The making of China: The construction of Chineseness during the Beijing Olympics

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Chapter One
Chineseness and Beyond

Beginning at 8 o’clock, 8 August 2008, the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics has attracted much of the world’s attention. Covering audiences of more than four billion people, it was regarded as the most widely broadcast media event: an audience of at least two billion has watched its broadcast on television,¹ and the viewers who have watched it on the Internet or through a DVD player make the number even bigger. As one of the most watched events (the Opening Ceremony of the World Cup Football may arguably be the only rival), the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games is consensually one of the best opportunities for the host city/country to present itself to the world audience. The artistic performance of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics was full of Chinese cultural and symbolic elements, which narrated the alleged five thousand years of Chinese culture and history (though in a non-chronological way), as well as China’s modernity, to the world and to China itself. The global media, representing the Ceremony as the “coming out party” of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), were lavish with their praises to the grandiose artistic presentations and staggering fireworks of the Opening Ceremony, despite with suspicions of what it meant to China and to the world, and how China would further develop after the Olympics. Scholars in China Studies have also affirmatively acknowledged that it was a marking event of “the birth of a new superpower,” presenting the “Chinese nation to the world as young and beautiful,

wise and strong” (Callahan 2010: 1). It is seen as a “story . . . crafted to speak directly
to the world of China’s vision of itself” (Barmé 2009: 64), or a ceremony showcasing
“how much world history and Western modernization are actually indebted to
Chinese civilization” (Manzenreiter 2010: 36).

Indeed, the Opening Ceremony obviously aimed to present an ideal and “new”
image of China to the world, which was one of the primary goals of China’s bidding
for the 2008 Olympics (Brownell 2008: chapter 5; Haugen 2008; S. Luo 2009:
episode 1, 2, & 7; Hong and Lu 2012), although it has heavily mobilized Chinese
historical and traditional cultural elements. However, the Opening Ceremony and the
overall Beijing Olympics were not just part of an international campaign for national
image building, they also targeted at the people inside China. Anne-Marie Brady, a
China studies scholar based in New Zealand, asserts that the preparation in 2006–
2008 for the Olympics was “a propaganda campaign designed to mobilize the
population around a common goal, and distract them from more troubling issues such
as inflation, unemployment, political corruption and environmental degradation”
(2009: 1). She proposes that the Opening Ceremony, reflecting the “recent
readjustments in China’s national narrative,” which defined a new China, was an
integral part of this propaganda (ibid.: 20). Viewing it from another perspective,
Yuezhi Zhao, a scholar on Chinese communication and media studies, takes the
Opening Ceremony as “the ultimate embodiment of this [pragmatic] version of
Chinese cultural nationalism in the digitalized neoliberal era” (2011: 566), which has
been used as “an instrument for rallying popular support for the state-led project of
‘the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation’” (ibid.). Both arguments point to the
fact that the Opening Ceremony promoted nationalism to the Chinese.

These reviews reflect, on the one hand, the intense attention paid to the “rise
of China,”3 and the international and domestic implications thereof; China’s national

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2 China has bid twice for the Olympics. The first was in 1993 and the second in 2001. For more
detailed discussion, please refer to Brownell (2008: chapter 5); and Hong and Lu (2012).
3 The “China rise” means that China, with its rapid economic growth, is becoming a “superpower”
moving up to the US.
image (as well as soft power and public diplomacy) and national identity building; and the interrelations of these issues in the case of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. On the other hand, these studies, which attach great importance to the Opening Ceremony, call for more specialized research. In the numerous studies related to the Beijing Olympics, few studies so far have scrutinized what has exactly been constructed in the Opening Ceremony and how.\(^4\) A lot of studies probe into how the Opening Ceremony was received in different countries (e.g., Luo and Richeri 2012; Bonde 2009; Naka and Kobayashi 2010; Tarantino and Carini 2010; Peña et al. 2010; Papa 2010; Hong 2010; Mangan and Ok 2010), but few have analyzed in detail how it was responded to and contested in mainland China, and in Hong Kong and Taiwan.\(^5\) Taking this Opening Ceremony as a “global media event” (Hepp and Couldry 2010), I try to scrutinize in this dissertation what was exactly constructed in the Opening Ceremony and how this has been done. I am concerned with the following interrelated questions: What image(s) of China and Chineseness was constructed during the Opening Ceremony and the overall Beijing Olympics? How was it constructed and for whom? What responses did the Opening Ceremony receive from the media from different geological origins? What is the significance of these responses, and why? What reflections can we draw from the mediation of this global media event?

Examining these questions, I propose that the construction of the ideal China in the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics both to the world and to the people inside China can arguably be summarized as a strategic construction of a “new” set of

\(^4\) Quite some articles discuss the involvement and significance of Chinese cultural elements in the Opening Ceremony (e.g., Barmé 2009; J. Luo 2011; Evans 2012; and Lawson 2011); its presentation style, national identity construction, and political implication (e.g., Wu and Yun 2008); and other aspects (e.g., Manzenreiter 2010). Yet, few have thoroughly scrutinized the representations and their implications in the construction of the national image of China, and the reinforcement of the national identity. Most of the studies include some of the selected aspects of the Opening Ceremony as (minor) evidence in their examinations of the overall Beijing Olympics, or other topics (e.g., Callahan 2010: Introduction; Schrag 2009; Latham 2010; Finlay and Xin 2010; Leibold 2010; Dong 2010; and Syed 2010).

\(^5\) Even in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, detailed research studies on the reception of the Opening Ceremony are also relatively few (most research studies include it as a minor part in their work on the Beijing Olympics), especially about the contestations (e.g., Cheng et al. 2010; Heslop, Nadeau, and O’Reilly 2010; and Shen 2009).
Chineseness. Following the approach of the “global media event” (Hepp and Couldry 2010), I examine how this new version of Chineseness was constructed and mediated in the context of the rise of China, and how it was perceived, responded, and contested in the media, with a focus on television, in Anglo-America (as examples of media in the global context), Hong Kong and Taiwan (as examples of regional media), and on the Internet in mainland China. In the examination, I will reflect on the diversity and borderlines, as well as theoretical and practical limitations, of the concept of Chineseness in the globalized world. With this examination, I call for new ways for Chinese identity construction and national image (or soft power) building. And, resonating with Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), I also call for more de-imperialized communication tactics and strategies between mainland China, and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Western societies.

**Global Media Events and the Opening Ceremony**

Before analyzing the “new” Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, it is necessary to introduce the concept and approach of global media events. Media events, according to Dayan and Katz, refer to three types of live broadcast events — conquests, contests, and coronations — that interrupt everyday life and serve metaphorically as “high holidays of mass communication” (1992: 1). According to Dayan and Katz, conquests refer to great steps for mankind, like the moon-landing and Egyptian President Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in 1977. Contests mean sports events like the Football World Cup that involve contestations.

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6 This PhD project is a sub-project of the NWO-funded project “Celebrations and Contestations of Chineseness — The Beijing 2008 Olympics and 21st Century Imaginations of Place, Culture and Identity.” According to the parental project, this project is designated to study the construction of Chineseness during the Beijing Olympics, and the responses and contestations in the global, regional, and national media. The selection of media was partly preset by the parental project. In this selection, the terms global, regional, and national refer more to the geographical location of the selected media, than to these media’s coverage or geographical distribution of the audience. I will reflect more on this scope in the methodology section of this chapter, in chapter two, and in the Epilogue.
Coronations are events that mark the role changes of the mighty, such as the British royal wedding in 1981. Dayan and Katz take media events as a “genre” of mass communication, which can be defined “at the intersection of the syntactic, the semantic, and the pragmatic” (ibid.:13). In other words, a media event is “[a] ceremony [that] interrupts the flow of daily life (syntactics); it deals reverently with sacred matter (semantics), and it involves the response of a committed audience (pragmatics)” (ibid.: 14). These characteristics distinguish media events as a “genre” and an integrative force that functions to reinforce the “core ideas” (and thus the integration) of a society.

Although far-reaching and influential, the concept of media events has been critiqued on different levels. Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry (2010: 5–8) summarize three levels of critique: The first level of critique is about Dayan and Katz’s neo-Durkheimian (or, rather, functionalist) perspective, which defines media events as rituals of mediated communicative integration and focuses on the question of possible social order. The assumption behind this perspective is that societies are stable and marked by a shared set of values, which is highly doubtful under today’s social conditions, especially under the perspective of critique theories. Nick Couldry launches a term “media rituals,” which defines the mediated events, in a different sense from the media events, as forms of media communication that construct “the myth of the mediated centers” (2003: 2). In this vein, media events refer to “forms of communication that articulate the power-related, hegemonic imagination of the media as the center of present societies, as the expression of the important incidents within that society” (Hepp and Couldry 2010: 5), which allow more flexibility “over the implications for value consensus (or otherwise) of both media events and indeed for ritual itself” (ibid.). The second level of critique questions the core definition of media events as a genre, pointing out that reverent and priestly styles of presenting and broadcasting media events are not necessarily given. Rather, a media event is, for John Fiske and other scholars who consider media events beyond a genre, a “discursive event” but not “a discourse about an event” (Fiske 1994: 2; qtd. in Hepp
and Couldry 2010). The third level questions the narrow typification of media events that includes only contests, conquests, and coronations. Critics argue that the live/immediately-after broadcast of disasters, terrors, and wars as “disaster marathons” (Liebes 1998), which usually last for days, weeks, or even months (in contrast to the narrowly defined “media events,” which are live and relatively short events), could also be included as possible scenario(s) of media events.

In response to these critiques, Daniel Dayan attempts to further develop the concept and approach. In an article entitled “Beyond Media Events: Disenchantment, Derailment, Disruption,” Dayan (2008) reviews that the concept and approach of media events was originally developed in the context of national broadcasting systems, and should be refined to meet the needs of the globalized media environment. Based on an analysis of the Beijing Olympics (about the preparation period from 2001 to 2007), he redefines the major features of media events as (a) emphasis (the omnipresence of the transmitted events); (b) performativity (gestures that actively create realities); (c) loyalty (accepting the event’s self-definition); and (d) shared experience (the construction or reconstruction of the “we”) (ibid.: 394). This new definition no longer takes the media representations of the media events as “loyal” representations of the “actual” events, but emphasizes the performativity and translocality of those media representations. However, he insists that a shared “we,” which is the social integration function of the media events, can be constructed through the media events and can reinforce the integration and unification of a society.

Based on Dayan’s new definition, Hepp and Couldry (2010) push the discussion further to the concept of “global media events.” They argue that in the global age, media events are becoming increasingly translocal and even global, their “omnipresence” is no longer confined to a national territory, but has become a situative “thickening” (a term referring to translocal processes for the articulation of meaning) in terms of locality (in translocal media cultures) and of media forms (expanded from mass media to the Internet and other digital media, and “mediated
interaction”). For example, the Olympic Games is not only broadcast on television, in
the press, on the Internet, and in other technologically based media, but is also
mediated and articulated in very different ways in different media cultures in different
regions. Therefore, the “performativity” (gestures that actively create realities,
including the thickening and centering) is linked to struggles for power and influence
in and between media cultures in order to articulate meaning and create reality
actively. In this transcultural thickening and performativity, the media events
“obviously... cannot be related to just one power center... and a one-dimensional
analysis at this point falls short” (ibid.: 11; italics original). Consequently, the
characteristic of “loyalty” is hard to ascertain either. Although a certain point of a
“thematic core” may still be detected,7 the “shared experience,” again, is hard to
obtain in a global context. Instead, although the “global we” is highly unlikely to
exist, the global-transcultural frame enables many different constructions of a
common “we,” and “of many varied national, ethnic, religious, subcultural and other
voicings of that ‘we’, all relating to how the main cultural thickenings within a media
event are appropriated locally.” (ibid.: 12) Thus, when the common “we” is lost, it
becomes all the more urgent to probe into the processes of articulation and
appropriation of the various “we/s” (instead of one common “we”) in a media event.

In this vein, Hepp and Couldry define “global media events” as “situated,
thickened, centering performances of mediated communication that are focused on a
specific thematic core, cross different media products and reach a wide and diverse
multiplicity of audiences and participants” (2010:12). In this definition, the term
“centering” is crucial. It refers to the “processes of constructing the ‘mediated
center’” (ibid.); or more specifically, as mentioned above in Couldry’s concept of
“media rituals,” refers to the media performativity that “articulate[s] the power-
related, hegemonic imagination of the media as the center of present societies, as the
expression of the important incidents within that society” (ibid.: 5). To put it simply,

7 For example, in the 9/11 event, in the global media reports, “the iconographic images of the destroyed
twin towers... worked as the unifying focus of the diversity of discourses gathered within the
situative thickening of this event” (Hepp and Couldry 2010: 11).
“centering” is the way the local media present global media events according to the agenda and preference of the local media culture. According to this concept and approach, the study of global media events needs to focus on how the events are constructed as “centering,” how the various powers within different media cultures are related, in the situative and thickening context, to articulate a “power-related, hegemonic imagination of the media as the center of present societies” in the mediated communication. Hepp and Couldry, therefore, argue in an emphasizing way that the “integrative” moment of media events is “something uncertain that must be investigated from one case to another,” but not something, as Dayan and Katz assume, “that may be assumed in advance as characteristic” (Hepp and Couldry 2010: 12). It is thus necessary to investigate the multi-centering of a global media event, to move beyond a single nation-based approach, and to insist instead on a comparative analysis.

The Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics is a typical global media event. It has a clear “thematic core”: the performance and ceremony, which aims to display a new set of representations of China and Chinese culture (or Chineseness) to the world, held in the Bird’s Nest (Chinese National Stadium). It is a highly thickened event, broadcast to global audience through multi-forms of media (which was the first Opening Ceremony of an Olympics to be broadcast live on the Internet). It is situatively and differently “centered” by the various local media cultures to articulate meanings according to their respective local agenda and priorities. In this dissertation, I will examine how the various media have centered the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness, and investigate how “integrative” moments of these centerings have been articulated in this particular case. In addition, I will also examine how this global media event interplays with the theory and practice of soft power (Nye 2004).
Old Images, New Images, and Soft Power of China

As a country that is globalizing its institutions “to a degree not seen in a big country since Meiji Japan” (Overholt 2005: 1), China is more and more concerned with its national image in the world. Simon Rabinovitch argues that it is “reasonable to assert that image considerations weigh heavily on the minds of Chinese decision-makers” (2008: 32). Indeed, as mentioned above, one of the main reasons for China to bid for the 2008 29th Olympics (and for the 2000 27th Olympics in 1993 that failed), was to demonstrate the rise of China as a modern country, to change and “upgrade” China’s international image, to improve China’s “soft power” (Nye 2004; Manzenreiter 2010), and thus to be more broadly accepted, admired, and followed in the “world community.”

This was a timely but challenging initiative. One year before the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games, various activists were addressing conflicting narrations of China in China’s official media and in the western media. In contrast to the Chinese official media that represented China as a prosperous, orderly, normal, globalized, and peace-loving country, there were counternarratives from Western governments, media, and NGOs that depicted China as a country unqualified to host the Olympic Games, “bashing” China on issues related to human rights, environmental protection, Tibet, and Darfur (deLisle 2008). The conflict of narratives was well reflected in the worldwide Torch Relay in March–May 2008 (Liu and de Kloet 2008; Latham 2009; Nyiri, Zhang, and Varrall 2010). China and the Chinese saw the Torch Relay as a message of China’s goodwill to the world, but this goodwill was received with protests in Paris, London, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Seoul, and some other cities. As NBC reviewer Tom Brokaw put it, the protests during the

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8 Darfur is a region in the west of Sudan where the non-Arabic indigenous population was at war with the Sudanese government from 2003–2010, which led to humanitarian emergencies in this region. Because of its huge investments in Sudan, China was blamed for financially supporting the Sudanese government’s “genocide” against the indigenous population.
Torch Relay “brought home to the Chinese people a troubling reality: their self-image was not shared by many others in the world.”

Then what is the image(s) of China in the “world,” especially in the West? As Jonathan D. Spence (1998) suggests, the shifting between admirable “good” and despised “bad” China permeates the imagination of China in the Western societies. For example, from the thirteenth century to the eighteenth century, Marco Polo inspired many fabulations that described China as an admirable “other.” The fabulations and exoticism, however, turned to stigmatization after the late eighteenth century, when China was depicted as a static, backward, even barbarian country, the people of which were weak, slough-eating, and opium-smoking; and the bureaucracy was systematically corrupt. This shifting between an admirable and a despised “other” accelerated in the twentieth century. In this period, the West (the United States in particular after World War II) evaluated China with the pragmatic criteria of whether China could be incorporated as a (weak) partner of the Western political and military strategies (e.g., the Cold War) or not (Mackerras 1999; Isaacs 1980; Mosher 1990). Thus, in the second half of the twentieth century, the image of China shifted dramatically in the West. This relationship between China and the West resembles what Edward Said argues: “the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen — in the West, which is what concerns us here — to be one between a strong and a weak partner” (Said 2003[1978]: 41).

This Janus-faced image(s) of China has persisted in contemporary Western societies, which is even exacerbated by the China rise: the economic growth broadens China’s communication, cooperation, and relationship with most of the countries in the world; yet, various “China threat” theories never disappeared, instead they

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10 In this dissertation, as I mentioned above, I discuss the “world” through the prism of the West and, especially, the English world (with a focus on Anglo-America). I will reflect on this scope in more detail in the methodology section of this chapter, chapter two, and Epilogue.
11 After 1949, China split into two parts, the PRC and the ROC, with Hong Kong as a British colony (which was handed back to the PRC in 1997). The image of China has become more complicated, and the interactions among the three regions have subtle yet important influences on the image(s) of China. However, in order to simplify the discussion, I have to narrow my focus on the PRC in this dissertation.
continue to haunt many, including Western, societies (Broomfield 2003; Jeffery 2009; Bisley 2012; Yee 2011). Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (2008) summarizes the contemporary binary imaginations about China as optimistic “dreams” or pessimistic “nightmares,” and “good Chinese” and “bad Chinese government.” Similarly, Peter H. Gries depicts the images of China in America between a “cute panda” and an evil “dragon,” and observes that people in the United States have to negotiate a position between “panda hugger” and “dragon slyer”: generally, in the business sector, the image(s) of China tends to be more optimistic; however, in the media and the political sector, the image(s) of China is more likely to be negative (Gries 2004: 3–5). Alexei Yurchak calls this mentality “binary socialism,” a model to depict “socialist” society including dichotomies “such as the Party and the people, repression and freedom, oppression and resistance, truth and dissimulation, official economy and second economy, official culture and counter-culture, totalitarian language and people’s language, public self and private self” (2003: 482).

However, in the mediation of China in terms of sports and the Olympics, the image of China in the Western media was largely negative. Susan Brownell, who had been following American media coverage of Chinese sports for over twenty years by 2008, “felt all along that the image of Chinese sports is generally negative” (2008: 150). Jacques deLisle (2008) describes how the “international civil society,” “foreign governments,” and other organizations and individuals “appropriate” the Olympics to deliver counternarratives, which have generated a media spectacle in the Western media, to the BOCOG (the Beijing Organizing Committee of the Beijing Olympic Games) and the Chinese government about the Beijing Olympics in the months leading up to Beijing Olympics. Kevin Latham (2009) analyzes the competition between the Chinese state and Chinese media (also nationalistic activists), and the Western media to reveal the “real” China in 2008, when “foreign journalists . . . engaged in their own efforts to reveal the ‘real’ China behind what they took as state propaganda, official deception of the public, and Olympic ‘fakery’” (Latham 2009: 27).
26). It is this mediascape that has given rise to the necessity of studying the mediation of the Beijing Olympics with the approach of global media events.

This mediascape also partly resembles the complexity of the Olympic Games. With its underpinning ideology of cosmopolitanism, the Olympic Games, the largest and most influential sports mega-event, is supposed to be value-free or politics-free (IOC 2010), and should promote and stimulate “sincere internationalism,” as proposed by Pierre de Coubertin (Quanz 1993: 18), or globalization (Maguire 1999; Hargreaves 2000). However, the Moscow (1980) and the Los Angeles (1984) Olympics, and partly the Beijing Olympics, have demonstrated how the Cold War and its legacy intervened the Olympics. Furthermore, the Olympic Games, after all, are organized through national/regional membership, which invariably involves a politics of identity and nationalism (Hargreaves 1992; Rowe 2003). Indeed, the globalization flows and fluxes (Appadurai 1996) and the cosmopolitanism of the Olympic Games have not yet made patriotism or nationalism “things of [the] past” (A. D. Smith 2003) or, even more radically, made them “vanish” (Beck 2002). Although Coubertin’s initial intention was to encourage peace by “maintaining and passing on patriotism in its true sense in such a way as to reinforce the reform of sport itself under the symbol the Olympic Games as a cause for all countries and mankind as a whole” (Quanz 1993: 3), the entanglement of nationalism and, consequently, politics has made the Olympic Games a multi-platform of contestation and antagonism: the hosting of the Olympics becomes a symbolic triumph, especially for non-Western societies; the organization of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is a political practice of international and sports politics; and the matches and games are symbols of national merits, national image, and national strength; and so on. One typical example is the competition of the medal counts between the United States and socialist countries like the Soviet Union and East Germany during the Cold War period. In the 2000s, the same competition continued between China and the United States. In 2008, the medal competition became a hotspot for the media both in China and America in the late stage of the Beijing Olympics and after. China has outdone the US in the gold medal
count (51:36), but the US outperformed China in the total number of medals (110:100), which has aroused debates in both countries about which country was the “real” sports superpower (Wu and Xu 2010; Huang, Wang, and Fu 2009). From the debates, it is noticeable that there is increasing eagerness to surpass the United States in China, and an increasing feeling of being “threatened” (not limited in the sports arena) in the United States.

It was under such complicated circumstances that China saw the Beijing Olympics as an opportunity to improve its national image and “soft power.” Since the early 2000s, the theory of “soft power,” coined by Joseph S. Nye, has gained great popularity in China. Soft power, different from hard power that rests on inducements (“carrots”) or threats (“sticks”), is the power of “getting others want the outcomes that you want.” It “co-opts people rather than coerces them” (Nye 2004: 5). Accordingly, the soft power resources “tend to be associated with the co-optive end of the spectrum of behavior,” in contrast to the hard power resources which are “usually associated with command behavior” (ibid.: 7). In order to achieve soft power, there are usually three categories of resources: “the country’s culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (ibid.: 11).

Since its first appearance in 1990, the concept of soft power has inspired numerous research studies around the world, and has become one of the key concepts and approaches in developing foreign policies in countries like the United States, Japan, and China. In China, this concept was officially adopted by President Hu Jintao in his speech to the 17th Chinese Communist Party Congress in 2007 (Xinhua News Agency 2007), meaning that enhancing China’s soft power has become part of the national policy. President Hu called for the enhancement of China’s soft power, partly through “strengthening the foreign cultural exchanges, absorbing excellent achievements of civilization, [and] enhancing the international power of Chinese
The launch of Confucius Institutes (a campaign to promote Chinese language and culture learning in the world; Hartig 2012); the initiatives to accelerate the development of the “creative industry” (Keane 2009); and the hosting of the Beijing Olympics, the Shanghai Expo, and other big international events have all been categorized under the realm of “soft power.”

As one of the most important global media events, the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics has a profound influence on China’s soft power and national image building. During the meeting of the bidding for the directorship of the Opening Ceremony (which will be discussed later in this chapter), the BOCOG required the directive team to present a ceremony that would outperform the widely praised Opening Ceremony of the Athens Olympics. Zhang Yimou was selected mainly for his experience in communicating China to the West in “international perspective” (Zhang and Xia 2008). Zhang and his creative team also meant to produce a performance that would “shock the foreigners.” They also aimed to “present the true Chinese culture to the world” (S. Luo 2009: episode 2 & 3), to impress the world and, therefore, to increase China’s soft power and upgrade China’s national image(s), by articulating a “new” set of Chineseness. However, under this mask, Zhang, his colleagues, and the BOCOG, as I will discuss later, also had a strong intention to manifest the Chineseness as an alternative of Western modernity.

Chineseness as an Essentialist Term

Chineseness, which literally refers to what China and Chinese is or should be, involves a set of essentialist narratives, such as narratives about geographic territory, language, food, race, Confucian values, and so on, that draw “an imaginary boundary

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12 Ibid.
13 Here the Opening Ceremony also involves the process of public diplomacy, a term closely connected to soft power and national image building. I specifically omit this part to narrow my arguments. For more detailed discussion about the interweaving of soft power, public diplomacy, and national image building, please refer to Cull 2008; Jian Wang 2011; Gonesh and Melissen 2005; and M. Li 2009.
between China and the rest of the world” (Chow 1998: 6). Generally speaking, this multilayered concept provides a cognitive basis for viewing “others” (non-Chinese who view China and Chinese as an “other” in the Saidian sense {2003[1978]}), as well for Chinese themselves, to perceive and conceive the ethnic belonging of “Chinese” individuals and groups from various geographical and national backgrounds (often regardless of their own identity/ies; Ang 2001; Reid 2009; Chow 1998; Louie 2004; Ong 1999). This “viewing” process usually involves a series of imagined or articulated characteristics of the Chinese ethnicity (Tu 1991; Ang 2001; Chun 1996; Shi 2003; G. Wang 1992), and the characteristics and image(s) of the Chinese state (Tu 1991; Shi 2003 & 2006; G. Wang 1992; Spence 1998). In this regard, Chineseness is closely linked to images of China or “Chinese.” Meanwhile, Chineseness also works as “national agency” (Berry 1998) to build and rebuild Chinese national identity (or Chinese communal identity for some Chinese diaspora communities) (Song 2006; Lin 2006; Shi 2003). For example, in cinema, television dramas, literature, mega-media events, and other media forms, the nature and characteristics of China and Chinese are always being defined and redefined to call for emotional attachment to the state, or at least to arouse/strengthen a sense of belonging to the category of “Chinese.”

As an essentialist concept, Chineseness contains some rather stable features. For example, the Chinese language (Mandarin)\(^\text{14}\) is a significant feature tied to Chineseness. Ien Ang depicts that she has experienced frequent disdainful comments, like “you are a fake Chinese,” since she is a “diaspora Chinese”\(^\text{15}\) who does not speak

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\(^\text{14}\) There are a lot of “dialects” in China, e.g., Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien. However, since the “national language standardization” movement in the 1910s, the Chinese language usually refers to Chinese Mandarin, which is called Putonghua [普通话] in mainland China and National Language [国语] in Taiwan.

\(^\text{15}\) There are quite some terms referring to the Chinese and their descendants living outside mainland China and Taiwan, e.g., Chinese overseas (or overseas Chinese, referring to Chinese living abroad with Chinese nationalities), Chinese diaspora (more general term to address Chinese and their descendants living outside mainland China and Taiwan), new emigrants (Chinese emigrated after the launch of opening up and reform policy in 1978), and more specific terms like Chinese American, British Chinese to refer to Chinese and their descendants who are born in other regions and countries, and have other nationalities. Each term is supposed to have its specific connotations. However, in some academic books and in the new press, these terms are also interchangeable. In this dissertation, I mainly
Chinese (2001: 30). On the other hand, it is also subject to changes, as in the example of the spread of Mandarin. The proliferation of the “standard Chinese” promoted by the People’s Republic of China (PRC, or mainland China) and the Republic of China (ROC, or Taiwan), has a subtle impact on the previous linkage between the Chineseness and Cantonese in Hong Kong (Davison and Lai 2007), as well as in some other Chinese diaspora communities in which Cantonese was or still is prominent. In fact, Chineseness has been constantly reshaped and contested by the various “Chinese” groups, the state of China, and the viewing “others,” and has ceaselessly been textualized and contextualized in accordance with the power-relationship between the diverse “Chinese” groups from different ethnic and geographical background (including Chinese diasporas and ethnic minorities in China), Chinese state, and the viewing “others” (as well as the society or state these viewing “others” are in).

The “new” Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony, as well as the overall Beijing Olympics, is a project initiated by the state with two dimensions: to change the current images of China in the world, and to strengthen the national identity in the domestic society. The national image, often defined in terms of international relationship (e.g., Snyder and Diesing 1977; Jervis 1970) or national branding (e.g., Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2006), involves popular beliefs and perceptions constituting “the totality of attributes that a person recognizes (or imagines) when he contemplates that nation” (W. A. Scott 1965: 72). As mentioned above, Chineseness is closely related to China’s national image(s) at the state level: as a set of essentialist descriptions of Chinese and the Chinese state, Chineseness works both as a cognitive basis and representation(s) of the image(s) of China, and constitutes “the totality of attributes” of China and Chinese.

Given that a “good” national image will generate competitive advantages for corporation products (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2006) in the global market, and can offer

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use Chinese diaspora to refer to all Chinese and their descendants living outside mainland China and Taiwan (including the overseas students, 留学生); and I use Chinese overseas to refer to Chinese and their descendants who emigrated before the launch of the opening up and reform policy in 1978. However, sometimes I also use these two terms interchangeably.
“greater use than a significant increment of military or economic power” (Jervis 1970: 6) in the international relations, China has a strong motivation to project an “updated” national image, by redefining a new set of features and attributes of what the “real” China and Chinese is, to leverage the “old” image haunted by backwardness, cold-war “legacy,” human rights issues (particularly the June Fourth Event in 1989), and many other aspects (Brownell 2008: chapter 6; deLisle 2008; Wasserstrom 2008; Ramo 2007; Ding 2011; Jian Wang 2011), on which I will elaborate later in this chapter.

In this regard, the Olympics Games is a highly constructive platform: the intense global public attention paid to the Opening Ceremony and the overall Olympics bestows upon the host city/country a great opportunity to project desired images, themes, and values, which is one of the main reasons for bidding to host the event. On this platform, media plays a vital role. As Marshall McLuhan points out, media work as “acceleration” and “amplification” (1964: 7). With the omnipresence of media, the national image building in the Olympic Games, on the one hand, becomes more demanding because every detail is subject to media scrutiny; on the other hand, it is also easier to achieve the desired outcome because of the large media coverage and the huge audience. This situation is well illustrated by an official of the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympics, who said: “There will be only sixteen days of television coverage, but we will have to live with the image for fifty years” (Larson and Park 1993: 246).

Meanwhile, the new Chineseness is not only constructed to project a new image of China, but is also a key element for national identity construction. Benedict Anderson proposes that nations “are imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”(2006: 6). In this sense, national identity is built through collective imagination, in which the essentialized narratives of a nation play a vital role. The “new” Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony aims to articulate “new” narratives and discourses about a new China in accordance with the rise of China: in 2007, after
almost thirty years of rapid growth, mainland China overtook Germany as the third largest economy in the world. The bewildering economic growth, and the subsequent changes in the social and cultural sectors, have stimulated China to define the 1990s and the 2000s as the time of Chinese “rejuvenation” or “revival,” a historical term to describe a glorious return to prosperity after a relatively long period of depression.

However, in the 2000s, along with the surging patriotic waves, there were also crucial problems accompanying the economic boom. The rapid economic growth was polarizing the social classes and exacerbating the imbalanced regional economy, which generated social tensions extensively across China (Gu et al. 2001; F. Wu 2004; Logon 2002). Separatist activities in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia have jeopardized the idea of “Chinese Ethnicity” and the constructed patriotism/nationalism, and become one of the major problems of the Chinese society (Y. Zhao 2010; H. Wang 2006). The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games have enabled Chinese authorities to systematically construct and present a new set of Chineseness to respond to and reinforce patriotism and to pacify social and ethnic tensions, by generating proudness of hosting the Olympics and presenting the nation as “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 2006: 7). The ultimate goal is to forge and reinforce the identity to the somewhat increasingly “distant” nation: a “mismatch between China’s rapid changing society” and those ideas “rooted in an idealized Chinese past,” namely, the “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Louie 2004: 26, 25).

After Beijing won the bid for the 2008 Olympiad, the People’s Daily, the most authoritative official newspaper in China, published a review which states: “(H)osting the 2008 Olympiad is an important opportunity for China in the new century, which will greatly inspire all the ethnicities nationwide with patriotic passion. . . . The success of bidding will advance the opening up and reform, and modernization; facilitate the world’s understanding of China; and advance China to move forward in

16 In 2011, China overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world.
the world.”

To encourage patriotism within China and to facilitate China to “move forward in the world” — this anticipatory statement illustrates the twofold goal of the new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony and the overall Beijing Olympics.

**Strategic “New” Chineseness?**

In the definition of the “new” Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony, the “newness” here does not indicate that the articulated discourses and narratives of this set of Chineseness had never been addressed in the previous fifty-nine years of the PRC history, or even in the entire Chinese history. Indeed, most of the narratives are replicas of the narrations that have been mediated for some time in international cultural and political communication and, internally, in the national identity building. I define this set of Chineseness as new for two reasons: (a) This set of Chineseness is the most notable, systematic, and holistic representation of “what China and Chinese is/should be” in the recent three decades; and (b) The narratives were specifically articulated and represented as “new” in order to impress the world, and were endowed with some sense of “newness” by contextualizational and representational changes in three ways. Firstly, these narratives were articulated with the state’s political discourse of “unceasing newness/renewal” or “change” in mainland China, which

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18 The “unceasing newness/renewal” or “change” is a fundamental idea of Taoism (as well as Confucianism) and is the key concept of the canon *I Ching* [易经; also known as *The Book of Change*], which emphasizes the idea that “the only unchangeable thing is change itself.” This ontological understanding of change was appropriated as a political discourse and movement in the “One Hundred Days of Reform” [百日维新] at the end of the nineteenth century, which aimed to facilitate political change in the stagnated late Qing empire. Confucianism also had a complicated tradition on the idea of “change” (and *I Ching*), which profoundly complicated the politicization of the idea of change. The reform failed but the political discourse of change was reinforced in the “New Culture Movement” in the mid-1910s to early 1920s (see footnote 35), and has become one of the most important political discursive resources in contemporary China (Jing Wang 1996). The PRC is called the “New China,”
aimed to make a political and cultural distinction from the “old” image, that is, the pervasive image and conceptualization of China as a backward, “abnormal,” and disordered country (deLisle 2008), or, more broadly, the image of an “evil dragon” (Gries 2004: 2–3) in the Western countries, and to forge stronger attachment to the state and society undergoing rapid changes. With this discourse, the slogan for bidding the 29th Olympics in 2001 was “New Beijing, New Olympic [新北京，新奥运]” in Chinese (in English, the slogan was “New Beijing, Great Olympics”). The implication of this slogan is twofold: on the one hand, the hosting of the Olympics would change Beijing as well as China; on the other hand, Beijing’s hosting of the Olympics would “make room in the Olympic Games,” where the Western dominance has been maintained for over a hundred years, “for different cultural traditions” (Brownell 2008: 196). In order to achieve this goal, the Opening Ceremony, as well as the overall Beijing Olympics, has displayed and incorporated modernity and high technology extensively to signify the “new” and modern Beijing and China.

Meanwhile, the initiatives to incorporate China’s ethnic sports, martial arts [武术], into the Olympics (although failed) and to arrange the sequence of national athletic teams according to the stroke sequence of their Chinese names (but not the usual alphabetical order) are examples of how to “make room for different cultural traditions” so as to make a “new” Olympics embedded with some Chineseness. Furthermore, as I will discuss later, the discourse of newness/renewal also articulates a “new” China to the world, and presents the Chineseness as an alternative and a renewal to the Western modernity.

Secondly, as a consequence of the discourse of renewal/change, quite some symbolic cultural elements were reinterpreted and re-contextualized in the context of

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19 According to Susan Brownell, “新北京，新奥运 [New Beijing, New Olympics]” was translated into English as “New Beijing, Great Olympics” because the “[m]embers of the bid committee felt that non-Chinese might not understand how China could create a ‘new’ Olympics” (2008: 196). For me, this translation was an expediency to lower the already high alerts of China in the IOC.

20 This was the first time in Olympic history for a host country to sort the sequence of athlete teams according to its own language but not the Roman alphabetical order.
the rise of China, and the current political discourses and rhetoric. The new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony and the overall Beijing Olympics is one of the most comprehensive versions that have emerged in the recent two decades, integrating almost all possible crucial aspects (see chapter two), many of which are endowed with “new” interpretations or significance in accordance with the “new” context of “China rise,” and with the “new” political context, for example, the discourses of “harmonious society” and “scientific development values” proposed by Hu Jintao, President of the PRC. This contextualization, along with the hidden motif of displaying to the world the “China model” through hosting the Olympics (which will be discussed later), implies not only the intervention of political rhetoric in the Opening Ceremony, but also China’s confidence and attempts to articulate a “new” development model to export to the world (which will also be discussed later), which arguably means a new wave of exporting values/models after the “revolution exportation” in the 1950s–70s. Meanwhile, some excluded elements in the revolutionary period, for example, Confucianism which had mostly been criticized in political discourses from the 1950s to 1980s (even in the 1990s and early 2000s), were again included and highlighted. This celebration of Confucianism and other previously forbidden/neglected elements, indicate a formal recognition of Confucian tradition in mainland China, which is indeed a “new” trend in mainland China politics.

Thirdly, the new Chineseness is a construction, with the approvals of the censors from the Chinese top leadership of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), that was incorporated with personal marks of Zhang Yimou, China’s most famous film-maker and the chief director of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics, as well as other key cultural intellectuals in Zhang’s creative team. One typical example of these marks is Zhang’s emphasis on the use of lights and LED display to create a spectacular visuality. As a member of the creative team argues, “every single element [of the performance] is not new,” yet,

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21 In the 1950s through 70s, the Chinese government had sponsored “revolutions” in many regions in the world with “Maoist” thoughts.
“the refashioning of the traditional culture with the digital multimedia ideas and ‘modernistic’ [technological] methods” did create “a visual strangeness” in these artistic presentations (S. Luo 2009: episode 6). With these personal marks, the presentations of the Opening Ceremony, despite the “banality” of the contents (for some critics, which will be discussed in chapter five), turn out to be technologically advanced, post-modern, romantic, and even dreamlike, which succeed in attaching a sense of modernity to mainland China, an image that symbolizes the rise of China and the revival of Chinese ethnicity. Thus, the newness of the “new” Chineseness is not strictly in factual or causal terms, but is rather a representational feature of a systematic and deliberate campaign of articulating a new China to the world and to the Chinese.

Despite the confidence of reinterpreting a “new” set of Chineseness and promoting it to the world, it is by no means an easy task. The Beijing Olympics is, after all, a “different” Olympics, and one of the factors that have made this Olympics so different is precisely the “Chineseness.” As cultural studies scholar Zhang Xudong argues, before the Beijing Olympics, there were the 1936 Berlin, 1980 Moscow, and 1988 Seoul Olympics, the host countries of which all had one conflicting, or at least different, aspect in social system, culture, or ideology with “the core value system of the ‘Western civilization’” (X. Zhang 2008: n. pag.). However, Zhang argues, the Beijing Olympics is the only one with a host that “is different from the West in all the abovementioned aspects in a way of ‘harmony without uniformity’ [和而不同] and ‘seeking common points while reserving differences [求同存异]” (ibid.). The significance of China’s relationship with the West, based on the so-called “harmony without uniformity,” is illustrated by Zhang Xudong as follows:

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22 “Harmony without uniformity” is an extract from the Analects (a canon of Confucianism). It initially refers to an ideal principle of interpersonal relationship, but it is also extended as an ideal principle for inter-institute and international relationships. “Seeking common points while reserving differences,” proposed by the late Premiere Zhou Enlai, is the main principle for international relation of the PRC.
The premise of this position or situation is not that China is seeking to be accepted as an “interior” (namely, a part) by the West, but is a contemporary economic, social, cultural, and political experiment that is supported by a whole civilization system and historical tradition, involved by 1.3 billion people, guided by a mighty and effective government, and explicitly or implicitly takes the polity legitimacy and the honor of the civilization system as the highest pursuits. (2008, n. pag.)

For Zhang Xudong, the implication of the Beijing Olympics is that it represents a different but equal civilization and development model (an “economic, social, cultural, and political experiment” embedded with Chineseness, like Chinese civilization, tradition, governmental involvement, and the highest pursuits) to the West. Similarly, this “economic, social, cultural, and political experiment” is also summarized as “Beijing Consensus” (Ramo 2004) or “China Model” (Lin 2006; Cao 2005), an alternative to the Western modernity and development model. For Joshua Copper Ramo, the “Beijing Consensus,” which is a counterpart of the “Washington Consensus,” refers to the development model combining market economy and democracy, and contains three theorems — repositioning “the value of innovation” from trailing-edge innovation to bleeding-edge innovation; using “a whole set of new tools” to guarantee “sustainability and equality” in order to manage possible chaos; and emphasizing “self-determination, one that stresses using leverage to move big, hegemonic powers that may be tempted to tread on your toes” (Ramo 2004: 11–12).

Lin Chun defines “China Model” as a normative term of the in-the-making socialist reform paradigm that is “political innovativeness of a Chinese alternative to the capitalist homogenization of the world” (Lin 2006: 12; italics added).

Although critics argue that a “Beijing Consensus” does not exist (e.g., Kennedy 2010; Chan, Lee, and Chan 2008), and that the “China model” is arguably not yet a model (e.g., Huang 2008 & 2012; Qin 2007), the concerns about the proliferation of the “China model,” or the “soft power” of China, has somehow
aggravated the worries about the already diverse “China threat.” For example, Joshua Kurlantzick writes in worries: “In the worst possible case, China’s success in delivering strong economic growth while retaining political control could serve as an example to some of the more authoritarian-minded leaders in the region, like Cambodia’s Hun Sen” (2006: 5).

Worries about the China threat(s) — based on its political, economic, cultural, and even demographic differences from the West — was one of the main reasons why China failed the first bid in 1993 for the 27th 2000 Olympics (Brownell 2008: chapter 5; Hong and Lu 2012), and why the Western media tend to “bash” China (I will elaborate on this point later in this chapter). After China’s successful bid for the 2008 29th Olympics, the Western media, NGOs, and activists had been exploiting the Olympics as a platform to criticize China or to promote their own agenda (deLisle 2008; Latham 2009; Brownell 2008: chapter 6), seeing the Beijing Olympics as “promising contexts for long-standing participants and newcomers to try to change China” (deLisle 2008: 37). The intention was so strong that it has invoked Susan Brownell to ask: “In the West, there is more concern with the question, Will the Olympic Games change China? Why is the West so concerned about changing China and not concerned about China’s changing the West?” (2008: 195–96)

However, for Chinese authorities, the validity of the concepts of “Beijing Consensus” or “China Model” was less complicated in relation to the Beijing Olympics. In fact, the Chinese authorities had an ambiguous attitude about manifesting the “Beijing Consensus” or “China Model.” Rather, with the political pragmatism since 1978 when the open and reform policy (also referred to as the Chinese Economic Reform) was formally adopted, the authorities prefer to keep silent about the development route while going ahead, except delivering the ambiguous discourse and rhetoric of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”23 The strategy is

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23 The discussion of development route in the Maoist time always fell into the debate of socialist route and capitalist route. After the launch of the Economic Reform, Deng Xiaoping proposed to “shelve” the debates but to focus on development, with his widely circulated saying “A cat that can catch mice is a good cat, no matter whether it is black or white [不管白猫黑猫，抓到老鼠的就是好猫].”
clear: if the Beijing Olympics “succeeded,” then China automatically finished the “coming out party” and entered a so-called “international club” of Olympic host nations, like Japan (Tokyo 1964) and South Korea (Seoul 1988). By then, the alternative development “model” that China was exploring would spontaneously be more “self-evident.” The key issue, or the prominent “politics” of the Beijing Olympics for Chinese authorities, was to avoid the “tragic” situation of the Moscow (1980) and the Los Angeles (1984) Olympics when cold-war politics drew some nations to boycott the event and tore the Olympic Games apart. Under such circumstances, China’s communication and mediation of the Beijing Olympics was rather cautious. In the international communication, the Chinese government and the BOCOG were somehow “self-restrained,” trying to avoid any possible “conflicts” with the criticizing actors and media. This had actually benefited “those who seek to use the Olympics as a platform for rival narratives and critical agendas” (deLisle 2008: 46). In the domestic communication, the BOCOG and Chinese authorities cautiously separated “politics” from its mediation. For example, since 2005, China had undertaken a massive “Olympic education” program in China, which aimed to promote Olympic knowledge and mobilize civil supports to, as well as national pride in, the Olympic Games. Susan Brownell argues that this program was not a “master plan” surrounding the Beijing Olympics that “was imposed by the party-state from the top down with the singular goal of promoting nationalist and Communist ideology”; rather, it was:

a de-politicized version that linked national identity with sports heroes rather than political systems, and re-situated Chinese national identity within an international community in which it would now take its place as an equal partner. Old nationalist symbols were re-shaped by new associations with symbols of internationalism, the global community and world peace. (Brownell 2009: 62)
However, this program still aroused critiques blaming that it was a part of a “spiritual civilization” propaganda program as “a soft form of social control” that aimed to distract the Chinese from “other less positive social and economic issues” (Brady 2009: 17–19).

The construction of new Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony was even more challenging. In addition to the concerns about the “political motives” from outside China, the Chinese in mainland China also had demanding expectations of the event. In the Closing Ceremony of the Athens Olympics, Zhang Yimou and his creative team launched an eight-minute artistic performance surrounding typical Chinese cultural symbols like Buddhism and the song *Jasmine Flower*. It gained applause from the foreign media for being especially “Chinese” but was heavily criticized in China for being banal (S. Luo 2009: episode 1). One of the reasons was that mainland China’s society, after more than twenty years of opening up and reform, was less homogeneous than in the Maoist times and possessed varying cultural and political orientations. On the issue of what should or should not be included in the Opening Ceremony (and in the symbolic system of the Beijing Olympics), there were at least traditionalist, neo-patriotic, neo-Leftist, and Occidentalist discourses that emphasized different aspects of Chinese culture and society that they thought should be presented in the artistic performances, as I will discuss in chapter two and five.

Thus, for the BOCOG, and the chief director Zhang Yimou and his colleagues, the Opening Ceremony had to meet high demands and expectations: it should be a manifesto of China rise, a modernistic but very “Chinese” show that could project a brand new image of China and forge a stronger national identity; meanwhile, it should not be too powerful or pressuring to the world audience so as to reduce the already high resistance and criticisms. In 2007, the CCP Politburo, the Chinese top leadership, prescribed five features for the Opening Ceremony: splendor [精彩], novelty [新颖], characteristics of Chinese ethnicity [民族特色], characteristics of the age [时代特征]
These features were summarized by the BOCOG and Zhang Yimou (and his colleagues) as “using the ‘world language’ to relate Chinese story” (ibid.). With this guideline, Zhang Yimou and his colleagues have articulated a set of new Chineseness that could (at least partly) be seen as an alternative to the Western modernity, based on the discourses of the splendid Chinese culture, multilayered harmony, and alternative modernity. I argue that this articulation of new Chineseness, on the one hand, implies a “strategic essentialism” as “the positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 1996[1985]: 214), a strategy here for China to articulate an equal subject with the West; on the other hand, it also implies a sense of “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 1992: 22–34; Chow 2010: 152–53) that implies the impact of the dominant aesthetics of Western cultural industry on the articulation of new Chineseness, as I will discuss in chapter two.

**Chineseness: One or Many, to Unbind or to Attach to?**

The new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony is rather monolithic, defining the “new” China, Chinese culture, and Chinese people in a strongly affirmative tone. However, as an essentialist term, Chineseness always contains variant versions, especially in the non-mainland Chinese communities (the diversity of Chineseness in mainland China will be discussed later).

As Song Geng (2006) argues, the study of Chineseness is closely related to globalization, and is consequently connected tightly with geopolitics and identity

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24 The translation of 世界眼光 as “international perspective” is borrowed from Barmé (2009: 70). However, 世界眼光 has more connotations than “international perspective.” It means the adoption of the dominant perspective, aesthetics, and representational styles of Western cultural production.

25 For Spivak, the “strategic essentialism” was a tactic used by marginalized groups to forge a sense of collective identity to be unified for political movements. But the proliferation of this term broadened its usage to include more social entities and social activities (Spivak herself later stopped using the term, but it is still influential in many research fields). Here I use this term to signify China’s relatively under-represented situation in articulating a more positive national image in the world.
politics. Song Geng draws a dichotomy between Chinese diaspora scholarship and its mainland China’s counterparts. He argues that the recent rise of the study of Chineseness, first initiated mostly by “overseas Chinese” and Western scholars in the broadly defined field “China Studies,” focuses more on its “constructiveness or discursiveness” (ibid.: 5) and on how to negotiate new cultural-political spaces for the overseas Chinese (Chinese diaspora), and for Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, in mainland China, for a large group of scholars (including some diaspora scholars with mainland China background), the idea of Chineseness is very much “an alternative for the Western modernity and a resistance to the Western hegemony” (ibid.), which emphasizes contemporary China as a representative of an alternative modernity.

Song (2006) has rightfully pointed out the diversity of the concept and connotations of Chineseness. However, the dichotomy seems overgeneralized. Even when mainland China’s diverse constructions about Chineseness are left out, the diaspora studies about Chineseness may still have, at least, three distinctive levels: diversion, refusal, or reengagement. The first level is to articulate a version of Chineseness detached from mainland China, a place always associated with controversies that have become the “burden” of the overseas Chinese across the world. One of the major efforts to detach Chineseness from mainland China is Tu Weiming’s concept of “cultural China.” Tu (1991) proposes that the periphery, namely, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, as well as the Chinese diaspora and the Western scholars of China Studies and Sinology, was becoming the new “center” of cultural China (in contrast to the “geographical China,” which usually refers to mainland China), due to the relative continuity of Chinese culture and fast economic growth in these areas in the 1970s and 80s. Tu argues that mainland China in the meantime had relatively slow economic growth and suffered from cultural discontinuity, because of the Cultural Revolution and other radical revolutionary movements from the 1950s to 1970s, and the radical anti-traditionalist movement that pervaded among the intellectuals and in urban areas in the 1980s. Therefore, mainland China failed to be a “modern” society like the periphery and “lost” the cultural tradition; as a consequence it was losing its
place as the “center” of Chineseness. Meanwhile, the periphery was becoming the new center, in the form of cultural China. In 1990 when Tu Weiming articulated the concept of “cultural China,” he apparently did not anticipate that mainland China would be emerging so quickly into the “modern” society that he saw in “Four Little Dragons.” Based on the assumptions of a slow or even static “modernization process” in mainland China and of a static and homogeneous Chinese identity in the periphery, he has asserted that the periphery would be the new center of the cultural China (in opposition to the geological China). He argues that:

Although realistically, those who are on the periphery . . . are seemingly helpless in affecting any fundamental transformation of China proper, the center no longer has the ability, insight or legitimate authority to dictate the agenda for cultural China. On the contrary, the transformation potential of the periphery is so great that it seems inevitable that it will significantly shape the intellectual discourse on cultural China for years to come. (Tu 1991: 27–28)

The assumptions of cultural China have aroused twofold critiques: one stems from the diaspora Chinese scholarship, which constitutes the second level of diaspora studies about Chineseness: refusal; the other is from mainland China (which will be discussed in the next section). As Tu’s assertion conflicts with the complex circumstances of the diverse Chinese diaspora communities, a large number of academic works — for example, Ien Ang (2001); Allen Chun (1996); Aihwa Ong (1999); Rey Chow (1998); Andrea Louie (2004); and many others — argue that the assumption of a static and homogeneous Chinese identity in the highly diverse “Chinese diaspora” communities across the world is problematic. For example, Chun (1996), with a provoking article title “Fuck Chineseness,” doubts the possibility of a univocal version of Chineseness

26 Four Little Dragons refer to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea, all of which had experienced rapid economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s.
under the postmodern and postcolonial condition in the Asia-Pacific area. Ien Ang proposes that “there is no necessary political righteousness in Chinese diasporic identity, the long-standing Chinese tradition of feeling victimized and traumatized notwithstanding” (2001: 12). Describing Chineseness as a “prison-house” that constrains the diaspora Chinese, she argues:

[D]ependning on context and necessity it may be politically mandatory to refuse the primordial interpellation of belonging to the largest ‘race’ of the world, the ‘family’ of ‘the Chinese people.’ (Ang 2001: 51)

With this understanding, Ang asks “Can one, when called for, say no to Chineseness?” (ibid.) Similarly, based on debates in a symposium on the “question whether Chineseness could or should be ‘unbound’ from a particular state (the PRC), or race (the yellow emperor’s seed),27 or definition of culture,” Anthony Reid asserts that “quests for either an essence of Chineseness or boundaries to it are bound to fail, and should fail” (2009: 199).

Despite all these reflections and critiques on the Chineseness and its connection to the “place” of China, the identity of Chinese (or at least positive involvement with the essentialist Chineseness) persists in some diaspora Chinese, which constitutes the third level of the discussion of Chineseness in the diaspora Chinese communities. Based on the examination of the diaspora living condition, James Clifford questions “the organic, naturalizing bias of the term ‘culture’ — seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, [and] dies” (1997[1988]: 25). He argues, despite being critical to this phenomenon, that the “culture” of the diaspora is always bound to a specific “root” place:

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27 It is more referred to as the “Emperors Yan and Huang’s seed [炎黄子孙],” which means that all Chinese are offspring of the Yan and Huang Emperors, two legendary figures in Chinese ancient sagas.
In these assumptions authentic social existence is, or should be, centered in circumscribed places. . . . Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes. (Clifford 1997[1988]: 3)

The search for roots in China among the diaspora Chinese reemerges against the background of the “China rise.” Even though Ien Ang questions if Chinese diaspora “can say no to Chineseness,” her mother — who had a somewhat “extreme” attitude to the assimilation into the Indonesian society when she lived in Indonesia — became “deeply interested, deeply attached to China” after she moved to the Netherlands (Gabriel 2011: 129). She also regretted her forbiddance of her children to learn Chinese in their childhood (in Indonesia): “When China had become more powerful globally, she would say, maybe it was a mistake not to have taught you Chinese” (ibid.). In the 1990s and 2000s, after decades of de-Chineseness, Singapore has been rebuilding connections with mainland China and reengaging with Chineseness through “roots-searching [寻根]” activities including learning Chinese Mandarin and visiting the ancestral “hometowns” in mainland China (Tan 2003). This resonates with Raj Vasil’s observation that “the fast-growing relationship and contact with China soon began to transform the Chineseness of Singapore from an unavoidable and unfortunate liability to an important and immensely profitable asset” (1995: 133). In Indonesia, after decades of “anti-Chinese” policy under the Suharto regime, the Chinese Indonesian began increasingly to reengage openly with Chineseness in the

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28 The relationship between the overseas Chinese and China before the 1980s will not be discussed here. For relevant studies, please refer to G. Wang 2000; Ho 2009: part one; Rae and Witzel 2008; and many others.
29 De-Chineseness for Eugene K. B. Tan (2003) is the systematic exclusion of Chinese language as well as political and cultural relations with China in Singaporean government policy from the 1960s to early 1990s. But more generally this term refers to the initiatives, actions, and policies to culturally, politically, or socially detach from China (both PRC and ROC, but mostly PRC).
30 See also Lim (2007), although he takes a critical position.
31 The diaspora Chinese in Southeast Asia and other regions have substantially contributed to the economic growth in their ancestral “hometown” in south China, especially in the Pearl Delta of Guangdong province in the 1980s and 1990s. For more detailed research, please refer to Lever-Tracy, Ip, and Tracy 1996; Zhou and Kuah-Pearce 2003; Kuah-Pearce 2011; Zweig 2002: chapter 2 & 5; Rae and Witzel 2008; and many others.
twenty-first century. The construction of *kong miao* [孔庙, Confucius’s temple] in 2011 in a national park in Indonesia “puts back the link between the Indonesia Confucian and Chinese culture and religiosity” (Satrisno 2012: 12), and has aroused the “balance issue” of “Chinese rootedness and Indonesian nationalism” (ibid.: 8). Meanwhile, there is an increasingly large number of “new emigrants,” namely, the Chinese emigrants since the 1980s, across the world. Although the overall attitude of the “new emigrants” to China and Chineseness is complicated,32 a notable phenomenon of “overseas Chinese nationalism” (Hong Liu 2005) has emerged among this group. Pal Nyiri, Juan Zhang, and Merriden Varrall have examined the critical responses of Chinese cosmopolitan youths’ to the protests against and interruptions to the worldwide Olympic Torch Relay in 2008 in Paris, London, San Francisco, and some other cities, as well as their supports to the Beijing Olympics and to China. They argue that “nationalism has become part of a cosmopolitan Chinese youth identity in overseas locations” (2010: 25).

These three levels of studies (namely, diversion, refusal, and reengagement) about Chineseness and the (non-)identification with it in non-mainland-China areas form a vital background for my analysis of the situative centering of the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness by Hong Kong and Taiwan television channels. In both Hong Kong and Taiwan, due to the geopolitics, there are involvements of all the three attitudes, which can be seen in the television live broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics in these regions. With the examination of the live broadcasts of TVB (Hong Kong) and CTV (Taiwan), I argue that, on the one hand, neither the idea of cultural China nor the new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony can serve as a univocal identity resource for Hong Kong and Taiwan, let alone all “Chinese” across the world. On the other hand, the Hong Kong and Taiwan live broadcasts also imply a Chinese identity based on Chinese traditional culture.

32 Quite some emigrants are political dissidents, such as “democratic movement [民运]” activists, Falungong [法轮功] practitioners, ethnic independence activists, and others, who have strong criticisms on China and Chineseness. Ong (1999) also argues that some of the Chinese new emigrants have no specific nationalistic attachments but just economic interests.
With this analysis, I propose that the increasing diversity of the global “Chinese community” calls for more updated and inclusive “new” Chineseness (or other forms of articulations), which can better match the pervasive hybridity in the Chinese communities across mainland China and the world, to serve as the basis for a “global Chinese identity,” at least for those who are willing to engage or reengage in some sort of Chinese identity.

**Discourses, Internet, and Chineseness in Mainland China**

In addition to the critiques from scholarship on Chinese diaspora studies to Tu Weiming’s idea of cultural China, there are direct or indirect responses to this idea from mainland China. For some mainland Chinese scholars (as well as some overseas scholars originating from mainland China and some Western intellectuals, e.g., Lin Chun and Joshua Copper Ramo), one of the features of the discussion on Chineseness from the 1990s is that Chineseness is seen as both an alternative and a resistance to the Western hegemony. Song Geng argues that this discussion “to some extent inherits the official discourse of ‘ethnicity [民族性]’ and tints cultural relativism in the appearance, and acts as theoretical resources of (neo) nationalism/patriotism” (2006: 5). Contrary to the 1980s when mainland China was pervaded with Occidentalistic universalism (mostly liberalist values and theories; Jing Wang 1996; Xiaomei Chen 2002), the 1990s was the beginning of a new wave of nationalism/patriotism. Song cites that, for example, Wang Yichuan proposes that since the 1980s, China’s second-phase modernization (from the 1980s onward) is not to pursue the globalization of Chinese culture according to Western discourses; instead, it is to reconstruct and uphold Chineseness to provide an alternative “modernity” to the world (Song 2006: 5).
Song’s generalization has somewhat simplified the complexity of the discussion on Chineseness and (neo-)nationalism in mainland-Chinese scholarship. Surrounding the question of “how to construct, and what is the body of, ‘Chineseness’ as an alternative modernity,” there are, at least, neo-patriotic, neo-Leftist, and traditionalist discourses that advocate respective proposals.\(^{33}\) The neo-patriotic discourse is derived from the neo-patriotism that emerged in the 1990s and thrives thereafter. It is a populist derivation of the government-engineered nationalism and is encouraged by China’s rapid economic growth (Dynon 2008; Gries 1999 & 2004; Callahan 2010). The “neo” here emphasizes the difference between the patriotism engineered in the 1950s–1970s with Maoism as the core, and the contemporary populist patriotism based on the discourse of China rise, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese ethnicity, and the socialism with Chinese characteristics. The most notable feature of this discourse is that it closely links patriotism to the government, thus legitimating the incumbent regime. One of the best (extreme) examples of this discourse is the best-selling trilogy *China Can Say No* (Song et al. 1996, 1998, 2009),\(^{34}\) which promotes populist nationalism in China. For example, in the latest book of the trilogy *China Is Unhappy*, the authors propose that “[s]ome people say that China should provide the world with a model. But I think that merely providing a model is too small a goal. What China should provide is the true administration and leadership” (Song et al. 2009: 98). The hidden appeal of this populist nationalism is the realization of China’s rejuvenation or even a rebuilding of a new “Chinese empire.”

The neo-Leftist discourse proposes to reassess the Maoist socialism and the Cultural Revolution in order to resist the ongoing bureaucratic capitalism, power-sharing structure, and social inequality in China. For example, Cui Zhiyuan (2003[1996]) argues that the Angang [鞍钢, the Anshan Steel Plant] Constitution, an idealism of industrial corporate management (which encourages every worker’s participation in production management and emphasizes gradual improvement) that

\(^{33}\) More detailed discussion on these discourses is in chapter five.

\(^{34}\) This trilogy contains *China Can Say No* (1996), *China Still Can Say No* (1998), and *China Is Unhappy* (2009).
emerged in the Great Leap campaign in the 1950s, represents the management trend in the post-Fordist times of the world. Cui insists that “the spiritual essence of ‘Angang Constitution’ is still the precious intellectual resource for China to welcome the twenty-first century, no matter how many mistakes had emerged in the execution [of this set of management idealism] in the Cultural Revolution” (2003[1996]: 224).

Another example is Wang Hui who anticipates that a certain new socialism, which is different from Maoism and the ongoing “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” will emerge in future in China and, probably, will spread to the world if we could reflect on Chinese socialist history and would carry on “theoretical and institutional innovation” in the context of globalization (2003[1994]: 42).

The traditionalists claim that Chinese culture will be the main cultural resource for the world in the twenty-first century to cope with the issues that have emerged in the globalized times. For example, the deceased prominent historian Ji Xianlin (1993, 1996) has proposed that “‘tianren heyi [天人合一]’ means the harmony between human and nature” and asserted that “only the Oriental ethics, the ‘tianren heyi’, can save the contemporary humans” (Ji 1993: 7). Fei Xiaotong, a deceased prominent anthropologist in China, proposed his idea of “cultural consciousness” in 1997. By cultural consciousness, he means that in the context of globalization, the less powerful cultures would have to pull through phases of self-contempt, self-reflection, and self-confidence when encountering powerful cultures. Proposing a culture-relativist compromise of the Occidentalism and radical traditionalism, he writes:

Only when it has pulled through the arduously difficult process of cultural consciousness and independent adaptation can contemporary Chinese culture, in this currently forming world of plural cultures, find its own place; benefit and learn from other cultures; and set up co-recognized basic orders and a set of principles enabling peaceful coexistence, respective strengths exertion, and co-development (Fei 1997: 22).
With this statement, Fei expects that China will be an equal power to the major powers in the world.

Although their points of view may vary, the initiatives of the neo-patriots, neo-Leftists, and traditionalists are all to construct and promote a new China as an alternative modernity to the world, which is surely a reflection of China’s increasing self-confidence accompanying the high economic growth and rising international power after the Economic Reform. These initiatives, to some extent, cooperate, or even “conspire,” according to some critics like Song Geng (2006), with the government’s political rhetoric of “restoration” and socialism with Chinese characteristics, both of which imply an alternative modernity to the “Western” capitalist modernity, the former even involving some degree of traditional cultural restoration. This cooperation or “conspiracy” is one of the most notable political and cultural phenomena in the 1990s or 2000s, which has generated a large number of publications about the Chinese model as an alternative modernity, as I have mentioned above.

Compared to this overwhelming cooperation between the official discourses and some broadly defined Chinese scholarships, the criticism and resistance from liberal and Occidentalist intellectuals and artists to this articulation of “Chineseness as an alternative” are comparatively less prominent. The Occidentalism, which thrived in the May Fourth movement and in the 1980s (Xiaomei Chen 2002; Jing Wang 1996), has been far less noticeable as it is restricted by the government. Yet, the Occidentalist critiques still keep on questioning the validity of the Chineseness “as an

35 The “New Culture Movement,” which was closely related to the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and thereby is called the May Fourth and New Cultural Movement, was a movement of the mid-1910s and 1920s, which aimed to create a “new” Chinese culture based on Western ideas of democracy and science, and to abandon the traditional Chinese culture. The peak of this movement was the May Fourth Movement in 1919, when college students marched into the streets to protest against the government’s diplomatic failure in the Paris Peace Conference after World War I. This movement has established a tradition of Occidentalism and radical anti-traditionalism in China. The establishment of the Chinese Communist Party was also one of the crucial outcomes of this movement. A by-product of this movement is the discourse of “new,” i.e., the political superiority of the “new” over the “old,” which is closely related to evolutionism and revolutionism.
alternative,” and emphasizing the necessity to adopt the “universal values” of democracy, liberalism, and constitutionalism. For example, using the life and words of the exemplar Li Shenzhi [李慎之], the deceased liberal intellectual, as illustration, Liu Junning argues that “although [the Western] mainstream civilization and universal values are not an inherent tradition of thousands of years of Chinese culture, they take their roots in China when they come, and merge into Chinese tradition” (J. Liu 2003: n. pag.). Liu Xiaobo, the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, states in his influential “Charter 08”:

The Chinese people, who have endured human rights disasters and uncountable struggles across these same years, now include many who see clearly that freedom, equality, and human rights are universal values of humankind and that democracy and constitutional government are the fundamental framework for protecting these values.

By departing from these values, the Chinese government's approach to "modernization" has proven disastrous. It has stripped people of their rights, destroyed their dignity, and corrupted normal human intercourse. So we ask: . . . will it [China] embrace universal human values, join the mainstream of civilized nations, and build a democratic system? (X. Liu 2008c: n. pag.)

With this statement and question, Liu obviously strives for a democratic China based on “universal values” and “mainstream civilization,” which resonates with his co-authored television documentary series River Elegy (1988) that proposes “a wholesale of Westernization” and the abandoning of Chinese traditional culture. These Occidentalist critiques may be low-key but their presence demonstrates that the dichotomy proposed by Song Geng between the diaspora and mainland scholarships on Chineseness probably neglects the counternarratives to “Chineseness as an alternative” within mainland China.
The diversity of these narratives is reflected in many websites and online forums that have populated the Internet since introduction of Internet to China in the 1990s. The Internet has been a medium for opinion debates and for activist contentions, especially when the traditional media is under stricter control (G. Yang 2003 & 2009; Tai 2006; Zheng 2007). Despite the government control over the Internet, every abovementioned discourse has, as its “centers,” one or two well-known websites or online forums, or at least some prominent communities (discussion boards) on the big forums: in the mid-2000s, there were, for example, at least Utopian Forum [乌有之乡] for the neo-Leftists; Kaidi Forum [凯迪网] for the liberalist; People’s Forum [强国论坛] and Tiexue Forum [铁血社区] for the neo-patriots; and the Guoxue Forum [国学论坛] and some communities on the prominent forum Tianya Forum [天涯社区] for the traditionalists.\footnote{In April 2012, the biggest online forum Utopian Forum for neo-Leftists was shut down by the government; but the neo-Leftists still have some other websites and online forums, e.g., The April (derived from anti-cnn.com, a former neo-patriotic website). Also, the Utopian Forum’s reincarnation Redchinacn [红色中国] is emerging.} These discourses are also notable on portal websites like Sina, NetEase, Sohu, and QQ, especially in the news comments and on the discussion forums embedded in these websites. The Tianya Forum has even become a battlefield for the Leftists and Occidentalists to debate about the future direction of China.

Despite the fact that some of the abovementioned discourses have been supporting or “conspiring” with the Chinese government in constructing Chineseness as an alternative to the “Western” modernity, each of them has different anticipations about what the new Chineseness is and how it should be constructed. Before and after the Opening Ceremony, there were heated debates about the representations of China and Chinese. One typical example was Ji Xianlin’s proposition of “uplifting Confucius” into the Opening Ceremony in 2007, which was greeted with enormous criticisms from neo-patriots, neo-Leftists, and Occidentalists, arguing that Confucius and Confucianism were too banal or even harmful to modern China.\footnote{For a more detailed report, please refer to “Debates Triggered by Ji Xianlin’s Suggestion of Uplifting Confucius to the Opening Ceremony [季羡林建议奥运开幕式抬出孔子引发激辩（组图）].”} Another case
was how to deal with the Maoist legacy, that is, whether Chairman Mao, his philosophy, and his policies were still assets of contemporary China, which is one of the key issues that have afflicted the neo-Leftists against the Occidentalists and the traditionalists (this will also be discussed in chapter five).

After the Opening Ceremony, these discourses, together with other discourses, rendered harsh criticisms (in addition to their supports) on the new Chineseness, forming a sharp contrast to the “traditional” media that were under strict censorship by the authorities. The criticisms covered most of the aspects of the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony, as I will demonstrate in chapter five. At first glance, these criticisms seem to largely echo the researches that emphasize the heterogeneity and openness of the Chinese Internet (G. Yang 2003; Tai 2006; and Zheng 2007), and “the power of the Internet in China,” with online activism being an ever-evolving creative force to propel the Chinese “long revolution”: building up “conceptions and practices of self, society, and politics,” and then gradually evolving into “democracy as a political system” (G. Yang 2009: 213–14). However, I argue that, through a discourse analysis of these online criticisms, under the specific circumstances of 2008 when nationalism was mobilized in China, these critical discourses nevertheless collectively strengthened the identity to the new Chineseness and, to some extent, reinforced the authoritarian governmentality, as I will demonstrate in chapter five.

Understanding Chineseness as a Mediated Construction: Methodological Reflections


38 This section briefly introduces my theorizing structure, framing, data collection, and analysis methods. For, more detailed explanation on data gathering and analysis, please refer to Appendix I.
and Anglo-America through the approach and perspective of global media events. I examine firstly how the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony was produced as the “thematic core” of a global media event that aimed to upgrade the image(s) of China in the world and to foster national identity in mainland China. Secondly, I will examine how television channels in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Anglo-America, and the mainland Chinese Internet situatively “centered” the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony, and how these media received, recognized, and contested the constructed Chineseness (i.e., how these media articulate meanings of the Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony according to their own agenda and priorities), taking the television broadcasts (for global and regional media) and discussions (for national media) on the Internet as examples.

The examination of the thematic core, namely, the construction of the new Chineseness, is conducted mainly through the examination of the live broadcast of the Opening Ceremony on China Central Television (CCTV, the most officially authoritative television channel in mainland China); documentary films and television series, and press reports about the production of the Opening Ceremony; and ten in-depth interviews conducted by myself with participants of the Opening Ceremony in order to have a better grasp of the construction of the Chineseness and of the production of the Opening Ceremony. CCTV cooperated closely with the production of the Opening Ceremony, and its interpretation and commentary of the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness can literally be seen as an “official” manifestation of the views of the BOCOG and the Chinese government. The documentaries and press reports provide valuable details about the creative, executive, and performative process, which show the aesthetics, ethics, and political compromises behind the construction of the new Chineseness.

The reason I choose television broadcasts for the study about how the global and regional media situatively center the Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony is that, although the Opening Ceremony was “thickened” by multiple media forms, the most influential media form for the Olympics mediation was still the television. My
analysis is largely based on the live broadcast and rebroadcast of the Opening Ceremony, with a supplement of press reports, documentary videos, and online data (for the study of national media response). The selected global television channels are BBC and NBC, a choice based on that (a) they have a long tradition of broadcasting the Olympic Games and have very broad coverage in the world; (b) they represent public and commercial television channels respectively; and (c) they are representatives of the main targets of the Opening Ceremony and of national image building (as I will discuss in chapter two). TVB [无线, Television Broadcasting Company] and CTV [中视, China Television] are the two channels selected from Hong Kong and Taiwan respectively. Hong Kong and Taiwan, on the one hand, share cultural proximity and have strong cultural ties with mainland China; yet, on the other hand, both of them are, at least partially, politically distant (for Hong Kong) and detached (for Taiwan) from mainland China. This background makes Hong Kong and Taiwan vital places for the study of the media responses to the Opening Ceremony as a global media event and the new Chineseness embedded in it, and gives rise to interesting questions which are crucial for the examination of the constructed new Chineseness. TVB is selected not only because it was the most watched live broadcast in Hong Kong, but it also presented the typical Hong Kong media culture on sports events broadcast and on the ambiguity of Hong Kong identity. The reason for selecting CTV is that it has displayed the most typical controversial response in accordance with the abovementioned dual situations to the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony, although it was not the most watched live broadcast of the Opening Ceremony in Taiwan.

The examination of the mediation and reception of the new Chineseness inside mainland China is mainly through the study of the critical discourses to the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony on the Internet. Media control in China, and the openness and easy accessibility of Internet have made Internet the prominent media channel for public debates on social issues, especially for social contentions and activism that resist the Chinese government. After the Opening Ceremony,
reports, comments, and reviews in the traditional media were overwhelmingly supportive; while on the Internet, there were hot debates on the presentations and representations about the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness, simultaneously involving supportive and critical discourses. In the examination, I have chosen to carry out my analysis with a focus on critical discourses, rather than on actors and critics, for two reasons. Firstly, the examination of the critical discourses will spontaneously involve their antagonistic supportive discourses to the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony. Secondly, people who participated in these debates shifted their positions from one topic to another. As Jodi Dean argues, overall public debates on the Internet are rather “issue by issue” than actor-centered (2003: 107–8). Following Jodi Dean, I analyze the critical discourses in an issue-by-issue way, instead of focusing on actors and critics. Based on a sampling of online forums, websites, blogs, and short messages circulated on mobile phones (see Appendix I), I examine how six different critical discourses debated about the new Chineseness and antagonized each other issue by issue on the Internet, and how these antagonisms have made the new Chineseness a “void institution” (Levi-Strauss 1963; Žižek 1999).

In the examination, I mainly use discourse analysis to analyze the texts and video/image texts from the selected media. After several decades of development, there is a myriad of discourse analysis in different disciplines. I mainly see the discourse as “a form of social practice,” which is shaping and shaped by “the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s),” and which produces and reproduces “unequal power relations” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258). In addition to the language, I also see video/image as a kind of discursive text that articulates discourses. In the examination, I am mainly concerned with how the discourses were articulated in given contexts where the language/image/visual text were situated, including both the articulation of the new Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony and the responses and contestations of it in various media.
Situative Centering of Chineseness in Various Media:
The Outline of Research

In this dissertation I will examine how and for whom the “new” Chineseness has been constructed in the Opening Ceremony; and how it was responded to and contested in the global, regional, and national media. My analysis begins with examination of how the new Chineseness was constructed in the Opening Ceremony in chapter two. The examination of CCTV’s broadcasting is combined with the production process of the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness in order to better understand how and for whom the new Chineseness was constructed. I propose that, with interwoven discourses of the Chinese splendid culture and long continuous history, harmony, and alternative modernity, the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics articulates an alleged “new” set of Chineseness. This new Chineseness emphasizes the Chinese particularity to distinguish China from the rest of world, mobilizes a dual universalism to guarantee its acceptance, and meanwhile hints the potential of the new Chineseness as an alternative to the Western modernity. Thus, the Opening Ceremony, as well as the new Chineseness, on the one hand, feeds the Western audience with its to-be-looked-at-ness and strategic essentialism, and aims to construct a new and ideal image to the world; while on the other hand, it fosters national identity according to the CCP government’s priority.

Chapter three and chapter four examine the global and regional media’s centering of the Opening Ceremony and the constructed Chineseness respectively. In chapter three, I will analyze NBC’s and BBC’s different centerings of the Opening Ceremony, and their situative interpretations of the constructed Chineseness. The difference between NBC and BBC’s centerings well reflects the different main concerns of commercial and public television channels: NBC as a commercial television channel deliberately presented an exotic and Orientalistic rebroadcast of the
Opening Ceremony, and a “friendly” recognition of the new Chineseness, which was meant to maximize its revenue; the BBC live broadcast, on the contrary, to some extent questioned the narratives of the new Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony, reflecting the concerns of public television channels in propagating the “core values” (Western democracy and humanism). I argue that, ostensibly different they may appear, the centerings of NBC and BBC are largely “the West itself mirrored in the eyes and handiwork of its others” (Chow 2010: 170).

Chapter four is concerned with the situative centering and thickening of the Opening Ceremony and the constructed Chineseness on the Hong Kong and Taiwan television channels. As I will show in this chapter, Hong Kong’s live broadcast (TVB) of the Opening Ceremony deliberately tried to stay in alignment with mainland China authorities, while Taiwan’s television (CTV) channels specifically tried to estrange itself from mainland China. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong live broadcast ironically implied a strong difference from the mainland media culture, and moreover, an implicit issue of local identity; while Taiwan’s live broadcast conversely showed a strong recognition of Chinese traditional culture, and an identity of Chinese. With this examination, I argue that neither the idea of cultural China (Tu 1991, 1994) nor the constructed new Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony can serve as an unequivocal identity resource for Hong Kong and Taiwan, let alone all “Chinese” across the world. A set of more updated and inclusive Chineseness (or other forms of articulations) is, therefore, called for to serve as a better identity basis for mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and those diaspora Chinese who are willing to engage or reengage in some sort of Chinese identity.

The national online response to the Opening Ceremony is explored in chapter five, with a focus on the online criticisms to the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony. I examine how the neo-patriotic, neo-Leftist, Occidentalist, traditionalist, interest-related, and playful-cynical discourses presented their criticisms to the new Chineseness and how they antagonized each other. Following Slavoj Žižek’s (1999) reinterpretation of Levi-Strauss’ concept of “zero institution,” I argue that the critical
discourses have nevertheless collectively strengthened the construction of the new Chineseness and, to some extent, reinforced the authoritarian governmentality.

Based on the above case studies, and a comparison with the Opening Ceremony of the London Olympics in the Epilogue of this dissertation, I call for new ways for Chinese identity construction and national image (or soft power) building. In addition, resonating with Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), I also call for more de-imperialized communication tactics and strategies between these regions and beyond.