Chapter Three

The Janus-Faced China:

How is China Presented in Anglo-American Media?

Despite the slogan of “One World, One Dream,” the Beijing Olympic Games turn out to be a multi-themed mega-media event. The rejection of Beijing’s first bid for hosting the Games, and the approval of the second were both related to political concerns (Brownell 2008; Haugen 2008). Since 2001 when the Games were awarded to Beijing, the Olympic Games have been regarded as the best opportunity to brand a new Beijing/China, and indeed China has been trying hard to deliver favorite narratives to domestic and global audiences. Meanwhile, world-spinning narratives and counternarratives, especially on the issues of human rights, environmental protection, Tibet, and Darfur, have never stopped (deLisle 2008).

In this chapter I will focus on how the global English media responded to this construction of a new China image in the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, by taking the broadcast of NBC in the United States and BBC in the United Kingdom as examples. Both NBC and BBC are prominent English television channels, and they both have a long tradition of Olympic broadcasting. Moreover, NBC and BBC are representatives of commercial and public television channels respectively, an analysis of these two channels can generate meaningful comparisons.

---

64 The selection is based on the influence of the channels, the project resources, as well as the language ability of the research team. Ideally, the analysis should cover broader geographic and linguistic areas and involve different media forms to achieve a more comprehensive analysis of the “global” responses to the Opening Ceremony. However, with limited resources and energy, I have to limit the case studies within the English world (with a focus on Anglo-America). For more detailed discussion, please see the methodology section in chapter one and Appendix I.
With the concept and approach of global media events, I will analyze how NBC and BBC situatively “center” the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics by their unique performativity, how these “centerings” are related to power and features of media cultures, and how they reveal the linkages and differences of the commercial and public television channels in the West. I will scrutinize the situative processes of “localization” in articulating meanings that are “meaningful” in their own media culture, while keeping in mind that such national media cultures are by no means univocal or monolithic. In other words, I will demonstrate that the global mediation of the Ceremony is not related to only one power center, but to many centers; that it articulates not one set of meanings surrounding a clearly defined thematic core, but multilayered meanings that are loosely, but not loyally, connected to a broadly defined thematic core: the Opening Ceremony held in the Bird’s Nest, Beijing, on 8 August 2008. With these cases studies, I argue that the West-China communication needs to turn away from an imperial and cold-war mentality.

**Dragon or Panda**

As I have already discussed in chapter one, there are two conflicting images of China that have long existed in Western societies. Nowadays, these binary images of China are depicted as a “cute panda” or an “evil dragon” (Gries 2004), optimistic “dreams” or pessimistic “nightmares,” and “good Chinese” or “bad Chinese government” (Wasserstrom 2008). When dealing with China, different people and institutions negotiate different sides of these binary images (and sometimes both sides). Western media also constantly mobilize this Janus-faced image of China in their reports, but with a particular interest in the “evil” image (Gries 2004; Wasserstrom 2008; Zhao and Hackett 1998; Mackerras 1999; and many others). This is also the case in the Olympics-related reports (Brownell 2008; Latham 2009; deLisle 2008). For example, by 2008 Susan Brownell had monitored American media coverage of Chinese sports for more than twenty years, and she “felt all along that the image of Chinese sports is
generally negative” (Brownell 2008: 150). In the months leading up to the Beijing Olympics, the Western media had been in a competition with Chinese media and neo-patriots in reporting the “real” China. In contrast to Chinese authorities’ efforts to showcase “China’s economic, technological, cultural, social and environmental achievements to the rest of the world,” the foreign journalists, “although to some degree silenced by the impressive organization and sporting spectacle of the Games, nevertheless engaged in their own efforts to reveal the ‘real’ China behind what they took as state propaganda, official deception of the public and Olympic ‘fakery’” (Latham 2009: 25, 26).

Under such circumstances, China was caught in dilemmas when facing the Western media. For example, Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom has portrayed the Western media’s perspectives and the dilemma China was facing:

If protests against the regime occur during the Games (or at other times), these will be taken by some commentators to be additional proof that the Communist Party is a repressive organization. But if there are no protests, this will likely be cited by some commentators as evidence of just how repressive the Communist Party is. (2008: 179; italics original)

The overall Janus-faced image of China in the Western society and the particular interest in an “evil” China in the Western media reveal a pervasive Western imperialism and the persistent cold-war mentality (Manzenreiter 2010; Brownell 2008), which was the backdrop of the live/rebroadcast of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics on the Western television channels. In the following, I will demonstrate how the western television channels, though in different ways, mobilize the Janus-faced image of China, taking NBC and BBC as examples.


**NBC**: Centering the Opening Ceremony with a Commercialized Exoticism

On 8 August 2008, the rebroadcast of the Opening Ceremony was shown on NBC roughly twelve hours later than the original ceremony. Due to the time difference, when the Opening Ceremony began in Beijing, it was morning in the United States (PST 5:08 a.m., EST 8:08 a.m.), a time when few people would watch television. Therefore, NBC decided to postpone the rebroadcast to the local time 8:00 p.m. (eastern), the prime time that would attract more audience and, more importantly, advertisers.

This timing has enabled NBC to have more time to refine the rebroadcast, and to partly dodge the rigorous standards and regulations of the IOC on live broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony. Compared to regular live broadcasts on, for example, CCTV or BBC, NBC’s rebroadcast has adopted more panoramas and medium shots that could better showcase the spectacular visuality of the artistic performance. The commentators also had more time to prepare, thus they appeared more familiar with the show’s content and were able to give more in-depth comments and interpretations of the cultural and political meanings than the live broadcasts of the show, even the CCTV live broadcast. The commentators’ casual dialogue-like commentary style, in-depth interpretation of the cultural meaning of the artistic performance, and the apparently friendly attitude toward China and Chinese culture, all gain high appraisal from many Chinese netizens. The NBC’s rebroadcast is, therefore, quite ironically, regarded as the “best representation” of the Opening Ceremony and a “friendly recognition of China’s culture and accomplishments” by Chinese netizens, and has

---

65 NBC has a complex channel structure, including NBC News, NBC Sports, and many other channels. In this chapter, NBC refers to NBC Sports unless specified, although the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics was broadcast on NBC’s multiple channels and platforms.

soon become one of hottest items for P2P software users in China. Volunteers, in a way that Alvin Toffler (1980) calls “prosumers,” have even translated all the commentaries of the artistic performance section into Chinese subtitles. Pirated DVDs with Chinese subtitles appeared in the market as early as the end of August 2008 in Beijing.

However, what cultural translations are taking place in NBC’s rebroadcast of the Opening Ceremony? Is it really a “friendly recognition of China’s culture and accomplishments”? If so, what factors have led NBC to such recognition? If not, what ideology lies behind the apparently friendly rebroadcast? Or in other words, what is “centered,” in what way is it “centered,” and by what performativity? And what is the response of the new Chineseness? What meaning does it articulate, and for what/whom? With these questions in mind, I will analyze in the following how the Opening Ceremony and particularly the new Chineseness, are situated, thickened, and centered through the performativity of NBC’s rebroadcast.

A Political Recognition with Reluctance

The rebroadcast of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics was certainly not the first time NBC engaged China in the Olympics broadcasting. In the past broadcasts since 1992, NBC’s attitude to and commentaries on China were quite coherent with the particular interest of the Western media in an “evil dragon”. One example is Bob Costas, the prominent sports journalist in NBC who commentated every broadcast of the opening ceremonies of the summer Olympics since 1992. In the broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, he introduced China as an authoritarian and oppressive country that “might be the closest thing to an old-style East German sports machine, closed society, very efficient, of watching the NBC’s rebroadcast of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. To some extent, for the Chinese supporters, the NBC’s rebroadcast has become a collective mediated memory (van Dijck 2007), for it has been an object “creating and recreating a sense of our past, present, and future selves in relation to others” (2007: 171).
taking young athletes, putting them in sports schools and using who knows what methods in their pursuit of Olympic medals” (qtd. in Brownell 2008: 166–67). In the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, he emphasized China’s “threat” in the Taiwan Strait disputes and stressed the doping suspicion of Chinese athletes. After the protests from Chinese Americans against his “polluting” introduction and comments of China, Bob Costas has softened his tone of interpreting China since the 2000 Sydney Olympics. However, accusations of his “racist” interpretations of the Chinese in broadcasts of the opening ceremonies of the Sydney and Athens Olympics can still be seen on the Internet and in the press.68

As mentioned before, since March 2008 there had been a new wave of critiquing China in the West, including the US media, indicating a new wave of articulating China’s image of an “evil dragon.” However, having invested 2.5 billion dollars to obtain the exclusive broadcasting franchises of the 2008 Summer, 2010 Winter, and 2012 Summer Olympiads in the United States, NBC was quite unlikely to support any boycott or to heavily engage in criticizing the Beijing Olympics, which would significantly affect its revenues.69 NBC mobilized three thousand professionals, three luxurious studios (one in the Olympic Press Building, one at the edge of Tiananmen Square, one opposite the Bird’s Nest Stadium), and its prominent reporters in the broadcast of the Beijing Olympics. It built up close cooperation with the BOCOG, and even managed to persuade the BOCOG and the Chinese government to allow it to employ one camera helicopter, which was a privilege that only the BOB (Beijing Olympic Broadcasting Co. Ltd, the official Olympic Broadcasting Organization [OBO] for Beijing 2008 Olympics and Paralympics), CCTV, and NBC enjoyed, given that the usage of helicopters was extremely sensitive.

67 After the telecast of the Opening Ceremony of the Atlanta Olympics, Chinese Americans collected thousands of signatures, and raised fund for a full-page advertisement in Washington Post and a quart-page in the New York Times to protest against Costa’s commentary about China.
69 Although NBC Sports operates separately from NBC News, the NBC News had also been less critical of China in the months leading up to the Beijing Olympics, compared to those more radical news channels like CNN and Fox News.
in Beijing (*Olympic Archives*: episode 12). However, facing a different media culture in the United States, NBC need to perform according to standards of its “local” media “professionalism” in reporting about boycotting initiatives and activities, and sometimes also need to engage in critiquing China. It, therefore, held a delicate position: it had to negotiate a space between the mainstream and hegemonic media culture (which tended to be a “dragon slayer”) and its own commercial interests. This situation has subtly influenced the performativity of its rebroadcast and the “centering” of the Opening Ceremony (and of the overall Beijing Olympic Games), as my analysis will show in the following.

NBC’s broadcast of the Opening Ceremony involved the Tiananmen Square studio and the Bird’s Nest onsite studio. NBC set up dozens of self-equipped cameras in the Bird’s Nest Stadium, including one on the helicopter, which substantially contributed to the spectacular representations of the Opening Ceremony. It involved Tom Brokaw in the warm-ups, and Matt Lauer (anchorman of the NBC News’ premium program *Today*) and Bob Costas as on-site commentators. In addition to these prominent reporters, NBC invited Joshua Cooper Ramo as its “special Chinese analyst” in the on-site commentary. Ramo, a former senior editor and foreign editor of the *Time* magazine, is the managing director of the Kissinger Associate, and the author of the *The Beijing Consensus* (2004). The book articulates a “Beijing Consensus” as an alternative to the “Washington Model,” and promotes an idea of the “China model.” Involving Ramo, a “panda hugger” to some critics, can be read as a political gesture that NBC performs in the rebroadcast of the Beijing Opening Ceremony.

Compared to the live broadcast on other television channels, NBC’s rebroadcast has a unique structure (see table 3.1). First, it has four sections of pre-event warm-ups, twenty minutes long, including a starting trailer, a video about the

---

70 Tom Brokaw, born in 1940, is one of the prominent journalists in NBC’s history. He is the only person who has hosted three major NBC news programs: *The Today’s Show*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Meet the Press*. He is also the author of *The Greatest Generations* and several other books. See Museum of Broadcast Communication (online). n.d. “Brokaw, Tom.” http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=brokawtom (accessed 27 Nov 2010).
Olympic Games, roughly four minutes, a video about the background of the Beijing
Olympiad, roughly seven minutes, and eight minutes of on-site commentary and
interviews. Second, some parts of the artistic performance and the parade of nations
have been cut off to shorten the overall rebroadcasting time. The selection criteria of
what to cut off and what not to is significant in terms of situative “centering.” Third, it
has included an interview after the ceremony with Yao Ming, the most famous
Chinese basketball player playing in the Houston Rockets in the NBA at that time, as
well as a short wrap-up for all the rebroadcast. Last but not least, NBC has inserted
more than fifteen commercial breaks into the rebroadcast, which distinguishes it from
any other live broadcasts. Overall, it looks much better structured and prepared than
the live broadcasts of other channels, more like a documentary feature program than a
rebroadcast of a mega-media event.

Table 3.1: The contents and structure of NBC’s rebroadcast of the Opening
Ceremony.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Starting trailer</td>
<td>0:00:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Short Video I (about the athletes and the Olympiad)</td>
<td>0:03:44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Short Video II (about the background of the Beijing Olympic Games)</td>
<td>0:07:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Commentary and Interviews (in the stadium before the artistic performance)</td>
<td>0:07:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Countdown</td>
<td>0:03:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Welcome Fireworks</td>
<td>0:00:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Introduction of Hu and Rogge</td>
<td>0:00:44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fou Drum Formation</td>
<td>0:03:53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Footprints of History</td>
<td>0:01:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dream Rings</td>
<td>0:02:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>the Chinese National Flag Entry</td>
<td>0:02:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Raising the National Flag and Singing the National Anthem</td>
<td>0:01:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artistic Performance: The Beautiful Olympics (Historical Section)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this section, I will analyze how the Opening Ceremony and the Beijing Olympic Games have been politically “centered” in NBC, or how the translocal political meaning has been articulated in the rebroadcast, by examining two questions:

103
(a) How does NBC’s rebroadcast articulate the meaning of the Opening Ceremony and the overall Beijing Olympic Games to China/the Chinese? (b) How does NBC’s rebroadcast interpret China and the relationship between China and the United States?

The overall tone of the broadcast of the Beijing Olympic Games, and more specifically, the Opening Ceremony, is first reflected in Section 1 Starting Trailer. This trailer contains a series of beautiful, even breath-taking, scenes: a window opens and a group of pigeons flies out and away over typical Beijing historical courtyard houses, with a red, three-story Chinese style building (Drum Tower) in the middle of the scene; a village located halfway in the hills with terraced fields; a cute young girl with big black eyes turning halfway back to look at the camera; a Chinese-style pavilion, a dragon pillar, the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, the Altar of Heaven (Tiantan); vivacious young children standing or running through the historical sites, the Water Cube, the World Trade Center, and the National Opera Theatre (see figure 3.1). The voice-over, with a magnetic voice and in a passionate way, says:

The footprints of their history stretched back five thousand years, but for the world’s greatest wall builders, makers of the Forbidden City [sic]. What happens tonight is not merely a small step, but a great leap! China is welcoming the world!

Figure 3.1: The images of “tradition” and “modernity” in NBC’s starting trailer.
The 38-second trailer contains two sets of images that are intentionally attached with symbolic meaning: the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, and other historical sites, which are depicted by NBC as symbols of a closed China; the Water Cube, the World Trade Center, and the National Opera Theatre symbolize the (material) accomplishments after the adoption of the reform policy in 1978. The contrast between the two sets of images suggests that China is undergoing a tremendous transformation from “tradition” to “modernity,” and from “closed” to “open.” Accordingly, the voice-over, first by explicitly referring to the Chinese as “the world’s greatest wall builders, makers of the Forbidden City” (both are symbols of closed-ness), alleges that China has a history of five thousand years of being closed; second, with an acoustic skill, the voice-over consciously leads the audience to the contrasting structure of “tradition” and “modernity,” “closed” and “open,” emphasizing the “rite-of-passage” (van Gennep 2004[1960]) meaning of the opening of the Olympics to China. The voice-over even uses an analog: “What happens tonight is not merely a small step, but a great leap,” which may remind the audience of the famous statement of the moon-landing astronomer, Neil Armstrong: “This is a small step for a man, a giant leap for mankind!” With all these spectacular images, contrasting structure, and impressive voice, this trailer, in an overwhelming way, delivers a clear but oversimplified message: although China is a country with great historical culture and a fast-growing economy, it actually has always been a “closed” country; however, it is now welcoming the world, and the symbolic meaning of this “opening” may even be comparable to the moon-landing in 1969.

Therefore, this trailer implies that the Opening Ceremony (and, implicitly, the overall Beijing Olympic Games) is a “rite of passage” or “coming out party” (according to NBC commentator Matt Lauer) of China. This message, on the one hand, exaggerates or amplifies China’s closed political and ideological system, and the symbolic meaning of the opening of the Olympic Games to China; and, on the other, largely neglects the openness that China has achieved in, for example, economic, cultural, and societal sectors in the past thirty years. Even in the period
from 1949 to 1978, China still managed to maintain international cooperation with other third-world countries, let alone the Silk Route that had lasted for over a thousand years. However, all these largely escaped NBC’s (and most of the Western media’s) attention. Thus, this starting trailer centers the Olympic Games in terms of the political and international relationship between China and the West, and articulates indeed a unique meaning of the Olympic Games for “China”: a coming out party for a country that has been perceived or imagined as always “closed,” a frequently referred-to feature of the “evil dragon” image of China (Isaacs 1980; Mosher 1990; Spence 1998).

This “centering” is further elaborated in Section 3 Short Video II. In this short video, NBC special reviewer Tom Brokaw deliberately explains what the Olympic Games means to China and the Chinese by recalling the key scenarios leading up to 8 August 2008. Brokaw partly adjusts the oversimplified assertion in the starting trailer by contextualizing the Beijing Olympic Games in the social, political, and economic conditions of contemporary China and in the complicated global situation. He recalls that China decided to “move beyond its ‘walls’” well before the Beijing Olympic Games — in 1971 when China invited the American table-tennis team to Beijing, and in the following year when China invited the US President Richard Nixon to visit China. Therefore, although the Games are important for China and its people, it is not China’s first “welcoming of the world.” Brokaw affirms the “rite of passage” meaning of the Games to China, and pushes it a little further, saying that for China and its people, the successful Olympic bid (in 2001) was “a validation of its . . . real wakening after the painful memories of foreign occupation, the cultural revolution, years of isolation,” thus the Games has become “an idol, great consequence, and patriotic pride,” the meaning of which “can’t be underestimated.” Thereby he echoes the symbolic meaning of the Games by calling the opening on the night of 8 August “a night that may be the most significant in modern Chinese history.”

Brokaw further amends the overgeneralized image of the starting trailer by pointing out that China has been a highly controversial country: “There are so many
Chinas. This is a country where half a billion people live on two dollars a day, but where hundreds of millions [are] now experiencing modern prosperity. It is the country where the few rule the many, where protest is not welcomed; a country that still can’t shake the echoes of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown.” He asserts that, on the one hand, although “culturally, and especially politically, China and the West have an uneasy relationship,” China is still a country “rising into the future, confidently, [and] it can claim its place on its own terms.” On the other hand, given that China is still under the control of an authoritarian regime, he concludes that it is hard to predict what the Games would bring in the short term: “I think in the end of the seventeen days, the leaders have taken a giant step forward or maybe two steps back, my standing rule is: don’t assume you know what the Chinese government will do.”

If we take the numerous “ordinary-looking” people (who are working hard, grieved by the Sichuan earthquake, and have genuine patriotic feelings) as presented in the short video, we may conclude that this short video might have affirmed the binary images of “good Chinese” and “bad Chinese government” that persistently exist in Western societies (Wasserstrom 2008). However, what is more noteworthy here is that this short video has articulated an image of a “rising China” (despite its authoritarian governance, polarized society, and fluctuating policies) that is rising confidently into the future and “can claim its place on its own terms.” This articulation implies that the “China” here, to the West, is an “other” who may be uncontrollable (and therefore somewhat dangerous), but after all, it has an optimistic future as a superpower in the medium/long term.

The reluctant recognition of China as a rising superpower is further expressed in Section 4 Commentary and Interviews, when the anchormen and commentators Bob Costas (BC) and Matt Lauer (ML) start their commentary. This time their focus is on the boycott of the Beijing Olympic Games and the nations that are politically sensitive to Americans. Matt Lauer brings up the topic in this way:
What’s going to happen, what response will President Bush get, for example, when he joins dignitaries like Hu Jintao . . . what’s the response going to be to Nicolas Sarkozy, the president of France who angered some people in China with talks of an early boycott and is going back on that; and what response will we hear when the delegations from North Korea, Iran, and Iraq enter this stadium, so [it is] a time that we just sit back and listen.

After two short interviews, they return to this topic again, focusing on President George W. Bush’s presence at the Opening Ceremony (the first time for a sitting president to attend the Games outside America), saying that although he has been urged to boycott the Beijing Olympic Games or at least the Opening Ceremony, he has decided to attend “to support the US athletes” and “to show the respect to China and its accomplishments, which he believes to lead to [sic] more constructive dialogue rather than yet to offending them by not attend[ing].” Then there comes a long but highly significant dialogue that deserves a lengthy quotation:

**ML:** But it doesn’t say that he has taken a soft line. On the plane way over here he talked about some of the problems he has with China [sic]. And then again yesterday, Bob, in a very strong speech in Thailand, he talked about things like China’s record on human rights on freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the jailing of dissidents, freedom of the press. . . . But then as you said, but wait a second, we encourage them and acknowledge their effort on behalf of the negotiations over North Korea and their nuclear ambitions, and Iran, which is still an unresolved situation.

**BC:** President Bush will meet with Hu Jintao over the weekend and he promises to a kind of exchange of ideas, and presumably, a subject (in) which . . . [words inaudible] pollutions will be included, as well as others, because there are arrays of issues [sic].
ML: And I guess this is the point, China and its emergence of power forces a lot of countries and their leaders to operate in a grey area, it can’t be black and white because while you agree on something, you don’t agree on others, and it can’t be a firm line, it’s gotta be a little “give and take.”

This conversation affirms Tom Brokaw’s reluctant recognition of China as a rising power, especially in Matt Lauer’s rejoinder when he uses “grey area” and “give and take.” Particularly, the words “force” and “grey line” indicate a more manifest sense of reluctance and unease that the United States (and the West) still has when confronting this rising power, even when they admit that the United States is expecting more Chinese cooperation on issues related to North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. President Bush’s speech in Thailand and Matt Lauer’s defensive statement “it doesn’t say that he has taken a soft line” again imply some degree of political and moral “superiority” over China’s authoritarian governance.

Thus, NBC’s rebroadcast centers, politically, on China according to the logic of Realpolitik, in terms of the China-US bilateral relationship and diplomatic cooperation, emphasizing the importance of China’s cooperation in regional political issues. It acknowledges China as an emerging superpower and recognizes its accomplishments, despite with reluctance or unease. The implied power relationship between the United States and China still largely falls in the century-long, Orientalistic US-China relationship paradigm: China is admirable or worthy of “mercy”/cooperation just because of its possible incorporation as a (relatively weaker) partner in international relationship issues (Isaacs 1980; Mosher 1990). Here the relationship between China and the United States resembles what Edward Said argues: “[T]he essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen — in the West, which is what concerns us here — to be one between a strong and a weak partner” (2003[1978]: 41). However, after all, this centering goes beyond the cliché of “China threats” and focuses on more constructive cooperation between China and the United States. The political construction of the new
Chineseness has been, at least partly, recognized by NBC’s rebroadcast. Compared with Bob Costas’s interpretations of China in the broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and 1996 Atlanta Olympics, when Costas mostly introduced China as an oppressive communist country and a “threat” to Taiwan, the covert alerts to China are still observable, but the change is obvious too.

Orientalistic Exoticism: Presenting and Interpreting China and Chinese Culture

1. An exoticism of grandiosity and massiveness

Compared to the reluctant political recognition, NBC’s rebroadcast displays a deliberate, even enthusiastic, “spectacularization” of the artistic performances with Chinese traditional cultures. As mentioned before, NBC’s presentation and interpretation of Chinese cultural representations have been appraised by Chinese netizens. The netizens believe that the additional panoramas and medium shots by NBC have much better presented the spectacular visuality of the artistic performances; and that NBC’s commentary is not only more detailed in explaining Chinese culture, but also very kind and friendly to China. Compared to the live broadcasts, the signal of which was largely provided by the BOB, NBC’s rebroadcast actually shares almost ninety-five percent of the camera shots with the standard BOB live version. However, the five percent of the shots taken by NBC’s own cameras, together with the remarkable reediting of the BOB standard signals during the 12-hour interval, have made the overall rebroadcast significantly different. The panoramas, especially the bird’s-eye shots and the medium shots made by NBC’s own cameras have perfectly complemented the weakness of the BOB version for being “too detail-

focused” and employing too many close shots. Therefore, NBC’s rebroadcast is believed to have “best” represented the Opening Ceremony as a visual and acoustic feast of Chinese culture.

Meanwhile, as many netizens noted, this rebroadcast omits quite a few parts of the artistic performance, many of which are in the most appraised historical section (see table 3.1). In Section 13 Painting Scroll, NBC omits the starting video that shows the creative production process of a Chinese painting and the whole section of Section 14A Beijing Opera Puppet Performance. In Section 17 Ritual Music, the kunqu opera performance is left out. Similarly, the ritual scenes in other sections, like the athletes’ parade of some small nations, the lengthy entrance of Jacques Rogge (President of the IOC) and Liu Qi (President of the BOCOG), the Athlete’s Oath and the Official’s Oath, have all been omitted.

NBC’s omissions partly reveal its logic of centering the cultural performance. These omissions, on the one hand, have made the rebroadcast more visually attractive to its audience. NBC always focuses on the most visually spectacular scenes, omitting or neglecting the less attractive ones. For example, Section 14A is a hasty and expedient substitution, choreographed and rehearsed in roughly two weeks, for the piying (shadow puppet) section that had been cut after the final rehearsal (S. Luo 2009: episode 7, 8), thus the overall visual and acoustic presentation is less spectacular than other mass performance sections such as the Fou Formation and the Writing section. The short video in Section 13 and the kunqu Opera in Section 14 are two visual “divergences” to the overall performance, for they are not so visually “grandiose” as the others. All these sections are left out in the rebroadcast. Moreover, while presenting the visually spectacular scenes, NBC tries to highlight the most spectacular shots. For example, in the Section 14 Writing, NBC focuses on the “jaw-dropping” (says Matt Lauer) robot-like Movable Type-printing performance, and

---

72 This is seen by Chinese netizens as the main weakness of the NBC rebroadcast. One post on Tianya Forum, one of the most popular online forums, clearly shows this point: “NBC’s Version of the Olympic Opening Ceremony Is So So [NBC版奥运会开幕式感觉挺一般啊].” 2008. Tianya Forum [天涯论坛], 13 August. http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/1411057.shtml (accessed 29 Apr 2009).
largely neglects the performance of “Confucius’s disciples.” In Section 20 Nature, NBC ignores the painting children but fully represents the amazingly perfect circles made by the 2008 taiji performers (in contrast to NBC, the BOB live-broadcast presents these scenes, and many others, in a more balanced, thus less impressive, way). By doing so, NBC’s overall rebroadcast presents the Opening Ceremony as a visually grandiose and structurally well-knit “cinematic show in the real time” (says Bob Costas).

These omissions also reveal how the rebroadcast articulates a particular exoticism and Orientalism of China. Grandiosity, massiveness, lavishness, and astonishment are some of the key words of this exoticism. As discussed above, NBC deliberately deletes scenes they consider less fitting, no matter how significant they are for understanding the narrative of the performance. Actually, some of the omitted parts are very crucial for the audience to understand the artistic performance, and for Zhang Yimou and his colleagues to construct the new Chineseness. The starting video of Section 13 is the introduction of the artistic performance: it tells how paper, brush, and ink are prepared, and how a painting scroll is created. It is on this video that Zhang Yimou’s thematic ideas of “scroll” and “painting,” which is the structural frame for the storyline, are based. The omitted performance in Section 17 is a graceful bit of the famous kunqu Blossoms on a Spring Moonlit Night, based on a song dated back to the Sui Dynasty (roughly 1500 years ago) and a poem written by Zhang Ruoxu in the Tang Dynasty (roughly 1200 years ago) about the poetic sorrow of separation and an ontological comprehension of life. It is one of the most prominent moments in the artistic performance that best reflects the sentiments of Chinese traditional intellectuals, and is one of the most important components of Zhang Yimou’s construction of China’s “romance.” However, the remaining part of Section 17 Ritual Music, which presents five groups of women in lavish costumes, juxtaposing the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties to impress the audience, has been included and emphasized. In the rebroadcast, the six hundred women’s “fashion show” (says Matt Lauer) has actually attracted most of the three
commentators’ attention and is, with multi-angled shots, deliberately presented in a spectacular way. This presentation resonates with the exotic imagination of China as a mysterious, oriental woman on the Western screens (Chow 1991: chapter 1).

Thus, the ample use of panoramas and medium shots, and the omitting of some bits of the performance serve to articulate an exoticism of grandiosity, lavishness, and astonishment. It is to emphasize the spectacular visuality of the Opening Ceremony and the exoticism of Chineseness. This articulation not only governs the visual presentation and the structure of the rebroadcast, but it also permeates the commentary. In Section 4 Commentary and Interviews, Bob Costas and Matt Lauer emphasize some impressive statistics or facts as follows:

**BC**: The Bird’s Nest, the big stadium of energy and excitement in the middle of the Olympic green . . . where some 91,000 of people will come to witness an opening ceremony of an unprecedented scope.

**ML**: It’s a big show, we are not hyping, here is a fact, 15,000 performers will take to the stadium floor, that’s a record.

**BC**: 11,000 athletes is a little less than the 15,000 performers, a 300 million dollar production, ten times what Athens spent four years ago [sic] . . .

Later, similar commentaries continue. Here are just some comments from Matt Lauer:

This is one of the world’s largest LED screens . . . 30 feet long by 70 feet wide, and it will even get bigger as this night progresses. (Section 13)

We talked about scope and scale at the beginning of the show. . . . A screen at the top of the stadium that stretches . . . stretches over a quarter of a mile, and everything [is] bigger here in China. (Section 15)

Once again putting the entire stadium to spectacular use with the images on the membrane at the top. (Section 20)
By emphasizing the impressive numbers, these commentaries also try to create a grandiose and exotic impression of the Opening Ceremony and the overall China state. This performativity of the centering of the cultural presentation provides a pertinent example for the exotic imaginations of China as an “other” of the West.

2. **Implicit contempt behind the friendliness**

The involvement of Joshua Cooper Ramo, NBC’s China analyst, the former foreign editor of the *Time* magazine, extends the commentary from exotic appraisals to more detailed cultural interpretations. In the commentator team, Ramo’s role is to provide background knowledge and cultural readings of the presentations. He has tried hard to reveal the historical background and cultural meanings of the performances to the American audience, which is also acknowledged by many Chinese netizens. Obviously, Ramo has specifically researched and prepared for the interpreting job; he has presented broad and in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture. His interpretation of the characteristics of traditional Chinese narratives, the cultural meaning of the patterns shown by the movable type-printing blocks, and the Chinese Inland and Maritime Silk Routes, as well as other sections of the performance, have provided a basis for the average American audience to grasp an idea of the cultural meaning of the performance.

However, he is so eager to deliver comprehensive interpretations of the performance in terms of history, culture, and politics that he sometimes “misreads” or over-interprets the performance. This is typically reflected in the interpretation of the ending part of Section 14 when the movable type-printing blocks transform from the mimesis of the Great Wall to the blossoming of peach flowers. He says:

> And now a symbol that is perhaps the most famous in China, the Great Wall, 4000 miles long, built and rebuilt over *almost a 1000-year period* as this country tried to keep barbarians out. Ha-ha, now a moment of symbolism
that is just remarkable, the director Zhang Yimou brings the Great Wall down and replaces it with blossoming *plum flowers*, the Chinese symbol for *openness*. [italics added]

This interpretation contains three “misreadings.” First, the duration of building and rebuilding the Great Wall is much longer than a thousand years: it was first built, at least, in the Qin dynasty which dated back to 221–207 BC, and its last massive reconstruction was during the Ming dynasty (1368 AD–1644 AD); thence the duration of its building and rebuilding is more than 1500 years. Second, the blossoms shown in the performance are peach blossoms and not plum flowers. Third, neither peach blossoms nor plum flowers symbolize openness: the peach blossoms mainly symbolize spring and love, sometimes may refer to peace. Similar mistakes and misreadings can also be found in the interpretations of Section 19 and other sections. The point here is not to emphasize the accuracy of the commentary and interpretation, but to analyze the power relations behind the commentary, to which I will go back later in this chapter.

When the eagerness to provide a comprehensive interpretation entangles with some more overt discrimination, it can produce some more indicative moments as shown in the commentary in Section 17 Ritual Music:

**ML:** . . . This is one of those moments for we have to stop and Woo and Ahh a little bit about the costumes, Zhang Yimou put on a fashion show on the floor. Look at the colors, look at the detail, look at the number of costumes he had to create for the show.

**BC:** And consider these performers in often heavy costumes in a pervasive heat and humidity [sic].

**JCR (Ramo):** One of the wonderful things about China, frankly, is there is incredible attention to little, tiny details. Watch the way these women move their hands, you can see this in teahouse or even in McDonald’s in
China. Just a leftover cultural emphasis on the way that tiniest gestures matter so much.

**BC**: So, so you order a Big Mac and fries in Beijing and they present it to you in conspicuous elegance?

**JCR**: For you? Yes.

**ML**: It’s the way they do in Manhattan, isn’t it?

**BC**: Absolutely.

In this dialogue, Matt Lauer first stresses the spectacle of the costumes, which reflects both the self-Orientalistic representing style of Zhang Yimou (Chow 2010) and the Orientalistic reading of Lauer himself. Bob Costas supplements by commenting on the harsh weather conditions for the performers wearing the heavy costumes, which may implicitly remind the audience of the reports about the arduous training that the performers and participants experienced, and may hint the stereotype in Western societies of the highly disciplined life under the authoritarian governance in China (see also Brownell 2008: 6–12). Ramo’s interpretation of the gestures further mobilizes the Orientalistic stereotypes of Chinese femininity and overall Chinese culture (Chow 1991). After that comes a casual joke involving the Chinese American workers in Manhattan’s Chinese restaurants, revealing the covert contempt for Chinese Americans who largely share an image as lower-class workers or laborers (Mosher 1990; Mackarras 1999).

The performativity of situative thickening (or the translocal processes of articulating meaning) here in these dialogues and many other commentaries in NBC’s rebroadcast mobilize multilayered Orientalistic stereotypes to interpret the performance of the five groups of female dancers. It implies the implicit “superiority” of the commentators over Chinese, although they apparently display an appreciation of the visuality of the performance or Chinese culture. Edward Said, more than thirty years ago, addresses this issue in this way:
To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by him, or as a kind of cultural and intellectual proletariat useful for the Orientalist grander interpretative activity, necessary for his performance as superior judge, learned man, powerful cultural will. (2003[1978]: 208)

From Said’s view, even in Ramo, the one who shows most appreciation of Chinese culture and in-depth knowledge of China (and is even labeled a “panda hugger” as his articles promote the “Beijing Consensus”), one can see the shadow of an Orientalist and a sense of Western “superiority.”

Admirable Technology and Modernity

Modernity, one of the two “motifs” (historical culture and modern material accomplishments) constructed in NBC’s starting trailer, is also elucidated in the rebroadcast. During both Section 2 Short Video I and Section 3 Short Video II, there are specific presentations of China’s modernity. Although the theme of Short Video I is to provide a narrative background of the Olympics, it also continues the narrative structure of the starting trailer, providing a series of dazzling images of historical sites (the Shichahai Park, the Great Wall, and the Tiananmen Square) and material accomplishments (the multileveled flyovers, the business streets, the riverside night cityscapes, and the Bird’s Nest). The voice-over refers to the Chinese as “1.3 billion who framed the front page story of the twenty-first century,” and interprets China as a nation “both outside tie and bursting in every which way in the bewildering rush of transformation [sic].” The Short video II involves a similar narrative structure, and Brokaw explains that among the “so many ‘Chinas’” there is the China “where hundreds of millions [are] now experiencing modern prosperity.” All this
performativity centers China as a fast-modernizing (or to some extent even modernized) country that enjoys high material accomplishments.

During the rebroadcast, NBC specifically presents the modernistic architectures in the Olympic Green, such as the Bird’s Nest, the Water Cube, and so on. The commentators pay specific attention to the technology employed during the performance. During Section 10 Dream Rings, Matt Lauer notes that “now as if by magic those dream rings are lifted from the floor of the stadium, just some of the technology and engineering that you are going to be seeing an awful lot of tonight.” He also, as mentioned earlier, notices and mentions three times, with passion and shock, the huge LED screens on the floor and at the top of the stadium. The commentators are also very impressed by the use of the giant globe (on which Liu Huan and Sarah Brightman sing the theme song You and Me), and the suddenly appearing Olympic cauldron (Matt Lauer comments, “it wasn’t even here thirty minutes ago, this appeared from over the top of the stadium, another amazing feat of the engineering here in the Bird’s Nest.”). Even without this passionate commentary, the audience may still be impressed by the exotic presentations of the dazzling use of light, the use of technology-based stage property (like the “stunning” image displayed on the LED, and the giant globe), and other “technology and engineering” that are prevalent in the performance.

Furthermore, although the artistic performance neglected the period from the nineteenth century to 1978 when the reform policy started, the commentators pay no attention to the periodization of the “historical” and the “modern.” Lauer and Ramo have the following dialogue at the beginning of the second half, the “Modern” part:

**ML:** We told you that the show will be divided into ancient and modern. We’ve now arrived at the modern and I guess we can put an estimated year on this, Joshua, somewhere around 1978.

**JCR:** Yeah, I think that’s about right, when the period of reform and opening began in China.
Unlike BBC, NBC commentators do not question why the missing “miserable moments” (BBC commentator Carrie Gracie’s words) are omitted. Also, they have not paid much attention to the issues related to economic growth, such as pollution (like BBC, which will be analyzed later in this chapter). Compared with the commentators of BBC’s live broadcast, they pay more attention to how technology, engineering, and modernity are employed and presented in the performance, and focus more on enjoying the overall artistic presentation.

Thus, this performativity of thickening the technology and modernity largely meets the constructed new Chineseness, and reflects the general attitude of the “panda huggers” who appreciate China’s economic growth and encourage the development of China-US economic relationship. Since the mid-1990s, after a short break from roughly 1989 to 1993, China and the United States have resumed bilateral relationships and have become more economically connected. China became one of the top five economic partners of the States in the late 1990s, and has been one of its top two partners in recent years. Meanwhile, the United States has been China’s biggest economic partner since the late 1990s (the only exception being 2008 and 2010). In both China and the United States, economic ties have surpassed many other, for example, political, concerns. In the United States, despite a concern of the impact of imported Chinese goods on the grassroots level, the importance of the Chinese economy for the business sector has long been emphasized. Although China at first served as a low-cost supplier, which also implies an unbalanced imperialist relationship as discussed above, China and the United States are building intensive, multilevel partnerships, which again have subtle impacts on the business sector on which commercial television channels like NBC Sports rely.

NBC’s rebroadcast reveals the working logic of commercial television. NBC has invested heavily in obtaining the exclusive broadcast franchise of the Beijing

---

Olympic Games. As a sports-focused commercial television channel, it is under intensive pressure to increase its revenue and to make a profit, thus it shares less political interests with public television channels or news channels. Heavy critiques of China might spontaneously drive viewers away and simultaneously imperil the cooperation with BOCOG, which was crucial for broadcasting the overall Games. Thus, NBC has to negotiate a space between the media culture of the United States, which tends to critique China, and its plan to increase revenue; or, in Gries’ words, to negotiate a position between “panda huggers” and “dragon slayers.” The result of this negotiation is: On the one hand, NBC has to present the Opening Ceremony as astounding and exotic as possible to push the audience to endure a commercial break every three to five minutes. On the other hand, NBC has to show some degree of local media “professionalism” by critiquing China’s authoritarian governance. The reluctance behind the acknowledgement of the rising power of China, the covert “superiority” of the West and the Westerners, and the must-have critics of the Chinese government all clearly demonstrate this performativity of “professionalism.” On the whole, its unique performativity of the centering of the Opening Ceremony, although regarded as friendly to China by Chinese netizens, still mobilizes the Janus-faced image of China and implies the imperialist power of the United States.

From the above analysis we can see that NBC’s rebroadcast does represent the Opening Ceremony as a media spectacle. It highly appraises the artistic presentation of the overall performance. An exoticism of grandiosity, the super-detailed commentary, and the editing/reorganizing of the structure and camera angles have collectively transformed the show into a dazzling, stunning documentary feature program. The spectacular, exotic thickening not only made the broadcast the second most-watched event in the Olympic broadcast history in the United States (only next to the Atlanta Olympics in 1996) and even gained three Emmy Awards for NBC in 2009, but has also, as mentioned above, gained huge popularity among the Chinese.

74 NBC’s rebroadcast gained four nominations for Emmy Awards 2009, and won three: “Outstanding Directing for a Variety, Music or Comedy Special,” “Outstanding Special Class Programs,” and
audience, who, ironically, even regard it as the best presentation of the Opening Ceremony. However, I do not concur with those netizens who advocate that this representation is a gesture of friendliness toward China. I believe it is, at least to a large extent, commercial considerations that made this specific rebroadcast possible. The business success of this rebroadcast is even more remarkable: NBC has inserted more than fifteen commercial breaks (two to five minutes each). In the first half of the artistic performance section, NBC even inserted a commercial break every three to five minutes, a total of ten times in the artistic performance, which lasted for less than one hour (see table 3.1).

**BBC\textsuperscript{75}: A Broadcasting Serving for British Propaganda**

As a typical public television channel, BBC forms a sharp contrast to NBC. Although its revenue structure is changing, BBC is mainly financed by the television license in United Kingdom, the content and programs sales, and governmental grants. It is not even allowed to have direct advertisements,\textsuperscript{76} and its goal, as a result, is deemed to provide broadcasting as public service. This public service, according to BBC’s *Charter Renewal* in 2004, is to “build the public value” (BBC 2004). For BBC, the “public value,” derived from Mark Moore (1995), contains five categories: democratic value, cultural and creative value, educational value, social and community value, and global value (BBC 2004: 8). BBC claims that it is different from commercial television channels and media by stating this “public” service. The Chairman of the BBC Governors, Michael Grade, states that BBC exists for “the idea

\textsuperscript{75} BBC live-broadcast the Opening Ceremony on BBC One, BBC Worldnews, BBC HD, and its online platform. In this chapter, I focus on the live broadcast on BBC One.

\textsuperscript{76} The advertisement revenue of BBC websites and the online broadcast platforms has been remarkably increasing in the past decade, but its ratio in the overall BBC revenue is still relatively small. See BBC. n.d. “BBC Performance Review 2010/11.” http://www.bbcworldwide.com/annual-review/annual-review-2011/performance-review.aspx (accessed 30 Aug 2012).
of building public value, of generating social capital, of serving its audiences not just as consumers but as members of a wider society, of contributing significantly to the quality of life in the UK” (Grade 2005). While serving the public, BBC also stays aligned with the government, as the current BBC Director of Strategy, Caroline Thomson, states: “The BBC exists to create public value, not only value for individuals as consumers, but also value for people as citizens. Hence the six public purposes the government has given us [sic]” (Collins 2007: 16). This position often jeopardizes BBC’s claimed “independence” and “impartiality” in its reports (Bicket and Wall 2009) and has led to long-existing criticisms of the BBC as being a propaganda machine. These features of public television have profound influence on BBC’s live broadcast of the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness, as I will show in the following sections.

BBC transmitted a live broadcast of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games mainly with the signal provided by BOB, so the body of the live broadcast is notably different from NBC’s rebroadcast. Yet, BBC’s broadcast is quite similar to the live broadcasts on other channels, such as CCTV (mainland China), CTV (Taiwan), and TVB (Hong Kong). However, besides the body of the ceremony, BBC’s broadcast also contains four pre-event warm-ups (see table 3.2) and a series of after-event interviews that work as important components of situative thickening (which will be discussed later).

Table 3.2: The pre-event warm-ups of BBC’s live broadcast of the Opening Ceremony.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Start trailer — Journey to the West</td>
<td>0:00:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Short Video (about the athletes and the Olympiad)</td>
<td>0:03:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>On-site Interviews I (with the BBC commentary team)</td>
<td>0:04:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>On-site Interviews II (with Michael Johnson &amp; Steve Redgrave)</td>
<td>0:01:13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to NBC’s rebroadcast, which is more like a documentary feature program, BBC’s live broadcast exhibits more liveness. It has a more compact structure, containing no commercial breaks, no cut-offs, no integrated interviews afterward (instead, the interviews appear in the supplementary interview programs following the live broadcast, which in turn reinforce the “live” feeling of the previous live broadcast). The warm-ups are significantly shorter than NBC’s, the interviews are all set in the stadium, and the anchorperson and commentary team refer more to “what is going on at this moment,” all of which produce a stronger sense of being live. The liveness itself reflects BBC’s centering on this event: as Nick Couldry argues, liveness “marks the media’s constructed role as the access point to what is supposed to be ‘central’ to the ‘group’, that is, the whole society” (Couldry 2004: 359).

However, BBC’s live broadcast, largely adopting BOB’s signal, has little space for performativity to center or thicken the overall broadcast, except the pre-event warm-ups, post-event interviews, and, most importantly, the commentaries. During the broadcast, the anchorwoman and sports reporter, Susan (Sue) Barker, and, especially, the commentators Huw Edwards (BBC anchorman and reporter), Hazel Irvine (BBC sports reporter), and Carrie Gracie (former China correspondent of BBC) play a vital role in the performativity of centering and thickening the Opening Ceremony, and in BBC’s responses to the new Chineseness constructed in the Ceremony. Their performativity of commentary, accordingly, falls more into the so-called “negative-reports” formula in China-related reporting, and implies again certain Western superiority or imperialist power.

---

77 Susan Barker was the anchorperson of the pre-event warm-ups and post-event interviews. In the commentator team, Huw Edwards was the coordinator who tended to provide instant explanation of “what’s going on” in the artistic performance, Hazel Irving’s main responsibility was to provide sports- and athletes-related interpretations, Carrie Gracie was responsible for interpreting China-related issues.
Political China: An Evil “Dragon” and an Unharmonious Country

BBC, as public television, has a well-known tradition or culture of critique (Bicket and Wall 2009). Douglas Bicket and Melissa Wall argue that, compared to NBC, which is a commercial channel and (along with other American media) cooperates with the US government, BBC presents significantly more skepticism, “independence,” and “impartiality,” or a media culture of “Britishness,” in its everyday broadcast (2005: 369–73). In the case of the live broadcast of the Opening Ceremony, BBC has shown stronger interests in political concerns and criticisms of China. This centering presents the “democratic value” that BBC upholds, but it nevertheless implies dissolution of BBC’s “impartiality” or neutrality.

The overall live broadcast is a continuation of the political and environmental critiques that pervade in the Western media, which is significantly different from NBC’s deliberate avoidance of political comments (and trying to narrow the comments down to US-China-related political issues when avoidance was not possible). The BBC even pushes the political concerns to an extreme. For example, in the pre-event short video on what the Olympics mean to the athletes, despite a declaration that “It’s your [athletes’] time!”, there is even a set of shots suggesting a parallel between the Beijing Olympics and the Berlin Olympics in 1936:

Shot 1: On the huge square before the Taihe Palace in the Forbidden City in Beijing, Michael Johnson walks toward the camera and says: “And that is what the Olympics are. Extraordinary!”

Shot 2 (black and white): A face feature of Adolf Hitler.

Shot 3 (black and white): Athletes running on the lanes.

---

78 There are quite some extreme political articulations of the Beijing Olympics. Besides paralleling the Beijing Olympics with the Berlin Olympics, “genocide Olympics” has also been proposed by activists for Sudan human rights, among many other critiquing labels. These extreme articulations and appropriations receive controversial reviews in the Western media and in academia (deLisle 2008; Price 2008).
Shot 4: An athlete (in a jersey marked with “USA”), standing before a microphone and with obvious nervousness, says: “I’m very glad to have won the 100 meters at the Olympic Games here in Berlin.”

Shot 5: The Bird’s Nest in Beijing.

This series of camera shots implicitly connect the Beijing Olympics with the Berlin Olympics in 1936, an Olympics that symbolized the rise of Nazi Germany, which is one of the most extreme political attacks on the Beijing Olympics (deLisle 2008: 52). This attack is rather irresponsible and without groundings. This analog of Berlin Olympics is often “reinforced by references to Chinese complicity in the Darfur genocide” (Wasserstrom 2008: 167; see also Price 2008) by blaming China for mining for oil in Sudan and accusing China for suspiciously selling/providing military weapons to the Sudanese government. The crisis in Darfur was much more complicated than the international activists’ description in 2008, and China had very little entanglements in it (Brosché and Rothbart 2013). The proliferation of this unverified accusation, and the far less attention paid to the Western countries convincingly verified imperialist activities, 79 reflects, on the one hand, a political and military imperialism of the Western countries (NATO, the United States, and the United Kingdom in particular), and the cold-war mentality in dealing with China on the other.

A few moments later, in the interviews in the warm-ups, Susan Barker, after a short introduction, again turns to the political concern: “But not for many years have sport and politics had such an uneasy balance [sic].” Then, she asks six questions about (1) the political context of the Games; (2) environmental phase and pollution in Beijing; (3) the meaning of the Games to the Chinese; (4) President Bush’s

79 For example, there were relatively few criticisms to the British colonialism, imperialism, and slavery, which is also a factor leading to the crisis in Darfur (Giroux, Lanz, and Sguaitamatti 2010), during the London Olympics, as I will discuss in the Epilogue.
attendance; (5) the Sudanese refugee as the flag bearer of the US team; and (6) the contesting and boycotting of the Beijing Olympic Games. These questions resonate with the dominant concerns in the Western media before the opening of the Beijing Olympics (ibid.: 36–48). The first three questions are articulated by the three commentators with some degree of criticisms of China. For example, Carrie Gracie answers the question about “the meaning of the Games to Chinese people,” a question with apparently the least political implications, in a caricaturing way, depicting average Chinese as blinded crowds:

People here really are not exposed to negative messages that we have been talking about, the protests, the environmental worries, the heavy-handed security . . . apart from a few exceptions . . . who have an uncomfortable habit speaking their minds because the government moved them from Beijing for negation of the games, but most people are proud, they are ready to party . . .

Gracie obviously neglects the internal criticisms to the Chinese government and to the Olympics, and ignores the strong nationalist sentiments aroused, ironically, by the criticisms from the West, as I will discuss later in chapter five. She simplifies the issue and describes the diverse “most people” as blinded crowds, though with “a few exceptions,” who are mostly mobilized and sheltered by the government. Interestingly, the two athletes, however, consciously answer the apparently political questions in a more personal, de-politicized way. For example, Michael Johnson answers the question about George W. Bush’s attendance to the Opening Ceremony in this way: “I think the decision is less political, he is a great sports fan, a huge sports

---

80 One of the critiques of the Beijing Olympics is that China has not done enough to stop the humanitarian crisis in southern Sudan. Some of the activists even rashly labeled the Beijing Olympics as “genocide Olympics.” The US Olympic Team’s choosing of Lopez Lomong as the flag bearer during the parade of nations in the Opening Ceremony was a very political decision that has attracted many media reports. NBC’s rebroadcast has not emphasized this decision during the warm-ups and the artistic performance, forming a contrast to BBC’s performativity.
fan, and he stands his own thing to wrap up . . . I think he probably made a personal decision . . . regardless of what anyone thinks back at home. . . .” However, the athletes’ “divergence” does not undermine the apparently political concerns and intended criticisms behind the structure of Susan Barker’s questions and in the overall pre-event warm-ups.

This attitude continues in the commentary. Huw Edwards notices that the Opening Ceremony is, for China, “basically saying to the world, we’ve arrived, we are the twenty-first century superpower, we can do the best Olympics ever.” Yet, the commentators obviously do not take China’s effort to “do the best Olympics” as an amicable one. During the commentary, Carrie Gracie, performs a unique “thickening” on China’s politics. As the commentator who is responsible for interpreting China-related issues, she, on the one hand, admits that after 1978, China “is a constantly growing economy with openness to the outside world, the market reforms, and the liberation of so many aspects of Chinese life” (said in the Starlight section). On the other hand, she recalls or implies eight times that China is a “communist” country or is governed by the “Communist Party.” Even when introducing Russia (a former communist state), Vietnam, and North Korea, she particularly articulates a sense of comradeship between China and these countries. For example, when Gracie comments on Vietnam’s athletes’ team, she says: “Both [are] reforming communist states with communist parties still in control but [with] market economies.” Carrie Gracie is not the only one in BBC to define China in this way. The BBC’s Beijing correspondent, James Rense, even pushes this emphasis to an extreme. During the BBC News at six o’clock (London local time), right after the Opening Ceremony, he talks about China’s President in a caricaturing way:

China’s president, Hu Jintao, he rules over more people than anyone else in history, is this what felt like to be a Chinese emperor [sic]. Tonight, everyone came to his court. The world’s most powerful man was enjoying himself.
This direct analog of Hu Jintao as an emperor again showcases BBC’s intended mobilization of the imagination of an “evil” China, and implies the political and moral superiority of a BBC reporter. At least in the commentary, the normality of the state and the harmony in the political sector and the “peaceful rise” into world, which are important components of the new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony and the overall Beijing Olympic Games, are largely contested in the BBC live broadcast. Moreover, the commentators also question the social harmony among the multi-ethnicities, a vital political element in the construction of the new Chineseness. When the artistic performance reaches the last section, the dance of the Chinese fifty-six ethnicities, Huw Edwards (HE) and Carrie Gracie (CG) have the following dialogue:

**HE:** Performers representing the fifty-six ethnic groups of China dancing in the stadium. . . . Fifty-six ethnic groups! Carrie, a lot of people will not realize that China’s ethnic makeup is that complex.

**CG:** . . . We all occurred to in the months and weeks running up to these games about the problems in Tibet and the problems in Xinjiang, but as far as the authorities here [are] concerned, they are fifty-six happy ethnic groups all taking part in this together. Not just the world has come to Beijing for these games, but all of China [sic]. It’s the point it wants to make.

In this dialogue, Carrie Gracie consciously articulates a binary view between the “reality” and the representation of the ethnic harmony constructed in the performance, questioning the latter with the former. What is also worth mentioning is that the BBC’s live broadcast pays keen attention to Taiwan and North Korea in the Athletes’ Parade. During the entrance of the athletes of Chinese Taipei and North Korea, the BBC gives two feature shots of Hu Jintao, which are two of the few camera shots made by BBC itself, with commentator Huw Edwards saying “President Hu is
looking on carefully as Chinese Taipei/North Korea enter into the stadium.” These emphases on the Taiwan Strait politics and North Korea further strengthen BBC’s particular interest in the internal and regional political tensions in and surrounding China.

Figure 3.2: BBC’s features on China’s president Hu Jintao.

For Susan Barker, the commentary team, and the BBC colleagues like James Rense, it is perhaps natural, following BBC’s “tradition” or “culture” of performing “impartiality,” to point out the (unwelcomed) facts behind the presentation and rhetoric and to provide counternarratives of a harmonious China, which the new Chineseness discourse articulates. However, this performativity resonates with the dominating political concerns in the Western media: the constant referring of China as a communist country with authoritarian governance, the caricaturing of the Chinese president and the Games, and so on, imply not only the “culture of critique” or “impartiality” of a public media or the “public value” that it claims to uphold, but also a clear cold-war mentality that of demarcates “we” and “enemies/others,” “democratic” and “communist.” The hints that parallel China with Nazi Germany, and the caricaturing of China’s president and the Games again reveal the moral and political “superiority” or the imperialist power behind the performativity, and display a “loss” of its claimed “impartiality” in the interpretation and commentary.
Truncated History and Fictional Culture

Like their NBC counterparts, the BBC commentators are not stingy in their appraisal of the massiveness, grandiosity, and creativity of the artistic performance. They employ phrases such as “more than spectacular,” “more than impressed by,” “stunning,” and other strong adjectives to describe and praise the artistic presentations. Meanwhile, by performing “impartiality,” they also try to provide alternative facts and comments on the performance and thus again question the represented grand history and rich culture (and its contribution to the world) — one of the key discourses of the new Chineseness presented in the Opening Ceremony.

One of the alternative facts emphasized in BBC’s commentary is the incompleteness of the Chinese “history” presented in the Opening Ceremony. In the sub-section of Maritime Silk Route, Carrie Gracie hints, in the beginning, that the “history” presented is far from complete. She comments with some alternative historical facts:

And it’s worth mentioning that the connotation of that [the Westerners’ maritime adventures] for China is an extremely sad period of history, the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, when the maritime adventures were carried out by others, there ended up becoming to be [sic] two Chinas due to the civil war [sic], and we saw the period of history that we won’t be seeing in tonight’s ceremony, the Opium War, the invasion to China, ultimately the civil war and revolution.

A few moments later, while coming to the second section of the artistic performance, the modern part, Carrie Gracie mentions that when Zhang Yimou “was asked a couple of days ago why he didn’t include the more recent episodes from Chinese history, he says: ‘Well, Chinese history is a vast bucket full of water, I knew very little and
[could] go through [only] a couple of drops.’’ But, in contrast to Zhang, Gracie has a different explanation about the gaps in the historical presentation:

I suppose this is fair enough, no Olympic host wants to go through the most miserable moments of their history in their Opening Ceremony [sic]. China doesn’t want to endure thinking again tonight about the greatly poor, the Cultural Revolution or the other tragedies in his recent history.

Although Gracie says that it is “fair enough” for Zhang Yimou to omit the “most miserable moments,” she has specifically mentioned it twice and in an emphasizing way. This centering of the “missing history” displays Gracie’s strong interests in the “weak” China that suffered from the unbalanced China-West relationship, and the stereotyped “communist China” with totalitarian governance under which the Chinese have led a miserable life. This performativity resembles the dilemma, described by Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (2008), that China was in: Whether the Opening Ceremony includes these historical phases or not, Carrie Gracie would deliver criticizing comments of China. If it had included there, Gracie would criticize the totalitarian governance or the backwardness of China (which will be further discussed in the next sub-section); now that it excludes, Gracie doubts the logic of excluding and hints the power politics behind this logic.

The commentators’ questioning of the representation of the constructed grand history and rich culture goes well beyond the incompleteness of history. For example, Hazel Irvine questions the presentation of movable type-printing, which indicates that China first invented the movable printing technology, by saying that “here we have the examples of the first movable type system which was created here in China out of ceramic blocks around 1041 AD, as then it took Europe to the 1450s to introduce [the invention]. Generally, what’s regarded as an independent invention type that was created by Germany Johannes Gutenberg [sic].” A few moments later, again in the
sub-section of the Maritime Silk Route, the presentation of the Silk Route on the sea, Hazel Irvine (HI) and Carrie Gracie (CG) have the following dialogue:

**HI:** You are going to see the representation of the seven journeys of Zheng He, [who] pioneered the first express sea route through the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, and his journeys incidentally took place eighty-seven years before those of Christopher Columbus.

**CG:** But what is amazing about Zheng He, Hazel, is that, that was it, at that point he went out, he saw the world, he tried to persuade his leaders to go out to explore it, to engage with it, but after Zheng He there was a time when China turned again inward in the Ming Empire. The Forbidden City, the Great Wall went up. . . . The lessons . . . the momentums left behind [sic]. Zheng He’s early work was not maintained.

A few moments later, when the Chinese compass is featured, Carrie Gracie goes on:

So that is the Chinese compass. And the message here is that China invented not just the gunpowder, not just the paper, but also the compass that enabled the rest of the world to go out and explore the new world, but not China [sic].

These commentaries contain at least two points. First, although they both acknowledge that Zheng He’s seven voyages to the western Pacific and Indian Ocean were earlier than those of Christopher Columbus, Carrie Gracie questions Zheng He’s impact on China by arguing that China turned inward again after Zheng’s seven voyages and the maritime tradition “was not maintained.” Second, Gracie emphasizes that it was the Westerners who navigated and explored (and exploited) the world, but not China. Thus, Carrie Gracie questions the articulation of the historical contribution of Zheng He’s navigations in the performance, and again blames China’s inward-turning after Zheng He. By doing so, Carrie Gracie focuses on Zheng He’s navigation,
and neglects Zhang Yimou’s other important articulations concerning the Maritime Silk Route (a counterpart of the Inland Silk Route, with the heyday roughly from Tang to Ming Dynasty), the climax of which is Zheng He’s navigations, and the peaceful and “harmonious” historical relationship between China and other countries. Consequently, Carrie Gracie, along with other commentators, again questions some of the historical and cultural articulations of the new Chineseness.

The commentators’ questioning of the completeness of history and the presentation of the Maritime Silk Route are related, implying a clear imperialist mentality. China’s turning inward was one of the main reasons that had stagnated its maritime tradition and consequently led to the loss of China (Qing Empire) to Britain in the Opium War in 1840 and in the subsequent wars between China and the West. However, it was the invention of the compass that “enabled the rest of the world to go out and explore the new world,” which eventually led the West to colonize the New World and to invade China. The “miserable moments,” which Gracie accuses Zhang Yimou of trying to conceal, were actually brought about by Britain’s intentional smuggling of opium to China. In contrast to the enthusiastic accusations, Carrie Gracie and other commentators have not mentioned a word of these “facts and truth” (factors that are key to the claimed “impartiality”) in this regard during the four-hour live broadcast, and the interviews and reviews of approximately two hours afterward.

**Old Fashioned Modernity**

Unlike NBC’s rebroadcast that expresses high appraisals of the technology and modernity presented in the Opening Ceremony and the overall Beijing Olympics, BBC’s live broadcast does not pay keen attention to the architecture of modernity and technology. For example, NBC’s three warm-ups intentionally form a binary view of Chinese tradition and modernity, and deliberately portray the modernity of Chinese cities, especially Beijing. By contrast, BBC’s short warm-up video is full of specific camera shots taken in the political and historical sites like the Forbidden City, Beihai
Park, and Tiananmen Square, with no camera shots presenting the modernity of China.

However, the commentators are very aware of the intention of the Ceremony to articulate a certain kind of modernity of China. For example, during the Dream Rings section, Hazel Irvin underscores that the overall presentation in the Opening Ceremony is “to say to the world, to that [sic] while China is very proud of its five thousand years of civilization, it is not afraid to modernize.” Meanwhile, as a former China correspondent of BBC, Carrie Gracie observantly notices that “there are some Chinese that don’t want to see this side of their culture, they are going to see more modern version” (in the Ritual and Music section). Huw Edwards also points out in the beginning of the modern part of the artistic performance that the aim of the second part is to portray “a more harmonious life” (in the Starlight section). Despite their awareness, the commentators do not give much appraisal or affirmative evaluation to the constructed modernity as their counterparts in NBC have done. The following is what the commentators think is behind the presented modernity, the economic achievements, and the technological developments:

I’m just sitting and thinking who that already call it Green Games [sic], it is so controversial, China . . . a country with sixteen of the world’s twenty most polluted cities, rapidly falling off the polluted table, the severe river pollution [sic] . . . The thirty years of economic reform, [is a] triumph for economy, but a damage to environment. (Carrie Gracie, in the Nature section)

Even the whole economic development in China is considered problematic. Carrie Gracie regards the Bird’s Nest Stadium and “other iconic structures appearing in Beijing and also in China’s other big cities, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenyang . . . ” as “bold, daring buildings,” which indicate an out-of-date modernity. She comments:
I was talking to Norman Foster who designed China’s big airport, the biggest in the world, only this morning. And he says to me, China today reminds him of Britain in the nineteenth century. It’s a country with confidence to do everything on a big scale, to do things of prestige, to say what we need now and to double it.

A few moments later, at the starting moment of the last scene of the artistic performance Dream, when the “astronauts” show up in the performance, Carrie Gracie again emphasizes that the presentation indicates that “China is a country which says we can go into space, and we can hold the Olympics, and we can do all the other things!”

From the above analysis we can see that, in contrast to NBC’s appraisal and admiration of the modernity and technology constructed in the Opening Ceremony, the BBC’s commentators regard the presented modernity (including the technology and engineering, post-modern architecture, space exploring, and so on) as impressive yet “old-fashioned.” This response reminds us of what Johannes Fabian calls “the denial of coevalness” (Fabian 1983), a denial of the coexistence of the non-Western societies in the contemporaneity — instead, seeing them as “primitive” — by the Western anthropologists when they are visiting the non-Western societies. The implication here is that Britain and the West have long experienced fast growth, pollution, the bold initiatives of construction, and that, most important of all, Britain has surpassed the relatively “primitive” or backward phase of development. Thus, like the harmony, history, and culture discourses, the modernity of the new Chineseness has also been questioned and criticized by BBC commentators.

However, this unique centering of the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony involves ideological reading of the artistic performances and the discourses constructing the new Chineseness, and reflects a Western imperialism and cold-war mentality. By imperialism here, I do not mean the “old” European nation-states’ extension of the sovereignty beyond their own boundaries (Hardt and Negri 2001: xii).
Instead, it refers to “neo-imperialism,” namely, Western countries’ construction of hierarchical relations to maintain non-Western countries and regions’ economic, political, and cultural dependence (K. Chen 2010: chapter one and four). The cold-war mentality means the inertia of adopting a perspective that views China (and other socialist or former socialist countries, even countries and regions with no socialist engagement) with cold-war considerations. As Edward Said argues, imperialism is “supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (Said 1993: 9). Although Said’s argument is drawn from the “old” imperialism, it is also illustrative for the understanding of the neo-imperialism and the cold-war mentality. Here, BBC’s centering that keeps viewing China as a “communist” authoritarian country and as a “primitive” society is a pertinent example.

Consequently, BBC’s centering breaks the “impartiality” it claims to uphold, and conflicts with the “global value” (one of the five categories of “public value” that BBC upholds) which tries to support the UK’s global role “by being the world’s most trusted provider of international news and information” (BBC 2004: 38). By doing so, BBC is more like “mov[ing] a recipient to a predetermined point of view” (Pratkanis and Turner 1996: 190), namely, delivering propaganda.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discusses how NBC’s and BBC’s broadcasts of the Opening Ceremony showcase the differences between commercial and public television in centering the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness. NBC tried to negotiate a position between the commercial interest and the political correctness of the US media culture, or, in other words, between “panda hugger” and “dragon slyer.” Meanwhile, BBC attempted to “create public value” by criticizing the new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony and the overall political, economic, and social conditions in
China. With these centerings, NBC gained huge revenue and three Emmy Awards, maintained cooperation with the Chinese authorities, and even gained high praises from vast number of Chinese netizens; BBC, on the contrary, appropriated most of the performances and the new Chineseness to create “democratic value” and to educate its “citizens,” which probably implies that the “impartiality” that it claims to uphold is more like a rhetorical disguise of propagation.

Despite the ostensible differences, both television channels have articulated China as an “other.” For NBC, China is an exotic and Orientalistic “other,” while for BBC, China is evil and authoritarian. Both channels have displayed covert (NBC) or overt (BBC) political imperialism, cold-war mentality, and the superiority of Western advancement. Even NBC’s exotic centering of Chinese culture does not mean a “real” recognition of Chinese culture. In this regard, Judith Farquhar and James Hevia convincingly argue:

‘culture’ becomes a problem in communication and culturally appropriate persuasion, an impediment to progress, or an exotic (but dependent) ‘garden’ for tourist consumption and paternalistic protection…culture also explains the irrationality and backwardness of non-modernity nicely, creating a neat divide between ‘oriental’ and ‘western’ reason. (Farquhar and Hevia 1993: 488)

Thus, NBC’s and BBC’s centerings indicate that the new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony, the most attractive moment of the Beijing Olympics, has been much contested by the Western media where imperialism and cold-war mentality are still persistent. Wolfram Manzenreiter argues that the Westerners’ reluctance to recognize the rise of China “is first of all a consequence of their unwillingness to waive their own governments’ predominance in international politics and abandon their very own affluence in exchange for a more balanced distribution of wealth and economic opportunities on a global scale” (2010: 43). If Manzenreiter’s argument
explains this dilemma, then how can more constructive communication between China and the West be achieved? And, if the way to construct new Chineseness can and should be redevised (as BBC criticizes), then should the Western media also need to turn away from their imperial and cold-war mentality?