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

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Chapter Five

The New Chineseness as a Zero Institution:

Online Resistance,

Antagonism, and National Identity

In 2008, one of the most notable phenomena on the Chinese Internet was the surge of patriotic sentiments. The anti-CNN campaign, the initiatives to boycott French products, and the pervasive “love China” symbol on the instant messaging software MSN are just a few examples of the surges that attracted global attention (Latham 2009; Merkel-Hess, Pomeranz, and Wasserstrom 2009; Nyiri, Zhang, and Varrall 2010; Liu and de Kloet 2008; de Kloet, Chong, and Liu 2008; Liu Handing 2008). However, the critical discourses that have emerged online and the digital voices of resistance against the Olympic Games, even if less conspicuous, were also significant. Because of the prevalent censorship in China, the traditional media had very limited space to criticize issues related to the Beijing Olympics. The Internet was one of the very few media outlets where Chinese could articulate and circulate critical discourses against the Olympics. For example, from early 2006, a rock and roll song called “Fuck the Olympics [奥你妈的运]” by a band called Pangu circulated in some online communities.\(^\text{102}\) Although it was banned in mainland China and gradually disappeared from mainstream video- and audio-sharing websites after May 2007, it successfully attracted substantial attention both on the Internet and in traditional media in and

\(^{102}\) A MTV of this song can be seen on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kw4Tf6bs7I (accessed 15 Feb 2011).
outside China. A number of activists, scholars, and famous bloggers criticized the Beijing Olympics for its extravagance, for overlooking the property and civil rights of the relocated people whose houses had been demolished, and for further worsening social inequality (e.g., X. Liu 2008b; He 2008; Brady 2009). On online forums, BBS (Bulletin Board System), and among the comments on Olympics-related news on the portal websites and Olympics-related videos on video-sharing websites, it is not hard to find criticisms of Olympics-related issues.

However, what were these discourses exactly criticizing? What impact did they have in 2008? Did they counteract patriotic sentiments or did they undermine the identification with the official narratives of the new Chineseness? In this chapter, I am trying to answer these questions by examining the online critical discourses related to the construction of new Chineseness before, during, and after the Beijing Olympics, with a focus on the critical discourses related to the Opening Ceremony. These critical discourses, among other discourses related to the Beijing Olympics, take the forms of blogs, short videos, critical posts and comments on online forums and websites, short mobile-phone messages, and many others. They form a notable contrast to the highly supportive voices in the traditional media and on the Internet across China. At the first glance, these discourses largely echo the research works that emphasize the heterogeneity and empowerment effect of the Chinese Internet (G. Yang 2003 & 2009; Tai 2006; Qiu 2007, 2008a & 2008b; Zheng 2007). For example, Qiu argues that “although new ICT connectivity may also lead to more commercial alienation,” the migrant workers who were previously deemed as “have-none” in the information divide have learned to “re-empower themselves by re-appropriating ICTs” (Qiu 2008b: 346). Guobing Yang emphasizes “the power of the Internet in China,” and argues that online activism has been an ever-evolving creative force to propel the Chinese “long revolution”: building up “conceptions and practices of self, society, and politics,” and then gradually evolving to “democracy as a political system” (2009: 213–14).
However, if one examines the critical discourses related to the new Chineseness, one will immediately notice that the critical discourses are resisting the articulation of the new Chineseness and other official narratives on the one hand, while also resisting each other. Therefore, the heterogeneity of these critical discourses does not simply imply the characteristics of “online public sphere” (N. Fraser 2007), for it does not generate consensus with rationality or more democratic outcomes as G. Yang (2009), Tai (2006), Zheng (2007), and many others have anticipated. On the contrary, as Y. Zhao (2008) argues, the Internet not only empowers individuals, civil societies, and online “communities” to facilitate the “long revolution,” but also facilitates the regime’s sustenance of its governance. Through close analysis of activist cases in urban and rural China, Ian Weber further argues that online activism, mainly carried out by the middle class, is based on the self-interest of the middle class and is carefully managed not to truly offend the government, so that “the middle class can continue to reap the economic rewards of state capitalism” (2011: 25). Consequently, online activism ends up in a way that “benefits the government and the current power structure” (ibid.: 42). These arguments open a space for further political critique of contemporary China about, for example, how criticisms of sovereignty are articulated and practiced, and what impacts such critical discourses have on the constructed new Chineseness.

Following Slavoj Žižek’s reinterpretation of Levi-Strauss’ concept of “zero institution” (Žižek 1999), I argue in this chapter that the critical discourses have served to collectively strengthen the identification with the new Chineseness and, to some extent, reinforce the authoritarian governance. With this argument, I do not intend to negate the democratizing power and democratic characteristics of the Chinese Internet that are significant in online activism in China in the past eighteen years since the introduction of the Internet in China in 1995. What I argue is that, under the post-socialist dynamics and engineered nationalistic enthusiasm in China in 2008, online resistance to national identity-building might have functioned differently from other online contentious activities that lead to democratization of the Internet
and the society: these contentious activities had actually reinforced government-patronized patriotism and the current governance rather than weakening them.

“Zero Institution” as a Void Symbol

Before going into a detailed analysis of the critical discourses, I would first like to introduce the concept of “zero institution.” Zero institution is a term first coined by the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. He uses this term to analyze the religious belief of *Mana* as an empty signifier which can “take on any value required”:

At one and the same time force and action, quality and state, substantive and verb; abstract and concrete, omnipresent and localized — *mana* is in effect all these things. . . . In the system of symbols constituted by all cosmologies, *mana* would simply be a valeur symbolique zero . . . which can take on any value required, provided only that this value still remains part of the available reserve and is not, as phonologists put it, a group-term. (Levi-Strauss 1950: xlix; qtd. in Derrida 2000[1966]: 99–100)

Later, he uses this term to describe how conflicting groups of people think they belong to the same tribe and take it as a unifying institution of a split society. Levi-Strauss (1963) describes a village of Winnebago that lies in the Great Lake of North America. Winnebago had two sub-groups (moieties) that had frequent conflicts in daily life. Both sub-groups preserved an identity of belonging to the tribe, but they depicted differently their village’s spatial disposition according to their respective perception of the inter-group relationship: “Those who were above” depicted that the two moieties “were separated by an imaginary diameter running northwest and southeast;” and “those who were below” insisted that the village was structured in concentric circles by pointing out that “the lodges of the moieties chiefs were in the
center rather than in the periphery” (ibid.: 133). Levi-Strauss calls the socio-cultural institutions, which is signified by this identity with two conflicting elements, as “institutional forms which one might characterize by a zero value” (ibid.: 159; italics original). He says:

These [zero] institutions have no intrinsic property other than that of establishing the necessary preconditions for the existence of the system to which they belong; their present — in itself devoid of significance — enables the social system to exist. (ibid.)

Thus, the zero institution here is an institution that relies on an empty symbol which can contain and pacify the inner conflicts, and to sustain the social system. Žižek (1999), in his famous critique of the film Matrix, applies this concept to analyze how the “real” is constructed and screened. He argues that in Winnebago there is first the “‘actual,’ ‘objective’ arrangements of the houses and then its two different symbolizations which both distort in an anamorphic way the actual arrangement” (1999, n. pag.). However, the tribe identity has united the “different symbolizations” into another “reality” which “is not the actual (spatial) arrangement, but the traumatic core of the social antagonism which distorts the tribe members’ view of the actual antagonism” (ibid.). It is exactly “reference to such a zero institution that enables all members of the tribe to experience themselves as such, as members of the same tribe” (ibid.). Similarly, this institution also exists in the modern national identity, for the modern notion of nation is also such a zero institution. For example, the relationship between the nation, and the Right and the Left factions in the political sector works under the logic of the zero institution as the tribe identity and the moieties in the Winnebago village. Žižek asks (in an affirmative way):

Is, then, this zero-institution not ideology at its purest, i.e., the direct embodiment of the ideological function of providing a neutral all-
encompassing space in which social antagonism is obliterated, in which all members of society can recognize themselves? And is the struggle for hegemony not precisely the struggle for how will this zero-institution be overdetermined, colored by some particular signification? (1999, n. pag.)

In this way, Žižek argues that the zero institution of a nation is an ideology to obliterate the antagonism of its members; on the other hand, the members’ struggle for hegemony of the interpretation of (and the identification with) the nation in the antagonism is exactly a process showing how (different) ideological meaning is attached to the national identity as a zero institution. In my view, although his main point is to use the “zero institution” to analyze the ideological perception and distortion of the “real,” Žižek’s critique of the zero institution of nation can be borrowed for illustrative purposes to study the construction of new Chineseness in the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. In the following, I will examine how the antagonism between patriotic supportive discourses and critical discourses, as well as the antagonism within the critical discourses is obliterated, and how the antagonism serves to unite the discourses to evolve into an identity under the void symbol of the new Chineseness.

**Six Critical Discourses**

The online critiques related to the new Chineseness proliferated before, during, and after the Beijing Olympics. The launches of the emblem design (Chinese Seal, Dancing Beijing), the five mascots (*fuwa*), the Torch Relay, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies (including the debate on the implications of China’s number one position on the gold-medal list) are just a few examples of the topics of critiques. These form remarkable counternarratives to the supportive discourses generated by the high patriotism in China. The Opening Ceremony in particular, being the most important
presentation stage of the new Chineseness, attracted all kinds of critiques, which will be the focus of analysis in this chapter.

There are scholars who still try to analyze the Internet according to practical agents of power. However, on the Internet, it is substantially more difficult to identify the “actors” than discourses. Inspired by works of Richard Rogers and Noortje Marres, Jodi Dean (2003: 107–8) argues that public debates on the Internet are in general rather “issue by issue” than actor-centered. The relatively stable actors of a “public sphere,” in the terms of Jurgen Habermas, are much more problematic on the Internet than in a “traditional” society. I propose that the critical discourses related to new Chineseness should also be presented in an “issue by issue” way for similar reasons. Firstly, anonymity on online forums makes it extremely difficult to locate the actors. This is particularly the case in China as sharp critiques of the government are restrained, leading to a situation in which even the noted “IDs” may have a few sockpuppets (pseudonyms). Secondly, the IDs and the celebrity bloggers (except some very adamant bloggers) may also change their points of view with the passage of time and development of the issue. With the “openness” of the Internet, the proliferation of information makes the actors’ opinions more volatile and in constant flux than in the times of television and the press. Thirdly, as a consequence, the discourses presented on the Internet are more evident than the actors, and relatively more stable on the forums, websites, and blogs (if examined on a large scale).

Because of the above reasons, rather than speaking of actors of factions in China, I will focus on how the different critical discourses were articulated in the issues related to the Opening Ceremony, and how these discourses worked vis-à-vis the constructed new Chineseness. My data are mainly gathered from scores of forums, websites, blogs, and short messages circulated on mobile phones. These forums and websites are selected according to their popularity and impact in mainland China. The forums include the most popular public forum Tianya Forum [天涯论坛, www.tianya.cn], the neo-patriotic forum People’s Forum [强国论坛, also known as Strengthening the Nation Forum, bbs.people.com.cn] and Tiexue Forum [铁血社区,
bbs.tiexue.net], the neo-Leftist forums *Utopia Forum* [乌有之乡, www.wyzxsx.com] and the Occidentalist forum *Kaidi Forum* [凯迪网, www.kdnet.net]. The portal websites are Sina, Sohu, Netease, and qq.com. The top video-sharing websites, youku.com, tudou.com, and 56.com, are also included. The posts on these forums and websites are selected according to the number of comments and page-views: all posts containing words related to the Olympics [奥运] and the Opening Ceremony [开幕式], and with more than ten comments or five hundred page-views, are selected. The blogs are selected according to their popularity, as well as the uniqueness of their narratives as a discourse. Short messages are collected from friends, website posts, as well as my own mobile phone (see Appendix I).

Through the discourse analysis on the data gathered from the selected forums, websites, blogs, and short messages, together with academic reflection on the thoughts and social movements in contemporary Chinese society (e.g., H. Wang 2003[1994]; Gries 2004; Shen 2007; Shen and Breslin 2010; S. Zhao 2000; Callahan 2006 & 2010; Xiaomei Chen 1992 & 2002; and many others), I propose that online critical discourses, despite having various constellations, can be grouped into six most notable categories: Occidentalistic, neo-patriotic, neo-Leftist, traditionalistic, interest-related, and playful-cynical. This typology is made according to their viewpoints to the incumbent regime, to the cultural and historical tradition, and to the ways to strengthen China. Except the interest-related (which shifts issue by issue) and the playful-cynical discourses, all other four discourses belong to nationalistic thoughts that have long historical origins and complicated entanglements with the international relationships between China and other countries or regions. Each of the four categories had enjoyed a prominent position, in variant forms, at one time or another.

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103 The *Utopia Forum* was shut down by the government in April 2012.
104 These criteria are partly drawn from S. Zhao (2000). Zhao categorizes the perspectives of Chinese nationalism in the twentieth century as Nativism, Antitraditionalism, and Pragmatism, according to their objectives, sources of modern national weakness, and approaches to national world’s revitalization. I have modified Zhao’s criteria and applied to my findings in this research.
105 Here I can only briefly describe the main characteristics of the discourses. For more detailed discussion on this issue, please refer to Shen (2007); Shen and Breslin 2010; H. Wang (2003[1994]); Gries (1999 & 2004); and many others.
in China (as I will discuss later in this chapter). What is new in the Internet age is that, thanks to the openness and democratic characteristic of the Internet (N. Fraser 1990; Castells 1996; Qiu 2008b & 2008c; G. Yang 2009; Tai 2006),106 nearly every person and every discourse now has access to the public domain despite the prevalent publicity censorship. This means that discourses can coexist and compete with each other more directly and on a larger scale than they have ever been. Furthermore, the open access to the Internet also enables public exposure of those interest-related complaints and resistance, and can sometimes even attract more attention (G. Yang 2009; Tai 2006), circumventing the much stricter censorship on the traditional media in China. Meanwhile, the trend to entertainmentalize everything in the digital age also generates a large group of people who enjoys the “playful-cynical discourse,” which involves taunting and gibing about everything (which will be discussed later).

Some people may assume that these criticisms, given the huge number of webpages/posts/blogs involved, would substantially undermine the legitimacy of the new Chineseness and, therefore, of the Chinese government. My analysis will show that this may not always be the case. In the following, I will first briefly introduce the six discourses (see table 5.1). Then, I will analyze how these critical discourses conflict with the new Chineseness, as well as with one another at the same time. I will also show how these antagonisms are eventually united under the new Chineseness and how each of them represents a different voice on some aspects of the construction of the new Chineseness.

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106 Although the openness and democratic characteristic of the Internet has been critiqued by current Internet studies, it is quite conspicuous in China when compared with the traditional media.
Table 5.1: The critical discourses.\(^{107}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for China’s (previous) weakness</th>
<th>Occidentalistic</th>
<th>Neo-patriotic</th>
<th>Neo-Leftist</th>
<th>Traditionalistic</th>
<th>Interest-Related</th>
<th>Playful-Cynical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Imperialism</td>
<td>Imperialism</td>
<td>Imperialism</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feudalism</td>
<td>Feudalism</td>
<td>Imperialism</td>
<td></td>
<td>Imperialism</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian governance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Radical Maoism</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the incumbent regime</td>
<td>Extremely critical</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Mildly critical</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Critical and cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiques related to the new Chineseness</td>
<td>Supporting the authoritarian governance</td>
<td>Softness to the West</td>
<td>Softness to the West</td>
<td>Mis-presentation of the tradition and culture</td>
<td>Insufficient representation of the disadvantaged people</td>
<td>Taunting and gibing about everything in a “wulitou” way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tradition-eccentric presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Insufficient representation of the disadvantaged people</td>
<td>Not being sufficiently Chinese</td>
<td>Neglecting the livelihood of the disadvantaged people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waste of money</td>
<td></td>
<td>Waste of money</td>
<td>Pretentiousness</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretentiousness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting the government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{107}\) The idea of this table is borrowed from S. Zhao (2000), but I have modified the criteria and expanded the categories.
1. The Occidentalistic Discourse

The Occidentalistic discourse, also known as extreme liberalistic/Rightist discourse in China,\(^\text{108}\) first thrived in China in the 1910–40s. It revived in the 1980s (H. Wang 2003[1994]; Xiaomei Chen 1992 & 2002) and from the mid-1990s to 2000s in the economic sector (Lee and Zhu 2006). After 2003, with the rise of China’s economic power and the rise of the neo-patriotic and neo-Leftist discourses, the Occidentalistic discourse is rather restrained in political, economic, and cultural sectors, although it remains influential among dissident groups such as liberalists (also known as Rightist in China).\(^\text{109}\) It sees the reason for China’s weakness as the Chinese cultural tradition and the authoritarian governance. Therefore, the solution is to incorporate the Western economic, cultural, and political system into China, namely, “a wholesale of Westernization.” The Occidentalist sees the United States (and sometimes some countries in Europe) as a model for China’s development, and strongly opposes the incumbent authoritarian regime (H. Wang 2003[1994]; Xiaomei Chen 2002; Liu Handing 2008).

Although generally restrained by government censorship, Occidentalistic discourses related to the new Chineseness that were constructed during the Beijing Olympics were abundant on the Internet, especially on the Kaidi Forum and the Tianya Forum, and in the comments on the news released on the portal websites and in some well-known blogs (for example, the blogs of Liu Xiaobo and Ai Weiwei).\(^\text{110}\) With regard to the new Chineseness, the main points of this discourse are (a) the Beijing Olympics is strengthening the incumbent authoritarian governance rather than accelerating China’s democratization and modernization; thence, the new Chineseness

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\(^{108}\) The term Right or Left has very different connotations in China than in Western academia. In China, the Right refers to a position advocating liberalism or democraticism, while the Left upholds socialism or the Maoist tradition.

\(^{109}\) The Occidentalist discourse had quite limited representations in traditional media before and after the Beijing Olympics. For example, even experienced Guardian's China correspondent, Jonathan Watts, commented that he was not aware of the Occidentalist and liberalistic critiques on the Beijing Olympics for the Occidentalists and liberalists were “relatively low-voiced” (said in an interview). But on the Internet, one of most notable online debates happened between the Occidentalists and the neo-Leftists and neo-Patriots (Liu Handing 2008).

\(^{110}\) One of the most prominent Occidentalistic actions in 2008 was the release of the “Charter 08” compiled by Liu Xiaobo (X. Liu 2008c). This “Charter 08” urges the Chinese government to facilitate political change to guarantee freedom, modernity, and human rights in China.
is dubious; (b) the new Chineseness incorporates too much “out-of-date tradition,” and does not encompass enough “modernity” of contemporary China and “universal values” like freedom, democracy, and egality. For example, a typical rejoinder of this group protests on the People’s Forum in response to the news about the success of the Opening Ceremony:

Hope this dynasty [the satirical pseudonym of the People’s Republic of China on the Internet] does not always linger in the shadow of ancient Chinese, hope Democracy, Civil Rights and People’s Livelihood thrive on the land of huaxia (华夏) (huaxia is a laudatory name for China).111

Another cynical comment on Kaidi Forum reads:

A labor-intensive performance. For the high-technology approaches I only saw steel wires, LEDs, light projections, and fireworks. If these could be counted as high technology, then this Olympics was truly a hi-tech Olympics.112

Both comments well reflect the main concerns of the Occidentalist discourse: they criticize the Opening Ceremony for relying too much on culture and history, with insufficient presentations of modernity and high technology. They also criticize the authoritarian governance that backs up the “pretentiousness” of the Opening Ceremony spectacle.

111 See Bushi Yeshi [不是也是]. 2008. The fourth comment to the post “Dude Yimou’s Creativity Is Fantastic, the Probability for the London Olympics to Surpass China Is Slim [老谋子的创意令人叫绝，下届伦敦奥运要超中国水平，难，难，难！].” People’s Forum [强国论坛], 9 August. http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?view=1&id=87734795&bid=1 (accessed 13 Apr 2009). The Democracy, Civil Rights, and People’s Livelihood are called the Three Principles. They were proposed by Sun Yat-sen in the 1920s and are still the official principles upheld by the ROC in Taiwan.
2. The Neo-patriotic Discourse

The neo-patriotic discourse originated from the neo-patriotism that emerged in the 1990s and thrives thereafter. It is a populist derivation of government-engineered nationalism and is encouraged by China’s rapid economic growth (see Dynon 2008; Gries 1999 & 2004; Callahan 2010). The “neo” here emphasizes the difference between the patriotism engineered in the 1950s–70s with Maoism as the core and the contemporary populist patriotism based on the discourses of the rise of China, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese ethnicity, and socialism with Chinese characteristics. It generally supports the incumbent government and keeps pace with the authoritative narratives and propaganda, regarding the oppression and exploitation from Western countries as the main reason for China’s (previous) weakness (this discourse may also take a stand against the government, jeopardizing the government’s international policies in some cases, as I will discuss later in this chapter). It also holds a controversial attitude toward tradition by seeing it as both a factor for China’s (previous) weakness and as a source of patriotic pride. The solution, then, is to realize the “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese ethnicity” or even to build up a new Chinese empire. The neo-patriotic discourse largely supports the representations of China in the Opening Ceremony, but it still has some, sometimes very strong, contestations. One example is a post on the People’s Forum:

What is exchange and communication? What is equality and elegance? What is naturalness and authenticity? . . . In the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics Games, what I smelled was the sourness of a pretentious parade of wealth and self-contempt.114

113 Nationalism has been one of the most notable political phenomena in China since the late eighteenth century, but its framework and target have been constantly changing. For example, in the 1920–30s, the framework was about anti-colonialism, and its target was to “save the country [救亡]”; in the 1950–70s, the framework was anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism (1960–70s), the target was to be “self-dependent [自力更生]”; in the 1980s it changed to “Earth-ship [球籍问题]” and modernization. In the 1990s and 2000s, the previous frameworks and targets were almost no longer mentioned, and the “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and “the restoration of China” have become the new framework and target.

Another post, created by an ID of Zhendou 镇铎 says:

(Thirdly,) the lyrics of the theme song did not showcase the Olympic spirit, did not showcase the spiritual outlook of China; its melody was too soft, having nothing to do with a sports event. 115

These examples show how the neo-patriotic discourse evaluates the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics: not self-confident enough, not strong enough, not showcasing the “spiritual outlook of China” enough. However, this discourse does not go further to criticize other aspects of the Olympics, which forms a sharp contrast to the neo-Leftist discourse.

3. The Neo-Leftist

The neo-Leftist discourse shares the view of the neo-patriotic discourse in terms of China’s weakness, while maintaining a tougher attitude toward tradition. This discourse also poses sharp critiques toward the incumbent government by pointing out the increasing social and economic inequalities that accompany the rapid economic growth in China and by emphasizing the welfare of poor and underprivileged groups. Some narratives of this discourse even seek to revert to Maoist development, which is one of the reasons that this discourse, as well as the group of people who upholds this discourse, is called neo-Leftist, implying a connection to and a difference from the Maoist Leftist radicalism. 116 The neo-Leftist discourse is articulated mostly by young generations (Latham 2009; Liu Handing 2008). For example, one rejoinder critiques the extravagance of the Opening Ceremony as a sign of neglecting the poor:


116 The rise of the neo-Leftist discourse has been a very important cultural and political phenomenon in the recent two decades, which has profound impact on the Chinese society. I can only briefly describe it in this section; for more detailed analysis, see Hook (2007); Ren (2006); and Fang (2006).
How much money have we spent on this? Socialism is good after all, we can centralize the money and spend it collectively! Please focus on helping the poor after the Olympic Games!  

Helping the poor, namely, maintaining social and economic equality, is one of the key concerns of the neo-Leftist discourse. However, the characteristic of this discourse is more aggressive than egalitarianism. Another post written by a young student shows the aggressiveness of the neo-Leftist discourse and deserves lengthy quoting:

What does the Opening Ceremony have except for the grand scenes? . . . Is the Chinese culture the sad and mild song *A Hymn to My Country*? Is it the pathetic and touching “all within the four seas are brothers” “all within the four seas are brothers”? Is it *You and Me*, which sounds like the complaints of an abandoned woman? Is it only harmony? No! Chinese culture is Kuafu’s chasing the sun, is the bird Jing Wei’s filling up the sea, is the boy Chen Xiang’s struggling to save his mother, is the old man Yu Gong’s moving the mountain . . . is “those who dare to confront us strong Han will be killed, however far away they may be”. . . . Where is the sense of national pride of the Chinese people? . . . The grand scenes of the Opening Ceremony conceal a weak core. The Opening Ceremony is a plea to the western world and a weakening to the Chinese nation. 

This post criticizes that the Opening Ceremony has totally failed to present Chinese culture. While negating the elements and presentation of the Ceremony, it defines

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117 One of the 282 comments to the post “Dude Yimou’s Creativity Is Fantastic, the Probability for the London Olympics to Surpass China Is Slim” [老谋子的创意令人叫绝，下届伦敦奥运要超中国水平，难，难，难！].” 2008. *People’s Forum* [强国论坛], 10 August.

http://www.wyzxss.com/Article/Class22/200812/62431.html (accessed 25 Sep 2009. This website was banned in April 2012, and is not accessible anymore). Kuafu, Jing Wei, Chen Xiang, and Yu Gong are all characters in traditional Chinese stories who had astonishing resolution and persistence to accept challenges that are regarded as mission impossible.

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Chinese culture as persistence, strong determination, and pride by using a series of metaphorical examples: the classic Chinese stories of persistence (Kuafu’s chasing the sun, Jing Wei’s filling up the sea, Chen Xiang’s struggling to save his mother, and the old man Yu Gong’s moving the mountain). All are about accomplishments of impossible missions, strong determination to resist enemies (exterminating the enemies regardless of the distance), and the pride of the establishment of the “new China” in 1949 (quoting the declaration of Mao). Another notable characteristic is that this discourse solicits the Maoist tradition, both by quoting Mao’s statement directly and the examples of persistence (like Yu Gong’s moving the mountain), and by calling for pride and antagonism against the imperialistic West.

4. The Traditionalistic Discourse

The traditionalistic discourse was also one of the mainstream discourses in the 1920s–40s, but was rather feeble from the 1950s to the early 1990s due to the anti-traditionalism of Maoism and Occidentalism. However, it has revived in China since the early 1990s and has become an increasingly important discourse thereafter, inspired by the success of the “four Asian dragons” and by the regime’s “patriotic education” program after 1990, which encourages patriotism partly through soliciting “national pride” in the rich Chinese traditional culture and long history. It shares the viewpoint of the neo-patriotic and neo-Leftist discourses with regard to China’s weakness. However, it proposes a return to the Confucian tradition as the solution; and the first step is to reeducate Chinese people about traditional culture and to promote its revival.

119 The “four Asian little dragons” refer to South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. These four regions had rapid economic growths in the 1970s–80s, which is regarded as a success of Confucianism in the economic sector (Tu 1996).
120 The revival of traditionalism has a complex social, political, and cultural context. For more detailed studies, see Tu (1994 & 1996); and Fei (1997).
121 The traditionalist discourse has multiple levels. The first level views Confucianism as the solution to the predicament of the modernity (Tu 1996; Fei 1997; Ji 1992 & 1993). The second level is about how to absorb “positive elements” of traditional and cultural institutions into the ongoing modernization in China. The third level devotes to the reeducation of the Chinese about the traditional culture. This discourse is increasingly influential in China. Examples of the impact of this discourse include the adoption of some traditional elementary books, for example, the *Three Character Primer* and *Standards for Being a Good Student and Child*, into some municipal education system in recent years, and the putting up of a Confucius statue in the Tiananmen Square.
The traditionalistic discourse accuses the new Chineseness for mis-presenting traditional culture. For example, right after the Opening Ceremony, there were blog entries and posts on the Internet critiquing the *fou* instrument in the welcoming section of the Opening Ceremony. Historians criticize that the *fou* that appeared in the Ceremony is not the “*fou*” in history (L. Zhang 2008; Wang Jichao 2008). Zhu Dake, a cultural study scholar based in Shanghai, points out in his blog that the *fou* was an instrument for funerals rather than ceremonies, and accuses the use of *fou* in the Opening Ceremony as a symbol of cultural disruption, indicating a necessity for an enlightenment of tradition and history. He writes:

I don’t think this discussion should be limited to the *fou* drum itself, but should be led to the bigger topic of cultural rupture and historical enlightenment. Just as *The Song of Chu* [楚辞] depicted, [no matter whether the *fou* is] a despicable equipment or a funeral equipment, the famous verse “bronze bells are ruined and discarded, whereas the clay tiles and *fous* are hooting wildly [黄钟毁弃，瓦釜雷鸣]” written by Qu Yuan [屈原] two thousand years ago implies the symbolic meaning of the Olympic *fou* drum to modern China. . . . My point is that the Olympic *fou* is an important cultural symbol, which is “hootling wildly,” revealing the reality that culture is despised and dying. (Zhu 2008)

In this widely circulated blog, Zhu criticizes that the *fou* was traditionally and ritually a “despicable equipment or a funeral equipment,” which is an improper instrument for welcoming guests from all over the world in such a dignified occasion. By quoting the famous verse “bronze bells are ruined and discarded, whereas the clay tiles and *fous* are hooting wildly” of Qu Yuan, he accuses that cultural tradition has been ruined in China and that no one knows how a proper and decent welcoming performance should be conducted. His point is that the Fou Formation, as well as many presentations of the culture and history narrated in the Opening Ceremony, is rather

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122 Zhu Dake, strictly speaking, is not a traditionalist, but his point of view in this blog does articulate a traditionalist discourse. This case may serve as a good example of the “issue by issue” character of online actors and discourses.

123 *The Song of Chu* [楚辞] was a poem anthology of Qu Yuan (339 BC–278 BC), a poet who lived in the Spring and Autumn Period.
“fake,” reinvented, appropriated, and improper. Upholding the importance of authenticity, Zhu does not agree that the fou in the Ceremony is actually a hybridity of the traditional fou, and that what Zhang Yimou intends to have is “a percussion instrument other than a drum” and modern technology, but not a traditional fou. For him, authenticity and accuracy are more important than Zhang’s imagination of traditional culture and expectation of a spectacular performance. The discourse in Zhu’s blog represents the main points of the traditionalist critiques of the Opening Ceremony: the fou, costumes of Confucius’s disciples, the compass, and other discussions related to traditional culture.

5. The Interest-Related Discourse

The new Chineseness, as a systematic and ideological construction to react to international and national changes, was partly designed to appease the social and economic tensions, for example, social polarization and regional imbalance, brought by the rapid economic growth and authoritarian governance. Partly because of this, the Opening Ceremony and the new Chineseness emphasize the harmony and modernness of the Chinese society. However, the Beijing Olympics, which was organized in a manner of mass mobilization, disturbed and disrupted many people’s life and interests: since 2001, many people’s homes had been demolished for the construction of sports centers and venues, roads, subway, and other infrastructures; from June to late September 2008, real estate constructions had to stop; factories, markets for building materials, a substantial number of lower-class restaurants, and other small businesses had to close temporarily; thousands of cars were put off the road. These disadvantaged groups also use the Internet to voice out, resist, and protest. Their criticisms vary from complaining about daily inconveniences to critiquing the problems of the social system, many of which are closely related to the new Chineseness. The following is a typical example:

[Let’s] nevertheless wish the Noisy-Olympics [闹运会] would finish smoothly and quickly; I do not want to either receive the whatsoever honor

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S. Luo 2009: episode 2; and Olympic Archives: episode 1.
of a rising superpower, or experience the whatsoever lofty sentiments of the “trials and tribulations revitalize a nation” [多难兴邦]; I just want to live a normal life of ordinary people.125

The term, Noisy-Olympics [闹奥运会, naoyunhui], was a pervasive parody byname of the Olympics [奥运会, aoyunhui] because the Olympics interrupted the daily life so much, especially during the few months leading up to the event when the ordinary people’s life were increasingly affected. This post, written by Absolute Hermit [绝对隐士] on 19 July 2008, specifically condemns the inconveniences brought by the Olympics (in shopping, hiring day-laborers, renovating apartments, moving, and so forth), and wishes the Noisy-Olympics would go away quickly.

6. The Playful-Cynical Discourse

G. Yang (2009: chapter four) and Xiao (2011) have already noted that online activism is, compared to the protest on the streets in 1989 in China, significantly more “playful” than the traditional forms of protest. However, they still understate the significance of the playful cynicism on the BBS, online forums, and in the text message exchanges on mobile phones. It is a notable trend in China that people are extremely enthusiastic in taunting and gibing about everything through short messages on mobile phones, and through posts on the online forums and websites. Such criticisms appear in a way similar to the “weapon of the weak” (J. Scott 1985) or Kynicism, which was first coined by Peter Sloterdijk and cited by Slavoj Žižek, as a means and procedure “to confront the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology — its solemn, grave tonality — with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime noblesse of the ideological phrases the egotistical interests, the violence, the brutal claims to power” (2008[1989]: 57). A broadly circulated text message says:

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The biggest originality of the Opening Ceremony: the Opening Ceremony started on the 8th, but the cauldron was lit on the 9th! The biggest characteristic of the Opening Ceremony: there are numerous people! The biggest unexpectedness of the Opening Ceremony: there is no fuwa [the mascots of the Beijing Olympics] from the beginning to the end! The most internationally popular good after the Opening Ceremony: the Chinese fan.

Another widely circulated short message mocks the Fou Formation performance and the involvement of the idea of harmony [和]:

The best originality of the Beijing 2008 Olympics Opening Ceremony: there are 2008 majiang tables in the beginning! Essence of the culture! Essence of the culture! Absolute essence of the culture! Three more people needed? The meaning is that since friends have come from afar, shouldn't we play a couple of rounds [of majiang]? What is the result? The majiang formed three different he characters, meaning we win three consecutive times!

These two short messages illustrate the aesthetic and practical tactics of the playful-cynical discourse. The taunting and gibing do not directly protest against or oppose what they resist, but they play around by joking at some specific but important parts by using the “wulitou [无厘头]” tactics, a way originated by a Hong Kong film star Stephen Chow, who likes to make jokes at something unexpectedly or nonsensically in his comic films. The first message jokes about the timing control, the massive performance, the missing of the well-advertised mascots, and the hot and humid weather at the night of the Opening Ceremony (the Chinese fan). The second jokes about the Fou Formation performance and the Movable Type-printing performance as shows of playing “majiang [麻将]” a traditional Chinese game that involves four people and a rectangular table, and taunts the he [和], meaning harmony, which is one of the essential discourses of the new Chineseness, as hu, which means winning a majiang game and shares the same character with he [和], but has a different pronunciation. The proliferation of these gibing and taunting messages and web-posts, confronting and ridiculing the new Chineseness and the Opening Ceremony, was a notable phenomenon in August and September 2008.
The New Chineseness: A Void Symbol with Fierce Antagonism

In the last section I have briefly described the six categories of critical discourses I have identified. These six discourses argue against those highly supportive discourses of traditional media and, especially those on the Internet, forming a notable phenomenon similar to the two different ways of depicting the Winnebago’s spatial arrangements. The critical discourses seemingly critique the new Chineseness, protesting that the new Chineseness does not sufficiently include or represent the elements or aspects that they think China and Chinese should be (e.g., more aggressiveness, more modernity, and high technology), and protesting that it does not represent some people’s interest. However, the critical discourses, especially the first four (I will discuss the last two discourses later in this chapter), do not reject the idea of new Chineseness; what they emphasize is that it must include or exclude certain elements so as to represent China better.

When patriotism was highly mobilized in 2008, these critical discourses were retorted by the reactive patriotic voices. For example, Nyiri, Zhang, and Varrall describe how the “cosmopolitan Chinese youths” across the world “express a natural desire . . . to redress China’s inferior position amongst other nations” with strong nationalistic sentiments (2010: 26) when they reacted to the criticism and protests in the Western societies after the Lhasa riot on 14 March 2008 in Tibet, in China, and during the Olympic Torch Relay in Paris, London, and some other cities in April and May 2008 (see also Latham 2009). De Kloet, Chong, and Liu argue that “[i]ronically, a discourse [from the Western media] that critiques China for its human rights and international policies backfires when we observe the response in China,” because “a narrative of (self-)victimisation is channelled to the [Chinese] audience [by the Chinese authorities], together with other performative national humiliation discourses . . . constituting a means of identification against the assumed Western ‘media hegemony’” (2008: 29; see also Liu Handing 2008). There has been extensive discussion on the general reactive voice to any criticism of China and the new Chineseness in 2008. I will not go into detailed discussion of this contestation, yet I will focus on the antagonism among the critical discourses, because this type of
antagonism is also an integrative and illustrative part of the overall splits under the new Chineseness: in addition to their criticisms of the constructions of new Chineseness, these critical discourses also attack each other to argue for a set of better representations of new Chineseness, struggling for its monopoly.

Table 5.2: Most notable antagonisms among the critical discourses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>Historical authenticity and cultural</td>
<td>Occidentalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-patriotic</td>
<td>representability</td>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(weak)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Playful-Cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-patriotic</td>
<td>“Harmony” of the society</td>
<td>Occidentalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(weak)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interest-Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-patriotic</td>
<td>Love/hate to Chinese government</td>
<td>Occidentalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love/hate to</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interest-Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreign</td>
<td></td>
<td>Playful-Cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., the</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S., Japan,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-patriotic</td>
<td>Ongoing modernization and urbanization</td>
<td>Occidentalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-patriotic</td>
<td>Stronger military power</td>
<td>Occidentalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neo-Leftist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interest-Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Playful-Cynical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data I have gathered show that the most notable antagonism surrounds the presentation of traditional culture, the “harmony” of the society, China’s self-positioning and international relationship, and the legitimacy of the government. In addition, these critical discourses not only criticize the new Chineseness, they also criticize each other when their opinions clash on the Internet (see table 5.2). As Žižek warns, it is easy to “slide into ideology under the guise of stepping out of it” (1994: 17). Although the antagonism is apparently fierce, the critical discourses do not significantly undermine or truly reject the new Chineseness, nor do they undermine identification with it. The main points of these critical discourses (with non-significant deviation in the interest-related discourse) are to argue what should or
should not be included when presenting China and the Chinese, and how to present it perfectly. These discourses are largely engaged in refining, thus enhancing, the new Chineseness and the identity attached to it, instead of undermining it. In the following, I will analyze these antagonisms with three most notable examples.

1. **Historical Authenticity and Cultural Representability**

All in all, the criticisms to the presentation of traditional culture in the Opening Ceremony performance can be divided into three categories: the authenticity of some historical elements, the overall evaluation of tradition, and the overall evaluation of Confucianism. In the first category, besides the *fou*-instrument argument mentioned above, the traditionalistic discourse blames the Opening Ceremony for mis-presenting the costume of Confucius’s disciples, the compass [司南, *sinan*], and many other historical elements. 126 For example, D. Yang (2008) claims that the *sinan* displayed in the Maritime Silk Route section is not an authentic one:

> The widespread “*sinan*” model with a magnet spoon on a copper plate emerged precisely in the 1940s. An alternative viewpoint from the academic is that this model is by no means the true *sinan* in the history. (para. 1)

Another post argues what the “true” compass of the four great inventions of China should be:

> The compass as one of the four great inventions refers to the compass invented in Song dynasty for navigational purposes, namely, the *aqua* compass . . . *sinan* was used by the wizard to check the *fengshui* [风水] of housing and tombs while the *aqua* compass was a marine device. So the

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126 Besides the *fou*, which is regarded as an invented “traditional instrument,” the costumes of Confucius’s disciples are criticized for being too noble, and for disregarding the diversity of social status of Confucius’s disciples; the compass displayed during the Marine Silk Route section is criticized for being a model of the East-Han dynasty instead of the Ming-dynasty model that Zheng He used in his seven long voyages to the mid- and west Asia and Europe. Similar criticisms also go to other costumes and symbols of traditional culture.
sinan was a petty invention with limited usage, while the compass was a great invention which influenced the world.\textsuperscript{127}

Despite their sharp accusations, what these criticisms find fault with is merely that the presentations of these Chinese historical inventions are not authentic enough. They strongly appreciate the long Chinese history and grand culture, seeing it as an adorable part of Chineseness, instead of rejecting it. According to these discourses, what should have been done is to make the presentations more accurate and authentic. Meanwhile, some comments sharply argue against these criticisms by pointing out that these posts are themselves also full of mistakes. For example, one comment argues that sinan was not used for fengshui, for the fengshui theory was formally developed in Song dynasty (960 AD–1279 AD), while sinan was used in Han dynasty (202 BC–220 AD) already. He summarizes:

Thus, claiming that the Han wizards were using ‘sinan’ to check fengshui for housing and tombs is nearly a joke. What was sinan used for? I tend to believe it was for astrology.\textsuperscript{128}

Besides these authenticity-oriented, traditionalist rejoinders, there are also some general, more neo-patriotic comments arguing that the Opening Ceremony is after all an artistic performance and not a process for “historical verification.” Some fiercer criticisms even call the authors “idiots.”\textsuperscript{129}

Another type of criticism stems from Occidentalistic, neo-Leftist, and (some) neo-patriotic discourses, which tend to demonstrate to the world China’s modernity


\textsuperscript{128} This is a post by the same author and was posted on another forum. The link was provided by the author himself. The cited comment is in the middle of the page: The 22\textsuperscript{nd} comment to the post “Sinan Is Not One of China’s Four Great Inventions — A Mistake of the Olympic Opening Ceremony [司南不是中国的四大发明 —记奥运会开幕式的失误].” 2008. Guoxue Shudian Forum [国学数典论坛], 26 August. http://bbs.gxsd.com.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=169205 (accessed 11 Apr 2009).

and achievements of the thirty years of open and reform policy. In an online interview on the People’s Forum, a question raised by a seemingly neo-patriot to the dance director, Shen Wei [沈伟], is a typical example:

May I ask the director: “When you were designing the performance for the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, why did you not present the modern China to the world, but pursue the elusive ‘ancient charms’? Thank you!”

In contrast to the traditionalist discourse that emphasizes the authenticity and accuracy of the traditional-cultural elements in the performance, this question implies a very skeptical attitude toward the presentation of tradition by calling the traditional-cultural performance (“ancient charms”) “elusive.” An even more radical critical discourse in this regard comes from the Occidentalist discourse. For example, Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2010 and one of the most radical Occidentalist discourse articulator in China, expresses his view that “the four greatest inventions, silk route, Chinese operas, china, ritual music, tea, taiji, terracotta warriors, calligraphy, painting, Confucius” are “out-of-date” and “banal” traditional elements that serve the dictatorial aesthetics of the Chinese authorities, and are thence not desirable symbols of China (X. Liu 2008a). For the Occidentalist discourse, the tradition should be replaced by a “wholesale of westernization,” which is believed to be the only effective way to truly revitalize China.

However, the neo-patriotic and neo-Leftist discourses split on this issue. Quite a lot of posts and comments in these categories praise the artistic performance of tradition, believing that the performance has well presented Chinese culture to the world. What these less radical voices find fault with is that the Opening Ceremony presents too much traditional culture or has mis-presented the culture, but they do not propose to eliminate the traditional-cultural presentations altogether in the performance or the traditional-cultural elements in the new Chineseness. For example,

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131 For a detailed discussion on Occidentalism, please refer to Xiaomei Chen (2002); and Jing Wang (1996); for the variants of Occidentalism in the 1990s and the 2000s, please refer to Yao (2011).
the neo-Leftist post cited above condemns the historico-cultural presentations in the Opening Ceremony (e.g., the reciting of Confucius’s *Analectics*), but it proposes a series of cultural stories (Kuafu, Jing Wei, Chen Xiang, and Yu Gong) as substitutions. These voices reflect the general attitude of the neo-patriotic and neo-Leftist discourses toward tradition: absorb the essence and discard the dross [取其精华，去其糟粕]. This was a principle set by Chairman Mao and is taken as the mainstream principle for policy-makers to deal with traditional culture, and has been inherited by neo-Leftists and neo-patriots.

What is essence and what is dross, however, is never an easy question. Chairman Mao and his successive policy-makers had never elaborated on how to differentiate essence from dross, which has led to hot debates about policy-making on tradition. This can also be seen in the criticisms of the tradition-involved performances, disputing which traditional elements should or should not be included, as already mentioned above. At the heart of these criticisms is whether Confucius and Confucianism should be included. In 2007, a prestigious historian and a traditionalist, Ji Xianlin, proposed that Confucius should be uplifted to the stage in the Opening Ceremony. The unexpected highlight on Confucius’s disciples and Confucius’s *Analectics* in the Writing section of the Opening Ceremony has indeed pleased traditionalists. Yet, apart from the abovementioned Occidentalistic contestation over the involvement of Confucius and Confucianism, there are also some neo-patriotic and neo-Leftistic discourses criticizing it. For example, one comment says:

The Confucian idea of “Let the emperor be the emperor, ministers be minister” [君君臣臣, *junjun chenchen*] hindered China to have fallen behind others for hundreds of years. If it had not been the Mao Zedong-led Chinese Communist Party, would we have the Olympics today? . . . If we say we have to de-politicize (the Opening Ceremony) and spare our governmental culture [the propaganda rhetorics], then neither should we

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133 *Junjun chenchen* [君君臣臣] has very different explanations in the Confucianism hermeneutics. This interpretation is a popular one.
mention Confucianism — bureaucrat-state culture, which had hindered China.\textsuperscript{134}

This neo-patriotic comment again attributes the cause for China’s lagging behind to Confucianism, and strongly objects to the inclusion of Confucianism in the Opening Ceremony. Yet, even with such a harsh criticism of the Opening Ceremony, it does not oppose to the inclusion of other traditional-cultural elements, such as the four great inventions, kunqu Opera, taiji, and other things. Amidst all this antagonism, only the Occidentalist discourse sometimes unveils some degree of historical nihilism, like what Liu Xiaobo does in his blog. However, following Žižek’s neo-Laconianism (2008[1989]), Liu’s specific naming of the long list of “out-of-date” and “banal” traditional elements still implies his recognition of the importance of these “traditional elements,” despite through an apparent contestation. The antagonism around tradition and historical culture is rather a struggle for the monopoly of an ideal set of traditional-cultural representations in the new Chineseness.

2. “Harmony” of the Society

Except the neo-patriotic discourse, almost every other discourse expresses its discontent toward the construction of a “harmonious society” in contemporary China. These discourses believe that the ongoing policy is not leading China to a more harmonious society, but to a more polarized, fragmented one. The most frequently criticized aspects are the neglected livelihood of ordinary people, social polarization, regional (economic) imbalance, and other social problems caused by the rapid modernization and urbanization. Criticisms of political despotism or authoritative governance, mostly from the Occidentalistic discourse (and sometimes from some mild neo-Leftist discourse partakers), are less obvious than above-mentioned social issues. For example, a post, drafted by a famous dissident He Qinglian \textsuperscript{134} Mingming Langlang [明明朗朗]. 2008. “The Confucian Idea of ‘Let the Emperor Be the Emperor, Ministers Be Minister’ Hindered China to Have Fallen Behind Others for Hundreds of Years. If It Had Not Been the Mao Zedong-Led Chinese Communist Party, Would We Have the Olympics Today? . . . [儒家的君君臣臣害了中国比别人落后了几百年，要不是毛泽东领导的共产党……]” People’s Forum [强国论坛]. 9 August. http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?view=2&pageNo=1&treeView=1&id=87739979&boardId=1 (accessed 13 Apr 2009).
criticizes the ongoing national sports system as evidence of social injustice and resource misplacement:

[As for the financial investment in the Beijing Olympics and in building an image of a “strong China,”] even if we take the deliberately underestimated figure, forty-three billion dollars, published by the Chinese government, the investment still far exceeds the [governmental] investment . . . in education . . . and in health care in China. But the [ordinary people’s] excessive expense on education and health care have been teased by the Chinese as two of the new “three big mountains” that are pressuring the ordinary people [the third one is the housing expense].

This post criticizes that reigning policy neglects the livelihood of ordinary Chinese people, comparing the Olympic investment with the education and health care investment in China, and by quoting the term “the three new big mountains,” which refers to medical care, education, and real estate property that are increasingly burdening people’s livelihood. The term “three new big mountains” is an analog to the “three big mountains,” namely, imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism that had been identified as the main burdens of ordinary people before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, according to the propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party.

This kind of criticism is rejoined by the neo-patriotic discourse (and sometimes by the neo-Leftist discourse), which points out the pervasive similar practices in the West. They compare today’s China with the Maoist times and the time before 1949, and solicit the political rhetoric of Chinese revolutionary history. One of the these

135 This is an excerpt of a post “(Repost) Resource Misplacement and Social Injustice in the ‘National Sports System’ [[转贴]‘举国体制’的资源错置与社会不公]”, 2008. Kaidi Forum [凯迪网], 2 September. http://club.kdnet.net/dispbbs.asp?id=2425208&boardid=1&page=1&1=1#2425208 (accessed 10 Jun 2009). This post was drafted by He Qinglian [何清涟], a famous dissident who is now a resident in the United States. It was first published on the BBC website http://news.bbc.co.uk/chinese/simp/hi/newsid_7590000/newsid_7591600/7591621.stm (accessed 20 Jun 2009), and has been widely re-posted on the Chinese Internet. On 1 November 2011, there were more than 17, 000 search results of this article on the Google search engine.

136 On the Chinese Internet, there is a large group of “wumao dang [五毛党]” (literally the 50-Cents Gang or Red Vests), who are organized and paid by Chinese government institutes to defend or provide supportive opinions for government actions, rhetoric, and policies. They are officially called
rejoinders is a post on the *Tianya Forum*, titled “The United Kingdom Invested 50 Million Pounds in Yachting and Rowing,” which talks about the huge investment of the United Kingdom government in the yachting and rowing sports for the Beijing Olympics. The comments to this post add that the United Kingdom was also investing heavily in equestrian sports, and so was France in some sports. Then the comment protests:

> The democratic national sports systems are not national sports systems; only the totalitarian national sports system is the national sports system.

Hahaha.\(^\text{137}\)

This rejoinder argues that some sort of national sports system that is financed by the state also exists in Western countries, thus China’s national sports system should not be criticized. Obviously, this rejoinder has neglected the investment ratio of expenditure in medical care, education, and other social welfare in these “Western” countries, and focuses only on the ostensible similarities between China and Western countries on sports investment. This tactic, namely, focusing on ostensible similarities while neglecting systematic differences, is broadly used in supportive discourses to argue against the criticisms, and was pervasive on the Chinese Internet in 2008. Partly because of media censorship (which would more or less delete or screen out some critical posts or comments) and partly because of the high patriotic sentiment, the neo-patriotic defensive discourse probably outperforms the critical discourse. With the help of censorship, there are significantly more supporting posts and comments for the Olympics, the Opening Ceremony, and the constructed new Chineseness on all the five forums (*Tianya Forum, People’s Forum, Tiexue Forum, Kaidi Forum*, and “Internet commentator” in the government administrative system. Appeared first in the early 2000s and thriving since 2007 when the Central Government delivered a policy requiring the government institutes to organize the Internet commentator groups, “wumao” has been an increasingly notable and important online source of supporting and defending opinions for the government. In my research, firstly, all differentiable “wumao” posts, comments, and blogs are technically ruled out. Secondly, I treat some of the less extreme “wumao” opinions, which are not technically differentiable, as a normal source of pro-government discourses for they are a part of the encompassing nationalistic surges on the Internet in China. Thirdly, as F. Liu (2012) and many others have observed, many people in China, consciously or unconsciously, hold a supporting position to the government; thus, wumao-like discourse may not necessarily come from wumao.\(^\text{137}\)

The pugnacious neo-patriotic discourse partakers (and the neo-Leftist discourse in many cases, especially in debates with the Occidentalistic discourse) energetically rejoin all criticisms of this kind, and nearly every critical topic is outperformed by corresponding supportive arguments on the forums.

Ironically, criticisms of the “harmonious society” as a political rhetoric by pointing out the social polarization, the regional imbalance, and the affected interests of the disadvantaged groups, do not deny that China should be a “harmonious society.” The main point of these criticisms is to argue for a “better” way, other than the ongoing policies including the extravagant spending on the Olympics, to build up such a harmonious society, that is, to facilitate political change in China. As He Qinglian argues at the end of her article:

Anyway, this systematic arrangement with misplacement of resources and unconcern of people’s livelihood should not continue. (2008: n. pag.)

This kind of argument does imply a weakening of the legitimacy of the incumbent government. However, it will be risky to be optimistic about the effects of these criticisms. The defensive discourses tend to argue that China has gone through great difficulties to gain the achievements that bring about the hosting of the Olympics, and that China is not yet perfect but it has a promising future. One widely circulated article by a famous TV news presenter Yang Jinling says:

Critics from the West and the East have ignored a basic fact: Although today’s China still has many problems, it has gone through thirty years of opening and reform. China, hosting the Olympics and after the hosting [sic], will continue to be open. . . . This ancient civilization country . . . in the process of actively learning from and aligning with the world, will be

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138 Although it is quite notable that the supporting discourse outperforms the critical discourse, it is very difficult to make statistics on the ratio of the supporting and critical discourses. One of the reasons is that many of the critical posts and comments have been deleted because of media censorship. The ratio of critical and supporting discourses ranges from 1:7 (done in April 2009) to 1:10 (done in August 2011) in the four forums from which I draw the data. It will be very risky to draw a conclusion whether the “actual” ratio of supporters and dissidents in the society (or on the Internet) is also similar to these figures, but it does demonstrate that the patriotic sentiments on the Internet outperformed the opponents in 2008.
greeting a more open future in a more self-evident and leisurely way. (2008: n. pag.)

Yang’s article is an exemplar of the supporting arguments and viewpoints that are most frequently published in 2008: admitting the existing problems in China (and often with pleas for change), but expecting a promising future with optimism. These articles, with a pragmatic reasoning rather than a Leftist or Occidentalistic idealism, share the rhetoric of a “harmonious society” in depicting contemporary China as a triumph in the evolutionary progress of the Chinese society and in calling for collaboration and solidarity of all Chinese to build up a harmonious Chinese society and a harmonious world. It may also be categorized as a kind of mild neo-patriotic discourse.

3. Love/Hate toward the Chinese Government and Foreign Countries

One often-contested issue that is closely related to the debate on “harmonious society” is the attitude toward the Chinese government. The discourses that criticize the neglect of people’s livelihood usually hold a stance against the incumbent Chinese government. For example, the Occidentalistic discourse often articulates a statement like this:

The Beijing Olympics will definitely be a rare-in-the-world political Olympics. The so-called great performance that the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] achieved with the Olympics will help it reinforce its one-party despotism . . . In a word, the honor of the Beijing Olympics belongs to the CCP regime but not to the ordinary people in China.139

There are also discourses defending the Chinese government on the Internet. The first type is the obvious supporting neo-patriotic voices that were quite evident in China in 2008. Frequently seen praises like “[the success of the Opening Ceremony or hosting the Olympics] is evidence of the success of the open and reform policy” or “a symbol

of the return of the Oriental dragon” are typical examples. The second level repeats
the above-mentioned pragmatic-sympathetic understanding toward the government,
supporting the government with pragmatic reasoning that emphasizes the concrete
difficulties for the Chinese government to gain the achievements in the past three
decades. The third type is what can probably be called “politically indifferent
nationalism/patriotism,” voiced out mainly by Chinese youths. Liu Fengshu (2012)
analyzes how the “politically indifferent youths” in China engage in nationalism. By
claiming “the nation is higher and greater than the party-government” (2012: 62) and
patriotism is apolitical, as F. Liu proposes, these youths have found a way to uphold
nationalism without violating their self-defined “apolitical” position, and then widely
engage in “national issues” as “angry youths.”140 They strongly defend China or the
Chinese nation especially when they think China and the Chinese nation are being
discriminated by “biased” Western media or countries. In most cases, these criticisms
naturally coincide with the support of the government and become one of the main
resources of the neo-patriotic discourse. The “politically indifferent
nationalism/patriotism” is sometimes non-differentiable from the first type of
supporting voices, but at other times it is easily recognizable. For example, one
comment to a post titled “We Cannot But Love the Country” says:

But I still love the country, regardless how others would badly comment on
the CCP. I allow myself to grumble about [the CCP], but I don’t allow others
to trample on my country [referring to the disruption to the Torch Relay in
Paris in 2008]!!!!! [sic]141

140 The term Angry Youth [愤怒 youth] originally emerged in Hong Kong in the 1970s, referring to the
younger generations who were dissatisfied with the status quo of the Chinese society, and sought
changes and reform. In China, this term is used to refer to younger generations who are either strongly
nationalistic or strongly Occidentalistic. The former is usually called “Leftist Angry Youths [左愤],”
but it actually includes neo-patriots and neo-Leftists. The latter is also called “Rightist Angry Youths
[右愤].” The academics and media usually pay more attention to the former, but neglect the latter. For
a general description of the logic of these two groups of angry youths, see Liu Handing (2008).
141 Yunnan Zhilian [芸楠之恋]. 2008. A comment to the post “We Cannot but Love the Country —
Thinking on the Blockages of the Torch Relay [我们不能不爱国－奥运火炬海外传递受阻给我的思
考].” by Forever Stone [永远 DE 石头]. Tianya Forum [天涯论坛], 10 April.
Another similar comment says:

No matter how discontented [we are] with the government, [we] do not allow the foreign bastards insult [our] motherland.\footnote{Tianya Qian Xiaosheng [天涯千小生], 2008. A comment to the post “We Cannot but Love the Country — Thinking on the Blockages of the Torch Relay [我们不能不爱国 — 奥运火炬海外传递受阻给我的思考],” by Forever Stone [永远 DE 石头], Tianya Forum [天涯论坛], 10 April. http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/1186294.shtml (accessed 11 Apr 2009).}

However, when the government fails to meet their expectations, these “neo-patriots” may also become “dangerous” to the Chinese government. The most frequently seen scenarios are the neo-patriotic discourse blaming the government for being too soft to the West, particularly when China is engaged in territorial disputes with neighboring countries or in diplomatic disputes with other countries, for example, the territorial disputes with Japan on the Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands for Japan).\footnote{Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands for Japan) are three small islands located in the East China Sea. Both China (including the PRC and the ROC) and Japan claim the sovereignty over these islands (which are currently under Japanese control). The territorial dispute has led to protests in all the three regions. In mainland China, it has increasingly been a source of anti-Japanese sentiments since the 1990s.} In 2008, there were several cases of this kind. For example, in the summer of 2008, the angry “neo-patriots” called on the public several times to boycott Carrefour, a supermarket chain headquartered in France, as a protest against French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s claim to reject the invitation to the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, as well as his plan to meet Dalai Lama (the Tibetan in-exile religious leader) after the 3/14 Lhasa riot in Tibet, and as a protest against the interruption that happened during the Torch Relay in Paris. When the government dismissed the protesting crowds around the Carrefour supermarkets in dozens of cities in China, discontents with the government’s “cowardice” on the Internet grew for months, though to a milder extent than the discontents over territorial disputes. The protests and discontents were finally pacified by Sarkozy’s final decision to attend the Opening Ceremony and by the Chinese government’s rhetoric of supporting the Olympics by not confronting “foreign friends.” This event shows how neo-patriotism may also at times be going against the government.
However, it will be risky to overestimate neo-patriotism’s disruptive power to the Chinese government and its legitimacy. As F. Liu (2012) argues, when the “politically indifferent youths” claim to be good Chinese “citizens,” namely, “country-living” citizens, they risk to become “subjects” rather than “citizens” of the country:

With the emphasis upon “obedience” and loyalty, hence on duties rather than rights, the Chinese understanding reminds one of the “subject” rather than the “citizen”, thus begging the question whether or not the Chinese young people, even the educated elite, have deserted their status as “subjects” and assumed the role of citizens in the true sense of the word. (2012: 62)

Although I am not so convinced that there is an idea of the citizen “in the true sense of the word,” I agree with Liu that neo-patriotism has entrapped itself into a “subject” role that, in most cases, practically supports the state, even when it sometimes tries to take a stance against the policies and actions of the government, as the abovementioned cases demonstrate. In fact, Xi Chen contends that even when collective actions in China involve confrontational tactics, they are still “generally perceived as essentially submissive rather than rebellious” (2007: 254). He maintains that today “Chinese protesters have a strong tendency to operate close to authorized channels and to take dramatic actions to demonstrate their obedience.” (ibid.)

With the three examples analyzed above, I propose therefore that, although the critical discourses render resistance to, discontents with, and different reading and reconstruction of the new Chineseness, all of them agree that there should be an ideal (set of) representation of China and Chineseness: in the end, the criticisms and debates on the new Chineseness constructed in the Opening Ceremony do not negate the idea of “new Chineseness.” The issues of argument are more about what should or should not be included in the new Chineseness and to what extent. For instance, the neo-patriotic discourse wants to be tougher to the West in order to show the strength of the rising China as a world superpower; the neo-Leftist wants to be even tougher to the West than the neo-patriotic, anticipating a more Maoist egalitarian development; the Occidentalist expresses a strong aspiration toward democratization and further modernization. Paraphrasing Levi-Strauss, these critical discourses work like the
different descriptions given by different groups to depict the ideal representation of China, which unexpectedly unify these groups under the name of new Chineseness.

Even the playful-cynical and interest-related discourses are hardly exceptional. The interest-related discourse appeals for better protection of individual and organizational interests or less intervention in people’s daily life. Its protest against the rhetoric of a “harmonious society” is actually, to a certain extent, an appeal for a more or “truly” harmonious China. The playful-cynical is a little more complicated. Yet, as Žižek suggests, once we yield to the temptation of intervening into the critique of ideology, we are back in ideology (1994:17). For example, the playful-cynical, despite their criticisms, somehow implicitly acknowledges the new Chineseness. Back to the second short message quoted earlier in “The Playful-Cynical” section, it jokes about the harmony and solicits support from majiang, a popular folk-culture form to counteract or deconstruct the intellectual culture forms like Confucianism, calligraphy, and the reinvented “ancient” instrument fou. The substitution of folk culture for intellectual culture is partly back to the debate of what should or should not be included as representations of China and the Chinese.

Thus, the antagonism related to the new Chineseness practically stimulates further enthusiasm to the new Chineseness and consequently supports the state. On the one hand, the criticism and antagonism have led to different versions of the ideal new Chineseness and turned the constructed new Chineseness into a zero institution as well as into a slippery signifier with various versions of signified meaning. In that case, isn’t the antagonism within the critical discourses to new Chineseness exactly the struggle of how the Chineseness as a zero institution should be defined or redefined, or paraphrasing Žižek, “be overdetermined,” colored by some particular signification that they appeal? And isn’t the ideological function of the constructed new Chineseness to provide “a neutral all-encompassing space in which social antagonism is obliterated, in which all members of society can recognize themselves” (1999: n. pag.)? In other words, these critiques and antagonism establish the necessary preconditions for the existence of a “nation” to which they belong and a national identity that they strongly possess. Their presence — in itself devoid of significance — enables the new Chineseness to exist, to assert its ideological power, and thus to some extent, reinforced the regime.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, the criticism and antagonism of government opponents encourage the pugnacious neo-patriotic discourse (Liu and de
Kloet 2008; Nyiri, Zhang, and Varrall 2010; Latham 2009; Liu Handing 2008). In the post-socialist era in China, the incumbent regime has to rely on its ideological, rhetorical control to deal with the profound problems resulting from the rapid capitalistic economic growth and the authoritarian governance. The ideological and rhetorical control engineers patriotic fever as part of the tactics to perpetuate the governance. This engineered patriotic fever, with extremely reactive characteristics, is reinforced when encountering critiques from either inside or outside China (Liu Handing 2008). As de Kloet, Chong, and Liu observe, the “oppositional discourses surrounding the BOG that emerge in the Western media have the ironic effect of strengthening nationalistic discourse, alienating the Chinese citizens from the global media, and reifying assumed cultural differences” (2008: 29). The antagonism in the form of critiques to the new Chineseness unexpectedly fuels the already high patriotic fever.

**Conclusion**

In 2008, the Western media, international NGO’s and activists, Chinese dissidents, and many other individuals or bodies actively engaged in criticizing China, believing that criticism might accelerate political change in China, or, at least, undermine the legitimacy of the Chinese government. Meanwhile, many scholars studying Chinese Internet propose that the openness and the democratic characteristics of the Internet open up more possibilities for China’s democratization. For example, G. Yang (2009), Tai (2006), and Zheng (2007) advocate that the Internet has facilitated the development of China’s civil society and thus has, to some extent, accelerated the possible democratization process. However, as Y. Zhao (2008) warns, the regime may also use the Internet and new communication technology to strengthen its governance. In the meantime, online activism may also have some degree of conspiracy with the government (Weber 2011).

In this chapter, I argue that the criticisms related to the new Chineseness and their appearance on the Internet unexpectedly reinforce the new Chineseness and consequently the legitimacy of the Chinese government. I have described how the critical discourse related to the new Chineseness has turned the constructed new Chineseness into a zero institution, a slippery signifier with various versions of
signified meaning. I have also examined how the critiques and the antagonism within this zero institution have not deconstructed the new Chineseness. I propose that these critiques and antagonism, on the contrary, reinforce the constructed new Chineseness. Meanwhile, the patriotic fever in the post-socialist China, engineered by ideological and rhetorical control, is increasingly sensitive and reactive to the critiques from both inside and outside China. Under such circumstances, all critiques around the Opening Ceremony have in fact encouraged the engineered patriotic fever, and as a consequence, reinforced the incumbent regime.

With the above arguments, I am not negating that the Internet has some degree of democratizing power (sometimes it has, see G. Yang 2009). What I am trying to emphasize here is that, under the particular circumstances in which patriotism was highly mobilized, the criticisms of the constructed new Chineseness, the Beijing Olympics, and China have not worked as democratic power as those in other famous events of online activism in China, but have worked in the opposite direction. I also do not intend to assert that only offline events can substantially undermine the Chinese government’s rhetoric and legitimacy. In fact, the online criticisms on food safety (e.g., the scandal about the poisonous dairy products in 2008), political corruption (e.g., Red-Cross corruption crisis in June–August 2011), the several self-immolations during the forced demolitions across China, the high-speed train crash in July 2011, and many other events have indeed significantly weakened the regime’s legitimacy and the constructed discourse of an ideal China. My point is that under the particular circumstances of the year 2008, with a highly mobilized patriotism, the criticisms of the constructed new Chineseness and the Chinese government did not achieve their political goals as many had expected.

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144 Examples include the Xiamen and Panyu PX project incidents (Huang and Yip 2012). The environmental actions organized by online and mobile communications successfully prevented the launch of the highly environmental-risky project in Xiamen, Fujian; though similar actions in Panyu, Guangdong were less successful. Another example is the positive role the Internet played in rights protection [维权], including the Sun Zhigang [孙志刚] incident in 2001 and the black kiln [黑砖窑] incident in 2007, that have, to some extent, improved the human rights conditions in mainland China (G. Yang 2011).