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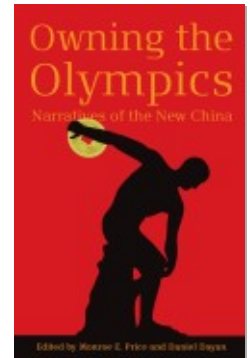
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“A Very Natural Choice”

The Construction of Beijing as an Olympic City during the Bid Period

Heidi Østbø Haugen

“Beijing has succeeded!” (*Beijing chenggong le!*) President Jiang Zemin’s declaration on July 13, 2001 brought the enthusiastic crowd gathered at Tiananmen Square the news they had hoped for. Millions of others heard the announcement through TV and radio broadcasts in China and abroad. This chapter examines how the Beijing Olympic Bid Committee and Chinese media presented Beijing to a foreign audience in the period leading up to the selection of the 2008 Olympic host city. It will show that Beijing was presented in a way that not only won the city the right to host the Olympic Games, but also strengthened the modernist ideologies of the Chinese Government and the Olympic Movement. Finally, Beijing’s bid will be discussed in light of the incentives to host the Olympic Games as well as the institutional context for the production of the bid material.¹

An Olympic bid provides an interesting opportunity to study the process of assigning meaning to places. The limited duration of the bid period, the large amount of textual material produced, the relatively well-defined goal of the bid campaigns, and the focus on an international target audience are all features that make bids different from most other processes of place construction. The Olympic Games take place within narrow spatial and temporal confines, during which the hosts are subject to intense international attention. During this period, the host cities try to project certain images, themes, and values (Hall 1992). As an

organizer of the Albertville Winter Olympics put it, “There will only be 16 days of television coverage, but we will have to live with the image for fifty years” (Larson and Park 1993, 246). The place identity constructed during the bid period exerts a powerful influence over how the Games are organized, and is therefore of great practical consequence.

Hallmark events such as the Olympic Games are important in confirming, strengthening, and undermining power relations in the places they are hosted. Their scale and nature necessitates a break with the normal planning procedures. This may create opportunities for new groups to assert their power. The break in routine can also be used by established elites as an opportunity to push their own agendas and to marginalize alternative opinions. The Olympic host selection process—the International Olympic Committee (IOC) selection criteria give extra points in the initial bid round to candidate cities with no demonstrable popular opposition to the bid—and the fierce competition to host the Olympics may combine to deter critical public debate during the bid period. In the case of Toronto’s 1996 Olympic bid, for example, it was speculated that the public debate surrounding the bid may have destroyed the city’s chances of hosting the Games. The discussion had led to a compromise in which the organizers promised to provide low-income housing, environmental assessment, and employment for unionized workers in return for support for the Games (Hiller 2000). While attaching importance to public support for the Olympics, the IOC does not require local public involvement, either directly or through elected city governments, in the preparation process for the Games.

The Stakes in the Bid Process

The stakes for the Chinese Communist Party were high in the 2008 Olympic bid round. Under Mao Zedong, China’s development model represented an ideological alternative to capitalism, both to the rest of the world and to its own citizens. Such an alternative was no longer offered after Mao’s death and the reorientation of the national development strategy toward “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The legitimacy of the Chinese government today rests largely on its ability to create economic growth. Chinese leaders have attempted to fill the ideological vacuum in the post-Mao era by reviving Chinese nationalist spirit (Ko 2001). Previous Olympic Games and bids had demon-

strated to Chinese leaders that the Olympics could be an avenue both to economic growth and to fostering a form of nationalism that is not hostile to the outside world.

In most cities, economic growth is the primary rationale offered for bidding for the Olympic Games (Hiller 1998). The Olympics are an important means for cities to build an appealing and progressive image and enhance their position in a largely postindustrial economy by attracting investments, residents, and visitors. Bidding for the Games has itself become a promotional act, as the prolonged choice process can ensure considerable publicity even for unsuccessful cities (Waitt 1999; Ward 1998). Beijing has become one of the many Asian cities with a strategic orientation that goes beyond the national space (Douglass 2000; Jessop 1999). In order to become hubs of global and regional economic activity, these cities pour money into urban megaprojects, theme parks, and events with high symbolic value: World Expositions (Expos), the Miss World final, the World Soccer Cup and, the biggest of all, the Olympic Summer Games. Both political and economic motivations drive the transformation of Asian metropolitan regions into "world cities." There is political credit to be gained when a city is internationally recognized as not only a major economic player, but also a creator of cultural symbols (Douglass 2000; Kelly 1997).

The Olympic Games' ability to incite patriotism is lauded as a positive quality in Chinese newspapers (Xinhua 2001b). Beijing's Olympic bid material furthers an official patriotic ideology in which aspirations for national greatness and an internationally openminded optimism are central features (Unger 1996). Such patriotism includes a vision of Chinese national unity that the bid material promotes through a selective representation of multicultural diversity. When writing about minority cultures, emphasis is put on art and cultural performances rather than on differences in systems of meaning and values. The diversity represented is thus nonthreatening to Chinese national unity.

The harmonious nationalism promoted through the bid material stands in contrast to the antforeign popular nationalism triggered by Beijing's failed bid for the 2000 Olympics. The United States in particular was blamed for the loss, partly because the U.S. House of Representatives had adopted a resolution against Beijing hosting the Games (Xu 1998). Antforeign demonstrations were arranged by people who accused Western countries of trying to hamper China's development (Zheng 1999). Such sentiments constituted a threat to China's national development strategy, and ultimately to the ruling regime, which de-

rives legitimacy from economic growth (Renwick and Cao 1999). There was also the threat of antiforeign demonstrations turning against the Chinese government itself for acting submissive in the face of foreign interests. The government eventually banned such demonstrations and organized official campaigns to contain antiforeign nationalism after the loss in 1993 (Xu 1998; Zheng 1999). For the 2008 Olympics, in order to contain the damage if the bid were lost, the Chinese nation was no longer presented as the unit bidding for the Games. The slogan of the first bid—"A more open China awaits the 2000 Games"—was exchanged for one that put Beijing at the center—"New Beijing, Great Olympics." The Olympic bid process was presented as an open and fair competition from which all candidates gained something. A Beijing Olympic Bid Committee (BOBICO) representative said that while the Chinese people "calmly and wholeheartedly supported the bid," a loss would have been gracefully accepted because "if the bid were unsuccessful, it would nevertheless have increased Beijing's 'celebrity rating,' made even more people understand Beijing, improved Beijing's image abroad, increased the interest in investing here, and enriched Beijing's cultural life. The bid had many advantages for the development of Beijing and the daily building of culture and civilization" (interview January 2002).

The Olympic Games have also been used to demonstrate the superiority of a certain political ideology. The first example of this was the 1936 Berlin Games, which saw the introduction of certain elements, such as the Olympic torch relay and a spectacular opening ceremony, that we take for granted today (Byrne 1987). The Games were as spectacular as they were well organized, and they were presented as proof of the superior performance of the Nazi ideology. During the Olympic opening ceremony, German officials announced that their country had become the center of world civilization, just as Greece had been during antiquity. Similarly, the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow attempted to exhibit the success of state Marxism to the western world, just as those in Los Angeles in 1984 were a celebration of American capitalism (Hall 1992). One main reason why the Olympic Games are a useful tool for promoting political ideologies is their perceived neutrality and universality. The Olympics are claimed to be about games and sports rather than politics, and Olympism is purportedly above ideology (Killanin 1983; Hoberman 1995). When national ideology—be it fascism, communism, or capitalism—is tied to allegedly universal Olympism, the gap between nationalism and universalism is bridged.

While the Olympic hosts benefit from tying their political values to Olympic universalism, the International Olympic Committee is increasingly aware that it is in its interest to keep strict control over the symbolic aspects of the Olympics. In the past, countries have boycotted the Games over objections to the ideologies the host nations promoted through the event. In addition to the losses directly incurred, boycotts pose a threat to the IOC's long-term finances. The brand name “Olympic”—together with the Olympic rings—is worth billions of dollars and is the IOC's greatest asset. The brand would lose much of its value if it became associated with a particular group or ideology. Juan Antonio Samaranch, IOC president from 1980 to 2001, had ambitions that went far beyond finances, including becoming a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and raising the status of the IOC to that of the United Nations (Wamsley 2002). An example of a conflict between the IOC and the Olympic host nations over symbolic uses of the Games took place during the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Olympics. President Bush wanted to use the opening ceremony as an occasion to commemorate the victims of the September 11 terrorist attack. When the IOC objected to what they perceived to be a display of American nationalism, Bush responded that the ideals behind the commemoration were *universal* rather than American: “All people appreciate the discipline that produces excellence, the courage that overcomes difficult odds and the character that creates champions” (U.S. Embassy 2002). The universal nature of these values would be confirmed through their incorporation into the Olympic opening ceremony.

The Production of the Bid Material

Beijing's Olympic bid material must be understood with reference to the concrete circumstances within which it was produced. The most important document presented to the IOC during the bid process is the Candidature File. The bid cities are required to present their practical arrangements for the Games in the Candidature Files, but the format gives ample opportunity to set the bid apart symbolically. Beijing set the tone by presenting the document to IOC members in golden silk boxes closed with traditional Chinese locks. IOC guidelines, former bids, and advice from international consultants and PR firms all influenced the making of the Candidature File and other BOBICO promotion material. The administrative structure of the Beijing bid team is

complex and difficult to map, partly because of what one senior official termed a Chinese system of “one organization, two names”; one could simultaneously be the head of the Chinese Communist Party Propaganda Department’s Sports Section, the section chief of the China Olympic Committee News Committee, and a leading official in the Chinese Sport Correspondents’ Association (interview January 2002).

In addition to the material published by BOBICO, English-language texts about Beijing’s Olympic bid were published in Chinese newspapers and magazines. Chinese media displays some distinct characteristics, and the circumstances under which news stories on the Olympic bid were produced therefore merit special attention. Many of the articles written by journalists from the state news agency Xinhua or the newspapers *People’s Daily* or *China Daily* were judged suitable for publicity purposes in their original form and republished on BOBICO’s Web site. Chinese journalists were under the influence of different, and at times contradictory, sets of journalistic conventions. At the National Forum for Propaganda and Ideological Work in 1994, Jiang Zemin charged the Chinese press with four major tasks: “arming people with scientific theory; guiding people with correct opinion; educating people in high moral standards; and using outstanding works to inspire people.” Chinese introductory journalism textbooks later added “being profitable” as a fifth goal (Li 2001). This intertwining of Chinese Communist Party logic with market logic has resulted in a journalistic style dubbed “popular journalism with Chinese characteristics” (Li 1998).

The degree to which the Chinese government exerts control over editorial content depends both on the type of publication and on the topics covered. National newspapers are generally more restricted than provincial and local publications (Lynch 1999). The English editions of Xinhua news agency reports, *People’s Daily* and *China Daily* are important to the Chinese government as channels for communications with a foreign audience. They are therefore tightly controlled and have largely been shielded from demands to make a profit. While the Western media claims to be based on objectivity, the Chinese government’s attitude toward objectivity as a guiding principle for journalism has varied over time. In 1948, *People’s Daily* was upbraided by the government for displaying an “objective tendency not to be allowed in our propaganda work” (Li 1994, 228). During the liberalization period in the late 1980s, on the other hand, top Party officials stressed the informational and watchdog role of the press. The news industry again became more restricted after the Tiananmen crisis of June 1989. However,

employees of the Chinese Communist Party Propaganda Department and media institutions cited independence and objectivity as important journalistic ideals (interviews January 2002). Reporters who write for English national media are exposed to foreign ideas about journalism, both through the Internet and through Western journalists hired by their employers to help adjust the writing style to suit a foreign audience. Despite this exposure, articles published by the Chinese media are often different from what Western readers are used to. In the bid material, descriptions of individuals—including residents of Tibet—who go to great length to support the bid come across as especially foreign. The following report about four farmers from Shanxi, for example, takes on an almost religious character:

Four farmers rode donkeys from the hometown in Shanxi province in Northwest China to BOBICO headquarters in Beijing to express their support for Beijing to bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games. The four farmers could have taken a train or bus, but instead, they decided to make their pilgrimage by riding a donkey all the way to Xinqiao Hotel where BOBICO's headquarters is located. (BOBICO 2001)

The different sets of writing conventions to which journalists are exposed were sometimes reflected in stylistic inconsistencies in their articles about Beijing's Olympic bid. An example is Xinhua's 2000 "Sport Yearender." While the piece generally portrays the bid for the 2008 Olympics in a very positive light, it includes one critical comment from a foreign researcher based in China. In the next sentence, however, the journalist dismisses the researcher's concerns as "unnecessary" (Xinhua 2000b). When questioned about this article, the journalist who wrote it said that he included the critical commentary to give a balanced view and follow his "consciousness and the ethical rules of the reporter." But he also said he served another role as a Chinese journalist, one that obliged him to discount the criticism: "I think BOBICO believes in us. Everything we do is to make Beijing's bid more appealing. We share something; we both want to make Beijing's bid successful. Therefore, when we report, we need to know what should be reported and what should not be reported" (interview January 2002).

The preceding incident is an example of how control over the Chinese media often relies less on direct intervention than on self-censorship on the part of the journalists. While the Chinese journalists I interviewed in 2001 and 2002 all said they had a duty to be objective,

they also said they wanted their writing to help Beijing win the Olympics. For example, one journalist commented that negative reporting could cause conflict with BOBICO, and he might be told that “such things are a little inappropriate [to include in your article]; I think you’d better omit it or just put it outside” (interview January 2002). When asked to cite such an occurrence, however, he said that BOBICO had never actually needed to correct him because he anticipated such comments and edited the articles himself. This example brings to mind a description given by a Polish poet writing in the 1950s of how social norms conditioned his writing: “I can’t write as I would like to. . . . I get halfway through a phrase, and I already subject it to Marxist criticism. I imagine what X or Y will say about it, and I change the ending” (Milosz 1990, 14–15). Another journalist said that BOBICO did once suggest that he change an article they thought was too negative. He altered it but stressed that the change was also something he *personally* wanted: “I complied because from the bottom of my heart, I don’t want to . . . let somebody put their finger on the bid. So I just revised my plan, and they [BOBICO] accepted it. You know, it is right for me to write the things I want to mention” (interview January 2002).

Although the relationship between BOBICO and Chinese journalists was characterized for the most part by such mutual cooperation and lack of dissent, the plan to host the Olympic beach volleyball games in Tiananmen Square caused discord. The foreign press interpreted the plan as an attempt to cover up the tragic events surrounding the 1989 student revolt and described it as an initiative that would “strike many human rights campaigners as grotesque” (*Financial Times* 2000). However, Chinese journalists had very different reasons for being offended by the idea of playing volleyball in Tiananmen Square. While in the West the word “Tiananmen” invokes the strong televised images from June 1989, the Chinese consider the square as the center stage of the country’s modern national history. Chinese journalists were upset because the government planned to fill the square they perceive to be the embodiment of China’s national dignity with sand and people in swimsuits, and they put pressure on BOBICO to release more information about the plans. BOBICO claimed that Tiananmen was chosen as a venue solely because the International Volleyball Federation had pressured them to choose a prestigious site to promote their sport. BOBICO complied, but they were as uncomfortable with the plans as the Chinese journalists were, according to one BOBICO representative (interview January 2002). The decision was later reversed. This incident is

an example of how the same event can be interpreted very differently in China than it is abroad.

Situating the Beijing Olympics Within Space and Time

The material produced for Beijing's Olympic bid combines to present a worldview in which Beijing becomes "a very natural choice" to host the Games (Xinhua 2000b). Certain notions of time and space are central in this construction. The bid *derives* meaning from existing conceptualizations of time and space by placing itself within a wider discourse on modernization and development. It also *attaches* meaning to these notions by reproducing and reworking them. Our understandings of time and space affect how we view the world—we approach and make sense of the world through certain temporal and spatial perspectives. In most circumstances these perspectives are taken for granted rather than being objects of critical reflection.

In presenting Beijing's candidature, the Chinese government needed to convince the IOC that Beijing possessed the qualities of an "Olympic city." Analysis of how meanings are attached to places is informed by Jacques Derrida's concept of "différance," which holds that definitions do not rest on the entity that is defined, but on the positive and negative references made to other definitions (Rosenau 1992). The perceived essence or identity of a place can only be constructed vis-à-vis a different and deferred Other, and the attribution of meaning is thereby endlessly deferred. While pairs of opposites may be widely circulated and accepted as legitimate ways to categorize places, meanings are never entirely fixed. This is what makes deconstruction, that is, undermining the binary oppositions by revealing their underlying assumptions and contradictions, possible. Two binary oppositions related to time and space are central themes throughout the body of texts about Beijing's Olympic bid—the division between the Orient and the Western world, and between the modern and nonmodern. The bid material, in referencing these dichotomies, makes bidding for the Olympics appear to be a natural choice.

Strategic Self-Orientalization

One of the most influential works on the relational nature of identities is Edward Saïd's "Orientalism," which outlines how "the Orient" is

defined in relation to and opposition to the West (Saïd [1978] 1995). Saïd argues that Western academics, artists, and colonial administrators have constructed the Orient as timeless, feminine, despotic, savage, and irrational. Conversely, they present the West as modern, masculine, democratic, civilized, and rational. The resulting worldview, Saïd claims, made colonial rule both possible and desirable. Subsequent work on the relationship between the construction of places and the exercise of power raises two points of criticism against Saïd's "Orientalism." First, the Orientalist system of power-knowledge was more heterogeneous than Saïd depicted it, and the European and American writings on the Orient did not contain one, singular essence (Gare 1995). Second, Saïd is criticized for incorrectly assuming that the power over representations of the Orient lies entirely with the colonizer. The colonized are presented as passively accepting that the Orient is an inferior mirror image of the West (Gregory 1994). Diminishing and devaluing of the voices of opposition against Orientalism can serve a conservative rather than a progressive purpose.

The way meaning is ascribed to a specific term or action depends on its context. Arguments made with reference to Saïd's "Orientalism" in China are examples of such a reappropriation of meaning. Chinese debates about national identity in the 1990s were often cast in terms of binary oppositions between East and West. "Orientalism" was used to restore a Chinese discourse of Western hegemonic imperialism and interpreted in ways that supported reactionary nationalist rather than progressive forces within Chinese domestic politics (Zhang 1998). Saïd's work, created with the intention of challenging the dominant powers in the West, was thereby employed to consolidate the dominance of certain groups in China. The term *Occidentalism* has been coined to describe the stereotyping of the Western world for political purposes in China (Chen 1995). Chinese "official Occidentalism" essentializes the West in ways that justify restrictions on personal and political freedoms. In "anti-official Occidentalism," in contrast, the Western "Other" is used as a metaphor for political liberation from domestic ideological oppression. The official and the antiofficial Occidentalism are influenced both by Western constructions of Asia and China and by previous Chinese constructions of the Western Other (Chen 1995).

Beijing's Olympic bid material placed heavy emphasis on the city's Oriental identity through text and images. The terms *Asia*, *the East* and *the Orient* are used interchangeably to describe a part of the world that shares a set of essential qualities. Eastern cultures are depicted as being

founded in tradition and history, as opposed to the modern, developed West—very much in keeping with Saïd's "Orientalism." In the words of one Chinese journalist: "Beijing [is] more appealing to others because we have such a long history. We have something you have never seen, something very native, something very Oriental" (interview January 2002). Perceptions of Oriental culture as being rooted in the past were reinforced by the bid material's frequent references to historical buildings, traditional costumes, and traditional lifestyles. Asians are described as being committed to ideals such as hard work and the promotion of a common good and a harmonious social order. Authority is sometimes added to such descriptions when they are presented as quotations by Westerners. For example, the opera singer José Carreras, who held a concert in the Forbidden City to promote Beijing's Olympic bid, was quoted in *China Daily* as saying: "China has a very good tradition such as the respect to the old people. I think it is where the West could learn from you" (*China Daily* 2001c; grammar mistake in the original). The chosen director for the Beijing Olympic bid presentation video was Zhang Yimou, whose previous movies, including *Red Sorghum* and *Raise the Red Lantern*, had been instruments of collective Chinese cultural self-assertion (Zhang 1997). The choice indicated a desire to focus on the subjectivity of the Chinese nation and its roots in the past.

Beijing is not alone in constructing itself as essentially different from the West in an Olympic bid. Istanbul—another contender for the 2008 Games—used a similar strategy by pointing out that bringing the Olympics to Turkey would bring Olympism to the Islamic world. The bid material of both cities described Olympism as fully developed in the West, while having unrealized potential in the Orient and the Islamic world. These arguments must be viewed in relation to the Olympic movement's global aspirations. The IOC claims to be the representative of a global community that is united by Olympic ideals. As former IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch declared, "The Olympic Games belong not to the IOC, but to humanity. The Olympic Games are the whole world's dream and the IOC's role is to perpetuate that dream" (IOC 2002). Beijing's bid material confirms the Olympic movement's universalist claims, and uses them to argue its case. The differences between the East and the West are *discursively created in order to be transcended through Olympism*. If Beijing were to host the Olympic Games, Olympism becomes increasingly universal, and difference is turned into sameness as the Eastern world adopts Olympic values already endorsed by the West. A quotation of Beijing's mayor Liu Qi sum-

marized the argument: "A chance for Beijing to host the Games would provide a closer link between the Eastern and Western worlds, bring fresh blood to the Olympic Movement and a true meaning of universality—which the Olympics represent" (*China Daily* 2001a). Symbolic references to how the Beijing Olympics will unite the East and the West abound in the bid material. The Olympic torch relay was planned along the Silk Road, the ancient trade route connecting China and the Mediterranean (*China Daily* 2001d). In a less subtle symbolic gesture, it was proposed that Beijing's mayor, who is an engineer, should construct a steel bridge to represent the East meeting the West (*China Daily* 2001d).

Olympic Revival of a Mythical Past

Time is a central organizing concept in Beijing's Olympic bid material. The bid was placed within a temporal framework from the opening line of the Candidature File: "Beijing, with its ancient past, dynamic present and exciting future, has the honor to present its second bid to host the Olympic Games." The bid material depicted time in a way that ascribes inevitability and purpose to China's development process and the hosting of the Olympic Games in Beijing. The passage of time was represented as an unbroken process of progress, a unidirectional movement from worse to better, and from lower to higher levels of development.

Since it was assumed that conditions necessarily improve with time, the adjective *new* became an intrinsically positive characterization. The word was used in Beijing's main bid slogan—"New Beijing, Great Olympics"—and was trumpeted even more loudly in the Chinese version—"New Beijing, New Olympics" (*Xin Beijing Xin Aoyun*). The motto of the bid's promotional program—"New Century, New Culture and New Technology"—was yet another example of the use of "new" to indicate an intrinsically desirable quality (Xinhua 2000a). The bid material employed the concepts of "development" and "modernization" to describe both material and cultural changes for the better, and no essential distinction was made between the two. China's *Report on National Economic and Social Development Plans 2000* exemplifies how the material and the social were viewed as parts of the same development process:

Radio coverage reached 92.1% of the population and TV coverage, 93.4%. The target for controlling natural population growth was

reached. Major advances were made in reform of the drug and health management system. Socialist spiritual civilization and democracy and the legal system further improved. At the XXVII Olympic Games, Chinese athletes scored their best achievements since China began participating in the Games, greatly stirring the patriotic feelings of the people all over the country and stimulating them to unite and work hard. (Xinhua 2001b)

As the passage illustrates, the Chinese people, working under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), were presented as the key engines of China's progress. Technological advances combine with the Chinese people's indefatigable struggle for a better future to move China along the path of development. Through newspaper articles, CCP officials outlined which roles different groups of people were expected to play in the Olympic bid campaign and Beijing's modernization drive (Xinhua 2001a; *People's Daily* 2001). This continued a tradition of instilling in the Chinese people a sense of their responsibility in furthering the country's progress. Another example came several years earlier, when a patriotic education program was launched to teach students where China was strong and where it lagged behind in order to enhance their sense of responsibility and historical mission (Zhao 1994).

Within the ongoing progress, there is a timeless and unitary subject that stays essentially the same—the Chinese nation. One of the symbols used for this constant is the Great Wall. In Beijing's presentation video to the IOC, the Great Wall tied China's past and present together. The video images of the Wall were accompanied by a voice-over suggesting that the past and present were in harmony: "The Great Wall. A monument to the survival of a vibrant culture that has been able to combine the greatness of the past with ever-changing economic, social and technological advances of the present" (IOC 2001). Emphasis on the historical continuity of the Chinese nation, as well as on the need to develop and strengthen the country, have been important features of Chinese postcommunist nationalism (Unger 1996). The way in which the bid material provided meaning and direction to the passage of time is an example of how nationalism can turn "chance into destiny" and "contingency into purpose" (Anderson 1991, 12).

Both Beijing's Olympic bid material and texts produced by the Olympic movement were marked by a certain ambiguity toward the project of modernization. While the texts conveyed a sense of in-

evitable progress and faith in modernization, they also endorsed myths of a distant past. Frequent references to Beijing's long history were accompanied by images of physical remnants of the distant past. The restoration of the past in the creation of a glorious future, termed "restoration nationalism," was central to official Chinese discourse in the 1990s (Ko 2001). This stands in contrast to the tendency in the second half of the 1980s to blame remnants of traditional Chinese culture, such as Confucianism, for socioeconomic problems (Wang 1996). While the desirability of traditional Chinese values has been questioned within China for a long time, both through intellectual discourse and popular culture, such as the TV series *River Elegy* (*He Sheng*), they were constantly evoked and presented as admirable in the material directed at a foreign audience. China's ancient history is not depicted as an earlier stage in the present development process, but as a golden age that illustrates the potential of China as a nation. The future holds the promise for realizing this potential, and is thus as mythical as the past. This resonated with IOC material describing the Olympic Games as a revival of past greatness and virtue. The founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, contrasts the anxiety of modern life with the happiness of the past and claims that sport has the ability to return mankind to its origins: "O Sport, pleasure of the Gods, essence of life, you appeared suddenly in the midst of the gray clearing which writhes with the drudgery of modern existence, like the radiant messenger of a past age, when mankind still smiled" (Coubertin [1912] 2002). The IOC often draws upon such mythological imagery in explaining its behavior. The establishment of the so-called Olympic Truce Foundation in 2000, for example, was claimed to be the revival of an ancient Greek tradition.

In Beijing's bid material, the present time was described as a period marked by dizzying technological, economic, and social advances. The city is undergoing a transition from underdevelopment to being a modern "world city." When the IOC Evaluation Commission visited Beijing, the mayor expressed hope that the committee members would see the *potential* in Beijing as well as its current achievements (*China Daily* 2001b). The Olympic Games were assigned several roles in this transition process. The first was to speed up the pace of development. As the state news agency Xinhua wrote, "Chinese economists have said that Beijing's successful bid to host the 2008 Olympics will help the city achieve modernization ahead of schedule" (Xinhua 2001c). Such statements reconfirm the Olympic Movement's claim to be a universal

force for modernization. In addition to adding momentum to Beijing's modernization process, the Olympic Games were expected to be a *rite de passage*—a dramatic event marking Beijing's transition from one state to another. The term was originally used in anthropology about ceremonies endowing a person with a new status, while simultaneously reconfirming the social order (van Gennep [1909] 1960). The Olympic bid material asserted that the time was right for the world to recognize that Beijing and China had changed. Hosting the Olympics would mark China's transformation from outsider to insider in the international community, and from underdevelopment to modernity. Importantly, the bid material did not express any ambitions to reform the system itself. While Mao aspired to make China an alternative model for development and to overthrow the existing world system, his successors sought to restore China to its historical greatness *within the existing* international economic and political order (Moore 1999).

Conclusion

The presentation of an Olympic candidature goes far beyond organizational issues. Constructing Beijing as an Olympic city was as much about creating and naturalizing certain world views as it was about presenting practical arguments. The variety of topics brought up in the bid material reflects the wide range of objectives that inform decisions to bid for the Games. Beijing managed to strengthen the legitimacy of the IOC by confirming the universality of the Olympic ideals, presenting Olympism as a force for uniting the East and the West, and promoting modernization. IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch favored Beijing's candidature both in 1993 and 2001 and played an important role in bringing the Olympic Games' civilizing mission in Asia to the forefront of the debate within the Olympic movement (Booth and Tatz 1993–94). Although both the Chinese government and foreign proponents of Beijing's Olympic bid stressed the positive effects the Games would have on China's development, they may have had different kinds of influence in mind. The government expects the Olympics to bring economic growth and international recognition, while the Western press expresses hopes that the Olympics will promote freedom of expression, political reform, and human rights.

The focus of the chapter has been the presentation of Beijing's candidature in official Chinese discourse. However, meanings attached to

places are always potential terrains of contestation, never fixed. Different agents resist and redefine the dominant constructions of places for their own purposes, and thereby reconfigure power relations. When a construction is moved from one social context to another, it may take on new meanings and become the tool of new personal and political objectives. A study of how the official narrative of Beijing as an Olympic city was received, contested, reworked, and reproduced by other actors is an intriguing extension of the analysis presented in this chapter. The Olympic bid initiated social and physical changes in Beijing, and influenced the image foreigners have of the city. As the plans for hosting the Olympics are brought to life, the stakes grow ever higher in the struggle to control the narratives through which these Games are understood.

NOTE

1. The expression “bid material” in this chapter refers to promotional texts and videos produced by the Beijing Olympic Bid Committee, as well as articles about the Olympic bid published for an international audience in Chinese electronic and print media.

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