

**New Assertiveness and New Confidence?  
How Does China Perceive Its Own Rise?  
A Critical Discourse Analysis of the  
*People's Daily* Editorials and Commentaries  
on the 2008 Beijing Olympics**

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**Abstract**

China's growing confidence and new assertiveness in the first decade of the 21st century have caught the world's attention. A watershed moment in modern Chinese history, the 2008 Beijing Olympics, was widely perceived as a "coming-out party" for China as an emerging power. How did Chinese official discourses interpret the significance and implications of this unique historical event beyond sports, in terms of its rise and position in the world? This study employs a critical discourse analysis, analyzing structures and meanings of the discourses on Chinese official media of the *People's Daily*, seeking a more complex and nuanced understanding of China's rise from the Chinese side and the far-reaching implications it entails. It finds that the Beijing Olympics not only changed the way the whole world looks at China, but also the way a self-conscious China perceives itself in terms of its role and position in a globalizing world.

**Keywords:** editorials, critical discourse analysis, Beijing Olympics, China's rise, new confidence

**JEL classification:** F52, F59, N45, Z13

**1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The world is witnessing a China with growing confidence and new assertiveness. One of the watershed moments in the first decade of the 21st century, the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, was hailed as the single most unique event in China's modern history. One hundred years of dream (*bainian mengxiang* 百

年梦想) and seven years of preparation and planning culminated in a 16-day global extravaganza in Beijing, putting China on the global centre stage for the first time since the 1989 Tian'anmen Student Movement. This event was widely described around the world as a great “coming-out party” (Mooney, 2008) for China, a debutante, showcasing her dazzling achievements in economic growth and modernization as an emerging power on the world stage. It has been also seen as a turning point for China, marking the transformation of China from a dormant dragon to an active global player, with newfound confidence and assertiveness.

Even before the light of the Olympic flame illuminating China, China already found itself in the world's spotlights. Against the backdrop of the rise of China, the coming-out party mantra was widely circulated in media discourses around the world. The image of an emerging China loomed large day after day. Bridges (2011) underscores that, “the Beijing Olympics could not but have an external impact and be viewed as part of China's putative ‘soft power’, whether intended or otherwise” (p. 13).

However, how did China herself see and define the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games at that moment? How did Chinese media and official discourses represent and interpret this event beyond a sports spectacle? What were the images they tried to project? What were the messages they tried to communicate to the world? What were the meanings behind those media texts? What elements of this event were included or accentuated? What were diminished and even left out in this meaning-making process? This study employs a critical discourse analysis, analyzing structures and meanings of the editorials and commentaries on the Beijing 2008 Olympics in Chinese official media of the *People's Daily*, contextualizing this event of the Beijing 2008 Olympics in its historical, social, and cultural contexts of the rise of China, and at the same time, situating it in a broader context involving a variety of issues, such as the Darfur genocide, Tibet riots, human rights in general, pollution and environment degradation, Olympic torch relay and boycotting, Sichuan earthquake and aftermath in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics, seeking a more complex and nuanced understanding of the position and the rise of China from the Chinese side.

## 2. Editorials and Official Discourses in China

This study focuses on editorials and commentaries on the Beijing 2008 Olympics, published in the *People's Daily*, a prominent official newspaper in China. As Cao (2007) points out, despite a recent decline in readership, the *People's Daily* remains the single most important newspaper in China and a key vehicle through which major government policies and Party ideological guidelines are promulgated.

The *People's Daily* is the official organ of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee and one of the principal mouthpieces of the Party and Government in China. Although, some may argue, during the reform era, the role of the Chinese media has changed dramatically from the days when it functioned strictly as "an ideological Party mouthpiece and government cheerleader" (Kalathil, 2002), the role of the *People's Daily* as the Party organ and propaganda apparatus and the symbolic significance and mouthpiece function of the paper remain unchanged to a large extent. Rather, it has continued to be the voice of the Chinese leadership, and widely read among government and Party officials, scholars, and politically inclined intellectuals. The editorials on the *People's Daily*, as argued by Latham (2007), "are still used for conveying important central political messages or statements of position by the Party and the Government".

Nonetheless, the political messages and statements of position on Chinese official media have changed. While the Chinese official media are torn between the party line and the bottom line, Zhao (2008) notices a change in the operation of the official media – their "historical role in the cultivation of class-based subjectivity among the population was completely replaced with an all-out effort to promote a pan-Chinese national identity during the reform era." She further argues that "with this discourse of nationalism, the state's job was to fulfill the grand objective of the 'Chinese nation's great rejuvenation'".

Editorials as a special media genre, or a public, "mass communicated types of opinion discourse par excellence" (van Dijk, 1998), have long been recognized as a site of powerful social discourses, in which opinions are formulated and ideologies are expressed. They contain explicit, implicit and implied opinions that lead the reader to agree with the recommendation formulated by the newspaper in its conclusion. Deng Tuo, former editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily* in the 1950s, describes editorials as the "banner" of a newspaper "expressing its political stance" (Deng, 2002). The editorials and commentaries in the *People's Daily* have been regarded as the "wind vane of the Party and Government line, which speak out to the important policy and important social issue, and undertake the important task of shaping public opinion" (Wu, 2008). They usually reflect the political stance, viewpoints, and positions of that party, and become an important part of public opinion. In Mao's era, a single editorial on the *People's Daily* could shape a whole mass movement (Zhao, 2008), through a process of what Wu (1994) termed as "command communication", in which the party-state controls the media and shapes information. "The *People's Daily* enjoys its 'hegemony' in shaping Chinese public opinion through special circulation channels for its commentaries. Consequently, commentaries in the *People's Daily* play a significant direct role in Chinese politics" (Wu, 1994).

As a former editorial editor at the *People's Daily*, Wu (1994) discloses that, “commentaries in the *People's Daily* do not obtain their authority from their viewpoints, analyses of events, or good writing style, but from their position as a vehicle of command.” Latham (2007) further explains that “the *People's Daily* becomes the voice of the party and government, with its editorials being used to announce new policies and new campaigns to the people – a heritage that to this day makes political observers attentive to its content”. Therefore, a study of editorials and commentaries in the *People's Daily* provides a unique window on Chinese official discourses and position and a wind vane of direction of Chinese social and political development.

Wu (1994) roughly divides the commentaries in the *People's Daily* into three major categories: editorials (*shelun* 社论), commentator's articles (*pinglunyuan wenzhang* 评论员文章), and signed commentaries (*shuming pinglun* 署名评论). Editorials are the most important type of commentaries in the *People's Daily*. They necessarily represent the opinions of the newspaper and the top leadership, are usually produced directly on command from the top leaders, and often revised and censored by them as well. However, since the beginning of the reform era in the late 1970s, China saw a flourishing of staff commentator's articles (*benbao pinglunyuan wenzhang* 本报评论员文章).

This research focuses on the Chinese official media discourses as reflected in editorials (*shelun*), staff commentator's articles (*benbao pinglunyuan wenzhang*), and signed commentaries (*shuming pinglun*) under the pen name of “Ren Zhongping 任仲平”. An extensive search was conducted at the *People's Daily* online commentaries archive. The time frame within which the search was made is from 2001, the year in which China made a bid to host the Olympic Games, to 2008, the year in which China hosted the Olympics. This time frame reflects the entire process of Chinese involvement in the Beijing Olympic Games, from bidding to executing the 2008 Olympics.

Eighteen editorials and commentaries on the Beijing Olympics were identified, including five editorials, five signed commentaries, and eight staff commentator's articles. Most of the editorials and commentaries (n=16) were unsurprisingly published in 2008, either before or after the Olympics. Only one editorial was published in 2001, right after Beijing was awarded the rights to host the Olympics. Another signed commentary was published in 2006. Out of other 16 editorials and commentaries, 4 were published before the Olympic Games, 5 were published during the Olympic Games, and 7 after the Olympics. One additional editorial published on the New Year's Day of 2008 is included into analysis later, because it also touched upon the Beijing Olympics.

The name of “Ren Zhongping” who authored several signed commentaries on the *People's Daily* is not a real individual person. Rather, it's a pen name

of a writing group. “Ren Zhongping” is the homonym of an acronym of “the People’s Daily important commentary,” (*renmingribao zhongyao pinglun* 人民日报重要评论), which first appeared on the front page of the *People’s Daily* on 22nd December 1993. It has become a “brand name” of the *People’s Daily*, ever since (Ma, 2006). According to Ma, who once participated in this writing group, the *People’s Daily* usually publishes four to six signed commentaries with this pen name of “Ren Zhongping” a year. Ren Zhongping’s signed commentaries differ greatly from the traditional empty, boring, and indoctrinating commentaries in the party newspaper, and usually focus on important issues that the whole society pays attention to, such as the revival of Chinese nation, the SARS outbreak and the cultural reform. It emphasizes a distinctive viewpoint, a thorough analysis, and a refreshing writing style, often using a prosaic or poetic language.

### 3. Olympic Games, China’s Rise, and National Pride

Like many other Olympic Games, the Beijing Olympics was more than just about sports. Brownell (2008) observes that, “the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games are the latest version of a 100-year-old model for promoting a national image to the world”. The Olympics have been a huge source of national pride.

Controversies around the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games brewed as early as when Beijing made a bid in 2001 to host the 2008 Olympic Games. People looked beyond sports in their decisions to award Beijing the Olympics or not. Critics attacked China’s poor record of human rights and environmental degradation, while others saw the Olympics as a potential catalyst for China to make improvements. As the 8th August 2008 Olympic Games was approaching, different groups took advantages of the Games to capture media’s attention, to pressure China and advance their causes.

As early as December 2006, *The Washington Post* published an editorial, “China and Darfur: The Genocide Olympics?” linking the Beijing Olympic Games to the extremely complex Darfur genocide. Later, activists such as actress Mia Farrow and other celebrities launched a large, full scale, organized campaign to highlight China’s complicity in the Darfur genocide, and called for boycotting the Beijing Olympic Games. At the same time, pro-Tibet activists around the world started a year-long campaign, and hoped to use the Olympics to highlight their grievances, and wanted to exert pressure on China. Beijing was under intensive international scrutiny before the Olympics, facing mounting criticism and China-bashing.

At the beginning of 2008, the ritualistic New Year’s Day editorial on the *People’s Daily* declared that, the year of 2008 “is a year that all of 1.3 billion sons and daughters of China expect eagerly, a year that more eyes of the world will turn to China, a year that will surely be inscribed in the history

of the People's Republic. The year of 2008 will write a splendid chapter in a history book of achieving the revitalization of Chinese Nation." The editorial explicitly made a reference to the upcoming 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

However, the year of 2008, which is supposed to be full of important events and happy moments, turned out to be a year mixed with moments of great joy and great sorrow for China. Natural disasters hit China hard one after another, first, a snowstorm in southern China around the Chinese New Year and later, a catastrophic earthquake in Southwest Sichuan province rocking the whole China. However, these are not the only incidents on the list. On 14th March 2008, riots erupted in Tibet's capital, Lhasa. Mounting criticism from the West and the protests that met the Olympic torch relay's "journey of harmony" outside China, especially in Britain, France and the USA widened the chasm between China and the West. The harsh reality further reaffirmed China's suspicion of a conspiracy, or a hidden agenda behind Western countries to sabotage Beijing's glorious moment out of the fear of the rise of China. This reminded the Chinese of the history of one hundred years of humiliation, and thus rallied the Chinese around the flag and "motherland". This misunderstanding, as Zhao (2008) discusses, has the possibility of giving rise to Chinese nationalism, "Investing so much in the successful execution of the Games, the Chinese government and Chinese people have both been looking forward to the Olympics as an opportunity to demonstrate their modernity and a reinforcement of their engagement with the wider world. Hence, when the Western media portrayed China in their Olympic reports as a showcase for violent repression, censorship and political persecution by a regime that has failed to rise above the level of a police state, the Chinese people and government became frustrated at what they believed was a failure on the part of foreigners to understand them, giving forceful rise to the popular xenophobic nationalism."

However, ironically, the tragic Sichuan earthquake diverts media's attention from their initial focus on controversy to redemption, solidarity, and sympathy. In the face of catastrophe, as Price (2008) observes, the same earthquakes that shattered China's Sichuan province in May 2008 facilitated the creation of a unified utopian Chinese Olympics narrative: the "earthquake Olympics". Beijing's quick and assertive response to the earthquake and relative "openness" during the media covering of the Sichuan earthquake unexpectedly changed China's image, and softened if not silenced criticism. International support and sympathy poured in.

#### **4. Media Events, Discourse, and Contesting Meanings**

The high-wire public spectacles such as the Olympic Games in front of a global audience, can be seen as "media events" (Dayan & Katz, 1992), the

“high holidays for mass communication”. Dayan and Katz put media events into three categories: contest, conquest and coronation. All media events are scripted, negotiated, performed, celebrated, shamanized, and reviewed. With this framework, Price (2008) sees the Beijing Olympic Games as media events of international importance whose meaning is increasingly negotiated in the media sphere, with narratives and counter-narratives. He argues that “rather than one strong unified message, the Beijing Olympics had already become polyphonic, multivoiced, many themed” (Price 2008).

DeLisle (2008) examines narratives and counter-narratives around the Beijing Olympics that are in a contest to define the Beijing Olympics under the slogan “One World, One Dream”, “On both sides, multiple actors pursuing diverse agendas and seeking to define the story of the 2008 Games can draw upon Olympic ideals in ways that range from invoking to resonating to hijacking”. He finds that the main official narrative on China’s side portrays the country as “a prosperous, orderly, normal, and globalized China”, ranging from presenting “China as a developed, prosperous and therefore powerful country,” to portraying “China as politically stable and orderly,” to asserting “China’s achievement of, or return to, international respectability and normal membership in the global community,” and to a “globalized” China. In addition, deLisle notices another strand of nationalist narrative in the form of Chinese culturalism, and argues that “the nationalist strand in the officially preferred story line also must contend with more accommodating and cosmopolitan themes in the regime’s principal narrative”. On the other hand, the counter-narratives challenged China’s official preferred narrative, mostly from media outside of China, with efforts “to expose, publicize, or affect repressive, illiberal, or otherwise international norm-violating PRC policies and practices predate and extend beyond China’s pursuit of the Games” (deLisle, 2008).

Price (2008) describes the contesting process whereby “the various actors or authors involved – China, global civil society, corporations, religious organizations, and others – have displayed a variety of techniques for affecting public understanding. Each recognizes the potential of surprise: unanticipated global crises, guerrilla approaches to alter agendas, the locus and efficacy of demonstrations, tactics that will attract press attention”.

The research questions I put forward for this study are: How were meanings of the Beijing Olympics contested and negotiated in Chinese official media discourses? How did official Chinese discourses position China itself and its relations to the rest of the world when defining the Beijing Olympics at this specific historical conjunction? What were those meanings and structures of these discourses, in terms of the rise of China and China’s position in the world?

## 5. Discourse Analysis and Analytical Procedure

The study employs a critical discourse analysis to uncover the hidden ideological meanings behind the written media text.

Media are discourse-bearing institutions, while media texts are “sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance” (Wodak, 2001). The differences between text and discourse, as Fairclough (2003) has indicated, lie in the language and its context. “In a broad sense, any actual instance of language in use is a text. The term discourse signals the particular view of language in use as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements.” Van Dijk (1985/1989) argues that, discourse analysis distinguishes itself from classical content analysis by its focus on theoretically specified textual units and structures, its special interest in underlying semantic structures and subtle grammatical, stylistic or rhetorical details, and its general emphasis on a qualitative approach over a more superficial quantitative methodology. Further, discourse analysis critically interprets textual units and structures in the socio-political and ideological context.

Discourse analysis links text and context, which offers an important potential for interpretation and understanding of texts, and their wider relation to social contexts. Discourse analysis is “an approach to the analysis of language that looks at patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur” (Paltridge, 2006). The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) regards “language as social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), and it takes consideration of the context of language use to be crucial. Moreover, CDA takes a particular interest in the relation between language and power, along with the concept of history and ideology. According to Wodak (2001), “every discourse is historically produced and interpreted, and it is situated in time and space.” One of the aims of CDA is to “demystify” discourses by deciphering ideologies. “Ideology, for CDA, is seen as an important aspect of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations” (Wodak, 2001: 10).

The Critical Discourse Analysis takes the view that the relationship between language and meaning is never arbitrary in that the choice of a particular genre or rhetorical strategy brings with it particular presuppositions, meanings, ideologies and intentions (Kress, 1991). The study of ideology is a study of “the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds, and also social contexts within which symbolic forms are employed and deployed” (Thompson, 1990). Through investigation, “ideologies are then grasped as discourses that give meaning to material objects and social practices; they define and produce the acceptable and intelligible way of understanding the world while excluding other ways of reasoning as unintelligible and unjustifiable. Ideologies are thus about binding



and justification rather than being concerned with truth, falsity and objective interests. They are the 'world-views' of any social group that both constitute them as a group and justify their actions" (Barker, 2004: 98).

Van Dijk (2000) acknowledges that CDA does not have a unitary theoretical framework or methodology because it is best viewed as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches instead of one school. The purpose of CDA is to reveal a "preferred reading" (Hall, 1973/1981) or "structure of faith" (Menz, 1989), and a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980), which when the discourse is effective in practice, is evidenced by its ability to organize and regulate relations of power. CDA helps make clear the connections between the use of language and the exercise of power (Thompson, 2002).

To do a Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough (2003) proposes an approach to exam both the "external relations" and "internal relations" of texts. While analysis of the external relations of texts is analysis of the relations of text with other elements of social events and more abstractly, social practices and social structures, analysis of the internal relations of texts includes analysis of semantic relations, grammatical relations, vocabulary (or lexical) relations, and phonological relations. He further describes how we go about identifying different discourses within a text, from identifying the main parts of the world (including areas of social life) which are represented as the main "themes", to identifying the particular perspective or angle or point of view from which they are represented.

This study also looks into the intertextuality of texts, how a text outside of a text is brought into the text, and how texts draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize and dialogue with other texts, by looking at both quotations and assumptions. "The former accentuates the dialogicality of a text, the dialogue between the voice of the author of a text and other voices, the latter diminishes it" (Fairclough, 2003: 40).

Huckin's (1997) "second look approach" suggests that one first approach a text in an uncritical manner, like an ordinary, undiscerning reader, and then come at it again in a critical manner, raising questions about it, imagining how it could have been constructed differently, mentally comparing it to related texts. Also, it is important that one does not start to decipher the text word by word; rather, one should start to look at the text as a whole and place it in its genre, and check out what sort of perspective is being presented – what angle, slant, or point of view, by looking at foregrounding if the text is emphasized and backgrounding if text is there but de-emphasized or minimized, or leaving certain things out completely; using certain words that take certain ideas for granted, as if there is no alternative (presupposition); manipulating the reader by using selective voices to convey the message that certain points of view are more correct, legitimate, reliable, and significant while leaving out other

voices. Having noticed the genre of text and how the message is framed, the analyst is ready to move onto the more minute levels of analysis: sentence, phrases, and words, looking at issues such as *topicalization* (choosing what to put in the topic position, the writer creates a perspective or slant that influences the reader's perception), connotations, metaphors, modality, nominalization, and registers.

## 6. Analysis and Findings

### 6.1. Defining a Historic Moment of Chinese Revitalization

The Chinese official media discourses situated the Beijing Olympics in a large historical context, or what they called "historical coordinates". Rather than being perceived as a nation coming of age, the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympics was hailed as a "historic monument", which is linked to the revitalization of Chinese nation. However, the histories they made references to vary significantly over time.

Different kinds of histories are invoked in the Chinese official media discourses, with ambiguity. The Beijing Olympics is linked to China's one hundred years of pursuing the Olympic dream, one hundred years of struggle, one hundred years of pursuing the dream of modernization and building of a strong nation, as well as thirty years of reform and opening up, several hundred years of Chinese encounters with the West, and even the entire 5000 years of Chinese civilization. The Beijing Olympics is perceived as a historic moment in the grand journey of revitalization of Chinese nation. However, they didn't explicitly make reference to more than half a century of history of the People's Republic, which is obviously backgrounded, rather, just the later part of history of the People's Republic, the so-called reform era (1978-2008) is foregrounded and celebrated.

As early as Beijing won the bidding to host the Beijing Olympic Games, the *People's Daily* published an editorial on the day after, entitled, *Writing the Most Splendid Chapter in the Olympic History*. In this editorial, it describes the night on which Beijing won the hosting rights as "a sleepless night, a sleepless night for 1.3 billion people, those eyes of Chinese sons and daughters gazed at a historic moment". However, it did not specify it was a historic moment in what sense. It continues, "For this moment, we have been waiting for very long". Obviously, this historic moment is more than a moment in the history of modern Olympics.

In a signed commentary published on 22nd May 2006, *The Sacred Moment Is Drawing Near Day by Day, Are We All Ready?*, it says, "Developing China should seize a hard-earned historic opportunity". Later on, it emphasizes that China is facing a "once-in-a-hundred-year opportunity",

that China is at “a new period with important strategic opportunities, the Beijing 2008 Olympics has its historical and current significances”. It cites the history of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the Seoul Olympics in 1988, “not only spurred fast economic growth, speeded up the transformation from developing countries to newly industrialized countries, but also lifted civility and civilization of the society and its citizens”. Beijing is the third Asian city to host the Olympics, so it's understandable to make comparison with both the Tokyo and Seoul Olympics, however, interestingly enough, what is emphasized here is the historic opportunity of “economic growth, transition to an industrialized nation, and lifting of civility of the people and civilization of the society”. It failed to mention the fact that, the Seoul Olympics in many ways assisted in transforming South Korea from a military dictatorship to a democracy. It commands every one of 1.3 billion Chinese to “let the Beijing Olympics become a historical turning point, from now on, lift quality of civility in our society, establish a contemporary image of cultural China, showcase a posture of peaceful developing China”.

At the beginning of 2008, the New Year's Day editorial defines the year of 2008 as a year that “will certainly write a splendid chapter in a history book of achieving the revitalization of Chinese nation”. The aim of the revitalization of Chinese nation has never been mentioned in previous editorials and commentaries on the Olympics. “We are standing at a new historical starting point”, it declares, “the contemporary world is undergoing a profound change, and the contemporary China is undergoing a profound transformation... we are facing unprecedented opportunities as well as unprecedented challenges”.

A metaphor of “dream of one hundred years” was often constructed and linked to the Beijing Olympics. In a signed commentary on 8th July 2008, one month count down to the Beijing Olympics, “*Beijing Embraces the World*”, after the tragic Sichuan earthquake, it looks back at one hundred years of history, and declares that “the earthquake cannot shake the determination of 1.3 billion Chinese to host an Olympics, and it cannot shake the high hope of Chinese nation to fulfill One-hundred-year-old dream”. It further explains that, one hundred years ago, the divine land of China was weak, people were poor, and the country was looked upon as the “sick man of East Asia”. One hundred years later, “in its journey of revitalization, Chinese nation is sending out invitations to the whole world”. In the same article, it further declares, “a nation that had once fully tasted humiliation and hurt in the modern history is standing up and moving towards the outside world”.

On 20th August 2008, thirteen days after the opening of the Beijing Olympics, one hundred days after the Sichuan earthquake, a signed commentary, *Travel through Disaster, Welcome the Glory*, links the Sichuan earthquake with the Beijing Olympics, and extols that the courage and spirits

in both events “will invigorate 1.3 billion Chinese to overcome obstacles and achieve a hundred-year-old dream of marching towards modernization”. One post-Olympics signed commentary, *Beijing, At Another Starting Point on a New Journey*, published on 26th August 2008, says, “the success of the Beijing Olympics is not equivalent to the realization of one-hundred-year dream of (becoming a ) strong nation.” However, whatever may the “dream of one hundred years” be, be it a dream of “hosting the Olympics in China”, a Chinese dream of modernization, or the one-hundred-year dream of a strong nation, there is a strong signal that China has moved past the period of one hundred years of humiliation and struggle, as this same signed commentary states, China has bid a farewell to the title of “sick man of East Asia”, and on a new journey now, “unquestionably, as a historic event, bidding, preparing, and hosting the Beijing Olympics will erect a new milestone on the journey of revitalization of Chinese nation and modern China’s development”.

In the same signed commentary, *Beijing, At Another Starting Point on a New Journey*, the author looks as far back as to 700 years ago, when Marco Polo traveled to Beijing, witnessing the dazzling glories in the capital, and to 100 years ago, when the eight-nation alliances invaded Beijing, a complex history of Chinese nation encountering the outside world, interprets the significance of the Beijing Olympics in the lights of the revitalization of China. More recent history of the thirty-year of reform and opening-up is also “marked”. The same signed commentary emphasizes that, “to host the Olympic Games in 2008 when China is celebrating 30th anniversary of economic reform and opening-up, was not a coincidence. The inner logical is the process of China moving from a poor and weak nation, to a wealthy and strong nation. The accumulating economic power in the last thirty years, together with a global vision and the willingness to connect with the world is the important condition for China to host the Olympics successfully.” This period of history is celebrated as a successful story.

After the Beijing Olympics, the *People’s Daily* published a series of staff commentator’s articles, discussing the implication of the success of the Beijing Olympics. In its 27th August 2008 article, *A Great Historical Monument*, it looks beyond the Beijing Olympics as a “coming-out party for economic reform and opening-up”, and defines it a new starting point in the new journey towards modernization. The article published on 30th August 2008, *An Important Development Opportunity*, calls for cherishing the opportunity, and states that “the new grand journey of revitalization of Chinese nation will step forward”.

## 6.2. Embracing the World with Confidence

The Chinese official media discourses position the Beijing Olympics on another “spatial coordinate,” defining this as a moment for China to “embrace

the world” and “integrate into the world,” putting aside the differences between China and the outside world.

The editorial, *Writing the Most Splendid Chapter in the Olympic History*, published on 14th July 2001, the day after Beijing won the bid to host the Olympics, already defined a theme of openness, “China today has already discarded closeness and narrowness, and replaced with an opening mind and open arms to share with the world and make progress together”. It sees that hosting the Olympic Games “will enhance the cultural exchange between the East and the West, enhance the exchange between Chinese people and people from the outside world”.

At the one-month countdown to the opening of the Beijing Olympics, a signed commentary, published on 8th July 2008, “*Beijing Embraces the World*”, solemnly declares, “1.3 billion Chinese enthusiastically open their arms – welcome, the whole world”. The Olympics is seen as “a window, through which China and the world get to know each other”, but in the process, China is taking a much more active role and making active efforts to reach out with great willingness, eagerness, and confidence, either “walking to the world”, “facing the world with smiles”, “embracing the world” or “integrating into the world”. It’s not the other way around. “Chinese civilization has an innate Tianxia (under heaven) feelings, and China hopes to make contributions to the world peace and showcase to the world the broadness and depth of Chinese civilization, and instill new elements into the Olympic spirits with a Chinese way”.

The major theme is the commonality and togetherness, or oneness between China and the outside world, a celebration of common humanity. The commonality is manifested in the motto of the Beijing Olympics, “One World, One Dream”. “It is a shared dream of humanity” (30th April 2008), one editorial declares. “The Beijing Olympics not only belongs to China, but also belongs to the world” (8th July 2008), says another one. “The Olympics is Beijing’s holiday, it’s also holiday of the world” (18th July 2008). “For people of China, and People of the world, this is a common moment” (8th August 2008). The editorial published on the Olympics opening day says, “on this globe that is becoming smaller and smaller, we all have a common destiny. The world is becoming even more inseparable than before”.

Facing mounting pressures and criticisms around the world, the Chinese media discourses emphasize the common ground between China and the world, while minimize the differences. After the torch relay disruption, the editorial published on 30th April 2008, entitled, *We Face the World with Smiles*, down plays the protests around the world, emphasizes that hosting a high standard and unique Olympic Games is “a shared aspiration of all Chinese, as well as expectation of people around the world”. It alludes to the protests around the world, by using quantifiers, as “some people with

unspoken motives tempted to disrupt and defame the Olympic Games,” and put a small number of protesters against the will of 1.3 billion of Chinese and 6 billion people around the world. The Beijing Olympics is a “promise that will be fulfilled together by China and the world”. It mentions the Olympic spirits and ideal as “universal values”. Although not clearly defined, it acts as a defender for some sorts of “universal values”. Since China officially denies the existence of universal values, and was often accused of ignoring or rejecting universal values by the West, by referring to “universal values”, it speaks directly to the West, where freedom and democracy are claimed as “universal values”, even though they disagree on what constitutes universal values.

However, differences and misunderstandings are acknowledged. “When a nation that fully tasted humiliation and hurt in the modern history stands up and walks to the world, what it is going to face is not all about applauses and smiling faces, there are suspicions, misunderstandings, and rejections. However, these will not dampen the sincere desire of China to communicate with the world” (8th July 2008). Although the editorial did not mention specifically what those suspicions, misunderstandings and rejections are, obviously it alludes to all kind of protests and calls for boycotting before the Olympics, as well as the perceived threats of China’s rise.

On the other hand, Chinese media discourses emphasize on reconciliation and exchange, seeking common ground while respecting differences. The 22nd May 2006 signed commentary, *The Sacred Moment is Drawing Nearer, Day by Day, Are We all Ready*, reviews the development of modern Olympics movement, which “reflects a process of different civilizations moving towards mutual understanding, exchange, integration and progress. There is no replacement, only complement. In the contemporary world, no activity can make its participants discard differences and get together on the same running track for a common goal, as the Olympics does”. The signed commentary, *Beijing Embraces the World*, sensing the objections to the Beijing Olympics around the world, struck a more reconciliatory tone, “Under the calling of Olympic spirits, the whole world are getting together, what people see is not confrontations and conflicts, but reconciliations and friends; It’s not a solo of single culture, but a symphony of one hundred blossom flowers; it’s not a closed fence, but an open and integrating platform...People get to know and understand things from other nations, and learn and respect other cultures” (8th July 2008).

Those differences, never clearly defined, are attributed or minimized to cultural differences, rather than political. The Chinese media try to de-politicize the differences, or I would say “culturalization of the differences”, in order to legitimize and strengthen its position. So through this process of encounter, the Chinese civilization, which is perceived as China’s “soft power,” is highly emphasized and elevated. “The development of

the Olympics reflects a process of different civilizations moving towards understanding, respect, integration, and progress". "The Beijing 2008 Olympics is a handshaking and dialogue between Chinese civilization and civilizations around the world" (30th April 2008). The Olympic Games "create a stage for different cultures to communicate". The creative forces of cultures from different nations are common heritage of the whole humanity and the Beijing Olympics is a window to showcase the essence of Chinese culture. "The whole world will experience the extraordinary charm of Chinese splendid culture of five thousand years old, through the Beijing Olympics". "The Beijing Olympics gives a opportunity for the world to listen to a story about China". It defends that the Olympic torch of "cloud of promise" carries the Chinese traditional ideas of harmony. This symbolizes the willingness of Chinese culture to communicate with the world. So the Olympic torch replay disruption is not about freedom and human rights, nor Darfur, nor environment, it is about cultural misunderstanding.

Thus, the solution is mutual recognition and respect between China and the world. "The Olympics is a way for China and the world to achieve mutual recognition". China wants to be accepted, understood, and respected by the international community. The editorial, *One World, One Dream*, on the opening day of the Olympics, sees the Olympics as "the confidence the world put in China, and the contribution that China wants to make to the world". It summarizes the inseparability of China and the world, stating that "the development of China cannot be achieved without the world, and the prosperity and stability of the world cannot be achieved without China either". In the editorial published on the closing day of the Olympics, *The Glory Belongs to Great Olympics*, it describes the 16-day Beijing Olympics as a "beautiful encounter of China and the world". It builds "a happy stage for the humanity" and also opens "a door of understanding for China". "In this world that is facing more and more challenges, and on a globe that is becoming smaller and smaller, mutual understanding, mutual openness and inclusiveness, mutual cooperation of humanity has never been in greater need than it is today".

### **6.3. Examining its Role and Position**

While China is positioning the Beijing Olympics in the coordinates of time and space, it also examines its own position in a fast changing world and the role it is going to assume.

China is very conscious about its role and position in the globalizing world. By hosting the Beijing Olympics, "China has never come into the world's sight with such a role" (24th August 2008). China realizes that, "the Beijing Olympics puts China at the centre of the world stage" (26th August

2008). However, a growing confidence was revealed in the lines and between the lines. On the day after bidding to host the Olympics, the editorial assesses China today and celebrates a new China by stating that “the economy is developing, the politics is stable, the ethnic groups are consolidated, and the whole society is making progress, the comprehensive national power is rising, these all laid a solid foundation for a successful 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing”. In another editorial, *We Face the World with Smiles* (30th April 2008), it reflects upon China’s 30 years of reform and opening-up, “Today, as a big developing country, that is facing modernization, facing the world, facing the future, we will steadfastly absorb all outstanding fruits of civilizations of human beings, with an open, inclusive attitude.” It further states, “we will steadfastly take our own path, with more determined cultural confidence and cultural consciousness”. A post-Olympic signed commentary cites a story of translating of the name of Olympics into Chinese at the turn of the last century as “*wo neng bi ya* 我能比呀”, literally means, “Can I compete?” or “how can I compete?”. And now, a nation used to be called “the sick man of East Asia” is having a seat among the nations, and competing now amongst the nations in this world.

A confident China will become more open, a “great nation” with an open and inclusive attitude. “The gain of the Beijing Olympics, for the host, is to show the thousand of millions of Chinese with the Olympic spirits, and nurture them with a demeanor of a great nation, let the world feel an old yet new China” (28th July 2008). After the Olympics, a signed commentary reflects that, “today, China contributed a magnificent Olympics to the world, and embraced the world with a mature, tolerant, open and self-confident attitude” (27th August 2008).

China is also questioning the role it is going to play in the international community. The signed commentary, “*Beijing Embraces the World*,” discusses that, “after 30 years of reform and opening-up, China is no longer a late-comer, who is learning how to walk”. It continues to question, “in the international affairs in the 21st century, what role is China going to play? How will the international community look at this role? This is the question from others, also a question China asks herself. To successfully host the Beijing Olympics is the active and loud answer to the world”.

China is showing the readiness to shoulder its responsibilities in the world. Hosting the Olympics Games is described as a promise China made and China wants to make contributions to the world. “To host a high-standard and unique Olympics is the promise that Chinese government and Chinese people made to the international community” (17th August 2008). As a host nation, how should China be a good host? The commentator’s article, *Being a Good Host* (11th August 2008), asks “how should we assume the responsibilities to be a good host?”. “In seven years, in order to fulfill the



solemn promise to the international community and be a good host, we have made our sincere efforts" (11th August 2008), "to improve itself, to make contributions to the world" (8th July 2008). "The Beijing Olympic Games is the heavy responsibility that China takes" (8th August 2008).

China is willing to participate in international communication and take responsibilities. It echoes the often-talked-of role of China as a responsible stakeholder. For China, hosting the Olympic Games is "not only a honor, but also a responsibility" (28th July 2008). Talking about the successful hosting of the Olympic Games, the signed commentary says, "what China did, besides fulfilling her dream, it also, because this old nation finally walks to the world, hopes to take due responsibilities, and let the world know China today is not only an economic power that has bid a farewell to the humiliation in the past, but also an important participants in the globalization". A post-Olympic staff commentary says, "China needs to go to the world more steadfastly, looking for the opportunities of peace and development, as well as taking responsibilities as a great nation. The post-Olympic China will pursue a peaceful, open, and cooperative development, with a broader vision and a high self-expectation, making effort to construct a long-lasting peace and common prosperity of a harmonious world with people from all the countries around the world" (31st August 2008). Is that a more confident and assertive China?

#### **6.4. Defending a New Chinese Way?**

Another theme in the editorials and commentaries is the uniqueness of the Beijing Olympics and its linkage to unique Chinese development model.

The Chinese official media discourses are filled with metaphors, such as "a Beijing version of Olympic dream", "to play the Beijing music score of peace, friendship and progress aloud", "Beijing Opportunities", etc., with excessive labels of either "Beijing" or "China, or Chinese". Those smiles on volunteers are "Chinese expressions"; The determination to keep carrying out opening up policy is a "Chinese will"; During the Beijing Olympics, the world witnesses a real and vital China, and change their "China imaginations"; Beijing Olympics "unprecedentedly let different kinds of cultures to communicate, Chinese offered a Beijing Opportunity for the world of peace and development"; To host the Olympic Games means Chinese civilization will instill new vital force to the Olympics, "Chinese traditional culture emphasizes on modesty and harmony, Chinese traditional sports culture emphasizes on nurturing one's characters and self-cultivation. The Eastern philosophy and wisdom will answer all the questions and challenges the Olympics are facing now". "The Beijing Olympic Game will add new elements in Olympic spirits in a Chinese way" (8th July 2008).

The three key themes of Green Olympics, Scientific Olympics, and Humanity Olympics were linked to a special Chinese development model. Those three key concepts “interpret unique Chinese model,” “infiltrate vital force from the East to the Olympics,” “become a new beacon for the boat of Olympics, as well as a banner flying in the process of development of civilization which is often battling in different kinds of development models” (26th August 2008). As a new development model, it alludes to the Beijing Consensus, an alternative development model to the Washington Consensus.

Along with the Chinese development model, Chinese traditional values, such as harmony are promoted. “The three concepts epitomized a convergence of Chinese values and the Olympic spirits”. “In the three concepts, Humanity Olympics is the soul, Green Olympics and Scientific Olympics are its two wings. These three concepts point to a core, forming an open and inclusive system, pushing the Olympics moving forward on a track of harmonious development, harmony between human being and nature, between human being, society and human world” (29th July 2008).

Through the aforementioned “culturalization of differences”, China defends its own choice of development, while rejects a Western road map to modernization. It is determined to follow its own course, an alternative model of development and modernization. “In the coordinates of the 21st century, at the intersection between history and future, Chinese is holding on to its own choice, and walking with the world” (8th July 2008). However, as a post-Olympic Game commentary says, “On the road towards the future, a Chinese factor still plays an important role, our struggle is far from ending” (26th August 2008). What and how will the Chinese factor play an important role? It remains a question.

## 7. Conclusion

The Beijing Olympics changed China profoundly, in the way China perceives itself and the way the world looks at China. The study of the editorials and commentaries on the Beijing 2008 Olympics in Chinese official media of the *People's Daily* reveals China's official discourses on China's rise and its position in a fast changing world.

As a site of powerful official discourses, editorials and commentaries on the *People's Daily* reflected the Chinese official lines, aiming at both domestic and international audience.

The meanings of the Beijing Olympics were carefully constructed, interpreted, and negotiated in Chinese official media discourses. The hosting of the Beijing Olympics was seen as a historic moment in the long process of the revitalization of Chinese nation. The self-congratulatory accounts of the

Beijing Olympic success, in the light of China's rise and its return to the glory, speak aloud to a domestic audience, function not only to hail the domestic audience into a subject position of proud Chinese to cheer for the party-state, but also to promote national solidarity with this rekindled national pride of the rise of China.

This study also reveals that, at this historic moment, China pledges to bid a final farewell to the history of the past humiliation. However, could China really shed the sense of victimhood, put the past to rest, put behind its historical burden, and move on, remains an unanswered question, since when facing the criticism from abroad, it is so convenient to revoke the history of foreign humiliation to rally people around the flag, even though the rise of China has become a new source of national pride. The question is, can China break this cycle of "pessoptimism" mixed with senses of pride and humiliation (Callahan, 2008), or it's always the case.

On the international front, the rise of China and its request of its rightful place in the world, have triggered wary, fear, suspicion, even animosity among the established powers. The study finds that, in a changing global power dynamics, this emerging China is becoming much more self-conscious, cautious, and yet confident. It is eager to assure the world that China is ready to embrace and join the community of the nations, integrate itself into the world community, actively participate in international affairs, assume great responsibilities as a great nation, and make its own due contributions, with an open and broader mind.

While defining the globalizing world as multicultural and multipolar, in which China wants to be accepted, recognized, and respected, China seems insecure, remains vulnerable, and is very defensive regarding its development model, on the surface level. What it is really defending is its political system, which is very different from those of the West, and is often one of the sources of conflict and tension between China and the West. So it pledges to steadfastly take its own path, a unique way that it tries very hard to justify continuously by defining it with Chinese culture and civilization, a practice I would term as a strategic "self-orientalism," by emphasizing excessively uniqueness of Chinese culture to reject the possible unilateral imposition of the so-called universal/Western values on China.

At the same time, by resorting to its unique culture assets, China is taking what I would call a "cultural high ground," to captivate the world in awe, or hail the international audience in a subject position. As Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997: 13-14), national security advisor to former US President Carter, notes that "to be Chinese meant to be cultured, and for that reason, the rest of the world owed China its due deference". However, it remains to be seen, to what extent, and how China will grow more assertive and confident, either from its growing pride or from its remaining vulnerability.

## Notes

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