China rejuvenated? Governmentality, subjectivity, and normativity: the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games
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CHAPTER 8 EPILOGUE

Four years have gone by and the 2012 London Olympics are going to take place this summer. The 2008 Beijing Games do feel like something that have happened not long ago; yet, many would disagree with me. In fact, the significance of the 2008 Games has diminished drastically — not only in China but across the globe — once the 17-day summer Olympics drew the curtains. I first came to realize the time- and topic-sensitive nature of this research project and the academic world when I submitted an article to an academic journal by the fall of 2009. I was told that no scholars wanted to review the article because the research topic was out of date topic and so many articles and books have been written on the Beijing Games already. After nearly three years, I visited Beijing again in April 2011. When I talked to the residents, I often got responses saying that the Olympic was a thing of the past. “Time and tide wait for no man”; the global interests in a single mega-event are equally cruel and short-lived.

This research might have started as an Olympic project but as it proceeded over the last few years, the central questions that have come up on governing strategies, tactics, and discourses; the formation of subjectivities; the processes of subjectification; and the examination of power-relations are not confined to the Olympics per se. This is something I argue throughout this dissertation. The 2008 Beijing Games provided a prism to study the governmentalization of the nation-state: not the end-result of an exceptional event. The research findings of this dissertation should not be reduced to something concerning merely and only the Olympics and China studies. All the questions I have engaged with are not limited to China but are relevant to other research studies on governance, nation-building, nationalism, the quest for modernity, the cultural politics of identity, the politics of sex/gender/body, urbanity, and the role of media and technology in these investigation.
This dissertation is a direct product of what appeared to be an (un)timely start of a research. When it started, the Olympics were only a few months away. This time constraint meant that I had little time to start my research with literature review. Instead of planning ahead what I should do and therefore preoccupied with a set of ideas about my research areas, I started this project with literally a piece of blank paper. Looking at it retrospectively, the insecurity of taking on a PhD project, coupled with a sense of nervousness in approaching the research subject with empty hands, has worked in my favor. Insecurity and nervousness made me stay alert and attentive to everything about the Olympics — including what seemed to be the most irrelevant. As mentioned in the Introduction, this dissertation chooses to study the gravely overlooked and neglected micro-aspects of the Olympic studies, that is, the everyday social life. These thematic choices were direct products of what seemed to be an untimely start. Given this unconventional beginning, it is important to note that the case studies were not written in chronological order but developed and ordered in the course of writing up this dissertation.

Now, let me summarize the preceding chapters. In the Introduction, I have stated my central arguments, research questions, and research focus. One of my aims is to write against the commonly perceived idea that the Chinese government maintains its rule through the deployment of negative power. I argue that the CCP rules primarily through motivating, guiding, and directing its people to act as autonomous subjects so that they can help achieve the state’s desired ends in the most economical and efficient ways. The state not only sought to have the whole population’s support for the Olympics but, more importantly, it sought to ensure that the Olympics could help secure the state’s governance. I have demonstrated the various strategies, tactics, and discourses mobilized by the state to achieve its desired ends. The discourse of China’s great rejuvenation is an encompassing and tactical discourse that brings together the discourse of national humiliation and the discourse of pride and glory. Through projecting this collective hope of a great rejuvenation, the CCP presents itself as the legitimate and capable leader that brings the people a promising China. The CCP also makes use of media and technology as governmental technologies that help identify the population’s interests and guide its population. Yet, how effectively they can function depends largely on how they correspond to the self-technologies that govern and guide the operation of media practices. The mobilization of Chinese history and culture, and the discursive construction of “proper”
Chineseness assign a set of cultural norms and values to a subject that enables the state to manage and arrange its population.

The case studies are structured around different segments of the population: the athletes (gendered norms assigned and embodied by Chinese men and women), the volunteers (the youth), Beijing taxi drivers (the urbanites), the Beijingers and Chinese (how place-making shapes the population’s view toward the past, the present, and the future), and lastly, the population in the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. Each of these cases helps demonstrate how specific governing procedures are formulated and mobilized to organize the population in such ways that each individual bears his/her specific responsibilities and acts as a self-governing subject, which enables optimal governance. Yet, as I have also shown, inscribed in the grammar of these strategies of governmentality are the possibilities or resistance, subversion, or dismissal.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the methodologies used in this dissertation and my attempt to overcome the respective dangers of empiricism and theoreticism related to social sciences and humanities. I emphasize that I did not conduct fieldwork with an aim to look for the “truth”; rather, I conducted fieldwork because it is a helpful way to learn about the research area through exposure and experience. On equal footing are theoretical texts, which are being the important and indispensable tools that guide me to dissect the corpus and explore what I encountered in the field. In concluding this chapter, I have provided a reflexive enquiry upon my position as a researcher in the field, in the hope of shedding light on the cultural politics and the identity practices involved in conducting this research.

The first case study, chapter 3, looks at how history and politics intersect with gender. It seeks to explain why such significance has been assigned to sports in general and the Olympics in particular. I have shown how the historicity of China’s traumatic past — how it fell prey to the Western imperialists — has allowed the state to draw on the biopolitical discourse that links its subjects’ physical, mental, and moral attributes to that of the survival and revival of a Chinese nation (Sigley 2004). I have drawn on Judith Butler’s (1993) concept of performativity to examine the gendered norms embodied by three sets of male and female athletes of three Olympic moments. Through ritualized and repetitive performance of the gendered and bodily images embodied by these athletes, sets of gendered ideals were regulated and regularized as the ideal archetypes and gradually normalized as the standards according to the need of the time they represented.
Representing post-Qing revolutionary China, Liu Changchun and Yang Xiuguang embodied China’s pursuit of modernization and its determination to shake off the traditions; the bodily image and the gendered norms they sought to represent were those that followed the image of the West. In the post-opening up period, China sought to mark its presence in the global arena; the ideal manliness and femaleness embodied by Li Ning and Lang Ping were defined by the glory they brought to the nation. Gender differences were downplayed, and their bodies and corporeal expressions were highly regulated. After more than thirty years of reforms, contemporary China sought to showcase its confidence and strength; the masculinity embodied by Liu Xiang was confident and bright whereas the femininity embodied by Guo Jingjing was not only confident but also stressed feminine physical beauty, signifying that China was as modern as the West. These athletes served as the models for the Chinese men and women in the nation’s struggles of defining itself vis-à-vis the imagined and powerful Other. This case has demonstrated, first, how the state operated in and along a set of existing discourses and practices as it capitalized and recycled the long-standing national burden/trauma to its advantages. Second, it shows that what entitled the state to rule were not so much its laws and regulations but rather its management of the population through indirect and diverse means.

During the 2008 Games, I was struck by the omnipresent smiling faces and emphasis on positive emotions shown by the Beijing Olympic volunteers. This experience urged me to trace and study the governing tactics and discourses underpinning the Olympic Volunteer program in chapter 4. Through examining the official volunteer promotion materials, I argue that these positive images evoked their power from the less visible governing tactics and discourses. Instead of emphasizing China’s traumatic past explicitly, the governmental discourse turned around by stressing the “bright” aspects of “dream” and “glory” to boost the subjects’ confidence and belief in modern China, and the intimate association of this discourse to a well-organized Olympics. This discourse of hosting a great Olympics was largely motivated by the national desire to gain face, to be recognized by the world. To seek this international recognition, the discourse of not to lose face that employed the tactics of shame was mobilized to discipline and guide the volunteers to act presentably for the nation. Here, we see how China’s humiliating past is such a resourceful discourse that the state can tap into in seemingly endless ways. The
discursive ideals of volunteerism and the ways these volunteers were guided to act parallel that of the model citizens the CCP has sought to promote since its establishment.

The Olympics are not only about history and politics but are also related to the material setting — in this case, the city of Beijing. Chapter 5 and chapter 6 attend to two aspects of the Olympic city: the urbanites and the representation of Beijing. In chapter 5, I have drawn on Walter Benjamin’s concept of the flâneur (1969) to give center stage to the urbanites, Beijing taxi drivers, to see how they narrated Olympics-led urban development and China hosting the Olympics. Many studies have examined the rapid urban changes of Beijing. These studies often neglect the local dwellers’ opinions. The Olympics have subjected taxi drivers to a series of government-initiated civility campaigns. The drivers’ direct association with the image of the city was recognized but not acknowledged as their opinions were hardly taken seriously in the society. This case study tries to redeem their neglected voices and to show how these subjects intersected with governmental technologies and diverse discourses that in turn formed and defined the ways they experienced and narrated their everyday life. For instance, when many studies critique the Olympics-led urban changes, claiming that they bring only undesirable effects to the people and China, the taxi drivers’ stories reveal that they saw these changes as a sign of progress and that China was a step closer to the developed West. Similarly, they might complain about strict and demanding Olympics-related trainings, but the worldwide media contestations helped instigate their nationalistic sentiments. They also claimed that raising people’s suzhi was crucial to make China look good. This chapter shows how the state mobilized diverse tactics to specific groups for their specific roles and responsibilities, and how these technologies of government were negotiated in turn by the taxi drivers themselves.

The Olympics offered a crucial moment of memory-making and this process involved making use of the materiality of the city. In chapter 6 I have examined how Beijing’s past, present, and future were re-designed and re-presented to shape people’s views about the city, China, and Chineseness. Abbas’ concept of disappearance (1997) is used to argue that the changes that had taken place were not so much about absence or non-presence but were rather a matter of misrecognition. The remaking of Qianmen was an attempt to re-create an imaginary of a cultural and historic China that was reminiscent of the popular filmic images of Chinatown — exotic and eye-catching, yet devoid of any
troubling historical references. The Olympic Green presented an ideal image of what the present China wanted to be — a cosmopolitan China; yet, this cosmopolitan-ness was made possible by selectively remembering the positive aspects and selectively forgetting the controversial and negative aspects such as the tight security measures and the moving of the migrant workers back home. The catchphrase of “New Beijing” projected the image of what the future Beijing and China would look like: promising and filled with hope. Based on future imaginations of the city in promotion films, the image that I have analyzed projected a tidy and technologically advanced China. This case reveals that place-making shapes the subject’s perception of the self and the other; place thus constitutes one dimension of the process whereby an individual becomes a Chinese subject who bears the duties and the visions of the nation.

While the preceding case studies focus on the China “proper,” the last case in chapter 7 has presented, to some extent, an odd case. It is unusual in the sense that Hong Kong is a newly acquired Special Administrative Region, a place and a people torn between its Chineseness and its colonial past in its endless struggles of defining its subjectivity. In keeping with my central inquiries, I examine, first, what kinds of governmental technologies were put forward; second, how they intersected with the existing beliefs and practices in the territory; and third, how subjectivity had been formed through media practices. Here, I have examined two sets of RTHK programs: the government co-produced Olympic programs and a documentary-current affairs program. In negotiating its position as a public servant of the HKSAR government and as a public broadcaster, RTHK mobilized tactics that brought in the local, the familiar, and the positive benefits. Although these RTHK programs managed to perform a sanitized and idealized version of Chineseness, they have also injected specific and potentially troubling articulation of a Hong Kong subjectivity in these negotiation tactics. The documentary-current affairs program HKC tried to live up to the discursive ideals of impartiality and advocacy for freedom of expression. Its narrative tactics, even though attempting to soothe the divide and introduce the thematic idea of accepting differences, have reproduced and sustained the us/them divide. The ways in which RTHK mediated the Olympics show that the state does not possess an encompassing power, nor does it control Hong Kong through negative power. On the contrary, the state recognizes the specificity and particularity of Hong Kong, and capitalizes on this particularity when formulating governing strategies.
The state operates in and along the existing discourses and practices that govern Hong Kong. This also explains why the seemingly conflicting discourses — one that emphasizes the importance of China to Hong Kong in contrast to one that emphasizes resisting the encroachment of China — coexist in today’s Hong Kong.

In what follows, I want to address and discuss several questions I have raised throughout this dissertation. I begin with a discussion on Foucault and China, namely the cultural politics involved in doing this research. Here, I will also attend to the questions on what Foucault does to China and what China does to Foucault. One question that lingers on in China studies is the question of the state, and I will re-address this by posing questions and challenges in the persistent emphases of the oppositional relationship between the state and the people, and the use of coercion and ideology. After this is a short summary of limitations and critiques on Foucault’s analytical approach, followed by a detailed discussion addressing the critiques and the question of resistance. I conclude this epilogue with a discussion of the role of the IOC. How China used the 2008 Olympics to instigate national belongings is not an isolated and special case; I discuss how the IOC, and its rules and regulations have given a hand in making the Olympics a stage for the state to do so.

FOUCAULT AND CHINA

I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area. . . . I don’t write for an audience. I write for users, not readers.


Over the course of this research, I have been confronted with several crucial questions regarding the state and governance, the processes of subjectification and subjectivity, and above all, questions related to power. Among the theoretical approaches I have read, Foucault’s works have been helpful tools guiding me out of a labyrinth of
questions. My intuitive response to the use of Foucaultian ideas lies in practicality and availability. If I were able to find an analytical tool in Chinese literature, I would no doubt have used it. Nonetheless, this pragmatism is not a simple matter of choice but one that deserves elaboration and critical reflection. Why do I apply Foucault's works to China? I recall that I was asked whether Foucault, whose works are based on analyses drawn from studying European histories, was a valid tool to explain things happening in a different geohistorical and cultural setting. On other occasions, I was asked why I was using a Western idea to understand China. Wouldn’t it be more appropriate and suitable to use Chinese writings to understand China? In what follows, I will first foreground the cultural politics involved in writing up this research and in responding to the above questions. Then, I seize this discussion to follow on and reflect upon questions on what Foucault does to China and what China does to Foucault.

A thread running through these questions is the insistence on the discursive differences of China, in Rey Chow’s words, “that is geographically deterministic and hence culturally essentialist” (1993b: 7). Even with discourses that advocate “care” and “attentiveness,” like the rhetoric of multiculturalism, this benign emphasis of placing China in context could not shrug off the problematic and reductive Orientalistic ideas as reflected in Said’s works (1978; 2001); and shared by many cultural critics (read, for example, Benhabib 2002; Ang 2001). “China is different” is a discourse held and practiced by various actors — both the natives as well as their counterparts — with various interests at stake. Sometimes, the discourse is articulated to resist the Orientalistic view; yet, regrettably, as Shih Shu-mei points out, “an anti-Orientalist gesture can slip into a reconfirmation of Orientalism” (2007: 82–83). This claim on difference would often lead one to demand a special reading for a special context — Chinese theory for China! Doing otherwise would generate questions like authenticity, betrayal, unfaithfulness, and, at times, would be criticized for lacking “Chineseness,” selling-out, Westernized, and being an imperialized subject siding with the imperial West (R. Chow 1993b). Often, this critique would reinforce the discourse that only “real” Chinese can understand what China is, who China is, and therefore can speak for China (R. Chow 1998b). Think, for instance, of a Dutch researcher studying governance in the Netherlands, s/he would not bear this ethnic burden; rarely would s/he be confronted with questions like “Would a Dutch theory not be
more useful to understand the Netherlands?” or be judged as selling out to the others, or even upon his ethnic authenticity.

The cultural politics implicated in writing and representing China and Chineseness involves great complexity. It demands one to question and reflect on “the nature and extent of the self-interestedness involved” in our own research (1993b), on the one hand; and on the other hand, it requires one to resist, what Rey Chow posits, “a violence which works by the most deeply ingrained feelings of ‘bonding’” (1993b: 25). For the latter, R. Chow proposes “writing diaspora” — “to unlearn that submission to one’s ethnicity such as ‘Chineseness’” (ibid.; emphasis in the original) — as tactics that challenge this cultural politics of Chineseness. To this I would like to quote Ang Lee’s words with regard to representing Chineseness:

With *Crouching Tiger*, for example, the subtext is very purely Chinese. But you have to use Freudian or Western techniques to dissect what I think is hidden in a repressed society — the sexual tension, the prohibited feelings. Otherwise you don’t get that deep. Some people appreciate it; others don’t because it twists the genre. It’s not ‘Chinese’. But to be more Chinese you have to be westernized, in a sense. You’ve got to use that tool to dig in there and get at it.224

Regardless of what Lee means by “more Chinese” or “Westernized,” what I read from his words is a tactic resonating with Rey Chow, that is, one needs to break out of the limiting and confining ethnic- and nation-bonding of Chineseness so as to understand the subject of investigation.

My second response to why I am not using a Chinese theory lies in the cultural politics of the global knowledge-production. Informed by Foucault’s notion of power and discursive analysis, Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) shows that the West’s domination of the Other is not solely a matter of materiality but is also manifested in its ways of managing knowledge production. This domination is laid bare in today’s geopolitical inequalities in knowledge-production; for example, English is seen as the lingua franca in the academic

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world and proficiency in English is indispensable (Chow, de Kloet, and Leung 2010). Not only is this domination in terms of language, knowledge produced in the West has set the standard that structures, measures, and shapes today’s knowledge-production. As Dipesh Chakrabarty writes about the representation of India’s histories:

‘Europe’ remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call ‘India’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Kenyan’, and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called ‘the history of Europe’. (1992: 490)

Knowledge produced elsewhere is often rendered as the auxiliary to Europe, or the West. Europe/the West claims this center stage where knowledge is disseminated to the other places — the others always learn from Europe/the West, not vice versa. The knowledge produced by the non-West is treated as insignificant. This, however, does not justify the insistence of using Chinese theory on China as means of “resistance” and “counter-hegemony.” Rather, this could very well lead to a victim-cum-narcissistic sinocentrism (R. Chow 1998b) that draws boundaries, blocks possibilities of communication, and, worse of all and unfortunately, reinforces the essentialized great divide.

**What China Does to Foucault? What Foucault Does to China?**

Why Foucault? What would be the limitations? In particular, what does Foucault do to China? Perhaps, more interestingly, what does China do to Foucault? Before addressing these questions, I would like to address some important points why Foucault would be useful here. Foucault’s works are not about writing and revealing “the truth” or “the fact” about a particular setting and therefore only useful for a particular geohistorical context. Recurrent in his research projects are his critique and challenge of the claims on truth and normalized fact that render alternative views marginal. He argues against theorizing the notion of power and in doing so, assigning “power” a status equal to universality. This explains why he calls it “analytics of power” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 184). Foucault indicates on various occasions that his interest lies in tracing “the general mode of thinking
Despite Foucault’s critical efforts and his perceptiveness, his analyses do raise questions, and I would like to address some of these immediate concerns to the subject of Foucault and China. Foucault has been criticized for being Eurocentric (read, for instance, R. Chow 2002; Stoler 1995; Young 1995; A. Ong 2005). Considering the weight that race and colonialism played in European histories, it is intriguing and compelling for one to question why and how Foucault could choose not to address colonialism or remain ambiguous toward the subject of racism (read, for instance, R. Chow 2002; Stoler 1995; Young 1995). To quote Rey Chow,

[Foucault’s] discussion of biopower and its institutional implementation could easily have taken him beyond the confines of European territories into Europe’s colonized lands overseas, where such implementation became a systematic effort to subjugate and exploit local native populations, in the bulk of his work Foucault did not exactly push beyond those limits. (2002: 8)

Much of Foucault’s discussion on the formation of subjectification, processes of objectification, and his interrogation of power/knowledge could easily bring his analyses beyond Europe; yet, he did not. Feminist Nancy Hartsock argues that Foucault is comparable to “the colonizer who resists” (1990: 164). Despite his criticality, Foucault, in Jan Teurlings’ words, “is too enmeshed in the power relationship he is critical of” (2004: 43).

In addition, Foucault’s understanding of the Other, despite his criticality in his various works, seems to be so uncritically Eurocentric and Orientalistic. To give an example, in an interview about Zen, Foucault talks about his impression of Japan:

For me, from the point of view of technology, a way of life, the appearance of social structure, Japan is extremely close to the Western World. At the same time
the inhabitants of this country seem in every way a lot more mysterious compared with those of all other countries in the world. (Carrette 1999: 110–11)

Elsewhere, in discussing the Iranian Revolution, he sees it as “an absolutely collective will” and contrasts it with European ones (Young 1995). As R. Chow suggests, his critical efforts could easily have brought him to interrogate these Eurocentric and Orientalistic perceptions of the others and looking beyond Europe could have contributed a great deal to his works; and yet, he did not.

Some of his followers not only overlook this limitation of Foucault without critical reflection; they would even assign Foucault’s analyses with a universality that Foucault himself seems to argue against. Studies of governmentality, as Sigley (2007) and Kipnis (2008) have pointed out, have largely failed to look at non-Western and non-liberal contexts; also, these studies often seem to see “the West’ as the sole determining referent” (Sigley 2007: 491). Take the discussion of Mitchell Dean on governmentality for example, he writes:

How we think about governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of contexts. In a more limited sense, the different ways governing is thought about in the contemporary world and which can in large be traced to Western Europe from the sixteenth century. Such forms of thought have been exported to large parts of the globe owing to colonial expansion and the post-colonial set of international arrangements of a system of sovereign states. (1996: 209–10)

Governmentality is a perceptive analytical tool; yet, in terms of the rationalities of government, as I mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the three governing ideals — Glory, Truth, and Benevolence — mentioned by Shue (2004 and 2010) and the Confucian way of governance share striking similarities to Foucault’s governmentality. Governmentality should not be seen as something originating in the West (Sigley 2007). Andrew B. Kipnis (2008), in his discussion of neoliberal governmentality, has critically engaged with this lack of comparative studies and Eurocentricism by pointing out how various cultures also promote self-disciplined and self-acting subjects, like Confucius, Mao Zedong, and
Mahatma Gandhi. It is important to note, by saying that Confucianism shares certain rationalities of government is not the same as saying Confucianism equals to governmentality. What I think comes close to governmentality in the Chinese context is what Kipnis suggests, “In addition to being authoritarian and neoliberal, Chinese governance is also Confucian, Legalist and Daoist, especially as one moves away from the state and into the realms by which Chinese people govern themselves, their relationships, and their families” (2007: 397). In other words, instead of one rationality, there are multifarious rationalities involved in governing a population.

Yet, one should not throw the baby out with the water; these limitations should not negate the perceptiveness offered by Foucault’s analyses. On the contrary, it is important to acknowledge these blind spots so that future studies can supplement and modify Foucault’s analyses. What China does to Foucault is to insist on a self-reflective inquiry on Eurocentrism and to be aware of the asymmetric relations in knowledge-production, under which “the ‘non-West’ has been relegated to a series of footnotes in the history of Western political reasoning per se” (Sigley 2007: 490). That also means highlighting the importance of comparative studies. What Foucault does to China, similarly, requires one to question a Sinocentrism that overemphasizes its diverging difference from the world.

QUESTION OF THE STATE

The ways in which the state manages its population from within is one of the central questions I have tried to tackle throughout this research. China as a case study, an object, a field for my investigation is a politicized subject. The relentless interest in this specifically “Chinese” state is not only fueled by today’s grand discourse of an allegedly rising China (Sigley 2007) but also largely and inexorably related to the knowledge production of the Other, as Said’s Orientalism (1978) and Rey Chow’s account of the relationship between area studies as a discipline and the post-WWII foreign policy of the U.S. remind us (1993a, 1993b). To recall Foucault’s formulation of power/knowledge once again, “the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (1980c: 52). Power and knowledge are inseparable. China as the subject of my inquiry would often be bracketed and compartmentalized as “a ‘distinct’ territory with a distinct history” (R. Chow 1993b: 7) and is differentiated from any inquiry related to the state and governance. As alluded to above, that also leads to studies
of governmentality that bypass China in their analyses. This bias leads one to overlook the mechanisms at work and clouds one’s judgments in examining questions related to China and the Chinese state.

**Problems Raised in the State Approach**

One popular and dominating view, which is also advocated by many specialists in China studies, sees the state as *solely* an authoritarian, totalitarian government that maintains power through the use of force and ideologies (see, for example, Anne-Marie Brady 2003, 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; and Brady and Wang 2009). In terms of theoretical approach, many resort to the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Gramsci 2007 [1971]) to explain this state-people dynamic (see, for example, A. Chan 2010; Fairbrother 2008; Tse 2007; X. Zhang 2011a, 2011b). The problems of such an analytical approach are many, of which I can only mention a few here. First, the dominating role occupied by the state and the notion of class domination, as in Gramsci’s hegemony (2007 [1971]), have insisted that power is possessed by the powerful few and is therefore lacking in the hands of the vulnerable majority. It contends that power is negative and repressing as it features violence, prohibition, control, and censorship. It overlooks the microphysics of power.

Through Foucault’s notion of power-relations and based on my analysis in my case studies, I try to show that power is not “a relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance it has no other option but to try to minimize it” (Foucault 1982: 220). Power *produces* and is disseminated throughout society, in a huge number of micro-centers; and is exercised “at the level of daily life” (Foucault 1980d: 59). These mechanisms of power-relations not only challenge class domination but also the assumption of clear-cut class-division in society, and that one can clearly discern the unifying class interests of each class.

Second, the maintenance of the state relies not on gaining the subjects’ psychological consent or contractual/negotiated relationship between classes and groups, as the Gramscian hegemony suggests (Bennett 1998: 69; Lemke 2007). Psychological consent is not only an abstract and vague concept, it also fails to see the complex processes of governing. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued again and again how the state is not only aware of but also attends to the needs, interests, and concerns of the people when
devising its strategies and tactics. As a matter of fact, people’s consent to the rule of the state is best understood as the result of the state’s successful deployment of strategic and tactical relations in managing the population from within in endless possible ways.

Third, the emphasis on ideology (to acquire consent) and seeing the state as ruling with ideological rhetoric lack analytical power when the idea of ideology assumes that there is a hidden truth waiting to be exposed and resisted. It also gives too much importance to the subjects’ consciousness as if some are “gifted” to tell right from wrong and therefore take actions to resist. The rest of the population would then be considered “fooled” or “brainwashed” by the powerful ruling bloc. Foucault’s concept of discourse, which avoids the idea of truth but also brings to light power-relations and how power and resistance are inseparable, is a better analytical tool. Again, there is no single dominating ideology that simply controls; instead, sets of intertwining discourses crisscross each other to make people act the ways they do. Many criticize Olympics-led development and may see those people who read urban development as a sign of progress as being brainwashed by the state and capitalist ideology; but as I have demonstrated in chapter 5, one should be warned against such clear-cut conclusion, and be aware how this discourse gains its discursive power through the intersection of various historical and cultural discourses.

Fourth, in relation to the role of media, the Gramscian approach takes the media as merely the “organs of public opinion” (Gramsci 2007 [1971]: 80) that are manipulated by the dominant classes to win the active consent of the majority.\(^{225}\) This, again, assumes a one-way top-down relation. It not only essentializes the role of media but also fails to look at the complexity and dynamics played out by the media (Bennett 1998; S. Hall 2009 [1982]) and, to emphasize once again, the microphysics of power. In terms of governmentality, the state’s use of media or mediation would be one of the means, instruments, and tactics of governance mobilized by the state. The discourses and governmental tactics mediated by the media do not have such “originality”; in fact, they intersect with a wide array of existing discourses and practices. Consider, for example, the mediatized message of volunteerism, it does not acquire its discursive power *merely* from the media; similarly, the discourse of patriotism might be widely disseminated through the media but the media alone do not produce this discourse. In a word, it runs a grave danger

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\(^{225}\) In Gramsci’s words, “the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion — newspapers and associations — which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied” (2007 [1971]: 80).
to assign too much “power” to the media or, equally, to brush it off as the mouthpiece of the state.

**The State and Governmentality**

The Chinese state, as a single-party state coming to power not by democratic election, is a “non-liberal” state; yet, it is a fallacy to assume that since liberty and freedom, the discursive cores of “liberal societies,” are denied and the subjects cannot be autonomous, the ways the state exercises power must be authoritarian and must be through the use of negative sovereign power. Based on this duality of “liberal” and “non-liberal,” the state is erroneously bracketed-off. Similarly, Jeffery T. Nealon argues that Foucault does not deny the exercise of the negative forms of power, but they are not the focus that Foucault wants to attend to. Nealon writes:

> It is not those “negative” functions of power that Foucault is particularly interested in studying. This is the case not, I would argue, because he thinks that brute force or sovereign power has been eradicated, or that directly contesting raw deployments of power is ineffectual . . . (2008: 37)

The use of negative power such as authoritarian and sovereign measures is practiced all along with the “liberal” rationalities of governance, as Barry Hindness (2001) and Mitchell Dean (2002) point out. That is to say, negative power should never be seen as something practiced only by the “non-liberal” state. In his book *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, Dean writes about the similarities in the exercises of power (biopolitics, pastoral power, and sovereign power) in both liberal and non-liberal forms of governance; yet, he does not push the limits to include the non-Western contexts in his studies (1999: 131–48). In recognizing these similarities between the liberal and the non-liberal, the West and the non-West, I argue that “the Chinese state” should not be bracketed-off and therefore marked as different. What concerns the Chinese state and how it operates applies equally to the other states. Similarly, inquiries about the power of the Chinese state should not be treated differently from other states.
Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated that the state does not possess “the whole field of actual power relations” (Foucault 1984c: 64). Foucault’s analytics of power, being both intentional and nonsubjective, shed light on this aspect. Power-relations have aims and objectives, like the state targets to manage its population. As power is never possessed by anyone or any institutions, it is nonsubjective. Power is relational, meaning that individuals participate in it. These individuals may make conscious and calculated decisions and yet, their actions would only constitute a node of a network of power-relations in the larger social, political, or cultural system. In a word, how power functions is beyond one’s control. From a Foucaultian point of view (1991a), the power of the state never has this ability to supersede and control everything. The state itself needs to operate in and along with the larger system of power-relations.

In light of the persistent emphasis on the power of the state, and seeing the state as a stable and pre-given institutional structure, Foucault argues:

But the state, no more probably today than at any other time in its history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor, to speak frankly, this importance; maybe, after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think. Maybe what is really important for our modernity — that is, for our present — is not so much the etatisation [stratification] of society, as the ‘governmentalization’ of the state. (Foucault 1991: 103; emphasis in the original)

The “governmentalization” of the state compels one to think and examine how the state, with a multitude of institutions and ideas, comes to be understood as a political entity overseeing and regulating the whole society and the population. The term “governmentalization” suggests that the state is not a preconfigured entity. The state cannot take its position for granted; it works toward its goal of managing the population in an exponential limitless way. As such, the state should be conceived as a series of contingent processes intertwining with a whole field of power-relations.

The example of how the CCP and its officials incorporate, adopt, and perform the ideals of governance on benevolence, truth, and glory demonstrates two aspects of the
state: First, it bears no pre-given totalizing power as it is required to re-work and reinvent its governing practices; and second, the state’s seemingly structural consistency throughout history should be understood “as an emergent and complex resultant of conflicting and contradictory governmental practices” (Lemke 2007: 10) and “a lived and embodied experience, a mode of existence” (ibid.: 7). The 150 years of colonial rule in Hong Kong have created this “gap” of embodied experiences and a different mode of existence that has compelled the state to learn and adjust its governing strategies and tactics. The contesting discourses generated in the mediation of Olympic reports demonstrate the differences existing between Hong Kong and China and also the limit of the state, at least in the year of 2008. The case study of Hong Kong shows that the state does not possess this “metapower” that allows it to simply “control” and insert its will on the people; and that, in its desire to secure its place in the society and successfully manage the population, is itself obliged to consider the desire and welfare of the population.

This mentioned, in showing the ways in which the state has successfully deployed discourses, tactics, and strategies to achieve its governing objectives and maintain its rule, this dissertation seems to point toward the direction that the state is very capable of managing its population. The question that will come to mind is how one should understand this seemingly paradoxical argument about the state — not being the “metapower” and yet in many ways seems to suggest that it is very successful in mobilizing the people — and, in following this line of inquiry, how one should understand “power” beyond its generative aspect. In addition, how should one conceptualize “resistance”? These questions require me to engage with some of the critiques on Foucault’s analyses in connection with the notion of resistance.

CRITIQUE

Foucault’s works have drawn a lot of criticisms. I will mention below those I find most relevant to my dissertation and discuss them in connection with the notion of resistance. Foucault’s suspicion of any forms of “objective” knowledge, truth, and norms have made him refrain from passing normative judgment — good or bad, oppressive or progressive — on the ideas of freedom, justice, and human rights, etc. (McLaren 2002). In addition, according to Foucault, power-relations are not good or bad (2002 [1983]) but are chains of action that generate and direct actions. In that case, one could easily be led to
read power as a neutral concept of “force” (Teurlings 2004: 40), or what Stuart Hall describes as a “behaviorists” approach (quoted in Teurlings 2004: 40), or what Patton criticizes as being a “descriptive analysis of power” (Patton 1998, quoted in Teurlings 2004: 40). In addition, Hartstock (1990) claims that Foucault fails to account for unequal power-relations. In brief, many criticize Foucault’s works for a lack of normative framework (read, for example Habermas 1987; Dews 1987; Hartsock 1990) and question the potential of his analyses in generating political or social changes.

Indeed, although Foucault’s works are largely about revealing the processes of subjectification and objectification, he does not seem to offer concrete solutions for social and political changes. Many also argue that resistance is under-theorized in his works (McLaren 2002: 49). Even though Foucault writes that resistance is implicated in all power-relations, that is, virtually everywhere, the notion of resistance remains abstract and he does not write much about it, as Seyla Benhabib argues: “For Foucault every act of resistance is but another manifestation of an omni-present discourse-power complex” (1992: 222). Critics argue that Foucault does not seem to answer the questions of whether power encompasses everything and is everywhere, or how resistance is possible, or, under what circumstances a moment of mutation would take place.

In his oeuvre, Foucault has been critical of social institutions, officially sanctioned knowledge (e.g. history, medical science, etc.), and norms; yet critics argue that Foucault writes and understands the world from the angle of the dominator or even the colonizer (Hartsock 1990; McLaren 2002; Teurlings 2004). Much of his analyses is based on these sets of knowledge that he is critical of; and in analyzing them, he, at the same time, regenerates these dominating perspectives. Though Hartsock refers more specifically to the gendered norms and the feminist struggles, I think this critique also applies to the studies of governmentality. In accounting for the rationalities of government, Foucault seems to describe and explain how it works and as such seems to reproduce the dominator’s views. Think, for instance, of how the Chinese government’s emphasis of soft power in national image-making seems to show how the ruler has incorporated these governing rationalities in maintaining its domination. In relation to governmentality, Foucault does not seem to provide suggestions on how one may subvert domination and make changes. In general, Foucault’s refusal to set an agenda for social and political changes has frustrated those like Hartsock who advocate social actions. All these seem to lead one back to Patton’s
argument that Foucault offers descriptive analyses and that his works leave little room for “imagining alternative worlds” (Teurlings 2004: 44).

RESISTANCE

The critiques posed above are best discussed and elaborated in concert with the notion of resistance. I begin this section by addressing the critique on Foucault’s lack of a normative framework. Humanistic normative values are central in social and political struggles; and the latter are often linked to the discussion of resistance. This is particularly the case here. I recently attended a conference focusing on digital media in East Asia. All the papers about China focused on digital activism and the discussion centered on whether the new media could constitute a force to resist the authoritarian state. Resistance and the Chinese state are like Siamese twins, inseparable and bonded by destiny.

Foucault is skeptical about the Enlightenment ideals that emphasize rationality, progress, human rights and autonomy, and the claims that rationality, reason, and scientific knowledge can produce a set of neutral, objective, and universal truth and knowledge that are independent of power. In Madness and Civilization (Foucault 2001 [1967]), Foucault shows how this Enlightenment ideal of rationality is formed on the basis of exclusion of otherness, such as the madmen. In other words, these ideals are not neutral or simply emancipatory per se, but are implicated in power-relations. To Foucault, there are no such things as value-free, universal, and ahistorical; nor is there objective truth and knowledge, that is, a transcendental knowledge. His concept of power-knowledge demonstrates how knowledge and power imply one another (Foucault 1995: 27). It would be wrong to assume that Foucault rejects all humanistic values such as anti-domination or anti-oppression. His genealogical works and his life as a political activist could shed some light on this. In fact, one should read Foucault’s approach as “re-working” and that he employs a “skeptical method” that “allows him to strategically appeal to norms without necessarily endorsing them” (McLaren 2002: 22; Teurlings 2004).

Instead of embracing universal humanistic values, Foucault’s formulation forces one to question one’s situated interests and the power-relations implicated in social and political movements. As I argue in, for example, chapter 4, the claims to speak for the people who suffered from destructive consequences brought about by Olympics-led urban
changes could not be sustained and justified when these claims do not take equivalent interests in knowing what the very people who dwelled in the city thought and felt. What is positioned as a just cause worth fighting for is not an innocent liberating mission. No humanistic claims are objective or value-free. Foucault’s interrogation on truth and power would indeed make social and political movements not a simple matter that is merely guided by a set of universal normative values.

Identified as a non-liberal state, the Chinese state is perceived to be ruling against the core humanistic values — freedom, justice, human rights, and the like — that are embraced since the Enlightenment, discursively practiced in the liberal West, and fundamental to worldwide social justice movements. As such, China is portrayed as a despotic ruler who takes away the rights and freedom of its people. Normative values endorsed in the liberatory politics are invoked to emancipate the Chinese people from the state.

Resistance to the Chinese state is advocated to be a good thing and something that should be encouraged. Reading as such, not only does it tempt one to fall back on the reductive duality of the state and the people; but it also, as Foucault points out, gravely mistakes resistance as something scarce and exercised by only a few brave individuals — something highly advocated in emancipation discourses like those of orthodox Marxism. Foucault argues against this simplistic notion of power as stemming from the state and as a thing held by the powerful, and therefore is something “bad” and needs to be overthrown as such. He argues that resistance not only does not stand outside of power; it in fact is implicated in power-relations. Like power, resistance is everywhere. However, it would be wrong to conclude that power is omnipresent and therefore there is no escape from it, as critics like Benhabib (1992) read it. Foucault argues, “Should it be said that one is always ‘inside power’, there is no ‘escaping’ it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is always subject to the law in any case . . . This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships” (1980b: 95). McLaren points out succinctly that “the idea that one could go beyond resistance to seize or overthrow power reinvokes the liberal notion of power as emanating from a state or as held by individuals” (24). To Foucault, resistance is not only possible but it is necessary. Resistance makes power-relations visible:
I would like to suggest another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way that is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and one that implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists in taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists in using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. (Foucault 2002b: 128)

Given the prominence of resistance in Foucault’s account, one would then question why Foucault did not set out concrete agendas for social and political changes. To spell out a concrete resistant plan would contradict Foucault’s critique on truth-like universal solutions. In an interview addressing gay politics, Foucault said the following and I argue this would reflect adequately his attitude toward resistance: “But I am not the only person equipped to show these things, and I want to avoid suggesting that certain developments were necessary or unavoidable. . . . Of course, there are useful things I can contribute, but again, I want to avoid imposing my own scheme or plan” (1988: 302). What Foucault advocates is not an abstract and universal notion of resistance but one that is local and specific to the context.

Back to the Chinese context, I believe it is important to reiterate again that it is a serious misconception to see resistance as a scarce thing possessed by a few social activists or intellectuals; and to see the people as a collective mass sharing the same interests, same goals and that they would be identified as such to stand against the state. I have mentioned the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991, 1995; McCall 2005) earlier in chapter 2, a concept developed by feminists to highlight the multidimensional character of social relationships and subject formation. What intersectionality helps illustrate is the complexity involved in understanding power-relations and resistance, the people are composed of individuals with a multitude of identifications such as class, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual oriental, work position, place-identity (city versus rural), nationality, so on and so forth. Resistance is never simply a unilateral, one-dimensional relation toward the state.
Let me elaborate on Foucault’s formulation of power and resistance with a few examples. With regard to resistance as a common thing, and an attempt to answer a question I raised in chapter 4 about the potential moments of resistance within the volunteer program, the first example is how the (potential) Games volunteers chose to withdraw from the program. Not all volunteers were selfless individuals who were committed to serving the others and the nation without expecting return; not to mention being a volunteer during the Olympics was not an easy task — getting up early, going home late, working without compensation, working in the heat, standing for the whole day, etc. Some young qualified individuals held distant and indifferent attitudes and they simply did not see the point to join. Some found the expectations and responsibility too time-consuming and demanding; they resigned even before the Olympics started. For those who already got a taste of the Olympic experience, they simply found it not necessary to spend more time to serve the Paralympics and found excuses to resign and skip the expected duty. With regard to the ideal of volunteerism (being selfless, devoted, diligent, and helpful), my volunteer-interviewees told me that they would at times find excuses to skip duties such as taking a break in the hidden area; or, when they were required to act politely and helpful even to rude (foreign) visitors, they found various ways to deal with them (gossiping about them, complaining about them among the volunteers, or deliberately giving them wrong directions to the venue). These would be some forms of resistance to the state-orchestrated promotion of model citizens and volunteer program.

The case study on taxi drivers shows the complexity implicated in the dynamics of resistance and power-relations. When taxi drivers were asked to take English exams, they, with the help of the taxi companies and their co-workers, found a way to cheat in the tests and pass the exam. When they were asked to wear a uniform, they wore the shirts unbuttoned and without the ties or wore the trousers rolled up as if working in the field. All these actions subverted the official plans of making them *look good* for Beijing and China.

As pointed out earlier, taxi drivers’ class position could place them in a marginal position but they are by no means “powerless” victims of society; think, for instance, of their relatively “superior” position vis-à-vis the migrant workers, of whom they complained to have low *suzhi* and to cause Beijing’s deteriorating living conditions. Similarly, their professional niche as people who know their way around Beijing means that they could...
easily drive a long way around and charge the passengers more. Their talkativeness (“很会侃”) and being informative of the city and China would subvert the passenger-driver dynamics and empower them to be seen as vocal voices of local life and as informants; and at other times, this talkativeness, often implying bluffing and therefore not being taken seriously, could exempt them from being judged politically even when they complained about politics, gossip, or spread rumors about the politicians.

The last point directs us to look at how subversion of power is made possible by using power against itself. The Olympic programs I analyzed in chapter 7 are such examples. These programs bore the functions to promote the Beijing Games and to resinicize the Hong Kong population. To accomplish these tasks, tactics of “the local” and “the familiar” were brought in; yet, in bringing in these tactics, they also helped strengthen a Hong Kong subjectivity and as such, challenge the original purpose of resinification. What were originally acts of power were subverted by the acts themselves. One more example related to this study is how Beijingers who were discontent with removal or demolition would at times employ the (foreign) media or academics from the West as leverage to make their voices heard, and in doing so, they hoped to increase their bargaining power with the government. This is a tactic that, on the one hand, grows out of the normalized view that the Chinese citizens are being bullied, treated unfairly by the government and therefore appeal to the interest of the liberal West to speak for them and to help them out. On the other hand, it appeals to the norms that the Chinese nation is a big family and that the government as the patriarch (父母官) is responsible for taking care of its family members and keeping them — the civilians — in their proper place. The latter invokes the social and political norms that help the government sustain its rule and demand it to look after its civilians (子民), as well as the norm that stresses keeping family quarrels within the family (家丑不出外传). In his genealogical works, Foucault is very critical of norms, the normalizing power, and domination. Yet, this example also shows that in norms, like in every power-relation, lie the potential of resistance. Power and resistance are so enmeshed with each other that it would not be entirely correct to conclude in broad strokes that power is either good or bad.

226 An English equivalent of this idiom is not to wash your dirty linen in public.
Indifference, deception, flight, gossiping, bluffing, using power to subvert power — these are some of the examples out of inexhaustive forms of resistance. These, however, do not explain why macro-scale structural changes, such as changing political regimes, class positions, gendered norms, are infrequent. By extension, Foucault’s concept of power — that power is not possessed, we all take part in it, and it runs through all social relations — seems to suggest that power is equally exercised and evenly distributed. Then, again, how does one account for the prevailing and persistent dominance, such as class, gender, ethnicity, race, etc.? In fact, Foucault does acknowledge that power is not exercised equally as shown, for example, by the psychiatrists vis-à-vis the mental patients relation in *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault 2001 [1967]), the medical professionals vis-à-vis the patients in *The Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault 2003b [1973]), and men vis-à-vis women (of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) in “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom” (Foucault 1997).

In “The Subject and Power” (Foucault 1982) and “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom” (Foucault 1997), Foucault writes specifically on the differentiation between power and domination, and three types of power relations — strategic games between liberties, technologies of government, and states of domination. In his words:

> It seems to me that we must distinguish between power relations understood as strategic games between liberties — in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conducts of others — and the states of domination that people ordinarily call “power.” And between the two, between games of power and states of domination, you have technologies of government — understood, of course, in a very broad sense that includes not only the way institutions are governed but also the way one governs one’s wife and children. (Foucault 1997: 299)

Power as strategic games belongs to the generative aspect of power, which is subject to reversal; whereas states of domination refer to the descending form of power, that is, power over others. The latter exemplifies an asymmetrical power-relation, which is
relatively static, not easily reversed, and can persist over a relatively longer period (Foucault 2002b; Lemke 2000; McLaren 2002). States of domination display the negative forms of power that function to control and constrain, which is comparable to the practice of sovereign power in Foucault’s juridical-discursive model of power (McLaren 2002). As discussed earlier, the use of negative power related to domination goes in tandem with the generative aspect of power, and this formulation makes explicit the workings of governmentality. States of domination and the accompanying negative power, as Foucault elucidates, do not form the basis of these asymmetrical power-relations. Rather, the relations of domination are the effects of the technologies of government that regulate, stabilize, and systematize power-relations (Lemke 2000; Hindess 1996; Patton 1998).

In states of domination, resistance is still possible, just as the examples I listed earlier. Whereas to subvert macro-structural kinds of domination, such as gender domination, heterosexual domination, racial domination (e.g. white people’s domination over non-whites), ethnic domination (e.g. Han dominance over the fifty-five other ethnic minorities in China), the Sino-centric way of defining Chineseness, the West's domination of knowledge-production, etc., it would require collective actions and the shifting of power-relations (McLaren 2002; Foucault 2002b). The end of domination, as McLaren points out, should never be read as “the end of power”; rather, what the end of domination offers are expanded possibilities of choices, possibilities of reversing power-relations, and resistance (2002: 41).

Foucault is not a fatalist or pessimist as some critics misread him. His lifetime involvement in social activism, and his critical interrogation of transcendental knowledge and the contemporary society demonstrate that he believes that social and political changes are possible. On the whole, I find Foucault’s analyses and his notion of power extremely insightful and perceptive. Yet, perhaps precisely because of this, to borrow McLaren’s words, “chilling recognition that his analysis is correct,” I find myself struggling with the critique that Foucault writes from the perspective of dominator and that his analyses present little room to imagine alternative worlds. Just as in governmentality, the state’s mobilization of various tactics, discourses, and strategies leads one to look at the ways in which the state can so Sophistically set things in motion, which in turn facilitate the achievement of its desired goals. Could governmentality offer more than being a perceptive
analytical tool? Even though I acknowledge that resistance is implicated in power-relations and as such also omnipresent, I cannot help but ask what the alternatives would be.

Lastly, studies of governmentality focus exclusively on the nation-state as the point of analysis. In view of this Olympic research and the role played by the IOC, and with the development of international, transnational, and supranational organizations like the European Union, the United Nation, International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc., there is an urgent need to extend the analysis of governmentality to include global governance organizations. This, however, does not suggest, nor do I want to engage with the debate, that these global organizations are “above” the nation-states, and that they undermine the latters’ sovereignty, or vice versa. It would be beyond this epilogue to engage with these debates. Finally, I would like to conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the role of the IOC.

THE ROLE OF THE IOC

Despite the large amount of Olympics-related research, there is a severe lack of research on the role of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). When China, other host nations, and their various actors are criticized of seizing the Olympics to promote their own agenda, hardly were there attempts to look into the role of the IOC in facilitating these possibilities. Few researchers engage with this enquiry on the role of IOC. Rarely are there articles written on the IOC; and when they do, they retreat to a kind of management advice (Milton-Smith 2002), challenges faced by the IOC (Digel 2010), or supplementary information (Rowe, Gilmour, and Petzold 2010).

The IOC facilitates the instigation of nationalism through assigning the unit of reference to the nation-state as the only legitimate unit in the Olympics. This, in turn, makes it possible for the host countries to hijack the event to celebrate their political ideologies and instigate nationalism (MacAlloon 1984; Edgecomb 2011; A. Guttmann 2002). Julie Guthman criticizes the Olympics as the culprit of nationalism: “Nationalism is dead. Long live nationalism. The Olympics, it is patently clear, is first and foremost a celebration and reinscription of nationalism, of the very simplest kind” (2008: 1799). All individual participants have to participate in the Olympics as the representatives of their National Olympic Committee (NOC). In competitions, it is always a national representative/team
competing with the other national representatives/teams, not to mention that the numbers of Olympic Gold medals and the overall medal numbers are grouped as the achievement of the nation-states. Other aspects of the Games such as the Olympic rituals of the Torch Relay, the opening and the closing ceremonies, and the awarding ceremonies (raising the national flag and playing the national anthem of the gold medalist’s country) all help normalize the belief that an individual should identify with and belong to “an imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Allen Guttmann criticizes the Olympics fiercely and compares them to a fanatic religion:

To witness the spectator’s emotions when their national representative mounts the victor’s podium, when their flag is raised, when their national anthem is played, is to wonder if nationalism — or sport — is not the true religion of the modern world. (2002: 2)

China is by no means the only country seizing a mega sport event to promote national cohesion and national identity. From where I write this dissertation, in almost all major sports events, Dutch people often dress themselves in orange with orange accessories to cheer for their national team. When their compatriots achieve outstanding results, the whole country is flooded with joy and official celebrations are organized. A recent example is the 2010 World Cup, in which the Dutch team entered the final and ranked second.

The tight relationship between international sports competition and nationalism is not a recent product. As early as 1945, George Orwell already criticized the “ills” of the international sports competitions, stating their similarities to “mimic warfare” (quoted in Close, Askew, and Xu, 2007: 51). The IOC, although its role in setting off nationalism cannot be exempted, is not the initiator of nationalism. Its role in this regard is best understood as strengthening the historically contingent significance of the nation-state as a unit, and the norms of identifying with a people and a nation.

Globalization, advancements in media technology, intensifying place-competition, and changes in politico-economic structure all have helped today’s Olympics become a global media spectacle; and this, subsequently, has made the IOC an ever-growing
influential international organization, as more and more cities are competing to host the Games “at any price” (Milton-Smith 2002) while multinational companies are willing to pay unimaginable amounts of sponsorship fees. With the discursive humanistic ideals promoted by the idea of Olympism, the IOC and the Olympics have acquired this status as a transnational form of governance that parallels the nation-state. This does not necessarily mean that the IOC is above the nation-state but it does imply that the IOC represents a mode of government that is set on a global scale and that can shape actions on a multitude of levels worldwide and within a nation-state. The related questions on how it actually functions and operates deserve a detailed study of its own.

The aforementioned critique warns one against essentializing (the power of) the state and associating it as a “metapower” that supersedes everything else. The Chinese state, like other modern states, acquires its place as the sovereign of a people through the concept of modern state, and that enables the state to manage its populations, and become the spokesperson to compete and negotiate with the others in the global arena. In addition, the global discourses regarding the humanistic ideals associated with Olympism, the Olympics as a prestigious global event, and the like, have lent their discursive power to the state and allowed it to reformulate and adopt it as tactics of governance. Similarly, these Olympic discourses and the Olympic spectacle are also platforms seized by social and political activists to make their statements heard.

This dissertation is born out of a larger research on the Beijing Olympics. While I do acknowledge that the year 2008 has gone by and China is indeed changing at an accelerating pace, I insist that the questions related to subjectivity and modes of governance remain relevant not only in China but also beyond the geopolitical setting of China. Future research would require one to look into the developments of tactics of governance in the capital and across the country, and perhaps to explore the evolvement of these governing tactics with China’s increasing interconnectedness with global politics.