China rejuvenated? Governmentality, subjectivity, and normativity: the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

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METHODOLOGY
CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

When this research started in the autumn of 2007, the Olympics were less than a year away. At that time, an academic commented that “we all know that China is using the Games to promote itself, it’s a known fact.” I could only agree partially with this. What troubled me was this casual articulation of “fact.” This kind of articulations seems to suggest that it is a truth we all know; why bother studying something we all know? At stake are two issues: (1) the truth-like fact that seems to be so commonsensical; and (2) the authority of articulating this fact — to what extent could one draw a conclusion from afar without actually studying the research area? This methodology section is to challenge this truth-like fact and to show how this multi-method qualitative research has enabled me to look into new topics, questions, and problems.

Academic disciplines in both social sciences and the humanities seek to understand social life and the human condition, and yet they diverge in the methods of approaching the topics of investigation. In my research I aim to avoid the danger of theoreticism that haunts some research in the humanities as well as the danger of empiricism that haunts some research in the social sciences (Gilbert 2001; Rorty 2000). Instead, my project navigates between both; it is informed by theorists ranging from Walter Benjamin and Judith Butler to Michel Foucault and Ackbar Abbas. Meanwhile, my analysis is drawn upon ample empirical data I collected during my extensive fieldwork.

The main focus of this research is on the micro aspects of everyday life. To address the problems mentioned above, I choose to combine various qualitative research methods
(which are situated within the interpretativist tradition\(^{36}\) that explore the individuals’ and the groups’ perception of the research subject) in the research process. Media materials are crucial “objects” of my study. All the case studies and some articles I work on involve — to a varying degree of significance — analyses on media materials, supplemented by ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews in many instances. Altogether I have carried out four fieldwork trips to China and Hong Kong: The first fieldwork was conducted in November 2007 for a month in Beijing and Hong Kong; the second lasted for seven months, during which I was mostly stationed in Beijing but also managed to travel to Hong Kong for corpus collection in July and November 2008; the third fieldwork was during the World Exposition 2010 when I spent a week in Shanghai; and the fourth fieldwork to Beijing was in April 2011.

In what follows, I will first give a brief description of the research methods I use. This will be followed by an elaboration of the methods of analysis. The third section will specify the research methods and corpus I have used for each case study. In various places, I touch upon how my position as a researcher and an analyst influences this research, a detailed discussion of which is included in the last section — reflexive enquiry.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Media Materials

   Media materials are means of representation that mark their imprints in people’s everyday lives. Accumulated bits and pieces in our everyday lives shape the way we see the world (Massey, 1995: 22–23). I have collected ample media materials including photos of posters, banners, and advertisements throughout Beijing; advertisements; (tourist-) brochures; maps; guidebooks; news reports; information found on various news websites; etc. These materials are used for visual and discourse analysis, which I will elaborate in greater detail in the next section. I could not use them all in this dissertation; some of them

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\(^{36}\) As opposed to the positivist idea of a single and objective truth out there to be studied and captured, the interpretativist-based qualitative research methods operate on the assumption that truth is a evasive and shifty concept, and there are multiple and subjective realities (Cooper 2001: 33).
were then used in other academic articles, book chapters, and conference papers. Because of the significance of the Olympics in China, there was an ocean of materials that could be collected, the challenge was how to make selection — what to include and what to exclude.

Television materials constitute an important part of my corpus. Television is a powerful and popular medium in China. Sinologist Stefan R. Landsberger (2009) points out that the national television has already reached ninety-eight percent of the population, approximately 1.17 billion people in 2005. I made daily recordings of Chinese television channels between April and November 2008. With the prime interest in the official promotion, I focused mainly on China Central Television (CCTV) — the state television broadcaster — amidst the numerous television channels available in China. Yet, to have some ideas about the contents of television programs in Beijing, I would often zap through other channels and make recordings of selective programs and advertisements from them as well.

The selection criteria are based on the relevance of the programs, first, to the Beijing Olympics; second, to events that were related to the Games; third, to the current affairs in China at that period. For the first criterion, some examples are news documentaries and documentary programs about China’s Olympic history, sports programs about athletes, as well as reports about the preparation of the Games (e.g. venues, security, and information about the volunteers). For the second criterion, these are reports related to, for instance, the 100-day Olympic count-down activities. Examples for the third criterion are programs about the Tibetan uprisings and how the foreign media had given incorrect reports about China. Given the prominence of the Olympics in China, a lot of the programs then were directly and indirectly related to the Olympics. A large quantity of TV programs was recorded: approximately 450 hours. There were twelve programs I recorded on a regular basis. These were Who’s Who (对手), Olympiad & China (我们的奥林匹克), Preparation for the Beijing Olympic Games (北京之路), Daily Reports about the Torch Relay (与圣火同行), Olympic ABC (奥运ABC), Special Sports Programs — Olympic Stories (体育人间特别节

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37 “Catastrophe Came to Rescue” was about how the Chinese government seized the disastrous Sichuan Earthquakes to divert global media attention from China bashing externally and internally to present itself as a capable and benevolent leader. It was presented at two occasions: European Summer School in Cultural Studies, Copenhagen, 2009 and ECREA Conference — Media, Communication and the Spectacle, Rotterdam, 2009 (Chong 2009a, 2009b). Three co-authored publications are: (1) de Kloet, Chong and Liu (2008); (2) de Kloet, Chong, and Landsberger (2011); (3) Chong, de Kloet, and Zeng (2012b, forthcoming).
目—奥运故事会), The Sports World (体育人间), Living in the Olympic Year (体坛快讯—人在奥运年), Sports News(体育新闻), Technology and Olympics (科技与奥运), Daily News (新闻联播), and Olympics Approaching (奥运来了). A coding scheme was designed to organize them systematically, classifying the programs by (1) disc number, (2) program title, (3) date of recording, (4) duration, (5) channel, (6) genres, (7) host(s), (8) main guests, (9) locality, (10) brief description, and (11) remarks for the recorded program.

In some case studies (e.g. chapter 3 and chapter 7), media materials are the main corpus for analysis. The limitation is that it runs the risk of media essentialism and the media would be taken as a totalizing reality. I try to address these limitations by including in the overall discussion not only the “text” (the media materials), but also the context (where these materials were shown, say, for example, images found in subway stations, in neighborhoods) and the social practices involved (when and how they were shown to the public; for instance, the images were meant for passengers who took the subway or the residents who lived in the neighborhoods). Other relevant questions — for example, how different media forms (e.g. films and Olympic documentaries shown on TV, commercials) were related to or differed from each other; and how official and non-official media corporations operated to co-produce or to oppose each other — deserve detailed studies on their own.

2. Ethnographic Observations

Ethnography is a “method of discovery” (Fielding 2001: 146) and “a process of learning through exposure” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999: 91). As Goffman writes, “any group of persons — prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients — develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it, and . . . a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject” (quoted in Fielding 2001: 147). In order to understand those being studied, I entered the “natural settings,” that is, the ongoing daily lives of my research subjects (Fielding 2001: 147). I participated in a wide array of activities ranging from walking in the city to attending various social functions and events. Not all of these activities were directly related to the Olympics; and yet everything in Beijing in 2008 seemed to be related to the Olympics,
some remotely, other implicitly, and most of them explicitly. After attending an event, I would write detailed notes on the setting, the topics of conversation, and the behavioral characteristics of the people I met. As Fielding calls it, the fieldnotes are “the observer’s Raison d’être” (2001: 152). I also relied a lot on my camera. Beijing is a vast city; things and people come and go quickly. It was not always possible to write notes, and sometimes it would simply be impossible to stop and perform analysis on, for example, a poster I saw in the subway station. The images I took serve not only as records of what I saw and experienced, they also become an important part of my corpus.

Through being in the “natural setting,” I engaged with the research field in ways that I had not thought of. This method helps me understand more about the fabrics of the city as well as the dwellers’ view on Beijing, China, and China hosting the Olympics. It also probes me to constantly think, interpret, and interrogate my own position and my research direction. The reality is much more complex and complicated: My background and various identities (thinking of variables like age, class, gender, ethnicity, personal experiences, and the like) always intersected with my research subjects and these subjects in turn would often bring new and unexpected ideas to me. It was during the fieldwork that I fine-tuned my research focus, research questions, and developed the frameworks and the five case studies for this dissertation. I would not have acquired this invaluable information just by sitting behind my desk reading theories.

3. Semi-structured Interviews

This research is derived from an interest in the interplay between the promotion strategies of the Chinese government and the perceptions of the people living in the Olympic cities. I had carried out semi-structured interviews with designers of Olympics-related materials, officials of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympia (hereafter BOCOG), Olympic volunteers in Beijing and Hong Kong, taxi drivers in Beijing, film directors, and teachers in Hong Kong. I pre-formulated a list of questions and topics in ways that they could be enhanced by probes and expanded for broader discussion (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999). I would only record them if interviewees agreed. Then, verbatim transcriptions of all interviews were conducted. All the interviews that took place in Beijing were conducted in Mandarin and those in Hong Kong were in Cantonese. I have translated all the quoted interview contents from Chinese to
English. I use pseudonyms throughout this dissertation as the majority of my interviewees prefer to remain anonymous.

There are multiple and subjective perceptions of the social world, people may choose to perform other facts or beliefs than they usually say or believe. In interviews with BOCOG officials, many of whom were government officials, they would sometimes give very standard bureaucratic responses (guan qiang/官腔 / guan hua/官话). On the other hand, Beijing taxi drivers were known for being very good at chatting (很会侃); and because of their social- and class-position, their words were often seen less creditable than, for example, a university lecturer. The interview settings also mattered. Whenever possible, I would choose to conduct the interview in a casual and relaxing setting like in restaurants, with food and beverages. The purpose of doing these interviews is not to seek the truth from the interviewees but to try to understand their perspectives, and to observe how they articulated and performed their views. As alluded to above, truth is an evasive and shifty concept. People construct their own social world and there is no single objective reality out there to be captured (Clarke 2001: 33). The interviews cannot be taken for analysis in isolation; they should be examined together with other elements such as the settings, the socio-political contexts, the context of our interaction, and the power-relations between me and my interviewees.

For example, in the interviews with taxi drivers, I often found it a good opening line to talk about urban changes and traffic jam: “Beijing has changed a lot in the past few years” or “Would there be traffic jam?” These topics were of direct relevance to their everyday lives, something natural, ongoing, and inevitable; and not seen as “heavily politicized” topics such as the minorities’ issues or complaints about the party leaders. Similarly, the nature of taxi operation — being in the taxi, driving through the city and having different passengers on board — provided a special context for my interviews. A driver told me: “We have passengers in our taxis. We drive around the city every day, if no one talks, if we don’t talk to any passenger for the whole day, that’s very monotonous.” It is important to combine other qualitative research methods with interviews. As Foucault warns against placing too much emphasis

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38 Guan qiang can represent two things: 1) a bureaucratic way of responding to questions/requests and 2) an official intonation; whereas, guan hua literally means what the officials say, but used generally in a negative sense, with traces of distrust. Both terms can be used interchangeably.
on the authority of the “author,” discourse analysis shows that “the author” is only an element of a larger discourse out there (Foucault 1984a).

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

I have divided my research into five case studies. For each case study, I would first look through the entire corpus I have collected to select and delimit the specific set of corpus I intended to use. Then, I would read or watch the chosen set of corpus at least two times to identify some regular images, features, and elements. For film or television materials, I would make screen shots of important images for analysis. This would be followed by a few times of re-readings in which I would try to connect the key themes with the theories used for the case study. Throughout this dissertation, I have performed discourse analysis together with visual analysis. The following is a detailed elaboration of these two methods.

1. Discourse Analysis

There are many strains of discourse analysis, for example those practiced in linguistics. The discourse analysis I refer to here does not only examine the linguistic utterance, but also the interplay between the utterance and the sites (e.g., the material reality, institutions, and social practices). What is being articulated is always a product of specific socio-historical conditions.

In this whole dissertation, I use Michel Foucault’s notion of discursive analysis as the analytical framework. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1989 [1969]), Foucault has in various instances elaborated on what he refers to as “discourse.” Below are two of them that I find useful:

1. the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements (ibid.: 90).

39 The “author” in Foucault’s discussion refers to an individual who creates works of art or literature but I relate it to my interviewees to stress that what they said should be understood as something belonging to a larger discourse.
2. Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functioning, transformations). (ibid.: 41–42).

The key phrases are “regularity” and “regulated practice.” “Regularity” and “regulated” do not refer to a set of formal and written rules. What Foucault wants to highlight are the unwritten rules and structures that produce these regulated and regular statements. Yet, meanwhile, it is important to note that what Foucault and his analysis attempt to do is not to show the formation of a totally cohesive truth. In fact, he warns against the elimination of contradictions in the production of “the history of ideas”:

The history of ideas usually credits the discourse that it analyses with coherence. If it happens to notice an irregularity in the use of words, several incompatible propositions, a set of meanings that do not adjust to one another, concepts that cannot be systematized together, then it regards it as its duty to find, at a deeper level, a principle of cohesion that organizes the discourse and restores to its hidden unity. This law of coherence is a heuristic rule, a procedural obligation, almost a moral constraint of research: not to multiply contradictions uselessly; not to be taken in by small differences; not to find too much weight to changes, disavowals, returns to the past, and polemics; not to suppose that men’s discourse is perpetually undermined from within by the contradiction of their desires, the influences that they have been subjected to, or the conditions in which they live; but to admit that if they speak, and if they speak among themselves, it is rather to overcome these contradictions, and to find the point from which they will be able to mastered.” (Foucault 1989 [1969]: 115)

Contradictions and conflicting statements exist in all kinds of discourse. Discourse is not a cohesive totality, nor is it atemporal. Lynn Spigel, in her discursive analysis of the role of television in postwar America writes that the coexistence of conflicting discourses is not “a matter of either/or but rather both at once” (1992: 37). Let me illustrate this point
with an example: the discourse of the West or the Western Other. One could say that instead of one discourse, there exist numerous discourses about the West and the Western Other. One could easily detect sets of statements, which present various descriptions of this subject. For instance, the West is the aggressor, which forcefully entered China and made China sign up all kinds of unequal treaties; in another instance, the West is the modern and progressive Other and China has been motivating itself to be like this equivalent Other. These statements may seem to deliver conflicting ideas about the West, and they are most likely deployed with different cultural and political purposes and therefore have in turn generated different effects. They, however, epitomize one key discourse about self/Other, a discourse that asserts the essential binaries of China/the Chinese and the West/the Western Other. Similarities could also be shown in my taxi case study. My analysis shows that the seemingly contradictory discourses — for example, the discourse of positive Olympics-led development and the discourse of “progress” — were always met by dystopian discourses of deteriorating urban living conditions and of a vanishing old Beijing. These discourses may change or evolve in different directions with new developments in time period. To paraphrase Foucault (1989 [1969]), discourse is not static but is subjected to constant changes.

In connection with the main focus of this research on examining the subject of governance, Foucault’s discursive analysis allows me to tease out the power-relations that give rise to sets of regular and regulated statements, and discourses. It shows the ways in which one should go further than seeing governing strategies, like the promotion materials, as merely another evidence of “ideology” (ideas imposed by institutions to influence individuals) or brushing them away as yet another example of propaganda.

2. Visual Analysis

Visual analysis should, as Lister and Wells quote Rogoff, be seen as a field that crosses disciplines: “Images do not stay within discrete disciplinary fields such as ‘documentary film’ or ‘Renaissance painting’, since neither the eye nor the psyche operates along or recognizes such divisions” (quoted in Lister and Wells, 2001: 63). Mieke Bal (2003), based on her method of doing cultural analysis, proposes an analytical approach that emphasizes the interrelationship between the object (visual materials), theory, and the analyst. She explains that what defines the domain of visual culture studies is not the
materiality of the object — the visual materials — but what she emphasizes as “the act of looking” (ibid.: 9) and “the possibility of performing acts of seeing” (ibid.: 11). What she highlights here is the role of the analysts: It is through bringing in the analyst’s profile that completes the analytical procedure. The objective of performing visual cultural analysis is to unfold the power-relations, in the Foucaultian sense. Bal writes,

> Knowledge directs and colours the gaze, thereby making visible those aspects of objects that otherwise remain invisible, but also the other way around: far from being a feature of the object seen, visibility is also a practice, even a strategy, of selection that determines what other aspects or even objects remain invisible.

(ibid.: 11)

What appears to be a “neutral” image, a map of Beijing as shown in chapter 6, for instance, is hardly natural. Rather, the materialization of such and such an image like a map is already a product of power/knowledge that subjects viewers to a regime of truth.

Visual analysis involves practical steps. In addition to the analytical approach proposed by Bal, I have made use of methods proposed by Lister and Wells (2001). In the following, I will elaborate my analytical approach according to three aspects: (a) contexts of viewing, (b) contexts of production, and (c) form and meaning (2001: 63).

a) Contexts of viewing

The first set of questions I deal with in analyzing visual materials is to start with the question of “where.” As Lister and Wells suggest, “the context influences how we look at the image through constructing certain expectations” (ibid.: 65). This is then followed by the question of “why”: Why were the viewers (e.g. I as a researcher) drawn to look at the images? How I came across these images/visual materials reveals a set of questions on how they were intended to be consumed — Were they displayed in the public or private sphere? Were they located in a place with heavy traffic? In a mall, on the roadside, etc.?

These questions are all relevant to the discussion above: The analyst is inseparable from the analytical process. To quote Lister and Wells, “the experience of the encounter is
inter-discursive in the sense that situation, contemporary references and resonances inform our experience, whether we merely glance at the image or study it more intently” (2001: 68). In collecting and then analyzing these visual materials, I exercise the power of selection and the power of making claims. I choose materials that suit my research interests and discard those images that are considered irrelevant. In doing so, I make a claim of “truth” that might not be shared by others. Just as the images I took in the subway, they “spoke” to me as meaningful materials; yet, passers-by might not pay attention to these images at all, and therefore the images would not mean so much to them. This analytical process requires me to interrogate my own position as a researcher, to address the questions on the reasons for choosing the images, and to explain my research interests in the images I have chosen.

b) Contexts of production

The contexts of production set forth a series of questions related to production and distribution. These are, for instance, the purposes of producing some of the visual materials, the institutional factors, social contexts (for example, what is socially perceived as an attractive feminine face, smiling or looking slightly quiet and shy?), and the constraints. Advertisements are good examples: Advertisements are not, as commonly believed, imposing ideas on the consumers. An advertisement that appeals to the public has to follow certain discursive rules circulating in the wider social world (Spigel, 1992: 7). This links us to Foucault’s argument on the “author” position mentioned earlier. The author is only an element of a larger discourse out there (Foucault 1984a). Back to China, experts in China studies have shown how the government has evolved in its communication skills, adopting commercial and marketing strategies (Landsberger 2009; Barmé 1999; Fung 2008). In recent years, one could witness a growing cooperation between commercial sectors and government agencies. A telling example is that “public service advertising” (PSA) produced by the government would look like commercial advertising (Landsberger 2009). All these aspects would need to be attended to when carrying out analysis.
c) Form and meaning

Central to this method of analysis are the questions of meaning — what the visual materials mean and how the meaning is delivered to the viewer. In analyzing TV materials, I pay attention to the temporal and spatial sequence, and also the pictorial representation, as I would do for a poster found in a subway station. During the analysis, I would look at the key elements in the three analytical methods proposed by Lister and Wells (2001): semiotics and codes, photographic conventions, and social conventions. The concept of conventions is central. Conventions are understood as “socially agreed way[s] of doing something” (Lister and Wells, 2001: 71), they explain the basic ways and manners of how one reads images and how images are produced. Like in photography, it usually deploys conventional signifiers or stereotypical signs in its composition. The idea of conventions would need to be contextualized; there is no one universal, conventional way of reading and deciphering an image.

Semiotics refers to the use of the signifiers (the physical symbols or objects) to suggest what they are used to signify (the meaning). Usually, the signifiers may have aspects that resemble the signified. Yet, this connection can also be arbitrary in the sense that the symbols may not bear inherent qualities to what they signify. For example, the color pink (signifier) is generally read as a color/sign of “femininity,” “femaleness,” “girlishness.” Pink bears no resemblance to the material subject of “female”; yet because it is so widely identified as such, it becomes a convention. A large number of visual, pictorial, material signs that are so widely and commonly used that they become a convention and “code,” in Lister and Wells’ words, “an extended system of signs which operates like a language (itself a code of uttered sounds or printed marks)” (2001: 73).

Lister and Wells also suggest that when reading an image, one should bear in mind the photographic conventions of elements like framing, gaze, lighting, context, and camera position (2001: 77). Sometimes, the image can be analyzed through taking into account social conventions, that is, practices commonly found in one’s everyday life. Apart from these points, the background of the analyst would play a role in reading an image; sometimes, the analyst’s cultural and historical background can shed light on visual analysis.
I demonstrate this technique with an example, figure 2.1. The Temple of Heaven and the Bird’s Nest were used as iconic signs — the signifier — that signified China’s historical and cultural past, and the hypermodern present respectively. The photographic conventions — framing, gaze, lighting, camera position — positioned two elements in such ways that the viewers would look at the Temple of Heaven from a lower angle up as this would convey the image that the historical past was something grand high up there deserving our respect. Whereas the Bird’s Nest was captured from a high angle, thus exuding a sense of closeness, something we could get hold of. The use of the color “red” — a social convention in China that signifies joy and happiness — could very well suggest how the historical, cultural past could go hand in hand with the new and modern present. As red is also the traditional Chinese color for weddings, one could also interpret it as a wedding between two different architectural styles, old and new, historical and hypermodern.

It is important to note that most of the producers of visual materials may not even know consciously that they are deploying certain photographic or social conventions, as they can very well apply these conventions as techniques that are acquired through working “on the job” (ibid.: 74). It is however possible that my reading deviates from other people; that is to say, there is a multivocality of interpretation. There is no standard and correct
reading of images: Different viewers could read the visual materials differently. This is why some analysts emphasize “the plural, messy, contested and even creative nature of our discourse with the visual and with images, the manner in which this is a site of a struggle over what something means” (Lister & Wells 2001: 73). In a similar vein, it is equally challenging to try to see beyond what is visible in the materials and what seems visible to the research (but may have different implications in other contexts). To emphasize again, I am not claiming what I read is the single truth. At best I could do is to explain my analysis and combine it with discourse analysis.

CASE STUDIES: METHODS OF CORPUS COLLECTION

Each case study has its own research focus, research questions, and as such, its set(s) of corpus. Below is a brief description of what kind of corpus is used for each particular case study.

Case Study 1: Chinese Bodies that Matter — The Search for Masculinity and Femininity

I have chosen three sets of male and female athletes who represent three different moments in Chinese history for my analysis. The first historical moment was in the 1930s, a time when the Republican China tried to modernize itself so as to be recognized in the international arena. Liu Changchun (刘长春) and Yang Xiuqiong (杨秀琼) are selected for their associated links to the Chinese Olympic history mentioned by the Chinese media. The second period was in the 1980s, after China reopened to connect to the world. Li Ning (李宁) and Lang Ping (郎平) are chosen for their popularity in the 1980s and also their recent reappearance in the 2008 Games. The third period was the most recent past, the time around the 2008 Beijing Games. Liu Xiang (刘翔) and Guo Jingjing (郭晶晶) are chosen for their huge popularity during the 2008 Games — in terms of media attention and the amount of advertising endorsements. My analysis is structured according to two aspects: clothing and corporeal expressions (including facial expressions).

The corpus I use includes TV recordings, weekly and monthly magazine articles published in 2008, interviews I conducted in 2008, and my own observations. From the large amount of TV recordings, I have selected the Olympic programs produced by CCTV
and advertisements shown on both CCTV and Beijing Television (BTV) that used athletes as spokespersons. The CCTV Olympic programs include *Sports News* (体育新闻), *CCTV9 Daily News Report*, *Olympics Approaching* (奥运来了), *The Road to Glory — Sprint* (光荣之路 — 短跑), and *Olympiad & China* (我们的奥林匹克), a 10-episode documentary program broadcast in July 2008; hereafter *Olympiad*. The two films I use are *The One Man Olympics* (一个人的奥林匹克) and *Dream Weaver* (筑梦). I attended the premiere of *The One Man Olympics* (hereafter *The One*) on May 17, 2008 at the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference Auditorium — an official venue of the government. Although *The One* was largely funded by the government, it was not promoted as the official Olympic film. *Dream Weaver* was the official Olympic documentary film; its production was supported by the BOCOG. The weekly and monthly magazine articles published in 2008 I have chosen include *Lifeweek* (三联生活周刊), *China Newsweek* (中国新闻周刊), *Bazaar* (時尚芭莎男士), and *Executive* (经营者). I have also included in my analysis interviews I conducted with the directors of both films mentioned above, Hou Yong (侯勇) and Gu Jun (顾筠), and with Olympic volunteers.

**Case Study 2: More Than a Smile, Gaining “Face” (Un)doing Shame: The Beijing Olympic Volunteers as the New Model Citizens**

This case study examines the multifaceted promotion strategies pertaining to the Beijing Olympic volunteer program (hereafter the Olympic Volunteer program). The Olympic Volunteer program was some of the key promotion campaigns that had been promoted actively by the BOCOG and the state organizations. The programs aimed to reach all Chinese citizens, urging them to embrace the Beijing Olympic Games selflessly.

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40 The premiere began with a minute of silence for the dead and injured of the Sichuan Earthquakes on May 12, 2008; and it ended with a long session of discussions with many senior official figures.

41 The production was largely financed by the Beijing Forbidden City Film Company (紫禁城公司), and partially by CCTV6 (the film channel) and a Hong Kong company. In our interview, the director told me that the funding provided by the Beijing Forbidden City Film Company was from the Beijing government.

42 Both *Lifeweek* and *China Newsweek* are weekly magazines. I read them regularly during my fieldwork in 2008 and paid special attention in the period around the Olympics.

and whole-heartedly. Their significance could be revealed by their omnipresent coverage in the media and in the streets of Beijing.

I did discourse analysis, based on (1) The Manual for Beijing Olympic Volunteers (hereafter Volunteers Manual), (2) posters promoting the Olympic Volunteer program that I came across when walking in the city, and (3) volunteers’ training materials found on the official website of the BOCOG. Apart from these promotion materials, I conducted altogether twenty-four in-depth interviews with Games, Paralympic Games, and BOCOG Pre-Games volunteers (twenty-one in Beijing and three in Hong Kong), and various talks with city volunteers and society volunteers in the period around the Olympics in Beijing. Due to the focus of this chapter, I use these interviews as supplementary information and not the focus of discourse analysis.

Case Study 3: Driving (in) the City — Taxi Drivers as the Modern Flâneur

Three sets of corpus are used here: The first is official materials — The Beijing Olympic Games Guidebook for People in the Service Sector (北京奥运会窗口行业员工读本, hereafter Guidebook), The Olympic Palm Book for Beijing Taxi (奥运会北京的士掌中宝, hereafter Palm Book), Operational Safety for Taxi driver (的士运营安全, hereafter Operational Safety); the second set of corpus is a monthly magazine called Taxi (百姓, hereafter Taxi) that could be found inside the taxis; the third set is ethnographic observations and the ninety-nine open-ended interviews (eighteen recorded and seventy-eight with handwritten notes) I did during my 7-month fieldwork in Beijing from April to October 2008. Although I had prepared a few topics for these interviews, 2008 turned out to be an unexpectedly eventful year: intensifying oppositional forces like “Dream for Darfur,” the high-pitched withdrawal of Steven Spielberg as an artistic adviser to the Games in February, the Tibet uprisings in March, worldwide anti-China and pro-China media contestations in April, and the disastrous Sichuan Earthquakes in May. These events, to various extents, left their traces on my interviews.

All interviews were conducted when I boarded a taxi as a passenger, sometimes with traveling companions. The length of our conversations depended on the traveling
distance and the traffic condition. I always started my interviews by telling taxi drivers about my research in Beijing and that I would be interested in talking with them about their lives. Before I asked if I could record our interviews, I would often make opening lines to see if the drivers were approachable for recorded interviews. Among the ninety-nine interviews I had conducted, six taxi drivers refused to talk to me entirely (by, for example, switching on the radio in high volume); and fifteen refused recording but were willing to converse with me. When drivers refused to be recorded, I always asked for the reasons. Here are some of their responses: “That is not necessary... Because I don’t know what you would use it for... I don’t know you,” “what do you want?” “I am only a taxi driver, I know nothing,” “I just don’t like it,” “I won’t feel comfortable, don’t know what to say,” etc. Requesting to record often had impacts on the “flow” of interviews (interviewees would usually become more conscious, and were cautious about what they said). Under circumstances like this, I would at times choose not to ask for recording and simply write down the key points during or after the taxi-rides. In addition, if the taxi-ride was not long, I also would choose not to make the recording request.

Case Study 4: Claiming the Past, Presenting the Present, Selling the Future: Imagining a New Beijing, Great Olympics

My analysis in this case study draws on two sets of corpus and my ethnographic observations. The first set consists of official representation tools published and sponsored by the Beijing Foreign Cultural Exchanges Association, the Information Office of Beijing Municipal Government, and the Beijing Tourism Administration. It includes three books, Beijing Official Guide (北京指南), Olympic City (奥运之城), and Get By in Beijing (走遍北京); an investment guide Beijing Investment Guide 2008–2009 (北京投资指南 2008–2009); and two maps, Map of Beijing: Beijing Welcomes You (北京地图: 北京欢迎您), and Map of Beijing (北京地图) (a three-dimensional map), both of which could be found online.45 The second set of corpus consists of four film clips about the city of Beijing produced by the Beijing Planning Exhibition Hall, entitled The City of Eternity (不朽之城), Today's Beijing (今日北京), 2008 Beijing Olympics (北京2008), and New Beijing (新北京).

Case Study 5: Learning to be Patriotic Citizens — A Case Study of Hong Kong

This case study looks at how programs produced by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), mediated the resinification processes during the 2008 Olympic Games and reports about the Olympics. My analysis is based chiefly on four Olympics-related television programs and a weekly documentary program on current affairs.\(^46\) The first program is an eight-episode series, *Glamour of Sport* (體育的風采), that was shown every Tuesday at 19.00, between December 26, 2006 and February 13, 2007, on the Cantonese channel of the Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB Jade, 無綫電視翡翠台).\(^47\) The second series is a ten-episode series, *Glamour of Sport — Events Capital* (體育的風采 — 盛事之都), shown every Saturday at 19.00 between Jan 12, 2008 and March 15, 2008 on TVB Jade.\(^48\) The third series is a six-episode series, *Glamour of Sport — Chinese Heritage* (體育的風采 — 體薈中華) broadcast every Saturday at 19.30, between July 5, 2008 and August 9.\(^49\) It was tagged as a “national education” program on RTHK’s website. This series heavily emphasized topics related to China, Chinese cultural heritage, sports history, and China’s contemporary development. It had the following themes: (1) Chinese sports philosophy and history; (2) China is no longer “the sick man of Asia”; (3) ethnic minorities, sports, and harmony; (4) horse-riding in China and its recent development; (5) unusual spirit — athletes with physical disabilities; and (6) the first in China (Olympic history in China).

These three programs were co-produced with a government organization — the Major Sports Events Committee (MSEC, 大型體育活動事務委員會).\(^50\) The fourth program, entitled *Olympic Highlights* (奧運回望), was a two-episode series about the Beijing Olympics, Olympics-related cultural activities, urban transformation, and life in Beijing. It was co-

\(^46\) RTHK has a special Olympic webpage *The Olympic Glamour* (奧運風采). Considering that the website is a different form of media and a vast amount of corpus has already been derived from RTHK’s television programs, I have decided not to focus on this website. For more information, see “The Glamour of the Olympics, RTHK: We are Ready [奧運風采香港電台: We are Ready].” RTHK. http://www.rthk.org.hk/special/beijingolympics/ (accessed on Jul 1, 2008).

\(^47\) TVB is the second commercial television channel and one of the free-to-air television broadcasters in Hong Kong. It has been broadcasting in Hong Kong since 1967.


produced with the HKSAR Home Affairs Bureau (香港特區政府民政事務局). The two episodes were broadcast at prime time (19:00–20:00) on October 5, 2008 and October 12, 2008, on the Cantonese channel of Asia Television Limited (ATV Home, 亞洲電視本港台).52

The fifth program is a 34-year-old (as to 2012) weekly documentary series Hong Kong Connection (鏗鏘集, hereafter HKC), this program discusses a variety of local and international issues. There were forty-two episodes in 2008. I have chosen nineteen relevant episodes for my analysis. Two of the episodes — “One World One Dream” (“同一世界同一夢想”, hereafter “One World”) and “Beijing under the Influence of the Olympics” (“奧運下的北京”, hereafter “Olympic Beijing”) — were directly related to the Olympic Games. Discourses surrounding the Olympics were not separated from topics related to China and Hong Kong-China relations. The series was shown weekly on Sunday at 19:30 and 22:00, on TVB Jade and Cable TV in 2008 respectively. This series also has an English version and is shown on Pearl, the English channel of TVB (無綫電視明珠台). All the programs were in Cantonese.

I have also included in this case study ethnographic observations in 2007 and 2008 (of which my readings of TVB’s recording in August 2008 and the newspaper Ming Pao [明報] were included),53 personal conversations with RTHK employees, and interviews with teachers and volunteers in Hong Kong to complement and elaborate on certain points I make.

REFLEXIVE ENQUIRY

51 The first episode was “Olympic Highlights — Sharing the Honor (奧運回望— 譽譽共享)”, broadcast on October 5, 2008; the second one was “Olympic Highlights — The Glamour of the People” (奧運回望—人民的風采), broadcast on October 12, 2008. http://programme.rthk.org.hk/rthk/tv/programme.php?name=olympichighlights&p=4296&m=archive&page=1&item=100 (accessed on Oct 16, 2009).
52 ATV is one of the two free-to-air television broadcasters in Hong Kong.
53 While I include my readings of these two media for discussion and comparison in issues related to RTHK’s programs, my focus is still on RTHK.
The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.  
(Foucault 1980a: 114)

Once in a conference presentation, I was asked by a British academic about my position in this research. He said that all of his Chinese students in Britain appeared to be very nationalistic. The students organized various pro-China activities, and they felt that they were attacked when China was severely criticized by the Western media in the spring of 2008. What he implied was that how I — as a Chinese — positioned myself; and whether my personal involvement would cloud my objectivity in this research. I felt the difficulty of speaking out loud my ambivalence; ambivalent because he, like many others, seemed to categorize all Chinese into an unquestionable identity. At that moment, I gave an academically correct response saying that I tried to remain “neutral” and take a critical stand in my research. Then, I continued to elucidate a little more, I added that my multiple identities — either imposed or self-identified — had not only allowed me but also forced me to engage in the complex and dynamic identity politics in various contexts; but how complex and dynamic? This did not seem to interest him and no more questions followed. This ambivalence is not only a momentary thought but something that has some significance in shaping the ways I approach this research. It played an indispensable part in my interactions with those I studied during my fieldwork. These identities are not confined to my national affiliation but I will begin with the question of my Chineseness.

In On not speaking Chinese, Ien Ang writes about the politics of identity: “if I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent. When and how is a matter of politics” (Ang 2001: 36). I could recognize Ien Ang’s ambivalence toward her Chineseness when she writes about her own experiences in living between Asia and the West. Related to the questions mentioned above, I did want to defend China when the Western media held prejudice toward China (though I could not agree with much of the pro-China behavior); and, when many people claimed the position of moral defenders to speak for the Chinese and yet did not know or were not even interested in China. This was
not because I felt primordially Chinese. Rather, it was an intellectual and emotional response derived from being in the West, to be precise, in the Netherlands.

Like many aliens, I am by law classified as a “non-Western” person; and in terms of physical appearance; I could not escape the fact that I look Asian, or Chinese to be precise. Being categorized and fixed as such means a lot of things, but it often points toward one direction: cultural differences. As Etienne Balibar reminds us, “culture can also function like a nature, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin” (1991: 21–22). These cultural differences are often reduced to something fundamental and therefore impossible to understand, which then lends its discursive power for the speakers to stop being curious and most importantly, to stop questioning their positions vis-à-vis the Other (thinking of questions such as in what sense are we different? Why are we different? Based on what grounds could one make this claim of difference? etc.). And, yet, when it comes to some hot topics like human rights, freedom of speech, and democracy, many in the West would feel electrified to speak for the underprivileged Other. When some scholars and journalists in the West take the moral high-ground to reveal the “ugly” and “covered-up” truth about China and claim their moral supremacy of helping and speaking out for the underprivileged, I find the power-relations involved in the politics of representation and the lack of self-enquiry highly problematic. In this context, this inescapable Chineseness has compelled me to engage with various questions related to China and the politics of representation between the West and the rest.

These relations of power play out differently in another context, namely between the China proper and the China margins, which include diasporic Chinese, as well as Chinese from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Beijing and mainland China are taken as the cultural and geopolitical centers of the sinic world, or what Tu Wei-Ming refers to as “Cultural China” (1994): The Chineseness they embody is not only authentic but also the proper one that all other forms of Chinesenesses are rendered inauthentic and of less importance. Once in a summer school, a white PhD student trained in Sinology told me in a self-proclaimed commonsensical manner that “Hong Kong is such a commercial city, without culture and depth! What’s there to be studied?” Academic practices and the popular imaginations of the West have helped fuel the advocacy for this proper Chineseness. During my fieldwork, Western journalists I met would selectively choose to
interview mainland Chinese because they represented “the original” voices the audiences expected to hear; while the other Chinese-es would be seen as secondary and, in some cases, lacking credibility. The alleged rise of China has strengthened this tilted interest: A large amount of research focuses on mainland China whereas other places such as Macau, Taiwan, or Hong Kong receive scant attention in the global academic world.

Being a self-identified Hong Kong person and speaking Cantonese as my first language, not the standard Chinese recognized by the world, my Chineseness was often called into question during my fieldwork. I often found myself trapped in situations where I needed to prove my “ethnic authenticity” (R. Chow 1998b: 12). I was told, often in a contemptuous manner, that Hong Kong people either spoke poor Mandarin or not at all, and they knew nothing about China. This was particularly peculiar when a white person was praised for speaking only a few words in Chinese. I was baffled. In displacing the other Chineseness-es, the speaker not only claimed his/her authority in speaking for China but also disciplined the other Chinese by marginalizing their ways of understanding China. This is the other reason I feel ambivalent toward my Chineseness: being fixed as a Chinese outside China and yet not being “pure” and “authentic” enough as a Chinese within the proper China.

Reading Rey Chow (1997), I warn myself against falling into the comfort of victimhood and remind myself of the need to interrogate my own position in relation to others. Maybe Hong Kong loses in the global battle of Chineseness but Hong Kong people still have a certain degree of dominance over the representation of their mainland counterparts within the territorial context, as shown in my Hong Kong case study. In fact, there are mutual prejudices between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese. Anthropologist Anton Blok, drawing on Freud’s notion of “the narcissism of minor differences,” seems to be right to pinpoint that “the fiercest struggles often take place between individuals, groups, and communities that differ very little — or between which the differences have greatly diminished” (1998: 33). This complexity in Chinese identity politics has warned me against tilting to one side, I was very alert in the ways I positioned myself in the fieldwork. On some occasions and social settings, I would choose to downplay my HongKongness.

My fieldwork experiences show the complexities and dynamics of identity politics. Chineseness may be a significant, and sometimes dominating, factor but it is not all.
Identity is not only multiple but also situational and intersectional. Intersectional, as proposed by Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 1995), is how a social relationship is played out by a multiplicity of relationships based on various identities. Class, age, gender, professional background, and the social setting intersect with national and regional identities. It also needs to be contextualized. A case in point is how the worldwide media contestations in the first quarter of 2008 marked their imprints on my research. Some interviewees such as taxi drivers would be more distrustful toward foreigners, especially Western journalists as the journalists were suspected of trying to get information to bad-mouth China. I was often asked if I was a journalist because I asked many questions and my Mandarin accent revealed that I was not an “authentic” Chinese. Being a female (gender aspect) student (profession and social position) from Hong Kong sometimes helped ease suspicion and helped create topics of conversation. Women are largely identified as softer, easier, and more domestic. Many people would hold similar perception toward a female researcher/student, seeing them as less threatening to the social orders. In other situations, male interviewees would also talk more as they felt that they needed to “teach” or “guide” their female counterparts.

In some cases, the idea that we were all Chinese seemed to lessen suspicion and to give the impression that we all shared the same goal: “Of course, the Olympics Games is a matter of national pride. You are also like us Chinese no?! We should be proud of our motherland,” or, “These Olympic Games are not only important for China, but also for all overseas Chinese!” In other cases, taxi drivers would ask questions about Hong Kong, or make comparisons between Hong Kong and Beijing. At times, my foreignness — being a self-identified Hong Kong person living in the Netherlands — would work in favor of my research. Interviewees and Beijingers I talked to would often express interest in and curiosity about life in Hong Kong and the Netherlands. At times, I was told that outsiders (foreigners) had higher **suzhi** (素质, literally translated to English as human quality, a discourse I discuss in greater detail later in chapter 5) than Chinese within the PRC — kinder, friendlier, and less hierarchical to people. I was told that mainland Chinese, if without any background (背景) and connection (关系), would encounter more challenges in conducting research in China. These situational contexts reveal that knowledge produced in interviews is never complete, and it is open to contestations and should be subjected to critical reflections.
Ang writes, “the displayed self is a strategically fabricated performance, one which stages a useful identity, and identity which can be put to work” (2001: 24). Identity could also be understood as a performance of identities, sometimes conscious and sometimes not. On various occasions during my fieldwork, I recognized that I needed to position my identity according to the social interaction. It paralleled that of picking suitable clothes for the right occasions but one that I would need to feel comfortable with. This, however, does not mean that it is value-free because I need to question myself: “What is the identity being put forward for?” (Ang, 2001: 24) When do I identify myself as a Chinese person? To what extent could I claim my Chineseness? What defines my Chineseness? How do I articulate my Chineseness? What defines my Hong Kong identity? Could I speak for the people I studied? Could I speak for China? And, could I speak for Hong Kong?

Foucault’s works have shown how knowledge-production is never free of power-relations. Even with the best intentions of claiming a neglected voice in the research area, I would still need to be held accountable for speaking for the people I studied. This research would become part of the larger corpus about China, information and knowledge that could be collected and would contribute to the discourses about China and of China — regardless of my position. Similarly, while I critique the tilted research interest on China proper, I cannot ignore the fact that this research is one focusing on the mystic but politically and economically powerful state — China. This research is made possible by this tilted interest, that is, the critique I have posed here.