Confucianism have been interpreted and re-interpreted over the course of the centuries is essential in exposing the ideological underpinning of both network's interpretations of Confucian scenes in the ceremony. Another prominent historical vignette in the Opening Ceremony depicts China's historic voyages of exploration, a period in the fifteenth century when China was the dominant naval power in the world. Both networks glorify these achievements but do not mention that China's imperial rulers shut down

the drive for maritime power only decades later, setting the stage for an aggressive, imperial West to humiliate and partially dismember China in the centuries that followed. Chapter Two discusses that history, laying the groundwork to analyze the ideological implications of the CCTV and NBC erasures. Research into the tributary system of trade employed by Chinese dynasties provides the context to understand the omissions CCTV and NBC make in their interpretations of China's historic dealings with foreign commerce. Without an understanding of history, the way history is used for ideological purposes in both the CCTV and NBC narratives cannot be grasped. For this, the study will rely primarily on a range of secondary historical sources.⁹⁴

Two chapters follow that offer close readings of the CCTV and NBC narratives. Chapter Three takes on the task of analyzing the CCTV presentation and shows how the Chinese network offers a narrative that presents China's history as an ever-evolving story that begins with a primordial origin and advances steadily, with remarkable inventions such as printing and papermaking, effortlessly culminating in China's sparkling modernity and promise of a limitless future. In CCTV's interpretation of the Opening Ceremony, Confucianism and other elements of the Chinese tradition unproblematically inform Chinese modernity, suturing the past and present. China and the West finally are operating on a

94 O. Edmund Clubb, *20th Century China*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Roger Daniels, "Westerners from the East: Oriental Immigrants Reappraised," *The Pacific Historical Review* 35, no. 4 (November 1966): 373–383; X. L. Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism"; John King Fairbank and Ta-tuan Ch'en, *The Chinese World Order; Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, Harvard East Asian Studies 32 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); Ted C. Fishman, *China, Inc.: How the Rise of the Next Superpower Challenges America and the World* (New York: Scribner, 2005); John W. Garver, *Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993); Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405-1433* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); Morris Rossabi, ed., *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1983); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982); Denis Crispin Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China* (New York: Frederic C. Beil, 1983); Denis Crispin Twitchett and John King Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

level cultural playing field, in a long-overdue reversal of historic proportions. China moreover has produced a citizenry that is disciplined and eager to submit to the rigors of incorporation on an equal, reciprocal basis into world capitalism.

Chapter Four turns to the NBC broadcast and shows how the American network produces a profoundly different picture of China, its history and culture, its place in the world, and its future. For NBC, the key word is ambivalence. The commentators offer an interpretation that welcomes China's embrace of capitalism but indicates that much more reform is needed before the nation can be fully accepted into the world economic system. An Orientalist sense of marvel about China's past pervades the broadcast, and there is nervousness about the West's ability to contain the Chinese other as "almost the same but not quite." At the same time, the commentary artfully dodges, without entirely avoiding, sensitive questions about China's authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies. Chinese individuality is highlighted, and collectivism is depicted as a possible threat. The question of whether China will be a friend or foe of the United States is on the table, even as the role of the Communist Party is minimized.

Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, critically compares and contrasts the two broadcast texts, arguing that each aims at fully incorporating China into the world capitalist system but on very different terms. CCTV sees China emerging from the periphery and competing with the rest of the capitalist world on an equal basis. The ideological effect of the NBC commentary, by contrast, would have China develop in a way that would preserve its "almost the same but not quite" status and remain on the margins of world capitalism. The ideological nature of the broadcasts is more hidden in the NBC presentation, but both strain narrative credibility because the stories offered by each depend on major historical erasures. The chapter raises a series of questions about the deeply embedded cross-cultural discursive struggles that characterize the texts, offering ideas that can be used as a basis for future work.

Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of the value of a critical, comparative approach to the analysis of media texts in academia, journalism, or any other field with an interest in China and cross-cultural representation. To illustrate the point, I show how the ideological discourses that underlie the CCTV and NBC broadcasts mirror actual foreign policy positions and debates. Realists and constructivists present different arguments in the policy sphere just as scholars who argue from the reflective view debate constructivists about how representation of China in the West works.

To sum up, the study breaks significant scholarly ground in general and specific ways. The study suggests strategies for interrogating broad questions about mass mediated representations of nation and culture, of the dialectical workings of the representation of otherness and sameness, and the tie between mass mediated representation and ideology. It offers additional insight into a significant aspect of Western representation of China, an area that is not sufficiently studied. It additionally adds a contrasting self-representation of China by the nation-state's own official broadcaster, which is another area that is insufficiently studied. The ability to draw insights by contrasting these views is likewise groundbreaking. Undertaking such work enables an exploration into new theorizing about the nature of cultural representation: that cultural narratives are dialectical, ideologically-riven constructions that involve a complex matrix of economic, political, and economic factors that push from the site of representation and pull from the location from which representation emanates. These points will come into clearer focus in the ensuing chapters. It is time now to turn to the study itself, beginning with setting the context for the close reading of the CCTV and NBC presentations.

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Chapter Two: Industrial, Historical, and Cultural Background

Mass mediated cultural and historical narratives do not spring to life like some miracle of creation. They emerge at a particular time and place and are products of complex formulations linked to the political, social, and industrial milieus in which the creators of narratives are located. They are ideologically-riven building blocks of imagined communities central to the construction of national identity. In the case of the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the structural dimensions that help frame and constrain the narratives emerging from the CCTV and NBC broadcasts can be understood by delving into three specific areas of inquiry: the political and industrial settings in which CCTV and NBC operated, journalistic themes around the time of the Opening Ceremony, and the historical interpretations of themes and events depicted in the ceremony itself.

These may appear at first glance to be disparate topics of examination, but they are intimately related and of great importance in enabling an analysis of the socially and ideologically constructed nature of the narratives offered in the CCTV and NBC broadcasts. A sense of the structural pressures and constraints under which each network operated will set general expectations for the range of approaches and interpretations in their respective broadcasts and expose fields of prescribed and circumscribed interpretation. Examining the journalistic record will establish the major contemporary issues that were circulating in the Chinese and U.S. media in the days and weeks leading up to the Games, enabling the analysis of the two broadcast texts to expose how CCTV and NBC either mirrored or deflected issues and ideas that had been swirling in the public domain, thereby providing further insights into the socially and ideologically constructed nature of the network narratives. Examining historical interpretations of themes in the Opening Ceremony will set the stage for analytical work in subsequent chapters. Juxtaposing factual and interpretive work by professional historians against narratives offered in the two broadcasts will provide further evidence of their ideological bent.

This chapter takes on these three tasks, which will set the context for a close reading of the CCTV and NBC presentations of the Opening Ceremony. The work will proceed in three steps. First, CCTV and NBC will be located within their respective political and industrial structures with the aim of providing an understanding of the structural dimensions that frame and constrain their fields of interpretation. A brief examination of the history of both networks will be necessary as an understanding of contemporary conditions must include some sense of how the present emerged from the past. Next, media coverage preceding and in some cases following the Opening Ceremony both in China and the U.S. will be briefly examined, providing the data to juxtapose against narratives about contemporary issues in both network presentations. Finally, key historical moments and themes referenced in the CCTV and NBC broadcasts will be explicated by delving into interpretations of them by professional historians.

The analysis undertaken in this chapter will set general expectations for the narratives of Chinese history and culture offered in the CCTV and NBC broadcasts in addition to providing the data for an ideological critique of the texts to be undertaken in subsequent chapters. The analysis will explain why CCTV would be expected to reflect Communist Party orthodoxy and appeal to Chinese nationalism, not through a shower of crude propaganda but in a way that reflects the adoption of more subtle, Western techniques of mass media presentation and persuasion. The chapter also will show how structural arrangements would push NBC to feature at times hyperbolic Opening Ceremony narratives that would attempt to captivate the audience by making China seem alluring and exotic while at the same time offering a seemingly credible account of China's past, present, and future. By examining the pre-Games coverage in the Chinese and U.S. media, the chapter will provide data needed to detail how each network either mirrored, deflected, or ignored contemporary issues and themes in the public domain, setting the stage to analyze the ideological implications of those moves. Providing facts and interpretations about historical themes in the the CCTV and NBC narratives serves the same

purpose, enabling subsequent chapters to show how the emerging network narratives are socially constructed and ideologically riven, more obviously so in the case of CCTV and more masked in the case of NBC. I will begin with CCTV and its political and industrial structure.

CCTV in Context

China Central Television exhibits the paradoxical, structural features that characterize contemporary China's unique model of development: a fusion of state capitalism and rule by an authoritarian Communist Party intolerant of rival political forces and organized dissent but highly concerned about its own image and staying power. CCTV is two things simultaneously: a state-owned, state-controlled broadcaster with a mission to serve as the voice of Chinese party-state and a commercial media company tasked with funding itself through advertising. CCTV's structure is a reflection of a policy of privatizing state propaganda efforts by transferring responsibility for funding from the state to the market. There is no parallel or precedent for this type of arrangement anywhere in the world.

By the time of the Olympics, the market-state mix had created conflicting demands on CCTV. As China's national television broadcaster, the network had to comply with the ever-changing guidelines of the Party, but it also had to deliver audiences to advertisers in an increasingly competitive media industry that was offering more programming choices and cracking the door open to international competition. CCTV's role as a state broadcaster and voice of the Party served as a constraint on its commercial ambitions and an irritation to many in the country's increasingly active and freewheeling blogosphere, about which more will be said later in this section. All of these factors would be expected to play a role in the form and content of the broadcast of the Opening Ceremony.

CCTV's structural position in 2008 reflected the changing needs of the Chinese Communist Party in an era of reform and marked a radical departure from its origins, as a brief review of the network's history will show. CCTV was established in 1978, when Beijing Television was renamed.¹ Beijing Television itself was created in 1958 with a mission to carry the message of the Chinese Communist Party, then dominated by Mao Zedong, revolutionary leader and founder of the People's Republic of China. With Mao's death in 1976, the sidelining of his chosen successor Hua Guofeng, and the arrest of the Maoist radical Gang of Four, which including Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, China moved away from Maoism and toward what was officially called reform and opening, or *gaige* and *kaifang*. Deng Xiaoping emerged in 1978 as China's paramount leader and began instituting capitalist-style changes – reforms that began touching the media. The number of government-run stations proliferated, commercial stations were permitted, and cooperative ventures with outside broadcasters also were allowed if not exactly encouraged. By the end of 2004, there were 31 provincial television stations and 2,000 city channels.² On the eve of the Olympics, CCTV itself had expanded to 16 channels, each differentiated by theme.³ CCTV-1 was the flagship, carrying news, current affairs and programs covering Party and government policy. Other CCTV channels specialized in economics, music and opera, sports, movies, children's programming, arts and entertainment.⁴ By the time of the Olympics, 90% of CCTV's revenue came from advertising.⁵ The implication for Olympic Opening Ceremony

1 Hong Yin, "Meaning, Production, Consumption: The History and Reality of Television Drama in China," in *Media in China: Consumption, Content and Crisis*, ed. Stephanie Donald, Michael Keane, and Hong Yin (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 29.

2 Hui Pan, "Government Media or Commercial Media: An IO Study in the Chinese TV-broadcast Market," Paper first presented at an economics workshop, Department of Economics, University of Essex, Essex, England (June 2009).

3 Noreen O'Leary, "CCTV: One Network, 1.2 Billion Viewers," *Adweek*, February 5, 2007, <http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising/cctv-one-network-12-billion-viewers-87831>.

4 Chengju Huang, "The Development of a Semi-Independent Press in Post-Mao China: An Overview and a Case Study of Chengdu Business News," *Journalism Studies* 1, no. 4 (2000): 652.

5 O'Leary, "CCTV: One Network, 1.2 Billion Viewers."

coverage is that CCTV would be expected to employ production values aimed at attracting and entertaining viewers with increasing choices even as the network articulated narratives designed to help enforce Party policies and strategies.

The commercialization of CCTV was instrumental in a rhetorical shift that has implications in how China's citizenry is conceptualized, something that also has a direct bearing on the narratives of nation emerging in the broadcast of the Opening Ceremony. Zhang Yong argues that CCTV took the lead in moving away from using the term “masses” to describe the Chinese people and adopting the word “audience.” A shift to thinking about audiences came as a consequence of CCTV's need to seek profit by selling audiences to advertisers, and it came about gradually. In 1987, CCTV began conducting audience surveys, but at that point the network centered on assessing how effectively Party propaganda was being disseminated. As time passed, the CCTV unit that conducted surveys became the Nielson of China – the largest organization in the country that measured ratings and market share.⁶

Commercialization, in fact, had given CCTV experience in producing programming that appealed to audiences in their own right, providing production tools and techniques that could be applied to the Opening Ceremony. CCTV had been pushed into offering at least some entertainment and news programming that would be more interesting to Chinese audiences than straight propaganda broadcasts.⁷ This had consequences for how news and information was conceptualized. By the early 1990s, scholars were remarking on a changing function of news in China, from purely a vehicle to transmit Party policy and an instrument of persuasion to “a form of socially constructed knowledge for public consumption, serving as a way for the public to make sense of a changing environment.”⁸ One

6 Zhang Yong, “From Masses to Audience: Changing Media Ideologies and Practices in Reform China,” *Journalism Studies* 1, no. 4 (2000): 617–635.

7 In Chinese Communist Party parlance, propaganda does not have a pejorative connotation. Propaganda is a noble and good thing, as it imparts useful and important information of high moral value to the people.

8 Tsan-Kuo Chang, Jian Wang, and Chih-Hsien Chen, “News as Social Knowledge in China: The Changing Worldview of Chinese National Media,” *Journal of Communication* 44, no. 3 (1994): 52–69.

consequence for the broadcast of the Opening Ceremony would be the expectation that CCTV would explain the greater meaning of the event and not simply offer a program that extolled the virtues of the Party and the need to follow its policies and guidance.

Inside CCTV, the new arrangement led to a push and pull between CCTV producers and censors, illustrating the new discursive dialectic created by the network's need to balance the competing demands of the market and the Party. CCTV's status as the voice of the Party had given it the political cover to push investigative journalism and talk formats in the 1990s, and some producers took the opportunity to press for more informative programming that would have a wide appeal. Under the watchful eyes of Party censors, CCTV introduced groundbreaking programs *Oriental Horizon*, *News Probe*, *Focused Interviewing*, and *Tell It Like It Is*. The first three were patterned on CBS's *60 Minutes*, while *Tell It Like It Is* was a talk show. The naming of *Focused Interviewing* became a contentious issue. According to Pan Zhongdan, CCTV's Commentary Department first suggested a program called *Reporter's Perspective*. The censors balked; a program with that name would showcase individual ideas and not perspectives of the collective leadership. The name of the actual program became *Focused Interviewing*.⁹

Xu Hua's detailed analysis of *Oriental Horizon* demonstrates what a radical departure the program was from CCTV's early format of chronicling important meetings of Party leaders, reports on the great successes of Party policies, and items that catalogued the consequences of disobeying Party directives. Reporters for *Oriental Horizon*, Xu concluded, variously took three different subject positions: as advocates of state objectives, as voices of victims, and as social commentators.¹⁰ The latter two roles were something new for CCTV and for Chinese television news broadcasting.

Journalists who worked for the network kept pressure on the censors, trying to push the boundaries.

9 Zhongdan Pan, "Media Change Through Bounded Innovations: Journalism in China's Media Reforms" (New York: International Communication Association, 2005), 1–35, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p13747_index.html.

10 Hua Xu, "Morality Discourse in the Marketplace: Narratives in the Chinese Television News Magazine *Oriental Horizon*," *Journalism Studies* 1, no. 4 (November 2000): 639–644.

Despite pressures from inside CCTV to push boundaries, the network's role as voice of the Party prevented too much adventurism. CCTV, in fact, established a multi-layered internal review process to weed out story ideas that would be censored.¹¹ In the early days of *Oriental Horizon*, some programs were censored and more than one-third of interview requests from reporters were turned down.¹² From the late 1990s to the middle of the next decade, the proportion of reports that could be termed critical declined markedly, both on CCTV's flagship magazine programs and on local television stations.¹³ Producers of CCTV's magazine journalism shows settled into using a format that adopted elements of the Western, tabloid journalism genre in order to present the state as the protector of the people and the enforcer of their will. Programs pursued themes that were consistent with overall state propaganda directives and featured characters that served as moral examples, both good and bad. There were corrupt officials, wicked merchants, devoted daughters caring for ailing parents, and the abused wife who was rescued.¹⁴ CCTV was feeling its way through the new and ever evolving rules of Chinese media, with all the consequences they would later have for the broadcast of the Opening Ceremony. Journalists had to satisfy the Party, the business bosses – whose goal was to attract audiences and sell advertising – and the audiences themselves, who craved more realistic and dramatic programming. Policemen breaking down the doors of a criminal suspect would attract far more eyeballs than stale footage of a Party conference, where officials did little more than mouth slogans and bland Party prescriptions.

Critical voices caution that the changes instituted by CCTV reflect how the Party was modernizing its control mechanisms. Anne Marie Brady argues that one of the reasons the party-state

11 Pan, "Media Change Through Bounded Innovations: Journalism in China's Media Reforms," 13.

12 Xu, "Morality Discourse in the Marketplace," 645.

13 Jingrong Tong and Colin Sparks, "Investigative Journalism in China Today," *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 3 (June 2009): 343.

14 Xu, "Morality Discourse in the Marketplace," 646.

has effectively maintained its power over the last decades of monumental change and development has been the adoption of tools of Western mass communication theory as control mechanisms. In her view, Party officials selectively absorbed Western techniques of mass persuasion and manufacturing consent.¹⁵

As Maoist ideology has been cast off, so too have the stale propaganda methods of old. In an extraordinary process of cultural exchange, China's propaganda system has deliberately absorbed the methodology of political public relations, mass communications, political communications, and other modern methods of mass persuasion commonly utilized in Western democratic societies, adapting them to Chinese conditions and needs.¹⁶

Brady argues that *Focus Point* had “just the right sort of amount of critical material to provide a little cognitive dissonance aimed at strengthening support for the status quo. As we will see in the close reading of the CCTV broadcast of the Opening Ceremony, the network combined its propaganda function with the Western techniques that Brady discusses.

CCTV operated in a milieu of constant tension between ideological and commercial goals, but there was no doubt that serious ideological demands came first. In 1999, the Party launched a campaign against Falun Gong, a quasi-religious group that had managed to line the streets outside the leadership compound in Beijing with thousands of silent followers.¹⁷ CCTV initiated a major effort to discredit the group. Yong said that a senior CCTV executive complained that the campaign cost the network more than 60 million yuan (or US\$7.25 million) in lost revenue.¹⁸ Xiao Wang's study of CCTV's most popular broadcast, the *Spring Festival Gala* that airs each year during the Lunar New Year, found that the propaganda function of the event had not diminished between 1983 and 2008, that

15 Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, Asia/Pacific/perspectives (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 186.

16 Ibid., 3.

17 Andrew Jacobs, “China Still Presses Crusade Against Falun Gong,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 2009, sec. International / Asia Pacific, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/28/world/asia/28china.html?adxnml=1&ref=falungong&adxnmlx=1310821437-931SuqcG8WnuLRT6t8YOjw>; Joseph Kahn, “Communism’s Nemesis,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 2008, sec. Books / Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/24/books/review/Kahn-t.html?ref=falungong>.

18 Yong, “From Masses to Audience: Changing Media Ideologies and Practices in Reform China,” 626.

messages promoting the Party's political ideas or new socially acceptable behaviors and morals were important elements in the broadcasts.¹⁹ Even so, official voices in China have pushed for greater freedoms and a lesser emphasis on propaganda. The official *China Daily* lamented in 2009 that Chinese television programs were not popular internationally, in part because they were too heavily laden with propaganda material.²⁰

As a commercial broadcaster, CCTV's monopoly position arguably militated against competing too aggressively with rivals to produce programming that pushed boundaries. The network's lock on national distribution enabled the exercise of unusual power when it came to selling prime time advertising. At the time of the Olympics, the network held an auction every November in which advertisers bid for prime time slots for the coming year, generating promises for 60% of CCTV's annual advertising revenue in a single day.²¹ This was one demonstration, according to *Advertising Age*, of how CCTV had graduated from a "backward state-controlled behemoth into savvy commercial entity."²² As the only nationwide network, domestic and foreign companies seeking to market their products nationally eagerly bid for airtime. In the auction the November before the Olympics, CCTV generated \$862 million, up 16% from the previous year.²³ *Advertising Age* quoted Jack Klues, chairman of Publicis Groupe's media division, as saying that in the U.S., TV networks were more or less equally strong, meaning advertisers could play one against another in search of the best deal. "But in China, CCTV has the power, so the system pits advertisers against each other," Klues said.²⁴

19 Xiao Wang, "Entertainment, Education, or Propaganda? A Longitudinal Analysis of China Central Television's Spring Festival Galas," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 54, no. 3 (July 2010): 391–406.

20 Qian Mu, "Screen Test: Chinese TV Serials Have Some Way to Go," *China Daily* (Beijing, December 11, 2009), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-12/11/content_9158919.htm.

21 Normandy Madden, "How China Buys and Sells TV; CCTV: National Network's System Helps Advertisers Go Beyond Big Cities," *Advertising Age* 77, no. 19 (May 8, 2006): 26; Normandy Madden, "P&G Reigns Supreme at China's Wild TV Upfront; 'Ad Age' Takes You Inside China Central Television's Colorful 10-hour Auction," *Advertising Age* 77, no. 48 (November 27, 2006): 1.

22 Madden, "How China Buys and Sells TV; CCTV: National Network's System Helps Advertisers Go Beyond Big Cities."

23 Madden, "P&G Reigns Supreme at China's Wild TV Upfront; 'Ad Age' Takes You Inside China Central Television's Colorful 10-hour Auction."

24 Ibid.

CCTV paid a price for relying on its monopoly advantages and not competing more aggressively against its rival programmers. In 2005, a program called *Mongolian Cow Sour Yogurt Super Girl Contest* and produced by Hunan Television in southern China rocketed in the ratings. Patterned after *American Idol* in the U.S. and produced far from the central authorities in Beijing, the program featured young girls competing in singing and dancing competitions and audiences choosing winners by sending in (and paying for) text messages. Some 120,000 contestants tried out for a chance to perform in a series of elimination rounds. When the finals were aired, state media said 20 million people had tuned in and 8 million voted for a winner (although the word “vote” was not used). The elimination rounds and the final episodes drew larger ratings than otherwise popular programs on CCTV, and Hunan Television was able to charge more for advertising than CCTV did for its popular shows. The huge audiences also benefited the show's main sponsor. During the course of the program, the Mongolian Cow Dairy went from China's No. 3 to No. 1 dairy producer.²⁵ CCTV had been outdone in the realm of commercial broadcasting by a provincial rival.

International competition was another force that CCTV had to contend with. One of the network's main competitors was a curious hybrid, Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV. A joint venture linking Rupert Murdoch's Star TV and Chinese companies, Phoenix beamed Mandarin-language programming into China, operating outside the formal structures of Beijing's control.²⁶ As a result it had more latitude in its programming. Michael Curtin offers two examples of how Phoenix was able to trump CCTV. When U.S. warplanes bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, Phoenix went all out in its coverage, while CCTV held back for fear of churning up nationalist sentiment that would

25 Edward Cody, “On Chinese Television, What’s Cool Is No Longer Correct,” *Washington Post* (Beijing, September 29, 2005), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/28/AR2005092802219.html>; Robert Marquand, “In China, It’s Mongolian Cow Yogurt Super Girl,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Beijing, August 29, 2005), <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0829/p01s04-woap.html>; Qing Miao, “‘Super Voice Girls’ Challenges China’s TV Culture,” *China Daily* (Beijing, August 12, 2005), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-08/12/content_468543.htm.

26 Le Han, “An Imagined Global Chinese Community: Television and Diaspora in Phoenix TV Documentary ‘Chinatown’” (paper presented at the 59th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, Chicago, 2009), 29.

get out of hand. Curtin quotes a Chinese media critic as saying, “Phoenix was trying to do what CCTV was not allowed to do, which was to tap into popular outrage and fervent nationalism.” A year later, Phoenix provided extensive coverage of the Taiwan presidential election, while CCTV ran only one-minute reports. Phoenix was careful with its terminology, reporting on the “Taiwan” and not “Republic of China” election, using the generic name of the island and not the official nomenclature for a state that Beijing considers a renegade province and not a nation in its own right.²⁷

CCTV had another problem as the Olympics approached. The network's monopoly power and its role as voice of the Party generated palpable animosity among segments of the Chinese blogosphere, where expression often is freewheeling and strident, despite intense government controls and risks of repression. China's often heavy-handed approach to regulating the Internet has been well documented. Sensitive sites are found and blocked through key word filtering, a small informal army of Internet censors monitors politically sensitive content, self-censorship is encouraged, and periodic arrests provide object lessons in what can happen when expression gets too far out of line.²⁸ But the Internet is a vital tool for China's economic development, requiring a policy that balances control with widespread access to the global Internet.²⁹ In addition, monitoring and controlling the Internet is a daunting task, even in a country with a highly developed, pervasive security apparatus. By 2008, China had exceeded the United States in Internet users, with more than 200 million people online.³⁰ Many of them took up blogging or posting to Internet bulletin boards. Chinese authorities adopted a multi-pronged strategy of

27 Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 207–209.

28 Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark, “Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content,” *Asian Survey* 41, no. 3 (June 2001): 377–408; OpenNet Initiative, “China Incentivizes Self-censorship in Regulation of Online Video,” *OpenNet Initiative blog*, January 4, 2008, <http://opennet.net/blog/?p=199>; Bobson Wong, “The Tug-of-War for Control of China’s Internet,” *China Right Forum*, no. 1, Walking the Tightrope (2004); Yongming Zhou, *Historicizing Online Politics: Telegraphy, the Internet, and Political Participation in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

29 Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, “Internet Filtering in China,” *IEEE Internet Computing* 7, no. 2 (April 2003): 70–77.

30 BDA, “China Surpasses the US to Become the World’s Largest Internet Population,” BDA (Beijing-based investment advisory firm), March 13, 2008, <http://www.bdaconnect.com/WebUI/pressInfo.aspx?id=200704260844565402&idIndex=810&child=1>.

focusing on specific areas for intense scrutiny. (It was well known among foreign journalists in China in 2008 that the regime was most sensitive about the so-called “three T’s:” Tibet, Taiwan, and Tiananmen.)³¹ Authorities also went to great lengths to ensure that the Internet was not used as a means to link disparate protests into any kind of social movement. They also employed the Internet as a sounding board to learn about social concerns that could be countered with government-sponsored Internet propaganda.³² The result was a space for expression that savvy netizens could exploit by finding ways around what has come to be known as the Great Firewall of China but also a strengthening of effective government control over the Internet and periodic jailing of Internet offenders even as expression was allowed to expand.³³ Authorities learned that controls on the Internet did not have to be perfect to be effective.³⁴

An illustration of the depth of the anti-CCTV sentiment among Chinese bloggers can be seen in blogging practices during the great Lunar New Year snowstorm of 2008, when hundreds of thousands of people found themselves stranded and unable to get home for the holiday. CCTV was a target of venomous anger. A blogger who took the name Tangflybra, for example, commented on a report by a CCTV reporter in Guizhou Province in southern China. Guizhou was hit particularly hard by the storm. Tangflybra accused CCTV of ignoring and distorting the truth, sarcastically attacking the Guizhou reporter for asking inane questions.³⁵ Tangflybra noted that the reporter’s first question to a citizen

31 This knowledge comes from my own background, off-the-record discussions with current and former China-based correspondents for international news organizations.

32 Fons Tuinstra, “Puzzling Contradictions of China’s Internet Journalism.,” *Nieman Reports* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 50–52.

33 Ibid.

34 Jack L. Goldsmith and Tim Wu, *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

35 tangflybra, “贵州，你还活着吗？ - 步行街 (Guizhou, Are You Still Alive?),” February 1, 2008, http://bbs.hoopchina.com/htm_data/34/0802/288553.html. There are several curious things about this blogger. The tone suggests the writer was a man, but that is not certain. Tangflybra wrote in Chinese but used English for a signature. The pen name “Tangflybra” has no obvious meaning to a native English speaker. The writer chose a blog site (<http://blog.hoopchina.com/>) designed as a forum for talk about the National Basketball Association (a hugely popular subject in China because of the success of Houston Rocket’s Center Yao Ming). The entry on Guizhou is laced with expletives, the most vulgar being in English.

suffering through the snowstorm was, “has this latest storm affected you?” The blogger was incensed. “I’ll be damned, snow in Guizhou doesn’t count as snow to you?” Tangflybra wrote that the reporter spent the next 10 minutes asking whether state offices had been affected and saying that officials were firing up kerosene generators every seven hours to guarantee cell phone transmissions. “People in the mountains are all complaining that they’re freezing to death and starving to death,” Tangblybra wrote. “And Guiyang (the capital of Guizhou) doesn’t have water or electricity and people cannot get out of their houses and you damn people are talking about guaranteeing cell phone transmissions.” At this point, Tangflybra turned to upper case English letters and the exclamation mark, “FXXK!!!” One can only speculate about why the blogger chose to use the letter “X” and not spell out the “F” word. Perhaps Tangflybra was aware of the convention of masking swear words in English. Perhaps the blogger believed that a word like “democracy” or “Tiananmen” could get identified in a filter. It is unlikely that Tangflybra was feeling the need for restraint, because the rest of his text shows no sense of that.

The blogger went on to further criticize Chinese state television. To be sure, Tangflybra wrote, state TV had broadcast some moving programs about people who were sacrificing themselves to help the millions suffering in the storm. But what was Guizhou Television doing? Showing soap operas and programs about shopping.

People on Tianya (a popular blog site) said something like this: people will save a dog only if it barks, and that’s true. So many towns and villages are like babies with their throats slit. They want to scream, but they can’t get any sound out. We can only beg that organizations with the ability to communicate with the outside will speak for them. But these organizations, damn it, are frozen to the point of confusion.

Tangflybra’s blog attracted supportive comments. One person mentioned a new popular slang phrase: “You want to be an upstanding person, don’t be such a CCTV.” Another added criticism of Guizhou TV. This writer attacked as misleading and “retarded” programs that depict Guizhou as a land full of

national minority people who wear colorful, native costumes. The attack had racist overtones: “In fact, in every city in Guizhou, if people see someone wearing minority clothing, he or she will be regarded as a monster.”

Another blogger, who went by the name of Chen Guang, also denounced the state media and mocked one of former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping’s early reform slogans that exhorted people to “seek truth from facts.”

Brothers, are you very disappointed? Yes. How phony is the Chinese slogan “Seek Truth From Facts.” TV news reports talk about a great deal of relief supplies going here and there. But I really don’t believe it! Because here is a disaster area and what have we gotten here? Nothing!!! We have nothing!!!!!!!!!! Our electricity has been out for more than 10 days, tea plants have frozen to death. The losses are staggering.

At this point, the writer emphasized that he or she was not simply looking for a handout.

Of course I don’t mean I *have* to get relief supplies. It’s just that we are really angry that we have become scapegoats. A lot of media say we have gotten a lot of relief supplies. Ay Ya. That’s such a lie. I’m numb. Brothers, this kind of government cannot be trusted.³⁶

To attract the largest possible audience for the Opening Ceremony broadcast, CCTV presumably would have wanted to take steps to mitigate the ill will that was directed at the network from the blogosphere. If CCTV could not lead in breaking taboos and could not offer programming that was critical and outspoken enough to satisfy the Chinese viewership, it still could attempt to appeal to nationalism, even it was unable to be as strident as Phoenix TV. But the network would have to strike a careful balance. Crude expressions of nationalism and exhortations to treat Party guidance as a kind of quasi-religious gospel would not work in an era of reform and capitalism, when ideological fervor was all but dead. The Chinese state could not let nationalism run rampant lest it damage important

36 Guang Chen, “谁来为南方的雪灾负一点责任? (Who Is Going to Take a Little Responsibility for the Southern Snow Disaster?),” *Chen Guang Zhuanlan (Chen Guang’s Commentary)*, February 13, 2008, http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/post_show.asp?BlogID=783428&PostID=12673285&idWriter=0&Key=0.

international ties. CCTV's messages would have to be more subtle and believable. As we shall see in the chapters ahead, this is precisely the tone that CCTV struck when it came to expressions of nationalism in the presentation of the Opening Ceremony.

Whether popular Internet criticism entered into internal discussions during the process of script creation for CCTV's rendering of the Opening Ceremony is unknown. Presumably there were vigorous discussions about CCTV's presentation involving network officials, the Party's propaganda apparatus, and possibly director Zhang Yimou. The final script may well have been vetted at the highest levels of the Party leadership. Evidence of such discursive struggles is presumably buried in the secret archives of the Chinese party-state, awaiting historical changes that will open this material to future scholars. But surely those in charge of the Opening Ceremony coverage would have been aware that CCTV was far from popular and trusted in the blogging community. An appeal to a kind of nationalism that would have wide appeal, whether consciously or unconsciously motivated, would serve to make CCTV's message-making more palatable across a wide swath of the Chinese audience.

What is clear is that the Opening Ceremony offered CCTV an opportunity to make maximum use of its dual roles as a commercial broadcaster with monopoly advantages and as the mouthpiece of the Party. As the sole broadcaster in China of the event, CCTV would have an extraordinary opportunity to gain revenues from the sale of advertising and to project the Party's narratives about the Games, the nation, and the national culture. Given the national importance of the Olympics and the saturation coverage in the run-up to the Games in the Chinese media, the audience would be huge and attentive. Given the importance of the presentation to the Party, the narratives would be expected to celebrate the emergence of China on the world scene and attribute China's successes to the wise leadership and guidance emanating from the highest levels of the Party. But, in keeping with the infusion of Western-style mass communication techniques, the messages would have to be less overt than in historical campaigns that saturated audiences with overt pro-Party sloganeering.

NBC in Context

The Opening Ceremony likewise offered NBC an opportunity to capture the kind of mass audience that rarely is on offer in the twenty-first century world of fragmented television viewership in the United States. NBC of course was under no government mandate to offer a certain interpretation of the ceremony or the Games, but there were other forces at work in framing the network's interpretation of the Opening Ceremony. NBC had adopted a strategy of investing heavily to win exclusive rights to broadcast the Olympics to the American audience, making the successful presentation of the Opening Ceremony and all other Olympic events an important corporate strategic goal. At the same time, NBC had evolved into two things: an entertainment and an information network, and requirements for each would help shape the interpretation of the Opening Ceremony. As an entertainment broadcaster, NBC would be expected to offer a program that would engage the audience and entice viewers to stay tuned, preferably for the entire length of the broadcast, in part by appealing to the exotic allure of China. As an information network, NBC would have to offer credible narratives not only about the athletes and the Games but about the host country. In other words, NBC's broadcast would have to combine discourses and production codes of entertainment and journalism, even as the latter increasingly incorporated elements of the former. The network would be expected to present the Opening Ceremony as a fantasy spectacular that would dazzle viewers but also explain how the unfolding scenes related to an understanding of China's culture, history, contemporary condition, place in the world, and relationship to the United States. To maintain credibility, problems and issues between the United States and China could not be whitewashed or ignored wholesale. But to successfully execute the corporate strategy of being *the* Olympic broadcaster in the U.S., neither China nor the Olympic organizers could be unduly embarrassed.

A brief examination of NBC's strategic position in the U.S. media industry and an account of how the network evolved into that role will help contextualize and explain the expectations for the Opening Ceremony broadcast.

At the time of the Olympics, NBC operated in a national media landscape characterized for decades by relentless industrial consolidation and integration. NBC Universal was the media arm of General Electric, one of six corporate conglomerates that dominated media industries in the United States, the other five being Time-Warner, Disney, Viacom, News Corp., and Bertelsmann of Germany.³⁷ In 1983 by contrast, fifty media companies dominated the market for newspapers, television, radio, movies, magazines, music, photos and videos.³⁸

NBC Universal in 2008 was a corporate giant that encompassed content creation, distribution, and delivery to audiences. The NBC brand had deep resonance with audiences that provided value for its corporate owner. Among the entities under the NBC Universal umbrella beyond the broadcast network were cable channels such as CNBC, MSNBC, USA Network, Oxygen, Bravo, the Spanish-language Telemundo, and the Weather Channel. NBC also owned local television stations, movie studios, myriad websites, and theme parks.³⁹

GE had acquired NBC from RCA in 1986 in a move to diversify from industrial production to information and service businesses.⁴⁰ Conglomeration offered opportunities for synergies for media companies with global reach. Dell Champlin and Janet Knoedler offer an example: units of News Corp. and Viacom collaborated in making the blockbuster movie *Titanic*. The film produced a plethora of

37 Ben H Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 27–55; Dell Champlin and Janet Knoedler, “Operating in the Public Interest or in Pursuit of Private Profits? News in the Age of Media Consolidation,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 36, no. 2 (June 2002): 460.

38 Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly*, 27.

39 “Who Owns What: A Columbia Journalism Review Survey and Report,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, accessed July 10, 2011, <http://www.cjr.org/resources/?c=ge>.

40 Christopher Anderson, “Creating the Twenty-first-Century Television Network: NBC in the Age of Media Conglomerates,” in *NBC: America’s Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Michael Henry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 275–290.

spin-offs, including a book published by a News Corp. subsidiary, a special on the making of the film on the Fox television network, CDs, a musical, and even chocolates in the shape of Celine Dion's face.⁴¹

Remarkably, GE was the last of the major American media conglomerates to full integrate by adding Hollywood television and movies studios to the NBC portfolio. That was accomplished in 2004 with the \$14 billion purchase of an 80% stake in Vivendi Universal Entertainment, a deal that created NBC Universal and added Universal TV and movie studios to the NBC family of companies.⁴² For GE, the acquisition was another part of its strategic move into high-tech information and communication systems, an attempt to move out of the analog world of the twentieth century and into the digital realm of the twenty-first century.⁴³ For NBC, the expansion created new possibilities for profitable synergies and advanced a blurring of lines between news and entertainment – something that would have a direct bearing on the presentation of the Opening Ceremony. NBC acquired enhanced clout when negotiating fees extracted from cable and satellite TV providers and allowed advertisers access to a broader range of programming. The studio that produced the profitable show *Law & Order* was now under the NBC umbrella, opening the way to a variety of new revenue streams, for example through the sale of DVDs and the cross-promotion of films on NBC's television platforms. Kevin Sandler provides a comprehensive catalogue of post-takeover cross-promotion and cross-pollination. An episode of one show would reference a character or plot in a different series. Stars or celebrities would appear on a program and put in a plug for their own show. News programs were particularly subject to self-

41 Champlin and Knoedler, "Operating in the Public Interest or in Pursuit of Private Profits?," 460–461.

42 Anderson, "Creating the Twenty-first-Century Television Network: NBC in the Age of Media Conglomerates"; Kevin S. Sandler, "Life Without Friends: NBC's Programming Strategies in an Age of Media Clutter, Media Conglomeration, and TiVo," in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 291–307.

43 Anderson, "Creating the Twenty-first-Century Television Network: NBC in the Age of Media Conglomerates," 285.

promotion. Certain episodes of *Dateline: NBC* were nothing more than promotions for other programs produced by NBC Universal.⁴⁴ The blurring of the lines between the discourses of entertainment and information was accelerating.

Christopher Anderson argues against viewing the post-takeover NBC as a corporate unit that strictly adhered to principles or strategies handed down by its parent, but he does say that elements of GE's corporate culture and practices could be identified in the new NBC. These elements included ruthless cost-cutting, a corporate culture that valued longevity for executives and movement of key personnel from one GE unit to another, leveraging size into market dominance, and a willingness to invest large sums for strategic goals.⁴⁵ It is the last two elements that have direct bearing on NBC's strategy to be *the* Olympic broadcaster for the United States. NBC has won the rights to air every summer Olympics in the U.S. since 1988.⁴⁶ This has required outlays of money. The network, for example, spent \$2 billion for exclusive U.S. rights to broadcast the 2010 and 2012 Olympics in addition to agreeing to pay \$200 million to become a worldwide Olympic sponsor.⁴⁷

NBC's Olympic strategy made a successful broadcast of the Opening Ceremony vital to the network. Beyond holding the promise of attracting the kind of mass audience for a one-time event that was exceedingly rare in an era of fragmented media, the Opening Ceremony would provide a kickoff to the televised coverage of the Games themselves, and the Games provided NBC with exclusive rights to sporting events that could be recycled and used in various ways, among them pushing such programming to its various cable TV outlets and online platforms. In fact, Anderson notes that the lure of Olympic programming provided an incentive to cable operators to carry CNBC and MSNBC.⁴⁸ The

44 Sandler, "Life Without Friends: NBC's Programming Strategies in an Age of Media Clutter, Media Conglomeration, and TiVo."

45 Anderson, "Creating the Twenty-first-Century Television Network: NBC in the Age of Media Conglomerates."

46 Jessica E. Vascellaro and Matthew Futterman, "NBC Realized Olympic Dream," *The Wall Street Journal Digital Network*, June 8, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304474804576371600435865450.html>.

47 Anderson, "Creating the Twenty-first-Century Television Network: NBC in the Age of Media Conglomerates," 283.

48 *Ibid.*, 284.

stakes were high, and the network needed the Opening Ceremony broadcast to deliver the audience numbers that advertisers expected and to be something that was talked about excitedly the next day over water coolers and in neighborhoods across the country.

At least part of the reason that the Olympics could play such an important role for NBC lies in the nature of the audience's relationship with the spectacle at hand, and this notion also speaks to expectations about the shape of the Opening Ceremony broadcast. The Olympics rank among the events that create a collective, national experience, a cultural marker, an event that is discussed widely, from office cubicles to supermarket checkout counters. Horst Stipp and Nicolas Schiavone argue that audiences are drawn to the Games in part because they know that coverage is available for all, over the airwaves, for free (even if they happen to be watching their local network affiliate on a cable network that they pay for). This “core value” is something that provides great benefits to advertisers and makes Olympic sponsorship highly sought after, according to a study done by NBC and one of its corporate sponsors.⁴⁹ Consumers see Olympic sponsorship as having social benefits beyond mere attempts by businesses to sell products; they see advertising as ensuring that the Olympics remain part of the national experience.⁵⁰ In other words, U.S. television viewers have achieved a degree of sophistication that enables them to separate the mere selling of goods from other functions of advertising. That makes Olympic sponsorship highly lucrative for advertisers and therefore valuable for NBC, and it also places a high premium on both the entertainment value and credibility of the Opening Ceremony.

The twin discourses of entertainment and information (or journalism) have deep historical roots at NBC. Current discourses always contain historical residue, and current practices evolve out of and in dialectical tension with historical practices. A brief examination of NBC's history will aid in

49 Horst Stipp and Nicolas P. Schiavone, “Modeling the Impact of Olympic Sponsorship on Corporate Image,” *Journal of Advertising Research* 36, no. 4 (August 1996): 22–28.

50 Ibid.

understanding how the two discourses became intermingled in the Opening Ceremony broadcast and how the discourse of information at NBC has been shaped by historical conditions, including the geopolitical landscape and geopolitical relationships at any given time.

NBC grew into a media behemoth from humble but groundbreaking beginnings. Created in 1926 by Radio Corporation of America as the first U.S. national radio network, NBC achieved success in an advertising-driven medium that also was compelled by law and government regulation to operate in the public interest.⁵¹ Emerging from radio, NBC and the other networks that would come to dominate the U.S. television landscape felt their way into the new visual medium, imbued to a lesser or greater degree with utopian ideas that accompany the introduction of new media technologies. Some early pioneers in what has come to be regarded as television's golden age of the 1950s wanted TV to become a high-brow, educational medium that would elevate the culture. Pat Weaver, who served as president of NBC in the mid-1950s, exemplified this idea. He championed the idea of modeling television on theater and pushed for live broadcasts of operas, plays, variety shows, and other programs he called spectaculars. Weaver's utopian vision of a new medium whose primary function would be to uplift the culture, however, never came to pass.⁵²

Instead, the pioneers of television worked out a business model through trial and error aimed at producing programming that would appeal to the emerging mass audience in 1950s America. The key became a steady diet of situation comedies (*I Love Lucy* was a huge hit for CBS in the early 1950s), westerns, game shows, and, in the daytime, soap operas. Radio's advertising model that saw companies sponsor whole programs gave way to selling airtime in blocks for a variety of products.⁵³ Re-runs,

51 David Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest: America's Town Meeting of the Air," in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 44–60; Michele Hilmes, "NBC and the Network Idea," in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 7–24.

52 Douglas Gomery, "Talent Raids and Package Deals," in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 153–168; Nicholas Lemann, "Tune In Yesterday; the Making of Broadcast Television," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 2007.

53 Lemann, "Tune In Yesterday; the Making of Broadcast Television."

considered an unthinkable waste of time in the very early days, turned out to be a crucial element in the enduring profitability of the networks. Audiences not only tolerated re-runs; they loved them.⁵⁴ The discourse of news and information in the early days was set apart from entertainment. News was serious, a part of the public service function of television, a necessary but not necessarily profitable element of the business. Entertainment was where the money was made.

NBC actually was slow to understand the business formula that would work in television. Douglas Gomery argues that the main impediment was the man known as the “General,” David Sarnoff, the legendary founder of RCA and its subsidiary NBC. Sarnoff insisted on pushing the business model that worked in radio. Sponsors had to buy whole programs, and there was no point in promoting a system of stars with big salaries. CBS was having success in rejecting radio's formula, and Pat Weaver wanted to emulate his rival in his pursuit of quality programming. Sarnoff rejected the idea of block advertising and restricted Weaver's ability to alter the prime-time lineup. Weaver got to put on plays, operas, ballets, and documentaries and they did enhance NBC's prestige, but those programs failed miserably in the ratings, and Weaver was not able to steer Sarnoff away from single company sponsorship. NBC languished in second place behind CBS through the 1950s.⁵⁵

NBC, however, was a pioneer in realizing that its news division could also be a money maker. By the mid-1950s, NBC was lagging behind CBS on the entertainment side and was looking for a way to enhance its reach and stature, particularly with its affiliated stations. The new president of NBC Television, Robert Kintner, saw news, and particularly the documentary format, as a means of achieving that goal.⁵⁶ He built on the success of Chet Huntley and David Brinkley's coverage of the 1956 Democratic National Convention and adopted a strategy of going CBS one better in news. He called it “CBS plus 30,” meaning that NBC would stay on the air thirty minutes longer than CBS

54 Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

55 Gomery, “Talent Raids and Package Deals,” 158–161.

56 Michael Curtin, “NBC News Documentary,” in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 175–191.

during major news events.⁵⁷ Fortunately for the network's bottom line, Kintner's forays into news proved to be profitable. News, however, was still very much walled off from entertainment, something that Cold War pressures in the 1960s reinforced.

Michael Curtin argues that a number of forces came together to push NBC into a leadership role in the 1960s in the making of documentaries that served as a true public service. High-minded intent was not the whole story, even though Kintner himself was extremely interested in news. Looming in the background was the Cold War that pitted the United States in a global battle for ideological influence with the Soviet Union. The American public was unnerved by the Soviet launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 and ripe for engagement in public affairs programming that provided fodder for ongoing debates about the U.S. role in the world and the state of scientific and educational development in the country. The Kennedy administration likewise was keen to use the power of television as a weapon in the ideological fight against Communism. Federal Communications Chairman Newton Minow, who gained fame for calling entertainment television programming a “vast wasteland,” jawboned the networks to expand news coverage, particularly internationally. NBC's news professionals, many of whom were veteran World War II radio reporters, themselves were eager to see their profession return to the status they had achieved in wartime, when Edward R. Murrow and other broadcasters used radio to bring home the deadly serious sounds and nature of the carnage in Europe.⁵⁸

NBC and the other two networks were learning to profitably serve two distinct functions. On the one hand, they were offering up a diet of escapist, entertainment programming, but on the other they were presenting a window on the real and often terrifying world, breaking into regular programming with news bulletins and spicing documentary programming into the mix. In 1962 alone, the three networks offered almost 400 documentaries.⁵⁹ The coverage of the Cuban missile crisis that

57 Gomery, “Talent Raids and Package Deals,” 165.

58 Curtin, “NBC News Documentary.”

59 Ibid., 177.

same year made the television set a primary fixture through which millions of Americans watched as the U.S. and Soviets came frighteningly close to nuclear war. Four days of continuous coverage of John F. Kennedy's assassination and funeral in November 1963 demonstrated the power of television as a central node in experiencing a national calamity. The sense of news as the unveiling of the real as distinct from entertainment was solidly planted – and solidly grounded in the political and economic circumstances and the Cold War, geopolitical framework of the era.

The foregoing discussion serves to highlight the historically contingent nature of the discourses of entertainment and information at NBC and provides an understanding of the historical context that resulted in the blurring of entertainment and information that characterized the network's production codes at the time of the Opening Ceremony. The change was the result of a decades long evolution.

The function of news divisions within the networks began changing in the 1970s as the networks pushed for a greater emphasis on profitability.⁶⁰ Even more changes were instituted in the 1980s and 1990s, as cable TV began to attract audience segments and make serious inroads into network ratings, both in entertainment and news programs.⁶¹ The notion that news divisions did not necessarily need to be profit centers was cast aside. Cost-cutting became a higher priority than public service, according to Amanda Lotz.⁶² CBS saved \$30 million by laying off 500 news employees, and NBC's new owner, GE, instituted a 5% cut in the news budget.⁶³ Critics derided the trend of blending news and entertainment, yet by the late 1990s, NBC's premier news programs, *The Nightly News* and *Today*, had moved into first place in the ratings based on a move to “news you can use” such as personal finance aided by glitzy visual presentations. *Today*, for example, unveiled a studio at street

60 Champlin and Knoedler, “Operating in the Public Interest or in Pursuit of Private Profits?”.

61 A personal note from my own professional experience. There was a widespread expectation in the CNN newsroom in the early 1990s that NBC and the other broadcast networks would abandon news programming altogether within a few years. That proved to be wishful thinking.

62 Amanda D. Lotz, “National Nightly News in the On-Demand Era,” in *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming in the Post-Network Era*, ed. Amanda D Lotz (New York: Routledge, 2009), 94–113.

63 *Ibid.*, 97.

level, with windows that enabled passers-by to look in and the television audience to see what was happening on the street over the shoulders of the presenters.⁶⁴ In light of these developments, it would be no surprise that NBC's presentation of the Opening Ceremony would blend the discourses of entertainment and information.

Journalistic Context

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the industrial location and historical development of CCTV and NBC in order to expose structural pressures and constraints that helped establish the ideological parameters for the narratives of Chinese culture and nation emerging from their respective broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony. Such an analysis, however, presents only part of the picture. The work of uncovering the ideological content of the narratives must include consideration of how each network dealt with contemporary issues facing China that were swirling in the public domain in each country as the Games approached. To lay the groundwork for such an analysis, it is necessary to review the general themes that were in the public domain, as articulated through mainstream journalistic discourses in both countries.

The coming Olympics was the subject of intense journalistic interest and scrutiny in the run-up to the Games both in China and the U.S. The nature of the reporting and commentary reflected the differences in media ownership and control in the two countries. The state-run media in China, as would be expected, portrayed the Games as an occasion for celebration, self-congratulation and national pride, an opportunity to present China as a friendly, constructive, and confident nation with a deep and rich cultural history. These themes provide a preview for the general approach that CCTV, the national broadcast arm of the Chinese party-state, would take during the Opening Ceremony, although CCTV, in a telling indication of the need to balance its propaganda and entertainment functions, did not address certain political criticisms that were covered in the official media. In the U.S., the journalistic

⁶⁴ Anderson, "Creating the Twenty-first-Century Television Network: NBC in the Age of Media Conglomerates."

commentary was far more wide ranging, but mainstream American reporting generally viewed China within identifiable lines: as a rising power that was highly problematic in terms of upholding cherished Western values such as human rights, even if it might be experiencing economic development that was nothing short of remarkable. There was a steady drumbeat of stories about China's suppression of dissent, Internet censorship, protests surrounding the Olympic Torch run, pollution problems, and repression in Tibet. None of these themes would have been the least bit friendly or positive from the standpoint of the leadership in Beijing. NBC's presentation of the Opening Ceremony reflects the ambivalence in the U.S. media about China but in a subdued way that referenced some of the criticisms and ignored others, a combination that provides a window into understanding the text's ideological dimensions.

What follows is a review of coverage from selected mainstream journalistic outlets in both countries, including reporting from NBC's news division. In China, representative articles from the official Xinhua News Agency, the *People's Daily*, and the English-language *China Daily* were selected. Given the central control of media messages in China and the repetitious nature of those messages, this section is necessarily brief. Mainstream American reporting comes from a sampling of mainstream national media companies: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and Fox News. In both the American and Chinese cases, the examples for the most part are drawn from articles published and stories broadcast in the two weeks before the Opening Ceremony. Some reporting from before that period and after the Opening Ceremony is included because it sheds light on aspects of the presentations, such as the post-Opening Ceremony revelations about lip synching and faking of some of the fireworks.

The anticipation and historic nature of the Olympics was palpable in the official, Party-controlled Chinese press, which struck ideological themes that were mirrored in CCTV's broadcast of the Opening Ceremony, including the notion that China had nothing but peaceful intentions and that the

Olympics would enhance cross-cultural understanding. A *China Daily* commentary asserted that the world would see that China was promoting a “peaceful, civilized global agenda” just as Chinese people were becoming more globally aware.⁶⁵ The Beijing Games would showcase peace, friendship, progress, and the pride of the Chinese people in their accomplishments.⁶⁶ Foreign leaders from countries that are rarely heard from in the West – specifically Namibia and Armenia – expressed the idea that the Olympics would enhance China's friendly relations with the world.⁶⁷ The Olympics would serve as a “culture bridge” between East and West.⁶⁸ As subsequent chapters will document, these narratives are important components of the ideological underpinning of the CCTV broadcast.

A version of another theme that would appear the CCTV broadcast, also articulated in a *China Daily* article, spoke of China's 100-year dream to host the Olympics and that “humiliation, subjugation, wars and poverty” had to be overcome to make the dream come true.⁶⁹ A raft of articles emphasized that the air would be perfectly safe, that haze was not pollution, and that even the IOC had lauded China for its exemplary job in improving the environment for the Games – steps that included taking 300,000 high-emission cars off the road and moving the capital's notoriously polluting steel works out of the city.⁷⁰ China had become the world's leading producer of renewable energy and was on a path to

65 Brendan John Worrell, “Beyond 08/08/08,” *China Daily* (Beijing, August 8, 2008), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2008-08/08/content_6915637.htm.

66 Sui Yu, “China Ready to Put Best Foot Forward for Games,” *China Daily*, July 24, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-07/24/content_6871980.htm.

67 Xinhua News Agency, “Interview: World to Rejoice in Beijing Olympics, Says Armenian President,” *www.chinaview.cn*, August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9025060.htm; Xinhua News Agency, “Namibia: Beijing Games to Cement China's Links with Other Nations,” *www.chinaview.cn*, August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9035832.htm.

68 Xiaoyang Jiao, “Cultural Bridge to Closer Ties,” *China Daily*, August 7, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/08/content_6915052.htm.

69 Xing Li, “One Hundred Years of Dreaming,” *China Daily*, July 31, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-07/31/content_6891292.htm.

70 Xiaohuo Cui, “Haze Doesn't Mean Poor Air Quality,” *China Daily*, July 30, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-07/30/content_6887598.htm; Li Jing, “IOC: Air Is Safe for One and All,” *China Daily* (Beijing, August 6, 2008), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/06/content_6906848.htm; Jing Li, “Shougang Steels for Life Beyond Beijing's Borders,” *China Daily*, August 7, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/07/content_6911582.htm; Xinhua News Agency, “Beijing Confident to Maintain Clean Air During Olympics,” *www.chinaview.cn*, July 26, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-07/26/content_8775970.htm; Xinhua News Agency, “Environmental Group Recognizes Beijing's Efforts to Clean up Air,” *www.chinaview.cn*, July 28, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-07/28/content_8826923.htm; Xinhua News Agency, “IOC Official Downplays Air Quality Concerns,” *www.chinaview.cn*, July 29, 2008,

overtake the developed world in green technology, a commentary in the *China Daily* said; moreover, spending on the Olympics was justified because it brought new subway lines, buses that ran on clean energy such as liquefied natural gas and electricity, tree planting, and renovation of apartment buildings.⁷¹ Xinhua also reported that even Greenpeace acknowledged that China had taken steps, such as building new subway lines, to enhance the environment but that more measures were needed.⁷² As we shall see in the chapters ahead, the notion that China was hosting a green Olympics was an important narrative line in the CCTV broadcast.

In another theme that echoed what would become a major ideological statement in the CCTV broadcast, Xinhua writer Zhu Shaobin made the point in a piece published the day before the Opening Ceremony that contemporary China was characterized by a seamless integration of tradition and modernity and by coexistence of East and West. The writer told the story of a young man who bought flowers for his wife the day before *Qixi*, or Chinese Valentine's day, which itself was derived from a Chinese folk legend about the tragic separation of two lovers. The man bought roses because he had learned that they were a potent symbol of love in the West. But he chose eleven of them in a reference to a four-character Chinese idiom that speaks of deep dedication, in this case to romantic bonds.⁷³ The notions that tradition seamlessly informs the modern and that East and West are operating on equal, reciprocal terms are major themes in the CCTV broadcast.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-07/29/content_8833141.htm; Xinhua News Agency, "IOC Chief Praises China's Anti-pollution Efforts," August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9031427.htm; "Traffic Rule Driving Rapid Improvement," *China Daily*, August 7, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/07/content_6911397.htm.

71 Worrell, "Beyond 08/08/08."

72 Xinhua News Agency, "Environmental Group Recognizes Beijing's Efforts to Clean up Air."

73 Zhu Xiaobin, "Qixi: When Modernity Dates Tradition and East Meets West," Xinhua News Agency, [www.chinaview.cn](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9029794.htm), August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9029794.htm. The four-character idioms, called *chengyu* in Chinese, often are derived from historical or folk stories but not in this case. The particular idiom cited in this story is "一心一意," which literally means "one heart, one idea." It is used to convey the idea of wholeheartedness.

Much of the reporting in China in the run-up to the Games focused on human interest stories, which foreshadowed CCTV's theme depicting the Chinese people as upstanding, humane, and heroic. *China Daily* readers learned that a former teacher of Premier Wen Jiabao said he showed promise as a basketball player when he was in middle school. The article was illustrated with a picture of NBA superstar Yao Ming, hero to millions in China, handing a basketball to the premier on behalf of the Chinese Olympic basketball team.⁷⁴ They also learned that Beijing was awash in colors by virtue of the good work of Chinese gardeners. In fact more than 40 million plants had been placed along roadways.⁷⁵ The *China Daily* reported that all 112 restaurants granted an official "Olympic" designation had been ordered to take dog meat off their menus so as not to offend foreigners. The article went on to say that Beijingers were being told to line up properly, avoid spitting, and not ask foreigners personal questions such as "how much money do you make."⁷⁶ Overall, the coverage made it clear that the coming Olympics was not only a monumental event for China; it also was an opportunity to showcase the underlying civility, humanity, warmth, and work ethic of the country's leadership and people.

The official media also dealt to some degree with political controversies that CCTV did not address in the its Opening Ceremony coverage, characterizing criticism as anti-China, anti-democratic, or anti-Olympic behavior. The *People's Daily*, which is the official voice of the Communist Party, reported that the disruption to the Olympic Torch run in Paris was perpetrated by "pro-Tibet extremists" who "were not expressing a legitimate freedom of demonstration and protest." The article went on to attack French media for a lack of objectivity and a promotion of disruption in a city that supposedly was a "capital of culture." French politicians who sided with the pro-Tibet demonstrators were said to be uttering absurdities of the kind that were common during China's own Cultural

74 "Wen Had Hoop Dreams as Boy," *China Daily* (Beijing, August 8, 2008), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/08/content_6915057.htm.

75 Wang Bo, "Gardeners Make City Bloomin' Beautiful," *China Daily* (Beijing, August 7, 2008), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/olympics/2008-08/07/content_6911723.htm.

76 Fuchsia Dunlop, "It's Too Hot for Dog on the Menu," *China Daily*, August 6, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/06/content_6907064.htm.

Revolution of 1966-1976.⁷⁷ *The People's Daily*, in a report that mentioned only pro-regime Internet opinion and not the kind that surfaced during the aforementioned snowstorm, reported that netizens in China en masse were decrying attempts by “Tibet Independence” separatists to disrupt the Olympic Torch relay in London. The newspaper said that many netizens were writing that interfering with the relay was a “desecration of the Olympic spirit” and reflected spiteful behavior.⁷⁸ A Xinhua News Agency story about the arrival of the Olympic Torch at the Beijing Olympic Youth Camp had nary a word about any protests, but it did tout a “Journey of Harmony” that took the Torch 137,000 kilometers through six continents over 129 days.⁷⁹ *China Daily* likewise reported on the arrival in Beijing of the Olympic Torch with references only to celebrations and not to protests that greeted Torch bearers in many cities around the world.⁸⁰ The official media also reported that Beijing would be safe⁸¹ and that security at Tiananmen Square was being enhanced.⁸² The latter article also made it clear that authorities would prevent any protest at the scene of the brutal crackdown on demonstrators in 1989. In laying the groundwork for an event of a monumental, historic magnitude, the official media were ignoring certain critical themes, attempting to blunt others, and making it clear that China's security apparatus would ensure an Olympic Games without incident. The ideological implications of CCTV not addressing politically sensitive issues will be discussed in the chapters ahead, but the omissions are important in enhancing an understanding of how CCTV was balancing its propaganda function with its relatively new role in offering programming that would be entertaining and attractive to audiences.

77 Dwanfang Tao, “‘A Slap in Face’ to Paris Itself,” *People's Daily Online*, April 11, 2008, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90780/91342/6391119.html>.

78 “Netizens Condemn Sabotage Attempts on Olympic Torch Relay,” *People's Daily Online*, April 9, 2008, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/6389248.html>.

79 Xinhua News Agency, “Olympic Torch Ends Journey Before Opening Ceremony,” August 8, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/olympics/torch/2008-08/08/content_6917575.htm.

80 Qian Wang and Tian Lan, “Torch on Final Leg of Journey,” *China Daily*, August 7, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/07/content_6911382.htm.

81 “Beijing to Quash Security Threats,” *China Daily* (Beijing, August 6, 2008), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/06/content_6906858.htm.

82 Xiaohuo Cui and Zhe Zhu, “Security at Square Stepped Up,” *China Daily*, July 31, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-07/31/content_6891277.htm.

Analyzing how NBC's presentation of the Opening Ceremony relates to pre-Games media coverage also is helpful in exposing the ideological narratives embedded in the network text. As in the case of CCTV, NBC sometimes mirrored, sometimes ignored, and sometimes deflected themes that were prominent in the U.S. news media. Coverage in the United States reflected the greater diversity, corporate ownership structure, and absence of a direct, government-directed propaganda function, but the themes about China differed in degree, not in kind. All major media projected an ambivalence about China, its rise, its failure to adhere to Western notions of liberty and human rights, and its potential as a rival to the United States.

Ambivalence toward China is an ideological narrative that underlies the NBC broadcast of the Opening Ceremony, but it is implied and not bluntly discussed, as it was in the media coverage. *The New York Times*, for example, reported that President Hu Jintao's press conference turned into an awkward attempt to display openness that was more apparent than real,⁸³ that Beijing authorities were implementing a major security crackdown in advance of the Games,⁸⁴ that suspects had been arrested in a terrorist attack in the far western city of Kashgar,⁸⁵ that Olympic organizers in Beijing had promised to open more websites to journalists,⁸⁶ and that China's own anti-doping workers were working to test Chinese athletes and hoping to prevent a national embarrassment.⁸⁷ Coverage included an interview

83 Jim Yardley, "China's Leader Meets the Press, but Only on His Country's Very Narrow Terms," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2008, sec. Sports / Olympics, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/02/sports/olympics/02hu.html?scp=29&sq=beijing+olympics&st=nyt>.

84 Edward Wong and Keith Bradsher, "China Orders Highest Alert for Olympics," *The New York Times* (Beijing, August 4, 2008), [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/sports/olympics/04china.html?sq=edward%20wong%20china&st=nyt&adxnml=1&scp=1&adxnmlx=1329512612-/YqcL039ePPXpQFfdbzkTg.,
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/sports/olympics/04china.html?sq=edward%20wong%20china&st=nyt&adxnml=1&scp=1&adxnmlx=1329512612-/YqcL039ePPXpQFfdbzkTg](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/sports/olympics/04china.html?sq=edward%20wong%20china&st=nyt&adxnml=1&scp=1&adxnmlx=1329512612-/YqcL039ePPXpQFfdbzkTg.,http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/sports/olympics/04china.html?sq=edward%20wong%20china&st=nyt&adxnml=1&scp=1&adxnmlx=1329512612-/YqcL039ePPXpQFfdbzkTg).

85 Edward Wong, "Town in China Returns to Normal a Day After a Bold Attack Kills 16 Policemen," *The New York Times* (Kashgar, China, August 5, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/06/world/asia/06kashgar.html?scp=3&sq=edward+wong+china&st=nyt>.

86 Juliet Macur, "Olympic Organizers to Weigh Unblocking More Websites," *The New York Times* (Beijing, August 2, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/02/sports/olympics/02censor.html?scp=3&sq=macur%20olympic%20organizers&st=Search>.

87 Juliet Macur, "Trying to Avoid the Negative of a Positive Test," *The New York Times* (Beijing, August 4, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/sports/olympics/04drugs.html?scp=1&sq=juliet%20macur%20china%20tries%20to%20avoid&st=cse>.

with Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, who helped design the Bird's Nest stadium but turned into a fierce critic of the Communist regime. Ai said he had not been invited to the Opening Ceremony and was not planning to go, calling the event a “pretend smile.”⁸⁸ A piece in the Sunday “Week in Review” section questioned whether the International Olympic Committee made the right decision in awarding the Games to China.⁸⁹

The Washington Post covered China's denunciation of U.S. President George W. Bush for meeting at the White House with Chinese dissidents prior to traveling to Beijing for the Opening Ceremony but in the same article reported on Bush's call to de-politicize the Olympics and quoted him as telling CCTV that he respected the Chinese people, that he was going to Beijing as a friend, and that his trip was the right thing to do to promote U.S.-China relations.⁹⁰ Another news story six days before the Opening Ceremony reported that President Hu Jintao said in a rare meeting with correspondents that the Games would highlight China's desire to engineer a peaceful rise, in harmony with other countries. Buried in the penultimate paragraph was a quote from President Hu promising further reforms, including reforms in the political system.⁹¹ (The *Post* reported a week into the Games that no one had staged protests in Beijing parks officially designated for the purpose. The few Chinese people who had applied for permits to protest had either disappeared or been arrested.)⁹² Jim Hoagland, in an

88 “China’s Olympic Crossroads: Bird’s Nest Designer Ai Weiwei on Beijing’s ‘Pretend Smile,’” *The New York Times*, August 4, 2008, <http://beijing2008.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/chinas-olympic-crossroads-birds-nest-designer-ai-weiwei-on-beijings-pretend-smile/?scp=11&sq=beijing+olympics&st=nyt>.

89 Jere Longman, “Why China Has the Torch,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/sports/olympics/03longman.html?ref=olympictorch>.

90 Jill Drew, “Chinese Say Bush ‘Rudely Interfered;’ Foreign Ministry Criticizes Meeting with 5 Dissidents,” *Washington Post* (Beijing, August 1, 2008), Final edition, A11.

91 Edward Cody, “Hu Asserts World’s Confidence in China,” *Washington Post* (Beijing, August 2, 2008), Final edition, A11.

92 Jill Drew and Ariana Eunjung Cha, “No Permits, No Protests In Beijing’s Special ‘Pens’,” *Washington Post* (Beijing, August 15, 2008), Final edition, A14.

editorial the week before the Games, called on Western leaders to use their visits to Beijing to focus on China's human rights record and promises to allow greater personal freedom – promises that Hoagland noted had been “bent and broken.”⁹³

Other *Post* articles ranged into other areas while still maintaining a political focus. *Post* movie critic Tom Shales favorably reviewed an ABC News documentary titled “*China Inside Out*,” calling it a “model of clarity and insight, a compelling primer on how changes in China are reverberating throughout the rest of the world, and why this industrious revolution may not be underestimated.”⁹⁴ An item by Philip Kennicott discussed the increasing sophistication of China's media strategy by comparing the openness about the Sichuan earthquake just months before to the secrecy surrounding the mammoth Tangshan earthquake in 1976.⁹⁵ Another Kennicott piece took issue with the Chinese glorification of the sports stadiums built for the Olympics, arguing that the iconic Bird's Nest and Water Cube were stunning because Chinese authorities spent lavishly to hire European and Australian architectural firms while other facilities were a dull “gray mass.”⁹⁶ A human interest piece focused on the thrill the Olympics were bringing to 1.4 million Chinese immigrants in the United States, including children adopted by American parents.⁹⁷ In a piece published a week after the Opening Ceremony, Edward Cody raised questions about the notion, put forward particularly in the NBC broadcast of the Opening Ceremony, that all of China was riveted on the Olympics. Cody focused on villagers in an eastern coastal province who were too busy to pay attention to the Olympics because of the tea harvest and used the anecdote to make the point that two-thirds of China's 1.3 billion people were far removed from Beijing and other glittering Chinese cities. For them, life revolved around the desperately hard

93 Jim Hoagland, “Calling China’s Human Rights Bluff,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 2008, Final edition, B07.

94 Tom Shales, “‘China Inside Out’: A Global Panorama On a Rising Nation,” *Washington Post*, August 6, 2008, Final edition, sec. Style, C01.

95 Philip Kennicott, “Reaching Out to The World With A Manicured Hand,” *Washington Post* (Beijing, August 6, 2008), Final edition, C01.

96 Philip Kennicott, “Gold and Lead; Amid China’s Dull Olympics Architecture, in a City More Gray Than Green, Two Imports Shine,” *Washington Post* (Beijing, August 7, 2008), Final edition, sec. Style, C01.

97 N.C. Aizenman, “Looking to Beijing, With Pride; Chinese Americans Find Cultural Connection in Games,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 2008, Final edition, sec. Metro, B01.

work of farming. Auditing firms reported that two-thirds of the Chinese viewing public watched the Opening Ceremony, he reported, but people in the village harvesting tea were not among them. They went to bed early, exhausted from working in the fields.⁹⁸

The Wall Street Journal in its pre-Games coverage presented China as an authoritarian power trying to keep a lid on expression and dissent. A report published on July 31, 2008 said Chinese authorities had not made good on a promise to provide full Internet access for journalists,⁹⁹ and another item published four days before the Opening Ceremony reported that the International Olympic Committee was “on the defensive” because of Chinese censorship of the Internet and the pollution in Beijing.¹⁰⁰ *A Journal* sportswriter predicted the U.S. would prevail over China in the eventual medal count, noting that China's rise as an economic and sporting power would make the race the most captivating since the Cold War.¹⁰¹ The newspaper also reported on how the U.S. Olympic team was being trained to behave appropriately in Beijing to avoid projecting an image of unruly, spoiled young people mostly interested in partying.¹⁰² The *Journal* speculated that U.S. consumers might not be able to sustain the lead in driving the world economy and that Chinese consumers might take over that role,¹⁰³ reflecting the underlying anxiety about China that was indirectly reflected in the NBC coverage of the Opening Ceremony.

98 Edward Cody, “Across China’s Countryside, ‘Just Too Busy’ for Olympics; Vaunted Games Barely Noticed by Farmers Focused on Harvest,” *Washington Post* (Fan Shen, China, August 15, 2008), Final edition, A12.

99 Geoffrey A. Fowler, “Wall Around Olympic News Proves Tall but Leaky --- While China Limits Games’ Web Access, A Secret Slips Out,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Beijing, July 31, 2008), A07.

100 Geoffrey A. Fowler, “IOC Chief Strives to Deflect Criticism of Chinese Censorship,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Beijing, August 4, 2008), A06.

101 Darren Everson, “Who Is Going to Take Home the Gold?,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 2008, Weekend Journal, sec. Sports, W01.

102 Christopher Rhoads, “U.S. Olympic Training Features A New Requirement: Etiquette 101 --- Bode and Other Embarrassments Prompt Course on Booze, Hugs and Chopsticks,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Palo Alto, Calif., August 6, 2008), A01.

103 Zachary Karabell, “Thank God for the Chinese Consumer,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 2008, A15.

China's environmental record was a prominent subject in the U.S. media coverage. *The New York Times* in the weeks before the Games reported on the terrible pollution in Beijing¹⁰⁴ and how homes and shops considered eyesores were unceremoniously covered with plastic sheeting to keep them out of view.¹⁰⁵ Several *Washington Post* pieces discussed Beijing's notorious air pollution, including one that reported that Beijing announced emergency contingency plans eight days before the Games.¹⁰⁶ "Partners in Grime" critiqued the official Chinese spin on the pollution, with reporter Sally Jenkins describing the Beijing sky as follows: "A smoke curtain lifts and falls, occasionally parting to reveal blue sky, as well as the workings of Chinese state power: Despite the fog, the *China Daily* said that it was 'clear' Monday, and that the city is 'green and beautiful.' Very well then. It smells like roses."¹⁰⁷ As upcoming chapters will detail, NBC deflects criticism of China's environmental record in its presentation of the Opening Ceremony.

Business coverage in the major U.S. newspapers also demonstrated the importance of China's engagement with global capitalism. *The New York Times* reported that NBC would likely take in \$1 billion in advertising from the Games.¹⁰⁸ *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Samsung of South Korea was spending \$100 million to sponsor the Olympics in hopes of raising its profile in China¹⁰⁹ and that Chinese and foreign advertisers were using the parents of star athletes to market their goods in a nod to the traditional Chinese notion of filial piety.¹¹⁰ In an article published three days after the Opening Ceremony that indicated the importance of Olympics for NBC, the *Journal* reported that the network

104 Jim Yardley, "In Beijing, Blue Skies Prove Hard To Achieve," *The New York Times* (Beijing, July 29, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/29/sports/olympics/29china.html?scp=1&sq=yardley%20beijing%20blue%20skies&st=cse>.

105 Jake Hooker, "Before Guests, Beijing Hides Some Messes," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2008,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/29/sports/olympics/29beijing.html?scp=25&sq=jake+hooker+beijing&st=nyt>

106 Maureen Fan, "China, Struggling to Control Smog, Announces 'Just-in-Case' Plan," *Washington Post* (Beijing, August 1, 2008), Final edition, A01.

107 Sally Jenkins, "Partners In Grime," *Washington Post* (Beijing, August 5, 2008), Final edition, sec. Sports, E01.

108 Shelly Freierman, "Popular Demand," *The New York Times*, August 4, 2008, sec. Business Day,

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html>.

109 Loretta Chao, "Samsung Invests in China Games," *The Wall Street Journal* (Beijing, July 30, 2008), B4B.

110 Geoffrey A. Fowler, "Athletes' Parents Get Chance to Be Stars --- Highlighting Families Helps Ads to Stand Out; Actress Portrays 'Mom'," *The Wall Street Journal* (Beijing, July 29, 2008), sec. Media & Marketing, B09.

gained more prime time viewers in the U.S. than any Summer Games in a decade for the first two broadcasts of Olympic sporting events, dispelling the notion that the Internet and piracy might cut substantially into the television audience.¹¹¹ In an indication of ambivalence toward China, another post-Opening Ceremony article in the *Journal* reported that major corporations were angry because Chinese authorities were preventing people from going into the Olympic Green, where Coca-Cola, Samsung of South Korea, Lenovo from China, and other corporations had built pavilions to promote themselves.¹¹²

As discussed in Chapter One, U.S. media organizations just days after the Opening Ceremony prominently reported on what was called the first scandal of the Olympics: the revelation that the cute nine-year-old girl seen singing “Ode to the Motherland” during a particularly emotional part of the ceremony was actually lip synching. Her voice was not deemed worthy, and a seven-year-old girl, whose looks were not considered aesthetically pleasing enough, did the actual singing, unseen by the audience in the stadium and on television. *The Washington Post's* Paul Farhi wrote that the disclosure “plays into a larger narrative of totalitarian control and perfectionism” and reminded the world that state control in China “is business as usual.”¹¹³

Coverage from the major U.S. broadcast networks followed similar parameters as their cousins in print. An analysis of the nightly news broadcasts from ABC, NBC, and CBS from July 28 until August 8, a period that covers two full weeks, shows that NBC, not surprisingly, outdid its competition, broadcasting seventeen China stories on its evening news program, compared with eight for ABC and seven for CBS.¹¹⁴ It is unsurprising that NBC would seize an opportunity to promote its own coverage

111 Matthew Futterman and Sam Schechner, “NBC’s Olympic Ratings Get A Web-Based Boost,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2008, sec. Media & Marketing, B07.

112 Rebecca Blumenstein and Mei Fong, “Big Sponsors Are Upset Over Visibility At Olympics,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Beijing, August 13, 2008), sec. Advertising, B01.

113 Paul Farhi, “Revelation About Singer Leaves That Syncing Feeling,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2008, Final edition, sec. Style, C01.

114 The story counts and the summaries in succeeding paragraphs of the items aired on the networks' evening news programs were gleaned from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

of the Opening Ceremony and the Games, considering the aforementioned strategy of cross-promotion. NBC evidently was using its *Nightly News* program as a platform to generate interest about China in hopes of securing large audiences for the extensive coverage of the Game to come.

Stories on network news programs often coupled what might seem positive, non-political, or innocuous with something that called to mind China's authoritarian structure, helping to place China's one-party political system firmly in the public domain and making it an issue NBC needed to address in the Opening Ceremony presentation. NBC's news division contributed to the focus on authoritarianism, reporting on how the makeover of Beijing meant the destruction of quaint old neighborhoods and how Chinese residents and foreigners were being given detailed rules for conducting themselves during the Games. An ABC story on a school that trained Chinese ping-pong players also delved into allegations that Chinese athletes lied about their ages.

The networks covered major news items that were also being widely reported in print and included the following stories: the problems of pollution in Beijing and the forced shutdown of factories in hopes of cleaning up the air, the arrival of U.S. athletes wearing masks to blunt the pollution, George W. Bush's criticism of China's human rights record in Thailand while en route to China, the blocking of websites on computer networks used by journalists covering the Games, earthquake recovery in Sichuan, including pressure on parents of victims not to speak out about shoddy construction of schools, the arrival of the Olympic Torch, and protests that erupted on its trip around the world.

Network reporters offered a number of enterprise stories that highlighted various aspects of China's authoritarianism. NBC's Brian Williams discussed how China was taking extreme measures to ensure the capital had enough water for the Games, including instructing farmers not to grow rice. ABC's Stephanie Sy reported on detentions of dissidents and raised questions about whether China was following through on promises of openness, noting that corporations advertising in China were not

demanding accountability of Beijing. On the day of the Opening Ceremony, she separately reported on migrant workers leaving Beijing by train because the Olympics had robbed them of jobs. CBS reported on Chinese cyber-espionage and warned that use of telecommunication devices in Beijing might not be secure.

The networks also broadcast a number of lighter, human interest and slice of life stories that were not unfavorable to China. CBS reported on attempts to relieve stress on pandas affected by the Sichuan earthquake, including efforts to alleviate damage to their habitats. ABC ran a piece that featured a boy who survived the Sichuan earthquake and faced a long recovery in getting used to the prosthetics that replaced his amputated arms. NBC presented the story of Sang Lan, who had become a national hero after being paralyzed as the result of an accident during the 1998 Goodwill Games. NBC also produced a sympathetic portrayal of a migrant worker who helped build the facilities for the Olympics but for years was able to go home only once a year.

Cable news coverage of the Games followed story lines that were similar to the networks, but their ideological positions were evident in their presentations. CNN, which says it attempts to strike a neutral, analytical stance, covered the same main stories as their brethren in print and broadcast. Correspondent Kristie Lu Stout, for example, reported that Amnesty International accused China of backsliding on human rights and using the Games as an excuse to crack down on dissidents. Stout included video statements from an Amnesty International spokesman and from a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, who denied the allegation and called for people to adopt an “objective” attitude about China.¹¹⁵ Correspondent John Vause, in a piece broadcast a little more than three weeks before the Games, displayed an obvious sarcastic tone in reporting that the *People's Daily* newspaper said “Beijing exudes a joyful, harmonious atmosphere” in the run-up to the Games. Vause went on to report that officials had ordered all Olympic restaurants to take dog meat off the menu, covering a story that

¹¹⁵ Kristie Lu Stout, “China Has Rejected a New Report Which Claims It Has Broken a (promise),” Video Sharing, *YouTube.com*, July 30, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehDvqZLuYGY&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

the *China Daily* also featured. Vause also reported that armed guards were deployed for the first full dress rehearsal of the Opening Ceremony at the Bird's Nest stadium.¹¹⁶ CNN's coverage also ranged into human interest pieces, including a Vause report about how 600 Chinese families were offering lodging to Olympic visitors for \$50 to \$80 per night.¹¹⁷ CNN coverage in the days after the Opening Ceremony included a report on “Anderson Cooper 360” that discussed allegations that Chinese gymnasts had faked their ages. When the Games were over, Kristie Lu Stout, reverting to her usual anchor role, interviewed Beijing social commentator Lijia Zhang and asked if the Games had been successful for China. Zhang said that they had been, but despite talk of them being a coming-out party for China, there was no party atmosphere. Security was extremely tight and the government did not encourage people to celebrate, she said. The Games would be remembered, she said, for the Opening Ceremony, which showed China's brilliance in organizing a mass spectacular.¹¹⁸

Fox News, also in predictable fashion, took a hard line when it came to China. A “*Fox and Friends*” broadcast on the day before the Opening Ceremony featured an interview with John Tkacik, a senior fellow from the conservative Heritage Foundation. The interview began with a question that demonstrated the questioner's disgust with the idea that China was hosting the Olympics: “John, how did they get these Games?” Tkacik attributed it to Chinese pressure on Third World countries, adding that despite Chinese promises, the human rights situation had gotten worse. The questioner asked if President Bush should “be over there?” After an initial hesitation, Tkacik said, “The answer is no, he shouldn't be over there. It's too bad. He made a big speech in Bangkok yesterday where he basically

116 John Vause, “Dog Meat Off the Menu at Beijing Olympics,” Video Sharing, *YouTube.com*, July 14, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFtluqlJnXs&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

117 John Vause, “Beijing Families Open up Homes, Hearts,” *CNN.com: Beijing 2008*, July 30, 2008, <http://olympics.blogs.cnn.com/tag/john-vause/>.

118 Kristie Lu Stout, “China Faces the Challenge,” *CNN Video*, August 24, 2008, <http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2008/08/24/lustout.intv.zhang.oly.cnn>.

repeated the China fantasy, which is that China will get better all by itself. We just have to sit and watch it.” He went on to call the upcoming Opening Ceremony a “great celebration of Chinese Communism.” The interview left no doubt where Fox stood on China.¹¹⁹

On the day of the Opening Ceremony, Fox News anchor Bill Hemmer introduced correspondent Dana Lewis in Beijing with a snide reference to Beijing's pollution and a suggestion that the event was taking place in what was very much a police state. Hemmer spoke in a kind of anchor-speak, popular at the time, that omitted verbs. “Opening ceremonies under way now in Beijing – through the smog or the fog or the mist – however you categorize it,” Hemmer said as a chuckle was heard from someone who was not seen on camera. Hemmer continued, “They will be perhaps the most controversial Games we have seen in four decades. Dana Lewis on the scene there live in Beijing, Dana, I heard you earlier today describing the security there. Have you seen anything like it before? You've been all over the world at events like these. Compare it.” Lewis shook his head, as if in disbelief about the security arrangements and told the audience there were 130,000 police and military personnel on the streets, supplemented by 300,000 “so-called volunteers.” Lewis went on to say that 300,000 cameras were deployed in Beijing and that he had been assured by a Chinese security adviser that fixed cameras had been pointed at every garbage can in Beijing because of threats from separatist groups. Lewis further reported that the immediate area around the Olympic Stadium was locked down, with nothing but official cars allowed to move. Then he turned to pollution, saying that despite Chinese spending of \$13 billion on a blue skies policy, the air is like “thick soup,” but the International Olympic Committee continued to maintain that it was safe.¹²⁰

119 “Let the Games Begin: Religious Persecution, Human Rights Violations, Restrictions on Freedom: Does China Deserve the Olympics?,” *Fox News Video*, August 7, 2008, <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3911421/let-the-games-begin>.

120 “Let the Games Begin: Beijing Olympics Kick Off with Unprecedented Ceremony,” *Fox News Video*, August 8, 2008, <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3911441/let-the-games-begin>.

Fox's attitude toward China was evident long before the Games. In a report months before the Opening Ceremony, Dr. Cynara Coomer of Fox News interviewed Jeanette Bolden, the head coach of the U.S. women's track and field team, about the threat Beijing's pollution would pose to athletes who suffer from asthma. Bolden, a former Olympic gold medalist, clearly was a good choice as an interview candidate as she was a long-time asthma sufferer herself. Just as she was telling the interviewer that she was not concerned about the situation in Beijing because organizers had taken many steps to cut the pollution, including shutting down factories, and that heat and humidity probably would be a greater problem, these words appeared on the screen below her: "Beijing is one of the world's most polluted cities and vehicle emissions from up to 3.3 million cars are largely to blame."¹²¹

At the time of the Olympics, a theme that emerged in American press coverage pointed to cultural differences between Chinese and Americans. The prominent, right-of-center columnist David Brooks of *The New York Times* was emblematic of this strain of thinking. In a column published just three days after the Opening Ceremony, Brooks drew a fault line between Asian and American culture that placed China and Japan on the collectivist side and the U.S. in individualist territory. Brooks also drew on the common notion that Asian cultures are high-context and the U.S. relies on low-context communication. Brooks used an example of people looking at a fish tank. A Chinese person will tend to describe the various things in the tank while the American will talk about the biggest fish. Brooks concluded by pointing to a clash of cultural civilizations. China was offering the model of a harmonious collectivist society that favored autocracy while the U.S. held out the individualist American dream. Trouble could be ahead, Brooks indicated as he wrote, "The ideal of a harmonious

121 "Asthma at the Olympics," *Fox News Video*, April 27, 2011, <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3909772/asthma-at-the-olympics>.

collective may turn out to be as attractive as the ideal of the American dream.”¹²² The Brooks commentary is another example of ambivalence toward and anxiety about China that was very much a part of the ideological unconscious of the NBC presentation of the Opening Ceremony.

Brooks's notion of a clear cultural dividing line was savagely rebutted in various letters to the editor. Jerome Cohen, a prominent expert on Chinese law, wrote that Brooks had fallen into the trap of repeating discredited clichés about West and East. China, in fact, is much more individualistic than Japan, and both Confucius and Mao had attempted to impose collectivist ideals as a means of taming “fiercely individualistic” traits in Chinese society. The current attempt to forge a “harmonious” society was another effort to channel Chinese individualism for economic advantage.¹²³ Letter writer Gina Kim also took on Brooks, saying that she was tired of the clichés that he was perpetuating. “Those who believe this dichotomy will not understand that China's growth is fueled by private enterprise and led by individuals who keep much wealth for themselves,” she wrote.¹²⁴ Kaitlin Gravitt attacked Brooks from another direction, writing that the myth of the American Dream obscured the fact that America has only been at its best “in times when we work together to build our communities.”¹²⁵ It is the absence of the critical, analytical commentary reflected in the anti-Brooks letters that underlies NBC's Orientalized view of China, as we shall see in the chapters ahead.

A week before the Opening Ceremony, Fareed Zakaria, then editor of *Newsweek International*, wrote an editorial in the *Washington Post* decrying China bashing from American politicians from the left and right and calling for more realism in the U.S. approach to China. Noting that a recent Pew Research Center survey showed that 86% of the Chinese people questioned said their country was

122 David Brooks, “Harmony and the Dream,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 2008, sec. Opinion, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/opinion/12brooks.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=David+Brooks&st=nyt.

123 Jerome Cohen, letter to the editor, *The New York Times* (New York, August 13, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/opinion/115brooks.html>.

124 Gina Kim, letter to the editor, *The New York Times* (New York, August 12, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/opinion/115brooks.html>.

125 Kaitlin Gravitt, letter to the editor, *The New York Times* (New York, August 13, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/opinion/115brooks.html>.

headed in the right direction, Zakaria called for understanding the complexities of China, with its closed political system but open economy. “The greatest failure of Western foreign policy since the Cold War ended has been a sin of omission. We have not pursued a foreign policy toward the world's newly rising powers that aims to create new and enduring relations with them, integrate them into existing structures of power and lay out new rules of the road to secure peace and prosperity,” he wrote.¹²⁶

The foregoing discussion highlights the vast differences in the Chinese and U.S. journalistic commentary around the time of the 2008 Summer Games. The Chinese media, articulating the official position of the party-state, viewed the Olympics as a moment of excitement and triumph for China, a time to applaud China as a virtuous, vital, and friendly member of the international community while at the same time acknowledging the existence of anti-China forces that were attempting to smear the nation's image. Reporting and commentary in the United States, on the other hand, presented a confusing picture. China was galloping ahead economically and was highly attractive to multinational corporations, but it displayed a disturbingly heavy handed and dictatorial political system. Promises of openness were not necessarily kept, and environmental problems such as pollution were severe. There was no question, though, that China was on the rise. The question was how the United States could or should deal with it.

The commentary in the Chinese media provides a framework within which CCTV would offer its narratives in the Opening Ceremony, and the reporting in the U.S. media raises issues that NBC, as an information network, would have to address in its presentation of the Opening Ceremony. The upcoming analysis in subsequent chapters will focus in part on extracting the ideological underpinnings of the CCTV and NBC broadcasts by focusing on similarities and differences of emphasis between the journalistic commentary and the two networks' interpretation of the Opening Ceremony.

126 Fareed Zakaria, “Beyond China-Bashing,” *Washington Post*, August 4, 2008, Final edition, A11.

Historical Review

Beyond a sense of the industrial location and historical development of CCTV and NBC and in addition to understanding the journalistic themes circulating in the public domain as the Games approached, historical grounding also is necessary to set the stage for analyzing the constructed nature and ideological content of the historical and cultural narratives emerging from the broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony by the two networks. Historical and cultural narratives always emphasize certain facts, trends, practices, and elements while distorting or excluding others. Juxtaposing interpretations and arguments among scholars of history against the CCTV and NBC narratives – work that will be done in subsequent chapters – will help bring the ideological implications of both presentations into bold relief.

The Opening Ceremony, as we shall see in the close readings of the CCTV and NBC presentations, consists of a series of performance vignettes that highlight historical and cultural themes. Salient among them are Confucius and Confucian thought, China's maritime voyages of exploration in the fifteenth century, the silk road and the openness of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), and the invention of moveable block printing. In their presentations of these themes, the two networks paint a stylized and idealized picture of the richness of Chinese culture and history and offer certain notions about the relationship of history and culture to Chinese modernity.

In the upcoming sections of this chapter, I examine the historical facts and interpretations behind these scenes in order to expose elements that are emphasized, downplayed, or erased in the ideological narratives emanating from both the CCTV and NBC presentations. First, I briefly examine the history of Confucius and Confucian thought, establishing the point that Confucianism has been (re)interpreted repeatedly in the course of Chinese history to serve changing political needs. Both CCTV and NBC mask that fact in the Opening Ceremony presentations, with different ideological effects. A discussion of the history of the period when China briefly ruled the seas follows the

Confucian expedition. Included is the fact that the Ming Dynasty effectively dismantled the Chinese navy at the very historical moment when the imperial West was about to pose an existential threat to the Chinese political, economic, and social structure. The omission of this part of the history in the Opening Ceremony narratives preempts a discussion of China's historical weakness and is likewise important for the ideological underpinnings of the CCTV and NBC offerings. The history of the overland silk road and the Tang Dynasty also is important to discuss, in order to expose how CCTV and NBC develop ideological justifications for their respective visions of China's incorporation into the global economic and political system. The history of printing in China is the subject of the next section. The glorification in both the CCTV and NBC broadcasts of moveable block printing highlights an invention that was not widely used in China but was exceptionally important in the West. Finally, a discussion of how historians have divided the study of Chinese history into traditional and modern components will help in analyzing how the relationship of tradition and modernity has different ideological uses in the CCTV and NBC broadcasts. In CCTV's narrative, tradition seamlessly informs the modern, but in the NBC presentation, traditional elements are offered up as isolated, cultural and historical curiosities connected to modern life only in an Orientalized fashion.

Confucius and the Opening Ceremony

The interpretation of Confucius and Confucian thought in the Opening Ceremony opens a potentially vast area of inquiry – namely, the varying ways Confucius has been used in Chinese history as a foundation for political and cultural orthodoxy and as a source of narratives about the Chinese nation and Chinese culture. The purpose here is not to produce a comprehensive review of the historical reworking of Confucius. No dissertation – or even a life's work – would be likely to accomplish that goal. Rather, my aim is to briefly explain, by focusing on historical periods separated by vast stretches of time, how Confucius and Confucian thought have been interpreted and reinterpreted in different historical epochs to suit the purposes of the times. Those interpretations then

can be set against the CCTV and NBC interpretations, thereby exposing the ideological outlines of each. Perhaps more than any other cultural signs in China, Confucius and Confucian thought stand as markers that delineate foundational cultural and political values of an era.

In undertaking this Confucian excursion, I am guided by the insights of Prasenjit Duara, who says every community must produce a believable image of its past in its present through a simultaneous movement between transmission and dispersal of historical information.¹²⁷ Some historical elements are appropriated; others are concealed or repressed in this process.¹²⁸ This is not a simple matter of the past taking up residence in the present. By transforming the present, the past is also itself transformed.¹²⁹ To illustrate the point with a Confucian example, the reinterpretation of Confucius at various times in Chinese history is not simply a matter of reinserting the original Confucius or the original Confucian texts into the narratives of the present. By reinterpreting Confucius, one necessarily reworks and changes the view of the original Confucius through the process of transmission and dispersal. What people in any one period believe to be the original Confucian texts and the arguments about the interpretation of those texts depend not only on the needs of the present but also on past and present reworkings of those texts. Duara believes that attention to “the manner in which dominant narratives seek to inflect and mobilize the meanings of existing symbols and practices” is key to understanding history.¹³⁰

Searching for the historical Confucius is even more daunting than looking for the historical Jesus. Hard evidence of the existence of Confucius does not exist; Michael Nylan and Thomas Wilson say the first historical rendering of Confucius – or *Kongzi* in Chinese – was written by the famed Chinese historian Sima Qian around 100 BC, almost 400 years after the sage's death. The *Analects* or

127 Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 71.

128 Ibid., 73.

129 Ibid., 76.

130 Ibid.

Selected Sayings of Confucius also are believed to have been written around this time. In Sima's account, Confucius in early life is charismatic and dedicated to learning and righteous behavior but is also an overly ambitious aspiring political adviser, who generally fails whenever he is hired by a ruler because he is too blunt and self-serving. Confucius wanders from kingdom to kingdom attracting and losing disciples at a time of great strife and instability. Only at the end of his life, in Sima's rendition, does Confucius become the wise sage who understands that righteousness comes from seeking the opinions of others.¹³¹ The *Analects* depicts Confucius as believing in the power of moral example and education, always testing himself and people around him for character flaws but never losing faith in virtuous action.¹³²

Nylan and Wilson point out that in the years since Sima's history and the writing of the *Analects*, the needs of the present have shaped the interpretation of Confucius, the man. There is not one but many versions of the sage.

In the two thousand years since Sima Qian's biography, society has made *Kongzi* by turns into a fortune-cookie phrase-maker, a brilliant moral philosopher, a fusty antiquarian, a divine sage, an old man with a scraggly white beard fussing over some detail or ritual, or a down-to-earth thinker with an honest assessment of the human propensity to falter.... Searching for the 'authentic ' *Kongzi* in history, we find no single convincing portrait, for the essence of *Kongzi's* life and teachings was just as hotly contested in 100 BCE, in the courtly circles that produced Sima Qian's version and the *Analects*, as it is today.¹³³

Confucianism similarly has been interpreted and reinterpreted over the years. John and Evelyn Berthrong, in fact, say modern scholars divide Confucianism into three modalities: as a popular form of Chinese thought and practice, as a political ideology or orthodoxy employed by various dynasties, and as an intellectual basis to call for reform or renewal of Chinese culture. All three forms interact with one another, making them difficult to distinguish.¹³⁴ The first modality would cover everything from the

131 Michael Nylan and Thomas Wilson, *Lives of Confucius: Civilization's Greatest Sage Through the Ages*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 1–28.

132 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 59.

133 Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*, 25–26.

134 John H. Berthrong and Evelyn Nagai Berthrong, *Confucianism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oneworld,

fortune-cookie phrasemaking that Nylan and Wilson mention to interpretations of Confucius in contemporary popular culture inside and outside of China. Chinese media studies professor and Beijing television personality Yu Dan, for example, offers her own, modern interpretation of Confucius in a series of programs broadcast on CCTV. In the *Analects* of Confucius she finds advice about how to achieve happiness in daily life. She interprets a famous line in the *Analects* that says, “If you are a gentleman, all men within the four seas are your brothers” to mean that one should jettison regrets lest they become destructive.¹³⁵ Nylan and Wilson look askance at this kind of Chinese New Age Confucianism saying, “Unique among the many Confuciuses on offer in the modern world, Yu Dan's *Kongzi* comes perilously close to making the Sage an eerie double for Chauncy Gardiner, the vacuous cipher at the center of the Peter Sellers movie *Being There*.”¹³⁶

The second form of Confucianism – as a political ideology or orthodoxy – perhaps holds the greatest relevance to the understanding of the narratives in the Opening Ceremony. Just when and how Confucianism became an established orthodoxy is the subject of scholarly debate. According to a long dominant interpretation in the West, Confucianism was first developed as a ruling orthodoxy by the Han Dynasty, which historian Sima Qian served. The Han ruled from 202 BC to 220 AD and adopted what Western scholars call Imperial Confucianism. The ruler had to exercise morally upstanding behavior and civility, which in turn invited respect and maintained harmony between heaven and earth. The proper observation of rituals was an important element in that it provided the ruler with an aura of virtue.¹³⁷ Scholar-bureaucrats not only exercised practical administrative power, they also established a self-perpetuating system. Officials were trained in an imperial academy, using particular Confucian

2000), 7–8.

135 Sheila Melvin, “Modern Gloss on China’s Golden Age,” *The New York Times*, September 3, 2007, sec. Arts, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/03/arts/03stud.html?scp=1&sq=%22yu+dan%22&st=nyt>.

136 Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*, 220.

137 John Stewart Bowman, ed., *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 9; John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History*, Enl. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 62–63.

texts that emphasized moral behavior. According to this interpretation, later dynasties reworked Confucianism for their own purposes, believing that the Han synthesis was insufficiently representative of the original thought of Confucius.¹³⁸

Some scholars take issue with the notion of a Han orthodoxy. Nylan posits that the argument for orthodoxy fails on numerous grounds. He argues that the Confucianism of the Han was not as cohesive as the dominant interpretation requires, that the Han rulers did not, in fact, need a single orthodoxy, that state sponsorship of Confucian activities was not consistent or effective, and that the Han did not exhibit a greater uniformity in ideological thought than what came previously.¹³⁹ The idea here is not to indulge in an academic debate over the actual nature of Han Confucianism (as interesting as that debate may be). The point is to reinforce the notion that Confucianism not only has changed in character over time, but that the view of past versions of Confucianism is likewise subject to change.

A major revision of Confucianism came during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279 AD) at the hands of a group of scholars, most prominent among them a scholar named Zhu Xi, who is widely regarded as the founder of Neo-Confucianism.¹⁴⁰ Zhu Xi came to believe that Confucian teachings from previous dynasties had deviated from the original ideas of the master. Zhu Xi revised the Confucian canon, organizing it around the Four Books, which were used as a starting point by subsequent dynasties for their own intellectual legitimacy.¹⁴¹ But Zhu Xi did more than rearrange Confucian texts. He developed a new cosmology to explain the universe and the individual's relationship to it, in so doing incorporating ideas from Buddhism, which by this time was firmly established in China. Zhu Xi taught that disciplined self-study and self-cultivation would lead to understanding of the *Dao* (also

138 Michael Nylan, "A Problematic Model: The Han 'Orthodox Synthesis,' Then and Now," in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On Cho Ng, and John B. Henderson, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17–18.

139 *Ibid.*, 18.

140 Berthrong and Berthrong, *Confucianism*, 97–100; Bowman, *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture*, 32.

141 Fairbank and Goldman, *China*, 97–101; Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*, 105–107.

written as *Tao*), or Way, in a manner that Confucius actually had sought.¹⁴² Zhu Xi also emphasized rational, moral learning, hierarchy, and prescribed conduct in key relationships, such as between father and son and ruler and subject.¹⁴³

Zhu Xi and other Song scholars were assisted in their project by the invention of block printing, argues Susan Cherniack. Before printing was invented, sets of Confucian texts were carved in stone half a dozen times, giving them an aura of permanence.¹⁴⁴ The advent of printing coincided with a wave of skepticism about the authority of canonical texts, and printing meant texts lacked a sense of finality, which prompted more questioning and more revision.¹⁴⁵ Cherniack also points out that Chinese and Western scholars operate from different philosophical starting points when it comes to analyzing textual changes. In the West, scholars are forever searching for original texts, believing that changes made over the years produce corrupted versions. Chinese scholars believe that amendments can improve and not necessarily corrupt texts.¹⁴⁶

Over the course of the succeeding centuries, the Neo-Confucian canon developed by Zhu Xi was used as a basis for reinterpretation as successive dynasties and rulers developed their ideologies. Scholars spun out commentaries and wrote amendments in vermilion ink on old documents, increasingly working Confucianism into a rigid orthodoxy.¹⁴⁷ In the Ming and Qing dynasties, official rank was achieved by passing rigorous examinations that called for intensive knowledge of the Confucian canon. This meant that a man who passed the exams (the system was not open to women) and was appointed as a local magistrate might know a great deal about Confucian philosophy but little

142 Fairbank and Goldman, *China*, 98.

143 *Ibid.*, 99.

144 Susan Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54, no. 1 (June 1, 1994): 19.

145 *Ibid.*, 19–21. Cherniack's argument calls to mind Harold Innis, who saw differences in communication media at the core of differences in civilizations. He also theorized that developments at the peripheries of empires often led to fundamental changes as a result of a dialectical process. Innis also said empires tended to flourish when one type of communication system (stone for example) was offset by another (papyrus, parchment or paper). See Harold Adams Innis, *Empire and Communications*, Rowman & Littlefield ed., Critical Media Studies (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

146 Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," 6–14.

147 Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 60.

or nothing about the workings of a canal or irrigation system. Hierarchical relationships became mechanisms to enforce absolute rule by the emperor and his lieutenants over subjects, fathers over sons, and husbands over wives. Classifications were established, with scholar-officials and farmers in favored positions and merchants at the bottom of the scale. Learning and moral education were highly valued; commerce was not. In practice, Confucianism was, as always, interpreted and reinterpreted to suit present needs, sometimes emphasizing high moral standards and other times encouraging trade and allowing profiteering to enter the picture.

Knowledge about the historical interpretation and reinterpretation of Confucius in Imperial China will help contextualize and expose the ideological outlines of the interpretations of the Confucian scenes in the Opening Ceremony by CCTV and NBC. But a more recent debate about the value of Confucianism is also highly relevant, especially because it is ignored in the broadcasts by both networks.

Modern Views of Confucius

In the early twentieth century, reform-minded Chinese intellectuals derided Confucian scholars for holding China back. After the collapse of the last dynasty in 1911 and against the background of a country descending into warlordism and falling victim to encroachments by Western imperial powers and Japan, a period of intellectual questioning and ferment ensued. On May 4, 1919 students in Beijing rallied in Tiananmen Square, protesting among other things extraterritoriality rights awarded in the Treaty of Versailles to Japan in China's Shandong peninsula.¹⁴⁸ A movement under the name “May 4th” grew in scope and became “an attempt to redefine China's culture as a valid part of the modern world,”¹⁴⁹ according to historian Jonathan Spence. Some blamed Confucianism for holding China back. Chen Duxiu, an intellectual who a year later became a founding member and first secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party, called for “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy” to replace ossified

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 310–311.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 312.

Confucianism.¹⁵⁰ The subsequent conflict and eventual civil war between the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists under Mao Zedong played out in part through a Confucian prism. Chiang considered himself the proper inheritor of traditional Chinese values and instituted a “New Life” movement that called for respect for tradition and rigid rules of conduct.¹⁵¹ Mao, on the other hand, viewed himself a revolutionary who was overthrowing the old, outmoded traditional values and remaking Chinese culture in a revolutionary mode.

Once in power, Mao and his allies at times variously used and attacked Confucius. Liu Xiaogi, a top leader who was purged during the Cultural Revolution, wrote a book entitled *How to Be a Good Communist*, which was widely disseminated and read in the 1950s. In the book, Liu quoted a famous phrase from the *Analects* as part of its pedagogy. Jonathan Spence translates the phrase as follows, “At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had my doubts. At fifty, I knew the decree of Heaven. At sixty my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow my heart's desire, without transgressing what was right.” Liu went on to dethrone any notion of Confucius as a deity, writing that Confucius did not consider himself a born sage but rather was relating the process of his own self-cultivation.¹⁵²

Later, Mao and company vociferously attacked Confucius and Confucianism. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, red guards loyal to Mao equated lauding Confucianism with attacking Mao Zedong Thought.¹⁵³ Following the betrayal and death of Mao's chosen successor Lin Biao in 1971,¹⁵⁴ the Communist Party instigated a campaign to criticize Lin and Confucius. One of the crimes that Lin and his wife were said to have committed was hanging calligraphy scrolls in their bedroom with sayings from the *Analects* that said, “Of all things, this is the most important: conquer thyself and

150 Ibid., 315.

151 Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*, 203–204.

152 Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 250.

153 Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*, 205.

154 Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 710–714.

restore the rites.”¹⁵⁵ The campaign had a classical Marxist gloss. Confucius was said to have represented a slave owning aristocracy who were fighting the emergence of a feudal system.¹⁵⁶ In 1974, the anti-Confucius drive became a mass campaign, with Premier Zhou Enlai as one of the principal targets.¹⁵⁷ Monumental change was about to sweep China. Zhou died in January 1976, followed eight months later by the death of Mao himself. After a power struggle that eventually resulted in the arrest of the Gang of Four, which included Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, Deng Xiaoping was rehabilitated and emerged as China's paramount leader. He began to open China to capitalist style reforms (which he called Socialism with Chinese Characteristics), reviving Confucianism in the process. Deng portrayed it as a Chinese ethical system that could counter Western spiritual pollution.¹⁵⁸

As we shall see in the coming chapters, the ideological underpinnings of the CCTV and NBC narratives both depend on eviscerating this history. CCTV's commentary on the Opening Ceremony ignores the Maoist attacks on Confucianism in favor of emphasizing its value and link to the Communist Party's goal of fostering a harmonious society. A reminder that the regime's revolutionary founder considered Confucius a counter-revolutionary scoundrel would have thoroughly discredited that narrative.

China on the High Seas

One of the vignettes in the Opening Ceremony depicted a huge sailing ship, with sailors paddling against fierce wind and waves in a demonstration, according to CCTV's commentary, of the high tide of ancient China's navigational skill. The scene begs the question: what does the historical record show when it comes to China and sea prowess? The answer reveals historical omissions that are vital to the ideological dimensions of the CCTV and NBC narratives.

155 Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*, 205.

156 Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 635.

157 Ibid., 637.

158 Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*, 206.

For significant periods of time China was a major seafaring nation, and for a brief period in the early fifteenth century China unquestionably was the world's preeminent maritime force. The buildup to preeminence on the high seas took several centuries. China's major turn toward naval power began in the early twelfth century, after the Song rulers were pushed from their northern capital of Kaifeng and forced to take up residence in the southern city of Hangzhou. Presiding over a realm with less arable land than he had in the north and living close to the sea, Emperor Gao Zong began looking outward. He tapped China's already extensive knowledge about shipbuilding and navigation and promoted the creation of a navy and merchant fleet. He also invested in harbor development and coastal navigational beacons. Innovation flourished, and Chinese shipbuilders developed ten kinds of ocean-going junks and ten different warships. It was at this time that the compass was invented.¹⁵⁹

The Song pressed their naval program in the early thirteenth century.¹⁶⁰ Chinese merchant seamen came to dominate Arabs sea traders, who had previously reigned supreme in the Indian Ocean. They plied ships as large as 300 tons that carried up to 600 crewmen.¹⁶¹ Chinese shipbuilders had learned to build holds with separate, watertight compartments, and sailors developed charts showing sea lanes to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.¹⁶² Chinese seagoing junks, constructed with four to six masts, constituted the most powerful ships of their time.¹⁶³ Song scholars found philosophical justification for the support of commerce, revising Confucian texts to declare that profit-making was righteous when business is done properly and when the goods in question are needed.¹⁶⁴ As we shall see in the chapters ahead, CCTV projects the idea that its version of Confucian teachings underpin China's modernization and full integration with the wider capitalist world.

159 Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405-1433* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 41–43.

160 *Ibid.*, 41–47.

161 *Ibid.*, 43.

162 Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 34–38.

163 Bowman, *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture*, 33.

164 Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 41.

The Song's military technology likewise was striking. They developed two particularly unusual and lethal types of warship: a “sea falcon” that featured rudders at midships that made the vessel look like a bird and a “flying tiger” powered by paddle wheels that seemed to float on top of the water.¹⁶⁵ Strategists developed gunpowder bombs launched by catapults. Louise Levathes writes that the first use of gunpowder in warfare is believed to have come in 1161 when Song warships unleashed these weapons against invading forces of the Jin people from the north.¹⁶⁶

Naval power was a key factor in the Mongol victory over the Song in the late thirteenth century and their further consolidation of power. The Mongols not only pressed the Song by land, but they also won naval battles to control the Yangzi river, capturing 3,000 Song ships in the process. They were also aided by two defecting Song merchants, who supplied 500 boats for the final assault on the Song capital at Hangzhou.¹⁶⁷ After establishing themselves as the rulers of China, the Mongols continued to develop their naval forces, launching two unsuccessful attempts to invade what is now Japan. Both armadas were inundated by typhoons, which the Japanese came to regard as a divine wind or *kamikaze*.¹⁶⁸ It was during the rule of the Mongols that Marco Polo visited court and observed ocean going junks with four masts, watertight compartments, and up to 60 cabins for merchants.¹⁶⁹

China's seafaring prowess reached its apogee in the early fifteenth century, when Ming Emperor Yongle embarked on an ambitious program to make China preeminent in naval power. He began a shipbuilding program that resulted in the construction of more than 1,600 large ocean going “treasure” ships in a sixteen year period.¹⁷⁰ To command the fleet, he tapped a Muslim eunuch named Zheng He,

165 Ibid., 43–45.

166 Ibid., 46–47.

167 Ibid., 48.

168 Ibid., 54; Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 25.

169 Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 49.

170 Ibid., 75–76; Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 33.

who led seven expeditions between 1403 and 1433, reaching as far as East Africa, the Arabian peninsula, and the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁷¹ The aforementioned scene in the Opening Ceremony evidently is a fantasized representation of the voyages of Admiral Zheng He.

The size and accomplishments of the expeditions were breathtaking, even by contemporary standards. The first featured more than 317 ships with more than 27,000 men on board.¹⁷² Levathes describes the appearance of a Chinese fleet in 1418 off the East African town of Malinda, south of the present day Mogadishu in Somalia. There were dozens of ships, the largest 400 feet in length, and they carried as many as 28,000 men and horses for the calvary. They brought porcelain, silk, laquerware and art objects to trade for ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, wood, incense, medicines, pearls, and precious stones. “It was a unique armada in the history of China – and the world – not to be surpassed until the invasion fleets of World War I sailed the seas,”¹⁷³ Levathes writes.

The Ming reversed course in their maritime quest almost as quickly as it began. By the early sixteenth century, building a ship with more than two masts was a crime punishable by death and by 1525 shipbuilding was shut down by imperial decree.¹⁷⁴ Levathes and naval historian Bruce Swanson point to a variety of reasons for this, including political in-fighting between eunuchs who controlled and profited from the sea trade and conservative Confucian scholars who disdained commerce. Additionally, the Grand Canal had been reopened early in the fifteenth century, obviating the need for the more dangerous sea transport of goods between north and south China. There were threats from hostile Mongol forces in the north and a war to be fought with the Annamese in current day Vietnam, requiring the diversion of resources toward the army. Japanese pirates were menacing China's coast just

171 Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 75–76; 167–181; Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 33–40.

172 Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 87; Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 33.

173 Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 19–20.

174 *Ibid.*, 174–175; Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 42–43.

as the population had shifted inland from coastal areas, lessening the need for commerce by sea.

Inflation and a shrinking tax base, partly the result of corruption, meant resources had to be directed where they were most needed.¹⁷⁵

The turnabout by Ming rulers after Zheng He's expeditions is perhaps the most dramatic example of the historic waxing and waning of Chinese interest in naval technology and power. Both Levathes and Swanson see at work here tension between a commercial impulse and a type of conservative, inward-looking Confucianism that periodically asserted itself and rejected as morally corrupt the idea of profiting from trading in goods and opposed foreign military adventures. In the mid-fifteenth century Confucian advisers argued that China could emerge supreme simply by demonstrating the superiority of its civilization and not by military means.¹⁷⁶ Swanson quotes from a memorial written to the emperor by minister Fan Ji in 1426 in which he said, among other things, that arms are instruments of evil and that noble rulers do not engage in military campaigns in far off lands. Fan pleaded with the emperor.

Abandon the barren lands abroad and give the people of China a respite so that they could devote themselves to husbandry and to the schools. Thus, there would be no wars and suffering on the frontier and no murmuring in the villages... the people from afar would voluntarily submit and distant lands would come into our fold, and our dynasty would last for ten thousand generations.¹⁷⁷

History has not been kind to Fan Ji and those who raised similar arguments. In fact, the turning away from sea power and maritime technology came at the worst possible historical moment. An age of exploration, expansion, and imperial conquest was dawning in Europe. It would not be long in historical terms before the Portuguese, Dutch, and finally the English would be first knocking and then

175 Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 174–181; Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 40–43.

176 Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 179.

177 Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 42–43.

kicking in China's door. The prohibition against shipbuilding by the Ming meant that by the sixteenth century, China had lost the knowledge to build large ships and had fallen behind in guns and cannon. "The Chinese began to lose their technical edge over the West, never to regain it."¹⁷⁸ Levathes writes.

Neither CCTV nor NBC reprises any of this history, and the reasons are evident. In narratives that point to the maritime voyages as a high point of Chinese culture, too much historical realism would raise too many troubling questions and point to embarrassing historical analogies. If a bureaucratic state that was so technologically advanced and able to project such commercial and military power could have precipitously shut down its maritime project just as the West was preparing to mount an existential challenge, allowing its Confucian ideology to quash what might have led to spectacular commercial possibilities, how does that show the glory of China's past? Could not the Communist rulers of today be nothing more than modern versions of the Ming?

The Silk Road and the Tang Dynasty

Another historical theme that figured prominently in the Opening Ceremony involves pre-modern China's trade along the silk road and the openness to foreign influences during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD).¹⁷⁹ As we shall see in the upcoming close readings, CCTV interprets these scenes as describing a China that had a long and continuous history of friendly cultural and commercial contact with the West and that at the height of its ancient greatness embraced foreigners. NBC describes the Tang period as China's golden era precisely because of its openness and offers the Tang as a historical model that demonstrates the benefits of neoliberal-style openness. The historical record, however, shows that both narratives depend on ideologically driven interpretations of what is a more nuanced picture. China's history is far from a story of continuous openness, and Chinese attitudes toward foreigners and commerce were much more nuanced than the Opening Ceremony narratives indicate.

¹⁷⁸ Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 177.

¹⁷⁹ Bowman, *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture*, 21.

The historical record supports the notion that the Tang period was indeed one of the times that foreigners were welcomed, but the picture is complicated and Chinese attitudes evidently were ambivalent when it came to foreign trade and foreigners. Foreigners of various stripes lived by the thousands in the magnificent cities of the Tang. The capital Changan was particular renown as an international metropolis, far grander than any Western capital at the time.¹⁸⁰ Changan at its high point had two million taxable residents.¹⁸¹ There were Persians, Indian Buddhists, Nestorian Christians, Turks, Jews and Arabs in residence.¹⁸² Current day Guangzhou became a trading center where foreigners lived and worked.¹⁸³ Yangzhou, inland on the Yangzi River, was another center of foreign residence and commerce. A tributary system was enforced, but that often amounted to taxes or bribes in another form. Individual merchants would offer certain quantities of goods to local officials in return for the privilege of doing business.¹⁸⁴

Although foreigners were able to live and thrive in business, there also was persecution and excess. Rebels killed several thousand Arab and Persian businessmen in Yangzhou in a raid in 760.¹⁸⁵ Although Chinese generally encouraged foreigners to adopt their cultural attributes, a government edict in 779 prevented Uighurs from marrying Chinese women and compelled them to wear their native dress.¹⁸⁶ A governor of Guangzhou in 836, learning that Chinese and foreigners were intermarrying, forbade the practice and also barred foreigners from buying land or houses.¹⁸⁷

180 Fairbank and Goldman, *China*, 78.

181 Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand; a Study of T'ang Exotics* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1963), 20.

182 Wolfram Eberhard, *A History of China*, 4th ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1977), 192–193; Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand; a Study of T'ang Exotics*, 10–11.

183 Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand; a Study of T'ang Exotics*, 14–15.

184 *Ibid.*, 23–28.

185 *Ibid.*, 18.

186 *Ibid.*, 22.

187 *Ibid.*

The Tang Dynasty has long been regarded by scholars as one of the high water marks of Chinese civilization. Founded in a rebellion aided by Turkic-speaking foreign forces, the Tang were aggressive military expansionists, sending armies to battle in Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia and Tibet¹⁸⁸ – historical facts that are neglected by CCTV and NBC in the Opening Ceremony broadcasts. The Tang reinterpreted Confucianism and established an empire that offered continuity not entirely through royal succession but by way of an “ideologically inspired” bureaucracy.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, S.A.M. Adshead argues that the genius of the Tang lay in transforming a faction-ridden aristocracy into a “cosmopolitan, multi-cultural, orderly and partly meritocratic state” that could consider itself as central to the world, rather than on the periphery of some other world order.¹⁹⁰ Buddhism thrived but was kept under control by the state. Painting and poetry also flourished. Tang poets are widely regarded as representing the high point of Chinese poetic development. Li Bai, perhaps the best known of the Tang poets, figures in CCTV's presentation of the Opening Ceremony.¹⁹¹

Deeper consideration of the history of Buddhism in the Tang and beyond is warranted as NBC's emphasis on Buddhist representations in the Opening Ceremony and CCTV's conspicuous omission of them contribute to the ideological messaging in both broadcasts. The Tang was considered a golden age for Buddhism, and early in the period monasteries gained land as well as wealth in the form of bronze statues and began exercising influence over the price of money. Wolfram Eberhard goes as far as to argue that these practices by Buddhists helped lay the groundwork for capitalism. But the state took great pains to ensure that official power trumped the power of the church. Monks, for example, were required to take state exams, which included material from the Confucian classics. In 845, the Tang launched a sweeping crackdown on Buddhism, forcing as many as 250,000 monks and nuns to

188 Bowman, *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture*, 21.

189 Samuel Adrian M. Adshead, *T'ang China: The Rise of the East in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 30.

190 *Ibid.*, 31.

191 The poet's name 李白 is also romanized as Li Po.

renounce their vows and leave the church. The state confiscated cash, silk, grain, and metal from Buddhist monasteries and returned land that had been in the hands of the church to the tax rolls. Afterwards, monks were required to obtain ordination certificates from the state. Buddhism nonetheless continued to exert a major influence in the Tang and in succeeding centuries. The state, however, continued to keep the religion from establishing an independent power base. Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism incorporated elements of Buddhist thought, and much later the Qing emperors installed themselves as de facto heads of the Buddhist church. Secret societies dedicated to the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in the eighteenth century gained popular support by adopting Buddhist ideas.¹⁹² The history of Buddhism, in other words, demonstrates a longstanding state wariness toward the religion that is mirrored in CCTV's glaring omission of any discussion of the subject.

The notion that the Tang poets represent the best of the Chinese poetic tradition – an idea that is used for ideological effect in the Opening Ceremony narratives – developed for specific historical reasons. Pauline Yu points out that Li Bai and Du Fu, the two most famous Tang poets, were not well regarded in their own time and were elevated to canonical status much later, the result of historically specific demands for certain aesthetic sensitivities. She explains that the poets of the high Tang, who wrote in the first part of the eighth century, were inserted into the canon for the first time 450 years later by scholar-critic Yan Yu of the Southern Song Dynasty. As mentioned previously, the Song rulers had been pushed out of north China and faced instability and a sense of diminishment. Under those circumstances, intellectuals looked backward for new models to reconstruct a cultural paradigm.

192 Adshead, *T'ang China*, 35, 42–42, 119, 146; Charles D. Benn, *China's Golden Age: Everyday Life in the Tang Dynasty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16–17, 28–32; Eberhard, *A History of China*, 195. Fairbank and Goldman, *China*, 47–54, 73–86, 98; Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 41, 81, 129; Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand; a Study of T'ang Exotics*, 10.

Rejecting the late Tang poetry in vogue at the time, Yan Yu pointed to the high Tang as a model for poetry. The high Tang was a time when poetry “was becoming a self-conscious craft with externalized conventions,” and high Tang poets were exemplars of moral rectitude.¹⁹³

Pauline Yu argues that another important moment in the canonization of high Tang poetry came several hundred years later during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when scholar and anthologist Gao Bing put together a compendium of Tang poetry, drawing a clear division between the early, high, middle and late periods. Building on Yan Yu's work, Gao Bing exalted the high Tang poets as ideal cultural archetypes. It was a moment of political rupture in China, as the newly installed Ming were intent on establishing their own intellectual legitimacy. Gao Bing's evaluation fit perfectly with the Ming emphasis on ethical self-cultivation. According to Yu, Gao's evaluation of the high Tang poets in essence carried forward to the succeeding Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and the post-imperial period that followed. It has only been in recent decades that scholars have been looking anew at old assumptions and resurrecting long forgotten poets, among them women and monks. The installation of the high Tang poets as signifiers of the primordial source of the poetic Chinese tradition thus was not random, democratic, or the work of the market but the result of a series of political-historical processes.

The Tang did not mark a sudden appearance of contact with the West. There surely was important cultural traffic and trade that stretched back into antiquity between China and the civilizations far beyond its periphery. Joseph Needham, whose extensive scholarship on science and civilization in China done in the 1940s and 1950s is still a foundational reference today, dates the earliest silk route to the first century BC and says that ancient Westerners knew of the Chinese capital of Changan and Loyang.¹⁹⁴ By the first and second centuries AD, a number of overland trade routes, and possibly maritime trade routes as well, had been established linking China with central Asia and

193 Pauline Yu, “Charting the Landscape of Chinese Poetry,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 20 (December 1, 1998): 71–87.

194 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. I (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 181.

the Middle East.¹⁹⁵ There is evidence the Romans knew of and prized Chinese silks. Roman, Indian and Sinhalese ships plied the seas early in the millennium, and by the eighth century Islamic Arabs had come to dominate the sea trade, with long-distance voyages by Chinese ships appearing only in the fourth century.¹⁹⁶ As discussed above, Chinese did not begin to displace Arabs until the twelfth century and only briefly in the early fifteenth century became dominant in world sea power.¹⁹⁷

There is little question that much knowledge, technology and material goods flowed between China and cultures to the West during the many centuries before the Age of Exploration, when Europeans established a firm foothold in China as a precursor to imperialist conquest. As a more advanced civilization for much of this time, China had a great deal to offer. Adshead argues that the Chinese inventions of printing, gunpowder, and the magnetic compass may well have contributed to the later rise of the West.¹⁹⁸ But influences went both ways. One of the great movements of the first millennium was the flow of Buddhism into China from India.

Contact between far removed civilizations was difficult and slow. Trading along the silk route meant travel either by horse, donkey cart, or camel.¹⁹⁹ Goods surely passed through many hands, transiting great market towns and bazarres as they made their way. Needham calls the conduits of contact between China and the far away peoples of the West “capillary vessels.”²⁰⁰ Joe Studwell reminds us that the cost and danger of mounting trade missions would surely have limited their scope. “The romantic image of camel trains trudging 3,000 miles through sand storms across the silk routes of central Asia is largely just that – movie material,”²⁰¹ he writes.

195 Ibid., I:170–176. Chart 32 on page 171 details land and sea routes.

196 Ibid., I:176–180.

197 Ibid., I:180.

198 Adshead, *T'ang China*, 1.

199 Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand; a Study of T'ang Exotics*, 13.

200 Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, I:191.

201 Joe Studwell, *The China Dream: The Quest for the Last Great Untapped Market on Earth*, 1st American ed. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002), 4.

Chinese rulers had a complicated relationship with commerce and foreign traders. They were first and foremost concerned with gaining and keeping power amid dangers and threats from hostile peoples on their periphery. As various times, Chinese dynasties employed what is known as a tributary system to manage “barbarians” who coveted Chinese goods and territory and might pose an existential threat. Morris Rossabi offers the broad outlines of the system as understood in dominant Western scholarship. The rulers of China would invite “barbarians” to trade in China under strict conditions, even though China, as a superior culture, had no need of anything produced by them. The foreigners would send missions to the Chinese capital to deliver tribute to the emperor, who would in turn give lavish gifts to the visitors. The foreigners then would be allowed to engage in trade for a limited period of time. The visitors would also have to perform rituals such as kowtowing, which acknowledged the emperor as the son of Heaven and themselves as envoys of a vassal state.²⁰²

There was a moral element in the equation. As Confucians, the rulers of China were required to lead by virtuous example. Offering benevolence, compassion and generosity to foreign trade missions would naturally extend the aura of Chinese civilization to them, enabling them to recognize the superiority of Chinese civilization. In so doing, order in society could be preserved.

Scholars disagree about the extent and time periods that the tributary system actually was in force. The volume Rossabi edited, in fact, produced a series of revisionist essays that take on the notion that the system more or less applied from the the second century BC until the Opium wars of the nineteenth century. The authors in the volume argue that for long stretches of history from the tenth to the fourteenth century China treated foreigners sometimes as equals, other times as vassals, often themselves engaging in foreign exploration and commerce to obtain useful knowledge, information, and material goods.

²⁰² Morris Rossabi, ed., *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1983), 1–4.

The precis of the Tang Dynasty and the discussion of the tribute system point up historical information that is ignored in the service of the ideological narratives offered by CCTV and NBC during their coverage of the Opening Ceremony. A more nuanced, realistic view of history would confound the CCTV view of China being always open to foreigners, always intent on conducting trade on a reciprocal basis. The ideological portrayal of the Tang Dynasty as a model for further neoliberal development in China that emerges from the NBC presentation likewise depends on emphasizing some aspects of the historical record and blurring others. The chapters ahead will offer further elaboration on these ideas.

Moveable Block Printing

Another signifier of the Chinese tradition used to great effect in the Opening Ceremony is moveable block printing. Early in the ceremony a field of undulating blocks, each topped with a representation of a Chinese character, appears on the floor of the stadium, representing the Chinese invention of moveable-type printing press hundreds of years before Gutenberg developed his press in Europe. Again, the historical record provides interesting insight into the use of a signifier of traditional cultural and technological genius that can be cross-referenced against the CCTV and NBC interpretations. Although moveable type was invented in China, it was not widely used until the nineteenth century, when modern printing techniques from the West were adapted for Chinese characters. Prior to that, wood block and not moveable printing suited China's needs and for many centuries was the dominant technology. The fact that China invented moveable printing but did not use it, coupled with the fact that the overwhelmingly powerful West did use moveable printing, could be seen as another example of Chinese weakness: a far different interpretation than the one presented by CCTV and NBC.

Wood block printing was cumbersome, but it suited the requirements of printing in a language based on tens of thousands of ideographs. Each block consisted of a single character, and as techniques improved over the years color and other flourishes were added to produce a wide variety of effects. Blocks numbered in the thousands had to be lined up for printing and stored in huge warehouses between press runs, but the arrangement fit a need for periodic printing of relatively small quantities of books.²⁰³ Blocks could also be preserved for long periods. There is evidence that blocks were handed down through the generations. Needham remarks that some books were printed first with blocks cut during the Song Dynasty, repaired in the Yuan, and used again during the Ming, a span of some 400 to 600 years.²⁰⁴

Block printing was a Chinese invention. Needham, in his extensive examination of Chinese sources, says wood block printing may have originated as early as the sixth century, but evidence is strong that the practice was certainly established by the beginning of the eighth century.²⁰⁵ By the ninth century, printing was an extensive practice in Tang China, with the publication of Buddhist works, dictionaries, works of geomancy, and interpretation of dreams.²⁰⁶ By the time of the Song, techniques had improved so much so that they became models for future printers. The technology of block printing began moving westward from China.²⁰⁷ The Song state also took steps to exercise control over the industry, maintaining a monopoly on the publication of calendars and astrological charts and engaging in what might be today termed licensing with private publishers, allowing them to print certain items for a fee. There were ongoing efforts, of greater or lesser effectiveness, to prevent private printers from

203 Joseph Needham and Tsuen-hsui Tsien, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5, Part I (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 220–221.

204 *Ibid.*, 5:, Part I:221.

205 *Ibid.*, 5:, Part I:147–150.

206 Denis Crispin Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China* (New York: Frederic C. Beil, 1983), 13–16.

207 Needham and Tsien, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 5:, Part I:159.

producing works considered dangerous or offensive, such as certain religious tracts or books that discussed border defenses.²⁰⁸ The Song also established an officially sanctioned canon of Confucian classics and histories.²⁰⁹

The printing press scene in the Opening Ceremony also draws on the well-known historical fact that paper was invented in China long before it was developed in Europe. Needham says it is “common knowledge” that paper was invented in China before the Christian era, that improvements in techniques came in the second century AD, and that by the third century paper was used widely in China and moved to Europe via the Arab world in succeeding centuries.²¹⁰ Denis Twitchett says that crude paper was in use at the time of Emperor Han Wudi (140-87 BC), but that early Chinese sources date it from the first century AD. By the fourth century, paper had almost completely replaced bamboo and wood as a writing medium in China, and by 500 AD paper was in use throughout central Asia. In the eighth century, Chinese prisoners of war introduced paper to Arabs in the Samarkand region, and by 800 AD paper was being made in Baghdad.²¹¹ Curiously, the history of paper in China was not a major part of either the CCTV or NBC presentation even though this history could have fed the ideological narratives offered by both networks.

Moveable type was also invented in China but proved too daunting for extensive use. Needham and Twitchett both date moveable type to the middle of the eleventh century, about 400 years before Gutenberg.²¹² Printers produced works over the years using a succession of media: earthenware, wood, and bronze, but the need to produce the thousands of components to print Chinese characters proved too difficult to overcome.²¹³ Needham points out that the imperial printing shop of the eighteenth

208 Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China*, 60–62.

209 Needham and Tsien, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 5:, Part I:162–163; Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China*, 34.

210 Needham and Tsien, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 5:, Part I:303–313.

211 Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China*, 11.

212 Needham and Tsien, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 5:, Part I:201–205; Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China*, 74–76.

213 Needham and Tsien, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 5:, Part I:201–220; Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China*, 74–86.

century Qing Dynasty had a storehouse of more than 200,000 bronze characters. A private printer in the next century needed more than 400,000 bronze characters to complete a press run.²¹⁴ Block printing remained the favored technique until the introduction of modern printing techniques in nineteenth century China.²¹⁵

Historiography

These excursions into historical and cultural movements and moments are building blocks in a historiography of China that, in its dominant form, creates a division between history that operates under “traditional” and “modern” signs. It is a dichotomy that has relevance for the exposure of the ideological narratives in the CCTV and NBC broadcasts. As Duara points out, “The exploration of history is always a movement between language and the historical real.”²¹⁶ The study of “modern” China is a discipline unto itself, tracing imperial China's clash and response to a Western civilization that presented an existential challenge. Historians of modern China argue about just when the modern period began and about why China failed to respond effectively to the challenge of the West. They trace the collapse of the dynastic order and chronicle a succeeding century of chaos, revolution, war, and dramatic experiments in human engineering. They look for evidence of continuity and change – how modernity and tradition fused, clashed or otherwise interacted in recent centuries. In this kind of epistemological approach, the focus is on understanding the cross-currents of modern history. “Traditional” history – the expanse of time from the first identifiably “Chinese” civilization about 2000 BC – serves as a vast template of evolutionary sources of Chinese political, economic, and cultural specificity.

214 Needham and Tsien, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 5:, Part I:220.

215 Ibid., 5:, Part I:184–194; Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China*, 85–86.

216 Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*.

It is a long history indeed, marked by the rise and fall of dynasties, long periods of disunion, brutality, warfare among contending kingdoms, and revolution. The strife that has characterized much of Chinese history is erased in the CCTV and NBC narratives, with ideological effects that will become fully apparent in the chapters ahead. Periods of strife are sometimes measured in the hundreds of years but always lead to the emergence of a new order in the form of a new ruling dynasty. There are notable political, economic, technological, and cultural developments along the way. Confucius and other thinkers that profoundly influence Chinese thought emerge in a turbulent period of disunion around 500 BC. The Qin Dynasty (221 BC- 206 BC) unifies the state, standardizing currency and the written language.²¹⁷ Succeeding dynasties establish and re-establish a Confucian order, based on successive reinterpretations of the Confucian canon, which originated with compilations attributed to Confucius and his followers written hundreds of years after the sage's death. Over time, an imperially run state administered by bureaucrats steeped in Confucian learning emerges between periods of collapse and disunion. China absorbs and incorporates major foreign influences such as Buddhism, a religious tradition that CCTV entirely ignores, despite obvious Buddhist representations in the Opening Ceremony. Some dynasties, like the Tang and Song, are heralded for their achievements in political, scientific, and artistic development. Often, there is tension and conflict between the state's impulse to control economic policy and political thought and the commercial impulse from below, but, unlike in Europe, the merchant class never is able to overcome imperial power. There is significant contact with and knowledge of the wider world, at least at times, but until the Western age of discovery and imperialism, the main threats come from peoples on China's periphery, not from the far away Western world. For much of the time, China leads the world in technological development, economic

²¹⁷ Bowman, *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture*, 7.

organization, and scientific development, but by the time the West poses its fatal challenge, China is lacking in key aspects of knowledge that fuel Western power. The stage is set for the showdown with the West, which proves disastrous for China's old order.

This kind of historiological discourse lends itself to a search for grand narratives of continuity in pre-modern China. Dynasties come and go, each refining, perfecting, or setting back political, economic, and cultural developments, but Confucianism, however it is defined at any one time, is a primary driver of Chinese organization. Adshead, in his history of the Tang Dynasty, offers a explanation for this historiological phenomenon. Emerging from three centuries of strife, the Tang developed a form of Confucian, bureaucratic administration that made China “the best ordered state in the world, with all the economic, social and intellectual side benefits that went with good government.” The continuity achieved during the Tang provided a standard that “masked radical discontinuities in other aspects of Chinese history and gave outsiders at least the illusion of a succession of essentially similar dynasties governed by cyclical process.”²¹⁸ Indeed, discontinuity is not something that has a place in the Opening Ceremony narratives from CCTV.

Another hermeneutic in the historiography of modern China focuses on the construction of the modern state and people. Patricia Thornton argues against the Western tendency to view modern state formation either in a Marxian sense, as an arm of ruling class repression, or in the Weberian sense, as an administrative body that holds the monopoly on physical violence. In the case of China, she says, the primary function of the modern state has been to establish itself as *the* sole, authoritative moral agent and not simply as an authority that mobilizes armies and fights rival states (although there was plenty of that in the modern period.).²¹⁹ Anthropologist Ann Anagnost calls attention to the construction of a people as a long, difficult, and ongoing project in China's modern history.²²⁰ The CCTV and NBC

218 Adshead, *T'ang China*, 30.

219 Patricia M. Thornton, *Disciplining the State: Virtue, Violence, and State-Making in Modern China*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 283 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 1–21.

220 Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke

narratives that emerge from the Opening Ceremony broadcast in very different ways construct an ideologically-riven picture of the Chinese people. Collectivism is emphasized by CCTV and individualism is the byword for NBC.

The purpose of the foregoing discussion is not to offer a critique of historiography of China, attack or support the notion of grand narratives in the broad sweep of Chinese history, or to privilege a focus on state-making or the construction of a modern people. Rather, my aim is to outline important historical elements that, as we shall see in the chapters ahead, not only have a direct bearing on the narratives of Chinese history and culture that emerge from the CCTV and NBC presentations of the Opening Ceremony but also can be juxtaposed against those narratives to help extract their ideological dimensions.

This chapter has covered a wide swatch of terrain. The chapter began by setting CCTV and NBC in their industrial context, outlining how each broadcaster has evolved, revealing the discursive elements and production codes that contributed to expectations for their presentations of the Opening Ceremony. News coverage in China and the U.S. around the time of the Opening Ceremony was then discussed, establishing themes in the public domain in both countries as a prelude to critically analyzing how they were, or were not, handled in the Opening Ceremony broadcasts. Finally, the chapter analyzed the prominent historical themes that emerged in the Ceremony itself, again to gather data for use in the critical analysis.

As an official mouthpiece of the Communist Party, CCTV would be expected to present narratives that would celebrate China's emerging role as an economic power and credit the Party for the nation's successful navigation to full modernity. As a commercial broadcaster, CCTV would be expected to provide coverage that was entertaining and compelling for its audience. NBC would be expected to weave together discourses of entertainment and information in its presentation, offering

University Press, 1997), 17–44.

coverage designed to grab and keep viewers and at the same time providing a journalistically credible explanation for the historical and cultural themes that would emerge in the ceremony. I will leave the details of the two presentations to the close readings in the following two chapters. And in the concluding chapter, I will tease out the ideological implications of the historical and cultural narratives by juxtaposing the contemporary and historical discourses outlined above with the interpretations that emerged from CCTV and NBC respectively.

Cultural and historical narratives may play up, or attempt to resist, cultural stereotypes. Historical themes promote historical myths or favor particular interpretations of history as a means to build stories about nation-states that serve current political needs. The cultural and historical narratives emerging from the Opening Ceremony also are expressions of a modern phenomena in which nation-states use the Olympics as a backdrop to showcase self-styled versions of their own evolution, emergence, and change. All of these aspects will be discussed in the upcoming chapters. It is time now to proceed with the close readings of those presentations.

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Chapter Three: a Close Reading of the CCTV Presentation

The Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Summer Games in Beijing provided a breathtaking opportunity for China's principal state broadcaster to project to the Chinese people narratives about their history, culture, and place in the world. CCTV reported that 840 million Chinese viewers watched its telecast of the Opening Ceremony. That number amounted to 84% of the Chinese television audience at the time, an astounding share figure which rose to 94% when the Olympic Flame was lit, CCTV said.¹ While those numbers might be questioned, there can be no doubt that the event attracted a huge audience in China.

Narratives of the kind CCTV projected are key building blocks of what Benedict Anderson calls the imagined community of nation and a key component of cultural identity.² Immanuel Wallerstein points out that the construction of a people requires accounts of the past in a process that is inherently paradoxical. A people requires a firm sense that they have a fixed primordial past, but the past that is constructed is ever changing based on the needs of the present.³ Critical theorist Homi Bhabha speaks of the “impossible unity” of nation stemming from an “ambivalence” that emerges from an awareness of the paradox of needing a fixed primordial past that necessarily changes with current cultural and social circumstances.⁴ Anthropologist Ann Anagnost explains how narratives of nation must be constantly reconfigured to attempt to achieve this “impossible unity.” Stories must be remade to paint a picture of a natural, continuous and unproblematic flow from past to present. This requires an “enunciating subject” (such as the Chinese Communist Party) that speaks with the force of history and

¹ “CCTV reports findings on Opening Ceremony audience,” *The Official Website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, August 10, 2008, <http://en.beijing2008.cn/ceremonies/headlines/n214525549.shtml>.

² Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983).

³ Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 78.

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, ed., “Introduction: narrating the nation,” in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1–7.

brings abstract conceptions (such as the very notion of a nation, people or oppressed class) into the political present. Anagnost calls this a “myth of presence.”⁵ For Bhabha and Anagnost, narrative closure is always subject to ambiguity, tension, and the potential to be undermined.

This chapter will demonstrate how the narratives that emerge from the CCTV broadcast of the Opening Ceremony present a mosaic of China, its history, culture, and people that buttresses the Chinese Communist Party's ideological project of building an economic development model that fully engages China in global capitalism but thoroughly enmeshes the Party and the state in the market. In doing so, the CCTV narratives engage profound questions of Chinese historical and cultural identity but in the end can be exposed as the kind of “impossible” unities that Bhabha and Anagnost write about.

I use a discourse, textual, and semiotic analysis method to unpack salient narratives emerging from the broadcast, analyze the issues they address, and discuss the narrative devices employed in that effort. The commentary, as recorded on a DVD offered for sale by the International Olympic Committee, was closely and repeatedly viewed and transcripts in Chinese and English developed and read. Emerging themes were critically analyzed.

To set the expectation and context for the CCTV presentation, it is helpful to recall the discussion in the previous chapter about the network's dual roles as official voice of the Chinese Communist Party and as a commercial broadcaster intent on attracting audiences in an increasingly competitive media environment. In the case of the Opening Ceremony, however, the former role would be expected to predominate but not overwhelm that latter. Given the Party's long attention to the importance of propaganda work, it would be expected that the script for the presentation would have been thoroughly reviewed, edited, and vetted at extremely high levels of the Party leadership

⁵ Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 4–6.

apparatus.⁶ The final product would be expected to reflect a consensus view of the various factions and forces competing for dominance at the top of the Party. The details of scripting for the event of course lie buried in the secret archive of the party-state, awaiting political changes that would make them available for future scholars.

CCTV presumably had a strong incentive to create a presentation that would hold its audience both for commercial reasons and because of the importance the Party would have paid to the messages emanating from the broadcast. CCTV had two distinct advantages. It had a monopoly on the broadcast of the Opening Ceremony in China, and it was dealing with an event that had been the subject of a media barrage in China. The Opening Ceremony not only was long and excitedly anticipated but also visually captivating.

It will come as no surprise that the broadcast promotes the Communist Party as the guiding force behind China's breathtaking economic and technological development. But in doing so, CCTV engages profound questions that have confronted Chinese leaders and intellectuals in the modern period. Salient among them: to what extent can China absorb influences from the outside world and to what extent must it exclude those influences? What is human and universal, and what is culturally Chinese? What is the role of tradition in modern China? How can a modern "civilized" people be nurtured, trained and disciplined, and what sense do terms like "civilized" and "people" mean for China? The answers to those questions are key to understanding how a sense of Chinese-ness is constructed.

⁶ For some recent work on the role of propaganda in contemporary China, see Jasper Becker, "The Big Lie," *Index on Censorship* 33, no. 2 (April 2004): 85-90; Anne-Marie Brady, "Guiding Hand: The Role of the CCP Central Propaganda Department in the Current Era," *Westminster Papers in Communication & Culture* 3, no. 1 (March 2006): 58-77; Junhao Hong, "From the World's Largest Propaganda Machine to a Multipurposed Global News Agency: Factors in and Implications of Xinhua's Transformation Since 1978," *Political Communication* 28, no. 3 (September 2011): 377-393; Chin-Chuan Lee, Zhou He, and Yu Huang, "Chinese Party Publicity Inc. Conglomerated: The Case of the Shenzhen Press Group," in *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association* (presented at the 56th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, Dresden, Germany: International Communication Association, 2006), 1-27; Yuezhi Zhao, "Toward a propaganda/commercial model of journalism in China? The case of the Beijing Youth News," *Gazette: International Journal for Communication Studies* 58, no. 3 (November 1996): 143.

The following pages delve into the suturing narratives of Chinese history and culture that emerge as answers to those questions in service of the notion that the Party acts as a kind of Delphic god overseeing China's progress. I will begin by demonstrating how the presentation skillfully places the Party front and center. The analysis will move on to explain the multiplicity of suturing discourses that the presentation brings forth, beginning with the central trope of harmony around which spins the idea of China's emergence and integration into world capitalism. Next I will turn to historical and cultural narratives that employ a related kind of suturing in that they offer a linear, seamless, and unproblematic picture of Chinese history and a view of Chinese culture that sometimes is fixed in a primordial past but other times is free-floating and able to adapt to new circumstances. That discussion sets up an analysis of the trope of the dream and how China's dream is married to the Olympic dream. Following that comes a discussion of how the presentation attempts to suture the universal and culturally particular in part through the depiction of children. That will be a prelude to an analysis of how the presentation constructs the Chinese people. The thematic analysis closes with a discussion of the didactic nature of portions of the broadcast, followed by a section explaining some of the techniques used to bring to the fore the themes already discussed.

The ensuing analysis will show how CCTV presents a master narrative with a paradox at its core. It purports to solve a problem that cuts across modern Chinese history – namely, the question of how to make China a modern nation – without acknowledging that the problem ever existed. In CCTV's narrative, Chinese tradition seamlessly and unproblematically informs the modern. China is finally in a position of equality with the West, ready to engage in world capitalism on an equal, reciprocal basis. Its people have been disciplined and inculcated in the attributes necessary for success in a capitalist world, and the shining prospects that the nation's future offer are all the result of wise

leadership and guidance by the Communist Party. The narrative, however, is plagued by internal incoherence and depends on massive erasures of history such as the long debate about whether traditions such as Confucianism had held the country back.

Opening Ceremony: Overview

The Opening Ceremony took place on August 8, 2008 inside Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium, which was constructed specially for the Games. It consisted of a series of performance vignettes, featured a cast of thousands, and depicted scenes from China's past, present and future. The program was divided into sections, starting with historical scenes and transitioning to contemporary vignettes. Among the historical highlights: a countdown and subsequent performance by 2,008 male drummers beating on replicas of ancient *fou* drums, scenes illustrating Confucian scholarship, Chinese ink brush painting, the Chinese written language, the invention of moveable type printing, the land and sea "silk" roads, China's voyages of discovery in the fifteenth century, and Chinese traditional music and opera. The contemporary portion included hundreds of green-clad "messengers" outfitted with points of light all over their bodies who formed into a "peace" pigeon and then a replica of the Bird's Nest itself, a modernist performance of the Chinese martial art *taijiquan*, and taikonauts floating around a rising blue planet. A high point came when Chinese pop singer Liu Huan and English star Sarah Brightman performed a duet of the event's theme song, "You and Me." The climax came after the Olympic teams entered the stadium when China's famed former Olympian Li Ning took the Olympic Torch on its final laps, eventually lighting the Olympic Flame high above the stadium in a finale that had all the earmarks of a high-tech acrobatic act.

CCTV presenters Sun Zhengping, a man, and Zhou Tao, a woman, provided the commentary. They did not introduce themselves and were never seen on camera. (Their names were obtained only by consulting Chinese blogs.)⁷ Only their voices were heard during the coverage of the ceremony.

⁷ "终极完整版]第29届北京奥运会开幕式解说词·上_暗香浮动_百度空间," Baidu.com, *Complete Transcript of the*

They alternated with almost mathematical precision, each speaking for a few minutes before allowing the other to take over. Their commentary was highly descriptive but also used flowery and metaphorical language as they talked about the splendors at hand and interpreted the significance of the unfolding scenes. The mood was festive throughout, with the commentators periodically raising their voices at emotional high points. At various times, the commentators remained silent, allowing scenes to play out without benefit of interpretation.

Erasing the Author

Understanding how CCTV's commentary erases authorship of the Opening Ceremony is a prerequisite to deciphering the textual dynamics of the presentation. While much attention in the Western and Chinese media before, during, and after the Olympics focused on Zhang Yimou, the famed film director who put together the Opening Ceremony under the watchful eye of the Communist Party leadership, CCTV never once mentions Zhang or makes any reference to who or what is responsible for creating and designing the Opening Ceremony.⁸ There is no discussion of how the performers were recruited, organized and trained.

This erasure of authorship and organization has significant narrative implications. CCTV is not presenting itself as the interpretive arm of some individual's vision. Rather, the CCTV commentators treat the ceremony as an event that is simply there to be understood on its own terms as it unfolds. The role of the commentator is to assist in that effort. A novel or a film has an author, a story, and characters who motivate the plot. Interpretative energy can be spent thinking about whether and to what degree

Opening Ceremony of the 29th Olympiad in Beijing, Part I,
http://hi.baidu.com/lang_ct/blog/item/254b3dfa73b0b5d8b58f3122.html.

⁸ Yifan Zhu, "Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony Director Praises Team Performance," *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing, August 9, 2008), <http://english.people.com.cn/90002/94411/95057/6471839.html>; Jim Yardley, "In Grand Olympic Show, Some Sleight of Voice," *The New York Times* (Beijing, August 13, 2008); Jing Zhang, "'Proud to Be Chinese'," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2008, sec. Sports / Olympics, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/09/sports/olympics/09ceremony.html?scp=18&sq=beijing+olympics+opening&st=nyt>; "What China Displays To World in Olympics," *People's Daily Online* (Beijing, August 11, 2008); Xia Chen, "Zhang Yimou Reveals Olympic Opening Ceremony Secrets," *China.org.cn*, November 1, 2007, http://www.china.org.cn/entertainment/2007-11/01/content_1230436.htm.

the author informs the narrative voices in the story. Questions about authorial intent arise. With any sense of authorship stripped from view in CCTV's presentation, authorial intent becomes a mute point. The story does not spring from the head of a creative individual or group of artists. Rather, on offer is a pure rendition of the unfolding timeline of Chinese history and culture, an authoritative narrative by virtue of the fact that it appears to just be there, in the same sense that filmmakers can use techniques that make an omniscient narrator seemingly invisible.⁹ Despite the mass display of humanity in the stadium, the show seemingly is created without the benefit of human authorial intervention. The erasure of authorship equips CCTV with the rhetorical armor to display its own interpretation, unchallenged by any notion that another authority might have had other ideas. The only matter to speculate on is who CCTV speaks for, and that is no matter for speculation at all. The Chinese audience knows the network speaks for the Communist Party. The link between CCTV's narration and the Chinese Communist Party is direct, making the Party, in Anagnost's terms, the enunciating subject of CCTV's narrative.

Setting up the Chinese Communist Party as the enunciating subject of the CCTV commentary is accomplished in unmistakable ways. Even before the ceremony gets under way, CCTV's viewers are shown a close-up shot of Communist Party Chairman and President Hu Jintao walking to his seat in the stadium with International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge. The commentators make no mention of Rogge but instead declare that state leader Hu Jintao has entered the stadium. Other state leaders are named one by one until a list of fifteen has been enumerated. Only then is Rogge's name announced. At crucial times during the ceremony, Hu and other state leaders are shown intently watching the unfolding drama. Shots of George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin looking awkward or bewildered only serve to emphasize by comparison the dignity and control of China's leaders. The clear

⁹ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), For a detailed account of narration in Hollywood films, see Chapter Three: Classical Narration, p 24–41.

message is that the Party is *the* force enabling the seamless transition from past to present to future and propelling China to greatness. As if to emphasize the importance of the national leaders, the CCTV commentators do not mention any of the performers in the ceremony – even the soloists – by name.

CCTV's use of visual imagery during the raising of the Chinese flag on the stadium floor further fuses nation and Party. At the beginning of the scene, viewers are shown the national flag at the bottom of the flag pole. As soon as the band begins to play the national anthem, the camera shifts to Hu Jintao as he sings along. Next, his predecessor as President and Party Chairman, Jiang Zemin, is shown singing. Shots of other leaders follow in succession. The flag is not seen again until it is atop the flagpole. From flag to leaders and back to flag again, the visuals leave no doubt that Party and nation are one. In Anagnost's terms, the Party is the subject that creates the nation as a myth of presence.

Harmony

The commentators reinforce the role of the Party by making the concept of harmony a central theme that sutures past and present. For the Chinese audience, there would be no need to explicitly state that creating a harmonious society is at the forefront of official Communist Party rhetoric. The Chinese character for harmony, or *he*, appears three times early in the ceremony, created by an undulating block printing press on the stadium floor. CCTV's Zhou ties *he* to Confucius and the long sweep of Chinese history. “The *he* character, which has gone through thousands of years of change and development, expresses Confucius’s concept of humanism, which emphasizes the importance of harmony, and shows that the Chinese people's idea of harmony stems from an excellent tradition in Chinese history,” she says.

References to harmony recur at various times during CCTV’s broadcast. During the modern portion of the ceremony, when the green messengers wearing colored lights form into a model of the Bird’s Nest stadium, commentator Zhou describes the scene as an example of how people can work together harmoniously in today's information society. The depiction of *taijiquan* also is linked to the

concept of harmony. Commenting on the *taijiquan* performance, Zhou says that the theory and “truth” of *taijiquan* is that heaven and people are one “harmoniously.” Harmony comes into play again when the Chinese Olympic team makes its triumphal entrance into the stadium. Commentator Sun articulates four main objectives of the team: to carry out the Olympic spirit, to do their best to win glory for the nation, to learn from other delegations and promote friendship, and spur the development of sports for the masses in order to build socialism and a harmonious society. It is the only mention in the entire broadcast of socialism.

Beyond the direct references to harmony and its link with Party goals, the idea of harmony acts as a grand trope in the CCTV presentation. Harmony is the backbone around which other narratives are constructed. The staging of the Olympics for the first time in China, the world's most populous nation and exemplar of Eastern culture, unifies Western and Eastern culture for the first time, in CCTV's telling. A long injustice – the exclusion of China from hosting the Olympics and by extension from full and equal participation in the wider, capitalist world – is rectified and world harmony is fostered. There are other indications in CCTV's presentation that China's exclusion was not its own doing. In a scene depicting what the commentators call two silk roads – one by land and one by sea – we learn that China was historically open and welcoming of trade and exchanges with the West. For an audience reared in the Chinese education system that emphasizes China's victimization at the hands of the imperialist West, the implication would have been clear.¹⁰ China took the moral high road and conducted its foreign trade and relations on the basis of respect and reciprocity, only to be oppressed by an aggressive, imperialist West. But the CCTV commentary also makes clear that those times are finally in

¹⁰ For more on the discourse of national humiliation in Chinese education, see William A. Callahan, “The Cartography of National Humiliation and the Emergence of China’s Geobody,” *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 141-173; William C. Callahan, “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (May 2004): 199-218; Paul A. Cohen, “Remembering and Forgetting National Humiliation in Twentieth-Century China,” *Twentieth-Century China* 27, no. 2 (April 2002): 1-39; Z. Luo, “National humiliation and national assertion-The Chinese response to the twenty-one demands,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 2 (1993): 297-319; Zheng Wang, “National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (December 2008): 783-806.

the rearview mirror of history. China has caught up technologically with the West and is now standing on an equal basis with other powers, and this is cause for celebration. This is the moment that, in CCTV's commentary, Western and Eastern culture come together as equals for the first time in human history, achieving a world harmony that could not happen with China on the sidelines.

Closing the gap between East and West, in fact, figures large in CCTV's interpretation of one of the emotional high points of the ceremony: the singing of the Beijing Olympic theme song, "You and Me." Moments before, a blue planet has risen from below the floor of the stadium. Commentator Sun excitedly invites people from all corners of the earth to share China's Olympic dream. Zhou elaborates: "We all live in the same world. We all have the same dream, a dream of friendship, a dream of solidarity, a dream of development, a dream that the world will become very small, like a family, a dream that our embrace will widen and cover the whole world."

The singing of the song follows, and the CCTV presenters allow the scene to unfold without the distraction of commentary. Liu and Brightman do a rendition in English before switching to Chinese for a portion of the song. The pair conclude in English, with the two singers holding hands. Audience members are left to make their own sense of some striking imagery: the object of the male gaze is an Occidental not an Oriental beauty. Liu and Brightman are standing on top of the world with hands clasped, physically and symbolically joining signs of Chinese maleness with those of Western femaleness.

Beyond a refashioning of East and West, CCTV's commentary makes a subtle but unmistakable move toward making Chinese culture the central signified of the sign of the East. In the description of a scene depicting Beijing Opera through a puppet show, CCTV's Sun remarks that everyone recognizes Beijing Opera as distinctly Chinese but that it actually has broader significance. Beijing Opera, he says,

is an Asian version of Western opera. The implication once again is that West and East finally are meeting on a level cultural playing field, but that China stands culturally as the dominant signifier of things Eastern.

Harmony and Globalization

The traditional China in CCTV's commentary is one that not only lived in harmony with “others” near and far but also engaged in mutually beneficial trade and respectful, reciprocal cultural exchange. The commentators make this notion explicit in their descriptions of vignettes depicting the silk road of the western Chinese desert and China's seagoing voyages of exploration in the fifteenth century. The commentators tell their audience that these vignettes depict a land and sea silk road.¹¹ Both of these roads, commentator Zhou says, were characterized by making friends widely, communicating back and forth, and learning from one another. “The two silk roads are the best evidence that affection and kindness are special qualities of the Chinese people that have existed since ancient times,” she says. Commentator Sun adds that Chinese trade missions began taking silk to Europe more than 2,000 years ago. “The silk road was an important pathway to economic and cultural exchange between China and the West,” he says. During the vignette that depicts the sea voyages, Zhou tells the audience that the scene not only depicts the high tide of Chinese navigational skill but also proves “the friendliness and affection of this civilized nation of China throughout history.”

The implication seems obvious, even if it is unstated in the commentary. It is clearly no coincidence that openness to trade, reciprocity, and respectful exchange are precisely the values needed for China to engage the contemporary capitalist world and thrive in an age of globalization. If China had a tradition going back thousands of years of sending trade missions to the West, there presumably would be no reason for concern that engagement in world trade and investment would result in

¹¹ Although the commentators do not explicitly link the scene to any specific historical event, it is obvious that the “sea silk road” cannot be anything other than a representation of the voyages of explorations undertaken by Admiral Zheng He in the fifteenth century. See Chapter Two for historical details of these voyages.

exploitation. There likewise would be no cause for alarm about the country's sophistication when it comes to commerce or about practices that might not be in keeping with global norms. Nations that are friendly are more likely to engage in friendly commerce. Engagement and openness with the world and capitalist-style reform have been at the heart of Chinese policy prerogatives since Deng Xiaoping began steering China on a course away from Maoism in the late 1970s. The fact that CCTV's depictions of the silk roads and voyages of discovery are at odds with the historical record and make for narrative difficulties within the context of the Opening Ceremony are issues that I will deal with later in the analysis section.

One of the final scenes of the Opening Ceremony encapsulates China's engagement with globalization and harmonizes the new, emerging China with the country that is still poor, backward, and subject to the terrible whims of nature. In accordance with Olympic tradition, the last team to enter the stadium during the march of the athletes is the host nation's delegation. Against the backdrop of deafening cheers, NBA basketball superstar Yao Ming emerges with a child at the head of the Chinese team. CCTV's Sun provides a "just-the-facts" descriptive commentary, saying that the famous basketball star Yao Ming is holding hands with Liu Hao, a second grader who survived the earthquake that devastated Sichuan Province just months earlier. Sun tells the audience that Liu is from Wenchuan (the hardest hit area in the earthquake zone) and won an award for heroism after the quake. Beyond that he lets the images tell the story. Walking side by side is perhaps the most potent signifier of China's success in the Age of Globalization in the form of Yao Ming and a powerful signifier of resilience against the forces of nature that have battered China for millennia in the form of Liu Hao. They could hardly have been visually more different – a seven-foot, six-inch NBC center¹² towering over a boy waving a small flag, looking happy but somewhat bewildered by the spectacle around him. Yet their appearance together produced a striking symmetry and harmony of opposites.

¹² "Yao Ming Info Page," *NBA.com*, 2011, http://www.nba.com/home/playerfile/yao_ming/.

Seamless History

The suturing that flows through CCTV's commentary on the Opening Ceremony is evident in the view of China as a civilization that has made a breathtaking and unproblematic transformation from a glorious tradition to a modernity of limitless possibilities. The ceremony moves from tradition to modernity in Hegelian fashion, from origins in an ancient but vigorous culture to an ever progressing technological society heading for bountiful fullness and literally reaching for the stars in the form of space exploration. Contradictions between traditional and modern ways are absent. The past flows easily into and informs the present.

Anchoring tradition in a fixed, primordial past begins even before the ceremony officially gets underway. As 2,008 male drummers form the tableau for a countdown clock, commentator Sun explains that their instrument, the *fou* drum, was used in performances involving singers as early as the Xia and Shang dynasties.¹³ A few minutes later, with the countdown still going on, commentator Zhou invokes another signifier of tradition, the Great Wall. She tells the audience the countdown enables everyone listening to move together through time and space as the ear-piercing rhythm shakes up the land of the Great Wall that has existed for thousands of years. Three signs of tradition – Xia, Shang, and the Great Wall – are fixed as primordial foundations of China and Chinese culture, even though in actuality about two thousand years separate the perhaps mythological time of the Xia and the building of the Great Wall. Likewise, the political, economic, and social workings of the Xia, Shang, and the Qin Dynasty that began construction of the Great Wall could hardly have been more different.¹⁴

¹³ Invoking the Xia Dynasty places the primordial origins of China as far back as 2200 BC, into what Western historians regard as pre-history. There is no evidence the Xia Dynasty actually existed; the Shang, which followed the Xia, is the first for which actual evidence exists. See John Stewart Bowman, ed., *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁴ Bowman, *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture*.

A later scene serves to establish Chinese tradition as a metaphysical link between heaven and earth. Thirty-two poles with images of dragons on each one arise from the floor of the stadium. Commentator Sun explains that the poles are reaching to heaven and holding the earth “completely showing the spectacular vigor of Chinese traditional civilization.” The view offered is one of completeness and timelessness. Chinese tradition encompassed all there was, from earth to heaven and back again. Nothing – no kind of knowledge or practice – could be outside the grasp of tradition in this signification. Time and space become suspended within a feedback loop between heaven and earth.

More signs of tradition are introduced as the ceremony proceeds, along with the paradoxical notion that tradition has changed and evolved along the way. Following the flag-raising and the playing of the national anthem, viewers are treated to a film that is being shown inside the stadium about paper making and brush painting. Zhou explains that the film demonstrates the weightiness, depth, and length of Chinese history and culture. She also introduces “Eastern” music as another sign of tradition. Commentator Sun takes over and explains that the film depicts four precious things from classical scholarship: brush, ink, paper, and the ink block. He notes that the sound of the ancient *qing* or zither is being heard in the background. He tells the audience about the steps taken to create a painting, from the making of the paper to the mixing of the ink on the block, to the fixing of the painting to the scroll. He then says that tonight's story shows the thousands of changes Chinese scroll painting has gone through. The scene then shifts to the floor of the stadium, where the electronic “scroll” is starting to unfurl, leaving a blank surface that will soon be worked over by black-clad, modernistic dancers who “paint” black lines that resemble ink strokes on the LED “canvas.”

The commentators at this point have introduced more signs of China's primordial cultural roots in the form of paper, brushes, ink, ink blocks, and the *qing*, fixing them in a vague past from whence Chinese culture arose. Yet they have also introduced the idea that Chinese painting has gone through

“thousands” of changes over the years despite the fixed, primordial past that changes over time have somehow left intact. Chinese tradition is both deeply rooted in an original cultural space but also able to evolve without fundamentally altering its sense of Chinese-ness.

The following scene reinforces the notion that the Chinese tradition is both fixed and changeable. The male and female commentators at this point express a kind of point and counter point, with Sun extolling the creative aspects of ink brush painting and Zhou reminding the audience that the art form emanated from a primordial cultural stew. Sun describes how the black-clad modern dancers are using their bodies to demonstrate the carefree nature and gracefulness inherent in Chinese brush painting. The implication is clear. Chinese traditional painting is not fixed in a particular, formulaic style. There is a creative gracefulness to it that enables a flowering of expression. Commentator Zhou takes over and positions the scene back in the primordial origins of tradition, saying that the sound of the *qing* in the background brings out the sense that Chinese culture is extremely old, that its nature springs from a far away, deep past. Sun chimes in, saying that Chinese ink brush painting is not restricted to one formula. “The unique body language of the dancers is expressing the special spirit and flavor of Chinese ink brush painting,” he says.

A sense of seamless, harmonious evolution of tradition emerges a little later in a scene that depicts the performance of a Chinese opera by a *qing* player and a scholar. As the singer intones a Tang Dynasty poem, a painter with a large brush starts to go to work on the electronic scroll on the floor of the stadium, filling in brush strokes that already are there. The words for “Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing” – the dynasties that ruled China from 618 AD to 1911 – emerge on the screen one after the other, suggesting an easy flow from one to the next. Commentator Sun tells the audience the scene shows the well-known, refined tastes of the five dynasties “in a lively way, showing the glorious spirit of ancient China, a country of *li* [or Confucian civility, manners, politeness, and propriety] and music.”

The figure of Confucius is a central sign in CCTV's commentary that provides a cultural backbone and relay between the deep traditional past, the modern present, and the expected glories of the future. Commentator Sun sets up the introduction of Confucius during the drum performance that begins the ceremony by telling the audience that China developed over thousands of years a civilized culture of elegant moral standards and rules of behavior based on the (Confucian) concept of *li*. Commentator Zhou then tells the audience that the drummers are intoning words that Confucius wrote in the *Lun Yu*, or *Analects of Confucius*. The words express the most sincere kind of welcoming emotion. (The commentators do not spell out the actual words, and characters that crawl across the bottom on the screen say only what the commentators have said – that the performers are intoning words from the *Lun Yu* that express a welcome to those from far away.)

The portion of the *Lun Yu* that CCTV emphasizes is made apparent in a later scene. Confucian scholars march to the center of stadium and chant what commentator Zhou tells the audience is a famous phrase from the *Lun Yu*: *wen xing zhong xin*, which can be translated as learning, ethical behavior, loyalty, and honesty.¹⁵ The words “*wen xing zhong xin*” at this point crawl across the bottom of the screen. Of the hundreds of Confucian phrases, explanations and commentaries and the many terms contained in the *Lun Yu*, it is curious that these four words were selected as a grand signifier of Confucian values. I will comment further on this in the analysis section below, but for now it is useful to recall the discussion in Chapter Two about how the *Lun Yu* was written hundreds of years after Confucius, that the document has been rearranged and interpreted again and again over the centuries, and that Confucius has signified many different ideas and traits over the years depending on the needs of the interpreter.

¹⁵ Arthur Waley, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 139; *Si Shu Du Ben (The Four Books Reader)* (Taipei: Zhi Yang Publishing Co., 1993), 128.

Confucian scholars emerge at a number of key points in the Opening Ceremony and function as relays between Chinese tradition and the nation's evolving history and culture. After the “painting” mentioned above is completed, it is lifted high over the stadium. Confucian scholars carrying bamboo scrolls at this point enter the picture and fill the screen. As mentioned, commentator Sun reminds the audience that they are intoning in a loud voice the famous *wen xing zhong xin* aphorism from the *Lun Yu*. The scholars form around the scroll, which morphs into a representation of a moveable printing block press, which undulates and forms the character for harmony (*he*) three times. The scholars slap their bamboo scrolls together in unison and chant: *wen, xing, zhong, xin* as they prostrate themselves before the printing block. They seem to be metaphorically using a signifier of Chinese primordial tradition to bless a signifier of Chinese technological prowess in the form of the printing press. Commentator Zhou engages the audience in a chain of signification, linking Chinese tradition in the form of characters to Confucian values and to the idea of harmony, which is at the core of the Communist Party's sloganeering.

The *he* character, which has gone through thousands of years of change and development, expresses Confucius's concept of humanism, which emphasizes the importance of harmony and shows that the Chinese people's idea of harmony stems from an excellent tradition in Chinese history.

The commentary supplies meaning to the scene. The Confucian scholars presumably are supplicating themselves before the *he* character because its evolution has carried with it the Confucian concept of humanism, which emphasizes the idea of harmony being espoused by China's current leadership. In one sentence, CCTV has linked Confucianism with humanism and harmony and created a spacial and temporal relay between the primordial Chinese tradition and the nation's current rulers, thousands of years of evolution and change notwithstanding. Confucianism gets a specific definition, and the Communist Party is infused with the legitimacy of China's primordial cultural origin.

The CCTV commentators make connections that fuse modernity and tradition in other parts of the ceremony as well. After the drum scene, the camera shifts to an aerial shot that follows twenty-nine sets of fireworks that are arranged in the shape of footsteps.¹⁶ The footsteps symbolize the twenty-nine Olympiads that have been held since the revival of the modern Olympics in Greece in 1896. As the camera travels along one of Beijing's main avenues, with fireworks erupting one after the other, commentator Zhou tells the audience that the Bird's Nest and the “very green” Olympic Park created for the Games have become happy partners with the solemn and dignified Tiananmen Square. Sun picks up the commentary and tells the audience that those places connect the city's “yesterday and today.”

The commentary provides a kind of suturing of traditional and contemporary life, metaphorically joining the Beijing (and by extension the China) of yesterday with the dramatically modern Bird's Nest and Olympic Park of today. Tiananmen Square, the symbol of the old, is tethered to the stadium and park, signifiers of all that is new, glittering, and environmentally friendly. But more than that, this part of the commentary links Tiananmen Square, a place so laden with political meaning, with everything that the Olympics signifies – namely, an awakening for China, an explosion onto the world stage, a future laden with possibility. Tiananmen Square in this rendering signifies a link between the linearity of China's historical evolution and an emerging, glistening present and promised future, and not the place where pro-democracy demonstrators were gunned down by the People's Liberation Army, not the place where, in 1976 public mourning for the late Premier Zhou Enlai turned into a

¹⁶ Ariana Eunjung Cha, “Pretty Face and Voice Didn’t Belong to Same Girl,” *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/12/AR2008081201567.html?hpid=topnews>; Richard Spencer, “Beijing Olympic 2008 opening ceremony giant firework footprints ‘faked’,” *Telegraph.co.uk*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/2534499/Beijing-Olympic-2008-opening-ceremony-giant-firework-footprints-faked.html>.

veiled protest of the Gang of Four, who then held supreme power,¹⁷ and not even the place where untold thousands of young Red Guards gathered some years before during the Cultural Revolution, their raised hands clutching Mao's collection of quotations known as the *Little Red Book*.

The seemingly effortless transition from tradition to modernity and the unity of the two is made clear in other parts of the CCTV commentary. In the aforementioned scene in which dancers clad in black make their way onto what appears to be a scrollwork but actually is a long, high-tech touch screen, the performers start “painting” with their hands, making movements that seem to invoke modern dance. As if to dispel any notion of Chinese traditional art being hidebound by a reliance on repetition and rote, commentator Sun explains that the body language and free-flowing expressions of the dancers are indicative of the spirit of Chinese ink brush painting. The old and the new mesh like quiet streams that majestically flow into one. The modern and the ancient are perfectly in synch, each informing the other.

During the modern portion of the ceremony, tradition is never far behind. Just before this part of the ceremony gets under way, commentator Zhou prepares the audience for the transition: “If the performance we just saw described Chinese classical beauty, next we are going to see the elegance of modern China.” At this point, the audience is seeing a long shot of Chinese pianist Lang Lang, decked out in a white suit and looking to an American eye like a Chinese Liberace. He has a bright-eyed young girl sitting next to him. The scene is titled “star light,” and hundreds of points of colored light twinkle in the background, as if to say metaphorically that the heavens are bestowing a very special kind of new life. The stage is brightly lit, with none of the visual signs of traditional China previously seen. Commentator Sun describes the scene: “The pianist Lang Lang and innocent young girl become our focal point... Let us enjoy this romantic moment, opening up an alluring trip into a brand new China.” As the camera zooms in and out, it becomes clear that the piano is placed at the center of the scroll.

¹⁷ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 647–648.

Green messengers with pin lights attached to them gather and crouch around the periphery.

Commentator Zhou emphasizes the metaphorical transformation to color but makes it clear that modernity is filling in the spaces outlined by tradition, in a natural, linear evolution.

The long scroll has come from ancient times to today. The black and white on either side of the scroll has poetically transformed into a world of glittering color. Countless messengers in green clothing are attracted into the color, gradually gathering on the scroll.... At this moment, the green-clothed messengers on the floor start to flash, as if the brush strokes on the painting are becoming a novel, eye-catching star-lit scroll work.

The brush strokes on the painting – signifiers of tradition – provide the background and the outline for the leap into modernity. Commentator Sun takes over and makes it apparent that modernity has no bounds, telling the audience that the stars sometimes are coming together to form a representation of the Milky Way and at other times becoming a brilliant star cloud “triggering our endless imagination.” By building on tradition, China has entered the glittering, modern world. The future offers unbounded possibilities.

The seamless union of the traditional and the modern is seen in a later scene that depicts a modernistic version of the Chinese martial art *taijiquan*. At the beginning of this vignette, the audience sees a female performer demonstrating *taijiquan* in front of an array of mirrors. A subsequent wide shot reveals that there is not just one dancer but many, all positioned around a circle. Wild, abstract patterns are fully visible behind and to the side of the dancers, making the scene signify modernity and tradition at the same time. Commentator Zhou explains that *taijiquan* “meticulously combines force and softness in the right combination... the theory and truth of *taijiquan* is that heaven and people are one, harmoniously. That is the beauty of nature. The current performance allows the entire Bird’s Nest to be covered with a full measure of peace and the quiet of a lantern.” Soon a waterfall making a rushing sound appears on the video screen that wraps around the top of the entire stadium, acting as a segue to

another major signifier of tradition, the Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai. Commentator Zhou tells the audience that the waterfall conjures up some of Li Bai's famous lines. She then recites four of them, which are taken from the poem "Waterfall at Lushan."

Sunlight streams on the river stones.
From high above, the river steadily plunges--
three thousand feet of sparkling water--
The Milky Way pouring down from Heaven.¹⁸

The scene begins with a harmony of traditional and modern signs and ends with one of the best known signs of tradition in the Chinese context, a poem by Li Bai. The sense from this scene is not only an easy flow from the traditional to the modern, but the possibility of returning to tradition, to reinvigorate the modern whenever that might be necessary.

The commentary that sutures the traditional and the modern performs a vital function in constructing a narrative of the Chinese nation and putting the Communist Party at the center of modern successes. As Wallerstein points out, narratives of nation must be rooted in a primordial origin, and, as Anagnost explains, they need to be constantly reconfigured as circumstances change in an attempt to achieve an "impossible unity." The CCTV presenters point to the Xia and Shang dynasties as the roots of Chinese culture but also, in discussing the non-formulaic nature of Chinese brush painting, establish (paradoxically) that tradition changes over time: a necessary element in the attempt to forge an "impossible unity." The folding of tradition into the modern is seemingly everywhere in the ceremony. It is seen not just in the brush painting, but in paper, papermaking, music, and in Confucian philosophy and scholarship. Crucially, harmony serves as a relay between Confucianism and Communist Party policy, cementing the tie between China's primordial origins and the current political leadership.

¹⁸ Sam Hamill, trans., *Crossing the Yellow River: Three Hundred Poems from the Chinese*, vol. 13, New American Translation (Rochester, N.Y.: BOA Editions, 2000), 87.

Olympic Dream

An important theme in CCTV's re-narrativization is China's redemption in the eyes of the world as a nation and a culture. The fulfillment of China's Olympic dream is the vehicle that makes this possible. There are multiple references in the CCTV commentary to China's "100-year" struggle to host the Olympics, which tracks historically with Chinese interest in the Olympics but also evokes China's 100 years of national humiliation at the hands of Western imperial powers in Party discourse. The commentators emphasize how long China has pined for this moment, as if to emphasize the inherent unfairness of having to wait so long. Over and over, the audience is urged to remember the extraordinarily special nature of this night. Olympic imagery is intertwined in CCTV's presentation with the notion of the reintegration of China into the world.

The meshing of the Chinese and Olympic dreams operates in several registers in the CCTV presentation. On the one hand, there are visual reminders of China imprinting itself onto Olympic imagery. On the other hand, there is Olympic imprinting into the Chinese consciousness and memory. When the Olympic Rings form on the stadium floor early in the ceremony, commentator Zhou tells the audience that for the first time Chinese color is being added, "imprinting a Chinese memory onto the five Olympic rings." She goes on to liken the scene to a "beautiful dream" that will live in the minds of the Chinese people for hundreds of years. As the rings rise above the stadium floor, Commentator Sun then forges a link with the Olympic dream, saying the sight of the rings lighting up the Beijing night sky stirs the emotions of everyone who loves "peace, friendship, and the Olympic movement." Zhou then asserts that the Beijing sky finally is being imprinted by the Olympic Rings and that the entire world will from now on remember that the history of the Olympic Games will have a "legendary Chinese chapter." The Chinese dream of reemergence, rehabilitation and renewed respect is

metaphorically merged with the Olympic dream, which in turn creates a new memory for the Chinese people and the world. For China, that will set up future memories of greatness quite unlike the previous hundred years of shame, weakness, and humiliation.

The strength and patriotic nature of the Chinese dream is only reinforced by the very next scene. A beautiful, young child clad in a red dress (and identified elsewhere as nine-year-old Lin Miaoke) sings “Ode to the Motherland” while fifty-six other children dressed in the costumes of China's officially recognized minority groups carry the Chinese flag into the stadium. The lyrics provide a stirring nod to Chinese nationalism and national resurgence.

The Chinese five-star Red Flag is waving in the wind
The song of victory resounds loudly
Singing our beloved country
From now on going toward prosperity, riches, and strength
Able to conquer high mountains and plains
Stepping over the fast running Yellow River and Yangtze River
The beautiful, wide open land
Is our lovely homeland
We love peace
We love our homeland
Our solidarity, mutual love and durable strength is like steel

As the song is heard in the stadium, the Olympic Rings are rising high into the sky, metaphorically spreading the message of China's patriotic resurgence far and wide. Commentator Sun reinforces that point, talking over the song for the first time in line four, saying the pretty melody is resonating into the sky above the Bird's Nest. His only other interruption of the song comes when he says in a matter-of-fact manner, that 56 children of each minority group are carrying the flag into the stadium, protecting and surrounding it. The commentary makes it clear that the highly particular, nationalistic, Chinese dream is inexorably linked to the Olympic dream.

The imprinting of dreams does not work all in one direction in CCTV's commentary. A scene toward the end of the ceremony makes the point that the world is making its mark on China as well. After the athletes from all nations enter the stadium, commentator Zhou notes that the scroll on the

floor of the stadium has “magically changed.” Ten-thousand athletes had planted their feet on the scroll as they made their way into the infield of the stadium, adding an abundance of color to the painting and making the Beijing Games “the most memorable in Olympic history.” It is not only China metaphorically make a lasting mark on the Olympics and the world, but the world making an unforgettable imprint on a signifier of Chinese culture, the scroll painting.

China’s Olympic dream is tethered to the wish for peace and reconciliation with the rest of the world in CCTV's commentary. This is made explicit in the dramatic moment during the ceremony when the metaphorical Great Wall comes down and plum flowers pop up from what had been the top of the Wall. The image of the Wall had been created moments before from the undulating block printing press that had earlier formed the *he* characters for harmony. Commentator Zhou sums up the emotion of the moment: “The spectacular Great Wall is gradually being replaced by the soft and beautiful plum flowers, as if overnight the spring breeze came, suddenly placing everyone in a fairy like harmonious and romantic garden with spring colors. All this expresses the fervent wish for peace of the Chinese people.” The barriers have come down; the outside world is welcome; peace and harmony can be achieved.

Suturing the Universal and Particular

Creating a narrative of nation and culture in the age of globalization requires a careful suturing of the universal and the particular. CCTV’s commentary makes it clear that China stands for universal human values yet offers a distinct culture that is open and welcoming. This theme emerges just minutes into the broadcast when commentator Zhou says that the Olympics symbolize the solidarity of the human race, friendship, and peace – qualities that are embodied in China’s 5,000 years of civilization. This is just the beginning of a delicate interplay between sameness and otherness that is evident throughout the presentation.

The theme of human solidarity is linked in the commentary to another universal with a Chinese twist: the promotion of an environmentally friendly Olympics in Beijing. Early in the ceremony commentator Sun notes that China had promised the International Olympic Committee to stage a “green” Olympics. In the scene where the green messengers appear, they form two figures on the floor of the stadium: a “peace” pigeon and a depiction of the Bird's Nest stadium itself. The former, says commentator Zhou, signifies “peace, friendship, and purity” – universal values linked to the notion that mankind is one. A few minutes later, when the messengers form themselves into the representation of the stadium, Zhou specifies that the messengers are forming a “green” Bird's Nest, linking the specificity of the Chinese Olympic stadium with the universal theme of building a world in which resources are used in a sustainable manner. Later, *taijiquan* performers and school children who have just finished drawing pictures with giant crayons become awed by green birds that appear on the video screen that wraps around the top of the stadium. Commentator Zhou juxtaposes this culturally specific scene against the universal “green” theme, telling the audience the children are “planting green hopes with their innocent minds. Let us work together to carry out the promise to hand the world a green Olympics.” The birds are sending a message that it is everyone's job to be good environmental shepherds of the earth. “It's like they are telling us this is their green home that they are sentimentally attached to,” commentator Sun says about the birds.

Cultural specificity mixes easily in CCTV's presentation with the idea that China is not just willing but eager to embrace all of mankind. At the beginning of the ceremony, as 2,008 male drummers prepare to perform on replicas of ancient Chinese drums, the LED screen that wraps around the top of the stadium comes alive with digitized scenes of fire. Zhou describes the images as pretty and welcoming and likens them to flowers blooming as the flames morph into an ancient Chinese sundial, or *erhuai*. The move from universal symbol to culturally specific instrument is the precursor to the introduction of another cultural artifact, the *fou* drum. As the *fou* drummers count down the final

seconds before the ceremony formally opens, the commentators draw a link to traditional China.

CCTV's Zhou tells the audience that the drumbeats are shaking up the ancient land of the Great Wall and exciting the passions of the Chinese people. This night is a time to sincerely and passionately welcome people from all over the world.

The commentators use the figure of the smile to erase visual differences and evoke the themes of universal Man and unity with the rest of the world. During the singing of “You and Me,” Commentator Zhou excitedly says, “No matter the skin color, no matter the race, no matter the nationality, no matter the language, the smile is our best expression. A smile can prompt us have kindly and friendly feelings for each other.” Sun picks up on the theme, saying: “Olympic Beijing definitely is a smiling Beijing,” adding that smiles would pave the way for establishing the warmest possible atmosphere for the competitions to come.

Children are an important link between the universal and the particular in CCTVs commentary. As “You and Me” is being sung, 2008 children on the stadium floor hold umbrella-like objects that display photos of children from all over the world. At the same time, other pictures of the children wrap around the video screen at the top of the stadium. Commentator Sun tells the audience that the Beijing Olympic Committee spent a year collecting these “smiling faces” specially for the Opening Ceremony. The linking of children to the appeal to hand the world a “green” Olympics and by extension a sustainable world once again puts China's unique culture in service of a universal goal, in this case the making of an environmentally friendly planet.

The depiction of space exploration is another area where the commentary weaves a theme that encompasses the universal and the particular. The scene involves the emergence of Chinese taikonauts floating around the blue planet, apparently simulating a space walk. Commentor Zhou introduces the scene by referencing the Chinese folk story of *chang e*, the woman who is said to reside on the moon. “Generation after generation of Chinese people have passed down the story of *chang e*, always stuck to

the dream of flying to the moon.” Commentator Sun takes over and universalizes the theme, saying that “mankind” had used its wisdom to open the door to the universe, launch satellites, and put people into space and do space walks. “Every great creation always starts with a great dream,” he says.

The commentary moves from a culturally specific anchor for images of Chinese taikonauts in the form of the story of *chang e* to universal themes depicting previous space exploration as an effort undertaken by all of mankind and not primarily the United States, the Soviet Union and later Russia. The culturally specific serves as a launch pad for unbridled universals: all humanity shares the same dream of peace, friendship, and a better life. But it is China's embrace of the world that will widen the human embrace to involve everyone.

Despite the weaving of the universal and the culturally particular in much of the commentary, CCTV provides moments when the specifically Chinese is fully in the spotlight. The march of the athletes is one such scene. As delegations from 205 countries and territories enter the Olympic Stadium, commentator Zhou says the march was refigured in a nod to “special characteristics unique to China.” According to Olympic tradition, Greece enters first and the host country, China, marches in last, but the routine for the other countries is radically changed. Rather than enter the stadium in alphabetical order using country names in their English rendering, delegations are organized by the number of strokes in the first character of the Chinese transliteration of their country names. If the number of strokes in the first character is the same, the deciding factor is the number in the second character of the name. The simplified characters used in China are employed rather than traditional characters that dominate in other Chinese speaking countries and communities around the world. In addition, a Chinese cultural element is added in the banners that announce the names of the countries in English and Chinese. They are made in the form of a Tang Dynasty scroll. The changes “show the flavor of Chinese culture,” Sun says.

The scene mentioned earlier, when children dressed in the ethnic costumes of China's fifty-six officially recognized minority groups carry the national flag across the stadium to the flagpole and a cute girl appears to be singing "Ode to the Motherland," marks another moment of full cultural specificity and high patriotism. Absent from the CCTV presentation are facts that emerge later: that the children were not minorities (they were mostly from the majority Han Chinese ethnic group) and that the girl seen singing is lip synching because her voice was deemed not pretty enough. Another girl, who had the right singing voice but did not fit the aesthetic requirements for beauty, actually sings from behind the scenes. The commentary masks the politics of aesthetic perfectionism and an internal othering project: both marks of extreme particularity. Only a certain kind of beauty would be acceptable for the singer of "Ode to the Motherland." Likewise, China's official minorities were represented by children who carried the visual markings of the nation's dominant Han ethnic group.

The many scenes that weave the universally human with the culturally specific in the CCTV commentary feed the master narrative of China as a nation with an ancient, unique, and valuable heritage but one that is fully in line with universal human values. That said, national pride and particularity have a place, as evidenced by the scenes, such as the singing of "Ode to the Motherland," in which cultural and national specificity are at the forefront.

Constructing a People and Nation

The question of how China will develop a modern people and create a civilized society has been a long and difficult historical project. As Anagnost explains, the question was very much on the minds of Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s. It was a project of Mao Zedong to construct the concept of the Chinese "masses" from the ruins of the previous effort and use them for his

revolutionary ends. And it is the current project of the Chinese leadership to manufacture a view of the Chinese people that is seemingly self-regulating yet under the guidance of the Communist Party and anything but self-governing.¹⁹

The CCTV commentary enunciates a range of specific qualities that define the Chinese people. They are hard working and understand that advancement has always come through smart and efficient labor. They go about their business quietly, with a sense of great solidarity and harmony. They sweat blood and tears without complaints or regrets. They are affectionate, kind, friendly, peace loving, and welcoming to fellow members of the human race. They share dreams of friendship, solidarity and development with all peoples and want to embrace the whole world and smile along with all peoples, even as they celebrate with pride their uniquely honed and exceptionally deep cultural heritage that has given them high moral standards, proper rules of behavior and refined musical tastes. They are fair minded and feel the true Olympic spirit flowing in their veins. They are proud of the labor done by their forebears, who built things as remarkable as the Great Wall. They are courageous and wise, and celebrate the ordinary people. They are able to entertain idealistic, child-like dreams that can actually improve the world for all humankind.

The qualities that define the Chinese people are nothing short of Olympian, in CCTV's commentary. Commentator Zhou at one point praises the multitudes of Chinese people who worked silently to build the Bird's Nest stadium. "Those diligently working contributors, thoughtfully smiling volunteers and genuine, passionate ordinary people all are China's pride. All are Olympic heroes," she says. In other words, the modern Chinese body politic is a disciplined people fit for the challenges of continuing to drive China down the road of bureaucratic capitalist modernity. In CCTV's commentary, they are inheritors of a historic Chinese nation that always has been civilized and displayed spectacular vigor.

¹⁹ Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, 17–44.

CCTV's commentary combined with the visual imagery created in the network's shot selection projects a sense of collectivity, of people working harmoniously in large groups, with individualism deemphasized. Besides Lang Lang, no other performer in the ceremony is identified by name. Performers are referred to by generic categories such as “children,” or “dancers,” and no information about them – how they were selected, how they trained, where they came from – is provided. Even scenes that focus on individual performances are described without reference to the individual in question. When Lin Miaoke intones “Ode to the Motherland,” the commentators do not make a mention of her, even when close-up shots feature her. In a vignette that demonstrates Beijing Opera, commentator Zhou makes a direct reference to collective labor: “A mass of people made it possible to create the majestic, moving stage,” she says, without naming any names. A little later, in the silk road vignette, when a female ribbon dancer appears on top of what looks like a floating carpet held up by a phalanx of men, the commentators make no reference to her. Commentator Sun speaks only of the performance itself and that it emphasizes the land and sea silk roads. Not one word is uttered about the performer herself. During this commentary, shots cut between close-ups, medium, and long views, giving the audience a full picture of the performer literally being supported and carried by a mass of faceless individuals underneath the floating carpet.

Shot selections in other vignettes offer a similar projection. In the drum scene that opens the ceremony and in Confucian scholar episode, CCTV often frames the performers so that they fill the rectangular screen in diagonal lines. The effect is the projection of a mass of humanity, with body parts working in synch. In scenes that show mass humanity on display – the end of the drum vignette when the drummers smile and wave and the close of the printing press/Great Wall scene when a mass of waving men pop out of the blocks revealing how the effect was done – the CCTV commentators are silent, allowing pictures to show a mass of bodies who are celebrating having worked toward a singular goal to speak for themselves.

The construction of the Chinese people as a disciplined collective force is an important element in Chinese integration into world capitalism. The kinds of qualities that the commentators outline are the very ones needed for China to succeed as a manufacturing powerhouse that exhibits the flexibility, precision, and labor pliancy needed for that role. Collectivity, and not the assertion of individuality, is also important for a state run by a powerful Communist Party. It will be worthwhile to bear this in mind during the analysis in the next chapter of NBC's presentation as much is made by the NBC commentators of these two scenes.

The Didactic Voice

Emanating as it did from the country's main official broadcast entity, the articulation of the attributes of the Chinese character was prescriptive as much as it was descriptive, in keeping with a practice of the Party offering guidelines to model thought and behavior. Since the Communist Revolution in 1949, the didactic voice has been a prominent feature of the state media, albeit less overtly in the post-Mao era of capitalist-style reform and opening to the outside world. While the commentary offers the audience certain ways of thinking throughout, the commentators at times slip into the didactic voice and go one step further, either speaking for the collective Chinese people or instructing the audience in how to think or behave.

The didactic voice is evident even before the ceremony formally begins. During the countdown performed by the drummers, commentator Zhou describes how the scene lets “us go together through time and space,” how the drum beats are stirring up the passions of the Chinese people. “Together we welcome the glorious Olympic movement that now belongs to China,” she says in a line that is constructed as much as a directive for how the audience should think about the Olympics as it is a description of how viewers actually are thinking about the Games.

In some parts of the commentary, the didactic voice is more overt. In the scene where the school children are using crayon-like brushes to create a beautiful landscape, commentator Zhou tells the audience they are planting green hopes with their innocent minds. Then she explicitly calls on the audience to cooperate in the effort. “Let's work together to carry out the promises to hand the world a green Olympics,” she says. When the Olympic Rings are being hoisted from the stadium floor, commentator Zhou tells the audience that they will create a Chinese memory in the Beijing sky “like a beautiful dream in the Chinese people's minds that will last hundreds of years.” A few minutes later, she tells the audience the imprint “will let the whole world remember that the history of the Olympic Games from now on will have a legendary Chinese chapter.” When the “peace” pigeon is released, commentator Zhou speaks to the audience in the first person plural, saying “we” hope it will deliver “to the whole world kindness and friendship from China.”

Some of the emotional high points of the commentary can be read in a didactic light. When “You and Me” is being sung, commentator Zhou excitedly tells the audience that we all live in the same world, with the same dream of friendship, solidarity and development and that “our” embrace will encompass the whole world. This could be read as an instruction to the Chinese audience that reaching out and embracing the world of difference is a key to China's continued success. A short time later, Zhou adds that the smile is “our” best expression, no matter the skin color, race, nationality, or language. “A smile can make us have kindly feelings for each other.” This can be read as an instruction to audience members about how to behave when confronting foreigners: simply smile. As the commentary is wrapping up, after commentator Sun tells the audience the Olympic Flame has been lit, Zhou takes over to frame the grand meaning of the event. It has been exactly one hundred years since the Athens Olympics of 1908, she says, when the Chinese people began their Olympic wish, and now the Olympic Flame is finally burning in the Beijing sky. It is at this point that she tells the audience that

Western civilization born in Greece and Eastern Civilization born 5,000 years ago are finally coming together.²⁰ The not-so-subtle message to the audience: we have arrived; we are now on an equal footing with the West; proceed about your business accordingly.

The subdued use of the didactic voice is indicative of CCTV's dual role as the chief television broadcast entity of the Communist Party and as a commercial broadcaster that is making use of Western techniques designed to attract and keep a mass audience. The exhortations to work together and use smiles as “our” best expression of China's friendship and openness are clear pronouncements from the speaking subject of the commentary, the Communist Party itself. But they are far from dictatorial pronouncements that would have been familiar to previous generations nurtured on Maoist propaganda.

Visual Imagery and Metaphoric Language

CCTV uses a number of noteworthy filmic techniques that help construct the narratives in the Opening Ceremony. Some of these devices have been referenced in sections above, but it is instructive to focus collectively on them to bring into sharper focus their role in projecting the major themes emanating from the presentation, including the centrality of the Communist Party, the lesser standing of China's major rivals (i.e. the United States and Russia) the friendship of the Chinese people, harmony, and the suturing of the traditional and the modern.

The network makes extensive use of imagery that focuses attention on the leaders of the Chinese party-state and presents the leaders of the United States and Russia in less than a favorable light. As described above, time is spent at the beginning of the broadcast showing each of the Chinese leaders as they enter the stadium, in order of their importance. Their gravitas is emphasized by a commentary that mentions Chinese President Hu Jintao but neglects IOC President Jacques Rogge, even though he is walking next to Hu. During the flag-raising scene, the shot selection helps to weld a

²⁰ This is another example of how a sign of “Eastern” civilization is conflated with and absorbed by Chinese civilization.

visual union between the leadership of the Party and the nation-state. Much later, as the U.S. Olympic team enters the stadium, commentator Zhou tells the audience that former President George H.W. Bush is the honorary chairman of the U.S. Olympic Committee and that President George W. Bush is the captain of the American cheerleading team. Earlier, immediately after the singing of “You and Me,” a massive fireworks display erupts over the stadium. The audience is shown a brief shot of George W. Bush looking skyward, seemingly in awe. A brief shot a few moments later of Vladimir Putin captures the Russian prime minister looking peevish. Shots of the Chinese leadership at other points in the ceremony, by contrast, project a group that is engaged, in charge, and relaxed.

The CCTV broadcast pays some attention to segues from scene to scene. While many of the transitions are effected simply by a fade to black with no reference in the commentary to the previous vignette, other scenes use more connective techniques. Aerial shots and fireworks are employed in a number of scenes for this purpose. Several scenes end with either a cut to an aerial or a pan of a camera from a shot inside the stadium to a wide view over the Bird's Nest. After the drum scene, the camera cuts to a moving aerial shot that shows fireworks going off in the twenty-nine “steps” across Beijing. Other transitions are more deliberate in their connectivity. When the audience is shown the film about paper making and brush painting, the last image shows a scroll. The scene changes to the floor of the stadium with a shot of the electronic scroll unfurling. As noted, in the transition to the modern portion of the performance with Lang Lang at the piano, a deliberate move to suture the traditional and modern is made. Commentator Zhou says, “If the performance we just saw was describing Chinese classical beauty, next we are going to see the *feng tsai* (elegance) of modern China.”

Another feature of the commentary is the metaphorical language in the script. Fireworks are like flowers that symbolize friendship. Fire and light signify the passion of the Chinese people to welcome visitors and display their hospitality. The sky is like water glistening. Lights conjure up dreams or even hallucinations. Star formations point to the infinite and unbounded future possibilities, signifying “our

endless imagination,” in Sun's words. The sound of water brings to mind thoughts of an ancient poet. In Zhou's commentary, the plum flowers that pop up when the metaphorical Great Wall falls recall a spring breeze, putting people in a “harmonious and romantic” garden with spring colors, all of which express the Chinese people's desire for peace. The sounds of the drums in the opening scene are like heart beats that transport people through time and space and stir up the passions of the Chinese people.

Analysis

At the most superficial and obvious level of analysis, CCTV's presentation of the Opening Ceremony was a grand opportunity for the Chinese Communist Party to promote itself and reinforce its political position and power. As Anagnost points out, the Chinese party-state sees itself as the voice of the people,²¹ and CCTV, as the state's national broadcaster, functions as an amplifier of the Party's voice. CCTV uses a number of devices beginning with erasing authorship to make it clear not only that the Party speaks for the people but also that the Olympic achievement and the prospect of an unlimited future is being made possible under its sole auspices. Shots of the Chinese leadership watching the ceremony are employed at key moments to make the presence of the Party and its association with the state and the people crystal clear. Party leaders are named; performers are not. The repetition of the harmony theme makes the link with the Party's well publicized goal of creating a harmonious society without having to explicitly state it. By hitching the fulfillment of the Olympic dream to China's broader redemption, emergence, and recognition as a rising power that will bring the good life to the people, CCTV is handing credit for China's achievements to the Party. The Party is the entity that built on historic aspirations and efforts of previous generations to bring the Olympics to Beijing. Acting on behalf of the whole people, the Party is restoring China to its rightful place in the world.

²¹ Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, 12.

Two other aspects of CCTV's method of linking the Party to China's overall progress and reawakening are noteworthy. Unlike in decades past, the state broadcaster no longer needs to directly extol the virtues of the Party and to explicitly instruct people to view it as the guiding light of national development. The message is implicit; there also is a decided lack of Marxist rhetoric in the commentary. In sharp contrast to the early years of reform, capitalist-style changes do not need to be framed as advancements in socialism. There are no shrill exhortations from the presenters that the China's progress could only have come by virtue of the leadership of the Communist Party. The word "socialism" is mentioned exactly once by the CCTV commentators.

The tone of the CCTV commentary was foreshadowed by coverage in the state-run media in the run-up to the Games, even though the network did not delve into sensitive political issues that were addressed in the Chinese media. As outlined in Chapter Two, Chinese publications presented the coming of the Games as a momentous, historic achievement for China and a reason for self-congratulations and national pride. The Chinese media also portrayed China as a friendly and open nation but one with an ancient, rich tradition that was a source of great pride. Some of the themes in the CCTV broadcast, including the idea that tradition easily informs the modern, were specifically foreshadowed in the pre-Games Chinese media coverage. I will discuss the ideological implications these linkages more fully in Chapter Five, including the significance of CCTV's not discussing sensitive political issues that were circulating in the Chinese media.

As important as it is to understand how the commentary places the Party as the unconscious enunciating subject behind China's re-emergence, it is perhaps more vital to (de)construct how the commentary allows the subject to offer narratives that answer profound historical questions about the nature of the modern Chinese nation and the Chinese people. This is where questions about the relationship between tradition and modernity, the history of China and the West, and the characteristics of the Chinese people come into play. They are at the very core of national identity, speaking to what it

means to be Chinese and what a modern Chinese nation should look like. The CCTV commentary offers a series of narratives that provide what might seem at first glance as cohesive answers to these questions. But as we shall see, the narratives ultimately are nothing more than impossible unities that shatter on the shoals of historical omissions and internal contradictions.

The glue that holds the commentary together is the master trope of harmony, which operates simultaneously at numerous levels of signification. The first, overt level has already been discussed. The commentators mention the word harmony on numerous occasions, providing a direct link for viewers to the Communist Party's oft expressed goal of creating a “harmonious society.” But harmony is implicit in the narratives that offer a seamless version of history, an unproblematic transition from one stage to another and a easy fusion of tradition and modernity, as the latter incorporates aspects of the former. Harmony also is very much in evidence in the uniting of the Olympic dream with China's own dream of glorious re-emergence, settling the grand historical question of China's relationship with the West. Harmony underlies the suturing of the universal and particular, the notion that a nation and people with an exceptionally deep and long cultural tradition can offer the world a highly particularistic identity – Chinese-ness – and can also easily, cheerfully, and respectfully welcome and engage the rest of the world. The construction of the Chinese people offered by the commentators likewise depends not on any notion of violent struggle but on a kind of upbeat, determined, and harmonious stoicism.

The suturing of the traditional and the modern is evident in CCTV's commentary during the section of the ceremony depicting China's modern awakening. The scene begins begins with pianist Lang Lang, decked out entirely in white, sitting next to five-year-old Li Muzi, who offers the picture of innocence. “Let us enjoy this romantic moment, opening up an alluring trip into a brand new Chinese era,” commentator Sun tells the audience, offering a link to depictions earlier in the broadcast that also described Chinese history as alluring. As if to emphasize the continuity between tradition and modernity, CCTV's Zhou tells the audience that the long scroll on the floor of the stadium has changed

from the black and white of tradition to a world of glittering color. The color and tone may be different, but the scroll remains. A little later, *taijiquan*, the ancient Chinese martial art, is on display, but in a very modern way. The performers run through their routines against surreal, mirror-like backgrounds that change from one abstract, flowing design to another. For the CCTV commentators, the scene conjures up a poem, “Waterfall at Lushan,” by Li Bai, the famed Tang Dynasty poet. The message is clear. The traditional and the modern are in complete harmony. Li Bai informs modern *taijiquan*. The suturing is complete.

The realization of China's Olympic dream and the settling of historical tension with the West are meshed in the CCTV commentary, in another kind of suturing. The message for the Chinese audience is that with the coming of the Olympics to Beijing, the problem has effectively been pushed into the dust bin of history. When China's most famous Olympian, gymnast Li Ning, lights the Olympic Flame high over the Bird's Nest stadium, CCTV commentator Zhou Tao sums up the deep meaning of the spectacle that has just transpired. “Western civilization, which was born in ancient Greece, and Eastern civilization, which has been passed down for 5,000 years, is finally, at this moment, coming together,” she says. Not only has China succeeded in its long cherished struggle to gain Olympic recognition and host the Games but the long dominance of Western civilization in a larger sense finally has been broken. This is the very night that Western and Eastern civilizations are meeting on an equal playing field, the field of Olympic dreams, in the capital of the oldest continuous civilization on earth.

CCTV's narrative offers the notion that the Chinese people can rush headlong toward a kind of uber-state capitalist modernity while at the same time maintaining the unchallenged rule of the Communist Party and embracing their traditional and cherished cultural identity. Such a message may be suitable, even wise, for those directing such a path of development, but the suggestion that Chinese tradition can fold easily into Chinese modernity breaks down and becomes unstable and “impossible” under the scrutiny of historical and textual analysis.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the transition of China from dynastic authority to the creation of a modern state has been anything but harmonious, easy, or unproblematic. As outlined in Chapter Two, the last several hundred years of Chinese history has been marked by extraordinary upheaval, violence, dislocation, revolution, and intellectual ferment. Tens of millions of people have been killed in civil war, revolution, and attempts to transform the state, first into a nationalist entity as conceived by Chiang Kai-shek and his compatriots and then as a revolutionary Communist nation characterized by Mao Zedong's notions of mass participation in ideologically driven movements. A commentary presenting a grand, suturing synthesis that depicts Chinese tradition as magnificent and forward looking, something that easily and unproblematically informs modern China, appears fantastic when reflected in the mirror of history.

The CCTV narratives depend on historical erasures small and large. One of the sub-narratives in the commentary outlines how China's 100-year quest for the Olympics began with a single person. This is a somewhat misleading snippet in a record that reflects the monumental challenges and upheavals of the recent historical past.²² In 1894, Pierre de Coubertin, the guiding light behind the modern Olympics, asked the Qing Dynasty to send a team to the first modern Olympics in Athens. The letter was ignored. But over the following decades, sports began to be seen in China as a means of national self-strengthening, and interest in the Olympic movement grew. The first Chinese member of the International Olympic Committee was elected in 1922, but it was not until 1932 that China had an official participant in the Games. Liu Changchun was the sole Chinese athlete participating in the Los Angeles Games, and he might not have gotten there if it had not been for politics. The ruling

²² The following is taken from various sources: Beijing Olympic Committee, "Getting Ready for the Games," *Getting Ready for the Games*, January 5, 2004, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/null/116819.htm>; Guoqi Xu, "China's history at the Games," *Time Out Beijing*, <http://www.timeout.com/cn/en/beijing/olympics/feature/5194/chinas-history-at-the-games.html>; "China's Olympic history," *CNNInternational.com/World Sport*, July 25, 2007, <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/SPORT/07/25/olympics.timeline/index.html>; "Key dates in China's Olympic history," *Deseret News*, August 6, 2008, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700248651/Key-dates-in-Chinas-Olympic-history.html>; "China's Firsts in Olympic History," *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*, <http://www.britannica.com/bsp/additionalcontent/18/34070818/Chinas-Firsts-in-Olympic-History>.

Nationalist government sent a delegation only after getting word that the Japanese puppet state Manchukuo (a.k.a. Manchuria) was planning to dispatch its own delegation. Politics intervened again in the 1950s, when disputes between the People's Republic and Taiwan over who would represent China led Beijing to walk away from the Olympic movement, only to return in 1979 when an arrangement was reached whereby Taiwan would compete under the name "Chinese Taipei." China won its first Olympic gold medal at the Los Angeles Games in 1984 and, after failing to gain the right to host the 2000 Games, Beijing succeeded in securing the 2008 Summer Olympics.

The suturing of the traditional and the modern as offered in CCTV's commentary requires specific historical erasures. As discussed above, Confucius serves as an important signifier of a tradition that can easily blend with the modern. This view depends in part on overlooking the contentious place that Confucius actually has played in modern China. During the intellectual ferment in the years after the 1911 Nationalist revolution, many intellectuals rejected Confucianism, saying it held China back from the adoption of modern, Western technology and values. During the Maoist period, and especially during the reign of the Gang of Four, Confucius was considered a relic of a past that needed to be uprooted and destroyed. Confucius became a symbol of counter-revolution, a sign of backwardness and inertia.²³ The reformers who eventually succeeded Mao, led by Deng Xiaoping, gradually restored Confucius and wrapped an aura of dignity around him, but not without resistance. As reforms proceeded, opposition to the incorporation of traditional figures receded, resulting in the full imbrication of Confucius with the modern Chinese party-state, as reflected in the Opening Ceremony.

Beyond that, there is another large question about the use of Confucius as a signifier of tradition. Put simply it is this: which Confucius should be showcased, and what are the implications of the choice? As Chapter Two points out, Confucius is like a warehouse that can be filled with a variety of idea sets that are not necessarily mutually compatible. As the CCTV commentary shows, the

²³ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 633–639. See these pages for details on how Mao's former heir apparent, Lin Biao, was called the contemporary Confucius.

Opening Ceremony encapsulates Confucian thought by selecting, from the thousands of words in the *Lun Yu* as we currently know it, just four: *wen*, *xing*, *zhong*, *xin*. The words emphasize learning, proper behavior, loyalty to a hierarchy, and being true to one's word. These values are highly desirable for a work force that can successfully compete in a globalized, capitalist economy under contemporary conditions of neoliberalism. But suppose that a different portion of the *Lun Yu* had been selected. A differently constructed Confucius could well have promoted values that would have been more closely aligned with independent thought, the questioning of authority, communitarian, or democratic, participatory values.

To achieve an unproblematic synthesis of Confucius and other traditional symbols with contemporary China, much of recent history also must be erased. No explicit reference to the Maoist past could be made in the commentary. To do so would either raise doubt about the narrative or require criticism of the Maoist repression of the Chinese tradition, which would open the door to a fuller discussion of Mao's legacy for contemporary China, a subject fraught with political difficulties for the Party. Airing dirty historical laundry in any event would have been an unpalatable option for an Olympic opening ceremony aimed at projecting a sense of national cohesion through soothing, fairy tale-like narratives. These kinds of forced omissions point to one reason the narrative of nation is impossible, to use Bhabha and Anagnost's terminology. Narratives of nation and culture suffer textual instability as a result of omissions made necessary by the requirements of re-narrativization.

The CCTV narrative also makes clear that China's national future depends on a harmonious integration with the world, recognizing the values that unite all people but insisting on maintaining, honoring and respecting China's uniquely evolving culture. Harmonious integration with the world is an important goal for a state that would not long after the 2008 Olympics overtake Japan to become the second largest economy in the world. But the wish and promise expressed in the CCTV commentary again butts up against reality. China's contemporary relations with the West have been notably

contentious on many fronts, and its integration with the wider world of global capitalism is likewise not without serious points of friction. It is not a little ironic that in the weeks leading up to the Opening Ceremony, Olympic Torch runs were disrupted by protests about China's human rights record and the treatment of Tibet, among other things. In the world outside the Olympic stadium, the question of China's relationship with the West very much was an open one.

CCTV's settling of China's contention with the West depends on a particular view of history. Unlike the historical record, which delves into the challenges that China faced from an often hostile outside world, the CCTV narrative presents pre-modern China as one that had harmonious relations with others. Old China as described by CCTV had two silk roads, one by land and one by sea. China benefited greatly from its outreach to the West then, in the same way that the current policy of openness and capitalist-style reform is benefitting the Chinese people today. This happy turn of events is occurring as China is rising, literally standing on top of the world in the form of Liu Huan, who is holding hands with Sarah Brightman.²⁴ A historic imbalance has been rectified, and Eastern culture – in the form of the long Chinese tradition – is finally on equal footing with a Western culture that had its wellspring in ancient Athens. World harmony has been achieved.

The narrative depends on viewing pre-modern China as a fundamentally open society that welcomed commerce and interchange with the West. Such a tradition carries over into the contemporary period, when China lights up, welcomes the world and fulfills its Olympic dream. Ancient China in CCTV's rendering of the Opening Ceremony may be a realm of Confucian scholars, artisans and musicians but is by no means insular or inward-looking. China engages in vast networks of trade with the West and thrives most when it is connected to the rest of the world. There is nary a hint of war, dynastic collapses, revolutions, the building of a Great Wall to ward off barbarian tribes, and the workings of a tribute system to manage foreign threats. Instead, there are two silk roads, one by land

²⁴ Belinda Goldsmith, "Brightman says ceremony moved her to tears," *Reuters.com*, August 9, 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKS0921233920080809>.

and the other by sea. Commentator Sun tells the audience the silk roads link past and present: “The two silk roads are the best evidence that affection and kindness are special qualities of the Chinese people that have existed since ancient times.”

The historical record suggests a much more complex, nuanced and fundamentally different view. The long sweep of history includes eras of disunion measured in the hundreds of years as well as periods of union, such as the Tang Dynasty, when China’s rulers encouraged commerce and international exchange, but for many centuries Chinese rulers employed a tribute system to keep potentially hostile outsiders at bay.²⁵ China’s seafaring expeditions were nothing short of remarkable and expansive in their times but did not lead to the kind of outward push that propelled European nations in the age of discovery and colonization.²⁶ At the very historical moment when an imperialist West presented its biggest threat, China was militarily weak, dismissive of the outside world, and unable to forcefully respond, to its great detriment.

China's interaction with Western ideas actually shook China to the core, as a few specific episodes from the historical record will illustrate. Reformers in the waning days of the Qing Dynasty thought they had a solution to the question of the utility of Western ideas for China. They addressed deep fears that accepting Western ideas would lead to an undermining of the Chinese essence and destroy Chinese identity and cultural values. They argued that Western techniques could be grafted onto the Chinese tradition. The core would remain Chinese while the outer skin would benefit from Western technology, making the state and nation strong and able to ward off further inroads by the aggressive

²⁵ Denis Crispin Twitchett and John King Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²⁶ Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1400-1433* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China’s Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982).

powers that were carving up and otherwise imposing their will on China. The reformers convinced the Emperor to let them implement their ideas, but the program was shut down after just 100 days by the Empress Dowager, who feared a fatal attack on the Chinese essence.²⁷

Western ideas also were the subject of intense debate about a decade later, after the Qing dynasty fell and China sank further into chaos and disunion following the Nationalist revolution of 1911. A spontaneous student demonstration erupted in Beijing on May 4, 1919. Although the specific trigger to the demonstration involved grievances against Japan, the protest quickly widened into a movement that focused on how best to move China forward. Activists raised the figures of “Mr. Democracy” and “Mr. Science” as a call to replace traditional thinking with Western ideas, setting off a cultural and political struggle that arguably extends to the present. Mao Zedong attempted to retreat from tradition entirely and build a new kind of socialism on a blank slate, an effort that is widely viewed today as misguided.²⁸

CCTV's construction of the Chinese people seems tailor made for a state that has adopted an economic development model based on a kind of bureaucratic capitalism that is export oriented and is thickly woven into the Party apparatus. People who are hard-working, forward-looking, cheerful, and collective and not individual in their orientation are ideal types to form a labor force that must power such an economic machine. People with affectionate and peace loving qualities would prevent scaring off foreigners, whose capital and expertise is needed at this stage of the economic construction process. The emphasis on collectivity and willingness to take direction presumably would help ward off something unsettling like the rise of a labor movement that would at the very least demand a larger share of the profits of economic activity for the workers of China.

²⁷ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 224–230.

²⁸ Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, 11, 30–35; O. Edmund Clubb, *20th Century China*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); John K. Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 10, Late Ch'ing 1800-1911, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jonathan D Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1990).

Like the other narratives in the CCTV commentary, this one also is at odds with many aspects of contemporary reality in China. For one thing, China increasingly is a society of haves and have-nots. The income gap between rich and poor is large and growing, and according to some estimates now places the country at a level of inequality on a par with the Philippines and Russia and less egalitarian than Japan or the U.S.²⁹ Although China's middle class is growing rapidly, the nation is still largely composed of farmers, who have not benefited nearly as much as others from development. The number of millionaires recently hit the one million mark,³⁰ but more than 200 million workers are migrants, who generally are poorly paid and have few rights and little if any bargaining power.³¹ Labor strife is endemic yet contained. State repression has thus far successfully managed to prevent small scale protests and outbursts of violence from expanding into movements. But even official China provides a hint of the scope of the unrest bubbling beneath the surface. The number of “mass incidents” increased to 87,000 in 2005, the last year full official figures were released. Since then, various Chinese researchers have indicated the problems are getting worse, although the vagueness of the term “mass incident” is a hindrance to drawing firm conclusions.³² Still, this is not a picture of a nation of cheerful working people who are willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary for the collective good.

²⁹ Jing Fu, “Urban-rural income gap widest since reform,” *China Daily*, Beijing, March 2, 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-03/02/content_9521611.htm; Dexter Roberts, “China’s Growing Income Gap,” *BusinessWeek: Online Magazine*, January 27, 2011, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11_06/b4214013648109.htm; “Data Difficult to Come by in Studying China’s Income Inequality,” *China Digital Times*, September 24, 2011, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/06/data-difficult-to-come-by-in-studying-chinas-income-inequality/>.

³⁰ Frederik Balfour, “China’s Millionaires Leap Past 1 Million on Growth, Savings,” *Bloomberg.com*, June 1, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-05-31/china-s-millionaires-jump-past-one-million-on-savings-growth.html>.

³¹ Alexandra Hamey, “Migrants are China’s ‘factories without smoke,’” *CNN.com*, February 3, 2008, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/02/01/china.migrants/index.html>; “Migrant workers in China,” *China Labour Bulletin*, June 6, 2008, <http://www.clb.org.hk/en/node/100259>.

³² Will Freeman, “The accuracy of China’s ‘mass incidents,’” *FT.com*, March 2, 2010, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9ee6fa64-25b5-11df-9bd3-00144feab49a.html#axzz1YzXYm0kg>; Don Weinland, “China: Increasing Trend in Mass Incidents,” *Global Voices*, February 14, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/02/14/china-increasing-trend-in-mass-incidents/>; Zhong Wu, “Beijing hears dissenting voice on unrest,” *AsiaTimes Online*, April 28, 210AD, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/LD28Ad01.html>; “Introduction: Growing Social Unrest and the Chinese Leadership’s Counterproductive Response,” *Congressional - Executive Commission on China*, December 6, 2005, http://www.cecc.gov/pages/annualRpt/annualRpt05/2005_a_intro.php.

CCTV's narrative also is riven with internal contradictions. On the one hand, the story line presents a tradition of internationalism that underpins contemporary openness. Yet another theme celebrates the rectification of a historical imbalance between East, represented by China, and the West. If the passage from tradition to modernity really was unproblematic, what was the historical imbalance all about? And why was the Great Wall necessary? CCTV does not explain how the tradition of openness as depicted by the two silk roads runs into a ditch. Likewise, the references to the long and hard Olympic struggle – code for years of shame and humiliation that China endured at the hands of imperial powers of the West and Japan – invoke a transition from tradition to modernity that was less than seamless and quite problematic. This kind of narrative incoherence coupled with the contradiction between the narratives in the ceremony and historical accounts make for what Bhabha and Anagnost call an impossible unity, or an inability of stories of nation to achieve narrative closure and fulfillment.

The narratives presented by CCTV may break down under critical academic scrutiny, but that does not make them any less potent as projections of the Chinese Communist Party's ideological project to build stories of nation, culture, and people that will further its goals. If anything, they demonstrate the Party's enhanced sophistication in moving away from previous overt and clumsy methods that featured hammering home the explicit message that all good things are coming about by virtue of the Party and that all capitalist-style developments are really socialist. The CCTV commentary attempts to settle profoundly important questions for China: the usefulness of tradition in the modern era, the relationship of China and the West, and the nature of the Chinese people. Paradoxically, this is done by constructing narratives that pretend that these questions were never questions at all. Tradition is ever adaptable and provides the framing for the house of the modern in the CCTV commentary. China always displayed an openness and sense of fair play in its dealings with the West. The Chinese people have always had the attributes necessary for success in the modern world.

The narratives appeal to a sense of nationalism and national revival. They address deep historical themes that are profoundly important in building narratives of the Chinese nation, culture, and people. And they were presented as a commentary to a highly anticipated, visually spectacular, even mesmerizing, event that had been the subject of blanket coverage in the Chinese media in the days and weeks leading up to it. And, as we shall see in the next chapter, a sense of what the authors of the Opening Ceremony were trying to project profoundly influenced how NBC interpreted the event for an American audience.

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Chapter Four: a Close Reading of the NBC Presentation

In the previous chapter, we saw how CCTV used its power as a monopoly broadcaster of the Opening Ceremony and voice of the Chinese Communist Party to project narratives to a home audience that attempted to answer profound historical questions about national identity and solidify the standing of the country's ruling elite. NBC, by contrast, faced a different challenge and operated under a vastly different array of production codes. NBC was entirely commercially driven; the network was under no government mandate to present Chinese history and culture in any particular way. Rather, it faced the challenge of attracting an audience and keeping it engaged in the unfolding spectacle while at the same time interpreting an “other” culture that in the summer of 2008 was increasingly being seen as a global challenger to American hegemony.

This chapter unpacks narratives of Chinese history, culture and place in the world emanating from NBC's broadcast of the Opening Ceremony and analyzes their ideological implications. I will argue that NBC presents an ambivalent view of China as a country that offers the promise of further integration with global capitalism, even if there are hints of disturbing, even frightening, monolithic and totalitarian behavior. The future of China is uncertain, and the nation almost seems to be on trial. NBC's China is a realm of exotic cultural splendor, an other culture that is alluring and mysterious yet paradoxically embracing a kind of modernism. As much as the manifestations of modernism are welcome signs of similarity to the West, China also seems to dwarf the West in certain accomplishments and without doubt in ambition. NBC's coverage also reflects the hopes and fears of a capitalist West seeking profit in the world's most populous nation. For NBC, China and Chinese-ness exist in a slippery and nebulous zone between fear and respect, between friendship and animosity, between an otherness that may have touchstones of similarity and an otherness that is different, but not so different that it cannot be embraced, albeit nervously.

As in the Chapter Three, tools of discourse, textual, and semiotic analysis are employed to unpack salient narratives emerging from the NBC broadcast, analyze the issues they address, and discuss the narrative devices employed in that effort. The commentary, as recorded on a two-DVD set offered for sale by the International Olympic Committee, was closely and repeatedly viewed. A transcript was developed, repeatedly read, and cross-referenced against the visual text. Emerging themes were critically analyzed.

Theoretical Grounding

Critical and postcolonial theory informs the analysis in this chapter. Critical scholars of China work from three assumptions: that media constructions of China help build a self-image of the U.S., that narratives about China are ever-shifting because of global change, and that the U.S. media discourse on China remains tied to history, politics and culture.¹ These scholars often employ critical discourse analyses of U.S. media texts and extract frames of analysis from them, such as narrative binaries that pit images of old China against those of new China, or accounts of the good China against the bad China.

Postcolonial scholarship provides a reference point and language to analyze Orientalism in media texts. Orientalism is the depicting of other cultures as objects of exotic, fetishized attention far removed from their lived realities. Edward Said's landmark 1979 book *Orientalism* did much to give prominence to this area of scholarship. Said argued that European colonial rulers in the "Orient" – by which he meant the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent – constructed a history of the people they conquered and created a fetishized aura surrounding them. The effect was to subordinate the "other" and facilitate colonial rule. In the process, Europeans were able to solidify their own identity by

¹ Kent A. Ono and Joy Yang Jiao, "China in the US Imaginary: Tibet, the Olympics, and the 2008 Earthquake," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 5, no. 4 (December 2008): 406-410.

projecting exotic and erotic fantasies onto the “other.”² Although China was never colonized in the way the Middle East and India were, the power dynamics with the West were similar, and scholars have successfully applied the concept of Orientalism to China.

If Said's conception of Orientalism places postcolonial people always in a subordinate relationship to former colonizers, other scholars theorize frameworks that offer agency and explain change, opening the door to looking at representation as a discursive struggle.³ Homi Bhabha describes mimicry as colonial desire for an “other” that is “almost the same but not quite.”⁴ Difference must be maintained, but there is an ambivalence in the process that produces slippage. Representations of an “other” in this theoretical framework are tension filled, always subject to a dialectical push and pull, never able to rest in a fixed position.⁵ The stereotype for Bhabha is one of the primary features of Orientalist, colonial discourse. Stereotypes are inherently unstable and must be nervously repeated lest they lose their potency.⁶ Orientalism may have begun as a feature of European colonialism, but it continues to reside in the postcolonial world, both in representations by former colonizers of the formerly colonized as well as for China and other parts of the “developing” world impacted by Western and later Japanese colonialism. Arif Dirlik argues that Asians and Chinese in particular have engaged in a kind of self-Orientalism, consciously or unconsciously producing representations that play to Orientalist conceptions in the West.⁷

Xiaomei Chen takes the conversation another step forward, arguing that China has employed “Occidentalism” as a discursive practice to absorb and make use of Western Orientalism. Chen asserts that Occidentalism “has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the

2 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

3 Arthur Kleinman and Tsung-Yi Lin, eds., *Normal and Abnormal Behavior in Chinese Culture* (Dordrecht & Boston: Springer, 1981); Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2005); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

4 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

5 *Ibid.*, 94–131.

6 *Ibid.*, 94–120.

7 Arif Dirlik, “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism,” *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 104.

process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western others.”⁸

Occidentalism includes the practice of officially deciding to consciously play to the West's Orientalist expectations. This is a cultural and political negotiation in which one side (China) appears to give the other side (the West) what it wants, through an elaborate cultural shadow dance. Occidentalism explains how China can adopt and adapt Western technology and declare, somewhat nervously, that the result is proudly and uniquely Chinese. The interplay of Occidentalism and Orientalism provides a framework for understanding the ambivalence that is always close to the surface as NBC presents China as an exotic, other culture that is “almost the same but not quite.”

Two Kinds of Discourse

The views of China emanating from NBC's broadcast of the Opening Ceremony also result from an interweaving of the discourse of entertainment and the discourse of information that had come to characterize the network's narrative practices. As an entertainment network, NBC, like CCTV, had a monopoly on the broadcast for its audience, but the network still was under pressure to produce an engaging program that would attract the largest possible number of viewers, both to enhance the returns for its advertisers and to promote and therefore boost the profitability of other NBC networks and programs. As an information network, it was obligated to explain and decode an other culture that loomed large in the future of the United States.

The dual discourses stemmed from NBC's history and industrial location. As outlined in Chapter Two, by 2008 NBC had evolved in stages, from its early days as America's first radio network, to one of the three major broadcast television powers, and finally to a media conglomerate and unit of General Electric that controlled an array of media properties, including cable TV channels, television and movie studios, and websites. A once clear separation between journalism and entertainment had blurred in recent decades, with a morphing and merging of techniques used in each. The result is an

⁸ Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 2.

Opening Ceremony presented both as an entertainment spectacular and as an object lesson in China's culture, history, contemporary condition, place in the world, and relationship to the United States.

The mingling of the discourses of information and entertainment is evident in the structure of NBC's presentation. The coverage begins with a voiced over video vignette that plays on the exotic allure of China, an ancient civilization that is bursting onto the world scene and now welcoming the world, a vignette that itself combines both discourses. Next comes a journalistic segment in which former *NBC Nightly News* Anchor Tom Brokaw reviews China's road to hosting the Olympics and the country's sometimes uneasy relationship with the U.S. and the rest of the West. The actual ceremony follows, with commentary by two of the network's more prominent personalities, sports anchor Bob Costas and Matt Lauer, co-host of NBC's *Today* show. Along with them is a new face, expert analyst Joshua Cooper Ramo, who is introduced as a former foreign editor of *TIME* Magazine.

A master theme that emerges from NBC's overall presentation is a sense of profound ambivalence about China and its future relationship with the United States and the rest of the world. There is the Orientalized China that seems to offer so much in cultural richness. There is the country that is moving at breakneck speed to modernize and pull its people out of their traditional shackles. Yet there are nagging questions about China's repressive political system and whether the nation will be a friend or foe, even if the hope for friendship outshines the fear of the opposite outcome.

The Exotic China

The alluring exoticism of China is front and center at the outset of NBC's presentation, with the opening, voiced-over video vignette. The coverage begins with a shot taken from inside a dark room. The viewer is looking out a window that is slowly opening. The window is identifiable as distinctly Chinese. There is no glass, but there are thin horizontal and vertical struts that create a pattern yet allow the outside to be clearly seen. The landscape on the other side of the window is decidedly traditional. On the right is a large, multi-story pavilion with red walls and green roofs. To the left are single story

tile-roofed houses of the type that until recent decades were ubiquitous in Beijing. Trees dot the landscape. The window opens and birds fly noisily away from the trees. Several other shots that signify China follow in quick succession: a green hill with terraced fields, a young girl with pigtails, a Chinese pagoda on a small island. With uplifting music playing in the background, an authoritative voice invokes the sense of China as a place that springs from a murky, primordial mist.

The footprints of their history stretch back 5,000 years. But for the world's greatest wall builders, makers of a forbidden city, what happens tonight is not nearly a small step, but a great leap. China is welcoming the world. Who will they be when this is over?

The narration invokes ideas and images that play on Orientalized stereotypes that have circulated widely in American discourse about China. There is the idea that China's history can be traced back 5,000 years, that today's China has its roots in the primordial soup of history. There is the reference to the Great Wall of China, the Forbidden City, and a great leap. In semiotic terms, NBC is making use of the “great leap” signifier, which was Mao Zedong's term for his 1958 program to transform China at warp speed into an industrial powerhouse. The Great Leap Forward has been well documented as a failure that led to famine and industrial decline.⁹ But the “great leap” survives as a signifier, now with a new kind of signified: China's opening to the world and hosting the Olympics. These first lines of the coverage invoke the promise of a nation with deep cultural and historic value that has heretofore been in the shadows. But they also set the Olympics up as a historical break point. NBC raises the perplexing question: What will China be after the Olympics? The implication of the question is that change will happen, but the kind of change is unknown. It is a question without an answer, an intriguing mystery waiting to unfold, and one befitting of a network that is appealing to the discourse of entertainment as a means of capturing audience attention. The notion that the answer might be cause of concern will come later.

⁹ Jasper Becker, *The Chinese* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16, 24–25, 92–94; John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 368–382; Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 655–658; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1990), 578–583.

The opening vignette moves on to juxtapose the idea of the Orientalized, mystical China against the one that is, with great consequence for the rest of the world, rushing headlong toward modernization. The narrator notes this is the first Olympics for the world's most populous nation and that China's 1.3 billion people will “frame the front-page story of the twenty-first century.” Over rapid fire shots of neon signs, the nighttime cityscape of Shanghai bathing in multi-colored light, circular highways with the film speeded up so that movement appears as blurs, and the outside of the Bird's Nest Stadium, the narrator says China is both “outside time and bursting every which way in a bewildering rush of transformation.” In this rendering, China is somehow both “outside time,” as if a singular, unchanging Chinese tradition overlays a China that not only is very much aware of time but is trying to outrace it by modernizing at a breakneck speed. The effect is to lay an Orientalized gloss over what actually is a wrenching transformation that is enriching some, impoverishing others, but utterly changing the lives of millions of Chinese people.

In narrative terms, the opening segment co-mingles the discourses of information and entertainment. It presents historical and cultural information while at the same time uses devices designed to entice the audience to continue viewing. Dangling exoticism before viewers is an item pulled from the toolkit of the discourse of entertainment. Leaving questions unanswered is another device that is often used in hopes of keeping audiences interested.¹⁰ Setting up the Olympics as a historic break point cannot hurt in the effort to attract audience attention for NBC's ongoing coverage of the Games. But NBC's production codes call for more than just an opening video piece when the Olympics in the world's most populous nation is the subject at hand. The vignette is quickly followed by a welcome from anchor Jim Lampley and an introduction of arguably the network's most credible journalistic voice, Tom Brokaw.

¹⁰ In television journalism, these are called teases, because they entice the viewer to continue watching.

Brokaw's Introduction

Brokaw delivers a report designed to set the real-world background of the Beijing Games for an American audience. Sitting next to Lampley at the anchor desk, he looks straight into the camera and says that this night is one of “great consequence and patriotic pride that cannot be underestimated” for the Chinese people. At this point a video vignette narrated by Brokaw begins. With the audience seeing the 2001 announcement by IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch awarding Beijing the 2008 Games, Brokaw says the moment was for China “a validation of its hard-fought reawakening after the painful memories of foreign occupation, the Cultural Revolution, years of isolation.” Brokaw saves for later in the piece a mention of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.

Brokaw moves along to talk about Beijing's building boom and the spending of \$40 billion to prepare for the Olympics as the audience sees rapid-fire images of construction in the Chinese capital. He contrasts these scenes to “the deprivations and a self-imposed exile of the China of not so long ago” using archival shots of Maoist China. Then he shifts gears and gives at least partial credit for China's opening and eventual winning of the right to host the Olympics to American foreign policy saying, “In one sense, this night is the culmination of events set in motion by another sports story, the surprising decision of Mao Zedong in 1971 to invite the American table tennis team to Beijing.” The so-called ping-pong diplomacy led to U.S. President Richard Nixon's surprise trip to China in 1972, which marked the first step in American rapprochement with Communist China. It is at this point in the narration that Brokaw mentions that China and the West have had an “uneasy relationship” culturally and “especially politically.” The Olympic Torch relay that had been much in the news gets a mention next. “This spring's worldwide Torch relay was conceived by the Chinese as a gesture of international good will. But violence flared. Demonstrators angrily protesting China's actions in Tibet and Sudan. There was shock, anger, injured pride in China,” he says. Brokaw then provides his analysis: the Torch relay brought home to the Chinese people “a troubling reality. Their self-image was not shared by many

others in the world.” The implication of Brokaw's analysis is that the Chinese people were learning not only that people elsewhere did not share their world view but that there was something askew about their own view. The implication is that they would have to learn to adjust. Brokaw does consider that people in China might believe that they were being unfairly criticized and that the problem was not with the Chinese view but with that of the critics elsewhere.

Brokaw next covers another event that was very much in the news in the run-up to the Olympics: the earthquake that devastated Sichuan Province just months before the Games. Brokaw calls the quake “an even greater blow” than the hurt feelings from the Torch relay. He reports on the awful numbers: 70,000 people dead and 5 million homeless in the earthquake. He notes that people were particularly devastated because of China's one-child policy, linking human suffering with government policy. He also says that “this time” Chinese authorities could not prevent the world or its own citizens from seeing the “heart-breaking images, or the rage and despair of the victims.”

In the space of a few short sentences, Brokaw sets off a chain of signifiers that invoke images of China as a land where people are still struggling on two fronts: to contain a cruel nature and to emerge from cruel repression. China is still prone to natural disasters that can take a devastating human and physical toll, made worse because of an imposed one-child policy. However, “this time” efforts by the state to prevent its own people and the world from seeing the devastation have failed. Likewise, authorities are unable to prevent the circulation of images of rage and despair. The despair is evident in the images that Brokaw uses of people suffering in the aftermath of the earthquake. But rage is implied. Rage at what? Viewers are left to make the link to the extensive reporting about shoddy construction of schools and other structures that worsened the human toll. In the days after the quake, both the Chinese

and international media reported on complaints of this nature, but Chinese authorities quickly shut down domestic reporting on the subject, evidence enough that they were still able to control information.¹¹

In painting the picture that he does, Brokaw ignores nuances that might have produced a blurrier, less black-and-white image of China. He does not report, for example, that the one-child policy had for years been relaxed in rural areas, allowing people in many cases to have more than one child.¹² Rural areas were among the hardest hit by the quake, which presumably means many of the victims had more than one child. Brokaw also distorts the idea that the authorities “this time” were unable to suppress images of the disaster, as they had been doing previously. Chinese authorities had been easing restrictions on reporting of natural disasters for years, but they still could and did exercise control over news flow. It may have been the case that the authorities were even more hands off in the case of the Sichuan earthquake because of the coming Olympics, but it arguably did not mark any particular turning point, as Brokaw implies. Hong Zhang's global transformation theory, which takes outside pressures into account, seems to explain the move from allowing to repressing reporting of flaws in Sichuan school construction in a way that Brokaw does not.

Brokaw moves on from the earthquake to speak in stark binaries about the “two Chinas” that are emerging. Brokaw says China is a country where a half a billion people live on two dollars a day, while hundreds of millions of others are becoming prosperous. China he notes, is a country “where the few rule the many.” It is a place where protest is not welcome, where the legacy of the Tiananmen

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- 11 Agence France-Presse, “China quake families to register dead, two years on,” Google News, May 12, 2010, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hIqPdcMzjP_a5hNdq1oyQiWNBm7A; Tania Branigan, “China jails investigator into Sichuan earthquake schools,” *The Guardian* (Beijing, February 9, 2010), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/09/china-earthquake-schools-activist-jailed>; Edward Wong, “Year After China Quake, New Births, Old Wounds,” *The New York Times* (Mianzhu, China, May 5, 2009), sec. World/Asia Pacific, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/06/world/asia/06quake.html?ref=sichuanprovincechina>; “The Sichuan earthquake: Salt in their wounds,” *The Economist*, May 14, 2009, <http://www.economist.com/node/13650027>.
- 12 “China steps up ‘one child’ policy,” *BBC News*, September 25, 2000, sec. Asia-Pacific, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/941511.stm>; Xinhua News Agency, “Official: China won’t waver in family planning policy,” March 5, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/05/content_7725524.htm.

Square crackdown still echoes.¹³ It is a country racing to the future, one that has taken a “long march” to the opening of the Olympics.¹⁴ China is a historically insular civilization that has “invited the world to a global event of epic proportions.”

The images chosen to illustrate Brokaw's script create a curious visual rhetoric that emphasizes the individual over the group and associates the group with totalitarian repression. When he is talking about the half a billion people living on two dollars a day, viewers see a single peasant in a field following by a shot of another individual peasant tending to a water buffalo. When Brokaw speaks about millions living in prosperity, viewers see an individual young woman walking by a car showroom with signs, in English, for Ferrari and Maserati. When he mentions “the few,” he is speaking over video images of a column of uniformed soldiers running in lockstep. The shot changes when he speaks of “the many” to a crowd in front of Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, with the famous portrait of Mao Zedong framed in the upper left. When he talks about the Tiananmen crackdown, iconic footage of “tank man” – the lone, unidentified individual who stood in front of a tank – covers his words. And when he mentions the long march to the moment of the Olympics, the audience sees a single boy running along a tree-lined road, with a row of stone monuments on one side. It is as if NBC is superimposing a Western notion of the primacy of the individual in a country where crowds are the norm and countryside generally means densely packed farmers, not individuals working alone or in small groups.

13 “PBS Frontline,” *The Tank Man*, April 11, 2006, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tankman/view/>.

14 The long march reference marks another semiotic twist, like the previous Great Leap remark. The original Long March was the epic, 6,000-mile trek from southeastern to northwestern China that Mao Zedong's Red Army made between 1934 and 1935 as Communist forces fled the Nationalist Army and eventually established a base in Yanan, in China's northwest. The Long March has a central role in Chinese Communist folklore and, according to Fairbank and Goldman, is “more documented than Moses leading his Chosen People through the Red Sea.” See Fairbank & Goldman, *China: A New History*, 305-307.

The images also play to some of the most prominent stereotypes of China. The water buffalo shot reproduces an image that has been used time and again to signify the unchanging nature of China, that peasants today tend to their fields in much the same way their ancestors did hundreds or thousands of years ago. Tiananmen, with its famous Mao portrait, is a common signifier of mainland China itself. The image of “tank man,” seen live around the world in the television news coverage of the Tiananmen crackdown, quickly became an icon of the event.

The discourse of entertainment takes primacy as Brokaw finishes his vignette. The NBC anchor closes with absurd hyperbole and another “long march” reference evidently aimed at trumpeting the importance of NBC's coverage of the Opening Ceremony. China, he says, had made “a long march to a night that may be the most significant in modern Chinese history.” In a nation that has seen so much in its modern history – war, revolution, mass upheaval, famine, outsized personalities, development on an unprecedented scale just to name a few salient things – to suggest that the opening of an Olympics might be the most significant moment in its modern history is nothing short of ridiculous.

With the beginning vignette and Brokaw's report, NBC establishes a master theme, even before the coverage of the actual ceremony begins. China holds a unique place in the American public consciousness, but it is a place that elicits conflicting images and emotions. There is reason enough for interest, curiosity, and sympathy, but also cause for suspicion and even fear. China houses an unimaginable number of people and a history that connects contemporary culture with a primordial origin five thousand years ago. It is a land of exotic mystery and difference, a proud nation struggling to emerge from two tyrannies: one of nature and one of man. China is a nation of extremes, yet it is accomplishing dazzling technological and engineering feats. But the jack boot of repression is ever present. Even so, there seems to be hope. People are working to free themselves and are beginning to realize that their self-image is not shared with the rest of the world, even if such a revelation is disturbing.

Ambivalence about China also courses through the coverage of the actual ceremony by anchors Bob Costas, Matt Lauer and expert commentator Joshua Cooper Ramo. But the overall message is skewed toward the idea that China is moving in a direction that is decidedly favorable to the global capitalist project, even if there are reasons for concern. The commentators offer up the idea of seeing China in a new light, saying the Chinese people themselves want to cast aside the darkness of the past, even as they acknowledge that undesirable aspects of the past may not be so easily forgotten.

Zhang Yimou and Authorship

A key element in establishing NBC's narrative credibility is the assignment of authorship of the ceremony to Chinese director Zhang Yimou. If CCTV erases any trace of Zhang as the creator of the Opening Ceremony, NBC goes out of its way to give full responsibility to the famed film director. The NBC commentators repeatedly attempt to explain not only what Zhang is trying to say but how he is trying to say it. In the moments before the event gets under way, Costas says flatly that the ceremony is “in the hands of Zhang Yimou, who is the most esteemed film director in China.” He follows this sentence, which effectively hands Zhang responsibility for the ceremony, by saying, “We're about to see what happens when an artist gets almost unlimited resources. It's almost a cinematic presentation playing out in real time.” Not only is Zhang in charge, but the Chinese state has handed him a blank check and unfettered creative authority.

There is no discussion about how a film director might have been able to obtain almost unlimited resources with no strings attached. Instead, the NBC commentators come back repeatedly to the cinema metaphor as the ceremony proceeds. As one of the characters for “harmony” appears on the floor of the stadium, Lauer says, “This is Zhang Yimou creating a cinematic blockbuster in real time on the floor of the stadium.” In a vignette that features Confucian scholars carrying bamboo scrolls, Costas tells the audience that Zhang Yimou refers to the scene as “Confucian travels.” When the Great Wall comes down and gets replaced by plum flowers, it is Zhang Yimou who is doing it, in NBC's telling.

Ramo reinforces the idea a few moments later, calling Zhang “a master of visual symbolism.” NBC even suggests that Zhang had the power to custom order the stadium itself. Lauer at one point notes that an LED video screen wraps entirely around the top of the stadium, adding that “this really leads us to believe that Zhang Yimou came up with an artistic dream and then said to the people here, now build me a stadium that can accommodate it. It's a stunning image.” In none of these comments about Zhang is there any discussion of a possible role of the Communist Party in deciding just what could and could not be included in the ceremony.

Beyond erasing the Chinese Communist Party as an author, co-author, or even final arbiter of content, the placing of Zhang Yimou front and center offers NBC a road map to credibility. If the network's commentators are simply reflecting what Zhang is trying to project, the only question that can be asked is whether NBC is doing that job accurately. The network's lineup of highly credible presenters provides a ready answer. Along with two of the network's most prominent and well regarded personalities is an expert commentator in the form of Joshua Cooper Ramo, who speaks Chinese and provides insights into Chinese history and culture to contextualize what is unfolding during the ceremony.

Ramo's pro-business credentials are not fully disclosed. In introducing him as a former foreign editor of TIME Magazine, NBC does not disclose that Ramo is a managing director and partner in the Beijing office of Kissinger Associates, the consulting firm started by Henry Kissinger that specializes in facilitating business deals for foreign companies in China.¹⁵ Predictably considering his connection to Kissinger Associates, Ramo's commentary leaves a strong impression that China is very much open for business and that the ground for money making is extremely fertile.

¹⁵ Huffington Post, “Joshua Cooper Ramo: Who Is NBC’s China Analyst During The Olympics?”, August 11, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/08/11/joshua-cooper-ramo-who-is_n_118225.html; Ken Silverstein, “NBC’s Olympics, Brought to You By Henry Kissinger,” *Harper’s Magazine*, August 9, 2008, <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2008/08/hbc-90003378>.

Explaining Culture

Having set itself up as merely the interpreter of Zhang Yimou's intentions, NBC expends a good deal of energy explaining the cultural particulars of the presentation. This is a role set aside for Ramo. Time and again, the other two commentators turn to him as a cultural guide. Ramo is on hand to give a thumbnail description of Confucius as a scholar who roamed the country during a particularly turbulent era dispensing advice to political leaders. Ramo speaks about Confucian ideals. He points to Taoist and Buddhist elements in the ceremony and notes the Taoist philosopher Zhuang Zi said, "A great life is lived like water, flowing easily, moving away from resistance and collision, always delicate, graceful and calm." He explains how the balancing and reconciling of opposites – light and dark, sound and light, mountains and water – are important Chinese cultural concepts. When a ribbon dancer emerges on what looks like a carpet being carried on the shoulders of a phalanx of men, Ramo explains that Zhang Yimou is trying to underscore that individual achievement in China cannot be accomplished without collective action.

During a performance by practitioners of the martial art *taijiquan*, Ramo explains the concept of *qi* as a type of energy that permeates everything. When the *taijiquan* performers surround a group of school children who are at center stage, Ramo uses a down-home style to explain.

I'll tell you, to a Western audience looking at a bunch of guys basically doing karate around a group of school children may be kind of confusing. But the message here is very clear. The harmony of the *taiji* master, the belief in harmony between man and nature is really the only hope for the kind of sustainable development for China and for other nations over the next few years.

Ramo may be offering valuable insights into Chinese cultural traditions, but they are, out of necessity given the broadcast format, thumbnail descriptions, or superficial capsules of much more complex

historical developments and cultural features.¹⁶ They are examples of a Chinese expression: *zou ma kan hua*, or riding on a horse and watching the flowers. They go by too fast to really see. This kind of snapshot view of culture contributes to a fetishized kind of appreciation and view of Chinese culture as an object of exotic appeal.

Curiously, NBC misses opportunities to explain moments of Chinese cultural assertiveness. For example, the commentators do not make the point that a statement about the value of China's cultural and national heritage is being made by having national teams enter the stadium based not on the Roman alphabet but on the number of strokes in the Chinese characters that comprise their transliterated names. Instead, Costas and Lauer take a pragmatic approach but one that puts China outside the bounds of normal in guiding viewers through the march of the athletes. "There is no alphabet here," Costas says: "So if you're expecting one nation to follow another, the way they generally do at an opening ceremony, think again. Lauer follows up with the reason.

Yeah, you're out of luck. It goes based on the number of strokes in the Chinese character that represents the country's name. So you could easily see a country that starts in "A" followed by a country that starts in "R" or vice versa. So we're going to have the graphics at the bottom of the screen which will give you an idea, if you look to the right, which countries are approaching the tunnel.

On the other hand, there are moments when cultural fetishism is very much on display in the NBC presentation. Some of them come during a scene that Costas describes as the "grandeur of China's dynastic history." In this vignette hundreds of women dressed in various styles of elaborate, traditional dress parade across the LED screen on the floor of the stadium, walking between poles that later rise in the form of dragons reaching toward the heavens. After a discussion between Costas and Ramo about how the Olympics are, in Costas's words, a "coming out party" and a "return to glory, a moment of redemption" for China, Lauer steers the commentary in a more superficial direction as he narrates over images of the performers saying this is a "time to stop and ooh and ah a little bit about the costumes.

¹⁶ See Chapter Two for details of the cultural and historical references in the Opening Ceremony.

Zhang Yimou is putting on a fashion show on the floor. Look at the colors. Look at the detail. Look at the numbers of costumes he had to create for this show.” Costas adds that the women are wearing the heavy costumes in oppressive heat and humidity. At this point Ramo declares that one of the “wonderful things” about China is the attention to minute detail. “Watch the way these women move their hands,” he says. “You can see this in tea houses and even in McDonald's in China. Just a left over cultural emphasis on the way the tiniest gestures matter so much.”

Costas does not let the McDonald's comment pass. “So you order a Big Mac and fries in Beijing and they present it to you with a conspicuous elegance?” he asks. Ramo continues the joke: “For you, yes, and a dance.” Although the exchange is meant to be humorous, it carries a serious underlying idea that the cultural traditions displayed on the floor of the stadium carry over into everyday Chinese life, that all Chinese are masters of fine detail. In other words, all Chinese fit a certain cultural stereotype that makes Chinese culture an object of exotic and fetishized fascination. Bhabha's stereotype is resurfacing, once again being reiterated as it must be in order that it not lose potency.

In terms of narrative style, the commentators balance their roles as entertainers and information providers. They are narrators who must capture and keep the audience's attention, but they also must serve as guides for the cultural and historical messages that the ceremony is offering.

In the latter capacity, the commentators pay close attention to historical and cultural detail in an effort to enhance their narrative credibility. This involves providing a litany of facts. In the drum scene that opens the ceremony, for example, the NBC commentators do not simply say, as CCTV does, that the performers on the floor are using replicas of ancient drums. Costas provides detail. The drums, he says, date to around 500 B.C. and are replicas of artifacts found near Shanghai during a 2005 excavation of a tomb. Costas is providing many of the “who, what, when, where, why, and how”

questions that are at the core of the discourse of information: what was done (an excavation), when was it done (2005), where did it happen (at the site of an ancient tomb), and what was found (drums dated to a specific year).

The commentators likewise fill in specific historical and cultural detail befitting the discourse of information as the ceremony proceeds. In a vignette that depicts China's seafaring missions, Ramo specifically mentions that it represents the voyages of Admiral Zheng He, whom he calls "China's own Christopher Columbus." He goes on to add details, saying Zheng was "perhaps the first really to master the use of magnetic compasses, something that was also developed in China, as he navigated around the world." The scene showing the bejeweled female ribbon dancer performing on what looks like a carpet depicts the Tang Dynasty, when China was open to the rest of the world, in NBC's rendering. And Ramo describes a scene that features green-clad performers decked out in multi-colored points of light as specifically representing the beginning of the reform and open door policy in 1978.

Do Not Miss the Future

The discourse of entertainment comes into play as the commentators constantly remind the audience about the dazzling, spectacular nature of the performance and urge viewers to stay tuned to see what will come next. The message is: do not go away because you might miss something even more spectacular. The commentators also build tension at the beginning of the broadcast by telling the audience that the ceremony is an extremely risky venture. As the NBC panel waits for the ceremony to get under way, Ramo speaks to the audience.

A Chinese friend of mine said to me last week, "This is for us the moon shot. It's the riskiest thing we have ever done." So, some of the energy we feel here in the Bird's Nest tonight is the nervousness of a nation about to put a match to a fuse of a rocket.

Beyond the obvious hyperbole of claiming that the Opening Ceremony is the riskiest thing contemporary China has ever done, the comment establishes the dramatic question: Can China pull this off? In so many words Ramo is saying to the viewers: stick around and find out. If you don't, you will miss either a spectacular event or a spectacular crash.

The idea could be read as a metaphor for another theme that runs through the NBC presentation. China's future is very much up in the air, and the nation seems to be on some kind of trial, or at least on probation. The slogan of the Games – “One World, One Dream” – is simply a “hope for the future,” Lauer reminds the audience as he artfully dismisses the idealistic notion. At another point in the ceremony, Ramo remarks that the Games are a beginning, not an end for China. “The process of reform and opening only gets more complex from this point on,” he says. As Yao Ming, the NBA star, marches along side a young survivor of the Sichuan earthquake at the head of the Chinese delegation of athletes, Ramo expounds on the contradictions of China. There is the joy of the moment, but it comes soon after the unfathomable tragedy in Sichuan. In China, millions have been lifted out of poverty, but the country also faces “unbelievable challenges in the future,” Ramo says. At one point Lauer says one of the reasons the International Olympic Committee awarded the Games to Beijing was to “present the Olympic movement to more than a billion fresh eyes.” The IOC, like the world's major corporations, wanted an entrée into the China market, and the Beijing Olympics represents an opening gambit in this direction. It is almost as if Lauer is implying that the IOC wanted to somehow inoculate the country against slipping out of the world system and into undesirable behavior.

Seeing the Other with New Eyes

NBC offers the notion of seeing China with new eyes early in the ceremony when a vast high-tech, LED screen that looks like a traditional Chinese scrollwork unrolls onto the stadium floor. Three male dancers dressed in black, high-collared Chinese suits emerge to perform a modern dance and “paint” with their gloved hands a Chinese *shan shui* or “mountain and water” painting. The traditional

zither – the *gu jeng* – plays a mournful tune as more dancer-artists emerge from the shadows and carve their own black lines onto the screen. As the dancers appear, Ramo makes it clear that this is not merely entertainment.

We begin here with something highly symbolic: a blank sheet of paper expressing the wish of the Chinese for people around the world to say look at this over the next 17 days to fill the blank sheet of paper with new images and maybe to replace images that the Chinese themselves in many cases are eager to leave behind.

A single mention of the notion that the Chinese themselves want to replace old images is insufficient.

During the scene when the Great Wall falls and plum flowers emerge, Ramo reiterates the idea, telling the audience: “And again, a desire to replace one image of China with another one.”

Speaking for the other is an important element in any discourse that takes command of defining cultural difference, and the practice is very much in evidence here. Ramo presumes to speak for the Chinese people as he offers an idea of what an American audience should draw from the scene. The images are all favorable for the capitalist project in China; the country is open, with a blank slate to be written on as contemporary Chinese people choose. But more than that, China, in Ramo's articulation, is eager to throw off the errors (socialism) of the past, join the world (of global capitalism) as it offers a uniquely fascinating cultural milieu. China may be “other,” but it is not “other” enough to prevent inclusion in the world on terms that capitalism can accept and work with. China fits as “almost the same but not quite.”

The image of China as a land of possibility taps into a long discourse of capitalist interest in the world's most populous country. China historically has been a place for adventurous entrepreneurs to make their fortunes. The prospects of oil for the lamps of China excited the imagination of nineteenth century traders in a way that is not dissimilar from the attraction that the multinational corporation has today for disciplined, docile labor.

Extolling the virtues of an open China is at the heart of NBC's commentary on the ribbon dance scene. This section opens with images of a magic carpet of Orientalized myth as the female dancer performs a ribbon dance literally standing on the shoulders of a phalanx of men dressed in long, flowing green robes. For NBC, the scene is about the virtues of openness and international commerce.

Again presuming to speak for the other, Ramo explains that the scene depicts the Tang Dynasty, which represents in the Chinese mind the notion that prosperity flows from reaching out to the world. During the Tang, he proffers, China exported silk and other valuable goods and got back ideas that enabled the civilization to flourish. It is a neoliberal idea writ onto Chinese culture: open trade brings prosperity as well as intellectual and cultural fullness. "As Chinese people look at their own history," Ramo says, "the moment they will almost all tell you was the greatest is the Tang Dynasty. And part of the reason they feel it was so spectacular is that it was a time when China was incredibly open."

The analogy to the present is obvious, but perhaps as interesting are the words Ramo emphasizes when he refers specifically to the dancer: "You can almost see in her headdress here, it almost looks Indian to some degree, a reflection of the *tremendous* openness of China at that time and the result, which was an *unbelievable* cultural and economic blossoming." By inflecting the words "tremendous" and "unbelievable," Ramo summons once again the imagery of China as a land of superlatives, with its vast population, long history, and enormous possibilities. But there is more at work here – namely, attaching exotic connotations to China and things Chinese. Use of the words "tremendous" and "unbelievable" harkens back to the fetishization of China as a land of mystery and promise, a place where missionaries went to save souls, where fortunes could be made, where adventure was waiting around every corner. China is "unbelievable" in its exoticness. Openness will lead to a kind of capitalism acceptable to the West and a flowering of wealth. The fact that the image is at odds with the reality of China's increasingly aggressive, individualistic, and unequal style of capitalism enforced through the power of the Communist state passes without comment.

The modern portion of the ceremony offers NBC another moment to praise the movement toward openness. At center stage, placed atop the LED screen in the middle of the stadium, is famed Chinese pianist Lang Lang, who is playing a white grand piano. Lang Lang might be mistaken for a Chinese Liberace. His black hair coiffed, he is wearing a silver suit and has a seven-year-old girl accompanying him. They are surrounded by dancers wearing full-length fluorescent green costumes and caps. As they dance, turquoise and white pin lights on their costumes illuminate, leaving a visual impression of thousands of points of light.

NBC once again turns to Ramo, who interprets the scene as depicting the moment in 1978 when China adopted a policy of reform and opening to the outside world. “No Chinese watching this at home needs a calendar to know what this is,” he says, once again speaking for the other. “This is that amazing moment when China began to plug into the world, when it began to light up even chromatically, when it went from a world of brown and gray Mao suits to bright, vivid colors, individuals deciding on the lives that they wanted to live for themselves.” In Ramo's telling, China has opened and transformed to the point of being almost the same as America, where making one's own way in life is part of the American imaginary.

Awed by Technology, Conflicted About Labor

China's technological and engineering process is much admired in the NBC presentation. This is not a case of “almost the same but not quite,” but rather: more like us than even us. The commentators repeatedly marvel at the host nation's ability to dazzle, with an LED screen that wraps around the entire stadium and the LED “scroll” on the floor of the stadium that rolls out and rolls in. When the Olympic Rings begin rising above the stadium floor early in the ceremony, Lauer tells the audience it is “just some of the technology and engineering that you're going to be seeing an awful lot of tonight.” Later, as the dancers on the LED screen on the stadium floor “paint” with their gloved hands, Lauer remarks, “This is one of the world's largest LED screens, again technology and engineering, 230 feet long by 70

feet wide, and it will even get bigger as this night progresses.” During the scene that represents China's maritime voyages of exploration, Lauer tells viewers that he wants to draw their attention to the video membrane that wraps around the top of the stadium, which at the time is showing images of roiling seas. “It's massive,” he says “It goes the entire way around and now projected on that screen – images of the sea.” A few minutes later, Costas proclaims that China had won the lifetime gold medal for Olympic openings. “When it comes to opening ceremonies, retire the trophy,” he says.

Some of the praise of Chinese technology fits with the discourse of entertainment. Teasing the audience by suggesting that an even greater spectacle is to come is a device used in hopes of preventing viewers from tuning out, especially during commercial breaks. The praise is effusive and continuous throughout the ceremony. In the closing scene, as China's famed Olympic gymnast Li Ning appears to be running sideways over the wrap-around video screen high over the stadium floor, the Olympic cauldron appears outside the top of the stadium, as if by magic. Lauer excitedly remarks that it wasn't there thirty minutes ago. “Another amazing feat of engineering here in the Bird's Nest,” he says.

NBC's commentary also offers fulsome praise for China's ability to organize skilled labor in non-threatening ways. This is especially shown during the scene in which an undulating printing press morphs into the Great Wall, which comes down, only to have purple flowers pop up from the top of the moveable blocks. The emergence from beneath the blocks of 897 (by NBC's count) smiling and waving men is a demonstration of the power of China's disciplined, precision, and cheerful workforce. The message to the capitalist world is unmistakable: China is a place that has an abundance of hard working, competent laborers constrained by a “harmonious” society that boasts of a state with the power and desire to impose stability. What could be a more welcome message to the capitalist order? What could be a better advertisement for China's reputation as the workshop of the world, the outsourcing destination of first choice?

As the performers are waving and the crowd is cheering, NBC's commentators marvel at the accomplishment. "How did they do it?" Bob Costas asks after the waving Chinese men pop out from under the moveable type figures. "They did it with people. Not computers, not hydraulics. People."

"It's unbelievable," says Lauer.

"Jaw dropping," says Costas.

The human and technological feats that NBC extols offer, as Ramo says early in the performance, a fresh way to look at China that is compatible with China's integration with global capitalism. Scenes that are depicted as describing the virtues of openness to the rest of the world are spoken of in hopeful terms. China's technological progress and prowess and its ability to organize skilled laborers who are happy with their lot are likewise praised. But that is only one part of the picture.

NBC's attitude toward masses of regimented Chinese men is profoundly ambivalent, as evidenced by the drum scene that begins the Opening Ceremony. The commentary at this point reflects a nervousness that is foreshadowed at the beginning of the ceremony. As the drum scene gets under way, Costas makes a reference to the "almost fierce precision" of the drummers. Lauer counters with a comment about the "minute detail" of the performance as he foreshadows an important point to come: "and by the way, we'll make reference to the smiles a little later on." It will be well to recall that in CCTV's rendering, this scene represents a grand welcome to friends all over the world as the 2,008 drummers chant words from the *Analects of Confucius*. But in NBC's version, the scene is a cause for some alarm. During the drum scene, Lauer calls their performance "awe-inspiring but perhaps a bit intimidating." He goes on to refer to what he referenced a few minutes before, telling viewers that the drummers had been told during a rehearsal to smile more. "And that takes a little of the edge off of it," he says. Costas, however, is not about to dismiss the implied Chinese threat. "Some," he says, eliciting a nervous chuckle from Lauer, as if to indicate the edge really has not been removed.

The response to the drummers exposes certain images of Chinese racial otherness, political difference, and regimentation. The NBC team leaves unsaid why the Chinese drummers are “perhaps a bit intimidating,” but the implications are far reaching. At least a portion of the American audience would not be so far removed from racist images of Asian hordes to fail to make an unstated connection. Even if that kind of racist imagery does not enter the subliminal picture, dominant discourses in the U.S. would reinforce a binary that pits the rugged individual American against the Chinese who subsumes his or her individuality to the collective. For the American eye, untrained in seeing difference in the faces and bodies of Asians, the sight of 2,008 drummers working in unison could hail an unfamiliar and potentially unsettling threat from a labor force that can move in lockstep. The question of whether China ultimately will be a friend or foe is very much up in the air, but it is a question that NBC defers. What is left is the specter of a vast, shapeless mass of humanity rising up and replacing or at least disrupting the United States as the world’s great super power. It is the specter of one kind of nationalism displacing another.

Racial otherness is submerged in NBC's coverage of the Opening Ceremony. Chinese otherness is always described in NBC's commentary without referring to physical characteristics or bodies, even when the visual display might have called for some mention of racial difference. At one point in the program, Chinese children assemble on the floor of the stadium while images of children from the rest of the world are displayed on the LED screen that rings the top of the stadium. The spectacle of Chinese children on the floor of the stadium and the images of other children – white, black, brown and various shades in between – floating above passes without comment by the NBC commentators.

NBC, Realpolitik, and Aesthetic Perfection

NBC also assiduously avoids political criticism that would paint China or the Chinese Communist Party in too much of an unfavorable light. To be sure, questions facing China are acknowledged about human rights and other problems that were the subject of extensive coverage in

the American media in the run-up to the Games. Lauer makes a point early in the ceremony as the audience is seeing President George W. Bush and his wife Laura moving to their seats in the stadium that Bush had made a strong statement in Thailand as he traveled to Beijing about human rights, freedom of speech, religion, and press in China. But Lauer moves his analysis along lines that could have been taken from U.S. State Department talking points on China. He quickly primes the audience to accept the idea that judgments about China cannot be made solely on grounds of human and other rights and that realpolitik must be a decisive factor. He says China's power and emergence “forces a lot of countries and their leaders to operate in a gray area. It can't be black and white because while you agree on some things, you don't agree on others. And it can't be a firm line. It's got to be a bit of give and take.” The non-democratic, dictatorial nature of the Chinese political system is never starkly held out in the NBC commentary for derision.

The handling in the NBC presentation of the idea of harmony is illustrative of this point. Most of the explanations of harmony in the commentary come from a cultural, not political, point of view. It is first mentioned in the scene that follows the drum welcome. Several apsaras – the supernatural women of Buddhist mythology – are seen flying (by wires) over the floor of the stadium. Ramo tells the audience that the ceremony will touch on all three of China's great philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and he says the apsaras symbolize “peace and harmony.” A few minutes later, Costas explains that the song being played in the background is about “harmony and the world coming together.” In a subsequent scene where modern dancers create a traditional Chinese painting by moving their gloved hands gracefully across the giant LED screen on the floor of the stadium, Ramo describes it as one of China's oldest art forms and one designed to express “harmony – the balance between the mountains and the water.” The next mention of harmony comes when Ramo

talks about how Confucius wandered around the country, giving advice to rulers about how to achieve harmony in society. And so it goes. Harmony in NBC's commentary is, with only a few exceptions, discussed only in a cultural context.

The notion that the establishment of a harmonious society is a central slogan of Hu Jintao's propaganda apparatus is alluded to but downplayed. The connection between Hu and harmony comes up for the first time just after the first Chinese character for the concept appears on the stadium floor, during the scene depicting the moveable printing press. Ramo has just interpreted the moving of the blocks as representing wind and recalling the Confucian phrase that a virtuous ruler can pass by his subjects with the ease of the wind. When the “harmony” character appears, Ramo calls it a “core philosophical concept.” Lauer then moves the conversation to the political, a role he plays throughout the presentation, saying that harmony is also “a core political ideal” and that Hu talks constantly about a “harmonious society.” Ramo agrees, using the Chinese phrase for harmonious society – *hexue shehui* – and saying it is “right at the heart of the Chinese political doctrine at the moment.” Costas immediately changes the tone of the conversation with a humorous comment about Ramo's use of the Chinese language. “I'm glad you said that,” he says as the chuckles of several anchor voices are heard. Ramo takes over the commentary to explain what is unfolding on the floor: the blocks take the form of a ripple effect that happens when water is dropped into a still pond. Ramo says this represents the silence that comes from Confucian self-cultivation but also appears in the Buddhist and Taoist traditions “as a mark of inner peace leading to external peace.” Shortly thereafter, Ramo issues a soft disclaimer about the idea of China actually being a harmonious society. He says that one of the “unusual” things about speaking of harmony in China is that “there are so many profoundly disharmonious things here in a way.” He then mentions two: challenges with the environment and urbanization “and so forth.” This kind of analysis establishes as a signifier the “profoundly disharmonious” elements of Chinese society but omits from the explicit list of signifieds a number of

the hot-button issues that had been circulating widely in the Western media. Ramo's tone calls attention to the items enumerated – environment and urbanization -- and not to issues reported in the U.S. media such as human rights, repression in Tibet, security crackdowns, broken promises about openness, cyber-spying, China's political system, and the wisdom of awarding the Olympics to China in the first place. The euphemistic referral to the challenges of the environment and urbanization puts a softer gloss on media reported that had honed in on haze, smog, grime, and migrant workers leaving Beijing on trains because the coming of the Olympics meant the loss of their jobs. Ramo concludes by saying the idea of harmony in society represents “an ideal for the Chinese as they watch this.” Toward the end of the ceremony, shortly before the Olympic Torch is carried into the stadium, Lauer returns to the subject, saying harmony is one of Hu Jintao's “most striking messages.” In the NBC commentary, harmony is a “striking message” or ideal of the people – not the latest slogan from a political system that structurally has changed little during the period of reform and opening.

The downplaying of the political use of harmony is an example of a more widespread blunting of ideas that might present China in a negative light, in keeping with the *realpolitik* notion that China must be handled in a special way. This is particularly evident in a scene early in the ceremony when smiling children dressed in colorful and flowing costumes of the country's fifty-six officially recognized national minorities bring the flag of the People's Republic to center stage. They hand it to soldiers, who goose-step it to the flagpole. In a solemn and patriotic moment, the flag is raised as the Chinese national anthem plays. NBC attaches a mythological egalitarianism to the moment that is more consistent with an American sense of fairness than any Chinese reality. As the children carry the flag across the stadium, Lauer declares that the young performers are “average Chinese children, from average families, chosen from some art schools around the area.” This is simply not possible. Even observers with a rudimentary knowledge of China would understand that average children would not attend a Chinese art school. Schools of that caliber are highly competitive and admission would be

highly coveted. Money and Party connections could well help ensure that such schools are dominated by the offspring of the elite. (As mentioned in Chapter One, it was subsequently revealed that the “minority” children were not actually minorities. Most if not all were members of the Han Chinese majority and belonged to a child acting troupe. In other words, they were far from average.)

Furthermore, nowhere in the representation is there a hint of ethnic tension and strife that is ever present in Tibet and other regions of China. Nowhere is there a recognition that minority costumes are largely worn only at official events like the Opening Ceremony or as come-ons for tourists and their foreign exchange. China, in NBC's visual presentation, is not simply an Orientalized mass of others that carry the stereotypical racial characteristics as seen in eyes, hair, and other epidermal features. There is another kind of other, in fact many kinds of respected, racialized minority others that the outside world can access.

NBC's presentation reinforces a China of the happy minorities that was standard if crude propaganda fare in Maoist times. But this time the notion has a more credible edge, courtesy of NBC's commentary. Ramo, articulating a residual Orientalism and ideological gloss, presumes to know exactly what everyone in China is thinking. As the children hand the flag to the soldiers, he says, “I think it's a profound statement that will resonate in the hearts of the more than a billion Chinese people watching this tonight, the idea that the state is the guarantor of the future of those children, in a country that for so long could not guarantee the safety or the stability of the society for generations of children.”

Ramo's message is clear enough. All 1.3 billion people in China are brimming with pride that the militarized, authoritarian/totalitarian state represented by the goose-stepping soldiers carrying the flag can now guarantee the future of the nation, which was not the case previously. China is emerging as a new nation, one that has overcome the great historical failure to nurture its people and deserves to

be regarded in a new light. At a fundamental level, the kind of reliable stability promised by this image is a long sought desire of Western capitalism. If capital is to be invested and markets exploited, there cannot be worries about upheavals that will tear apart the social fabric.

The visual sequences that NBC uses during the playing of the Chinese national anthem reinforce the link between nation, leadership, and the “minority” children. As the band strikes up the anthem, ramrod-straight soldiers salute the flag. One of their number flings a corner of the flag skyward in an exaggerated motion, and it begins moving up the pole. The shot shifts to a brief close-up of Hu Jintao, his eyes looking up, singing along with the national anthem. Next comes a close shot of one of the minority girls, who is also singing along. Following that is a shot showing four of the children in focus. They also are looking up at the flag and singing. The camera pulls back before the next switch to a close-up of three of the children from the back. The camera pushes forward to bring the flag into greater prominence. Next comes another angle on the flag as it approaches the top of the pole. The following shot shows a group of the children at floor level, as the camera pans right. Finally, we see the flag at the top of the pole, the camera pushing in to enlarge the banner as the band finishes the anthem. The shot sequence links signifiers of nation, national leadership and defense (the flag, Hu Jintao, and the soldiers) with the minority children, who represent, in NBC's rendering, the newfound ability of the state to care for the next generation, who are supposedly ethnically diverse.

A kind of Orientalism is deeply embedded in the Ramo message. The idea that anyone, even a knowledgeable outsider, could access the thoughts of 1.3 billion people and reduce them to a single idea is absurd, but it serves the purpose of lumping China's 1.3 billion people into a single, recognizable, malleable mass that can have one mind. The instability of the idea is obvious; the 1.3 billion people of China cannot have one mind, but saying they do creates an absence, an absence constituted by what Chinese people are really thinking. That absence is unknowable and inscrutable, conjuring up images of the exotic, Orientalized China.

The “minority” children and flag-raising scene reveal another kind of ideological gloss in NBC's presentation: the projection of an acceptable kind of nationalism. In the NBC commentary, nationalism is presented as pride, not any kind of militant or threatening projection of national authority. As the “minority” children are carrying the flag and the song “Ode to the Motherland” is sung, Costas himself presumes to speak for the other, saying, “It's hard to overstate the universal sense of pride, any other differences aside among the billion plus Chinese. In the days leading up to this Opening Ceremony, sales of Chinese flags went up some thirty times over.” All of China is expressing pride, a sentiment that cannot be understood as anything but uplifting and non-threatening. Pride is a unifying emotion, and the evidence of its scope is the massive increase in the sale of flags. Alternative explanations are not offered or hinted at. The possibility that government units went out and bought up flags to distribute to citizens is not raised. None of the lyrics of “Ode to the Motherland” – which include the lines “the song of victory resounds loudly” and “our solidarity, mutual love and durable strength is like steel” – is offered to the audience.

The way NBC refers to the song also projects a softer image of Chinese nationalism. While the song was widely called “Ode to the Motherland” in the American media and referred to as “Sing a Song of Praise to the Motherland” by the official Xinhua News Agency's English-language service,” Costas calls it “A Hymn to My Country.”¹⁷ Paul Farhi, writing a few days later in *The Washington Post*, did not miss the toning down of the patriotic sentiment in the title used by Costas. He called it “a more benign translation than the title reported elsewhere: 'Ode to the Motherland.' 'Hymn.' Hmm, that sounds kind of religious. 'Motherland.' Why, that sounds.... communistic,” Farhi wrote, using the ellipses in his article before the word “communistic” to add extra emphasis.¹⁸

17 Xinhua News Agency, “Little Girl Sings at Opening Ceremony of Beijing Olympics,” *www.chinaview.cn*, August 9, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/09/content_9107203.htm.

18 Paul Farhi, “Revelation About Singer Leaves That Syncing Feeling,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2008, Final edition, sec. Style, C01.

NBC also sidesteps the potentially embarrassing question of whether the Chinese organizers faked certain parts of the ceremony for the television audience. After a commercial break following the drum scene, the NBC coverage resumes with an aerial shot outside the stadium of fireworks that appear to be forming the shape of steps. Lauer explains: “You’re looking now at the footsteps of history, quite literally, coming from the old center of Beijing near Tiananmen Square, to the new area of Beijing, this national stadium along the north-south access.” He adds more detail: “You’re looking at a cinematic device employed by Zhang Yimou here. This is actually almost animation, a footstep a second, twenty-nine in all, to signify the twenty-nine Olympiads.”

The words appear to have been chosen carefully. We are looking at a “cinematic device” that is “almost animation.” The projected meaning is vague at best. What does “almost animation” actually mean? A cinematic device sounds like something that is not quite realistic. So we have something that may not be representative of reality but rather more akin to animation. Days later it was revealed that the footsteps actually were created by computer animation, were not real, and were not seen in the Beijing skies.¹⁹ Was NBC attempting to avoid mentioning a sleight of hand that the production team knew about? Three days after the Opening Ceremony, MSNBC’s website said the NBC broadcasters “made mention of the alteration” in a generous interpretation of what seemed more like a misrepresentation.²⁰ In any event, NBC’s approach to this portion of the ceremony enabled the network to avoid a discussion of manufactured aesthetic perfection in the ceremony and state-sponsored Chinese art in general.

19 Richard Spencer, “Beijing Olympic 2008 opening ceremony giant firework footprints ‘faked’,” *The Telegraph* (Beijing, August 10, 2008), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/2534499/Beijing-Olympic-2008-opening-ceremony-giant-firework-footprints-faked.html>; Jonathan Watts, “China faked footprints of fire coverage in Olympics opening ceremony,” *The Guardian*, August 11, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2008/aug/11/olympics2008.china>.

20 “Part of Olympic display altered in broadcast,” *msnbc.com*, August 11, 2008, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26139005/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/t/part-olympic-display-altered-broadcast/#.TrCWxHEzLMQ.

To be fair, NBC probably should not be faulted for not revealing perhaps the most prominent example of manufactured aesthetic perfection in the Opening Ceremony: the lip synching of “Ode to the Motherland” by a smiling nine-year-old named Lin Miaoke during the scene when the Chinese flag is carried to the stadium's flagpole by so-called minority children and goose-stepping soldiers. Members of the Chinese Communist Party's Politiburo, it was revealed days after the Opening Ceremony, had decided that Lin's voice was not pretty enough and at the last minute ordered a change. Lin would sing but the voice would come from a seven-year-old elementary school student from Beijing who was not as pretty but whose singing voice was superior. Unbeknownst even to herself, Lin became the picture of perfection in lip-synching.²¹

Making allowances for NBC with regard to the lip synching scene does not soften the impression that the network's commentary in key ways elevates the status of the Communist Party and Chinese state, or at least shields them from the kind of criticism that was widespread in the U.S. press in the lead-up to the Games. This is one aspect of the profoundly ambivalent picture of the party-state that emanates from the NBC presentation. After erasing the role of the Party by assigning authorship of the event to Zhang Yimou, the NBC commentators repeatedly sidestep questions about the nature of the Chinese party-state. Lauer tells the audience that allowances must be made for China because of its growing power. The implied message is that too much is at stake to frame the U.S.-China relationship in Cold War terms (or in the kind of terms Fox News uses, as described in Chapter Two) as the freely capitalist versus the repressed and Communist. The Party is displayed as the protector of the people, including China's minorities. Harmony, in the NBC commentary, is not so much a central propaganda

21 China Digital Times, “Another Olympic Secret: Who Was Actually Singing as the National Flag Entered the Stadium? (Updated),” November 22, 2008, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/08/another-olympic-secret-who-was-actually-singing-as-the-national-flag-entered-the-stadium/>; Ariana Eunjung Cha, “Pretty Face and Voice Didn’t Belong to Same Girl,” *The Washington Post* (Beijing, August 12, 2008), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/12/AR2008081201567.html?hpid=topnews>; Jim Yardley, “In Grand Olympic Show, Some Sleight of Voice,” *The New York Times* (Beijing, August 13, 2008), http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/13/sports/olympics/13beijing.html?_r=1&hp=&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1227377025-VecpV+0tXBnsAhH2Olsezg.

element in the Party's rhetorical arsenal as it is an ideal and “striking message.” The one time that harmony is called an item of political “doctrine,” the commentators quickly move the conversation to the politically non-sensitive. The “minority” children are said to be just ordinary pupils in local art schools, a statement that masks the stratified structure of privilege and connections at the heart of contemporary Chinese social relations. The apparent knowledge that fireworks were faked is glossed over, foreclosing a discussion of the politics of aesthetic perfectionism. Nationalism is softened by equating it with pride, and an Orientalist gloss overlays the proceeding, as NBC's expert commentator professes to have special insight into what 1.3 billion Chinese are really thinking.

Missed Opportunities

There are other omissions or diversions in NBC's commentary that also have great ideological significance. The scene in which the green-clad dancers form what CCTV's commentators describe as a peace pigeon unfolds in the NBC presentation without comment, without mention of China's intent to stage a “green” Olympics or emphasize the pursuit of peace. This is the vignette that begins with Lang Lang and a young girl playing piano. The green dancers adorned with points of light surround them and the NBC commentators interpret the scene as depicting what Ramo calls “that amazing moment when China began to plug into the world” when Deng Xiaoping launched his reform program in 1978. The NBC commentators refer to the dancers as “star men” as they form and re-form, changing colors as they go. Rather than offering an interpretation of the significance of the movement, Lauer presents a story about Zhang Yimou that once again anchors him as the author of the event. He says that when the scene was first rehearsed a week earlier, the performers were clad in black. “Zhang Yimou didn't like that,” Lauer says. “Said change them. Three days later, they were this green color. He said: 'I like that. Make me 2,007 more,' and here we are on a Friday night.” A full minute and a half goes by without further commentary during which the dancers form the pigeon, elegantly shown by NBC in aerial shots. There is no commentary on the pigeon, which amounts to a lost opportunity to emphasize the

theme hit hard by CCTV – that China is proclaiming its peaceful intentions to the world. Instead, NBC uses the moment for another opportunity to hammer home the authorial authority of Zhang Yimou.

To the extent that NBC addresses the “green” theme, the network does so by taking the focus off China and placing it on global environmental problems. In the aforementioned scene in which *taijiquan* performers form concentric circles around a group of school children, Ramo declares that the environmental message is one for the world, not just China. Again he places the motivation for the message squarely on the director/auteur saying, “This is Zhang Yimou pointing at the many problems we face, not only China, but the world, but the problems of global warming, the problems of resource depletion, and the burden of that places on the next generation which is going to have to solve them.” A few minutes later, when the *taijiquan* performers and the children watch in awe as green birds fill the video screen that wraps around the top of the stadium, Ramo again make the message universal. The scene depicts a time “when the conflicts between man and nature have been resolved, and where a model that allows both prosperity and environmentalism flourishes,” Ramo says. Far from indicating that China is offering the world a “green” Olympics, the message from Ramo is that environmental problems are global. Global problems require global solutions. But more than that, it is not even this generation that is going to have to solve them. That burden, in Ramo's interpretation of Zhang Yimou's message, falls on the next generation. The current generation of Chinese leaders is almost exempt from forging a solution to environmental degradation, which seems like a utopian dream in any event.

A later scene in which the appearance of Chinese taikonauts is followed by the emergence of a giant blue globe from beneath the floor of the stadium likewise does not warrant interpretation by NBC. In this vignette, the earth rises and dancers circle the globe one behind the other, at various latitudes. Rather than interpret the significance of the scene, the NBC commentators fall back into a discussion about the physicality involved. Costas asks rhetorically, “Think there isn't some athleticism

involved here?” Ramo answers, “Eight months of training for these dancers. The hardest part apparently, the ones running around the equator where they have to stand more or less sidewise.”

In the scene that follows, NBC misses an opportunity to emphasize, as CCTV does, a cultural role reversal. This is the scene in which the male Chinese singer Liu Huan performs the song “You and Me” with the British female star Sarah Brightman, and the couple finish the number by holding hands while standing atop the globe. The shot of the Oriental man holding hands with an Occidental object of desire is given much visual attention by CCTV. NBC, however, spends just a few seconds on a close-up of the hand-holding. Instead the audience sees a series of wide shots showing the hundreds of dancers assembled on the field beneath the globe and the scenes emerging on the video screen that wraps around the top of the stadium. The NBC commentators likewise make no mention of the hand holding, referring only briefly to the meaning behind the song. Lauer says, “One world, one dream, the slogan of these games. And as Joshua said before, if not a reality now, maybe the Chinese are saying it's the hope for the future.” Whether NBC was consciously unwilling to reverse classical Orientalism is a matter of speculation.

Impossible Claims

To sum up, the NBC text expresses guarded hope for China's (capitalist) future and a view of China as a place where a fresh canvas is being created in the world mosaic of nations and cultures. It is a repository of cultural resources, unique in its breath and historical depth, a nation that is hurtling at light speed toward a modernity that already is showing signs of outdistancing the West – “almost the same but not quite,” not from an inferior direction but in at least some ways from a superior one. It is a nation that is reclaiming its heritage of greatness, with a disciplined labor force that is highly attractive to the capitalist world. It is a nation under the leadership of a government that seems to have solved the great historical problem of caring for its next generation. But there is another side of the ledger. If Costas's jury has affirmed the greatness of the Opening Ceremony, it is still deliberating on China's

overall future. Among the unanswered questions and concerns is whether China will make the political and economic reforms necessary to satisfy the West and fully engage the capitalist world, and whether it ultimately will be a friend or foe of the United States. China's political system, repression, and lack of democracy are concerns, but the nation's growing power is forcing the rest of the world to make accommodations that it would not for lesser nations. Hope is in the air, however, and for now the allure of China seems stronger than the warning signals.

The NBC presentation projects narrative credibility by making the claim that the commentators are merely relaying to the audience what director Zhang Yimou is trying to project. Underlying this are the unstated, impossible claims that he is the sole creative force behind the ceremony and that the Chinese Communist Party is a mere bystander. Yet there are hints of contradictions within NBC's own narrative. How was Zhang able to wave his hands and get what he wanted on short notice? Some greater organizing power must have been in operation. Zhang himself said after the ceremony that he was given full artistic license but that when top leaders made suggestions he told his team they had to be taken very seriously – shorthand for do what the leadership wants.²² However, the auteur narrative is entirely natural in an American context and one that could be expected to emerge from an American broadcaster attuned to thinking in terms of individual authorship. Furthermore, looking at the Opening Ceremony as the work of one man and not as the collective expression of China's closed ruling group forecloses a view of the Opening Ceremony as merely a propagandistic expression of a totalitarian elite and opens the possibility of seeing China as a place that can be legitimately welcomed into the global capitalist world, a nation of immense cultural value where individual expression can thrive. In other words, China is a place that can be “almost the same but not quite.”

22 China Digital Times, “‘The Way Art Works’: An Interview With Zhang Yimou (1),” August 14, 2008, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/08/the-way-art-works-an-interview-with-zhang-yimou-1/>; Richard Spencer, “London 2012 cannot match Beijing Olympics opening ceremony ‘because of trade unions.’” *The Telegraph* (Beijing, August 25, 2008), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/2617980/London-2012-cannot-match-Beijing-Olympics-opening-ceremony-because-of-trade-unions.html>.

NBC's interpretation of Zhang Yimou's intentionality also ignores the director's own attempt at self-othering, what Chen Xiaomei calls Occidentalism. And it neglects the use of an aesthetic of manufactured perfection. In an interview about the Opening Ceremony in the Chinese media, Zhang said one of his challenges was finding elements of Chinese culture that would be easy for foreigners to understand. "If they can't grasp our ideas, all the efforts we made are worthless," he said, interpreting self-othering as a kind of cultural dumbing down. "China cherishes a long history and a profound culture. To make people from all corners of globe understand our culture, we must approach the profound in a simple, explicit way." Zhang said he recognized that *The New York Times* would publish only one, inch-wide photo of the Opening Ceremony in the next day's newspaper, which would be "the whole impression China conveyed to the rest of the world." Not only that, Zhang said that photo would capture the moment people would remember "for years go come." His goal was to provide multiple photographic moments that could become that signifying image. "If would delight me largely if they had eight photos at hand but were unable to make the choice," he said.²³

NBC's commentary assiduously avoids any comparison of Zhang Yimou's extravaganza with previous mass events staged by Communist or fascist states. The subject of manufactured perfection is not on the network's agenda. But Zhang Yimou himself and other Western press outlets were not that reserved. Zhang told a Chinese interviewer that China was second only to North Korea in human performance, and that the uniformity exhibited by the North Koreans "brings beauty." Chinese performers could achieve that level of perfection, he said, with more hard training and discipline.²⁴ David Barboza noted in *The New York Times* that (apparently Westernized Chinese) critics accused Zhang, some of whose earlier films were banned by the Communist authorities in China, of cozing up to the regime and fitting the role that Leni Riefenstahl played for Adolph Hitler and the Nazis.²⁵

23 Xia Chen, "Zhang Yimou reveals Olympic opening ceremony secrets," *China.org.cn*, November 1, 2007, http://www.china.org.cn/entertainment/2007-11/01/content_1230436.htm.

24 Spencer, "London 2012 Cannot Match Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony 'Because of Trade Unions'."

25 David Barboza, "Gritty Renegade Now Directs China's Close-Up," *The New York Times* (Beijing, August 8, 2008),

The narrative credibility of the NBC commentary also is undermined by the mingling of the discourses of information and entertainment, leaving an even more ambiguous overall picture. The image of China that emerges from the Costas, Lauer, and Ramo presentation clashes in many respects with the messages in Brokaw's opening piece. Brokaw speaks of China as bubbling with problems beneath the surface. The frenetic economic growth of the past thirty years has been highly uneven, leaving out hundreds of millions of people and creating an astounding gap between rich and poor. The few rule the many. This is far from a society, in Ramo's telling, that can now guarantee the future for its children. If Ramo's analysis presents the hope that China can fully integrate with the global capitalist system in a profitable way for all, Brokaw's message is that China is not Ramo's nation that lit up in 1978 and began allowing people to freely choose how they wanted to run their lives. Flawed as it is, Brokaw's vignette highlights the problems in Ramo's interpretation while at the same time making Chinese people seem more than even a little similar to the American self-conception of the citizenry as people who desperately want to freely choose their path in life.

The role and nature of nationalism in China is another subject that is sidestepped in both the Brokaw piece and the commentary on the ceremony itself. There is much talk about national pride that hosting the Olympics has brought to China. But framing nationalism as merely an expression of pride in country forecloses a deeper discussion of the subject that is immensely more important and multifaceted. It puts behind a curtain sensitive and difficult questions, such as whether a destructive nationalism is on the rise in China and to what extent the leadership manipulates nationalistic feelings for its own purposes. It is a rhetorical move, in other words, that closes the discussion before it even gets started.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/08/sports/olympics/08guru.html>.

The conceptions about China, Chinese culture, and China's future that NBC offers in its version of the Opening Ceremony in many ways contrast sharply with those presented by CCTV. Each paints a certain picture of China's history, culture, national characteristics, and future potential. Neither comes close to describing the dizzying dimensions of life in China today in all their complexity. The next chapter will take a comparative approach to analyze the ideological underpinnings of each broadcast, raise questions about the dialectical struggles that shaped the two broadcasts, and examine the consequences of demands and constraints imposed by narrative choices made by each network. Such an undertaking provides fresh insights into questions of how ideas about national culture are constructed on different sides of a cultural and political divide in an age of globalization, when political monopoly in China and concentration of media in the United States conspire to shatter the utopian prospect that technology brings – namely, that the exponential increase in the flow of information will remove barriers and bring greater cross-cultural understanding.

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Chapter Five: a Critical Comparison of the CCTV and NBC Broadcasts

The Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was a singular event that reverberated with a multitude of meanings. The primary subject was China, its history, culture, people, national identity, place in the world, and prospects for the future. The ceremony at the Bird's Nest Stadium on a hot August night was the first act of a spectacle infused with no small share of ideological irony. The modern Olympics after all were established with the idea of showcasing and promoting universal human values and reducing inter-state conflict through athletic competition.¹ Despite nods to lofty universal values, contemporary Games have become highly commercial events and platforms for host countries to offer particularistic stories of nation and culture, both for their own people and for the rest of the world. The Opening Ceremony in Beijing provided just such an opportunity.

The narratives about Chinese history, culture and people that emerged in the Chinese capital were not transferred directly from the stadium floor by osmosis into the minds of millions of people around the world. The ceremony was a mass mediated, televised event, and meaning was filtered through the lenses of broadcasters around the world. This study has examined the broadcast presentations by China Central Television (CCTV) and NBC, texts that presented the Opening Ceremony in Beijing to viewers in China and the United States respectively. Each were high stakes efforts by the respective networks that reached huge audiences. Each network provided a commentary on a performance organized by the famed Chinese film director Zhang Yimou. CCTV's broadcast was anchored by two presenters: Sun Zhengping, a man, and Zhou Tao, a woman. NBC's coverage consisted of an opening video vignette, a journalistic set-up piece by former *Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw, and commentary on the ceremony itself by veteran sports commentator Bob Costas, *Today* show co-host Matt Lauer, and expert commentator Joshua Cooper Ramo.

¹ Norman Chad, "A Remote Boycott," *The Washington Post* (Beijing, August 4, 2008), Final edition, sec. Sports; Allen Guttman, *The Olympics, a History of the Modern Games* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Christopher R. Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1996). Chapter One: Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the revival of the Games.

Previous chapters have offered close readings of the narratives that emerged from each text, established the industrial and journalistic contexts that helped frame and constrain each of them, and offered historical background for key scenes in ceremony. This chapter builds on those analyses by juxtaposing the CCTV and NBC texts, critically comparing them, and offering further evidence of their ideological and constructed natures.² I will argue that CCTV and NBC offer narratives that take different ideological valences in pursuit of the same goal – namely, to fully integrate China into the global, capitalist order. The differences between them, however, plant the seeds for potentially deep ideological conflict. I will further argue that the ideological dimensions of the narratives are more hidden in the NBC broadcast, and that both sets of narratives are internally incoherent and depend on historical erasures to make sense. In other words, the narratives are “impossible unities” that break down under analytical scrutiny. I will offer some thoughts on the discursive struggles and choices that contributed to the construction of the competing narratives. The chapter will close with some observations about the critical approach to the analysis of cross-cultural mediated texts and its wider value.

The theory that informs the analysis in this chapter is an amalgam of the critical and post-colonial approaches employed in the close readings of the CCTV and NBC presentations. The notion put forward by critical theorist Homi Bhabha and anthropologist Ann Anagnost that stories of nation form “impossible unities” provides grounding for the analysis of CCTV's narratives about the Chinese nation and Chinese culture.³ Immanuel Wallerstein's notion about the necessity of stories of nation having a primordial origin that seems at all times to be fixed but actually changes to meet current needs also

2 Helen Fulton et al., “Novel to Film,” in *Narrative and Media* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16; Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 109–159; Roland Barthes, “Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today,” in *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill & Wong, 1977), 164–169.

3 Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 4–6; Homi K. Bhabha, ed., “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1–7.

provides a vital theoretical element for the analysis of the CCTV presentation.⁴ Post-colonial theory offered by Edward Said and expanded upon by Bhabha, Arif Dirlik, and Xiaomei Chen informs the analysis of the NBC presentation, in particular Said's view of Orientalism as the West's attempt to depict what he called Oriental culture and history as an exotic fetish for the purpose of domination and Bhabha's assertion that the former colonizer seeks in the former colonized a slippery status that is "almost the same but not quite."⁵ The object of representation, in this view, is expected to mimic the subject in command of the representation. But the object cannot ever be exactly equivalent to the subject.

The upcoming sections of this chapter provide evidence for my key claims by offering a comparative analysis of the major themes emerging from the CCTV and NBC presentations. First, I will examine in turn narratives that speak to overall views of China, the linkage of themes of peace and China's Olympic dream, China's claim to be hosting a green Olympics, nationalism and the relationship between the nation-state and the Chinese Communist Party, views of Chinese history and culture, interpretations of Confucius and Confucianism and their linkage to the ideology of the current regime, the nature of the Chinese people, and, finally, the construction of the culturally particular and the human universal. Following the sections offering the comparative analysis, I will probe more deeply into the ideological composition of each and then show how both presentations construct "impossible unities," to again use Bhabha and Anagnost's term. Both break down because of internal narrative incoherence and by virtue of the erasures of historical and contemporary facts. A discussion of discursive struggles evident in the presentations will come next, followed by a concluding section that

4 Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 78.

5 Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 94–131; Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Bhabha, "The Other Question"; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

offers a summary of all of the chapters in this dissertation and a further discussion of their ramifications. Some of the Opening Ceremony vignettes will be referenced in more than one section as they may have multiple significations. I will start with the overall view of China.

Overall Views of China

CCTV offers an expansive and celebratory view of China as a whole. The nation's 100-year struggle to host the Olympics finally succeeds. The achievement corresponds to the end of China's 100 years of humiliation at the hands of the Western powers and marks the end of the historic dominance of Western civilization. As the famed Chinese Olympic gold medalist Li Ning lights the Olympic Flame high above the stadium, commentator Zhou Tao says, "Western civilization, which was born in ancient Greece, and Eastern civilization, which has been passed down for 5,000 years, is finally, at this moment, coming together." The glow from the Olympic Flame rises as does China. The Olympic ideal, symbolized by the Flame, hails a fundamental equality and common humanity of the peoples and nations of the world, and China's rise signals a leveling of power between Eastern and Western civilization. The new world order will be based on openness and reciprocal trade relations, enabling China to thrive in a world of capitalistic globalization.

CCTV's new world order also features a role reversal of the Western fantasy that makes the Oriental woman the object of male desire. The broadcast focuses much attention on Chinese pop singer Liu Huan and English star Sarah Brightman as they hold hands while singing the Olympic theme song "You and Me" from their perch atop a blue globe that has risen from beneath the stadium floor. CCTV offers no commentary during the song but lingers on the close-up shot, allowing the visual imagery to do the talking. The female object of attention is Occidental, and the Western woman is holding hands with a Chinese man. As far as the symbolic object of male desire is concerned, the playing field has not been leveled; it has been upended and inverted, tipped in favor of the East.

NBC's text also presents China's full integration with the wider capitalist world as a desirable, necessary goal but, unlike the CCTV version, one that is far from a finished project. This is not the moment of East-West equality and full redemption for China that CCTV proclaims, a message that comes through in the commentary and the visual imagery. NBC, for example, shows the close shot of the two singers holding hands for only about three seconds, spending the rest of the time while the song is sung switching between wide shots of the hundreds of performers on the floor and a slideshow of children's pictures that is appearing on the video screen that wraps around the top of the stadium. In symbolic terms, CCTV's move to turn Orientalism on its head is downplayed for the American audience.

If NBC does not assign China equal status with the West, it does highlight hopeful signs. NBC's expert commentator Joshua Cooper Ramo offers the notion that China is changing in ways that are palatable to the Western project, but he makes it clear that much more in unspecified reform is needed. The Olympic moment marks a time when China can be seen in a new light, when the Chinese people want to replace former images of themselves and paint new ones on a blank slate. There is a sense that a historic turning point may be at hand. As Ramo offers his analysis, black-clad dancers appear on a blank LED screen on the floor of the stadium and begin producing a modern version of a traditional Chinese "mountain-water" (*san shui*) scrollwork by "painting" with their gloved hands. Ramo says:

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 17 days to fill the blank sheet of paper with new images, and maybe to replace images that the Chinese themselves in many cases are eager to leave behind.

Ramo does not say what images the Chinese want to leave behind, but the implication seems clear enough. In the context of an NBC narrative that glorifies the Chinese tradition, the historical reference point in this case extends into the recent past, implying that the Chinese themselves desire a clean break from their Communist history. CCTV makes a similar point but with a darker valence. Over aerial shots

that show fireworks and connect the Bird's Nest stadium with Beijing's main avenues and Tiananmen Square, commentator Zhou notes that the stadium, the new Olympic park and the stately, solemn Tiananmen Square are now happy partners. Commentator Sun follows up by saying the aerial trip linking the three locations also fuses the city's "yesterday and today." The commentary carries heavy ideological weight for a regime that has worked assiduously to erase from public memory the bloody 1989 Tiananmen crackdown in which unarmed demonstrators were gunned down by Chinese troops.⁶ The Square is solemn and stately, not the scene of violence and a metaphor for China's old guard killing its young. The city's "yesterday" does not include what is officially regarded as a counter-revolutionary movement that had to be crushed to save Chinese "socialism."

For NBC, what is important for China today is to wipe away negatives of the Communist past. The open-ended nature of this signification allows for a profusion of signifieds. Depending on one's point of view, a negative needing correction could be the country's human rights record, the authoritarian, non-democratic political system, the treatment of Tibet, unfair trade practices, currency manipulation, or any other image or practice that from a dominant American view is preventing China from gaining full acceptance within the Western capitalist orbit. Ramo's rhetoric also opens up a moral question. Is he talking about simply sweeping ugly images of past transgressions – such as the Tiananmen crackdown – under the historical rug as the Communist Party has attempted to do, or must some reckoning with the past accompany these different images? Is NBC ideologically aiding the Party in erasing public memory of the ugly past, or is it suggesting a course that could lead anywhere from a national apology to reforms that seek to change the basic structure of the regime? These questions are deferred in the interest of avoiding unnecessary antagonism and furthering the capitalist project in

6 Anthony Thomas, "PBS Frontline," *The Tank Man*, April 11, 2006, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tankman/view/>.

China. An apparently ideological alignment between CCTV and NBC on the need for China to fully engage in the world capitalistic system on closer scrutiny reveals differences and ambiguities in how that goal is to be accomplished.

Peace and the Olympic Dream

A major theme in the CCTV presentation is the tethering of China's Olympic dream to a wish for peace and reconciliation with the rest of the world. Commentator Zhou tells the audience early in the broadcast that the Olympics symbolize human solidarity, friendship, and peace. A little later commentator Sun declares that the Olympic Rings, which at this point are rising above the stadium floor, stir the emotions of everyone who loves “peace, friendship, and the Olympic movement.” At another high point of the ceremony – when a representation of the Great Wall dramatically falls and plum flowers appear on top of it – commentator Zhou says the scene expresses “the fervent wish for peace of the Chinese people.” When performers on the stadium floor maneuver themselves into the shape of a pigeon, Zhou declares that the scene symbolizes peace, friendship, and purity. The underlying message is that a rising China is contributing to the well-being of the world in the spirit of the Olympics and is not a threat – military, political, economic or any other kind. China should be allowed and even encouraged on its present development path because the rest of the world will reap benefits.

CCTV's narrative of a non-threatening, peace-loving China is an extension of a theme that had been established prior to the Games by the official Chinese media, and it also depends on erasing any hint of the controversies that were widely reported in the American media prior to the Opening Ceremony. China's human rights record, the treatment of Tibet and other indications of China's authoritarian system, demonstrations that occurred along the Olympic Torch route, and general concern about China's emerging role in the world were all prominent subjects of reportage and commentary in the U.S. None of these topics is referenced directly in the CCTV commentary. In pre-Olympics

reporting, the official Chinese media blunted criticism in some cases by criticizing the critics – calling people who disrupted the Torch run in Paris pro-Tibetan extremists, for example – or by putting a favorable gloss on an event. The arrival of the Olympic Torch in Beijing, for example, marked a “journey of harmony.” For CCTV, it is all gloss and no rebuttal.

For CCTV the emphasis on friendliness and warmth suggests a double-edged ideological meaning. China must maintain friendships with the peoples of the world to achieve its goals, but the repeated emphasis on this theme could indicate concern by the leadership that China is perceived as insufficiently friendly and peaceful, that the outside world is not so sure of the country's motivations. China must counter the notion that its intentions are anything but peaceful or that it is seeking economic domination and singular superpower status.

The NBC commentary by contrast deals with the question of a rising China and its intentions but in a decidedly ambivalent manner that takes the fine point of critique evident in the U.S. media reporting and rounds it into a blur in which questions of right and wrong are obscured. Matt Lauer early in the ceremony tells the audience that President Bush had issued a tough statement in Thailand about human rights in China, as he was en route to China for the Opening Ceremony. But he quickly adds that China's rising power dictates that nations around the world deal with China in a nuanced way, agreeing on some things and disagreeing on others. His message is that there is no sense in characterizing China as a pariah state because of its authoritarian, non-democratic tendencies. As an information network, NBC is fulfilling its obligation to deal with salient, real issues in coverage of a ceremony that in part showcases the China of the past, present, and future. As an entertainment network, NBC is staying true to its mission of offering an engaging presentation of an event that also is an eye-grabbing high-tech fantasy show.

The theme of peace, so heavily emphasized in the CCTV presentation, is absent in the NBC narratives. The scene with the peace pigeon passes without comment from any of the NBC presenters. There is no mention by the network's commentators that the pigeon represents China's desire for peace and friendship in its dealings with the outside world, that the Chinese people exhibit a friendly and welcoming spirit, or that China stands for world peace.

In ideological terms, CCTV's depiction of China as a friendly, peace-loving nation adds a dimension to the overall view of China. The nation has not only rectified a historical imbalance and achieved an equal footing with the West; it also is offering values that the world longs for: peace, friendship, and hospitality befitting a nation that adheres to Olympic values. These open-minded values, buttressed by a deep sense of fair play, are driving contemporary China, which should be embraced and not feared. NBC, on the other hand, offers a mixed reception at best. If China can rise in a way that is acceptable to the West, the nation can be applauded. But there is uncertainty, and, at least for now, China must be carefully handled.

Green Olympics

The CCTV commentary emphasizes that China is offering the world an environmentally progressive Olympics as part of its friendly, peace loving, and cooperative role in the world. Early in the ceremony, commentator Sun mentions that China promised the International Olympic Committee a “green” Olympics. A short time later commentator Zhou emphasizes the “green” nature of the new Olympic park in Beijing. But an extended discussion of the green theme comes further along in the ceremony, during a vignette that demonstrates the Chinese martial art *taijiquan*, which involves exaggeratedly slow movements of the arms, legs, and head. As the *taijiquan* performers transition between routines by forming concentric circles and running, with those in each circle going in opposite directions, they encircle a group of school children who have just finished doing a painting with giant crayons. Commentator Sun explains the importance of the circle in Chinese culture, saying it expresses

the idea that the universe and the emotional lives of people are intimately linked. Commentator Zhou then provides the ideological meaning of the scene and offers instructions to the audience. The children, she says “are planting green hopes with their innocent minds. Let's work together to carry out the promise to hand the world a green Olympics.” When flocks of green birds appear on the wrap-around video screen above the stadium, commentator Sun points out that both the *taijiquan* performers and the children seem to be drawn by an unseen power. The birds “are telling us this is their green home and they are sentimentally attached to it,” he says.

The message at the close of the *taijiquan* scene is that the future must be green. Otherwise, the Chinese nation will disappoint its next generation. Even the birds are mesmerizing everyone – adults and children – with a rapturous projection of the message. It is not something that can be passively received. With all the force of the Chinese party-state, CCTV is telling the audience to participate in the effort. A green Olympics, and by extension, sustainable development into the future, is something that China must “hand the world.”

Once again, CCTV's narrative dovetails closely with the pre-Games reporting in the official Chinese media, which quoted high officials, including IOC President Jacques Rogge, and even Greenpeace as praising China's efforts to clean up the environment. Once again, the narrative depends on erasing anything that might depict China as a major polluter.

NBC ignores the direct claim that China is putting on a green Olympics and moves attention away from the specific problems of pollution in Beijing and in China generally, deflecting a theme that had been circulating widely in the U.S. media.⁷ Ramo interprets the concentric circle scene as offering

7 On the same day that Xinhua reported that IOC President Jacques Rogge was singing China's praises for its super human efforts to improve the environment, Jim Yardley wrote a piece in *The New York Times* reporting that authorities were considering emergency measures during the Games because the skies were so murky. See: Xinhua News Agency, “IOC Chief Praises China’s Anti-pollution Efforts,” www.chinaview.cn, August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9031427.htm; Jim Yardley, “In Beijing, Blue Skies Prove Hard To Achieve,” *The New York Times* (Beijing, July 29, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/29/sports/olympics/29china.html?scp=1&sq=yardley%20beijing%20blue%20skies&st=cse>.

a universal, and not just a Chinese, message about environmental protection. “This is Zhang Yimou pointing at the many problems we face, not only China, but the world – the problems of global warming, the problems of resource depletion, and the burden of that (sic) places on the next generation which is going to have to solve them,” he says. Against a backdrop of U.S. journalists reporting on the specific and widespread problems of environmental degradation in China, NBC's commentary indicates that pollution is not exclusively or even primarily a Chinese problem. The ideological effect is to take the focus off China and the environmental problems of its own making and suggest that creating a sustainable world can be done only through the cooperation of the global community of nations.

NBC at the same time offers no support for the notion that Beijing is hosting a “green” Olympics. The ideological effect is to weave a careful, ambivalent line, avoiding expressions that could be interpreted as siding with the official Chinese claims of environmental progress and at the same time sidestepping widely circulating criticism of China for contributing massively to the world's environmental degradation. Sustainability, like the establishment of a harmonious society, is a hope, an ideal, as Ramo makes clear when he says about the concentric circle scene:

And I'll tell you, to a Western audience looking at a bunch of guys basically doing karate around a group of school children may be kind of confusing. But the message here is very clear. The harmony of the *taiji* master, the belief in harmony between man and nature is really the only hope for the kind of sustainable development for China and for other nations over the next few years.

Ramo's commentary leaves hope for harmony between man and nature as a vague, idealistic sentiment befitting of an Olympic opening ceremony that is part phantasmagoria. And the message comes with an Orientalized meshing of national cultures. Karate is a Japanese cultural practice.⁸ Ramo evidently is attempting to make a cute, down-home, American type of analogy based on the notion that the audience would be familiar with karate and not with *taijiquan*. The two are linked only because they are performed by people who have similar visual characteristics in Western eyes. But the performers are

8 Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate-Do Kyo-han; The Master Text: 空手道教範* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1973).

not “basically doing karate.” Karate is karate and *taijiquan* is *taijiquan*. They are arguably more different than American football is from the Canadian version of the game, a distinction that would never be lost on North American sports fans.

The commentaries on the green theme offer divergent ideological valences. For CCTV, the promise of an environmentally friendly Olympics is another element in China's role of enhanced responsibility and openness in the world. The association with children signals that the green consciousness is not fleeting. It is recognized as necessary to nurture the next generation, so much so that even the birds, which link symbolically to the peace pigeon, are paying attention. For NBC, ambivalence once again is the watchword. In the wake of U.S. media reporting on the ugly pollution problems in China, NBC, as an information network, cannot endorse the notion that China is presenting a green Olympics. NBC likewise could not be expected to detract from the entertainment value of the broadcast or overtly criticize the host nation by pointing fingers at China for environmental degradation. The result is the making of pollution and other environmental problems as a universal, not just a Chinese, issue. On the one hand, NBC is rejecting the CCTV view of China as an environmental champion. On the other hand, NBC is sheltering China from the kind of criticism that had circulated widely in U.S. journalistic discourse.

Nation, Party, and Nationalism

The presentation of nationalism and the relationship between the Communist Party and Chinese state is another major theme that emerges from each commentary, and, once again, a surface ideological congruity between the CCTV and NBC texts becomes more tenuous, nervous, and unstable as the ceremony unfolds. Both networks suggest that China has made great strides in addressing profound historical problems, and both in their own ways attempt to soften the strident nationalism that

threatens to erupt in this portion of the ceremony. But as a comparative analysis shows, stark divisions underlie the texts. A future that seems unbounded to CCTV by virtue of the leadership of the Party is ripe with challenges for NBC, which minimizes the role of the Party.

These complicated dynamics become evident in the handing of the moment of highest patriotism in the ceremony. In this scene, children dressed in the costumes of China's fifty-six officially recognized national minorities carry the Chinese national flag into the stadium while a girl who expresses the picture of childhood beauty is seen singing the patriotic ballad "Ode to the Motherland." (It is not revealed until days later that she is lip synching.) The children hand the flag to a squad of impeccably dressed soldiers, who goose-step their way to the flag pole and raise the banner while the national anthem plays.

CCTV opts for a mostly visual approach, showcasing the singing of "Ode to the Motherland" as the children carry the flag and allowing the audience to hear the lyrics virtually without interruption. The words also crawl across the lower part of the screen. The song emphasizes themes of victory, steel-like strength, and riches gained from a beloved land.

The Chinese five-star Red Flag is waving in the wind
The song of victory resounds loudly
Singing our beloved country
From now on going toward prosperity, riches, and strength
Able to conquer high mountains and plains
Stepping over the fast running Yellow River and Yangtze River
The beautiful, wide open land
We love peace
We love our homeland
Our solidarity, mutual love and durable strength is like steel

CCTV's viewers see shots that cut between the unfolding developments on the floor of the stadium, the rising of the Olympic Rings over the stadium, and Communist Party leadership watching the

performance and singing along with the national anthem. The effect is to cement the idea that the Party is synonymous with the nation. The Party is responsible for the glorious fulfillment of China's Olympic dream and the rebalancing of East-West cultural, and by implication, political power.

NBC's Ramo offers an explanation of the handing of the flag to the soldiers by the children that also attributes great achievements to the Chinese state while ignoring its non-democratic character and any unsettling signification that the goose-stepping soldiers might be producing among the audience.

I think it's a profound statement that will resonate in the hearts of the more than a billion Chinese people watching this tonight, the idea that the state is the guarantor of the future of those children, in a country that for so long could not guarantee the safety or the stability of the society for generations of children.

Implicit in the commentary is the idea that pre-reform (read Maoist) China could not guarantee the future for its citizens. Maoism was a failure, but reform instituted in the post-Mao Zedong era has launched China on a path to prosperity. The state is emphasized in Ramo's commentary, and the Party is not mentioned. Visual imagery, however, semiotically links the Party with the state and the people. NBC shows two short shots of President Hu Jintao, who also serves as Party Secretary-General, singing along with the national anthem during the flag-raising scene. The connection is made, albeit in a more subtle, less obvious way than in the CCTV presentation. There is an element of cultural relativism and Orientalism embedded in Ramo's remarks as well. It is acceptable for the state to be the guarantor of the children in China, a notion that would meet with stern resistance from many quarters in the United States. Ramo also is exercising Orientalism by speaking for the other. He professes to know exactly what will resonate in the hearts of more than a billion Chinese people.

NBC neither translates nor describes the lyrics of "Ode to the Motherland," but commentator Bob Costas softens the idea that Chinese patriotism could turn in a xenophobic direction by transmuting patriotism into pride. The word patriotism does not appear in his commentary. As "Ode to the Motherland" is being sung in the background, Costas links pride to the sale of Chinese flags.

It's hard to overstate the universal sense of pride, any other differences aside, among the billion plus Chinese. In the days leading up to this opening ceremony, sales of Chinese flags went up some 30 times over.

The emphasis on “universal” and “pride” removes any hint that this kind of patriotism could have an aggressive intent. Who in an American audience accustomed to waving the Stars and Stripes on the fourth of July could argue that expressions of pride in the form of sales of flags are anything but positive signs?

CCTV also tempers the overtly nationalistic sentiment of “Ode to the Motherland,” not at the moment of its singing but elsewhere in the presentation. To be sure, the commentators make it clear that China is indeed headed toward prosperity, riches, and strength. Its people are united in love of country. But CCTV takes its commentary in a direction that NBC does not by blunting talk of victory and conquering with narratives that speak about the inherent warmth, openness, friendship, and great imagination of the Chinese people. China is hospitable and welcoming to outsiders. An Olympic Beijing is a smiling Beijing. Smiles are a bridge between universal humanity and cultural particularity. As commentator Zhou says during the singing of the Olympic theme song “You and Me:”

No matter the skin color, no matter the race, no matter the nationality, no matter the language, the smile is our best expression. A smile can prompt us to have kindly and friendly feelings for each other.

CCTV's emphasis on a peace-loving, peace-seeking China serves to further downplay of any sense of aggressive nationalism.

The figure of the smiling child plays prominently in the muting of nationalism in the CCTV presentation at other times in the ceremony. As “You and Me” is being sung, 2008 children gather on the floor of the stadium holding umbrellas with pictures of smiling children from around the world. A variety of races and creeds is on display. At the same time, pictures of the children appear on the LED video screen that wraps around the top of the stadium. For CCTV, smiles express a core element in the essential Chinese nature and provide a link between Chinese particularity and universal human nature.

Commentator Zhou, in the only disclosure during the broadcast of an aspect of how the ceremony was put together, says the Beijing Olympic Committee spent a full year gathering the photos. Children also are linked to China's hopes for the future and the modernist notion that what will unfold is limited only by the imagination – in other words, not limited at all.

Smiles in the NBC narratives are signifiers not of an essential Chinese characteristic but of a cosmetic fix for potential problems. In the opening drum scene, Lauer notes that the performers were told to smile more to take the edge off an otherwise fierce demeanor. The commentators then exchange nervous laughter as an indication that the effort did not exactly remove the potentially frightening image of a mass of organized Chinese humanity moving in lock-step toward the same goal. The point is clearly a major one for NBC. Even before the scene unfolds, Lauer tells the audience that he and his colleagues would have more to say about the drummers demeanor later. The message to viewers is: you risk missing something important if you do not stay tuned.

The linking of children and the friendly, peaceful nature of the Chinese national character is likewise absent in the NBC narratives. Children who hand the flag to the soldiers are signifiers of a China that seems to be moving in the right direction, but commentary later in the ceremony emphasizes the many hurdles and challenges ahead. Ramo declares that reform – code for further integration into the world capitalist system that might include lower trade barriers, a freer currency, more openness to financial services, and a more pluralistic political system – only gets more difficult from here. The falling of the Great Wall and the emergence of the plum flowers in NBC's narrative is not overtly identified as an indicator of peaceful intentions; rather, the network offers a cultural and political spin. Costas interprets the scene as a reconciling of opposites, and Ramo adds that it is “again, a desire to replace one image of China with another one.” The images in question are implied and not directly

enunciated, but the message again is clear. The Chinese themselves want to replace the old vestiges of insular Communism and move toward a kind of capitalism favorable to the Western project. The emphasis on peace and friendship as a counterweight to nationalism is not in evidence.

The ideological undertones separating the CCTV and NBC commentaries when it comes to nationalism, the state, and the Party are striking. CCTV's audience is allowed to bask in the glories of patriotic fervor by linking nationalism to the universal values of peace and friendship. The state and Party are one, and the road ahead is clear. These narratives cement the notion that the state and the Party have righted the injustices of history and brought China level with the West. An ideological invitation is in the air: accept China's current system of capitalism with authoritarian state control because it has delivered and will continue to deliver. For NBC, however, full-blown nationalism and the role of the Party are airbrushed out of the scene along with the notion that China has only peaceful and friendly intentions. Cultural relativism allows a particularistic acceptance of a role for the state in China that would hardly be acceptable for many in the United States. Once again, the seeds of ideological divisiveness are planted.

History and Culture

The interpretations of Chinese history and culture offered in the CCTV and NBC presentations likewise present surface similarities that give way to an ideological divide upon closer scrutiny. For CCTV, history and culture seamlessly and unproblematically inform the present, buttressing the political legitimacy of the party-state. For NBC, history and culture are isolated, Orientalized snapshots that make China alluring but do not speak to current political arrangements. As we shall see, both narratives depend on massive historical erasures.

As outlined in Chapter Three, CCTV offers a suturing narrative of a China that has evolved unproblematically, with history and cultural tradition seamlessly informing the present. Openness and friendship are not just contemporary national qualities. They have characterized the long Chinese tradition and smoothed the move from tradition to modernity. In the CCTV rendition, Chinese history moves ever upward, with forward progress being made as the past gives way to the present.

CCTV's China evolves easily from a magnificent past of Confucian values, cultural high water marks, practical inventions, and maritime prowess to a glittering modern present that offers the unlimited promise of better things to come in the future. Traditional culture has both a fixed reference point in the primordial past as well as an ability to change and organically evolve practices that help inform the modern world. Chinese cultural traditions reinforce the current Party discourse championed by President Hu Jintao that calls for the establishment of a harmonious society. Culture in the CCTV narrative is inflected with political meaning.

NBC moves through the same terrain on some levels mirroring CCTV in glorifying Chinese history and culture and celebrating the openness of the past as an indication of the preferred path for the future. But a closer look at the network's representations reveals an ideological schism with CCTV's version. For NBC, Chinese history and culture are subjects of fetishized fascination. History is compartmentalized as postcard snapshots of the past. Any infusion of tradition into modern life in the NBC narrative occurs in an Orientalized context.

Two vignettes depicting the silk road and China's voyages of maritime exploration further illustrate the surface similarities and the underlying ideological divisions. In CCTV's rendering, these representations provide evidence of Chinese friendliness and openness *throughout history* and the people's respectful, reciprocal approach to economic and cultural exchange. There are two historic silk roads in CCTV's commentary: one by land and the other by sea. In the first vignette, a bejeweled dancer who performs on what appears to be a floating carpet holds two ribbons, one symbolizing the

land and the other signifying the sea route. She is projecting the idea of Chinese friendship and respectful cross-cultural learning under the rubric of the Confucian concept of *li*.⁹ The maritime scene that follows not only depicts the high point of Chinese navigational skill and the movement of iconic Chinese products such as pottery and tea to the West, but it also shows the courage and wisdom of the Chinese people as they successfully challenge nature. The scene proves “the friendliness and affection of the civilized nation of China throughout history,” in the words of the CCTV commentator.

In NBC's presentation, the silk road and maritime adventures represent particular moments in Chinese history. They indeed signify openness and great material benefit and reinforce the idea that further Chinese moves down the reform (read capitalism coupled with greater market openness and a democratic, pluralistic political system) will bring even more prosperity, but they do not suggest any universal Chinese value of friendliness. The ribbon dancer who depicts the silk road is rooted in the Tang Dynasty, and the NBC commentators make no mention of what the ribbons signify. They speak of the overland silk road; there is no talk of a sea silk road. The maritime scene specifically represents the adventures of Admiral Zheng He, the fifteenth century Ming Dynasty explorer whom Ramo identifies as China's Christopher Columbus. (CCTV does not name any historical figures in its commentary.) The scene exemplifies China's “wonderful maritime tradition” and demonstrates that Zheng He was the first to master the use of the magnetic compass, says Ramo. The commentary highlights accomplishments specific to one historical epoch, feeding a discourse that casts China's maritime inventiveness as specific to a bygone era. Why China did not build on its seafaring prowess is not raised. Sailing with more men and more ships farther than anyone had ever done in human history until that point is just part of a “wonderful” tradition.

9 “Confucius,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, September 5, 2006, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/confucius/>.

NBC looks at the East-West exchanges differently from CCTV. While the Chinese network projects the idea of mutually respectful trade that showcases the movement of Chinese goods to the West, Ramo says the ribbon dancer represents China “casting their most precious things, silk and Chinese cultural values, out to the world, and getting in return all sorts of amazing ideas.” China is “casting,” which conjures up the image of a fabulously wealthy society that can afford to rid itself of precious goods because it has them in abundance. The exchange is one of goods for ideas, which tracks with the contemporary influx of Western capitalist ideas into China in exchange for exports of everything from clothes to flat-screen television sets. It is a far cry from the CCTV narrative's emphasis on reciprocal exchanges that highlight the discovery in the West of iconic Chinese cultural treasures.

The maritime vignette in the NBC presentation likewise establishes it as a historically specific cultural marker and curiosity. The importance of Admiral Zheng He's voyages is that he was the first in the world to use the magnetic compass. This is yet another specific indication of a magnificent but isolated Chinese technological and cultural achievement. The magnetic compass can take its place beside the invention of paper, printing, and gunpowder. But that is as far as it goes in the NBC presentation. As remarkable as they are, these inventions and innovations are points in a long historical landscape. They are cultural fetishes. This is far from the CCTV rendering that makes the voyages a part of the forward progress of Chinese history and links them to timeless values of courage, friendliness, and civility of the Chinese people and nation.

Both presentations glorify openness, trade, cultural exchange and global exploration, another promotion of the idea that China's future lies unmistakably in further integration with the global economic system. Yet, CCTV and NBC suggest very different paths and challenges in reaching that goal. For CCTV, reciprocity, mutual respect, and the export of Chinese cultural products loom large. For NBC, the indications of past achievements, which for CCTV reveal inherent Chinese character traits, are isolated, Orientalized curiosities that provide historical examples that should be emulated in a

modern context. If China would open itself as fully as it did during the Tang dynasty, the nation perhaps would get to a point where it could again cast off its riches in return for ideas from a superior West. The terms of engagement between the highly developed West and developing, yet always peripheral, China could be maintained. China could remain, in Bhabha's configuration, "almost the same but not quite."¹⁰

Both networks' views of the fifteenth century voyages of discovery as the high point of Chinese maritime prowess depend on glossing over a profound question in Chinese history: why the Ming rulers abandoned sea power at the very historical moment when Western states were beginning to rely on it for imperial expansion? The interpretation outlined in Chapter Two that an ideologically informed bureaucratic elite who were prone to infighting, weakened by corruption, preoccupied with domestic concerns, disdainful of merchants, and unable to see the value in naval power hardly bodes well for either network's interpretation of the maritime vignette. The historical facts and interpretation would undercut CCTV's narrative of the maritime adventures showing the wisdom, openness, and friendliness of the Chinese people, and it would raise potentially embarrassing parallels with the current day. If bureaucratic imperial rulers in Ming times could make a bad decision, repress a potentially rising merchant class, and quickly turn the state in a disastrous direction, who is to say that the contemporary bureaucratic (Communist) elite could not do the same – in other words ruin China's stunning, if uneven, economic growth? For CCTV, raising the question would destroy its narrative of seamless, unproblematic development and the harmonious folding of the traditional into the modern. It also would expose a historical weakness, calling attention to the humiliation that is supposedly a thing of the past. NBC's interpretation of the voyages as a "wonderful" tradition likewise would be threatened by the injection of too much historical reality. If maritime prowess was such a tradition, why did China not develop the world's largest navy in the modern period? The highlighting of the voyages of

¹⁰ Bhabha, "The Other Question," 122.

discovery as brilliant moments in history and nothing more prevents either network from having to address the question of why China was unable to successfully face the challenge of Western imperialism. Furthermore, a discussion of Western encroachment in China would hardly enhance the entertainment value of either broadcast.

The idea, offered by CCTV, that China was always open and interested in engaging in respectful, reciprocal trade also depends on a series of historical erasures. As outlined in Chapter Two, for centuries Chinese dynasties were preoccupied with questions of how to deal with foreigners of various stripes. Invasions and rebellions were periodic, and military preparedness was a constant concern. To a lesser or greater degree, China's rulers for many centuries employed a tributary system in which foreign traders offered gifts to the emperors in exchange for the right to do business. NBC's contention that the Tang Dynasty marks the high point of Chinese historical openness relies on a one-dimensional view of a period that was, to be sure, characterized by openness but also featured periodic attacks on foreigners and repression of trade.

Historical erasures of different kinds characterize the commentaries by both networks on scenes that highlight the Chinese invention of moveable block printing, an innovation that was not actually used extensively in pre-modern China but was extraordinarily important in the development of the West. In this extended vignette, the blocks rise from beneath the floor of the stadium and undulate in a rhythmic pattern, forming the Chinese character for harmony three times. Both CCTV and NBC tell their audiences that moveable block printing, or as CCTV calls it the printing press, is one China's key historic inventions. CCTV notes that printing is one of four key Chinese inventions, the other three being paper, the compass, and gunpowder.¹¹ In the CCTV commentary, the four inventions, like other signifiers of tradition, are examples of glorious technological innovations that fold easily into

¹¹ CCTV mentions gunpowder, an invention that has decidedly non-friendly, non-peaceful overtones, only once in passing during the Opening Ceremony commentary. Too much mention of gunpowder could call to mind the Opium Wars and other instances when the West made good use this Chinese invention to gain concessions from a weak Qing Dynasty.

modernity and help define the contemporary Chinese character. NBC mentions only printing and paper as specific inventions, and treats them as Orientalized cultural curiosities. In introducing the moveable block scene, Lauer talks to the audience about what is significant about holding the Olympics in China saying: “Well, how many places could you go around the world where the culture is old enough where you can say, oh, by the way, the Chinese invented paper and printing. And that's actually true here.”

As outlined in Chapter Two, moveable printing was in fact invented in China but proved too cumbersome for widespread use. Non-moveable blocks that were manually lined up and fixed in place turned out to be much more appropriate for printing in a language of single ideographs, even though the technique required vast warehouses for storage between press runs. The moveable printing press was not widely adopted in China until the late nineteenth century, the result of the importing of Western technology. In light of this history, a nuanced discussion of the invention of moveable printing could threaten to remove the printing press as a signifier for both networks of China's one-time technological superiority. Too much exposure of the history also could raise embarrassing questions about why China was outdistanced by the West in an invention of its own. A signifier of technological prodigy could be turned into a symbol of historical failure.

Another area in which surface ideological alignment gives way to an ideological divide comes during the presentations of the vignette depicting the Chinese martial art *taijiquan*, the scene discussed above in relation to CCTV's assertion that China was putting on a green Olympics. Both CCTV and NBC treat *taijiquan* as an important, even unique, Chinese cultural practice, but that is where the ideological parallel ends. In CCTV's presentation, *taijiquan* sutures the past and the present as it bolsters the political legitimacy of the Party. After a scene in which the performers offer a modernist interpretation of the Chinese martial art, a waterfall appears on the video screen that wraps around the stadium. CCTV's Zhou says the image makes it impossible not to think of a famous poem by China's most well known Tang Dynasty poet, Li Bai. She then recites four lines of his “Waterfall at Lu Shan,”

suggesting that it provides a cultural foundation for the modern martial art. She declares that the “theory and truth” of *taijiquan* is that heaven and earth are linked “harmoniously” as one. The invocation of harmony makes the semiotic link with the Party Chairman Hu Jintao's frequent calls for the establishment of a harmonious society. As we shall see in the coming discussion of the interpretation of Confucius, this is not the only time CCTV links harmony with the Party.

NBC opts for an Orientalized interpretation, treating the *taijiquan* performance as an expression of a particular, isolated Chinese cultural practice that is enjoyed by hundreds of millions of Chinese people. Ramo introduces the performance with a brief explanation of the concept of *qi*, which he calls a type of energy that pervades everything. *Taijiquan*, he says, highlights the idea that a movement in one direction starts with a subtle faint in the opposite direction. The NBC commentary uses the waterfall to mention that water plays an important role in Chinese culture. At this point, Ramo steers the conversation not to a discussion of Tang Dynasty poetry but to Taoism. Ramo explains the renowned Taoist philosopher Zhuang Zi said a great life should be lived like water, “flowing easily, moving away from resistance and collision, always delicate, graceful and calm.”

CCTV and NBC both exalt *taijiquan* but attach a very different political signification to the cultural practice. CCTV makes a historical and cultural link between *taijiquan*, the Tang Dynasty poetry of Li Bai, and the authority of the Communist Party. The cultural practice of *taijiquan* and the poetry of Li Bai conjured up by the waterfall are expressions of harmony, which links signs of traditional culture to the Party's call for building a harmonious society.¹² The message is entirely secular. NBC, with its reference to Taoism, engages in a cultural politics that calls attention to a

¹² Making the work of Li Bai a signifier of the full flowering of traditional Chinese poetry reifies a practice that, as Chapter Two points out, began in the Southern Song Dynasty. The fact that the practice of elevating Li Bai and other High Tang poets to canonical status has been done by Chinese rulers for political reasons for hundreds of years goes unstated.

religious tradition entirely ignored by CCTV. In referencing Taoism during the *taijiquan* vignette, Ramo is not referring to any overt Taoist symbolism in the ceremony, but his mention of Taoism is not random. *Taijichuan* and other martial arts are linked in Chinese folklore to Taoist mysticism.¹³

Ramo's reference to Taoism is part of a broader discourse on Chinese cultural traditions that dramatically contrasts with the CCTV presentation. Early in the ceremony, Ramo tells the audience that all three of China's major religious and philosophical traditions – Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism – will be touched on in the program. While NBC provides extensive commentary on all three, CCTV covers only Confucianism, making no mention of either Buddhism or Taoism.

CCTV's exclusion of Buddhism and Taoism and NBC's emphasis on them are particularly striking. Ramo introduces the three traditions just after the opening drum scene as performers representing flying apsaras, or supernatural women who appear in Buddhist mythology, are seen suspended in the air over the stadium as if by magic. Ramo says they “will be familiar to anybody who has seen Buddhist iconography anywhere in the world.” He goes on to declare that they symbolize peace and harmony and are found in the Dunhuang desert caves in Sichuan Province, “which are wonderfully preserved Buddhist art masterpieces.” Ramo does not say so, but the caves are a major tourist destination and presumably would be familiar with at least some members of the audience. CCTV ignores the Buddhist element in the apsaras, calling them only “beautiful fliers.” CCTV likewise makes no reference anywhere in its presentation to Taoism, despite unstated links between the performance vignettes and the religious tradition that NBC points to. It is not NBC's only mention of Buddhism and Taoism. Later, when Ramo is describing the printing press morphing into a representation of a water drop on a still pond, he links the stillness and silence of the scene to all three of the major Chinese traditions, in which the cultivation of inner peace leads to external peace.

13 Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 3–4.

The omission particularly of the obvious Buddhist representation is a stunning lacuna that further illustrates what CCTV incorporates, and what it does not include, under the sign of tradition. In political terms, it evidently reflects the Party's decision to build a narrative of nation and culture that will serve its own legitimacy by erasing two of China's three great traditions. It also apparently reflects the Party's allergy to any kind of possible competing power center, which Buddhism and Taoism, as religious and philosophical systems, represent. Buddhism is particularly sensitive because of its association with Tibet and the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan political and Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader. While NBC seems to be going out of its way to make viewers aware that China has three major philosophical and religious traditions, CCTV makes it clear that only one – Confucianism – is officially sanctioned by performing the auditory version of airbrushing Buddhism and Taoism. Confucius and Confucianism play a large role in the ceremony and in the CCTV and NBC presentations and therefore warrant a thorough discussion.

Confucius and Harmony

Competing views of Confucius and Confucianism in the presentations illustrate another aspect of the ideological disjunction between CCTV and NBC. For CCTV, the interpretation of Confucius is central to the fusing of tradition and modernity and the notion that the current regime embodies moral values that bestow legitimacy on the party-state. NBC, on the other hand, presents Confucius as a worthy sage who is a historic and cultural figure, but the network links him only tenuously to the party-state and its current leadership.

At the outset of the ceremony, CCTV makes it clear that the Confucian value of *li* is at the core of the Chinese conception of political culture. With the Confucian drummers performing, commentator Sun speaks of manners, civility, and ceremony embodied in the concept. Commentator Zhou then incorporates the idea of friendliness, hospitality, and inclusiveness, telling the audience the drummers

are intoning the actual words of Confucius himself as written in the *Lun Yu*, or *Analects of Confucius*. Zhou does not mention the words, and they are not superimposed on the screen. The important message in this scene is the expression of hospitality and friendship. “We are using this unique way to express Beijing's most sincere welcoming emotion,” says says.

The phrase from the *Lun Yu* that is central to CCTV's ideological messaging comes later, in the scene when Confucian scholars make their way in formation to the center of the stadium floor. It is here that the scholars chant *wen xing zhong xin*, conjuring up a chain of signification that touches on loyalty, honesty, ethics, and learning. Confucius and the *Lun Yu*, linked earlier to friendliness and hospitality, now have a far deeper signification. The qualities embodied in *wen xing zhong xin* are valuable for the forging of a modern state and disciplining a modern people. For an authoritarian state, loyalty would be of great importance.

CCTV's assignment of the authorship of the *Lun Yu* to Confucius himself is part of a story of nation that builds on texts and traditions that have deep historical roots. The specific interpretation of Confucianism offered by CCTV is merely the latest in the many ways that it has been refashioned to suit current needs. The idea of personal authorship of course is a historical sleight of hand. As discussed in Chapter Two, the *Lun Yu* is believed to have been written 400 years after the death of Confucius. It has been rearranged, reinterpreted, and annotated countless times in the course of history. It is a historical leap of faith to assert that the exact words from today's *Lun Yu* are the very ones crafted by Confucius himself.

NBC, in its description of the drum and scholar scenes, takes a more superficial path to the signification of the *Lun Yu*, linking it only to welcoming friends from far away. During the drum performance, Ramo makes the same move as CCTV, telling the audience that the drummers are chanting the actual words of Confucius written 2,500 years ago. During the scholar scene, Ramo offers a thumbnail biography of Confucius but does not mention or translate *wen, xing, zhong xin*, the words

being intoned. He says Confucianism is a “really powerful” tradition in China but offers no elaboration. The ideological effect is that it allows NBC to avoid a discussion of the deeper meaning of *wen, xing, zhong xin* and how Confucian values tie into broader cultural or political themes in the ceremony. For CCTV, the broader signification becomes clear as the ceremony progresses. Confucianism is given definition through the intoning of *wen xing zhong xin* from the *Lun Yu*, and values such as civility and manners are tied to openness when it comes to foreigners and to the idea of Hu Jintao's harmonious society. But with NBC, the message to the audience is one dimensional. These are words that mean China is welcoming friends from around the world. Intentionally or not, the network is blocking the chain of signification that CCTV opens.

Competing views of the *fou* drums used in the opening scene illustrate a clear ideological divide. For CCTV, the drums are linked to China's primordial origins in the Xia and Shang dynasties. They are an object and signifier in the wider narrative that constructs China as a nation that has fully incorporated the traditional into the modern. For NBC, the drums are specific cultural artifacts, discovered in a particular place at a particular time. They date to a specific period around 500 BC. They are linked to Confucius only because the drummers who beat on them in the opening vignette are intoning the words of the sage. The descriptions and depictions, in other words, are part of the NBC narrative that makes Chinese cultural artifacts into items of Orientalized, exotic wonder.

In a later scene, CCTV links Confucianism to the Communist Party's call to build a harmonious society. As the Chinese character for harmony, *he*, appears on the stadium floor for the third time, commentator Zhou says it expresses the Confucian concept of humanism, which embodies harmony and “shows that the Chinese people's idea of harmony stems from an excellent tradition in Chinese history.” The narrative draws a direct connection between Confucian values and the core concepts at the heart of the party-state.

NBC is hardly that expansive about Confucius. The network associates him with harmony but does not cement the semiotic link to the Communist Party and Chinese state. In the American network's view Confucius was a scholar who roamed China at a time of great chaos 2,500 years ago and dispensed advice to rulers about how to achieve harmony. Ramo mentions that a depiction of drops on an empty pond calls to mind Confucian self-cultivation. The commentator provides another example, as a representation of the printing press undulates on the stadium floor.

These moving blocks which are eliciting quite a reaction here in the Bird's Nest are evoking something that many Chinese viewers will recognize. This is wind and recalls one of Confucius's most famous phrases: the idea that the virtuous leader can pass across his subjects with the ease of the wind.

There is no suggestion that the current leaders of China are the kind of virtuous leaders that Ramo's Confucius would have had in mind. Ramo makes no association between this Confucian ideal and any worldly political arrangement. It stands alone as an expression of a Confucian political culture isolated from current practices. (CCTV, for its part, makes only an indirect political linkage in this portion of the ceremony. Commentator Zhou says the blocks flying like the wind show the evolution of *he*, the character for harmony.) By treating Confucius as a cultural curiosity and distancing Confucian harmony from the party-state's version of the concept, NBC is once again providing a narrative that fits within the bounds of Orientalism. Confucianism is something to be regarded highly but ultimately more as an exotic relic of history than a living political philosophy.

NBC finesses the question of harmony and its use by the Communist Party. After Ramo calls harmony “a core philosophical conception,” Lauer adds that it is a “core political ideal as well.” Ramo follows that by saying harmony is at the heart of “Chinese political doctrine at the moment.” This statement marks the only time in the NBC presentation that a word that could be interpreted as pejorative – doctrine – is semiotically associated with harmony, and the moment is quickly deflected through the use of humor. Ramo uses the Chinese phrase for harmonious society, *hexue shehui*, and

Costas immediately jokes, “I’m glad you said that,” referring to Ramo’s ability to speak Chinese.

Chuckles are heard, setting up the last word on the subject as Ramo notes that many things today in China are “profoundly disharmonious.” But he shies away from mentioning any of the things covered in Brokaw’s set-up piece: issues of human rights, the legacy of the Tiananmen crackdown, the gap between rich and poor, or the few ruling the many. Ramo provides examples of disharmony in China that could easily be culled from any economically advanced, democratic country on earth: “challenges with the environment, urbanization, and so forth.” Harmony, Ramo concludes, is merely an ideal for the Chinese, something that perhaps will be realized in the future.

In ideological terms, the NBC text in one sense counters CCTV’s suturing narrative that seeks to settle a profound historical question in recent Chinese history and infuse the party-state with the political authority of China’s Confucian tradition. But the American network in another sense is providing ideological cover for the party-state by shielding it from wide exposure of its authoritarian or even totalitarian tendencies. NBC is threading a fine ideological needle, making it clear that the Communist Party does not have the full imprimatur of the Confucian heritage but not engaging in a deeper discussion of the nature of the Chinese political system and the Party’s use of sloganeering. Instead, the network settles on discreetly and backhandedly making the semiotic link between harmony, doctrine, and propaganda. But even that linkage is countered by other references to harmony that are neutral or even laudatory. Toward the end of the ceremony, Lauer, for example, portrays the Chinese president as statesman-like, calling Hu Jintao’s appeal for harmony one of his “most striking messages.”

The critical comparison of the CCTV and NBC interpretations of Chinese history and culture presented in the paragraphs above demonstrates how narratives that on the surface glorify Chinese history and culture actually reveal under analytical scrutiny very different ideological orientations. For CCTV, Chinese culture and tradition folds neatly into the contemporary party-state, uncovering traits

that lay the foundation for China's role in the world as an equal partner with other nations and provide political legitimacy for the Communist Party and state. For NBC, history and culture are isolated snapshots that illuminate a glorious past and deep, alluring cultural practices but do not by themselves underlie the current political system. To the extent that history provides a model for contemporary development, it indicates China needs more opening and reform so that the West can maintain the current terms of engagement, or Bhabha's "almost the same but not quite" status.

Construction of the People

CCTV and NBC construct portraits of the Chinese people that reflect competing ideological visions of what is necessary for China's full integration into the wider capitalist world. CCTV enumerates a long list of qualities that the people collectively possess and exude. They are hard working, cheerful, peace-loving, and uncomplaining. They exhibit the kind of human touch that the pre-Games reporting in the official Chinese media trumpeted. To recall one account discussed in Chapter Two, Premier Wen Jiabao was depicted as a middle school basketball prospect. In CCTV's rendering, thousands of years of Chinese tradition have infused the value of labor into the people's minds. The Chinese people are inheritors of the qualities embodied by the builders of the Great Wall. The people revere and celebrate their own culture but at the same time want to embrace the world. They have high moral standards and refined tastes. They embrace the Olympic spirit of fairness and self-sacrifice. The descriptions always refer to the collective Chinese people, never to any one individual. The Chinese people, in other words, possess the discipline and talent to succeed in a world of hard work and little reward.

For CCTV, a state broadcaster with a didactic function, the enumeration of qualities is as much a prescription as a description. It is a means of disciplining the citizenry by explaining the qualities that are expected of them. As with other such pronouncements in the CCTV broadcast, the list may include qualities that the regime believes are insufficiently strong or lacking in the Chinese work force, or

insufficiently understood by the outside world. The overall message is that to sustain the stunning economic growth that has vaulted the nation into a position of equalizing Eastern and Western culture, China needs a modern citizenry, disciplined to work efficiently and productively without making unreasonable demands.

NBC presents the Chinese people as individuals caught in an oppressive system that at times herds them into a repressive collectivity. They are described in a favorable light when they are seen as individuals rather than members of a collectivity. This can be seen clearly in the presentation of two scenes that involve massive numbers of Chinese men. The 2,008, fierce-looking Chinese drummers who open the ceremony lead the NBC commentators to suggest that their regimentation might pose some kind of unspecified threat. They are a little intimidating. But in the later scene that depicts the undulating printing blocks that morph into the Great Wall, the network's presenters are overwhelmed with awe and good cheer when, at the end of the vignette, performers who had been shielded from view inside the blocks emerge smiling widely and waving to the crowd. The performers wave in a chaotic pattern – the polar opposite of the stern, synchronized drummers – and are viewed with warmth and relief. The NBC commentators marvel that they had accomplished the task entirely through manual labor and not with machinery. The metaphorical and ideological implications are striking. The West fears Chinese totalitarian impulses signified by the drummers while at the same time hopes that smiling and waving (read low-priced, competent, and compliant) Chinese laborers will fill a needed niche in the global capitalist structure. Low paid, efficient Chinese workers can make the mass produced, standardized goods that technologically advanced, higher level economies such as the United States invent, design, and market. The neoliberal economic alignment between core and peripheral nations does not have to change. The U.S. can retain its place as standard bearer for the core of wealthy nations

while China remains on the edges. Economically, China still is “almost the same but not quite.” The NBC interpretations of the two scenes is all the more striking because CCTV lets both moments pass without comment. For the Chinese network, they apparently are entirely unremarkable.

NBC makes other moves that emphasize Chinese individuality and create negative associations with collectivity. In Brokaw's set-up piece, descriptions of collective activities are illustrated with shots of individuals. When Brokaw talks about 500 million Chinese people living in poverty, the audience sees successive shots of individual peasants tilling their fields. When he speaks of millions having become prosperous, the audience is shown a Chinese woman walking by herself in front of luxury car shops. Dialogue about China's “long march” to the Olympics is illustrated with video of a boy running alone. But when Brokaw mentions the few ruling the many, the screen fills with a shot of uniformed soldiers marching in lock-step that gives way to a picture of a crowd gathered in front of Tiananmen Square, under the famous portrait of Mao Zedong. The associations are striking. The Chinese people are portrayed as individuals who face repression at the hands of collective forces.

NBC, in fact, goes out of its way to distort Chinese reality in the process of projecting the image of Chinese individuality. In the scene where the children dressed as minorities carry the flag to the soldiers, Lauer announces that they are ordinary children from Chinese art schools in the area. It is an absurd claim, and, as discussed in Chapter One, reporting in the days after the Opening Ceremony revealed that the “minorities” were child actors who were mostly members of the Han majority ethnic group. In any event, competition for a place as a performer in the Opening Ceremony would be anything but ordinary; it would be an Olympian struggle in itself, with powerful elites – i.e. high ranking Party members and their relatives – potentially exercising great influence. In addition, elites in China enjoy advantages in gaining entry into art and other speciality schools for their offspring. It is likely that the pool of children in any art school would be heavily weighted in favor of the elites. But NBC's commentary buries these notions. The identification as “average” by NBC infuses the children

with a sense of American-style individuality. To be ordinary in an American context is to have an equal opportunity to make something of one's life, to avoid being a cog in society's giant wheels. The implication is that the children from the art schools are similar kinds of individuals, another example of “almost the same but not quite.”

NBC's commentary also obscures the party-state's penchant for aesthetic perfectionism, a characteristic that clashes with American conceptions of artistic genuineness and fair play. Although the lip synching in “Ode to the Motherland” probably was unknown to NBC at the time of the broadcast, the network clearly was aware that fireworks seen on television in the form of steps were computer generated. In describing these fireworks, Lauer calls their appearance a “cinematic device” that is “almost animation.” Following reports in subsequent days that the steps were computer graphics and not actual fireworks, MSNBC put out a statement saying the NBC commentators “made mention of the alteration,” implying that Lauer had been forthright in telling the audience that the fireworks were computer generated, which in fact he was not. Lauer's commentary leaves a vague impression at best. In ideological terms, the fudging of the nature of the fireworks alleviates NBC of the need to explain why the Chinese organizers – Zhang Yimou in NBC's narrative – would resort to such a tactic. It is one more area of potential friction that NBC artfully avoids.

Even when NBC explains the cultural specificity of Chinese collectivity, it is done in a way that highlights individuality. During the silk road scene in which the ribbon dancer performs on what looks like a carpet, Ramo explains that Zhang Yimou is making an unmistakable statement about the relationship in China between the individual and the collective. “Zhang Yimou, who is a master of visual symbolism, obviously here sending a message that great accomplishments, great individual accomplishments, particularly in this society, rely on much more than the individual alone,” Ramo says. The focus of Ramo's commentary is on individual accomplishments and how they come about in China. The primary focus of the scene is the dancer, and how she represents, in Ramo's words, “the

tremendous openness of China at that time and the result which was an unbelievable cultural and economic blossoming.” The NBC approach contrasts starkly with the CCTV presentation, which never mentions individual accomplishments and refers to people only in a collective sense.

In ideological terms, each network is presenting its preferred construction of the Chinese people. To face the challenges of the future, CCTV's people must collectively offer the kind of labor force required to fuel global manufacturing. They must be hard working, skilled, flexible, and not prone to complain (read strike). The ideological vision projected in the NBC narrative may have the same underlying goal, but it exalts individuality and associates collectivity with the lingering negative aspects of Communist rule as reported by the U.S. media: totalitarian control, overt repression, and the denial of human rights.

Universal vs. Particular

In addition to offering ideological positions on China in an overall sense, on contemporary issues such as environmentalism, on Chinese history, culture, and philosophical traditions, and on the nature of the Chinese people, CCTV and NBC present narratives that delineate the lines between the universal and particular, exposing the ideological underpinnings of the presentations in another way. This section will discuss four scenes where this kind of ideological production is particularly evident: the aforementioned march of the minority children, the rising of thirty-two dragon poles, the depiction of Chinese taikonauts, and the march of the athletes before the lighting of the Olympic Torch.

The scene in which children dressed in the costumes of China's officially recognized fifty-six national minorities carry the national flag across the stadium floor to soldiers waiting to hoist it on a flagpole highlights a striking difference between the CCTV and NBC approaches. CCTV mostly lets the pictures tell the story. There is no commentary other than a flat statement from commentator Sun, who says fifty-six children from each minority group are carrying the flag into the stadium, protecting

and surrounding it. The ideological message is an undramatic reiteration of the official national profile: China is a nation that houses and protects fifty-six national minorities. This is a condition of the particular cultural configuration that defines China. NBC's Lauer, on the other hand, goes out of his way to create a fiction that the "minorities" are "average" children from area art schools. Ramo describes the scene where the children hand the flag to the soldiers as symbolizing that now the state can take care of all of its children, which was not the case previously. The NBC commentary implies that the children are signifiers of China's move toward universal democratic ideals. Average children are able to participate in something as grand as the Opening Ceremony. Minority children do not so much represent China's particularity as they stand in for all of the people and call to mind the nation's attempt to fulfill the universal goal of caring for everyone and righting historical failings. Where CCTV showcases China's cultural particularity, in effect othering its minorities, NBC opens the door to viewing China more as part of the universal human family.

The dragon pole scene marks a portion of the ceremony when CCTV and NBC both exalt traditional Chinese cultural practices but do so with different ideological valences. As the thirty-two poles with images of dragons rise from the floor of the stadium, CCTV commentator Sun tells the audience that the shafts are rooted in the earth and reach to heaven. There is a notion of completeness offered in this explanation. Heaven and earth are inextricably tied. Nothing can exist outside of that union of opposites. Tradition encompasses all. The moment marks an unalloyed glorification of Chinese particularity under the sign of the dragon, even as it links with other narratives in the CCTV presentation that make it clear that tradition unproblematically informs the present.

NBC opts for more of an Orientalized, pop culture kind of approach to the scene. The network provides no specific interpretation of the dragon pole scene but uses it as a backdrop for a more generalized analysis. Costas say that it "pays tribute to the grandeur of China's dynastic history," adding that the Olympics mark a coming out party, a return to glory, and a moment of redemption for

many people in China. Ramo quickly changes the tone by saying that the hard work of reform will only get more difficult after the Games end, reiterating the theme that China's advance toward full inclusion in the capitalist world is far from complete. The discussion then turns toward exotic fascination. By this time, hundreds of woman dressed in flowing, multi-colored traditional dresses have appeared on the floor of the Bird's Nest. Lauer tells the audience it is time to “stop and ooh and ah a little bit about the costumes. Zhang Yimou is putting on a fashion show on the floor. Look at the colors. Look at the detail. Look at the numbers of costumes he had to create for this show,” he says. The conversation turns in an even more Orientalist direction, with Costas and Ramo engaging in a conversation about how the Chinese attention to detail extends to servers at McDonald's in Beijing. It is presented as a humorous exchange, but it raises an Orientalist fantasy: that contemporary Chinese people – women in particular – have inherited the exotic cultural charm of a glorified representation of traditional high culture. For NBC, the servers at McDonald's in Beijing exhibit the grace and attention to detail of the traditional Chinese court. This is Chinese particularity with an Orientalist twist.

The scene in which Chinese taikonauts conduct what appears to be a space walk around a giant, blue planet that has risen from beneath the stadium floor demonstrates a different facet of the universal and the particular. CCTV's commentary meshes Chinese cultural particularity with universal human curiosity to present a benign interpretation of the nation's ambitions in space. NBC moves its commentary away from discussing the Chinese space program to banter about the physicality of the performance. Neither offers any hint that China's space program could harbor anything but peaceful intentions.

CCTV weaves its narrative by starting with a folktale. Commentator Zhou tells the audience that people everywhere have always wondered about the heavens and that every Chinese child for generations has learned the story of *change e*, a folk tale about a woman who lives on the moon. The *chang e* story has spurred dreams of flying to the moon. Chinese cultural particularity and ambition to

land taikonauts on the moon, in other words, is just a form of universal expression. Commentator Sun expands on the point, saying “mankind” has used its wisdom to launch satellites, put people in space, and conduct space walks. China by implication is simply joining the wider human race in undertaking a space program and not entering a competition for space supremacy with the United States, Russia, and other nations.

Zhou expands the point by telling the audience that the earth is everyone's home and that “we” want every person, from every corner of the globe, to share China's Olympic dream. An appeal that marks an emotional high point of the ceremony follows.

We all live in the same world. We all have the same dream, a dream of friendship, a dream of solidarity, a dream of development, a dream that the world will become very small, like a family, a dream that our embrace will widen and cover the whole world.

The scene moves from an explanation of how China's ambitions in space are reflections of universal human curiosity, just as the Chinese cultural legend of *change e* is an expression of mankind's wonder about the stars, to an emotional call for universal solidarity and friendship under a Chinese embrace. The ideological message to CCTV viewers is that Chinese culture should command respect as an expression of universal human values, that China's space program reflects universal human curiosity and not competitive or aggressive intent. China wants to embrace the world, not in a menacing way, but in a way that allows everyone to share universal values. This is not an expression of “almost the same but not quite.” It is more like an inversion, “enough the same to be treated as an equal.”

Like CCTV, NBC downplays China's ambition to become a power in space. But the American network does so first by distraction, as Lauer declares that the scene is an “incredible artistic vision of Zhang Yimou.” Ramo follows by reciting the relevant facts. China has put three taikonauts into space. The launching of the first man in space was a moment of tremendous national pride. China has plans to land a man on the moon by 2024. Again there is a mention of pride and not a menacing kind of nationalism. The conversation then moves away from the question of China's space program to the

athleticism of the performers, how they trained for eight months, and that moving around the equator is the hardest part. The shift from relevant facts to a discussion of the athletic prowess of the performers cuts off the potential for a more serious discussion of the implications of a Chinese space program. Like CCTV, NBC is avoiding the suggestion that Chinese ambitions are in any way threatening. Unlike CCTV, there is no sense that Chinese cultural particularity has anything to do with the scene. NBC does not venture into CCTV's sanctioning of China's space endeavors as an expression of universal human curiosity. The scene is not like the drummers, who are “perhaps a little intimidating,” but the emphasis on the artistic vision and athleticism of the taikonauts points out that this is a performance, something detached from reality.

The deferral of the Chinese space program that swirls around both presentations could be read against the grain, again sewing the seeds of ideological conflict in narratives that on the surface point away from such problems. CCTV's account could be interpreted as an effort to justify an aggressive space effort with a military component that could lead to Chinese domination. Talk of an embrace under the banner of universal human values of friendship and solidarity could be seen as a cover for a more sinister purpose. NBC's narrative likewise could be viewed as not providing enough acceptance of China's legitimacy in space. NBC does not do anything overt to suggest the Chinese space program could cause a menace, but there is nothing to suggest it is being embraced either. And there is no recognition of a tie between Chinese cultural specificity and universal human values, no underlying ideological justification for China's efforts in space. Once again the ideological message from CCTV is that China's cultural particularity meshes with universal values. China seeks to engage the world on the basis of friendship and reciprocity. China is no threat. For NBC, on the other hand, deferral and ambivalence are the watchwords.

The march of the athletes shows a clear example of CCTV proudly emphasizing a cultural particularity that NBC strains to contain within the bounds of the acceptable. When the athletes enter the stadium, CCTV explains that the manner of their entrance will reflect characteristics unique to China. Olympic athletic delegations enter the stadium and march around the track according to the number of strokes in the Chinese characters used in their transliterated names. The nation with the fewest number of strokes in the first character of its name enters first. The only exceptions are the first and last teams. Adhering to tradition, Greece, the host of the first modern Olympics in 1896, marches in first, and the host team, China, enters last. CCTV points out that the banners carrying the names of the countries are written by brush in Chinese and English, reflecting another Chinese cultural particularity.

NBC describes the arrangement not as an expression of Chinese cultural pride but in pragmatic terms that cover a sense of dismissiveness. The following exchange reveals NBC's tone. As the athletes begin marching into the stadium, Costas explains why Guinea follows Greece: "There is no alphabet here. So if you're expecting one nation to follow another, the way they generally do at an opening ceremony, think again." Lauer picks up the thread: "Yeah, you're out of luck. It goes based on the number of strokes in the Chinese character that represents the country's name. So you could easily see a country that starts in A followed by a country that starts in R or vice versa. So we're going to have the graphics at the bottom of the screen which will give you an idea, if you look to the right, which countries are approaching the tunnel." The NBC commentators are clearly straining to bring China into the realm of "almost the same but not quite." China is not doing things the way they are generally done. As a viewer, you might be "out of luck" if not for the graphics that NBC is providing. There is a sense of difficulty in making this arrangement understood, which is a far cry from describing it as even a curious cultural flourish. NBC is stretching to recognize a particular quality that for CCTV is a proud expression of a cultural practice that folds appropriately into the Olympics, where universal human values are on display.

Ideology in the Shadows

The critical comparative analysis of the CCTV and NBC broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony undertaken in this chapter demonstrates the different ideological positioning that emerges from each network's text. In many ways, CCTV's ideological assertions are deflected in the NBC presentation. Regarding an overview of China, CCTV takes the position that the historical imbalance between East and West has been rectified and that China has achieved equal status. For NBC, the question of China's full integration into the club that the United States leads is far from answered. CCTV presents contemporary China as a peace-loving, friendly, and non-threatening rising power, a characterization that NBC defers, leaving the question of whether China will be friend or foe on the table. Consistent with the peace-loving image, CCTV emphasizes that China is hosting a green Olympics, an indication of the great strides the nation is making in environmental protection. NBC once again deflects that notion, framing China's environmental problems as part of a world issue. CCTV both hails and softens the expression of Chinese nationalism, emphasizing the indispensable role played by the Communist Party in the nation's success. NBC deflects nationalism into an expression of pride and moves to erase the Party from the picture. CCTV views China's historical greatness and cultural attributes as establishing national characteristics that seamlessly lay the groundwork for contemporary and future glories. At the same time, CCTV attempts to suture Chinese cultural particularity with universal human values. NBC sees China's history and culture as Orientalized snapshots that stand as alluring markers of a long and ancient tradition but not necessarily indicators of future success. CCTV specifically points to a particular version of Confucianism as a model that informs the party-state's goal of establishing a "harmonious" society. NBC again dodges any link between Confucianism and the legitimacy of the party-state, casting harmony as a cultural attribute. CCTV constructs a profile of the Chinese people that emphasizes collectivity and buries individuality. NBC offers a decidedly ambivalent picture of the Chinese people that is positive when they attempt to assert individuality but negative when they are

seen as a collectivity subject to totalitarian repression. The underlying ideological messages of the two broadcasts may be aimed at fully integrating China into the global capitalist order, yet they sow the seeds of ideological conflict.

The ideological nature of the narratives is more obvious in the CCTV presentation, more hidden in the NBC broadcast. CCTV's narratives would be expected to offer an ideological slant by virtue of the network's location as China's state broadcaster and official transmitter of Communist Party messages, even though the network in 2008 was operating under far different discursive formulas than it had in Maoist days or even in the early days of the post-Mao reform period, when Party propaganda was overt and direct. In those times, CCTV would have been expected to offer exhortations to the effect that only the Communist Party could have thrust China onto the world stage on an equal footing with the United States and other Western powers. By 2008, the network was informed by Western-style broadcast techniques, and the ideological message production had become more subtle. In addition to being a purveyor of state and Party messages, CCTV was also a commercial broadcaster, dependent on advertising revenue and engaged in competition with other media outlets. Both tendencies are seen in the Opening Ceremony broadcast. CCTV's narratives in significant ways follow patterns and themes established in the pre-Games reporting by the official Chinese media. But the adoption of Western techniques of mass communication are in evidence as well. The word "socialism" is mentioned only once in the course of the CCTV broadcast, an indication of a move away from the overt propaganda of the past and toward a new kind of production code that incorporates the need to appeal to audiences. The tone of national celebration and affirmation of a strong but non-xenophobic nationalism in the CCTV broadcast would be expected to appeal to a wide swath of Chinese opinion. As outlined in Chapter Two, CCTV faced a range of opinion, expressed in the blogosphere, that was decidedly hostile. To attract viewers who might have skeptical views of CCTV because of its propaganda function, promoting nationalism – an emotion that cuts deeply in China – could be part of a winning formula.

In the case of NBC, the ideological underpinnings of the narratives must be teased out through critical analysis because they are more deeply embedded. The commentators assume a positivist attitude undergirded by the Western discourse of science. The universe is knowable; facts can be gathered and their meaning determined through careful investigation. As an information network, NBC must provide accurate, revealing insight into a nation that is of great importance to the future of the United States even as it appeals to the discourse of entertainment and produces a broadcast that is enticing to watch. The network also must be cognizant of the public discourse on China as reflected by the journalistic record and address major themes without antagonizing the host country or pushing away an audience that has tuned in to watch a spectacle. NBC is perfectly positioned for this task, with its two highly respected anchors and its one expert commentator.

Narrative stylistic differences contribute to the different ideological configurations in the two texts. This can be seen in sharp terms in how CCTV and NBC treat Zhang Yimou, the famed Chinese director who was charged by the Party with putting on the Opening Ceremony. The Chinese network erases Zhang as the author of the Opening Ceremony. His name is not uttered during the broadcast. There is no mention of how the ceremony was designed, who the performers are, or – with one exception – how the materials used in the ceremony were gathered. By never mentioning Zhang Yimou's name, CCTV promotes collectivity, diminishes individuality, and makes it clear that the force of nature behind China's rise is the Party itself. The ideological effect is to attach the wondrous achievements of the Chinese nation directly to the Party.

NBC, on the other hand, is almost hyperbolic in assigning authorship of the ceremony to Zhang Yimou. The ideological effect is to enhance the role of Chinese individuality and blur the role of collectivity and the Party. The commentators, following positivist notions that underlie their interpretations, project the notion that to understand the meaning of the Opening Ceremony, all that is necessary is to correctly grasp the auteur's intended messages. There are things that Zhang Yimou is

trying to say, and what needs to be done is to accurately gather those narratives and explain them by offering a sufficient degree of cultural and historical background in a digestible form for an American audience. Culture and history likewise can be grasped only if one is sufficiently informed and only if knowledge can be conveyed by skillful communication. The commentators are simply relaying and explaining the narratives that Zhang is presenting in a way that can be clearly and easily understood in an American cultural context. An underlining fact buttresses the notion of Zhang's importance as an auteur: he was selected by the Party to organize and direct the ceremony.

The CCTV presentation is rigidly structured, suggesting a more overt ideological content. The two presenters, one male and the other female, alternate their commentary in a regimented way that mirrors the precision of the performers on the floor. Their emotional tone rises and falls as if it were choreographed. The dialogue to be sure is celebratory in tone, but it appears to be rigidly scripted; there is no banter between the commentators, no words that seem out of place. Much of the description is flowery and highly metaphorical, not the sort of language that would likely be spontaneously uttered. The NBC presentation, on the other hand, has the feel of a breezy conversation. The three commentators address each other by name and move from serious commentary to humor and back again. How much of the text is actually scripted and how much is off-the-cuff – or whether any of it is ad libbed – cannot be gleaned from a textual analysis. The important point is that it has the conversational tone that suggests the audience is receiving the personal interpretations of three skilled presenters, one of whom happens to be a China expert. The format invites viewers to believe the commentators and regard the narratives emanating from the presentation as natural. The CCTV broadcast conversely has the feel of a heavily scripted performance, suggesting the words carry official, not personal, messages.

Visual choices also contribute to the differing ideological valences. CCTV focuses much attention on the leaders of the Communist Party. They are shown entering the stadium one by one as the commentators announce their names, neglecting to mention IOC President Jacques Rogge, who is walking beside Chinese President Hu Jintao, until all the state leaders have been introduced. When the national flag is being raised as the national anthem is played following its arrival in the stadium through the careful work of the “minority” children, CCTV intersperses shots of the leadership and the flag, visually cementing the Party, the nation, and the people. These sequences promote the notion that the Communist Party has solved the great challenge of bringing the Chinese nation and people into modernity and opening up a limitless future. The visual semiotic linkage could not be clearer.

NBC's handling of the scene uses a wider lens, even as the commentary projects the ideological message that the state finally has achieved the ability to guarantee the welfare of the people. As the “minority” children carry the flag, NBC briefly shows a shot of U.S. President Bush talking to Russian President Putin, but the camera focuses largely on the children. Fast-changing close-up shots of the colorfully dressed children emphasize the exploding visuality of the scene. Chinese President Hu is shown twice, both times for only a few seconds. The ideological linkage between the state and the people is made – as it is by CCTV – but the visual shot choices make the aesthetic, entertainment value of the children vie for dominance with the political message, blurring the ideological underpinning of NBC's presentation.

Both presentations in some ways mirror journalistic themes in the run-up to the Opening Ceremony, but the linkage is more direct and overt in the case of CCTV, again demonstrating how the network's ideological messaging is closer to the surface. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Chinese media set a celebratory tone in the run-up to the event that is captured in the CCTV broadcast. The idea that China is peace-loving and friendly, implying that the nation's rise would pose no threat to anyone,

was directly asserted in a *China Daily* commentary.¹⁴ The Xinhua News Agency quoted leaders of obscure nations – the former president of Namibia and the president of Armenia, for example – as saying the Olympics would enhance China's standing in the world.¹⁵ The correspondence between the media reporting and the peace and friendship themes in the CCTV presentations is direct, befitting of a broadcaster that is echoing officially sanctioned ideas.

Linkages between the media coverage and certain CCTV narratives are clear and direct in other ways as well. The Chinese network's insistence that Beijing was hosting an environmentally friendly Olympics calls to mind the extensive pre-Games reporting in the Chinese media declaring that the air would be safe, haze was not indicative of a pollution problem, and that China was leading the way in development of renewable energy.¹⁶ CCTV's narrative that Chinese tradition seamlessly informs Chinese modernity mirrored a *China Daily* article about how a young man combined Western and Chinese customs in buying flowers for his wife on Chinese Valentine's Day.¹⁷ The raft of human interest stories in the media parallels CCTV's narratives about the heroic, humane, and upstanding

14 Brendan John Worrell, "Beyond 08/08/08," *China Daily* (Beijing, August 8, 2008), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2008-08/08/content_6915637.htm.

15 Xinhua News Agency, "Interview: World to Rejoice in Beijing Olympics, Says Armenian President," *Www.chinaview.cn*, August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9025060.htm; Xinhua News Agency, "Namibia: Beijing Games to Cement China's Links with Other Nations," *Www.chinaview.cn*, August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9035832.htm.

16 Xiaohuo Cui, "Haze Doesn't Mean Poor Air Quality," *China Daily*, July 30, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-07/30/content_6887598.htm; Li Jing, "IOC: Air Is Safe for One and All," *China Daily* (Beijing, August 6, 2008), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/06/content_6906848.htm; Jing Li, "Shougang Steels for Life Beyond Beijing's Borders," *China Daily*, August 7, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-08/07/content_6911582.htm; Xinhua News Agency, "Beijing Confident to Maintain Clean Air During Olympics," *Www.chinaview.cn*, July 26, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-07/26/content_8775970.htm; Xinhua News Agency, "Environmental Group Recognizes Beijing's Efforts to Clean up Air," *Www.chinaview.cn*, July 28, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-07/28/content_8826923.htm; Xinhua News Agency, "IOC Official Downplays Air Quality Concerns," *Www.chinaview.cn*, July 29, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-07/29/content_8833141.htm; Xinhua News Agency, "IOC Chief Praises China's Anti-pollution Efforts."

17 Xinhua News Agency, "Qixi: When Modernity Dates Tradition and East Meets West," *Www.chinaview.cn*, August 7, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/07/content_9029794.htm.

nature of the Chinese people. Themes with direct and clear links appear to be communicative priorities for the Party. As we shall see in the discussion below, other themes in the media were ignored in the CCTV presentation, with different ideological implications.

The ideological relationship between pre-Olympic reporting in the United States and NBC's presentation of the Opening Ceremony is less obvious, reflecting the more hidden and complicated nature of its ideological content. Ambivalence about China, for example, is expressed in both the media reporting and the NBC presentation, but in the former the issues are forthrightly stated while in the latter they are implied. David Brooks, in *The New York Times*, expressed fear that China's model of state capitalism might become more attractive than the U.S. free-market (read neoliberal) ideal.¹⁸ The concern was sufficient for Fareed Zakaria in *The Washington Post* to make a plea for a pragmatic approach to dealing with China.¹⁹ In the NBC narratives, ambivalence about China is expressed by presenting the drummers as a little intimidating and by declaring that reform will only get more difficult after the Olympics. These ideas are presented as matter-of-fact, naturalized statements. They do not repeat verbatim, but they do buttress, ideas that had been swirling in the journalistic discourse.

Other controversies are softened even further in the NBC presentation of the ceremony itself. The NBC anchors shy away from discussing the question of pollution in China, which had been a major item in pre-event U.S. media reporting. As discussed above, when environmental issues come up in the NBC broadcast, they are discussed in a universal sense. The problems of pollution are worldwide and not just Chinese issues. Specific questions about the safety of the air in Beijing, whether the athletes would suffer health problems, or the effectiveness of China's counter-pollution measures – all

18 David Brooks, "Harmony and the Dream," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2008, sec. Opinion, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/opinion/12brooks.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=david+brooks&st=nyt.

19 Fareed Zakaria, "Beyond China-Bashing," *Washington Post*, August 4, 2008, Final edition, A11.

prominent subjects in the American media before the Games – go unaddressed in the Costas, Lauer, Ramo commentary. It appears that NBC is going out of its way to avoid hot-button issues that would be sure to antagonize its Chinese hosts.

A similar pattern emerges with regard to the most sensitive issues raised in the pre-Games media reporting in the U.S. – human rights and the nature of the Chinese political system. While mainstream journalism hits these topics directly, the controversies are softened in the NBC commentary. Early in the presentation, Lauer explains that President George W. Bush's approach to China consists of speaking out on human rights issues but showing respect to China by attending the Opening Ceremony. Lauer goes on to say that China's power and emergence forces many countries to operate in a gray area, not taking a firm line with China but agreeing on some things and not on others. Lauer is falling back on his role as a reporter. He is saying in effect: this is what the U.S. president has adopted as a policy. This is how many other countries deal with China. There is no need for critical commentary, no need for a discussion of alternative approaches to China. NBC has satisfied its role as far as the discourse of information is concerned, the ideological effect of which is to blunt criticism that had appeared in the U.S. media and to offer the U.S. government line on dealing with China as the only reasonable approach.

The NBC narratives are further complicated by narrative incoherence resulting from the need to appeal to the discourse of information and the discourse of entertainment. Tom Brokaw's set-up piece before the coverage of the ceremony itself is in many ways more aligned with the media reporting and at odds with the Costas, Lauer, Ramo commentary. I will say more about how contemporary and historical matters are blurred or ignored by both networks in the following discussion of “impossible unities.”

Impossible Unities

If the ideological messaging is more overt from CCTV and more hidden on the part of NBC, neither network presents narratives that maintain their coherence when held up to analytical scrutiny. As previous chapters have pointed out, the narratives produced by both networks are “impossible unities” in the sense that Bhabha and Anagnost use the term. The narrative credibility of each depends on blurring or erasing contemporary and historical issues pointed to in the Opening Ceremony.

Befitting a network that was straddling the need to entertain and attract audiences with the mandate to project Party messages, CCTV avoids any overt discussion of contemporary political controversies, such as the demonstrations that greeted Olympic Torch runs around the world, which the Chinese media addressed by framing protesters against China's human rights record and policies toward Tibet as anti-China. In the CCTV presentation, the notion that China has achieved parity with the West, rectifying a historical imbalance, depends on a particular reading of the geopolitical world situation. The notion that China is peace-loving, friendly, and non-threatening depends on deferring any accounting of China's real world strategic military goals. The depiction of the Chinese space program as a benign Chinese-style expression of the universal human desire for exploration reflects this kind of erasure but is consistent with the general celebratory nature of the CCTV narratives. The green theme relies on overlooking narratives, such as those emerging from reporting in the American media, that depict China's pollution problems as increasingly severe.

NBC's narratives on contemporary issues also depend on sidestepping or downplaying issues that were much in the news. The narrative about the Chinese state finally being able to take care of its people depends on ignoring U.S. media reporting on continued crackdowns on expression and dissent. NBC's commentary about the universal pride felt by the 1.3 billion Chinese is called into question by Edward Cody's reporting in *The Washington Post* that chronicles how in at least one rural area, which by implication was probably indicative of many places, people were too busy with the harvest to pay

attention to the Olympics.²⁰ NBC's presentation of Chinese history and culture as quaint, Orientalized snapshots depends on ignoring the kind of discussion that was evident in letters to the editor following the David Brooks piece in *The New York Times* on the looming threat of the Chinese development model. As discussed in Chapter Two, letter writers accused Brooks of reinforcing outmoded stereotypes about cultural differences and misunderstanding the nature of Chinese individuality.²¹

Large scale historical erasures are necessary for the NBC and CCTV narratives. The unproblematic evolution of the Chinese nation from tradition to modernity in the CCTV text depends on ignoring the long and brutal historical strife (which included a Communist revolution) that accompanied the transition. CCTV's interpretations of the silk roads and maritime voyages make the claim that China was always open to foreigners, ignoring a historic preoccupation with defense against invaders and China's tributary system for handling foreign trade. NBC's emphasis on the Tang Dynasty as a model for contemporary development blurs the dynasty's mixed history of openness punctuated by periods of repression. Glorifying China as a great maritime power depends on ignoring the inconvenient history of the Ming Dynasty's dismantling of naval capabilities, which contributed to China's failure to meet the challenge of the imperial West. Presenting the moveable block press as a glorious Chinese invention skirts the fact that moveable printing was more instrumental to the development of the West than of China, once again avoiding the historical question of why China was unable to use its inventions and innovations to blunt the deleterious onslaught of the West. The history of the Maoist period, which would call attention to China's recent failure to modernize, is not mentioned. CCTV's bold erasure of Buddhism and Taoism sets up its interpretation of Confucianism

20 Edward Cody, "Across China's Countryside, 'Just Too Busy' for Olympics; Vaunted Games Barely Noticed by Farmers Focused on Harvest," *Washington Post* (Fan Shen, China, August 15, 2008), Final edition, A12.

21 Jerome Cohen, letter to the editor, *The New York Times* (New York, August 13, 2008), Gina Kim, letter to the editor, *The New York Times* (New York, August 12, 2008); Kaitlin Gravitt, letter to the editor, *The New York Times* (New York, August 13, 2008). All three letters appeared in the Opinion section under the headline "Alone or Together: Paths of Glory," <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/opinion/15brooks.html>.

and linkage to harmony and the legitimacy of the party-state. NBC likewise defers any exploration of historical Confucianism but presents an ambivalent and nervous view of Chinese labor: somewhat frightening if regimented but joyous if contained to non-technological tasks.

The view expressed in the CCTV commentary that a particular articulation of Confucian thought seamlessly informs Chinese modernity and contemporary Communist Party policy directions and NBC's depiction of Confucianism as a quaint cultural attribute both depend on massive historical erasures, including the recognition outlined in Chapter Two that Confucianism has long been interpreted and reinterpreted to serve current political needs. CCTV in effect is closing a great historic debate that took many forms in modern China. A central historical question of the late imperial and modern period was whether to view Confucianism as a useless conservative force that prevented China from effectively blunting the challenge of the West or as a valuable tradition. As Chapter Two noted, Levathes and Swanson argue that the Ming Dynasty turned its back on what had been in effect the world's most powerful navy in part because Confucian bureaucrats were ideologically opposed to commerce. Inside China, the debate about the value of Confucianism began taking vigorous shape in the late nineteenth century as the Qing dynasty was unraveling. Many early twentieth century Chinese intellectuals argued that Confucianism indeed was a retrograde force. In Mao Zedong's later years, the Party launched a campaign against Confucianism, declaring it an evil, counterrevolutionary vestige of tradition that held back the flowering of Chinese modernity.

CCTV, in effect, is settling those questions by ignoring them, and NBC is likewise skirting the issue. CCTV is projecting the idea that Confucianism, defined by four words in the *Lun Yu*, informs Chinese modernity and infuses the rule of the Communist Party, constructing a political and moral foundation that stretches back into the depths of China's long history. NBC's treatment of Confucianism as an Orientalized cultural philosophy obviates the need to speak too specifically about the tenets of the philosophy. CCTV is offering a contemporary version of a phenomenon outlined in Chapter Two –

namely, the definition and redefinition of Confucianism throughout Chinese history for current political purposes, a move that is masked both by the Chinese and American networks. For CCTV, any hint that Chinese history was other than a story of continuous progress or that Confucianism did anything but inform current political thinking would undermine the narrative that places the Communist Party as the font of all solutions to China's historic and contemporary problems. If Confucianism unproblematically informs Chinese modernity, the suggestion that it might have held China back would be heresy. Any hint that CCTV might be engaging in historical revisionism, affixing its imprimatur to a particular version of Confucianism, likewise would undermine the message. NBC's interpretation of Confucius as a cultural figure is central to the ideological position that severs any discussion of Confucianism's role in the Party's attempt to build political legitimacy. A discussion of the history of Confucianism in China would likewise undercut that projection.

CCTV's narrative credibility is strained by the obvious failure to reference Buddhist representations in the ceremony itself, although sensitivity about Buddhism is entirely understandable. Mentioning Buddhism could raise associations with the People's Republic's long and disharmonious relationship with the religion and particularly with the exiled Tibetan Buddhist spiritual and political leader, the Dalai Lama. Throughout the coverage of the ceremony, CCTV conspicuously avoids references to Tibet and other sensitive political issues that were discussed in official media reporting in the days and weeks before the Games. CCTV and the censors who would have vetted its script presumably would not have wanted to open the door to even a tenuous semiotic linkage with the state's attempt to enshrine an official form of Buddhism and denigrate the Dalai Lama or to recent historical events such as the desecration of Buddhist temples and general repression of Buddhism during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. From a longer historical perspective, the enduring effort by China's secular dynastic rulers to control Buddhism mentioned in Chapter Two needed to be erased for CCTV's narratives to make sense.

The CCTV version also strains internal narrative credibility. As Hayden White points out, historical narratives must provide an unconscious sense of credibility by revealing stories that are sensed as real and not created by the demands of narrative. Credible narratives of the real, according to White, must have the “coherency, integrity, fullness and closure” of the imaginary and instill an “odor of the ideal.”²² If the narrative form becomes too transparent, this “odor of the ideal” is lost, and the story becomes unbelievable. This is precisely the problem of the CCTV text. The form of the story – the idea that China has evolved unproblematically – obviously is imposed over facts and interpretations that, because of what they overlook, fail to shape the story with the necessary kind of integrity and fullness. If China was open to the outside world throughout its history, what became of the silk roads and why was a Great Wall necessary? If China had a long and fruitful history of reciprocal exchange with the West, why is the dismantling of the Great Wall such a monumentally important symbol? Why would there be an East-West imbalance that needed to be rectified? If flying asparagus – clear representations of Buddhist elements – are conspicuously ignored, what else is not being said? The narrative loses further coherence because it is presented as finished on the one hand, but the emphasis on openness, friendliness, and peacefulness implies that extant threats could cause the project to unravel. In other words, it is not finished after all.

There are further internal contradictions in the CCTV's presentation of Chinese cultural attributes. The network showcases certain cultural practices, among them the Tang Dynasty poetry of Li Bai, as emblematic examples of traditions that seamlessly inform Chinese modernity. The idea that Tang poetry became installed as part of the traditional canon for specific historical reasons and reinforced over centuries for political convenience is absent. The CCTV narrative makes an explicit point that one of the glorious things about the Chinese tradition is its adaptability and malleability. Tradition is able to change to suit current needs. The modernistic *san shui* painting done by the modern dancers who create

22 Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 10–24.

their lines on an LED screen with their black gloves seems to attest to this notion. Why then fix on poetry created more than a millennium ago as an iconic representation of a culture that has a plethora of other possibilities?

NBC's claim to narrative coherence may seem credible at first glance, but it also breaks down under analysis. The network appeals to the discourse of information, through the use of the opening vignette and Tom Brokaw's set-up piece, to project the idea that the commentary is offering insights into Chinese reality. But the presentation of the ceremony, which blends the discourses of entertainment and information, clashes in key respects with Brokaw's narrative. NBC in essence is wrapping its presentation in the bunting of a representative, non-ideological, we-are-just-reporting-the-facts view, but the package inside is a full-blown ideologically-riven set of constructed narratives that says as much about American hopes and fears about China as it does about China itself.

In his set-up piece, Brokaw takes a reflective view of China, which is another positivist approach. There is a China that is knowable through journalistic investigation and reportage. Brokaw's skill as a reporter and commentator provides the assurance that he is correctly representing Chinese reality, priming the audience with a framework for understanding the narratives that will come during the Opening Ceremony.

But the narratives offered by Lauer, Costas, and Ramo undercut a number of Brokaw's major points, undermining the overall presentation's internal narrative credibility. Brokaw speaks of the problems of China, which include many of the themes struck in the pre-Games media reporting in the U.S.: the authoritarian system in which the few rule the many, the yawning gap between rich and poor, the uneven development, the problems with human rights and treatment of Tibet, and the sometimes poor reception of the Olympic Torch as it made its way around the world to Beijing. In the commentary on the ceremony itself, Ramo speaks of a state that for the first time can take care of its people who now are able to freely choose how to live their lives. There are subtle differences as well. Brokaw

speaks of “patriotic pride” about the Olympics in his set-up piece, but Costas in his commentary during the moment of highest appeal to patriotism – the entrance of the Chinese national flag, the singing of “Ode to the Motherland,” and the flag-raising ceremony – transmutes patriotism entirely into pride. The combining of the discourses of information (Brokaw) and entertainment (the Costas, Lauer, Ramo commentary) effectively erodes the network's narrative coherence.

Exaggerated claims also undercut the narrative credibility of the NBC presentation. The Olympics, in the NBC narrative, are as much a challenge for China as a signifier of the arrival of the world's most populous nation as an equal player on the world stage. As the broadcast is getting under way, Ramo speaks of the challenge of pulling off such an elaborate ceremony saying, “A Chinese friend of mine said to me last week: 'This is for us the moon shot. It's the riskiest thing we have ever done.’” Costas picks up on the idea later, raising something of a straw man by wondering aloud how the Beijing ceremony will stack up against previous ones. Before the Opening Ceremony is finished, Costas answers his own question, saying this is without a doubt the most spectacular opening ceremony ever. There is of course more than a touch of hyperbole in these statements, and some of it could be attributable to the discourse of entertainment. One way of holding an audience is to set up dramatic situations and invite viewers to stay tuned to find out how they will play out. Another way is to indicate audiences will miss something vital if they dare to change the channel. But Ramo's puffy exaggeration clashes with the discourse of information, to which NBC also must adhere. For a nation that has pursued a Maoist revolution, unwound Maoism, moved toward authoritarian state capitalism, fought wars, developed nuclear weapons, and taken untold other risks including an actual moon-shot program, to say that the Olympic Opening Ceremony and the staging of the Games is the “riskiest thing we have ever done” is absurd. But it does point to NBC's position, in contrast to the CCTV view, that the

Olympics and everything they signify in terms of China's path to capitalist integration ushers in a profound challenge as much as a historic arrival and reversal of political and cultural power arrangements.

CCTV offers its own form of hyperbolic descriptions of cultural practices and events in the ceremony that could be read as exaggerations that detract from its own credibility. The dragon poles show the “spectacular vigor” of Chinese civilization. Words like glorious, deep, and weighty are used to describe painting, papermaking, calligraphy, and music. The imprint of Chinese colors on the Olympic Rings will live for hundreds of years in the minds of the Chinese people. Additionally, the commentators say that traditional painting expresses spirit and charm, while the music of the *qing* and the sound of the ancient drums excite the senses and stir the emotions. These sounds are transcendental, an invitation to cross time and space in an effort to discover the distant roots of Chinese culture. Chinese characters also show the depth of Chinese history and civilization.

Perhaps the most significant underlying element contributing to the “impossible unity” of both the CCTV and NBC presentations is the aforementioned differing treatments of the authorship of the Opening Ceremony. By erasing Zhang Yimou's role in the Opening Ceremony, CCTV is ignoring the obvious fact that the Communist Party selected Zhang to organize the event. NBC's zeal to repeatedly assign full authorship of the ceremony to Zhang and blur the role of the Communist Party points to a neglect of the obvious fact that Zhang was working at the behest of the Party's top leaders.

Discursive Struggles and Zhang Yimou

A closer examination of the moves by CCTV and NBC to blur or assign authorship can shed additional light on the hidden discursive struggles that helped structure both texts. The ideological nature of both moves is obvious, especially when one takes into consideration the few public statements made by Zhang Yimou and other facts that have emerged about the Party's role in the ceremony. Zhang himself said that the program for the Opening Ceremony had the highest level of

political review in the history of the People's Republic and that he insisted on implementing changes suggested by Party leaders, even if members of his team objected and even if the suggestions seemed unjustified. In an interview with the Chinese newspaper *Southern Weekend*, Zhang said:

We often had dozens of leaders come in at once. They all sat down and talked with us. If an opinion was raised by more than three of them, I definitely would make the change. I really did. Because I already realized that this is a test. Because leaders know that this is a huge matter for the nation. They knew that time was urgent. They were all very clear headed.²³

There is further empirical evidence of the Party's hand in the ceremony. It has been widely reported and acknowledged that Party leaders ordered a last-minute change resulting in the lip syncing episode with nine-year-old Lin Miaoke.²⁴ Zhang was hardly the auteur fully in control of the ceremony as depicted by NBC.

But he was not without major influence either. Zhang's creative vision was surely a large factor in the final production of the raw material interpreted by CCTV and NBC, even if it was subject to regulation by the Party. Zhang said in the interview in which he acknowledged making changes demanded by Party leaders that he was given broad artistic license.

But let me tell you, from the bottom of my heart, each time after the review, the highest leader always only said one sentence to me: "Yimou, it is hard to please everyone. You directors need to integrate everyone's opinion, but you must do it according to the way art works. Which (opinions) to take and which to leave out is entirely up to you." This is really a very progressive opinion... They did not ask me to do exactly what they said, and there were many different opinions as well, all very tolerant, very understanding of the way art works.²⁵

23 "The Way Art Works': An Interview With Zhang Yimou (1)," *China Digital Times*, August 17, 2008, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/08/the-way-art-works-an-interview-with-zhang-yimou-1/>.

24 Cha, "Pretty Face and Voice Didn't Belong to Same Girl"; Kent, "Faking Their Way to a Perfect Olympics"; Jane Macartney and Hannah Fletcher, "New Fakery Scandal, as China's 'Ethnic' Children Actually Come from Han Majority," *The Times Online*, August 16, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/olympics/article4540907.ece>; Magnier, "China Abuzz over Lip-syncing Singer"; Vause, "Olympic Girl Seen but Not Heard"; Yardley, "In Grand Olympic Show, Some Sleight of Voice."

25 "The Way Art Works': An Interview With Zhang Yimou (1)."

One of the ways Zhang made his art work was by employing Occidentalism in the ceremony. In an interview published nine months before the Opening Ceremony in the *Shanghai Morning Post*, he talked about the challenge of representing the essence of Chinese culture in the performance. The following comment reveals how Zhang believed it was essential to project ideas of Chinese culture to foreign audiences in simplistic ways so that they could be easily understood.

What should we provide the global audience within such a short time span? What is the real essence of Chinese culture? It is difficult to choose. We have invited many specialists and leading scholars engaged in the study of Chinese culture to discuss this issue. The elements used in the ceremony must meet two standards: First, they must embody the profound Chinese culture; second, they must be easy for foreigners to understand. Elements with salient Chinese features are easy to be found. The difficulty is how to make the foreign audiences understand what we want to tell them. If they can't grasp our ideas, all the efforts we made are worthless. China cherishes a long history and a profound culture. To make people from all corners of the globe understand our culture, we must approach the profound in a simple and explicit way.²⁶

Zhang also expressed a particular interest in how the Opening Ceremony would become embedded in public memory around the world. In the same interview, he said that foreign specialists kept reminding him that just one, inch-wide photo would be published in *The New York Times* the day after the ceremony, and that picture would become “the whole impression China conveyed to the rest of the world” that would be remembered “in years to come.” Zhang went on to say that “it would delight me” if he were able to provide eight such photos and that editors would be unable to choose among them.²⁷

The approach of both networks masks the fact that Zhang was consciously engaging in what Dirlik terms self-othering, or what Xiaomei Chen calls Occidentalism, in offering certain images that would be taken as signifiers of China. The idea is that Zhang would be providing the United States, and by extension the rest of the West, images that would be understood through the filters that operate in West. Put simply if a bit crudely, the director was giving them what they wanted to see and could make sense of. This is a far cry from the claim of uncovering objective reality that underlies the NBC text. In

26 Xia Chen, “Zhang Yimou Reveals Olympic Opening Ceremony Secrets,” *China.org.cn*, November 1, 2007, http://www.china.org.cn/entertainment/2007-11/01/content_1230436.htm.

27 Ibid.

this sense NBC's method, once exposed through a comparison with the CCTV text, fails Walter Fisher's test of narrative coherence.²⁸ It fails first by assuming the narratives from the Opening Ceremony spring from the creative wellspring of Zhang Yimou's mind and that Zhang holds the key to projecting accurate representations of China. By shutting out recognition of Zhang's subjectivity, NBC is erasing the fact that Zhang was consciously trying to offer impression of China that could be easily grasped by foreign audiences. Furthermore, if NBC is simply reflecting Zhang's ideas, why ignore the promotion of peace and friendship and downplay the green themes? The method fails on a second ground by not permitting consideration of the possibility that the narratives were not merely Zhang's creations but that they were reflections of Communist Party thinking and at best a negotiation between Zhang and the Party leadership and propaganda apparatus.

CCTV, in a nod to Occidentalism, makes it clear in its commentary that the ceremony is offering images that will help the outside world better understand China and get swept up in the charm of Chinese culture. As commentator Zhou says at one point, "Friends from all over the world will comprehend the elegant sound of Eastern musical instruments and understand the long Chinese culture and appreciate China's modern allure." Zhou's statement carries a self-conscious recognition of the idea that "friends from all over the world" comprehend Chinese culture through specific, exotic cultural artifacts and practices. The ceremony, in CCTV's narrative, is offering up these sorts of images as a way of experiencing the exoticism in modern China. CCTV's Occidentalism is met by NBC's Orientalism, setting the stage for one of the deep ironies uncovered by critical analysis of the two broadcasts. One of the emotional high points of the Opening Ceremony, the singing of "You and Me,"

28 Fisher's narrative paradigm holds that humans see the world as a set of stories that are constantly being created afresh and constantly test stories for narrative fidelity as they have an inherent awareness of what constitutes a coherent story. See Walter R Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, Studies in Rhetoric/communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 64–65.

is supposed to highlight the meshing of China and world. Yet a juxtaposition of the texts reveals a hidden discursive struggle: a reversal of Orientalism by CCTV and a turning away of that image by NBC.

Beyond that, comparing the NBC and CCTV texts reveals discrepancies that highlight the different ideological nature of each. A clear example is Ramo's invitation to look at China through new eyes. Ramo portrays his exhortation as something that Chinese people themselves want. But judging from the CCTV narrative, the goal, at least from the official point of view, is not to write a fresh story on a blank slate but to infuse the traditional into the modern, thereby reclaiming China's proper place in the world and gaining recognition as a co-equal with the West. The comparison is not presented to make a truth claim about one or the other but rather to show that both networks are offering their own ideological interpretations. Neither narrative provides evidence that they simply reflect an objective Chinese reality.

Comparing the two texts also reveals further evidence of ideological agendas by exposing lacunae in each. As NBC's commentary points out, the ceremony contains clear Buddhist representations. They are conspicuously ignored by CCTV, which raises intriguing questions about hidden discursive struggles that may have been at play. How was the decision made to exclude any mention of Buddhism or Buddhist representations in the CCTV presentation? Did CCTV producers attempt to include that in the script, only to be rebuffed by Party censors? Was Zhang Yimou appealing to Occidentalism on his own volition, or was that a result of a negotiation with censors? Like other such questions, they are not answerable within the scope of this study, but they are suggestive of hidden discursive struggles and choices.

There are myriad other questions involving the CCTV text. How did the script for the presentation take shape? Who wrote it and how did the editing and vetting process work? What was the nature of the discussions about the script between CCTV's producers and the Party propaganda

apparatus? Did the top leadership make suggestions for the script? Did any top leaders vet the final version? Where did Zhang Yimou figure in all this? Did Zhang offer CCTV producers guidance about what he was intending to say? Did he make any suggestions about shot selection for the CCTV broadcast? How was it decided that the commentators would make no mention of him? Knowing that Zhang was trying to create images that would become iconic in the U.S., did CCTV consciously emphasize those images for the Chinese audience? Did Zhang have the same intention for images that would be remembered in China? And did CCTV comply with those intentions? Why did CCTV shy away from addressing controversies such as protests over the Olympic Torch run? What kind of debates, if any, unfolded about that between CCTV producers and Party censors? Were the censors unable to agree on a strategy for dealing with such matters? Did CCTV producers believe that dealing with international political controversies was inconsistent with a program that was aimed at entertaining the audience as well as projecting Party narratives?

Other questions can be asked about the NBC commentary. How was the decision made to attribute authorship to Zhang Yimou? Surely the NBC anchors and producers knew that Zhang could not have acted as a free agent in the creation of the ceremony. Surely they knew that the Party would have had an abiding interest in the projection of images and narratives about China. Was NBC consciously trying to mute an image of the Chinese Communist Party as a totalitarian menace? Did the network's position as a unit of a giant industrial conglomerate with interests in China influence, even indirectly, a text that takes pains to defer difficult questions about the country's political system? Or was NBC to some degree a victim of its own production codes? Was a calculation made that as far as the commentary on the ceremony was concerned, the audience would be looking to be entertained, and that meant shying away as much as possible from discussing the nature of the Chinese regime? Or did NBC feel obliged, or consider it safe, to toe the U.S. government line on China in the commentary (if not in the journalistic set-up piece)?

By raising these questions, I am not attempting to answer what is unanswerable in a study that is a textual analysis, which by its nature is not aimed at extracting the intentionality of a producer of a text. Rather, the point is to demonstrate that discursive struggles were surely at work and the outcome of those struggles contributed to the final, ideologically-riven, constructed sets of narratives.

Concluding Thoughts

This study began by raising questions about how mass media construct narratives of nation and culture in the age of globalization, when information can move at light speed around the globe. Of particular interest were questions about the relationship between mediated representation and ideology, about how industrial structures and national policies help frame and constrain production of mediated narrative, about discursive practices that go into mediated representation, about how mediated narratives construct culture by drawing lines between sameness and otherness, and in a general sense whether globalization is helping to reinforce or break down the defining lines that encircle ideas about nation and culture. In an effort to draw insights on these questions, the CCTV and NBC presentations of the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics were selected as specific objects of study.

Focusing on the two mediated representations of the Opening Ceremony provided a number of benefits in addressing the questions at hand. It enabled a look at two media texts interpreting a singular event that was viewed by mass audiences in the United States and China, the world's leading superpower and the world's leading rising power, in which narratives about China, its history, culture, and place in the world were on full display. Examining cross-cultural mediated representations of China directed scholarly attention not only on a vitally important nation-state but also on Western mediated representation of China and Chinese mediated representation of China, both of which are understudied. The Olympic context also provided a backdrop that would shed particular light on the constructed divisions between the culturally specific and the universally human and their ideological underpinnings.

In Chapter One a theoretical and methodological approach was laid out. For the former, insights from critical, post-colonial, and narrative theory were drawn upon in thinking about mass mediated narratives of nation, history, and culture as products of discursive struggle shaped by ideological demands. Stuart Hall's notion of encoding and decoding provided support for focusing on the codes associated with producing the media texts and with the notion that texts offer a preferred ideological reading. Edward Said's insights into Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's work on mimicry and the stereotype in post-colonial representation provided tools for the analysis of the NBC text, and Xiaomei Chen's work on Occidentalism did likewise for the analysis of the CCTV presentation. Qing Cao's work on Western mediated representation of China demonstrated a division between texts based on the reflective and constructivist view. Insights from Benedict Anderson, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Ann Anagnost provided theoretical standpoints useful in the analysis of the CCTV texts. They offered ideas about the importance of the paradoxical practice of building narratives of nation by constructing stories about a primordial past that must appear to be fixed but actually change over time to serve current political and ideological needs. Bhabha and Anagnost also provided the notion that narratives of nation are by their nature unstable "impossible unities." Critical theory also forced attention on the political economy of media, in this case enabling an examination of the industrial and political context in which NBC and CCTV operated.

A qualitative methodological bricolage using tools of textual, discourse, semiotic, historical, visual rhetorical, and narratological analysis was selected as appropriate considering the hybrid theoretical orientation of the study. The close analysis of the CCTV and NBC presentations was aimed at uncovering the salient narratives about China, Chinese history, and Chinese culture and exposing the ideological discourses that underpin each text. Both presentations were viewed repeatedly, transcripts developed, and themes extracted. Care was taken to focus on particular, identifiable themes and match

commentary with visual images. The analysis employed principles of discourse analysis and was critical to the extent that it uncovered the constructed nature of matter-of-fact, taken-for-granted narratives. Semiotic analysis was used as a supplemental method.

Before undertaking the close readings of the CCTV and NBC presentations, Chapter Two set the context for the analytical work in three ways. The industrial and political setting in which NBC and CCTV operated and the historical evolution that resulted in those configurations were examined. Contemporary issues about China circulating in the public realm were discussed by examining the journalistic output in China and the United States in the run-up to, and in some cases after the beginning of, the Games. Historical renderings of themes in the ceremony also were presented as data to be cross-referenced against historical narratives offered by CCTV and NBC. The chapter established production parameters that shaped the ideological readings of the ceremony by the two networks and pointed out contemporary issues as well as historical events and trends that were given an ideological gloss in the CCTV and NBC presentations.

The analysis in Chapter Two demonstrated how CCTV had evolved into a broadcaster with the dual role of serving as the voice of the Chinese Communist Party but also as a commercial entity employing Western techniques of mass communication to attract and keep audiences. The competitive environment that CCTV faced also was examined, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages CCTV possessed as China's national television broadcaster. The hostility CCTV faced from portions of China's blogging community also was discussed as evidence that CCTV would have needed something with broad appeal – such as nationalism – to please the mass audience it attracted for the Opening Ceremony broadcast. This background is helpful in understanding elements of CCTV's production codes that helped frame narratives featuring the idea that the Communist Party was the guiding force behind China's rise to co-equal status with the West, closing the chapter on an era of humiliation.

NBC's evolution as the broadcast arm of one of the five major media conglomerates operating in the United States also was examined, showing how a discourse of entertainment and a discourse of information had become thoroughly entwined in 2008. This framework set the context for understanding how NBC mingled both discourses in its presentation of the Opening Ceremony, which was in part an entertainment spectacular and in part a conscious effort to project narratives about China, its history, culture, contemporary condition, and future prospects. To keep the audience watching, the network needed to employ the discourse of entertainment, which included hyperbolic statements designed to hold audience attention. But NBC also had to offer a credible explanation of the ceremony's narratives about China through the discourse of information. Understanding the dual nature of the discourses set the context for comprehending how the use of the two discourses resulted in ideological clashes and narrative discontinuities in the NBC broadcast.

The discussion of contemporary issues in the official Chinese media set a framework for the celebratory themes that CCTV would sound in its presentation of the Opening Ceremony. For example, the Chinese media were replete with human interest stories in the days before the Games, including an article saying Premier Wen Jiabao was a budding basketball player as a middle school student. This kind of coverage tracked with themes in the CCTV presentation that described the Chinese people in human terms as welcoming, open, and friendly. Other themes in the Chinese media coverage more directly translated into narratives in the CCTV presentation. A Xinhua News Agency article discussed how Chinese Valentine's Day seamlessly combined traditional and Western attributes, presaging a major CCTV suturing narrative that Chinese tradition unproblematically informs Chinese modernity.

The examination of the contemporary issues covered by mainstream U.S. journalistic outlets in the period before the Games established themes in the public discourse that NBC, as an information network, would have to address in some fashion in its coverage of the Opening Ceremony. U.S. journalists focused on familiar themes in their coverage of China, including the country's authoritarian

political system and human rights record, concerns about China's rise as a power rivaling the United States, the treatment of Tibet, and demonstrations during the Olympic Torch relay around the world. Setting this context provided a benchmark to measure the ideological underpinnings of the NBC broadcast by comparing the media coverage with the narratives emerging from the coverage of the Opening Ceremony. To mention one example, the U.S. media reported extensively on severe pollution in Beijing. In one article *The Washington Post* mocked the official *China Daily* for declaring that a murky, foggy day actually was clear. NBC deflected any hint in its Opening Ceremony presentation that China might have a pollution problem that should be singled out for attention. The NBC commentary framed China's environmental difficulties as part of a problem that the world community as a whole would have to tackle, ideologically sheltering China from criticism of its environmental record while at the same time not joining CCTV in asserting that Beijing was hosting a green Olympics.

Chapter Two also presented facts and interpretations of key historical themes presented in the Opening Ceremony, setting the stage for showing how erasing and deflecting history underlies a number of the narratives presented by CCTV and NBC. To recall one example, China's emergence in the fifteenth century as the world's preeminent naval power is the subject of a performance vignette in the Opening Ceremony that was glorified, with differing ideological valences, by CCTV and NBC. The fact that the Ming Dynasty shut down the maritime program just at the historical moment when the West was about to enter an age of exploration and imperial conquest is not mentioned by either network. What might be interpreted as an example of China's weakness and failure to meet the challenge from the West is depicted as a high point in Chinese achievement.

Confucius and Confucianism are major subjects of the ceremony, and the chapter discussed how Confucianism has been interpreted and reinterpreted in Chinese history to suit current needs. This background provides context to understand how CCTV and NBC's presentations do exactly that: offer

interpretations of Confucianism that suits current ideological needs. In CCTV's case, the particular form of Confucianism on offer emphasizes harmony, providing legitimacy through a semiotic link to the Chinese Communist Party. NBC on the other hand presents an Orientalized, snapshot view of Confucianism that severs the link between harmony and contemporary political structures. Both views depend on erasing a deep intellectual skepticism about the value of Confucianism that took shape as the Qing Dynasty was collapsing in the early twentieth century and was very much in evidence under Mao Zedong.

The close readings and critical comparison of the CCTV and NBC broadcasts demonstrate how two sets of narratives that on the surface glorify China and the long Chinese cultural and historic tradition actually offer very different ideological projections about China's rise as a power and engagement with the wider capitalist world. For CCTV, China has finally righted a longstanding historical injustice and established itself as a co-equal nation among nations. A 100-year period of humiliation has ended, and China can engage the world on a reciprocal basis. The Chinese version of authoritarian state capitalism can stand as a beacon of developmental prowess, and the Chinese Communist Party can be thanked for bringing about this splendid result. China offers only peace and friendship to the world, and its rise comes with no threat. As a demonstration of China's good faith, Beijing is presenting the world with a green, environmentally friendly Olympics. China is a proud, patriotic nation, united and as strong as steel, but adherence to the universal values of peace and friendship means Chinese nationalism is a progressive, not xenophobic force. China's ambitions in space are nothing more than expressions of universal curiosity about the heavens. The nation's long and proud history and culture inform modern practices, without any hint of conflict or contradiction. Openness has been a special Chinese characteristic throughout its long history, as shown by two silk roads, one by land and one by sea. Confucianism, an ancient and worthy system of beliefs that emphasize loyalty and righteousness, informs the harmonious designs that the Communist Party has for

modern China, ensuring that future possibilities will have no limit. The Chinese inventions – especially of printing, paper, and the compass – and its former maritime greatness have provided a cultural heritage that informs the character of the modern Chinese people, but that heritage does not include Buddhism and Taoism. The Chinese people have all the qualities necessary to thrive in the global capitalist world. Chinese cultural traits, including the written ideographic script and folktales, are to be celebrated, either in their own right or as particular examples of universal human longings.

NBC's presentation projects a profoundly nervous, ambivalent view of China's rise. China can be seen in a new light, and for the first time the state seems able to take care of the welfare of its people. But there are troubling, even frightening signs. China's terms of engagement with world capitalism are far from settled. There is no declaration of East-West equality, and no celebration of the Communist Party for putting China on a path to recover its former greatness. Reforms that by implication will help clear China of its non-democratic, totalitarian, and economically mercantilist sheen are needed before the country can be fully embraced. Still, there is much to admire in the steps the nation has taken to move to a system where the people can freely choose how to live their lives, and the Chinese people themselves want to leave their Communist past behind. Even so, this is a not a moment to either embrace the claim that China is in essence peace-loving or offer overt criticism over issues like environmental degradation. Rather, China requires careful handling and compromise that would not be offered to nations with lesser clout in the world. Chinese nationalism is an expression not of xenophobia but of national pride and is therefore non-threatening. Chinese history and culture are nothing short of remarkable, exotic, and alluring, featuring three great religious/philosophical systems: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The stacking of disconnected historical facts and descriptions of cultural attributes, however, produces a non-narrative quality that enhances the presentation of history and culture as a Orientalized fetish. Tradition informs the present only in an Orientalized way as if the idealized customs and manners of an ancient imperial court could be superimposed onto waitresses at a

Beijing McDonald's. The only historical period with actual relevance to current policy directions is the Tang Dynasty, which proves that neoliberal style openness produces untold riches. For NBC, Confucius is somebody who roamed China 2,500 years ago, giving philosophical advice to rulers at a time of great chaos. The CCTV notion that Confucianism provides legitimacy to the ruling Communist Party is pushed aside. The Chinese people, in NBC's rendering, are individuals who are striving to free themselves from the shackles of collectivity. They can be embraced when seen as individuals, but they may be frightening when assembled as a mass collectivity. CCTV's explanation of the relationship between Chinese cultural particularity and universal human characteristics is not reciprocated by NBC. There is a sometimes a strain to keep China in the "almost the same but not quite" category.

CCTV purports to solve the historic problem of building a modern nation and people by masking individualism, applauding national collectivity and attributing the monumental achievements of contemporary China to the leadership of the Communist Party, which itself is a collectivity. NBC paints its hopeful yet somewhat wary picture of China's integration with the world by making collectivity and the dictatorial role of the Communist Party vanish and focusing on Chinese individuality. CCTV creates a story of the Chinese nation that begins in the primordial mist of history, develops a strong moral foundation, achieves wondrous things, disciplines a modern people, and is able to infuse tradition into the modern effortlessly. NBC's story of the Chinese nation makes China's historical and cultural triumphs objects of exotic wonder and paints the future with a sense of guarded optimism at best, reflecting the hopes and fears of the United States as it faces a rising power. CCTV reflects both the confidence of a rising power and a sense of concern either that the outside world insufficiently understands China's peaceful and friendly intentions or that the Chinese people are still insufficiently disciplined for the tasks ahead – or both. Each network's narratives blur differences between China and the wider capitalist world, creating an absent ideological presence that serves to underline those differences.

The ideological constructions for both networks depend on massive erasures of history and blurring of contemporary issues. CCTV's view of Chinese history as a straight line of progress relies on ignoring the long periods – sometimes hundreds of years at a stretch – of disunion, war, and internal fracture that characterize the historical record. CCTV's claim that China was always open and willing to engage in respectful commerce with the West is a gross distortion of the historical record but ideologically in line with the idea that mutually respectful, reciprocal trade and openness should be pursued. NBC's depiction of Chinese history as a series of exotic snapshots depends on a collapsed sense of temporality. Historical events and periods exist as points that live side by side with little sense of linkage rather than as noteworthy elements on a historical time line that is part of a narrative outline. NBC's snapshot view of Chinese history and culture plays into an Orientalized fetishism that ideologically seeks to keep China in an “almost the same but not quite” category. A more complex, nuanced version would threaten that construction. CCTV's narratives depend on skirting any discussion of political criticism of China, asserting that Beijing is promoting environmentalism, ignoring criticism of China's environmental record, and disregarding anything that might detract from the image of contemporary China as a harmonious society. NBC's narrative loses coherence because the network attempts to both address and downplay contemporary issues such as China's human rights record and treatment of Tibet.

The ideological nature of the narratives emerging from both broadcasts can be further understood by examining how audiences are hailed by mythological stories. A broadcast of an Olympic opening ceremony after all is a performance for audiences that expect to be entertained, and it is intricately interwoven with myth in the Barthesian sense.²⁹ In the case of the Beijing event, Chinese and American audiences are presented with what on one level are fantastical stories illustrated by a stream of visual

29 As discussed in Chapter One, Barthesian myths are stories that reinforce values, truths, and beliefs underlying ideological positions. Such stories can be exposed as myths through critical analysis. See Barthes, “Myth Today”; Barthes, “Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today,” 164–169.

delights: pyrotechnics, rolling and unrolling LED screens, performers suspended on wires, and more. The visually spectacular dovetails with the Barthesian mythological quality of the narratives being spun by CCTV and NBC. When CCTV commentator Sun tells the audience that the ribbon dancer performing atop what looks like a magic carpet represents two silk roads, he is setting up a tale that flies in the face of the historical record. But he is in effect inviting the audience to fuse the visually striking and fantastical image of a bejeweled beauty performing a ribbon dance almost as if she were suspended in mid-air with an ideologically-infused, ahistorical account of Chinese history. When NBC's Ramo declares that the imagery of the children handing the flag to the soldiers suggests that the state is now able to care for the next generation of Chinese people, he is similarly appealing to the audience to make the same kind of union of image and myth.

The ideological positioning reflects hopes and fears on both sides. The celebratory nature of the CCTV narratives is an obvious indication of optimism about the future. China is not only engaging with the capitalist world, but it is doing so on a field of mutual respect. The Chinese people have the inherently heroic, Olympian qualities needed for success, as long as they display the enumerated attributes. But the repeated references to China as a peace loving and friendly nation that is embracing the world in a sea of smiles can be read as more than a national pat on the back. It can be interpreted as an indication of a lack just as commercial advertising can be read against the grain; the qualities most touted in advertisements often are the very ones in which the product is most deficient. As a state broadcaster with a didactic function, the CCTV messages can be understood as a reminder to the audience that China must convince the rest of the world of its peace loving and friendly intent to ensure continued success.

There is plenty of ideological fodder for each side to view the other with distrust. From the Chinese perspective, one could read the NBC text as indicating Americans are not willing to accept China on an equal basis and want to hold the nation always in a subservient position. Chinese

hospitality and desire for sustainable development and peace are not taken seriously. Conversely, an American view could be that Chinese smiles are like a Trojan horse, a seemingly non-threatening faint to mask aggressive, totalitarian tendencies and an effort to reset the core-periphery arrangements and make China the dominant power in the twenty-first century. From the Chinese point of view, a push for individualism could be regarded as an effort to stir labor unrest and undermine economic progress in China. From an American standpoint, insistence on collectivity could signify a reliance on unnecessary, distasteful, and immoral repression. There even are divisions on the level of the cultural unconscious, with CCTV suggesting that Chinese cultural traditions provide the underpinning and backbone for contemporary development and political organization while NBC's Orientalism isolates Chinese tradition as a museum piece. Ironically two ideological undercurrents that on the surface point to suturing conflict between China and the West also lay the seeds for an opposite interpretation.

This study of the CCTV and NBC presentations of the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games exposes the constructed nature of the narratives produced by the two networks and demonstrates the power of a critical approach to draw out ideological positioning embedded within texts by focusing on their narrative coherence and cross-referencing them against the history and facts they purport to represent. The study demonstrates that the ownership, industrial location, and historical evolution of a media enterprise must be taken into account when conducting a critical analysis. It should provide something of a template for cross-cultural, cross-national comparisons of mediated texts in other contexts, particularly those involving unequal power relations where post-colonial theory is applicable.

The study points out the importance of history, culture, national self-image, media production codes, and role of government in the production of mass mediated, historical and cultural narratives. Comparing two very different media systems through a variety of lenses helps shed more light on each, in part by looking beyond the obvious difference of CCTV being an arm of the Chinese state and NBC

being a leading U.S. corporate media entity. This kind of approach enables the analyst to see that narratives emerging from an NBC broadcast can be every bit as ideologically infused as those coming from CCTV.

The above discussion suggests that there is a deeper, cross-cultural, cross-national sense of discursive struggle that informs the production of the CCTV and NBC texts. Fully exposing the dynamics of these processes is beyond the scope of this study, but the analysis undertaken herein does suggest some approaches for future work. It is evident that the construction of the two texts involves dynamic processes influenced by many factors, including the push and pull of political, economic, and cultural power between China and the United States, the globalization of communication technology and techniques, and traces of historical discourses.

Scholars of mediated representation of China in the West often have taken an approach that does not fully account for how the discursive regime that produces representation is influenced by the historical location, political alignment, and relative economic and cultural power of the object of that representation. Arguments have raged about whether media texts take either a reflective or constructivist approach. The former assumes the NBC position – that there is an objective Chinese reality that can be accurately reflected if enough background knowledge and facts are available. The second takes the position that all representations are ideological constructions of some kind, often based more on Western concerns than on attempts to understand China from a Chinese point of view. Constructivist studies tend to examine how Western media reporting on China reflects Western ideological concerns and not how cross-cultural, cross-national dynamics may influence what is depicted and how it is depicted.

The argument about reflective and constructivist approaches mirrors a core, Western philosophical debate that has been ongoing since the Enlightenment. As outlined by Levi Bryant, the central question revolves around whether objects exist outside of the human ability to conceive of

them, or whether they are constructions of the human mind, or at a minimum are shaped in their conception by the multitude of factors that influence perception. Bryant calls the two sides realists and anti-realists, but they also can be thought of as realists and idealists, or, in the case of mediated representation, those favoring a reflective view and those who believe in the constructivist approach. To continue with Bryant's analysis, if the realists are correct, the question of representation comes down to whether reality is being accurately described. True representation is possible. If the anti-realists or idealists are correct, the world is socially constructed, and critique can reveal how factors such as history, culture, language, and class influence such constructions. For realists, truth is a matter of correspondence between representation and reality. For anti-realists, truth is a matter of consensus – if truth is even possible.³⁰

This study supports the constructivist position in the debate about mediated representation of China without abandoning realism and the reflective view and suggests that a critical and dialectical approach that takes greater account of cross-cultural dynamics of representation can help blur the lines between the reflective and constructivist positions, to some degree puncturing ideological barriers and improving cross-cultural understanding. After all, real, observable things happen. They can be described and mutually understood by people from very different cultures and with very different ideological orientations. It is the interpretation and meaning of those events that is ideologically inflected.

A hypothetical historical comparison will help underscore the point that representation involves the push and pull of political, economic, and cultural power. In 2008 China was emerging as a world power. It was a nation that had to be taken seriously. There was a sense that the future of the U.S. was inextricably tied to how China developed. NBC's approach to China reflected all these notions.

Suspend belief for a moment and suppose that the Olympics were being held in Beijing in the 1950s, at

³⁰ Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2011), 13–33, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.9750134.0001.001>.

the height of the Cold War. It is inconceivable that if this unlikely event would have taken place that NBC, or whichever American network won the broadcast rights to the Games, would have seen the Chinese narratives about themselves as anything other than a production of Communist propaganda. A Cold War prism would have prevailed. For its part, China would have offered crude, Maoist propaganda emphasizing revolutionary self-reliance, leaving the American network no entry point to go beyond framing the narratives as expressions of a hostile ideology. By 2008, the political, economic, social, and cultural relationship between China and the United States had changed in ways that would have seemed inconceivable in previous decades. China was on the rise amid increasing discussion that it would eclipse the United States as a global power in the twenty-first century. The sense that China had to be engaged despite some serious differences was very much in the air and a part of the NBC commentary. As Matt Lauer himself indicated, China's power necessitated placing the nation in a gray zone. He was referring to policy-making by governments around the world, but he might as well have been speaking about his network's own approach to the Opening Ceremony.

The globalization of communication technology and techniques comes into play with the infusion of Western broadcast methods and discourses into China. As noted above, CCTV in 2008 was not the crude propaganda machine that it had been previously. It did not display the slick machinery that NBC did, but it had moved many steps in the direction of catering to audience desires and avoiding what would push viewers away. In the Opening Ceremony, CCTV used visual techniques and not overt language to project the notion that the Party and the state were in synch and that the Party was the source of the miraculous change that had been sweeping the country.

For both CCTV and NBC, traces of historical discourses linger in the background. By calling for openness and friendship with the outside world and engagement with capitalism, CCTV is in effect rebutting pre-reform decades of discourse that spoke of self-reliance and framed the capitalist world as

a hostile, counter-revolutionary force. NBC's ambivalent discourse about China reflects a history of swings from periods when images of the “good” China prevailed to times when the “bad” or even sinister China was in vogue.³¹

Historical traces paradoxically can be seen in NBC's handling of the question of race in the Opening Ceremony. Racial otherness is never mentioned by the commentators, reflecting contemporary sensitivities regarding the subject. Chinese otherness is always described in NBC's commentary without referring to physical characteristics or bodies, even when even when the visual display might have called for some mention of racial difference. But it is not so easy to erase racial imagery. Following the opening drum scene, NBC does not explain why thousands of seemingly similar Chinese men moving in synch would be a little intimidating, but at least a portion of an American audience would not be so far removed from racist images of Asian hordes to fail to make the unstated connection. For the American eye, untrained in seeing difference in the faces and bodies of Asians, the sight of 2008 drummers working in unison could hail an unfamiliar and unsettling threat. The question of whether China ultimately will be a friend or foe is very much up in the air. What is left is the specter of a vast, shapeless mass of humanity rising up and displacing or at least disrupting the United States as the world's great super power. It is the specter of one kind of nationalism displacing another, and it is buttressed by historical traces of racial imagery.

Beyond that are questions about the nature of mass mediated narrative itself. Without getting bogged down in a discussion about whether deep structures characterize all narratives, or whether narrative resists structure and is dependent on specific historical and cultural arrangements, it is clear from the comparison of the CCTV and NBC texts that certain common narrative elements characterize each and that these elements offer possibilities and impose constraints on understanding. They relate to

31 Sometimes these swings took place quickly. My short, two-year stint as the Beijing correspondent for *The Asian Wall Street Journal* was characterized by reporting (my own included) that depicted China as becoming uncooperative with Western business interests in comparison with positive reporting in a few years before about the enormous business opportunities presented by China's new opening.

Hayden White's insights that suggest a paradox at the heart of narrative, insights that bear repeating. A story's credibility – the extent to which anyone believes it is real – depends on it exuding a kind of coherency, integrity, fullness and closure that only exists in the imaginary.³² To comprehend the real world through narrative, the qualities that make an imaginary story satisfying must be superimposed on the process. Specific tools and devices are employed in this quest. Three of the main ones that can be identified in the CCTV and NBC presentations are stories of progression, compelling characters, and sharply contrasting binaries. Each reflects both the ideological position of the storyteller and a desire to engage and “hook” the audience.

For CCTV, the overarching story of progression speaks of the evolution of China from its primordial beginnings, through its glorious cultural achievements and traditions, to the present and into the future. The compelling characters in this dramatic story of progress are China itself, the Communist Party that is guiding the nation, and the Chinese people, who are infused with the qualities necessary for national greatness. The binaries are largely implied, but messages in the narrative can be understood only in relation to their inverse: the coming of the Olympics is cause for national celebration (as compared to times of national misery); the Olympics mark the equalization of Eastern and Western culture (as opposed to periods of unfairness and inequality); China needs a strong, if tempered, sense of nationalism (implying that China would be nowhere without a robust sense of national spirit and purpose); the idea that China is an open, friendly, and peaceful nation (as opposed to the possible perception that it is none of these things).

For NBC, the story of progression is unfinished, as it depends on China continuing to engage with global capitalism in a manner suitable to the Western project, implying China's need to democratize its political system and further reduce economic barriers. It is a story with dramatic tension built in, a plus for narrative coherence. Like CCTV, one of the compelling characters for NBC is China

³² White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality.”

itself, but unlike CCTV, the other is director Zhang Yimou, who offers a pleasantly distracting sub-narrative. (Look at what he is giving us now!) The binaries in the NBC presentation are stark indeed. Tom Brokaw speaks about the divide between rich and poor, how the few rule the many, how China's self-image is at odds with the view of outsiders, how the good Chinese people must cope with bad government and cruel nature. In the ceremony itself, Joshua Cooper Ramo speaks of the tremendous openness of the Tang Dynasty (as opposed to isolation); the moment in 1978 when China begins lighting up (as opposed to the drab darkness of the Maoist era); the relationship of opposites in Chinese culture (as opposed to disjunction, harmony is the result).

In both presentations, there is a narrative within the narrative that the structure of the broadcasts imposes. The presenters set clear terms in their relationship with the audience. The commentators are the storytellers. The storytellers make meaning of the ceremony and the audience listens. The audience expects a story to unfold from beginning to end, with the storyteller infusing it with the qualities that Hayden White speaks about and the narrative coherence and fidelity that Walter Fisher defines. The structures and tools of narrative allow for certain choices, close off others, and facilitate the production of ideologically infused messages about China, Chinese history, Chinese culture, and the nature of the Chinese people, in other words, Chinese-ness.

Each of the three elements discussed above offers communicative possibilities and imposes limitations. Tales of progression appeal to the storytelling nature of human communication. As Fisher and White point out, we communicate by telling stories. A Chinese historiography that evolves from some vague and distant origin and proceeds through stages may be pleasing and have explicative value, but it forecloses the possibility of regarding China as characterized more by discontinuity than continuity. I have already discussed the ideological implications of making Zhang Yimou either a central or absent character. Employing stark binaries forces comparisons between extremes, focusing attention away from the vast middle ground where life is mostly experienced.

The discussion about the role of narrative itself points up an irony of media globalization. This is a time when there arguably is more information than ever flowing across borders, and digital technology means movement is at light speed. This is happening despite concerted efforts by governments around the world – China's being a leading example – to control and channel these flows. One might be tempted to draw a utopian conclusion that globalization of mediated information will necessarily lead to greater cross-national, cross-cultural understanding. My study suggests that such a conclusion would be misguided.

Viewers of the CCTV and NBC presentations of the Opening Ceremony were presented with different narratives about China, each with their own internal problems of coherence. Neither tracked well with the realities and complexities of contemporary Chinese life. Neither touched adequately – or at all – on the monumental, historic changes that had been sweeping the country: the elevation of hundreds of millions of people from poverty to a middle class life full of hope but also anxiety and challenge to social structures and confusion about values and mores, the movement of hundreds of millions of migrant workers who form the working class backbone of China's manufacturing prowess but are treated as second-class citizens, the sense of widespread corruption that has accompanied the accelerating divide between rich and poor, and the intricate and extensive economic linkage between China and the United States that makes the two nations uneasy if inseparable partners, just to name a few serious items of inquiry.

A critical, comparative approach to analyzing media texts can do more than simply highlight the ideological nature of the emerging narratives and point out what they omit. It can offer observers and analysts – in academia, journalism, or other areas of endeavor – a method to work toward resisting ideological constructs and offering texts that do more to assist in cross-cultural understanding.

It is my contention, based largely on my own 35-year career as a working journalist for large, mainstream American media companies, that individuals pursuing a critical approach can at times make a difference in how coverage and narratives are shaped. It is possible, even within existing production codes, to effect change, at least to some degree. To offer a hypothetical, but concrete example, an enterprising, persistent NBC producer working from a critical framework might well have been able to infuse Joshua Cooper Ramo's commentary with more of the sense of the large questions facing China mentioned above. Ideological discourses may underlie mediated discourses, but they are at least somewhat flexible frameworks. Someone with an understanding of where ideological lines can and cannot be crossed can influence media discourses. (In China, journalists routinely engage in these kinds of shadow dances with censors, but that is the subject for a different kind of study.)

Having a sophisticated ability to dissect ideological discourses is an important skill for journalists or anyone seeking to understand the U.S.-China relationship in all its dimensions. Ideological discourses are not mere theoretical constructions that can be held up against the bright light of historical and contemporary reality. The ideological discourses that underlie the CCTV and NBC broadcasts, in fact, reflect actual policy debates and positions in China and the United States, as the following discussion of Chinese soft power will illustrate.

The notion that China is peace loving and seeks friendly relations and sustainable development – one of the prime narratives in the CCTV presentation – is a major theme in Beijing's recent efforts to project soft power, particularly by expanding the reach of its media as evidenced by CCTV's launch of a U.S.-based, English language news operation.³³ The soft power campaign already has had major successes in Asia.³⁴

The projection of soft power is an effort to blunt what Chinese leaders have long seen as an attempt by the West, and the United States in particular, to promote a policy of “peaceful evolution,” or the idea that China's Communist system can be undermined and eventually overthrown by incremental changes that eventually will result in the installation of liberal democracy.³⁵ In CCTV's presentation of the Opening Ceremony, fears about peaceful evolution are never stated, but concern that China's peaceful intentions are not sufficiently understood are implied by the relentless repetition of the theme. In the policy world, these issues are very much on the surface and openly discussed. Concern about peaceful evolution has been a constant in Chinese foreign policy since the idea was articulated by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in the 1950s.³⁶ The idea that China suffered years of humiliation at the hands of the West – a theme that underlies the 100-year struggle in the CCTV broadcast to host the Olympics – provides the historical background for modern distrust. Concerns about peaceful evolution have been re-articulated over the years, following the Tiananmen bloodbath and as China

33 David Barboza, “China Yearns to Form Its Own Media Empires,” *The New York Times* (Shanghai, China, October 5, 2009), sec. Business/Global Business, B1; Lara Farrar, “Can Chinese media rule the airwaves?,” News, *CNN.com*, September 3, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/BUSINESS/09/03/china.media.expansion/index.html>; Matthew Garrahan and Kathrin Hille, “China to expand English language TV service,” Newspaper, *FT.com*, November 7, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/28a4ccec-0965-11e1-a2bb-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1edyeJQCb>; David Shambaugh, “China Flexes Its Soft Power,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 2010, sec. Opinion, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/08/opinion/08iht-edshambaugh.html>; “The Chinese are coming,” Magazine, *Economist.com*, March 4, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/15607496>.

34 Young Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, “China’s Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects,” *Asian Survey* 48, no. 3 (June 1, 2008): 453-472.

35 Russell Ong, “‘Peaceful Evolution’, ‘Regime Change’ and China’s Political Security,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 16, no. 53 (November 2007): 717-727.

36 Russell Ong, *China’s Security Interests in the 21st Century*, Routledge Security in Asia Series 5 (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), 22.

moved into a model, far afield from Maoist central planning, that features an authoritarian, state capitalism dominated by the Communist Party. Qi Zhou notes that Chinese publications assert that U.S. advocacy of human rights is a tool of a policy of peaceful evolution. The aim is thought to be the imposition of a Western political system and Western values on China.³⁷ A flavor of the official concern about peaceful evolution can be seen this statement from former Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

International hostile forces will never stop using peaceful evolution against us for a single day. Bourgeois liberalization is an internal matching force which they use to carry out peaceful evolution. These kinds of hostile activities constitute a real threat to China's independence, sovereignty, development and reform. In other words, peaceful evolution and bourgeois liberalization are aimed not only at overthrowing our socialist system but, fundamentally, at depriving us of our national independence and state sovereignty.³⁸

The Chinese leadership's use of soft power to counter fears of peaceful evolution is consistent with a policy articulated by Deng Xiaoping, who famously emphasized the need to maintain world peace so that China could reach the level of developed nations in 30 to 50 years. An official online publication of the Communist Party's Central Committee quotes Deng as saying: "Safeguarding world peace is not an empty talk. It is our need, also the need of all states of the world."³⁹ Ezra Vogel, the noted China scholar and author of a recent biography of Deng, says forging good relations with the major powers of the world was a cornerstone of his policy.⁴⁰

From the official U.S. point of view, the question of how relations with China will evolve and whether the rise of the world's most populous nation will result in conflict with the United States is very much on the table – a notion that is reflected in NBC's ambivalence about China. U.S. government attitudes and policies toward China have straddled conflicting policy line and ideas. Zhu Zhiquan sees U.S. policy toward China as being influenced by realists on one side and idealists on the other. Policy

37 Zhou Qi, "Conflicts over Human Rights Between China and the US," *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 111–112.

38 Thomas Kane, "China's Foundations: Guiding Principles of Chinese Foreign Policy," *Comparative Strategy* 20, no. 1 (March 2001): 52–53.

39 "The Objective of CPC's International Relations," *International Department Central Committee of CPC*, 2007, <http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/inlrelations/objective.htm>.

40 "Revisiting Deng Xiaoping: A Word With Ezra F. Vogel," Newspaper, *The New York Times: ArtsBeat Blog*, October 21, 2011, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/revisiting-deng-xiaoping-a-word-with-ezra-f-vogel/>.

has been aimed at both engaging China economically and containing it militarily, particularly in regard to Taiwan, resulting in a mix of contention and cooperation in the relationship between the two states. The U.S. goal has been to prevent the rise of China from undermining U.S. interests while at the same time preventing the emergence of hostility from China.⁴¹ Taiwan is of such importance that Andrew Kennedy argues that Chinese views of U.S. policies toward Taiwan provide a benchmark for understanding overall U.S. intentions toward China.⁴²

Aaron Friedberg sees U.S. policy-making toward China as being informed by a cross-current of orientations within the foreign policy establishment that he broadly characterizes as belonging to liberals, realists, and constructivists. Liberals are generally optimists who believe in the “pacifying power of economic integration,” the salutary effects of involvement in international organizations, and democratization. Some liberals are pessimists who fear that Chinese moves toward capitalistic reforms and democracy will lead to hyper-nationalism and trouble for the United States. Realists generally are pessimists who see international relations in terms of inevitable conflict among states motivated by objective power realities. In this view, rising powers such as China tend to make trouble. Some realists are optimists, however. They believe that China is weaker than it is often portrayed and that the nation's rise is not as rapid as many believe. These conditions mean that China's aims will be limited for a long time to come and will not necessarily be aggressive. The final group in Friedberg's typology consists of the constructivists, who regard perceptions and beliefs in the minds of policy-makers and not objective power realities as decisive. Constructivists are also divided into optimists, who believe that engagement and interaction can change beliefs and national identity, and pessimists, who express concern that such changes could well evolve in a direction that is unfavorable to U.S. aims because old

41 Zhiqun Zhu, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century: Power Transition and Peace*, Politics in Asia Series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006).

42 Andrew Bingham Kennedy, “China’s Perceptions of U.S. Intentions Toward Taiwan: How Hostile a Hegemon?,” *Asian Survey* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 2007): 268–287.

discourses and animosities are difficult to break. China, in this view, could continue to feel bullied by the United States, which would reinforce historic memories of the years of humiliation and shame.⁴³

The discussion about the different approaches to policy making underlines the importance of understanding narratives about nation and culture when it comes to China, and by extension, any other nation and culture. Training in a critical, comparative approach can aid in identifying and dissecting ideological arguments and intelligently facing commercial and competitive pressures that are an inevitable part of a professional, working life for anyone dealing with this subject matter – whether in academia, journalism, or other professions. This kind of approach is all the more important now, in a rapidly changing American journalistic landscape of media consolidation, narrowing of mainstream voices, and Internet news and blogging sites that all too often do little more than disseminate and amplify mainstream ideological currents. The stakes are high and only likely to get higher.

⁴³ Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?,” *International Security* 30, no. 2 (October 1, 2005): 7–45.

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