The making of China: The construction of Chineseness during the Beijing Olympics
Zeng, G.

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Chapter Two

Particularity, Universality, and Alternative:
The Constructing of New Chineseness

This chapter focuses on how a “new” set of Chineseness, or the “thematic core” of this global event (Hepp and Couldry 2010), was constructed during the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. As the most attractive moment of the most influential and globalized sports event, the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games has always been a crucial stage for the host nation to present itself and its culture. During the “staging,” it invariably involves the “narrative of nation” (Hall 1992) to respond to national, international, and global changes. For example, Jackie Hogan has studied the opening ceremonies of the Nagano 1998 (winter), Sydney 2000, and Salt Lake City 2002 (winter) Olympic Games, and examined how Japanese, Australian, and American identities were gendered and ethnicized. According to Hogan, “these gendered and ethnicized discourses of national identity at times both reflect current social hierarchies and contribute to the maintenance of these hierarchies by naturalizing the marginalization of women and ethnic minorities within these nations” (2003: 100). Teresa Heinz Housel (2007) has specifically analyzed the narratives of the nation in the 2000 Sydney Olympics’ Opening Ceremony, which presented images of a linear, multicultural, and chronological narrative of Australian history. Through the textual analysis of television broadcasting and news coverage of the ceremony, Housel demonstrates that the narrative of a united Australian nation in the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympics (2000) was largely a response to “the...
increasing disintegration of nation-states’ boundaries in the context of globalization.” (2007: 447)

Likewise, Jilly Traganou has examined how the organizers of the Athens Olympic Games took the design of the sports stadium and the Opening Ceremony to build up a “new Greece” image, to “overhaul the country’s outdated image as a nation caught between a glorious antiquity and technological backwardness, as well as convince the international community of Greece’s modernity and Europeanization in both cultural and economic terms” (2009: 76). Even the rebroadcast of the opening ceremonies presented by other nations can serve the purpose of expressing and arousing a sense of nationalism. Lee and Maguire have depicted how the media in South Korea “framed the event [the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Athens Olympic Games] with reference to anti-Japanese sentiments and an expression of unitary Korea Nationalism — both of which are central elements of Korean nationalism.” (Traganou 2009: 5)

Many observers have noted that the Beijing Olympics has also deliberately constructed a new image of China through the Opening Ceremony (Barmé 2009; Wu and Yun 2008; Callahan 2010: Introduction; Y. Zhao 2011; and many others). However, up until now, few of the publications about the Opening Ceremony or the overall Beijing Olympic Games have analyzed in details how this new China was precisely constructed and imagined during the ceremony. This chapter aims to probe into how the new image of China, or more concisely, the new Chineseness, was constructed during the Opening Ceremony. In this chapter, I will examine the “narratives of nation” or discourses — namely, the discourse of a grand culture and long history, the discourse of harmony, and the discourse of modernity — that underpinned the construction of a new Chineseness during the Opening Ceremony. I will also examine how they were articulated in terms of Chinese particularity, dual (Chinese and world) universalism, and relativist alternative to the Western societies. The analysis is mainly based on the CCTV live broadcast of the Opening Ceremony, the Media Guide for XXIX Olympiad Opening Ceremony, media reports on the
production process, and in-depth interviews with participants and reporting journalists of the Opening Ceremony done by myself in the follow-up fieldwork in the summer of 2010.

**To-Be-looked-At Spectacle**

In the Closing Ceremony of the Athens Olympics in 2004, Zhang Yimou and his creative team presented an eight-minute artistic show as a symbolic ritual indicating that the Olympics was passing on from Athens to Beijing. This performance included very symbolic Chinese cultural elements: red lantern, the song *Jasmine Flower*, Buddhism (the dance *Thousand-Handed Bodhisattva*), and so on. This performance gained high praises from the audience in Athens. Zhang Qing, vice director of logistics of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, recalls it in proudness: “The roof was blown up. . . . They rushed into the VIP box . . . and said, ‘[Y]ou have successfully aroused our desire of going to China [for the Beijing Olympics]’” (S. Luo 2009: episode 1). However, this performance was harshly criticized by Chinese media and some netizens as being “banal” and “old-fashioned,” and as feeding into the Westerner’s Orientalistic imagination of China, thus not representing the “real” contemporary China that has dramatically “modernized” in the past three decades (ibid.). Because of these criticisms, Zhang lost the unofficially granted directorship of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics, and had to participate in the bidding for the position. On 16 April 2006, the final outcome of the bidding turned out to be a combined directive team that included Zhang Yimou, chief director, Chen Weiya, vice-chief director, and Zhang Jigang, vice-chief director (S. Luo 2009; Zhang and Xia 2008; J. Li 2008; Olympics Archives 2008).

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39 Netizens is the word used by the Chinese Internet users to refer to themselves. It sometimes connotes an implication of “the people” or “the public” on the Internet.
These criticisms demonstrate that, as I have discussed in chapter one, the thirty years of rapid economic development, as well as the engineered nationalism, have stimulated strong motivation for some Chinese to expect a new image of a modern and “strong” China instead of an “oriental” country that only has traditional culture to “bluff.” After Zhang regained the directorship, he had to take both the national and global audiences into consideration, and not just the global audience alone. One of the basic principles was to make the artistic performances “intelligible to foreigners and favored by ordinary Chinese people” (S. Luo 2009: episode 2 & 3). He had to avoid the cultural elements that he had used before in his movies and other artistic works, such as red lanterns and round Chinese drums (ibid.). At the same time, he and his colleagues intended to “shock” the foreigners (especially those in Western countries that China had been tracing and trying to surpass for more than a hundred years) and to outperform the Opening Ceremony of the Athens Olympics (S. Luo 2009: episode 1). Ostensibly, the former consideration confined Zhang’s choice of cultural elements; the latter prescribed the general spectacular effect that he wanted to achieve. However, these two aspects are actually closely connected: the internal critics also want to impress the world, but they wish to include more modern elements which can better present China’s modernity. After all, as I have discussed in chapter one, one of the main intentions for China to host the Olympics is to display China’s achievements of modernization and economic development, hoping in so doing, it can gain more recognition from the world, facilitate further “development,” and tackle national and global issues. Therefore, this Opening Ceremony has to serve the purpose of changing China’s “old” image as an oriental, backward country, which only possesses traditional culture, into a modern, strong country and a “rising superpower,” which is returning to its grandiose glory; and thus facilitating the national identity.

In fact, in April 2007 when the BOCOG leaders were reporting to the CCP Politburo, the Chinese top leadership prescribed five features for the Opening Ceremony: splendor, novelty, characteristics of the Chinese ethnicity, characteristics
of the age, and international perspective (Q. Wu 2008).\textsuperscript{40} These features, according to Zhang Heping (Department Director for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of BOCOG) who depicted them in an analog, mean “using the ‘world language’ to relate Chinese story” (ibid.). They have become the main ideas for the choreography and creation of the artistic performance.

Therefore, for the organizers, who were broadly from the top CCP leadership, and the creative team, the Opening Ceremony was certainly not so much an “objective” presentation of the contemporary China as a grandiose spectacle (splendor and novelty) with Chinese particularity (ethnic characteristics) and “world universalism” (characteristics of the age and international perspective), which will be discussed in more details later. I argue that this strategy of articulating the 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 a subject of equal standing with the West by producing a new set of essentialist new Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony. On the other hand, it also implies a sense of “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 1992; Chow 2010) that signifies the Western dominance in worldwide culture industry. For Laura Mulvey, in the Hollywood cinema in the 1950s and 1960s, the female characters were coded with “to-be-looked-at-ness” by the looking males (1992: 22–34). Based on the ideas of Mulvey, Rey Chow expands this concept to study the national movie as self-ethnography. “The state of being looked at, she [Mulvey] argues, is built into the way we look” (Chow 2010: 152). Parallel to Mulvey, Chow argues: “the state of being looked at not only is built into the way non-Western cultures are viewed by Western ones; more significantly it is part of the active manner in which such cultures represent — ethnographize — themselves” (2010: 153). This argument resembles the construction of the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing

\textsuperscript{40} This prescription was actually a summarization of the main creative ideas of the BOCOG and Zhang Yimou’s creative team into “principles,” a usual tactics in CCP political activities, rather than an actual “prescription,” given that at that time the performance idea creation and design had almost finished and it was already entering the operation and execution process.
Olympics. While trying to escape from the some Western “Oriental” imaginations of China, the construction of new Chineseness falls into the “world-ness” in which the Western aesthetics again dominates, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

However, how is the strategic essentialism mobilized in articulating a set of to-be-looked-at new Chineseness and in the Opening Ceremony? I argue it is mainly through the logic of spectacle. Spectacle was first systematically theorized by Guy Debord (1995). According to Debord, spectacle refers to the abstract images and representations that are increasingly governing modern everyday life, which is fragmented into increasingly separate spheres by “the modern conditions of production” (1995: 23). Just like the spectacle, the images themselves are “detached from every aspect of life” and they “merge into a common stream” (ibid.: 12). Furthermore, the spectacle is “at once as society itself, as a part of society and as means of unification” (ibid.). In a word, the spectacle, through the images or visualization of representation, reunifies the separate aspects of everyday life and the separated individuals in the society:

The spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world. The spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this division. Separation is linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate but it unites it only in its separateness. . . . the spectacle is the map of this new world — a map drawn to the scale of territory itself. (ibid.: 22, 23; italics original)

Thus, the spectacle is “Not A Collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (ibid.: 12; capital letters original). The spectacle has the power to unify the separate aspects and individuals of the society for it monopolizes all communications in a one-way manner to its own advantage. The
spectacle embodies a strong disciplinary power to justify the existing society, itself, and the mode of production that has given rise to it.

Debord’s theorizing of the spectacle, although very inspiring, like his other situationist works, is sometimes over-generalized and lacks a clear empirical grounding. Combining Victor Turner’s studies on ritual studies with the spectacle, John J. MacAloon (1984) advocates further to distinguish the interwoven performative genres that he identifies as spectacle, festival, ritual, and game in the study of the Olympics Games. Douglas Kellner (2003, 2005, 2010) also contributes to the refinement of the theory of spectacle through the examination of the specific mechanism of the narratives of spectacle. Kellner emphasizes that media spectacles are becoming “the form in which news, information, and the events of the era are processed by media corporations, the state and the political groups, and institutions and individuals who have the power to construct political and social realities” (2010: 80); they “continue to produce modes of entertainment, sports, news and political information ever more beholden to spectacle” (2005: xvi). For example, in his book Media Spectacle, Kellner (2003) examines how the media spectacles impact on everyday social life in the contemporary US society, for example, how the exchange values of sports clothes and shoes are determined by the advertisement-created images rather than their use value, and how television news is drafted and broadcast according to the size of the potentially interested audience rather than the value of the facts and truths, and so on.

Kellner’s theorizing helps us probe into the logic of spectacle in media events and examine how it relates to everyday practice. In this regard, Don Handelman, an Israeli anthropologist, pushes the exploration further. Handelman’s book, Models and Mirrors (1998[1990]), explores the underlying logics that connect the special moments of spectacle and the everyday categories out of which social order and governmental practices become possible. Handelman examines the shift in the study

41 Here I specifically thank Nick Couldry for his generous sharing of his unpublished text on the “The Logics of Spectacle” (2009) from which I benefit a lot in writing this part.
of spectacle from (a) events that create a “model” of society or present “mirror” image of parts of society to (b) events that re-present aspects of social logics (qtd. in Couldry 2009: 6). He asserts that “[s]pectacle is the exciting, sensuous mask of bureaucratic ethos and organization. . . . the holidays of bureaucratic ethos” (Handelman 1998[1990]: xxxi–vi), and “the spectacle becomes the representation of social order under surveillance, under control, manipulated by its compositors and auditors” (ibid: xxxix). In his other book Nationalism and the Israeli State, Handelman further argues that the spectacle is a part of the general process whereby “the modern state torques together infrastructure and emotion” so as to generate commitment to a distant state (2004: 202).

More specifically, for Handelman, the underlying logic of the spectacle, which is also called a bureaucratic logic, is “a way of generating linear forms [note: a set of vertical or horizontal forms] of classification and dynamic for the creation and organization of linear form, that in its multitude of applications makes, shapes, and counts social life into existence in so many ways” (2004: 6). It is, in other words, “a logic of forming . . . the social forms” (ibid.). This logic not only underpins the spectacle, but also underpins everyday practice. For example, in a spectacular memorial event, the speeches were given by representatives of official categories of the Israeli state. These categories “constitute a linear taxonomy that delineates the state’s organization of responsibility for the welfare of the citizenry, according to categories of national policy (the minister), local government (the mayor), public order (the police commander), and national security (the Home Command general)” (ibid.: 9). The bureaucratic logic of this memorial event as a spectacle was partly revealed by the linear arrangement of these speeches.

This chapter follows “the logic of the spectacle” to analyze the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games. Despite its ritual and festive features, the Opening Ceremony is above all an event dominated by visual performance. As I will demonstrate in the analysis, the strategic essentialism of the construction of new Chineseness was achieved through the to-be-looked-at performances and visual
spectacles. And the to-be-looked-at-ness was integrated into the classification and dynamic generating the linear forms that constructs the spectacle, namely, the bureaucratic logic behind this Opening Ceremony. Through the examination of the classification logic of the performances in the Opening Ceremony, I try to reveal the “linear forms” that shape the construction of the discourses, the narratives, and the spectacle of the Opening Ceremony and the new Chinesseness.

**New Chineseness and Discourses**

The articulation of a “new” set of Chineseness, according to the five features prescribed by the top Chinese leadership, has to be equipped with “ethnicity characteristics, characteristics of the age, and international perspective.” These ambiguous features, just like other Chinese political discourses or rhetorics, must be understood intertextually. The characteristic of the age, together with an international perspective (though it refers more to the “globalized” perspective, aesthetics, and representational style), emphasizes the modernity China has achieved or has been endeavoring to achieve in the recent three decades. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping launched the Four Modernizations (including modernizations in industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology) as the goal of the Economic Reform. This had defined the basic understanding of “modernization” and modernity in the era of opening up and reform. Although Deng also promoted a balanced development of the “material civilization” and “socialist spiritual civilization,” the link between modernization/modernity, and materiality and economy is much stronger than any other linkages of modernity in the recent thirty years of development in China. Based on this understanding, modernization/modernity, as well as globalization, becomes a kind of “international perspective” or even “universalism” in mainland political rhetoric.

The international perspective implies not only modernization or globalization, it also connotes the Westernized aesthetics, cultural production techniques, and the
philosophical grounds dominating the cultural industry in the world. While trying to achieve the required features of “splendor” and “novelty,” the directive team also had to employ and display this international perspective in the performances of the Opening Ceremony. This situation resembles the “common difference” proposed by Richard Wilk (1995, 2004). The process of “common difference” is, namely, the “institutions, often hierarchical ones that create common difference by providing standards and terminology that allow disparate groups to compare themselves along a common set of dimensions” (Wilk 2004: 91). If we see the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games as stages for the hosting countries to compare with each other their cultural and visual spectacles, then the ritual procedures and operational requirements prescribed by the IOC are overt “standards and terminology” that make this comparison possible. Meanwhile, the Western aesthetics and techniques dominating the cultural industry across the world are covert standards for comparison. One of the reasons that Zhang Yimou was selected as the chief director of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics was that he was regarded as being equipped with the “world-ness,” having the ability to produce cultural products with “internationalized” perspective, techniques, and ideas (Zhang and Xia 2008).

Compared with modernity, the idea of “ethnicity characteristics” is more complicated, consisting of Chinese historical/traditional culture, ethnic groups’ culture, and politico-cultural discourses, for example, the “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” which has been the governing political ideology in China since the 1980s; the “socialist spiritual civilization” proposed by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s and updated by Jiang Zemin in the 1990s; the “socialist political civilization” promoted by Jiang Zeming in the late 1990s and early 2000s; and most importantly, the “harmonious society” promoted by Hu Jintao since 2004 (Dynon 2008). As I will elaborate later in this chapter, the political discourse of a “harmonious society” (together with its two interrelated discourses, “scientific development values” and “harmonious international community”) serves as one of the ideas behind the
performances. This discourse is also an element of the “characteristic of the age” as it is the newest discourse of the incumbent government.

The preset basic concepts of the Beijing Olympics — the “Green Olympics,” “High-tech Olympics,” and “People’s Olympics,” have also been interwoven into the performances, for they are also intertextual concepts of the five features prescribed by the CCP top leadership. According to the website of the BOCOG, a “Green Olympics [绿色奥运]” emphasizes the use of environmental-friendly technologies and measures to design and construct Olympic facilities and the promotion of environmental awareness to the general public; a “High-tech Olympics [科技奥运]” stresses scientific innovativeness and high-tech achievements in the Games and also their popular use in daily life; a “People’s Olympics [人文奥运]” aims to showcase Chinese culture, its historical and cultural heritage, and the population’s positive support to the Games, while promoting cultural exchanges and “harmonious development between mankind and nature.” Interwoven with the five features, these concepts penetrate all the performances in the ceremony: the Green Olympics is illustrated by the political discourse “harmony” (scientific development values) and the historico-cultural idea of “harmony between human and nature [天人合一]”; the High-tech Olympics penetrates the performances by the technologies employed as well as presented; the People’s Olympics is elaborated by the performances about China’s grand culture and long history.

This combination of the “five features” and “three concepts” produce a basic principle: articulating the new Chineseness and choreographing the artistic performances in the Opening Ceremony through the “Chinese particularity” and a “dual universalism,” namely, world (Western) universalism and Chinese universalism. The logic is that China has effectively combined the Chinese particularity (Chinese culture and “socialism with Chinese characteristics”) and the “universal” modernity (materiality); and (at least some parts of) this combination can

be “universal” to the world too. Meanwhile, in order to facilitate the reception of the Chinese universalism, the artistic performances were organized through the “world” aesthetics and techniques, for example, the light technology and setting design aesthetics, and sometimes “world-universal” ideas, for example, humanism, romanticism in the “Western” sense, and so on.

Consequently, Zhang Yimou and his creative team have constructed the new Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony with the following three discourses: Chinese splendid historical culture, multilayered harmony, and Chinese alternative modernity. Meanwhile, in order not to be too mighty or intimidating in the artistic performances, Zhang and his colleagues also articulated some kind of “determined romanticism” as Chinese “new” temperament, as well as a strategy of presenting the performances.

In the following I will elaborate how these three discourses and one temperament (see table 2.1) construct the new Chineseness, through the examination of the CCTV live broadcast, as well as the production process, of the Opening Ceremony. As many other opening ceremonies of the Olympics held in recent decades, the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics roughly consisted of three parts: the artistic performance (1 hour), the athletes’ entry (2 hours 16 minutes and 16 seconds), and the lighting of cauldron (33 minutes). The artistic performance, titled “The Beautiful Olympics [美丽的奥林匹克],” also had two components (“acts”): the Brilliant Civilization [灿烂文明] and the Glorious Era [辉煌时代], each of which lasted for roughly 20 minutes and consisted of several sections: the former had five, the latter had three (see table 2.1).

The CCTV live broadcast mainly adopted the standard signals from the Beijing Olympic Broadcasting Co. Ltd (BOB), with a few shots by self-equipped cameras. The “centering” of this ceremony was mainly through two commentators’ [孙正平，周涛] reading (but not talking in a dialogue manner) of prepared official scripts. Given that CCTV co-worked closely with the BOCOG and the directive team of the Opening Ceremony, it knew perfectly the implications of the artistic performances and the ceremonial rituals of the Opening Ceremony. CCTV is also the
most authoritative television channel in mainland China. Given the importance of the Opening Ceremony, this interpretative script was drafted with great prudence and approved by the top CCTV officials and high-level CCP propaganda leaders. This script, therefore, can be seen an official interpretation of the Opening Ceremony, as authentic as, if not more than, the Media Guide for XXIX Olympiad Opening Ceremony (hereafter Media Guide) drafted by the directive team. Its targeted audience was mainly mainland Chinese, so the commentary aimed not to interpret the basic contents of the performances, but to reveal the political and cultural implications of the performances, and to foster national pride. This is particularly relevant in interpreting the “harmony” discourse, as I will show later in the text. In the following, I will examine how the new Chineseness is articulated in the Opening Ceremony, through the examination of the live broadcast on CCTV and the production process of the Ceremony.

Table 2.1: Program summary of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Discourse(s) involved</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Performance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pre-Ceremony Performance</strong></td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1:45:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Arrival of the Chairman of PRC and the President of IOC</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>0:03:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Countdown</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0:01:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Welcome Fireworks</td>
<td>C/M</td>
<td>0:00:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Welcome: Fou Formation</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0:03:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Footprints of History</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0:01:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dream Rings</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0:02:55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Chinese National Flag Entry</td>
<td>H/R</td>
<td>0:02:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Raising the National Flag and Singing the National Anthem</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>0:01:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artistic Performance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Prelude to the Artistic performance</strong></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0:01:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Beautiful Olympics”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First Component: Brilliant Civilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Painting Scroll</td>
<td>C/M</td>
<td>0:05:15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Writing</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0:06:45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Opera</td>
<td>C/R</td>
<td>0:03:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Silk Route</td>
<td>C/H</td>
<td>0:06:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Ritual Music</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0:06:00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Component: Glorious Era</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Starlight</td>
<td>M/H</td>
<td>0:08:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Nature</td>
<td>M/H</td>
<td>0:08:30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Dream</td>
<td>M/H/R</td>
<td>0:07:05</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Athletes’ Entry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19 The Athletes’ Entry</td>
<td>2:16:16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Lighting of the Cauldron</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Speech by the President of BOCOG and the President of IOC</td>
<td>0:07:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Declaration of the Opening by the Chairman of PRC</td>
<td>0:00:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Olympic Flag Entry</td>
<td>0:06:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23 Raising the Olympic Flag and Playing the Olympic Anthem</td>
<td>0:03:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Athlete’s Oath and Official’s Oath</td>
<td>0:01:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Dove Release</td>
<td>0:02:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 The Journey of the Torch</td>
<td>0:07:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 The Lighting of the Cauldron</td>
<td>H/R</td>
<td>0:03:30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Celebration Fireworks</td>
<td>0:03:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: C=Culture and History; H=Harmony; M=Modernity; R=Romanticism.
Nearly everyone who has watched the Opening Ceremony on the spot, on television, or through recording seems impressed by the presentations of Chinese culture and history in the performances. The splendid Chinese culture is one of the most widely recognized features of Chinese particularity, and is thus a must-have element in the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness. Some people may assume that the representations of the Chinese culture should be the easiest project in the vast Opening Ceremony program. For example, a cultural studies scholar Zhang Xudong says that the Opening Ceremony’s “function” is to remind the audiences that “at this moment, ‘Olympics’ and ‘China’ are connected;” then, “with the premise of achieving this function, all the cultural symbols are exchangeable” (X. Zhang 2008: n. pag.). For him, it is “the inexhaustible richness of the basic symbols and symbolic resources of Chinese culture that consists of the ‘content’ of the cultural symbols used in the Opening Ceremony, but not any concrete, specific symbols themselves” (ibid.). However, for Zhang Yimou and his colleagues, the selection and presentation of the historical cultural symbols was in reality more complicated. Besides the avoidance of some symbols and elements that Zhang had used before in his movies and works, the selection of these “exchangeable” symbols also involved subtle political and social entanglements.

Numerous cultural symbols have been interwoven into the Opening Ceremony, especially at the beginning of the ceremony and in the Brilliant Civilization part. At the beginning of the Ceremony, a dazzling light is shed on the huge sundial model, “a timing device used in ancient China to measure the time by

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43 Many influential media, including NBC, BBC, New York Times, International Herald Tribune, the Asahi Shimbun (Japan), and the China Times (Taiwan) reported the Opening Ceremony. The history and culture part was one of the parts that were most frequently referred to. The international responses to the Beijing Olympic Games (including the Opening Ceremony) will be discussed in chapter three.
the shadow of sun” (BOCOG 2008: 19), which could be dated back to at least four thousand years ago, signaling the long history of China. The following welcome performance, “Fou Formation,” displays the historical instrument fou, “the most ancient Chinese percussion instrument made of clay or bronze” (ibid.). The passionate and stylish performance of the 2008 fou-players gives the audience a strong feeling of “Chinese culture.” During the Dream Rings section, twenty “Apsaras [飞天]” from Dunhuang Buddhist Caves in Gansu province in China are “flying” via wires in the “sky” of the Bird’s Nest. Apsaras is one of the symbolic images of Dunhuang Buddhist Caves, which thrived in the Sui and Tang dynasties.

A few minutes later begins the first component of the artistic performance — Brilliant Civilization. It consists of five sections: Painting Scroll, Writing, Opera, Silk Route, and Ritual Music. The five thousand years of Chinese history and culture has been, deliberately but not chronologically, interwoven into the 20-minute performance. It presents Chinese culture through two structures. The first structure is the traditional high culture — music, calligraphy, and painting [琴，书，画].

Music includes an ancient instrument guqin [古琴], the Beijing Opera and kunqu Opera [昆曲], and other Chinese music forms; calligraphy includes Chinese characters, movable type-printing, and writing; and painting forms the storyline of the Ceremony — the whole process of the Opening Ceremony is to paint a giant painting. The second structure is the Four Great Inventions — paper-making, gunpowder (displayed mainly through fireworks), typography (movable type-printing), and compass. Therein, the Chinese scroll painting is used as the most important structural symbol and the metaphor of the ceremony: the huge LED “scroll” serves as the main stage for the performance, as a stage property providing background for the performance. The giant “painting” is first drawn by Chinese modern dancers (in the Painting Scroll section), later painted by children (in the Nature section), and finally trampled with colors by all the athletes during the athletes’ parade.

44 The four high cultural activities for traditional intellectuals in history are music, Chinese chess, calligraphy, and painting [琴棋书画].
Figure 2.1: Key cultural symbols employed in the Opening Ceremony.

Image 2.1.1: The Sundial | Image 2.1.2: Gunpowder | Image 2.1.3: Fou formation

Image 2.1.4: Paper-making | Image 2.1.5: Painting scroll | Image 2.1.6: guqin

Image 2.1.7: Confucius’s 3000 disciples | Image 2.1.8: Calligraphy and movable type-printing | Image 2.1.9: The compass

However, as mentioned above, the selection of traditional cultural symbols is entangled with political considerations. For example, one of the most noteworthy parts of the Brilliant Civilization is the prominent presence of Confucius (image 2.1.7): eight hundred dancers, representing Confucius’s three thousand disciples, are dancing and reciting Confucius’s sayings from the *Analects* [论语]. As the most successful successor of the New Culture Movement, and the May Fourth Movement in the 1910s and the early 1920s,\(^{45}\) the CCP and the regime had long held an anti-

\(^{45}\) It was a radical cultural movement to renew Chinese culture to meet the requirements of modern development and to catch up with Western countries. For a detailed description of this movement, please refer to Chesneaux, Le Barbier, and Bergère (1977); Lawrance (2004); and many other books.
tradition position. They were more interested in building a “new” China than seeking a restoration of traditional culture in which Confucianism (as well as Buddhism and Taoism) was prominent. As the alleged representative of the “negative” aspects (also known as “dross [糟粕]”) of traditional culture, Confucius was severely criticized by the CCP and the regime, especially in the Cultural Revolution in 1967–77. Even in the 2000s, after a new wave of “fever” on traditional cultural studies resulting from “patriotic education program” and the promotion of the political discourse of the “Great Restoration of the Chinese Ethnicity” in the 1990s, the systematic studying of Confucian canons was still discouraged. The image of Confucius barely appeared in formal artistic performances (except as a representative of negative traditional culture to be criticized in the 1970s), and his sayings never enjoyed such an appreciation in those performances. In 2007 when Ji Xianlin, the prominent historian or master of nationology suggested “uplifting Confucius” in the Opening Ceremony, he was rejoined by fierce disputes.

The final inclusion of “Confucius’s 3000 disciples” in the Opening Ceremony and the approval from the top leadership of mainland China symbolize a new stage of reconciliation of the CCP government and Confucianism (as well as other forms and elements of more “banal” traditional culture). Some observers even argue that the structure and performances in the Brilliant Civilization section imply the “respect of cultural and artists’ values,” for it allows the “artists to use the cultural forms that are disliked by the CCP, e.g. the mountain and water painting, calligraphy, water-ink painting… which are [representations of] cultural intellectuals’ sentiments.” (said Zhang Ying [journalist of Southern Weekend and co-author of

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46 Many books and articles have addressed the anti-tradition position of the CCP and its rhetoric of “new.” See, for example, Q. E. Wang (2001); Meisner (1999).
48 Cultural intellectuals’ sentiments [文人情怀], is a very broad term referring to sentiments based on a combined worldview of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. It implies the strong responsibility of the people [苍生], the sensitive feelings to nature, a tasteful lifestyle and manners, good tastes of literature and cultural activities, a “care-little” attitude to fame and fortune, and so on. Here, for Zhang,
Zhang and Xia 2008], personal interview). The “cultural intellectuals’ sentiments” had been largely dismissed in the CCP ideology and discourse system since the *Speech on Literature and Art Forum in Yan An*, which emphasized the literature and art should “serve” proletariats, farmers, soldiers, and petit bourgeoisies, by Chairman Mao Zedong was published in 1942. The including, and highlighting, of these traditional cultural representations may not be “exchangeable” as Zhang Xudong asserts. Instead, it reveals a gradual whilst crucial turn of the Chinese government’s cultural policy from radically abandoning traditional culture to gradually restoring it. This political turn displaces Tu Weiming’s assertions about the disposal of traditional Chinese culture in mainland China, a presumption of Tu’s concept of cultural China, which articulates a cultural center in the geographical periphery (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Chinese diaspora communities) and the de-centering of the geographic center of mainland China (Tu 1991).

Meanwhile, like many other opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games (such as Sydney [Housel 2007] and Athens [Traganou 2009]), the Beijing Olympics’ Opening Ceremony also involves certain manipulation of history: the artistic performance has ambitiously included Chinese history from ancient times to the Qing Dynasty, though not strictly as a chronicle, and then jumps to the opening-up and reform era. Modern history (usually defined as from 1840 to 1949) and the first thirty years of the People’s Republic of China (1949–1979) have been specifically left out. In the taxonomy of CCP ideology, the “Old Bourgeois Democratic Revolution History” (1840–1911) and the “New Bourgeois Democratic Revolution History (1911–1949)” are more important than the ancient history, for they are most relevant to the legitimacy of the government: it was the CCP-led revolution that liberated China from the tragic and humiliating predicament that resulted from feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism. However, these two periods in history are not included in the Opening Ceremony, nor is the history of the first thirty years of the sentiments refer more to the tasteful lifestyle and manners, and the good tastes of literature and cultural activities.
PRC. Zhang Yimou’s explanation is that these histories are “too complicated” to present (S. Luo 2009: episode 2–3). I suspect the “complication” here is not in terms of presentation, but in terms of politics. As the CCP is still promoting in its propaganda cultural products, for example, the television drama series about the anti-Japanese war in 1937–1945 (e.g., Drawing Sword [亮剑]), and the civil war in 1946–1949 (e.g., Concealing [潜伏]) in the 2000s, it is surely not because that part of history is politically sensitive in mainland China. The reason lies in that the “Old Bourgeois Democratic Revolution History” involved confrontation with Western countries, and the “New Bourgeois Democratic Revolution History” involved confrontations with Japan and the ROC in Taiwan. In such an event in which China was attempting to articulate a vision of “One world, One dream” and a “harmonious” relationship with other countries (which will be discussed in the next section), it was surely not wise to involve these confrontational histories. However, the neglect of the first thirty years of the PRC does reveal the real political taboo in mainland China in the recent twenty years — the involvement of the Maoist China — when the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap, and other extremist leftist movements have been restricted from discussion in order not to undermine the already vulnerable legitimacy of the CCP regime.49 These selective presentations of history reflect a tactic: a specific “politics of memory.” This was a tactic prevalent in the nation-state building in the nineteenth century, which is “to mobilize and monumentalize national and universal pasts so as to legitimize and give meaning to the present and to envision the future: culturally, politically, socially” (Huyssen 2003: 2). The “willful forgetting” of the Maoist history and the contestable past with some other countries is to envisage a

49 On the appropriation and manipulation of authentic history, the Chinese government, as many other governments in the world (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1992; Utgaard 2003; Lee et al. 2004), has a tradition to choose the former according to the political or pragmatic requests. Since 1949, all the Chinese history has been rewritten according to materialist historical philosophy. Even today, the “refinement” of history textbooks for the elementary and middle school students has never aborted. The revising and refinement are very presuppositional, aiming to verify the “historical route to socialism” and to critique the history with materialist historical philosophy, so as to legitimatize its regime (Friedman 1995: chapter 1). Reorganization and reinterpretation of historical events, to generate a spectacle of history, are very common means used in rewriting China’s history. All descriptions of historical events, if not compatible with its legitimacy, would ironically be regarded as non-objective [不客观].
better future of China with “harmonious international relationship” that is without Maoist political radicalness, and the colonial humiliations and confrontations.

Another notable selective politics is the classification of high culture and low culture, the center and the peripheral. The “high culture,” including poetry, painting, calligraphy, and music, is the most appreciated traditional form of culture in Chinese history and even in contemporary society. The “low culture” refers to folk cultures that are regarded as less appreciated and less “sophisticated” in form. The center means the Central Plains (comprising the middle and lower reaches of the Huang River), which has been the center of Chinese culture for four thousand years; the peripheral, though always changing in different contexts (M. Wang 2006), includes all the regions other than the central (in the broadest sense) or the boundary frontiers (in the narrowest sense). Nearly every section of the artistic performance about Chinese culture in the Opening Ceremony is around high culture and technological inventions of the central China,\textsuperscript{50} regional and ethnic cultures are largely neglected (which will be discussed further later), let alone the low culture. This taxonomy of high and low culture, the central and the peripheral, has a hierarchical connotation, which resonates with the “internal othering” with the Han-centrism or sino-centrism (Chow 1995: chapter 4 in part 2).

Despite the politics involved in selection, the selected historico-cultural symbols and the overall performances have been presented as a truly splendid, novel spectacle, meeting the prescribed features of “splendor” and “novelty.” The emphasis on visual attraction goes into every detail: costumes, stage property, performance unity, dance choreography, even the performers’ and participants’ smiles (S. Luo 2009). One typical example is the 32 giant dragon pillars and 2500 magnificent costumes of the Ritual Music section (see figure 2.2): the costumes are divided into five categories, symbolizing the lady dresses in Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing

\textsuperscript{50}Historically, technicians and craftsmen were among the lower classes in the society. Technology was regarded as inferior and trivial, compared to the high culture. However, since the May Fourth Movement in the 1910–20s, science and technology has been granted top importance. The High-tech Olympics, one of the three concepts of the Beijing Olympics, is an example of the emphasis on technology in China.
dynasties, which are decorated in extremely rich colors and details; the pillars are more than one meter in diameter and above fifteen meter in height, each decorated with golden dragon and painted in bright Chinese red, with a player of different musical instruments lying on each platform of pillars. With its grandiose scale, extremely rich colors, and massive female dances, it is visually awesome and spectacular, in the fullest sense of the words. Zhang calls it “a simple pile of cultural symbols of clothing, music, and architecture” (J. Li 2008: 80), while it is actually a less important part of the overall structure of the artistic performance. Yet, the spectacular visual impacts have still attracted special attentions from various media (which will be discussed in chapter three).

Figure 2.2: The Ritual Music section.

Image 2.2.1: Costume of Tang dynasty lady
Image 2.2.2: Dragon-decorated pillars, and group presentation of instruments and ladies of the five dynasties

In order to create such a spectacle, the tactic of “(re)inventions of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992) has also been involved. For example, the fou instrument in the welcoming section is a total reinvention. Zhang Yimou and the creative team of the Ceremonies wanted to have a formation of a huge percussion instrument as a welcoming scene, because such scene could produce stunning visual and audio effects. One possible choice was the popular Chinese drums; however, Zhang had used drums many times in his movies, thus he could be sneered at by the media (for lacking creativity) if he used it again in the Opening Ceremony (Zhang and Xia 2008; S. Luo 2009: episode 3). After a few trials, he chose the fou. The fou as a
famous historical instrument was, unfortunately, pervasive far before the Tang
dynasty (618 AD–907 AD); there is no reliable written record of how it was made and
played. Finally, the fou shown at the Fou Formation section was made up on the basis
of unearthed cultural relics (which were most likely not the fou instrument in history).
The instrument was also significantly enlarged and altered in shape in order to meet
the “visual” requirements.\textsuperscript{51} Likewise, since no one nowadays knows how to play fou,
the performers have reinvented a unique form of drum-playing (S. Luo 2009: episode
6; Olympic Archives: episode 1).

The (re)invention of fou is not the only example of the “invention of
tradition.” Zhang Yimou has extended his predilection for exaggerated and luxurious
costume in his movies to the Ceremonies.\textsuperscript{52} The costume of “Confucius’s disciples” is
a complete invention (I will elucidate this point later in this chapter). The dresses of
the Tang, Song, and Qing dynasties (which appear in the Ritual Music section) are
altered exaggeratedly to generate a spectacular visual effect. However, by pointing
out these make-ups and “invention of tradition,” I do not intend to criticize the
Hollywood-style design aesthetics and principles. Neither do I want to advocate
historical authenticity. The point is to illustrate how much Zhang Yimou and his
creative team emphasize visual impacts, and to examine the politics of the selection
and appropriation of cultural symbols. Here, Zhang and his colleagues, indeed,
intentionally “self-Orientalize” the Chinese culture with the to-be-looked-at-ness. But,
this “Oriental’s Orientalism,” as Rey Chow argues about Zhang’s films, “turns the

\textsuperscript{51} According to historian Zhang Lifan [章立凡], the fou that appeared in the Fou Formation section
was not the fou in history (L. Zhang 2008). Historian Wang Jichao [王纪潮] further points out that it
could be a “misreading” of traditional culture. This “misreading” is productive and can enrich the
understanding of traditional culture. However, the instrument should not be named “fou” but could be
called “Drum in Jianfou-shape with LED” or so (2008). This issue will be further discussed in chapter
five.
\textsuperscript{52} Zhang’s recent movies, such as Hero, hit the top of the box office in China; but his movies have been
criticized by the media for their involving of arbitrary falsification of history (including historical
settings and costumes).

See “Gong Li’s Costume Is Ahistorical, Scholars Blames Curse of the Golden Flower Unauthentic” [巩
http://ent.cnwest.com/content/2006-10/20/content_331971.htm (accessed 10 Nov 2009). Also, the chief
costume designer of the Opening Ceremony, Eiko Ishioka, is a famous Japanese designer who has won
the 1992 Academy Award for costume designing in Bram Stoker’s Dracula and numerous other awards.
remnants of orientalism into elements of a new ethnography” (Chow 1995: 171–72), a
cultural translation, despite superficial, that “makes ‘China’ survives and thrives” in
the West (Chow 2010: 170). Similarly, the self-Orientalization in the Opening
Ceremony is an attempt to articulate a “new” China, with the wish that it would
survive and thrive in the West and in the world.

Thus, the presentation of splendid culture and continuous history is subject to
complex classification politics which also has to meet with Zhang’s personal
predicament; the taxonomy of high culture, technology, and low culture; the binary
division of center and periphery; the politics of history and memory selection; and the
invention of tradition and so on. However, with Zhang Yimou’s outstanding self-
Orientalized visual tactics and “strategic essentialism,” the splendor and particularity
of Chinese culture has been spectacularly presented to the world, articulating an
overwhelming display of Chinese culture.

**Multilayered Harmony**

Although the artistic performance is clearly targeted at global audiences, Zhang has
not neglected the political context; he understands that “in China, we should do things
according to the Chinese way,” so “we [need to] present the best of China to the
world, within the framework of he [和, harmony]” (S. Luo 2009: session 6), because
“the character he has many explanations, it can be as broad as the discourse of country
[the political rhetoric “harmonious society” which is proposed by Hu Jintao in 2004],
and can be as narrow as ‘happy and harmonious family life,’ gentleness, and peace”
(J. Li 2008: 73).53 With this tactic, the artistic performance of the Opening Ceremony

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53 The discourse of “Harmonious Society” had been integrated into the Beijing Olympics-related
campaigns far before the Opening Ceremony. Stefan Landsberger describes how this discourse has
become “a topic that merits PSA attention and complements the innumerable examples of open-air
advertising for the same” (2009: 249). See also de Kloet, Chong, and Liu (2008).
has switched from the articulation of Chinese particularity to Chinese universalism, an alternative of the Western culture and modernity.

1. **Harmonious Society**

The most notable articulation of harmony is in the android-like performance in the Writing (Movable Type-printing) section. Nine hundred young soldiers operate cuboids, representing the movable type-printing, to simulate turbulences and relieve-like shapes, form Chinese characters, and simulate the Great Wall, in a computer-controlled and extremely precise manner of movements. For millions of people who do not speak Chinese, it was the first time that they saw the Chinese character 和 [he].

Figure 2.3: Three different forms of the character “和 [he].”

![Image 2.3.1: The first he](image1.png) ![Image 2.3.2: The second he](image2.png) ![Image 2.3.3: The modern he](image3.png)

This highlighted theme of harmony is a projection of the current Chinese political rhetoric of “harmonious society,” “harmonious world,” and the “scientific development values.” The Chinese Party-State has a long tradition of launching periodic political propaganda campaigns, even after 1978 when the Economic Reform started. Examples include the “Four Modernizations” and “Two Civilizations” rhetoric proposed by Deng Xiaoping during the 1980s,\(^5^4\) the “Great

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\(^5^4\)“Two Civilizations” include “Material Civilization,” which means the production of materiality based on “socialist market economy”; and “Spiritual Civilization,” which refers to the cultural prosperity based on socialist ideology.
Restoration of Chinese Ethnicity” introduced by Jiang Zemin in the late 1990s, and the “Three Represents” again introduced by Jiang Zemin in 2001. According to the Party-State tradition, every rhetoric serves as the compass of the current propaganda campaigns. In 2003 and 2004, Hu Jintao, the General Secretary of CCP and Chairman of the PRC, launched the new rhetoric of “Scientific Development Values” and “Harmonious Society” (Dynon 2008). Aiming to alleviate the exacerbating polarization of the society and to make a turnaround from the previously prevalent tendency of over-emphasizing GDP growth, Hu proposed this rhetoric to call for an ideal future: a harmonious social condition with an environment-friendly and sustainable development pattern. In addition, Hu expanded the notion of “harmonious society” to “harmonious world” to express an expectation of a world of “peaceful coexistence” which “overcomes differences and seeks common ground” (a diplomatic principle proposed by the PRC Premier Zhou Enlai in 1956).

After its launch, the new rhetoric became the central discourse for the Party’s propaganda and served as the compass of “creative artistic works” with official background, which is what Zhang Yimou calls the “Chinese way.” Adopting the “Chinese way,” Zhang and his colleagues have presented an ideal China based on the idea of harmony: in the Opening Ceremony, besides the Writing section, the notion of harmony as the central motif penetrates every section of the performance. For example, the most visually notable performance is the aforementioned three forms of the Chinese character he (和). Along with the astonishing movable type-printing performance, the apothegms from the Analects (论语, also translated as Confucius’s Sayings) that the “3000 Confucius’s disciples” recite include a well-known apothegm — “harmony is the keyword for propriety” (和为贵) (which is also translated as

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55 “Three Represents” means the CCP needs to represent the advanced productive forces, the overall interests and development of the people, and the new advanced culture, which is actually the originating idea of the rhetoric of the three promises of the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee: the Green Olympics, High-tech Olympics, and People’s Olympics.

“peace enjoys priority”). When the third character (the modern version of *he*) appears, the commentator of CCTV narrates the performance and the rhetoric of harmony in this way: “Through thousands of years, the character *he* develops as time goes by. It expresses the humanist idea of the saying ‘harmony is the keyword for propriety,’ and manifests the long history and great tradition of the harmonious value of Chinese ethnicity.” Here, the narration that the idea and practice of harmony has a long history in China articulates a Chinese cultural characteristic of harmony. At the same time, the connection with Confucianism, which is always endowed with universalism, implies the universality of the idea and practice of harmony, which forms a basis to further articulate the Chinese universalism of harmony.

Figure 2.4: Key scenes in the Starlight section.

![Image 2.4.1: Lang and Li](image1.png) ![Image 2.4.2: The galaxy](image2.png) ![Image 2.4.3: The dove](image3.png)

![Image 2.4.4: The girl flying a kite](image4.png) ![Image 2.4.5: The Bird’s Nest](image5.png)

The Starlight section, the first section of the second component Glorious Era, is designated to describe the overall harmony concept. It integrates all the main layers of harmony (see figure 2.4): harmonious development (the green, the galaxy, and the nebula symbolize the harmony between human and the universe/nature), peaceful and harmonious world (the dove), the present harmonious life and society that China claims to have (the scene on the LED screen), and a dream of the harmonious future.
The green emissaries, who together build up a Bird’s Nest with their bodies (image 2.4.5), not only remind the audience of the “Green Olympics” promise of the Beijing Olympics, but also symbolize China’s commitment to green economy and environmental protection.

One of the most notable narratives of the “harmonious society” is the harmony among the “fifty-six ethnicities as Chinese Ethnicity [中华民族]”; this has also been included in the Opening Ceremony. During the Chinese Anthem section, there is one group of fifty-six representatives of different ethnicities, dressed in different ethnic suits and dresses: one of them is standing by the flag altar (image 2.5.1), the other escorting the national flag to the flag altar (image 2.5.2). These two scenes have strong political implication: by standing beside the flag altar and by escorting the national flag, these scenes signify the assumed harmonious relationship among the ethnicities and the consolidation of the Chinese ethnicity, which is regarded a crucial part of the construction of harmonious society.

Figure 2.5: Key scenes signifying the harmony within Chinese Ethnicity.

Image 2.5.1 Lin and ethnic children
Image 2.5.2 Ethnic children

In the second part of the artistic performance, there are also representations on the huge LED screen of a harmonious Chinese society by displaying the economic development, happy life of ordinary people, and other relevant scenes, demonstrating the fulfillment of “mutual richness, social stability and solidarity, rich public goods
and public services,” and other goals of the harmonious-society policy.\(^5\) However, as one participant of the Opening Ceremony remarks: “The emphasis on harmonious society of ordinary people is less important, because the hosting of Olympic Games is evidence of it. Foreign visitors can see how (harmonious) Beijing and China look.” The more important issue is to articulate other aspects of harmony, namely, the harmonious world and the harmony between human and nature.

2. **Harmonious World**

With the slogan “One World, One Dream,” the Beijing Olympics endeavors to convey an appeal for a “harmonious world.” The relevant representations sprawl the whole ceremony. Besides the abovementioned huge dove in the Starlight section, the Opening Ceremony has also employed other symbolic elements to construct a narrative of a harmonious world for the global audience. One of the first apothegms that the Confucius’s disciples recite is “all men under heaven will be his brothers [四海之内，皆兄弟也].” At the end of the Movable Type-printing section, the last diagram made by the movable types is the shape of the Great Wall, which, to some extent, is a symbol of China, and a symbol of defense and self-isolation. After that, every cuboid “blossoms out” into a bunch of pink peach blossom, and then there are cheering performers appearing at the curtain call. By substituting the Great Wall (one of the greatest defense architectures in the world) with pink peach blossoms and lively cheering, it signifies that China is no more separated from the world and is trying to build a harmonious world with its “peaceful rise.” Serving the same purpose are the 2008 smiling children faces collected and selected from all over the world shown at the end of the artistic performance; so is the joyous welcoming of the Torch Relay around the world shown on the series of huge LED screens encircling the whole rim.

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of the sports stadium (the chaos in Paris and London has been omitted) when Li Ning is winched up and is “running” in the air before lighting the cauldron.

Figure 2.6: Key scenes signifying/anticipating a “Harmonious World.”

![Image 2.6.1: Reciting Sayings](image1.png)
![Image 2.6.2: The Great Wall](image2.png)
![Image 2.6.3: Peach blossom](image3.png)

![Image 2.6.4: Smiling faces](image4.png)
![Image 2.6.5: Torch relay](image5.png)

The Silk Route section is another section that serves to express the openness of China and an aspiration for a harmonious world. Juxtaposing the Inland Silk Road with the Maritime Silk Route, this section presents the long history of China’s communication with the world and implies China’s historical and cultural contribution to the world (including the compass [司南], one of the alleged Four Great Inventions). This is meant to construct a peace-loving image of China and its harmonious relationship with the world. The CCTV commentator Zhou Tao [周涛] interprets the two silk roads/routes as “making friends in every quarter, trading goods, learning from each other and enjoying respectful interactions.”\(^{58}\) Also, she says “Chinese ethnicity has long been warm-hearted and friendly, and the two silk routes are the best examples. . . . The Maritime Silk Route not only indicates ancient China’s

\(^{58}\) This is the long-term principle of diplomatic policy that the Chinese government claims to hold.
high level of navigational technology, but also confirms the amity and ardor of China, the country with great civilization.” These presentations articulate a “tradition,” showing that China has always been interacting with other countries with peaceful trades, which implies a comparison with the Western countries that have been colonizing the world with military forces.

Figure 2.7: Scenes in Maritime Silk Route section.

Image 2.7.1: Inland silk route
Image 2.7.2: Maritime silk route
Image 2.7.3: The compass

3. Harmony between Human and Nature

The second component of the artistic performance, Glorious Era, narrates the harmony between human and nature, which implicitly refers to the rhetoric of “scientific development values.” Besides the aforementioned Starlight section, the taijiquan performance of 2008 men in the Nature section of the Glorious Era component is the key section presenting China’s traditional philosophical understanding of the relationship between human and nature. Taiji is the first Taoist ontological understanding of the world, a view emphasizing the balance and harmony between human and nature.59 Taijiquan is a set of exercise based on the philosophical understanding of taiji. The taijiquan performance is divided in two parts. The first part is at the center of the sports stadium where performers exercise taijiquan around a circle of silk-made sheers, which are projected with mysterious lights and shadows to resemble mountains, rivers, and natural landscape. The

59 For more detailed description, please see R. J. Smith (2008); and D. Zhang (2002).
accompanying music is the sound of waterfalls, sea waves, bird twitters, and so on.
This performance is to elaborate the idea of “harmony between human and nature [天
人合一],” with the presentation of exercising taiji to acquire the qi [气] into human
bodies; the second part consists of 2008 taijiquan-exercisers forming homocentric
circles, with scores of children coloring the huge scroll, which has been sketched by
the modernist dancer during Painting Scroll section earlier, and collectively reciting a
text to encourage environmental protection. At the end of this performance is the
recapitulation of a harmonious coexistence between human and nature, after
employing the idea of “harmony between human and nature”: the polluted world turns
back into the balanced nature. The first part aims more specifically to present the
philosophical understanding of harmonious relationship between human and nature,
whereas the second part wants to show how taijiquan as a special Chinese martial
exercise has become so popular that it has turned into a part of people’s everyday life,
thus implying the ontological understanding of harmony is underpinning the values of
all citizens, and signifying the positive outcome of applying the Chinese philosophy
of “harmony between human and nature.”

Figure 2.8: Key scenes in taijiquan section.

Through the rhetoric of harmony, the Opening Ceremony constructs China as
a country with a harmonious and consolidated society, with long historical
connection, communication, and contribution to the world, with the self-confidence to
open up to the world, and with the courtesy to build a harmonious world. This
construction implies that the closed-ness and isolation of China has only lasted for a short, insignificant period, and that China has now built up a strong economic connection with the world again and will make great contributions to the world as it has done in history. In this articulation, the artistic performance again mobilizes various resources of Chinese particularity, such as the harmony among the fifty-six ethnicities, as well as the harmonious and happy everyday life of Chinese, to articulate an ideal version of Chineseness, and to change some stereotypes of a backward, abnormal, and disordered China (deLisle 2008). However, it is also notable that the Opening Ceremony, with this articulation of harmony, is switching from the emphasis on the Chinese particularity to broader themes like human-nature relationship and international/global relationship. The *taijiquan* performances, especially the *taijiquan* massive performance that shows the idea of “harmony between human and nature,” aim to display to the world a vision of a more sustainable future. With this presentation, the Opening Ceremony articulates a Chinese universalism and a potential alternative to the Western industrialization and modernity.

However, the inherent controversies in the construction of harmony might again open space for questions. First of all, although the theme of harmony is omnipresent during the Opening Ceremony, the presentation is not quite “harmonious.” In the dramatic performance of “Confucius’s Disciples Reciting the *Analects*,” the three thousand performers, who are dancing and reciting selective apothegms, are in broad, black-and-white, robe-like costume, and wear a three-foot high headwear (images 2.1.7 and 2.6.1). Both the costume and the dancing, as well as the stylish Chinese voice-over reciting, are very impressive. However, this representation is far from the concept of harmony in history or in the present day. In the Spring and Autumn Period (春秋时代) when Confucius lived, there were over a hundred seigneur states with different writing (characters) systems, different raiment customs, and even different languages (dialects that sometimes were incommunicable). For Confucius, the principle of teaching is “to teach for all (有教
“君子和而不同，小人同而不和.” Actually, Confucius’s disciples came from many different states and from different social classes (from high-rank nobles to ordinary people). Thus, we can imagine that the three thousand students should wear clothes of different styles, speak in different dialects/languages, which is, philosophically and apparently, very different from the spectacular scene in the Opening Ceremony. Again, my point is not to advocate the “authenticity” of history, but to argue that the representations of the Confucian idea of harmony are not conforming to Confucius’s idea of harmony. Instead, these presentations imply the taxonomy of the governmental understanding of harmony, which will be discussed later.

The costume design and the selection of Confucian apothegms are not solitary examples. Nearly every massive performance in the Opening Ceremony, like the welcoming Fou Formation and the taiji show, shares the same features: identical costume, and uniform and identical actions. Smaller group performances, for example, the display of women style of Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties, also show similar aesthetics. Actually, this is the very secret and myth of massive performance spectacle: only through identity and unity can a shocking effect be achieved. Zhang Yimou has explained it in interviews: “[T]he aesthetic generated from this kind of traditional, identical action . . . which is like computer controlled . . . shocked the foreigners”; it is a product of Chinese culture and tradition; in the world “only North Korea can exceed China in massive performance”(Zhang and Xia 2008). Zhang’s explanation clearly shows that, according Zhang Yimou and the censors from the central government, the aesthetics of unity and identity go well with harmony. It also conforms to the everyday logic of government. In every political campaign or in regular promotions of the Party’s rhetoric, the government always emphasizes the “unification of thoughts” and “keeping identical pace with the Party.” In the government’s taxonomy, identicalness and unity enjoy more importance than pluralist
diversity. It seems that, according to the Opening Ceremony, harmony can largely be achieved through unification and identicality.

More examples can be given to support my claim that the performance of harmony during the Opening Ceremony is itself fraught with ambivalences and contradictions. For example, the ritualized presence of the fifty-six ethnicities implies the harmony of the ethnicities in China. The harmony of ethnicities was extremely important given that there was a riot in Lhasa of Tibet in March 2008. However, although the ethnicities are presented in an essentialist way by having the children dressed in fifty-six ethnic traditional clothes, and the Media Guide clearly claims that they are “children from fifty-six Chinese ethnic groups” (BOCOG 2008: 25), most of the fifty-six children are actually of Han ethnicity and from Beijing. Thus the representation of the fifty-six ethnicities is rather controversial: being essentialist in visual representation and “non-essentialist” in ethnic origins.

On the whole, the fifty-five minor ethnicities have very limited presence in the Opening Ceremony. In addition to the taxonomy of high and low culture, the periphery and the central-China, we see here another taxonomy of Han Chinese and ethnic minorities. In the Opening Ceremony, the ethnic minorities are visible only in the more ritualistic presentations: accompanying the national flag and standing by the flag-raising altar, singing the Olympic Anthem, and participating in a 60-second dance performance at the very end of the artistic performance (which was barely broadcast by the CCTV). All these presentations testify to the main goal of including them: to show how the nation is united in multicultural difference, and to present to the world the idealized picture of a harmonious multicultural society. Only the last presentation (the dance) has some relationship to minority culture itself; but this part is heavily Orientalized: minor ethnicities are reduced to exotic people who sing and dance. This kind of internal Orientalism haunts the representations of minorities in

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60 Many countries have/had similar presentations of minorities. For example, in American sports events, it used to be common to have non-Indian American performers to act as Indian American, although this sports “custom” is fading (Chao and Leow 2008). The difference is that usually the organizers would not claim that the performers are/were “from” Indian American origin.
China (Schein 1997). The political highlight of “harmonious society with minorities” and the actual neglect in the presentation form an irony in the Opening Ceremony: an irony caused by the discourse of harmony and, again, the logic of taxonomy of the center and the periphery, the Han and the minorities. Thus, unity and identicality of harmony constructed in the Opening Ceremony, are, quite clearly, driven by a Han cultural centrism and sino-centrism, or “internal othering” (Chow 1995: chapter 4 in part 2).

The articulation of the idea of harmonious world again falls into appropriation of memory and history. Although there were the thousand-year-long Silk Routes, and a tradition of peaceful communication with the world, this tradition ceased in Ming and Qing dynasties. This selectivity goes beyond the mobilization and monumentalization of the “national and universal pasts so as to legitimize and give meaning to the present and to envision the future” of a nation (Huyssen 2003: 2), it is actually expanded to articulate and call for an ideal of a “harmonious world.”

Last but not least, the articulation of “harmony between human and nature” as an alternative vision for the future is a philosophically attractive one. However, this vision faces an irony: China is among the most polluted countries in the world, and the situation was aggravating in the 2000s, although China had become the second largest investor in green technology (especially green energy) by 2005 (and has been leading the green investment since 2010). In the months leading up to the Beijing Olympics, China was subject to numerous criticisms from the Western media for its environmental pollution (Latham 2009; deLisle 2008). The Opening Ceremony does not address the environmental problems in China but treats it as a “world” problem that can be solved with Chinese philosophy and, therefore, Chinese modernity. Thus, for the critics, the proposal of harmony between human and nature in the Opening Ceremony is at best an optimistic vision of an ideal future with characteristics of “Chinese modernity,” which calls for communal efforts for its realization; or at worst, a propaganda to legitimize the Chinese government and its policies, as I will discuss.

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61 For more detailed discussion, please refer to World Bank (2007).
in more details in chapter three, as it obliterates the “actual” difficulties in the society in the representation but emphasizes a vision in a self-affirmative way.

Thus, conforming to the central political rhetoric, harmony is one of the prominent motifs of the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony, and is also the most ambitious discourse mobilized in the Ceremony, aiming to construct a new version of narratives of history, culture, development pattern, and social life, and to construct a Chinese universalism as an alternative to the Western industrialization-based human-nature relationship, while calling for a peaceful and harmonious world. However, the logic and aesthetics of presenting this harmony and the controversies of China’s human-nature relations, together with the legacy of the Cold War, may again open up space for questions and contestations.

**Alternative Chinese Modernity**

As mentioned before, to showcase the modernity of contemporary China is one of the most important purposes for bidding to host the Olympic Games. Zhang Yimou and his creative team have made up their minds right from the beginning to “shock the world” by “presenting the best of China” (S. Luo 2009: episode 1; J. Li 2008). The “best of China” means not only its grand history and culture, but also its modernity. Modernity is what Chinese have been longing for more than a century since the first Opium War when the imperial government was defeated by the British fleet in 1940. The often heard claim in popular and political discourses is that after more than one century’s “humiliation” of being invaded (Callahan 2006), exploited, and isolated, the Chinese have a strong anxiety to be “strong” and to showcase the strengths and power of China to the world. With the approaching “great rejuvenation” of the Chinese ethnicity, the Chinese authorities are confident in articulating a kind of Chinese modernity. The Chinese modernity, according to Lo Kwai-Cheung, is “a culturally specific kind of modernity — one that differs from the Euro-American model but fits well into its specific context” (2011: 382). It should “not be merely grasped as a
pluralization of or a sheer resistance to the monistic Eurocentric account of modernity”; instead, it “implies a potential emergent center of capitalist power that may cause the global picture of capitalist modernization to be redrawn” (ibid.). The Opening Ceremony has provided an ideal stage to articulate this Chinese modernity to the world.

Modernity is mainly presented in the second component, Glorious Era, which is designated to show the achievements of the Chinese Economic Reform and to express China’s aspirations and expectation for the future. One of the most notable performances about modernity is the aforementioned metaphor of green development, appearing mainly in the first two sections, Starlight and Nature, as I have discussed in the above section. This “harmony between human and nature” implies a vision of the future of the Chinese modernity, and a future of mankind (image 2.9.3). In the third section Dream, astronauts are winched down from the rim of the sports stadium, reminding the audience of the outer-space and moon-landing program, a program which is regarded as evidence of China’s advance and progress in high technology (image 2.9.1). The high-speed train, the Internet, and the social landscape shown on the LED screen during the Starlight section are other explicit presentations of the modernity achieved in China (image 2.9.2).

Figure 2.9: Scenes of High-tech Olympics and Green Olympics.

Image 2.9.1: The astronauts
Image 2.9.2: The high technology in daily life
Image 2.9.3: The children paint with green idea

62 One manned space flight was launched on 27 September 2009, roughly one month after the Olympics, propelling yet another wave of popular nationalism across the country.
There are also other implicit presentations of modernity. The Bird’s Nest sports stadium, a very modernistic building and the biggest sports stadium in the world, is itself regarded as representing China’s modernity. Its huge capacity has allowed about ninety-one thousand spectators to witness the Opening Ceremony, which also set a new “record” in the modern Olympic history. The spectators have also become a part of the spectacle: on the one hand, they are audiences of the spectacle as they do not participate in the actual performance; on the other hand, in the broadcast and rebroadcast of the event, their vast number has made them an important part of the spectacle, for their responses to every performance and section during the Ceremony are so notable.

In fact, the creative team of the Opening Ceremony has turned the entire city of Beijing into the venue for the event. The firework of twenty-nine giant footprints, representing the steps of the twenty-nine Olympics walking to Beijing and the Bird’s Nest, traveled through the south-north axis of Beijing to the modernistic National Olympic Park. The regular celebrating firework also involves the National Olympic Park. The south-north axis of Beijing, including Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Beihai and Shichahai Park, the drum and bell towers, and Anding gate, covers most of the historical aspects of Beijing. The National Olympic Park, where the Bird’s Nest and the Water Cube, and many other modernistic Olympics-related facilities are located, is regarded as one of the representative districts of modern Beijing. The inclusion of the south-north axis and the National Olympic Park is meant to implicitly indicate that Beijing enjoys both long history with grand culture and high modernity. Thus, the twenty-nine giant steps of firework, starting from the south to north, have double implications: to indicate the twenty-nine Olympics in history walking to Beijing and the Bird’s Nest, and to signal the continuity of Chinese history from ancientness (in another word, backwardness) to modernity.

In addition, the modernity of contemporary China shown in the Opening Ceremony is also showcased by the creativity and technology employed in presenting
and organizing the event. The opening ceremonies in Sydney and Athens gave much pressure on, as well as inspiration to, the BOCOG, Zhang Yimou, and his creative team. Their goal is to outperform the Athens Opening Ceremony. One of their strategies to achieve this goal is to use advanced technology to create and present the visually stimulating performances. For example, the huge LED “Scroll,” with a length of 147 meters and a width of 22, was the biggest LED screen in the world. It is with this huge LED screen that many spectacular performances become possible and more attractive: it extends across the whole depth of the stage and serves as an ever-changing background, enabling the seamless complement between the performance and the background in practically every session of the event. The design of the fou drum is another example. With sound- and touch-controlled LED lights, the fou drums produce the magnificent, Tetris-like counting-down and the dazzling drum performance in the Welcome section. Similarly, the design of the Dream Olympic Rings, the employment of the huge globe (in the Dream section), the dazzling light effect, the spectacular fireworks, and many other stage properties and performances serve the same purpose. In order to produce the sense of high technology, Zhang has even abandoned his favorite warm colors like Chinese red and bright yellow, which were frequently used in his movies, and chosen the cold hues of color. Colors like deep blue and green imbue the presentation of modernity with technology. Moreover, the smooth organization of the whole performance, which has involved more than 14,000 performers and a huge amount of logistic work, reflects the significance of management — a “science” that China has been eager to pursue through the Economic Reform since Deng Xiaoping’s era.

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63 Deng had anticipated an improvement in corporate management or “management modernization” in the 1980s. More detailed description can be seen in Ezra Vogel (2011: chapter 10).
Figure 2.10: The involvement of the modernistic sports stadiums and the central Beijing.

Image 2.10.1: Footprint firework  Image 2.10.2: Water Cube  Image 2.10.3: Bird’s Nest

As many observers have noticed, modernity is constructed in the Opening Ceremony largely through the use of technology and material production; and, partly, through an expectation toward a green “scientific development” pattern. The presented modernity also shows the taxonomy that China has long had. The pursuit of modernization has been the goal for many generations of Chinese. After the Opium War in 1840, many Chinese elites attributed China’s failure to the backwardness in technology and material production, especially in armament technology and production. Later, people gradually acknowledged that it was not only the backwardness in technology and material production, but also the political system that had made China fall into an unprivileged situation. In the New Culture Movement in the 1910s to early 1920s, there was a famous assertion that “only ‘Mr. Democracy’ and ‘Mr. Science’ can save China.” After 1949 when the People’s Republic of China established, the government proposed that China had solved the problem of “democracy”; thus, only the science and technology problem remained. This assertion was again emphasized after the launch of the Four Modernizations: the Four Modernizations are, after all, about science and technology, and materiality. The long-term emphasis on technology results in a strong tendency that favors technology and materiality but de-prioritizes social well-being and the building of more balanced power-sharing structures.

The management capacity is integrated as one of the important aspects of Chinese modernity in the Opening Ceremony. However, the robot-like performances
presented in the Opening Ceremony and the numerous interviews about the preparation (e.g. *Olympic Archives*: episode 1; S. Luo 2009) show that nearly every group of performers and workers of the ceremony have been managed in a “half-military” way with an emphasis that “national interests are supreme” (*Olympic Archives*: episode 4). For example, the presenter escorts of the athlete teams had been trained for about half a year, in an enclosed environment and following a seven-day-a-week training schedule (*Olympic Archives*: episode 3). It is, to some extent, a highly Taylorist and half-military management, and involves a classification of the collective and the individual that demands the latter to sacrifice for the former, which is one of the most media-circulated characteristics of Chinese culture. Although the management of the Opening Ceremony is much more complicated than performers and human resources management, the slogan “national interests are supreme” on the wall of the directive office of the Opening Ceremony can reveal the underpinning idea of this management modernity.

Although the modernity constructed in the Opening Ceremony is one-dimensional (focusing on materiality and technology) and even authoritarian (as displayed in the organization and management of the Opening Ceremony and the overall Beijing Olympics), it is what is going on in China and it is what China is trying to present to the world: an economic development with Chinese cultural and political characteristics. It implies an eagerness to wipe out the “one hundred years of humiliation” since the Opium War, and a pride resulting from the fulfillment of this “modernity.” As I have discussed in chapter one, the Chinese modernity, either in the name of “Beijing Consensus” (Ramo 2004) or “China Model” (Lin 2006), can be seen as an alternative of the “Washington Consensus” and the Western modernity. The celebration of this modernity is to implicitly prove its feasibility and to promote it as one of the components of the Chinese “soft power.”
Determined Romanticism

The intention to change the old images of China is comprehensive: Zhang Yimou and his colleagues also aim to redefine Chinese “temperament.” As Zhang explains in an interview:

> Usually, [when we talk about] dreams and romance, [we] refer to the French. The Chinese ethnicity always gives others an impression of being solemn, reserved, and repressive. But I think a dreamlike and romantic style will greatly improve our image: we are not the Chinese in their imagination. (Zhang and Xia 2008)

In order to produce this dreamlike and romantic style, in contrast to some people’s insistence on showcasing China’s power and strength, Zhang Yimou is believed to have specifically “softened” the narrating style (J. Li 2008: 74, 80). A typical example is the softening of the nationalistic An Ode to My Homeland [歌唱祖国], which is performed after the fou drum welcoming section and before the national anthem (image 2.5.1). A beautiful and sweet girl, Lin Miaoke [林妙可], sings the originally strong and march-like song in a soft and lyrical style (to achieve a better effect, Zhang has selected the singing of another girl who can sing better and asked Lin to lip-synch on the spot). The winched-up young girl flying a kite in the air (in the Starlight section), the 5-year-old cute young girl who co-plays with the famous Chinese pianist Lang Lang (in the Starlight section), the inclusion of 2008 smiling faces from all the countries and regions participating in the Beijing Olympics, and the adoption of the theme song “You and Me” are other pertinent examples of these “softenizations.”

However, according to Zhang, it is not softening but “humanizing,” “emotionizing,” and “romanticizing,” implying a “world-ness” or “universalism.” Zhang explains:
What nicely surprises them [the foreign audience] is that [these performances] show another visage of ours: romance and dream, dream and romance in the modern sense, although what are presented are the many cultural heritages from ancient China. In fact, the world-ness comes exactly out of here: that is, humanity, world-ness, and tolerance. (Zhang and Xia 2008)

Here Zhang is articulating a specific humanitarianism and universalism of “dream and romance.” According to his understanding, the dream and romance “in the modern sense” implies humanity, world-ness, and tolerance. This understanding reflects the Chinese humanism discourse since the 1990s. As Wang Hui argues, the “Contemporary Chinese humanism and the concept of the human being were, at first, directed against Marxism which occupied a dominant position in ideology” (1995: n. pag.). It is a counternarrative to the official discourses in which:

Chinese philosophy, history, literature, and other branches of the social sciences established, around the core of the Marxist mode of production concept, a system of knowledge based on the following fundamental concepts: the economic basis, the superstructure, ideology, class, class struggle, and so forth. (ibid.)

In the articulation of Chinese humanism, Chinese history and philosophy, and Western individualist culture are mingled together. Chinese humanism is “again molded by Western individualist knowledge” (ibid). This articulation, according to Wang Hui, is Chinese scholars’ responses to the official political discourses about “the issues regarding the modernization of China” (ibid.). Similarly, Zhang Yimou is concerned about the possible representation of Chinese modernity in an “official” or nationalist way (or more precisely, neo-patriotic or neo-Leftist way, as I will discuss in chapter five), thence he uses this humanistic “world-ness” of “romance and
“dreams” to present China and Chinese modernity to the world, a strategy which is closely linked with “to-be-looked-at-ness.”

Presenting the performances and China in a dream-like and romantic style is thought to help build up a better China image, for it showcases another visage of the Chinese: self-confident, romantic, and friendly. However, for Zhang, being romantic implies not only “world” universalism, but also Chinese mightiness. Zhang believes that China is already strong and powerful, one typical example of which is the timing of the Opening Ceremony in the evening. He comments:

Two of the three opening ceremonies of the Olympics in Asia, one in Tokyo, the other in Seoul, were scheduled during the daytime. What dreams and romance can you make during daytime? Why? It was out of the concerns of the audience-rating and the time-difference issues of the powerful countries in Europe and America. . . . But this is not the case in China: [it is set] at 8:00 p.m., our prime time, regardless what time it may be in your time zone. China is powerful now, powerful enough for them to accept this time difference. This is why we can finish these artistic performances in the evening, in the dazzling rendering of lights. (Zhang and Xia 2008)

The timing of the Opening Ceremony itself, therefore, is the proof and evidence of China’s powerfulness. Meanwhile, he is alerted that this powerfulness could be disturbing, he says:

I know many foreigners have many misunderstanding of us, they even juxtapose our Opening Ceremony with the Nazi’s in the 1930s. They don’t know you, misunderstand you, and are expected to be frightened by us, they expect that “you shock me and make me fear.” I know exactly that many foreigners are expecting this. (J. Li 2008: 78)
Indeed, it is the possible hints of “China threats” that he wants to avoid in the
Opening Ceremony. His strategy is to romanticize the performance. He explains: “I
think that only when an ethnicity becomes self-confident can it be romantic and make
dreams. Merely making greatness and grandiosity is not enough.” (J. Li 2008: 74).
The reason for this inadequacy is that “mightiness brings about look-up-ness, and
look-up-ness creates distance, which discomforts people” (ibid.: 75). In this sense, the
romanticization of the performances is an expediency employed to create a better
image of China without alarming others.

This romanticization or humanization, though expedient, requires substantial
efforts. For example, in order to produce the perfect friendliness, during the last week,
especially the last three days before the Opening Ceremony, all the performers were
required to practice “smiling.” Some performers practiced so hard that they even got
facial spasms (S. Luo 2009: episode 7, 8). In order to produce the dream-like visual
effects, vast investments were put into costume design and manufacturing, stage
properties procurement, and dance choreography. In addition, some of these
deliberately romanticized cases have even caused huge controversies, as we can see in
the case of lip-synching in the performance of An Ode to My Homeland.

Thus, this intentional romanticization/humanization is a reflection of China’s
yearning to be recognized by the world on the one hand, and of China’s determination
to rise as a superpower on its own terms on the other. It is a mixed institution of
articulating a “world” universalism of humanism and romanticism to make its appeals
more agreeable, whilst insisting on the fundamental particularity of its appeals (e.g.,
the Chinese culture, nationalism, political discourses, harmony between human and
nature). With this institution of “common difference” (Wilk 1995, 2004), Zhang and
his colleagues have promoted a Chinese universalism (Chinese cultural modernity) as
an alternative to the Western one. The romanticization/humanization, therefore, has
served as a masking institution of the Chinese determination, which may be called
some kind of “determined romanticism,” a strategy that may be linked to “strategic
essentialism.”
Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can see that, with interwoven discourses of Chinese splendid culture and long continuous history, harmony, and alternative modernity, the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics has articulated a new set of Chineseness. This new Chineseness emphasizes the Chinese particularity to distinguish China from the rest of world, mobilizes universalism to guarantee its acceptance, and meanwhile hints the potential of this set of Chineseness (at least some aspects of it) as an alternative to the Western modernity. It is, on the one hand, a to-be-looked-at spectacle, which traps itself into the “world-ness” of Western aesthetics while trying to escape from the Western Orientalistic imagination of China; on the other hand, although it is not absolutely, in Gayatri Spivak’s term, “scrupulous,” it is an articulation of what Spivak calls “strategic essentialism,” that is, “positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (1996[1985]: 214), which aims to articulate a new and ideal China image. With this strategically essentialized Chinese particularity, universalism, and alternative, this new set of Chineseness articulates an ideal China: China is a “superpower” with a long continuous history and grand culture, a harmonious society, which has long been advocating and contributing to the harmonious world, and a modern and prosperous society with harmonious and scientific development values that emphasize green development and the harmony between human and nature. In addition to these essentialist narrations of the “tangible” Chineseness, the Opening Ceremony has further constructed the temperament of the “new” Chinese: self-confident, friendly, romantic, and determined (with perseverance) to build an even better China.

This construction of new Chineseness is rather one-dimensional or even monolithic. The logic of spectacle in Handelman’s (2004) terms can be clearly observed in the articulation of the new Chineseness: with a self-consciousness to “do things according to the Chinese way” and a competitive goal to outdo the Opening
Ceremony of the Athens Olympic Games, the chief director Zhang Yimou and his creative team constructed this set of new Chineseness largely in accordance to the Chinese bureaucratic logic, such as the hierarchy between the central and the peripheral; the priority between the material and technological development, and political changes; the emphasis on the open and reform era and the political avoidance of the Maoist times; the employment of the political discourse of harmony; and so on. The Ceremony, therefore, has articulated an ideal China based on the political discourses and bureaucratic institutions that aim to foster nationalism. It has turned the new set of Chineseness into a part of a general process whereby “the modern state torques together infrastructure and emotion” so as to generate commitments to the distant state (Handelman 2004: 202).

Thus, the new set of Chineseness, on the one hand, feeding the Western audience with its to-be-looked-at-ness and strategic essentialism, aims to construct a new and ideal image to the world; while on the other hand, it fosters the national identity according to the CCP government’s priority. It embodies inherent controversies in its articulation process and opens up spaces for contestations. In the following chapters, I will examine how this set of new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony are contested globally, regionally, and on the Chinese Internet.