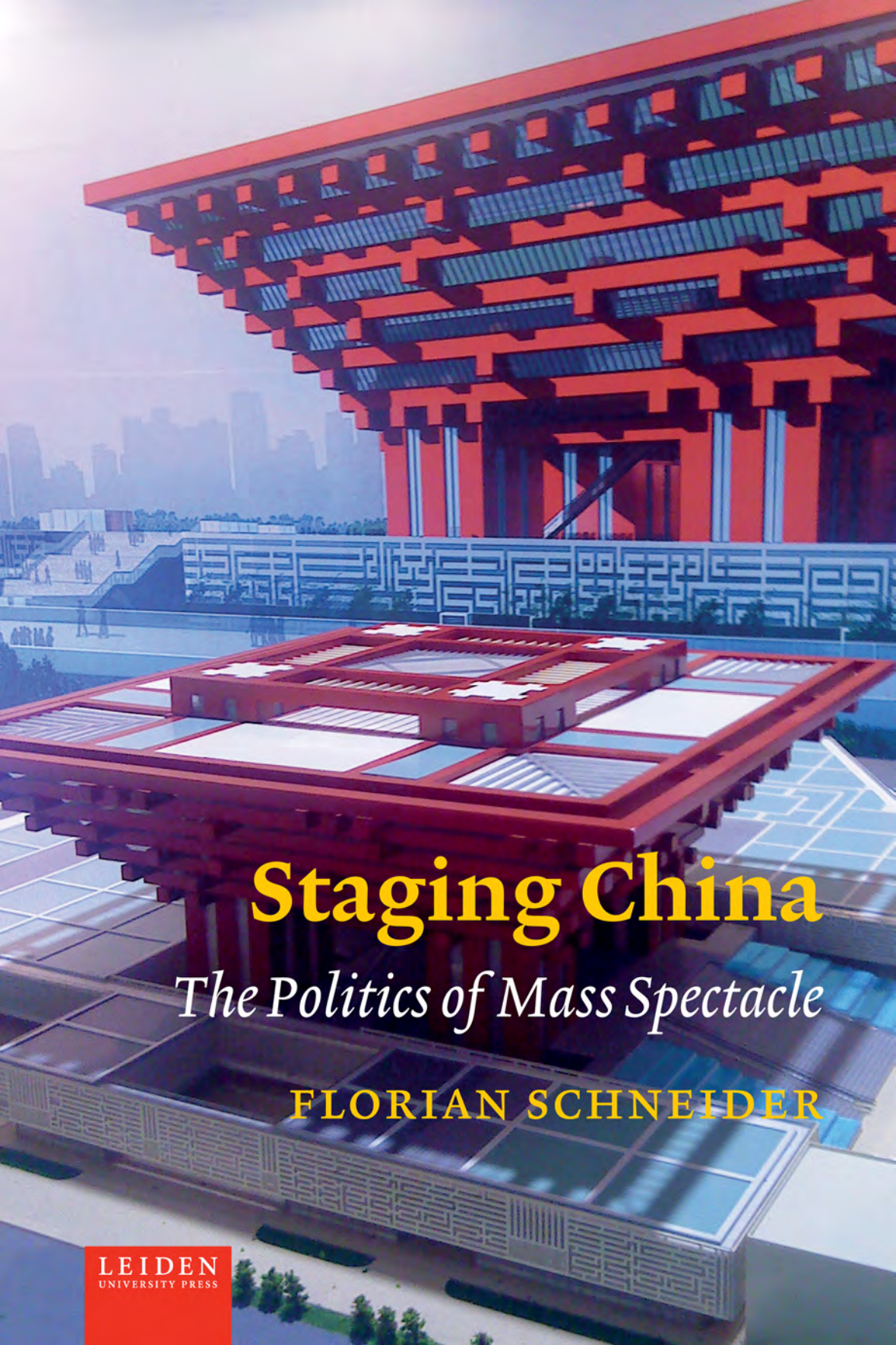
Staging China : the politics of mass spectacle

Schneider, Florian



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The Politics of Mass Spectacle

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER

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For F
You are spectacular.

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Note on Conventions

Throughout this text, when quoting original source materials, I have provided the Chinese characters after the translation. All translations, if not marked otherwise, are my own. As a matter of consistency, I have opted to render the original text passages in the simplified character script that is used in mainland China, even where quoting from sources written in the traditional character script favoured in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and many overseas communities. I have made this choice solely on the ground that this book focuses on events organised in mainland China, and not to suggest a personal preference for a specific character script.

For short Chinese phrases, I have provided transliterations in Pinyin. I have done so only for key phrases or terms (like 'harmony' or 'China Dream'), important organisations (like Chinese Central Television or the Shanghai Expo Organisation Department), and for Chinese names. For longer passages of Chinese, I have provided only the characters. My reasoning is that readers capable of reading Chinese will not require a transliteration, and that readers who do not read Chinese will not benefit from it either.

Throughout the book, I have followed the Chinese convention of placing surnames before given names, e.g. 'Xi Jinping'. I have made exceptions only where persons are commonly known by English names (e.g. 'Jackie Chan'). In cases where names are more commonly spelled using transliteration schemes other than Pinyin, I have followed those common conventions (e.g. Chiang Kai-shek).

List of Abbreviations

ARD	Allgemeiner Rundfunkdienst
BIE	Bureau International des Expositions
BIMC	Beijing International Media Centre
BOB	Beijing Olympic Broadcasting
BOCOG	Beijing Olympics Committee for the Olympic Games
BODA	Beijing Olympic City Development Association
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CTV	China Television
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
FTV	Formosa Television
KMT	Kuomintang (Nationalist Party)
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PR	Public Relations
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China

1 Introduction: Making Sense of China's Spectacles

It is 2009, a year after the Beijing Olympics, and I have made my way across northern Beijing, past one of the massive ring-roads, to a large block of office buildings that sits not too far from the Olympic axis — a long stretch of asphalt, greenery, and event buildings that cuts across the city in an extension of the old north-south connection that the Forbidden City forms with its gates. New construction sites are again blossoming around the area, only a year after much of the city was remodelled to host the mega event. Three new metro lines were constructed in the run-up to the games. More will follow.

I am looking down from an office window at the traffic jam below, people milling across overpasses in the blazing heat. The passers-by are not yet wearing particle masks. The full scale of Beijing's pollution has not made it into the public conscience in 2009. While I am sipping a cold soft drink, one of the organisers of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony shows me images from the event's press book. She flips to a picture of actors representing Confucian scholars, accompanied by an explanation of the quotation they recite: 'all those within the four seas can be considered his brother'. Another picture shows the huge painting scroll that displayed examples of pre-modern Chinese ingenuity like paper, pottery, and bronze casting.

'Our goal was to brand the Chinese nation', says my host. 'We had two keywords that we were going to showcase: harmony and civilisation'. I turn to the page that shows serene martial artists in white attire performing the elegant movements of Taijiquan below the large digital canvas that circled around the top of the stadium, where animations cascade downwards like a waterfall, in reference to a famous poem by Li Bai. Another page shows the stadium at a distance as fireworks form smiley faces in the sky above.

'Many people abroad felt the Beijing Olympics were controversial', I point out. The torch relay had been accompanied by protests, by calls to

boycott the Games. Then Chinese students abroad responded with their own protests, meant to defend the event. The confrontations between the two protest groups quickly turned the public relations campaign into a security exercise. How did people perceive those conflicts here, I ask. She explains that these negative reactions came as a shock to many. Thousands of people had volunteered. They were hoping to show visitors their home and what China had become. 'Of course they were disappointed about the criticism. In their view, all they had wanted to do was throw the world a giant party'.

The Beijing Games were a source of major pride in China's capital, and generally for people across the country. It is easy to see why. Chinese society had undergone massive transformations over the preceding decades, and the event marked a high-point in economic and political developments in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Official slogans about China's 'hundred-year old Olympic Dream' resonated with many Chinese citizens, especially since such phrases evoked images of an earlier China that had violently and disruptively modernised amidst wars and foreign colonial interventions. Now, in the 21st century, past national struggles and humiliations had finally led to a moment of national rejuvenation and international recognition. China was finally hosting the Olympic Games, an event that epitomised modern internationalism. When the fireworks lit up Beijing's night sky on the auspicious day of 8 August 2008, at eight o'clock, it marked for many a watershed moment in modern Chinese history. China had returned to the world stage.

As students of the Olympic Movement have pointed out, the Games were never just about sports. From the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 to the present day, the Olympic Spirit has been loaded with political meanings, and it has been used extensively as a public diplomacy tool (Cull 2008: 120-128). The Olympic Games in Beijing were special in that they were hosted by a state that some academics argue exerts a comprehensive 'control of symbols' (Price 2008: 11), or at least tries to do so. Indeed, the Beijing Olympics fit into a larger state-led strategy that involved numerous high-profile events along with media coverage that utilised advanced 21st-century information and communication technologies (ICTs). The PRC leadership had developed a new and improved public relations approach (see Brady 2008). In the eyes of China's propaganda experts, China's increasing economic, political, and cultural relevance in the world needed to be matched with a communication strategy that would alleviate suspicions about a potential

'China Threat' while simultaneously showcasing the leadership's policies to a domestic audience.

Large-scale staged spectacles have been a corner stone of this communication strategy. Aside from the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the PRC government also organised a massive parade to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the PRC in 2009 and a six-month World Exposition in Shanghai in 2010, spending billions of RMB in the process. Each of these endeavours has been hailed by China's state media as the grandest and most impressive event of its kind. In the propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), these events remain crucial markers of China's domestic and international success. Later spectacles would follow this template. Examples include the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou, the 90th anniversary of the CCP in 2011, the G20 summit in Hangzhou in 2016, and the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the PRC in 2017, but also the recent tradition of holding parades on 3 September, which the state designated a national holiday in 2015 in order to commemorate the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Then there is the ongoing Olympic dream, extended to yet another occasion: at the time of writing, the city of Beijing was preparing to host the 2022 Winter Olympic Games.

This book explores the politics of China's staged spectacles, especially those that the PRC organised between 2008 and 2010 under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (i.e. during the 'Hu-Wen administration'). It examines various attempts to showcase a modern China through large-scale, mediated mass events, and it asks how different actors position themselves during such events to intervene in public discourses and experiment with mechanisms of networked governance. Throughout this book, I refer to such events as 'networked spectacles', and in this introduction I spell out the core theoretical considerations that drive my study of these events. I also discuss the practical implications of my conceptual arguments, laying out the materials I have used and the methods I have deployed to analyse China's networked spectacles. The chapter ends with an overview of the book and its main arguments. First, however, allow me to examine how others have made sense of China's most prominent staged spectacles.

1.1 Why China's staged spectacles matter

China's high-profile spectacles have generated no small amount of controversy. Observers outside China have at times voiced harsh criticism of such events, arguing that the Chinese authorities are manipulating public opinion to obscure their political agenda at home and abroad. In reference to the PRC's relationship with the Sudanese government, US critics christened the 2008 Beijing Summer Games the 'Genocide Olympics' (Farrow & Farrow 2007). Others called for boycotts to highlight deficiencies in the PRC's human rights record (see the various contributions in Worden 2008 for examples and discussions).

The PRC anniversary that took place a year later became an even stronger focal point of foreign criticism, with many journalists seeing the large-scale military parade that rolled across Tiananmen Square as evidence that China was returning to its Maoist past. The *Financial Times* interpreted the event as harking back to 'Mao, Marx and the Military' (Dyer & Anderlini 2009). The German news magazine *Spiegel Online* (Lorenz 2009), reminded of parades in North Korea, argued that 'this was not the modern China, whose functionaries wear Armani suits and invest in international hedge funds. This was a deeply conservative China ...'. The BBC (2009) quipped that China was 'holding itself a Party... a Communist Party'.

When the Shanghai World Exposition opened its gates to visitors in 2010, the anxieties continued: the large, red China Pavilion quickly became a symbol for the perceived new assertiveness of the Chinese government. Foreign observers pointed out that the 'massive structure ... looms, coolly, over the entire site' and 'practically hangs over the Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan pavilions' (Minter 2010). The design, size, and location of the pavilion even led some to view it as evidence that the leadership was expecting the whole world to pay 'tribute to the emperor' (Master 2010).

While foreign news reports interpreted the events primarily through the lens of authoritarian politics and Maoist clichés, scholarship on China has tried to add more nuance, though academic studies have also at times criticised China's mass spectacles for presenting simplistic and potentially manipulative narratives. Barmé (2008: 86), for instance, concludes his discussion of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and its presentation of China with the assessment that the event presented 'a flattened vista of its own history'. Brady (2009: 6) compares the Beijing

Olympics to a magician's sleight of hand and interprets the event as part of a larger campaign of 'mass distraction', an attempt to use economic growth and mass entertainment to gloss over domestic problems; a modern-day version of the infamous Roman imperial practice of providing the subjugated masses with bread and games.

Interpretations of the Shanghai Expo have also at times been severe, with William Callahan (2012: 257) criticising the various participants for creating 'a stable harmonious utopia that combines global capitalism and Chinese civilisation', and for reproducing racist and sexist themes. Similarly, Nordin (2012a: 246) asserts that at the expo 'there is only one Future, and it does not welcome contestation'. Both Callahan and Nordin acknowledge that Shanghai also contained counter-stories to the perceived monolithic narrative of the expo, but they see these stories taking place elsewhere, for instance in the discussions of intellectuals, in the arts, or in the interpretations of critically-minded expo visitors, not at the event site itself.

These accounts draw attention to the many ways in which staged spectacles in the PRC deploy advanced public relations techniques as means of persuasion, if not manipulation, and they remind us that such events frequently construct problematic master narratives in the service of particular interests. Indeed, there is much to criticise about how these events portray contemporary China and its politics, just as there is much to criticise about Chinese politics in general. In terms of civil liberties, the PRC ranks among the poorest countries in the world. The liberal American organisation Freedom House (2017) regularly classifies China as 'not free', with the country scoring only 15 out of 100 potential points in the human rights organisation's 2017 score for 'Freedom in the World'. In terms of political freedoms, Freedom House awarded the PRC only a single point out of 40 in its 2017 assessment.

It would be a mistake to belittle or ignore such concerns, or the many challenges that the PRC faces today, even though such scoring exercises arguably force an understanding onto politics that is rooted in American and European self-perceptions of 'freedom'. The consequent judgements frequently say more about those who are judging than about those who are thus judged. Such criticism also at times risks obscuring how complex the PRC's social and political environment actually is, and it does not always sufficiently acknowledge the degree with which this environment continuously changes. This problem extends to discussions of China's staged spectacles and the diversity of their messages. We can learn

much from these events, beyond the stories of perceived domination vs resistance. Jeffrey Wasserstrom (2016: 9-17), for instance, fruitfully compares the PRC's efforts to host the Beijing Olympics and Shanghai Expo with the efforts by the State of Japan to host the Tokyo Olympics and Osaka Expo some 40 years earlier. He discusses how China and Japan each tried to use such events to overcome the legacies of their modern histories, and the parallels with Japan are indeed striking (see Wilson 2012). I will return to their relevance in the next chapter, but what matters here is that mass spectacles can be important windows into domestic and international politics. As Callahan (2010) points out in his account of how political communication features in China's security policies, 'the opening ceremony of Beijing's Summer Olympics can tell us much about the political direction of China's rise' (ibid.: 1).

Others have similarly made the case that understanding political communication in China is crucial for understanding the politics of the country as a whole. Frank Pieke (2016) makes this clear in his discussion of how the CCP has been innovating and updating its ideology since 1978. To Pieke, the Party has been extraordinarily skilled at constructing messages meant to convince the wider public of the CCP's legitimacy to rule China: 'communist ideology is the constantly evolving fruit of highly specialized creative work that compellingly presents these messages as conveying the only possible correct understanding and evaluation of reality' (ibid.: 25). China's networked spectacles have been an important site for negotiating these messages, and I believe we should heed Pieke's advice that 'those who want to understand what the Party has to say had better suppress their scepticism and learn this language and its referents' (ibid.).

Staged spectacles in China are an ideal place to study such communication codes. Taking a closer look at how different actors produced these events, and what was actually communicated through them, promises to shed light on the rich roles these events play in contemporary Chinese politics. Indeed, as others have pointed out, these events are relevant in a number of ways, for instance as opportunities for implementing infrastructure and urban planning projects (Dreyer 2012, Sun & Ye 2010), as incentives for increasing tourism (Yu et al. 2012), as attempts to affect public opinion (Chen 2012, Cull 2008), and as vehicles for legitimating the politics of the day (Brady 2009).

I will discuss these dimensions in detail, but I will also make the case that staged spectacles in China showcase two important dynamics

that are too often overlooked, and that make these events what I call 'networked spectacles': elaborate mass events, designed to be aesthetically striking, that offer various actors the chance to reconfigure organisational and ideational networks in the service of their respective political projects. The first dynamic that creates these networked spectacles is that China's authorities have generally transformed politics into a mixture of hierarchical and collaborative processes that involve a wide range of networked actors and that are highly flexible, adaptive, and consensus-seeking; China's networked spectacles are as much examples of these politics as they are sites of innovation where networked forms of governance can be tested. The second dynamic is that the diverse actors involved in China's networked spectacles use their unevenly distributed communicative resources and skills to construct and reshape the very meanings of politics, which makes these events ideal sites for tracing how Chinese politics are shifting. In short, the PRC has re-invented itself and its modes of governance for the 21st century, and its networked spectacles have been important testing grounds and sites of innovation during that process, providing real-world laboratories to test different approaches to power, legitimation, and meaning-making.

1.2 Power in networked politics

How, then, should we conceptualise these attempts to recalibrate politics through networked spectacles? This question is closely tied to issues of power, and to how power works in complex societies. To gain purchase on such processes, I find it helpful to view these spectacles as examples of networked politics, and to turn to the work of network scholars for theoretical and empirical insights into how people interact, communicate, and generate meanings through their interactions. Throughout this book, I will draw from three intellectual projects that each deal with networks: the macro-sociology that fuels arguments about how power works in network societies, the micro-sociology that informs discussions about so-called interaction ritual chains and actor-networks, and the communication theory of conceptual blending, which explores how actors make meanings out of complex networks of mental concepts.

In what follows, I will explain each of these projects in turn, followed by a practical example from China. Readers who are less interested in these theoretical discussions of how we might create our societies through

networked communication processes may of course skip ahead to the methodological foundations of this book (section 1.6) or the overview of its sections (1.7). Throughout the subsequent chapters, I have tried to avoid unnecessary academic jargon, and I have compiled definitions of core technical terms such as 'conceptual blending', 'interaction ritual chain', or 'networked spectacle' in the glossary for easy reference. I would nevertheless recommend bearing with me for the conceptual detour I have provided below, as it covers the basic mechanics of contemporary political communication, along with a discussion of the intellectual traditions that inform my analysis of such communication.

Before proceeding with this theoretical account, a word of caution is in order. Each of the three fields I have drawn from here (macro-sociology, micro-sociology, and communications theory) makes assumptions about what society is and what scholars might emphasise to best understand it. Some of these premises may at times seem inconsistent or even mutually exclusive. For instance, is it empirically correct to say that 'China is organising a spectacle'? Or, rather, is it correct to aggregate social interactions between individual human beings into larger, unified organisations such as nation-states, corporations, and so on, and to then treat those organisations as actors in their own right? Who is really 'acting' in such cases? Macro-sociologists may at times find it acceptable to use shorthand to describe what organisations are doing, whereas micro-sociologists frequently consider such simplifications to be anathema.

To give another example of conceptual disagreement: regardless of who or what qualifies as an agent, it is widely accepted throughout much of the so-called social sciences that such agents then act within pre-existing structures such as material, social, and ideational constraints. The choices of decision-makers reflect their knowledge of the world, the financial restrictions they labour under, the norms they have been socialised into, and so on. However, it remains contested how strongly agents create and change these structures, and whether such structures can be agents in their own right (can a social norm *act upon* somebody, or is it really other people enforcing that social norm and creating social pressure through their interactions?). Such issues have led some sociologists to argue that distinctions between agency and structure are, in fact, a false dichotomy to begin with (Collins 2004: 570, Latour 2005: 202-203).

Such issues go to the heart of disputes between structuralists (who assume structure exists before and outside human experience) and

poststructuralists (who argue that all structures are constraints of our own making), as well as various strands of functionalists (who believe that every structure has a social purpose). My goal is not to trace these debates and their intellectual history here; interested readers may turn to a number of useful introductions, e.g. Belsey (2002), Elliott & Lemert (2014, especially chs 5 to 7), Han (2014), the tongue-in-cheek Palmer (1997), and — specifically on Foucault's transition from structuralism to post-structuralism — Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982/2014). Instead of discussing these various schools of thought in detail, I will shamelessly poach disparate traditions to highlight commonalities that I believe can be fruitfully put to work to understand China's networked spectacles. In this, I will remain committed to what might be called a critically realist, poststructuralist view of society, in which people use their perceptive, cognitive, and affective faculties to constantly create and revise the symbolic resources through which they make sense of their existence, in interactions with each other and the material world.

A useful starting point for understanding these processes comes from macro-sociologists like Manuel Castells, who try to explain the broad processes that shape our societies today. Castells (1996/2010) proposes that we view society as a 'network society'. He envisages this network society as diverse actors, such as states, enterprises, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which pursue their agendas within advanced communication and information networks. Importantly, Castells (2009) describes two kinds of powerful activities that actors pursue in network societies, and he calls these activities 'switching' and 'programming'.

In Castells' view, networked actors frequently create or sever connections between themselves and others, which allows these actors to configure the network in line with their goals and projects. The ability to exclude actors from a process, for instance by denying them resources or information, is indeed a form of power, as is creating new connections and enabling interactions (see also Lukes 2005). This then is what Castells calls 'switching power': the ability of actors to create or sever ties within a network.

The second crucial kind of activity 'programmes' a network with specific value, that is: with a rationale that then fuels and constrains the actions of the various networked actors. 'Programming power' is the ability to spread certain discourses through a network, for instance by circulating symbols and statements among networked actors that imply

certain assumptions and invite participants to accept these as common sense.

The two types of power frequently work in tandem, with actors trying to switch themselves into networks or creating connections between disparate networks to position themselves to then programme these networks with their own discourses. Take, as an example, the logic of profit that infuses financial networks and guides the behaviour of organisations within markets (see Harvey 2007). It was arguably an extremely effective move of neoliberal economists during the 1970s and 1980s to manoeuvre themselves into close proximity with sympathetic politicians, and for powerfully positioned political actors like Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Regan, or Deng Xiaoping to in turn spread the economic rationale of market capitalism through their own policy-making networks across vast segments of their network societies, by either using existing ties or 'switching' on new ties that would connect traditional markets with e.g. education or health-care networks. Infusing these newly connected networks with discourses of productivity, personal responsibility, austerity, and profit-rationales effectively forced participants in those disparate sectors to re-orientate their activities in relation to the values of the market.

Castells' conceptual work provides a useful entryway into how power works during such complex processes, since it highlights how agents, power, and communication are related. In this, it shares certain similarities with the arguments of German macro-sociologists such as Ulrich Beck (2005), who argues that in late modernity power is no longer just the ability to win the game of politics but is enmeshed with the ability to define the rules of that game, leading to a complex 'meta-game'. There are also potential points of overlap with Jürgen Habermas' work, who for instance argues in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981/1995: 473) that the 'systems' of the market and the state 'colonize' the various sectors of our 'lifeworld' — a process reflected in the increased commercialisation and bureaucratisation of more and more aspects of our lives. Viewing these processes as networked politics enables us to see the 'systems' behind these processes as groups of interlinked actors within the market or the state who switch themselves into other social networks to try and govern them with their values. Castells' theory also connects with French poststructuralism, e.g. with Michel Foucault's (1977/1995) argument that people construct, through communication, the background knowledge

that informs their social practices and institutions, an argument I will return to below.

To speak of switching and programming in network societies is indeed an apt metaphor for how communication and power work in complex societies; however the idea of the network society also suffers from several problems: it depicts the networked processes as the outcome of an 'information age' or 'global age', which problematically assumes that history is divided into 'ages', when scholars have repeatedly shown that this idea is itself a modern construct (e.g. Mumford 1967: 22, Graeber 2004: 54). Instead, interactions between people have always created 'networks', and they continue to do so in contexts that can be decidedly low-tech. What is more, Castells' network analogy also potentially reproduced the problematic assumption that advanced ICTs create processes that take place in 'virtual realms', removed from material interactions and conditions, when really our interactions remain firmly tethered to the material world and our places in it. Finally, Castells remains frustratingly abstract on the exact, practical workings of power in networks: how exactly does an actor 'programme' a network with value? What chain of events has to unfold in order for such an activity to succeed?

To be fair, Castells has revisited and refined some of his earlier work (e.g. 1996/2010) to show how the processes he describes are embedded in political economies, and his later arguments (in Castells 2009) about how powerful, entrenched actors like states and corporations configure networks provides a useful corrective to the impression that his work favoured only progressive underdogs who strove for social change. Nevertheless, the exact workings of networked power remain vague. I have tried to provide an account of how programming and switching power might be understood as actors calibrating the administrative privileges of specific networks (Schneider 2018: ch.8), and I still believe this is an appropriate metaphor where communication networks are concerned, but more work needs to be done to unpack how human interactions take place in, and ultimately calibrate, different kinds of networks.

1.3 How actor networks assemble society

Some of the most meticulous and insightful studies of such interactions come from sociologists and anthropologists who explore the intricacies of everyday life. These studies update and extend the work of three

influential thinkers: Emile Durkheim (1912), who focused on the way that social rituals turn the mundane into the sacred; Clifford Geertz (1973/2000), who stressed that human beings inhabit 'webs of symbols' that they themselves create; and Erwing Goffman (1959, 1967, 1974), who showed how people act out their face-to-face interactions on 'stages' with different publics.

Combining these insights to varying degrees, scholarship in micro-sociology has made the case that what we call 'society' is actually disparate sets of highly contextual networks that actors construct through their recurring inter-subjective activities. In this understanding, subjects are formed through the chains of interactions they experience, leaving individuals with ever-changing, situational identities. As Collins (2004: 26) writes:

> Agency, which I would prefer to describe as the energy appearing in human bodies and emotions and as the intensity and focus of human consciousness, arises in interactions in local, face-to-face situations, or as precipitates of chains of situations.

In this view (ibid.), participants in a specific situation 'charge' their interaction with emotions, giving it meaning and making it memorable. As actors fill shared moments with specific relevance, they frequently outsource their associations and sentiments to cultural artefacts (see Sperber 1996). In this way, they create objects that come to stand for the original experience and that can at times become, to use Durkheim's terminology, sacred (Collins 2004: 69). This, then, is how group cohesion comes about: through actors engaged in rituals. Collins describes such rituals as mechanisms 'of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership' (ibid.: 26). As I will show throughout this book, networked spectacles are sites of precisely such rituals.

These micro-sociological arguments about how human interaction creates meaning are not merely theoretical abstractions; they have practical implications. Rather than accepting concepts like 'culture' or 'society' as pre-existing realms that influence human processes, these approaches prompt researchers to ask how such realms are really constructed, and in the process to pay close attention to the details of who is doing what, and in which situations. Micro-sociology consequently

provides an important corrective to macro-sociological accounts, which have been criticised for 'the error of describing how things happen in the social world without mentioning how people might make them happen, or, indeed who the people are who make them happen' (Billig 2013: 142). Empirical studies in the micro-sociological vein have yielded insightful results, including how scientists conduct scientific experiments (Latour & Woolgar 1979/1986), how people use specific technologies like the internet in their everyday lives (Miller & Slater 2000), how economists think about and ultimately create financial markets (MacKenzie 2006), or how and why people smoke (Collins 2004: ch.8), to give just a few examples.

Despite the many differences between these studies, they share a commitment to tracing how actual people enact sociality and meaning through their interactions, and they consequently align fairly well with the research programme that Bruno Latour (2005) has proposed under the banner of 'actor-network theory'. To Latour, scholars should indeed follow the actors closely, trying to 'catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish' (ibid.: 12). He further proposes that we extend the reasoning of Goffman's work to map how people interact with one another and, importantly, to trace how they interact with various objects, and how objects in turn interact with each other.

This leads Latour to redefine the meaning of 'actor' as '*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference' (ibid.: 71, emphasis in the original). He argues that the following should then be the new default position for social inquiry: 'that all the actors we are going to deploy might be *associated* in such a way that they *make others do things*' (ibid.: 107, emphases in the original).

Latour sees these associations as playing out as a network, as a 'a string of actions where each participant is treated as a full-blown mediator', meaning that people and objects act upon, and in some way transform, others in the network (ibid.: 128). If traced carefully, such a network is precisely the context in which actions take place. This is one of Latour's most intriguing observations, since it moves away from the idea that context exists outside interactions, instead seeing it as something that has to be explained as part of the situation itself. 'Context' is the span of traceable interactions within a network (ibid.: 202). These interactions

may not be 'local', in a geographical or even temporal sense (for instance an event in the city of Shanghai in 2010), but they constitute the network within which 'a bewildering array of participants is simultaneously at work' and 'which are dislocating their neat boundaries in all sorts of ways, redistributing them away and making it impossible to start anywhere that can be said to be "local"' (ibid.).

Again, these conceptual concerns have practical implications. Latour (ibid.: 147) writes the following about actor-network theory:

> Its main tenet is that actors themselves make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics, even their own ontologies. So the direction to follow would be more descriptions [of these processes].

To fully understand what power is, and how it works, we need to examine closely how different actors *assemble* the social, i.e. how they act upon each other, and how these actions create cultural objects that act upon others in turn. Networked spectacles are perfect arenas for exploring such complex interactions, as they are occasions during which actors come together to create social realities; indeed, it is telling that Latour's seminal book *Reassembling the Social* (2005) has as its cover an illustration of men planning and constructing the Madagascar exhibition at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris. It is at sites like these that people assemble social relations and cultural meanings.

1.4 Meaning-making in networks

Micro-sociological accounts of networks and interaction ritual chains provide detail-oriented accounts of how humans assemble 'societies', but they go beyond the mere interactions between people and things. As Collins (2003: 1382) argues, they also make a contribution to our understanding of cognition:

> Interaction ritual is a full-scale social psychology, not only of emotions and situational behaviour, but of cognition. Rituals generate symbols; experience in rituals inculcates those symbols in individual minds and memories.

This is then a powerful entry into the processes that generate meanings and imbue them with emotions in the human mind. As I will show, actors at networked spectacles frequently produce, draw from, or relay what Müller and Kappas (2011) have called 'pathos formulae'. Following the work of German iconographer Martin Warnke (1980), Müller and Kappas outline how specific symbols such as handshakes between politicians become such tropes, i.e. recurring patterns of signs that, based on a previously established social convention, connect to specific meanings. Such tropes then become anchored to specific sentiments, allowing actors to mobilise them in efforts to trigger emotional responses.

The question of how humans generate their sociality is then also closely linked to questions of how meanings become associated with cultural artefacts, imbued with sentiments, and spread through communication. On this issue, it is worth following Müller and Kappas' example and turning to scholarship on media and communication.

Throughout this introduction, and indeed throughout this book, I refer to the complex communication processes that both inform and are generated by networked spectacles as 'discourses'. Drawing on Michel Foucault's influential work (especially 1965/1988, 1977/1997, and 1978/1990), I understand 'discourse' to mean a set of statements through which communicating agents systematically construct and share their knowledge of the world, in turn creating the raw materials from which they and other actors then go on to form yet more discourse. Importantly, discursive statements reproduce and often re-enforce assumptions about the world that become 'naturalised' as 'common sense', meaning that they become unquestioned truths among certain groups of actors.

Much of Foucauldian discourse theory (e.g. Foucault 1978/1990) highlights how communication is struggle over what should be considered true (see Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982/2014, Howarth 2000). Every time any of us makes a statement, be it verbal or non-verbal, we draw from a pool of social conventions and shared meanings in order to 'make sense'. In doing so, we either reinforce those social conventions and collectively accepted beliefs, or we challenge what others consider to be common sense.

This is not merely a communication exercise: through their interactions, actors turn the assumptions that inform their discourse into actual institutions, for instance when actors adopt certain ideas about mental health or about crime to then create the rationale for treating

mental disorders in certain ways (Foucault 1965/1988), or for constructing particular kinds of prisons (Foucault 1977/1995).

Discursive struggles over what should constitute truth are crucial to how societies become constituted. Communication is very much an interplay between status-quo-oriented actors who contribute to 'hegemonic' discourses and attempts by agents of social change to challenge established truths with 'counter-hegemonic' discourses, for better or worse. I will discuss a number of examples in this book where these dynamics are indeed at play, for instance when human rights organisations challenge the Olympic narrative of China's central government, or when foreign expo pavilion organisers intentionally create counterpoints to the official Shanghai Expo narrative. Nevertheless, viewing discourse solely as struggle would not capture the full complexity of communication processes, especially not in dynamic and multifarious cases like networked spectacles, which is precisely why I have drawn so heavily from network theories to conceptualise how discourse might work during such events. Social and discursive practices are interlinked with each other through the networked interactions of diverse actors, many of whom negotiate and collaborate with each other as they go about making meanings. Not all of these interactions are struggles.

Discourse analysis is strongest when it examines textual evidence, but networked spectacles are media events: they compile written and verbal statements with elaborate (and often dynamic) visual and acoustic arrangements for dissemination to diverse mass audiences. What is more, these arrangements take place over extended periods of time, across dedicated spaces like Beijing's National Stadium, Tiananmen Square, or the Shanghai Expo territory along Shanghai's Huangpu River, and they frequently rely on visitors and audiences, as well as media professionals, to collaboratively construct discourses through interactions with each other and with media contents.

To study the communicative dimensions of such interactions, I have drawn from semiotics, especially the work of Umberto Eco (1979) and Charles Sanders Peirce (compiled in Hoopes 1991). Whereas discourse analysis looks at the statements that cultural products contain, semiotics unpacks these statements to show how they consist of assemblages of signs: things that stand for other things, such as a visual representation that denotes an 'apple', or that by extension connotes a specific company that produces digital devices. By identifying and tracking signs, semiotics

reveals how different actors create, re-appropriate, and re-invent the visual, acoustic, and textual building-blocks that form 'multi-modal' discourses (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001), such as those that circulate through China's networked spectacles.

Both discourse theory and semiotics have been criticised, e.g. by Collins (2004: 27 & 52), for their perceived tendency to outsource too much of the human meaning-making process to external, structural realms, such as the history of ideas (in the case of discourse theory) or sets of cultural codes (in the case of semiotics). In this line of argument, both of these approaches tend to return to structuralist assumptions, bypassing the people who are creating the signs and discourses through their continuous chains of interactions. While such warnings are well taken, they nevertheless risk dismissing these schools of thought too quickly. Foucault's later work shifts away from his earlier structuralist leanings, and semiotitians have likewise updated their research programmes to emphasise the social element in communication processes and link social practices back to the meanings of signs (e.g. Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006 and Van Leeuwen 2005).

It is indeed not hard to see how the core arguments in discourse theory and semiotics can be brought into fruitful dialogue with the works of micro-sociologists, whose own reasoning (e.g. Collins 2004: 63) is frequently similar to that of critical theorists like Foucault. After all, communication is also an interaction ritual, one in which actors creatively combine signs to generate meanings.

Fauconnier and Turner (2002) call these kinds of activities 'conceptual blending', and they make a strong case for understanding them as creative efforts that take place in agents' mental spaces. These spaces 'contain elements and are typically structured by frames. They are interconnected and can be modified as thought and discourse unfolds. Mental spaces can be used generally to model dynamic mappings in thought and language' (ibid.: 40). The authors go on to provide involved models of how networks of meanings can be juxtaposed to create new meanings, often in ways that seem effortless and 'natural' to those participating in the process, even though 'it takes all of our cognitive powers to have common sense' (ibid.: 54).

In practice, Fauconnier and Turner's approach entails identifying the sets of meanings that actors pull together as they construct their discursive statements, and it involves exploring how these actors then manipulate, combine, and frame symbolic elements in distinct 'input spaces' to yield

a 'blended space' in which they can then explore novel meanings. As an example, Fauconnier and Turner (ibid.: ch.3) discuss a riddle, originally presented by Arthur Koestler (1964), in which a monk travels up a holy mountain one day, and then back down a few days later. The puzzle: is there a time on each of those days at which the monk occupies the same space on the path? Answering this question requires a mental leap in which we imagine the monk moving up and down the mountain on the same day, effectively encountering himself somewhere in the middle. Fauconnier and Turner use this act of counterfactual reasoning to show how human thought frequently relies on concepts and relations in one 'mental space' (the journey up the mountain) and concepts and relations in another (the journey down the mountain) to create new meanings in a 'blended space' that existed in neither of the two inputs (an encounter between two monks).

A number of interesting things are happening in this example, and I can recommend following the authors' thoughtful explanations in the original (ibid.: 39-50). Two aspects of their argument are particularly worth stressing here: that networks produce emergent properties, and that these properties can be studied empirically.

A fundamental characteristic of a complex system such as a social or conceptual network is that it 'exhibits nontrivial emergent and self-organizing behavior', meaning that complex processes generate outcomes that are more than the sum of the parts that originally went into the process (Mitchell 2011: 13). Importantly, emergent properties cannot be predicted. A good example is evolution (see Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 55), which is a complex process combining drifts in genetic materials with the dynamics of natural selection over extended periods of time. Biologists would be hard pressed to say how any given species will evolve next. This is not merely a practical matter of missing data: even if scientists had all the possible data points that feature into the complex process of evolution, the dynamics of these factors would create new properties that can never be predicted. Complexity defies prediction, in practice as well as in principle (Mitchell 2011: 33). That said, complexity is not arbitrary, and it can be explained. After all, biologists are indeed able to show scientifically how different species have evolved.

Social and political interactions are also complex, as are psychological processes: when two people meet and interact, events unfold dynamically. A sudden memory leads to an awkward silence; laughter ensues even though a joke fell flat; someone has a new thought, based

on an unexpected association with something someone said, etc. When meanings mesh, new stories are told and new ideas emerge. In any complex network, the outcomes of such processes will remain unpredictable, but they can be traced and explained if we follow the actors and how they assemble symbolic resources into new meanings. As these assemblages become repeated and redeployed, they potentially turn into tropes, and in extreme cases into background knowledge and 'frames' that provide the resources for the next rounds of meaning-making. The theory of conceptual blending then provides a useful entry into how networked interactions construct and relay beliefs.

1.5 An example of discursive innovation: the mascot's butt crack

To give an example of actor-networks and the discourses they generate, consider a string of interactions that unfolded during the Shanghai Expo in 2010, and that generated new meanings about the event. In the run-up to the expo, the authorities issued a call for designs of the event mascot. They then commissioned the Taiwanese designer Wu Yong-jian, who created the blue comic character Haibao (海宝). The Shanghai city government then rolled out a public relations campaign that strongly featured the mascot, covering advertising spaces across the city with posters and putting up statues of the blue Haibao (see Figure 1.1).

The mascot design itself already illustrates important characteristics of conceptual blending, and we could 'dip' into the social interactions at this point to analyse how the mascot combines different 'inputs': it integrates the Chinese character for person (*ren* 人) and various associations with the city of Shanghai (the blue colour of the sea, the idea of a wave, the character for 'sea', *hai* 海, which also forms the second part of the city's name Shang*hai*) to create something new: a personification of the event.

Actor-networks lend themselves to such explorations of meaning-making at 'nodes' of the network, and indeed any part of the interaction chains may be worth unpacking, depending on the questions that are at stake. In this case, I am interested in a communication process that took place after the authorities established the mascot as a symbol of the expo.

On 22 March 2010, and in the first instance unrelated to the expo, a group of Chinese citizens published a letter to the Chinese authorities demanding that it deregulate the internet and enable Chinese users to

Figure 1.1: Haibao statues in Shanghai, 2010. Image © F. Schneider 2010.

freely access websites through search engines. On the evening of the same day, and probably as a response to this letter, the search giant Google followed through on earlier threats it had issued to stop its censoring practices in the PRC. The company abandoned its mainland search engine www.google.cn and redirected all traffic from that site to its Hong Kong equivalent www.google.hk, where the mainland's censorship laws do not apply (an almost minute-by-minute breakdown of the events of that day is recounted by Johnson 2010).

Back to matters of the expo: on 22 April 2010, the influential blogger, novelist, race-car driver, and enfant terrible Han Han (韩寒; see Strafella & Berg 2015) published on his blog a mock interview with himself about the Shanghai Expo, ostensibly to pre-empt journalists from asking him about the event. His comments were relayed through the internet and received coverage in domestic and foreign media; they would later be taken down from his blog, though copies are still available online (e.g. Han 2010).

One of the questions Han Han asks himself in the interview is how he feels about the World Fair's 2010 mascot Haibao. His answer (translated in Goldkorn 2010):

> Haibao has given people a really bad headache. I'm not even talking about his image, just his design. Haibao's original two-dimensional design has created a really difficult problem for those tasked with making him three dimensional: what should his backside look like? Does he have a tail? Does he have a butt? Does he have a butt crack? These are all unknown. That's why we can see towering Haibao statues whose fronts are all the same, but whose backsides, you will discover, may or may not have butt cracks. But recently, there are more without butt cracks because the butt cracks have already announced that they're leaving China.
>
> 海宝是一个让人非常头疼的东西，因为从城市中矗立的海宝雕像可看出，有的海宝没有股沟，有的海宝有股沟。但是最近以没有股沟的海宝居多，因为股沟已经离开中国了。

Importantly, the Chinese word for 'butt crack' (*gugou* 股沟) sounds similar to the transliteration for 'Google' (*guge* 谷歌), creating a tongue-in-cheek analogy between the mascot and China's information politics. The core statement remains implicit, though that does not make it any less provocative: due to the government's cyber politics and the departure of Google, China now resembles a person that lacks an anus and consequently has to process its faeces internally.

I have illustrated the interaction and meaning-making process in Figure 1.2 below. The lower part of the figure traces a number of important actors and how they interacted: the authorities, the designer, the Haibao symbol and statues, Google, and of course Han Han and the interview he issued. Again, each of these interactions might generate new questions and empirical analysis, expanding the network further, for instance to explore how China's central government creates and implements the censorship laws that affected Google, or the competitive dynamics in China's search engine market that made it a reasonable move for Google's executives to abandon their mainland endeavours. I have not added this kind of complexity here, since my concern is with Han Han's analogy, which is modelled in the top part of the figure.

One input space draws its signs from the Shanghai expo discourse and the symbolism of its mascot; it reflects social interactions between the Shanghai-based expo office, the designer, and the various cultural products associated with Haibao. Another input space draws from the

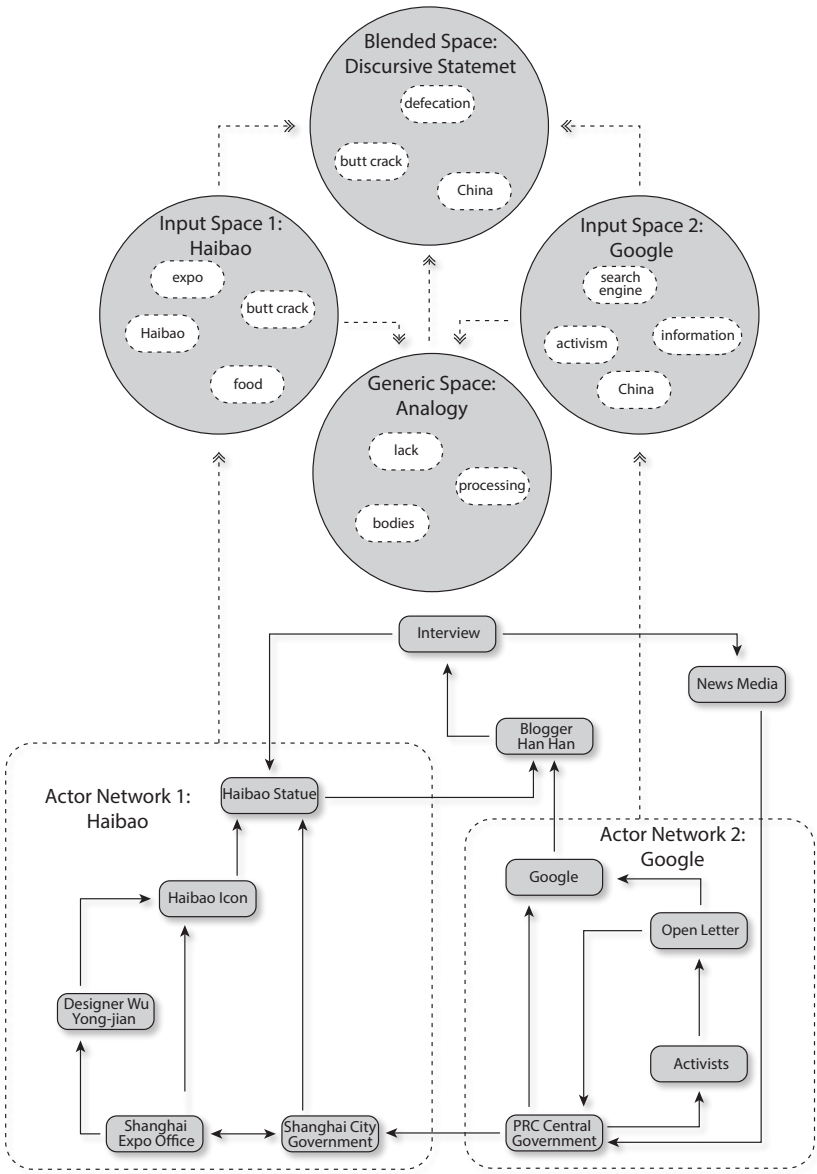

Figure 1.2: Blended Meanings and Haibao's Butt Crack. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

recent events surrounding Google's departure from China and the company's relationship with the PRC central authorities.

Below these two circles and the semiotic components they contain is a 'generic space' that contains commonalities between the two: each

contains an actor with a physical representation (Haibao's body vs. China's territory); each speaks of a lack (Haibao statue's lack of a butt crack vs China's lack of free search engines); in each case, something is processed (food vs information). The generic space is where the analogy is constructed.

Finally, Han Han's analogy invites his audience to 'project' selected analogous elements from the inputs to the 'blended space', which I have represented as the top circle. Here, the reader recombines the available signs with the help of the frame that Han Han has made available through his narrative, and this is what forms the discursive statement: on the eve of hosting an important international event, China is becoming more inward-looking. Note how this meaning is made plausible by the elements that the actor draws from: the expo symbolism and the wordplay involving the corporation's name. At the same time, the result is indeed more than the sum of the parts: neither input contained the idea of defecation, for example. This meaning becomes available during the interpretation because conceptual blending, as Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 48) write, encourages pattern completion, meaning that 'we see some parts of a familiar frame of meaning, and much more of the frame is recruited silently but effectively to the blend'. Not having a butt crack is one thing, but the important cognitive leap is to imagine what would *happen* if someone did not have a butt crack, and to then extend that logic to an entity that is not itself a person, and that most certainly does not have a humanoid anatomy (here: a country).

This example illustrates how micro-sociological processes create opportunities for actors to generate discourse, and how one specific actor draws from semiotic resources and cognitive frames to creatively assemble new meanings, which are injected back into networks where they may serve as political interventions. I will showcase and analyse numerous such examples throughout this book, along with the idiosyncratic processes that unfold as different actors get their hands on the communicative building-blocks. It is, for instance, by no means the case that Han Han's analogy allows for only a single interpretation, though certain interpretations are certainly more plausible in light of the frame that the author 'flags' for his target audience. This is then also true for official statements and symbols. As I will show, actors at networked spectacles expend a great deal of effort to disambiguate (and sometimes intentionally obscure) their messages by encouraging certain blended meanings to emerge through their semiotic manipulations.

1.6 Analysing networked spectacles

How, then, should such a study proceed? I have so far discussed the conceptual assumptions that fuel my analysis of networked spectacles, moving from theories of networked social interactions to accounts of how communication generates meaning. As I have pointed out, these theoretical considerations have very real practical implications: they focus attention on people, the cultural objects they produce, and the interactions that ensue between actors in successive situations. I have also suggested that we explore social and discursive processes by tracing the concrete activities of networked actors, the ways in which they assemble meanings in the form of cultural artefacts, and how they then feed the discourses that these artefacts relay back into the networks. In this book, I will apply this logic to China's networked spectacles, concretely to the large-scale, staged events that the PRC organised during the Hu-Wen administration: the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008, the 60th Anniversary of the PRC in 2009, and the Shanghai World Exposition in 2010.

My goal is twofold: firstly, it is to establish what kinds of stories these events told, what kinds of messages they contained, both for domestic and foreign audiences, and who shaped these messages. Secondly, it is to explore how these events served the CCP as watershed moments in its political, economic, and cultural development of China, and how they provided crucial sites for networked actors to field-test, calibrate, and perfect their approach to governance.

To this end, my study will focus on how different actors produced the three networked spectacles, constructed their discourses, and reworked networks of ideas in the process. Empirically, I have analysed the production and dissemination processes by conducting interviews with event planners, organisers, officials, journalists, and other media workers who were involved in creating the events. I have augmented the insights from those interviews with a close study of official documents, news reports, and academic accounts. These resources form the basis for my analysis of actor-networks and the interactions they enabled.

Where primary materials came into play, I have conducted discourse analyses of the statements that these materials contained (if not noted otherwise, all translations are my own). As pointed out above, the strength of marrying micro-sociological work with discourse analysis and semiotics is that this move encourages scholars to view communication

as contributing to a continuous flow of knowledge, assembled by senders of messages according to socio-cultural conventions (or codes) and transmitted to recipients who decode and interpret the messages. Understood in this way, we can capture such processes and analyse them empirically. We can ask: who constructs what messages, and what resources do they draw from during their interactions, to make those messages intelligible and (possibly) convincing to specific audiences? Answering this question will then also provide insights into the power dynamics that govern networked spectacles in China, and into the communication strategies that different actors adopt in order to shape the discourses at such events in line with their own ideas, world views, and interests.

Importantly, networked spectacles are created for mass consumption. They are mass spectacles. This means that the meanings they generate are by no means arbitrary, even if they are highly diverse. In order to function as mass communication, networked spectacles need to communicate their messages in such a way that the broadest possible audience will interpret and understand their meanings in similar ways (see Carroll 1998 for a discussion). This is not to say that different audience members may not come up with extremely idiosyncratic interpretations of what they are witnessing, but it usually means that such idiosyncrasies are rarely intended and not normally widespread. Where they are, this exception then deserves special scrutiny. Discourse analysis, semiotics, and conceptual blending provide useful methods for in turn exploring such unexpected meaning-making processes. It is then possible for researchers to analyse media products and cultural expressions in a way that can distil the most readily available meanings as well as interesting discursive innovations.

By breaking discourse down into discursive statements and then systematically analysing the components, it is possible to reconstruct the assumptions that informed the discourse. It is these methods that enable critical discourse research to shine a spotlight on the power relations that actors reinforce by establishing certain beliefs as part of a generally accepted worldview (see the contributions in Wodak & Krzyzanowksi 2008 and Wodak & Meyer 2009). But how should analysts deal with the methodological challenges that the complexity of networked spectacles creates? Mass communication processes like those that take place at networked spectacles combine various different discourses, and they do so in different modes and through different channels of communication.

Discursive statements frequently connect several topics, or what Siegfried Jäger (2004) calls different 'discourse strands'. For instance, statements about the connection between environmental sustainability and pre-modern Chinese philosophy, such as those that could be found at the Shanghai Expo (see chapter 6), become coherent when they appeal to collectively recognisable knowledge about the individual topics and their relationship. A study of networked spectacles then needs to remain sensitive to discursive juxtapositions and intertextualities, and this is why I have drawn from the conceptual blending approach outlined above which, together with the toolboxes from discourse analysis and semiotics, informs my qualitative study of meanings at China's networked spectacles.

In practice, I home in on diverse cultural products and sources to map how actors interweave 'strands' of discourse and generate meaning on such occasions. My study of the political discourses that the events communicate covers broadcasts of the events, news articles, event merchandise, exhibits, staged performances, cultural products like films and interactive displays, the physical spaces and buildings where the events took place, as well as official media guides and public relations materials.

As I have noted above, and as this list of sources also suggests, discourse does not consist solely of written or spoken text. It incorporates a large array of visual and acoustic cues, as well as the technical affordances of the media through which actors communicate. In practice, exploring these dimensions meant logging communication processes in protocols such as those that film studies scholars use (Korte 1999) or creating geographical representations of particular sites. It also meant venturing to those sites and participating in events, most notably during the Shanghai Expo, where I spent three weeks conducting first-hand research throughout July 2010.

1.7 Overview of the book

This book is organised into nine chapters. To provide context for this book's analyses and arguments, the next chapter discusses the relevance of networked spectacles, both in China and elsewhere. How should we make sense of large-scale events like parades or festivals, particularly when societies use mass-delivery technologies to frame these events and

disseminate their political messages to large numbers of people, as is the case with world expositions or Olympic Games? What distinguishes a large-scale event from a mass event, and what happens when mass events become mediated and turn into media events? What roles do such events play in modern politics, how do they reproduce or challenge the logic of modern economic production, and how do they accommodate specific approaches to communication and didactics? By drawing attention to recurring historical patterns in large-scale staged spectacles, for example in comparison to past cases like the Tokyo Olympics and Osaka Expo in Japan, the chapter shows why organising such events has become a crucial part of Chinese political communication.

Chapter 3 recounts how a diverse range of political actors designed and organised events such as the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo. The chapter first discusses the relationship between the Chinese state and the Communist Party, and how different agencies from these domains commission and control China's networked spectacles. It then goes on to show that this process is not a simple matter of top-down 'governing', but rather of collaborative 'governance' – an approach that later continued to inform the political practices of the PRC under Xi Jinping's leadership. To illustrate how this process works, the chapter analyses how different actors planned the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, how the authorities managed the Shanghai Expo territory, and what went into organising a national pavilion at that Expo. The chapter concludes with the argument that China's networked spectacles are examples of 'cultural governance', that is: of attempts to regulate society collaboratively by regulating the symbolic galaxy in which actors then enact their politics.

Following this discussion of how different actors create and regulate China's networked spectacles, chapter 4 turns to the meanings that official actors try to programme into the events. The chapter proceeds chronologically, first examining the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, then the 2009 PRC anniversary parade, and finally the Shanghai Expo with its iconic China Pavilion and the official exhibitions that this building housed. Finally, it discusses how official media products such as news reports, films, and documentaries framed the events, specifically the 2009 anniversary. As I show, the various official actors used the trope of China's 'Road to Revival' to tell stories of national rejuvenation, creatively deploying for instance young children and recognisable elements from

historical golden ages to locate contemporary China on a modernist time-line of progress.

A crucial component of this linear narrative is the notion of the Chinese nation. Official actors evoke this imagined community through their use of nationalist symbolism, but they also programme and re-programme what that nation should stand for at the start of the 21st century. Chapter 5 first discusses the relevance of nationalism in the Chinese context, and the ways in which actors communicate nationalism through mass media. It then explores how the Chinese authorities in charge of propaganda design and disseminate the key terminology of the nation, and how practices to define official ideological 'watch words' (known in Chinese as *tifa* 提法) also extend to visual cues and their emotional anchors. The chapter then examines how official actors use recognisable symbols to 'flag' national attachment during the PRC national anniversary, and it examines the rhetorical moves they make to suggest that the nation should be viewed the same way one might view a close, lovable family member. Next, the chapter takes a look at how China's networked spectacles constructed the nation as an ancestral land, drawing from historical elements to create a national narrative. Finally, the chapter returns to some of the conceptual considerations I outlined in this introduction, asking how these practices might invite participants to join in the experience of nationhood, for instance during an event like the world fair, where visitors playfully experiment with their status as national citizens in an imaginary, miniature world.

Chapter 6 returns to the ways in which China's networked spectacles re-imagined the past, specifically how they evoked pre-modern philosophy and culture to fill contemporary political concepts like 'harmony' (*hexie* 和谐) with meaning. I first discuss what role pre-modern ideas have played in contemporary China, and how they have been used by different groups of actors to promote either cosmopolitan or nativist visions of Chinese modernity. Next, I explore the harmony discourses that the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and the PRC anniversary parade relayed to audiences, focusing on how the Hu-Wen administration's concept of a 'harmonious society' became translated into domestic and foreign contexts, for instance by arguing that the PRC's government is inherently peaceful due to its embrace of a long-standing tradition of harmony. This discussion is followed by an analysis of how official actors involved in constructing the China Pavilion at the world expo used classic Chinese sources to intervene in harmony discourses and creatively reinvent what

a 'harmonious society' should stand for. Finally, the chapter shows how the China Pavilion's core exhibitions imagined harmony in hypermodern, urban terms, and how these imaginations became the backdrop for decidedly neoliberal arguments about how harmony should imply being individually responsible for one's behaviour.

While chapters 4 to 6 trace how official actors contributed to meanings that emerge from networked spectacles, chapters 7 and 8 turn to the question of what happens when non-official actors get their hands on the semiotic resources that official discourses relay. Chapter 7 asks what becomes of such building-blocks of meaning when they start to travel to foreign contexts. It first reviews how ideas about nation branding and soft power have informed the official attempts to steer meaning-making of Chinese cultural products outside the mainland, and it then examines how these attempts can become hijacked by actors with very different agendas. Following this discussion of explicit counter-discursive activities, the chapter takes a closer look at how foreign actors reproduced the semiotic components of official nationalist discourse to create advertisings for their products. Using the example of Coca Cola commercials, it turns out that such activities generally promote similar nationalistic parameters to those that the authorities endorse, but that they also subtly shift meanings in new directions, for instance by infusing available networks of meaning with commercial rationales, deploying nationalist stereotypes, or adding a cosmopolitan twist to their representations. Finally, the chapter explores how a discourse that was carefully designed to generate 'soft power' was broadcast on television outside the mainland, specifically how two different Taiwanese stations made sense of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony.

Chapter 8 extends this analysis of multifarious meaning-making by asking how different non-official actors tried to use China's networked spectacles to intervene in domestic Chinese discourses. The chapter begins with a discussion of theoretical arguments that envisage spectacles as powerful semiotic machines that effectively abolish the audience's ability to distinguish between reality and fiction. In contrast to this view, I present various examples of how actors at the Shanghai Expo reprogrammed meanings either to directly challenge or subtly shift what they perceived of as 'dominant' discourses. This included foreign national pavilions that aimed to persuade Chinese visitors of their ideological positions, but also the officially commissioned theme pavilions in which private domestic and foreign actors collaborated to

make meanings that did not fit with the official narratives of, for instance, the China Pavilion. This became particularly visible at the exhibition dedicated to showing visions of the future, where audiences were thrust into a utopian space that confronted them with ambiguous artistic imaginations of hypermodernity. Finally, the chapter turns to a case of domestic actors intervening in political discourses during a networked spectacle, specifically looking at the way that publications by the Southern Media Group in Canton took official discourses on the day of the PRC anniversary to create ambivalent statements about the Chinese nation, inviting readers to either follow the familiar nationalist framework the authorities promoted or step into alternative interpretations that opened up the potential for radically different blends of meanings regarding the Chinese nation at that particular moment in history.

To conclude these analyses, chapter 9 summarises the findings from the various chapters and emphasises the two main arguments of this book: that China's recent networked spectacles can shed light on the frameworks of meaning that inform politics in the PRC today, and that such events can help us understand in what ways politics and communication generally intersect in complex, modern societies. Aside from highlighting how the studies in this book might provide conceptual insights into 21st-century networked politics, the conclusion also stresses the continuities between China's networked spectacles during the Hu-Wen period and the discursive efforts that Xi Jinping's administration has subsequently made in its attempts to govern contemporary China.

2 *Arriving on the World Stage*

In the summer of 2010, I had reserved several weeks of research time to visit Shanghai and explore the expansive Expo territory. Media coverage both in China and abroad had reported on the many superlatives that marked the event: it was meant to be the world fair featuring the largest number of nations, the largest territory, and the most visitors. The city itself was plastered with expo posters and public service announcements, some extolling the virtues of a 'better city, better life' — the official slogan of the event — while others used the expo as an occasion to promote specific institutions or companies. One large poster announced that 'soldiers and civilians welcome the expo hand in hand' (军民携手迎世博); another advertised 'harmony alcohol' (*Hejiu* 和酒), a drink that according to the ads also proudly witnessed previous national events such as Hong Kong's return to the PRC, the establishment of direct flights to Taiwan, or the Beijing Olympics (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Advertisement for 'Harmony Alcohol' during the 2010 Shanghai World Exposition. Image © F. Schneider 2010.

As I was travelling on the recently constructed metro line number 8 south to the expo stop at Yaohua Road, TV screens blasted expo news at commuters: '330 million visitors so far', 'temperature outside now 40 degrees Celsius', 'visitors should stay in the shade; drink plenty of liquids'. At the stop, I filed through the underground tunnels with the crowd, past the security check and main entrance, and up onto the walkway spanning the 'Expo Axis', an elevated concourse that ran from the southern Pudong entrances north across the territory. The red China Pavilion towered to the east, commanding immediate attention, and beyond it lay an impressive landscape of futuristic constructions. To the west, behind the large Expo centre and the theme pavilions, bizarre buildings rose before the backdrop of the massive Lupu Bridge. Below, thousands of people were lining up to enter popular exhibits, pouring into the shaded areas to escape the sun, marvelling at the grand edifices all around, snapping selfies, and filming the vistas on their mobiles. The lights, the sounds, the super-sized attractions, everything seemed designed to overwhelm.

The Shanghai World Exposition was a spectacle, a large-scale staged event that is organised in such a way that it has a profound impact on participants, due to its elaborate designs and multi-modal aesthetics. It was also a 'mass' event, in that it mobilised large numbers of people, and it relied on these masses to truly become spectacular. What is more, the spectacle was 'networked', bringing together a diverse array of actors who would plan, organise, execute, and ultimately embody the expo experience, which created a challenge, but also an opportunity to experiment with various ways of handling such complex interactions.

Throughout this book, I use the term 'networked spectacle' to describe major sports events, national celebrations, and international exhibitions, but what precisely characterises such events? In this chapter, I discuss how scholarship has traditionally made sense of staged events, what role mass mobilisation plays in that context, and what happens when events are mediated, for instance through broadcasting technologies. While many of these discussions also relate to spontaneous events such as natural disasters, accidents, and unanticipated social revelations, my focus here is primarily on carefully organised and widely anticipated staged spectacles.

An important question in that context is what makes an event a 'mass event'? What distinguishes, for example, a private birthday party, a friendly game of dodge ball, or a museum exhibit from a national anniversary, the Olympic Summer Games, or a world's fair? Intuitively,

the simple answer would be that it is the scale, and the degree to which an event is relayed through mass media such as broadcasting, that makes it a *mass* event. This indeed captures crucial dimensions of mass events, but it does not tell the whole story.

The experience at the Shanghai Expo I have described above provides a glimpse into the impact that a mass event can have on visitors. My first visit to the event left me, frankly, awestruck. I have since heard many visitors and participants report a similar sense of wonder when they recall their visits to the site; a sense that they were witnessing something extraordinary. This sense of amazement is a crucial part of networked spectacles more generally.

What, then, makes networked spectacles tick? One important observation about these spectacles comes from sociologists who have studied mass events, and who have argued that they constitute a specific 'genre' of collective human activity that has much to do with 'modernity'. Another important insight stems from media studies scholars, who point out that media technologies shape the meanings of organised media events, that basic narrative templates turn them into shared stories, and that such processes create a wellspring of collective symbols that form a 'symbolic universe' (Berger & Luckmann 1967: 92-108). This 'galaxy of symbols', as Rydell (1984: 3) calls it, is then deployed to various ends. Finally, we should keep in mind that such events have profound, transformative social impacts and that varying stakeholders try to use them for their own political or commercial purposes. Together, these considerations then provide the foundation for understanding how and why the Chinese authorities have placed such a high premium on organising these types of events.

2.1 Mass events and modernity

To have better purchase on the workings of networked spectacles, this chapter explores the meanings of terms like 'mass', 'media', and 'spectacle', moving from discussions of organised large-scale events to mediated spectacles, and examining along the way what makes sport events, parades, or world fairs the highly political affairs I refer to as networked spectacles throughout this book. First, it is prudent to ask what marks an event as a 'mass' event. I have suggested above that the answer might simply be scale. After all, a group of friends playing

music together is a decidedly different 'happening' from a rock concert with an audience of thousands. However, it is not the scale alone that 'massifies' events. Scale is a shorthand; a container for a set of complex processes that inform how such events work. The scale of an event has organisational and social consequences, it is linked to the broad public appeal that organisers attempt to build into such an event, and it has psychological implications for those who participate in it.

All of these dimensions are closely tied to modernity. Modernity is a set of human actions and cognitive frameworks that imply certain ways of going about life. Where they are adopted, these modern ways of life have profound implications, radically restructuring our world across at least five dimensions, all of which are interconnected: economics, the environment, politics, society, and thought.

Economically, modernity emphasises industrialisation, urbanisation, and economies of scale. It implies increased connectivity between natural resources and chains of production, and widespread dissemination of material goods for rapid increases in welfare. These results, and the many shortcomings or 'distortions' that accompany them, can be brought about by a variety of mechanisms, be they centrally planned or derived from the capitalist model of ostensibly free markets.

The construction of modern economies is closely intertwined with urban development, industrial construction, and resource extraction, which in turn recast our natural environment in often radically new ways, with all the detrimental environmental impacts associated with invasive human activity. The scale of these changes has led some scholars to refer to our current historical period as the Anthropocene, an age in which humans affect their global environment more than that environment affects them (see Duara 2015).

Politically, modern modes of organisation combine territorially defined participatory politics and hierarchical decision-making structures to make it possible to govern the large numbers of people required for advanced industrial production, that is: the 'masses'. Much as with economic models, the challenge of governing large populations across expansive territories has generated diverse strategies, some authoritarian, others democratic, but all tied to the invention of the nation-state, a quintessential technology of modernity (see Gellner 1983/2006).

Socially and culturally, modernity creates pressures to reform or wholly abandon previously influential institutions, removing or

revamping the power of clans, families, temples, and churches, relegating many communal activities to the 'private' realm, and transferring power and the responsibility over public activities to the increasingly complex system of the nation-state.

This then also entails a conceptual rethinking of what society is and how people fit into the modern world. Modernity implies that human history is a linear progression through time, driven by philosophical enlightenment as well as scientific and technological progress, notably progress in the areas that 'shrink' our world (e.g. transportation and communication), and it prompts a number of ideological innovations meant to weave the disparate, disruptive elements of modernity into a coherent explanation of the world that suggests a fundamental yet inevitable breach with the times that came before.

Viewed this way, it should be clear that modernity does not neatly mark a specific historical phase or era. As I have discussed in the introduction, scholars of modernity have pointed out that the very idea of historical 'ages' or 'eras' is itself an invention of modernity (e.g. Graeber 2004), and I have suggested elsewhere (Schneider 2018: ch.2) that it might be fruitful instead to think of modernity as a 'mode' of social arrangement that has spawned a set of conceptual and practical technologies. This mode interacts across different times and places with other modes (e.g. 'tradition', 'the digital', etc.), imbuing each locale with modern rationales about how life should be organised, but also creating an endless array of variations on the modern theme (see also Gluck 2011, Hobwbawm 1983/2013), even if many modern assumptions have their origin in a specific 'Euromodernity' (Dirlik 2011c: 4) derived from enlightenment-era experiences dating back roughly three centuries (see also Dirlik 2011a). As a consequence, many contemporary societies strive to be 'modern', and yet, for example, Chinese modernity is not quite the same as American modernity, British modernity, Japanese modernity, and so forth. This is the result of complex human acts of social assemblage.

The reason I sketch these contours of modernity here is that the very idea of a 'mass' event is a decidedly modern affair. It is through the modern mode of thinking that artists, politicians, merchants, dissidents and so on invent the mass public in the first place; modernity opens up innovative ways for actors to inspire group cohesion, provide entertainment, teach certain lessons, illustrate their beliefs, and make a particular social reality plausible. As Collins (2004: 1647) writes, large-scale sporting events are, for instance, 'scheduled, predictable, and

contrived (using a ritual technology to generate what might be considered an artificial ritual experience), and they bring together a community that has no other coherence, and no other purpose, than the experience of the peaks of ritual emotions itself'.

Of course, pre-modern societies also featured large communal events, such as pagan festivals and religious celebrations (see Dowden 2000: 178-179 & 202-203), or contests like the ancient Olympic Games or Roman gladiator matches (see the various contributions in Christensen et al. 2014, particularly Dunkle 2014, Fagan 2014, and Kyle 2014). There are indeed parallels between these precursors and later mass events, which often pick up on traditional themes and tropes to then reinvent them in contemporary contexts. However, pre-modern antecedents that involved large numbers of people are themselves better classified as 'large-scale events' rather than as 'mass events', since the latter take on new qualities in terms of organisation, participation, and social relevance. During mass events, actors incorporate and tie together various elements of modernity, which sets these events apart from earlier examples. Take the idea of the international event: pre-modern events in ancient Athens or Rome, for example, may to some extent have been multi-cultural, drawing participants from diverse locales in the Hellenic and Roman worlds, but such spectacles were never 'inter-national' (i.e. taking place between nations) — the technology of the 'nation' had not yet been invented, and an 'international' order emerged only at the onset of modernity (Anderson 2006), after the late middle ages in Europe (Gellner 1983/2006).

In that sense, the mass event is itself a modern technology, and as such it requires a number of ideational and organisational changes to the templates that pre-modern events arguably provided, for instance recasting participants as 'the masses', designing the event as a vehicle for popular mobilisation, presenting the event as 'historic' and as an instance of 'progress', and tying its organisational practices to the nation-state and modern forms of industrial production.

This close link between mass events and modernity has ensured that these events have become a calling card for signalling modernist credentials. This is the case for national mass events like parades and mass assemblies, which serve to mobilise large numbers of people in the name of a modern cause while also signalling the citizenry's ostensible support for that cause. Military parades are a good example of how a mass event template has become adopted and shared as a genre of

modernity (see Figure 2.2), even among actors who would otherwise insist that their modern projects shared very little in common. Despite variations in execution and message, the general format and iconography of contemporary American, French, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, or North Korean national celebrations overlap eerily with each other, as well as with past mass events organised e.g. in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, or Mao's China. A good example of this is military parades. It would seem that a society does not qualify as a modern nation if its state does not march its means of exerting violence across urban boulevards and squares at regular intervals. It should come as no surprise that those who agitate on behalf of radically nativist modern projects, for instance Donald Trump, are so enamoured by such displays of state power. Indeed, the lack of such events in countries like contemporary Germany and Japan often gives both foreign and domestic pundits with conservative, realist leanings cause to lament that these nation-states are not (yet) 'normal' members of international society.

Figure 2.2: Parades on France's Bastille Day, 14 July 1790 and 2014. Image (left): Wikimedia Commons 2017; Image (right): Pierre-Yves Beaudouin 2014 (both Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 4.0). (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bastille_Day_2014_Paris_-_Color_guards_034.jpg)

It is not just national mass events like military parades and state anniversaries that provide modernist certification. Events like Olympic Games and World Expositions similarly offer organisers the opportunity to showcase their relevance on the world stage in a widely accepted and shared international format. It is a mark of honour and respect to be awarded the chance to host one of these prestigious events, and host cities and countries use such occasions to boost their own 'brand'. This

has real social and economic consequences, which I will return to below, but the relevance of international events is to no small degree symbolic.

East Asian examples are illustrative in this regard: in Japan, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics were a watershed moment in the country's post-war reconstruction. The event signalled to the international community that the State of Japan had moved on from its wartime past and was ready to be a member of the international community. Moreover, the Olympic Games provided an opportunity to redesign the city of Tokyo in ways that would revitalise its symbolic relevance as the country's post-war capital (Tagsold 2010). Six years later, the Osaka World Exposition extended this sense of a fresh start, showing off futuristic architectural designs and technological innovations that would herald a new era of prosperity and respect for modern Japan (Wilson 2012).

South Korea's government attempted to follow the Japanese example in 1988 by hosting the Olympic Games in its capital Seoul. The leadership had initially hoped to legitimate its dictatorial politics, though the event later turned out inadvertently to have created a stage for the democratic opposition further to promote South Korea's political transition towards electoral reform (see Bridges 2008 and Larson & Park 1993), demonstrating how modern mass events can become arenas for complex domestic political assemblages.

The PRC leadership seems to have at least implicitly modelled its approach to international mass events on Japan's example as well. As Wasserstrom (2016: 10-11) writes:

> China's leaders might have, at least in private, considered the Tokyo 1964/Beijing 2008 analogy compelling on several levels — even if their suspicion of a historic adversary (and present competitor) made them reluctant to voice this sentiment openly. China, too, had been rapidly climbing the global economic hierarchy and wanted to move higher still. It was preparing to follow its turn at the Olympics with its own Expo ... China's own modern history had seen moments of such destructive extremism (the Great Leap Forward) and defeat (Japanese invasions in the 1930s) that, by 2008, it had good reason to want to put those experiences far behind it.

The Beijing Olympics and Shanghai World Exposition showcased, in quick succession, images of a hyper-modern China that was ready to be a responsible partner in world affairs, and this imagery in turn promised

to legitimate the leadership's model of development, 'one that is neither purely state socialist nor free market, but that advertises a vision of success for the twenty-first century' (Fernsebner 2010: 669).

The international mass event is an excellent format for generating a sense of membership in the international community, among both domestic and foreign audiences, since it provides an opportunity to present locally produced cultural and political discourses using an internationally acceptable grammar and iconography. Events like Olympic Games and World Expositions come with a range of international community markers, whether in the form of institutionalised rituals such as flag raisings, the playing of anthems, and other ceremonies, or in the form of background processes that have established themselves as 'best-practice' procedures, e.g. commercial sponsorships, advertising, and diplomatic protocols. To demonstrate literacy in this language of the mass event is tantamount to being initiated into the club of respectable modern nations.

2.2 Common themes in mass events

The close connection between mass events and modernity imbues them with a recurring set of themes, which often interact in contradictory ways. These themes are most visible in the discourses that mass events produce — in press announcements and speeches, in exhibits and ceremonies — but they can run deep through social interactions, informing how agents produce, stage, and experience such events. Scholars of mass events have examined the many modernist dimensions of event discourses in great detail, with Maurice Roche (2003) arguably providing the most thorough discussion in his seminal book *Mega-Events and Modernity*. I will confine my brief overview to some of the most common and most hotly-debated dimensions: the legacies of imperialism and colonialism, and the ways these legacies are implicated in racist and sexist practices; capitalist themes, particularly in their neoliberal guise, with their close connection to representations of modern science, technology, and design; and the ubiquitous tensions between nationalism, internationalism, supra-nationalism, and cosmopolitanism.

Many mass events have their roots in imperial projects of the 18th and 19th centuries. This is certainly true of the bombastic grand military parades popular for example in Victorian England, Napoleon's France,

Tsarist Russia, or the Prussian-led German Empire. Urban sites like the Arc de Triomphe in Paris or Horse Guards Parade in London remain monuments to such traditions. Yet imperialist themes have also been at the core of many large-scale exhibitions: the modern world fair may have officially started as a national exhibition in 19th-century France and England, but the format was intimately tied to, and in some instances coterminous with, imperialist ambitions that stretched far beyond the respective domestic context.

In fact, displaying faux native villages of exotic colonial lands and the goods and peoples of fantastic 'Oriental' places was a hallmark of exposition culture (see Qureshi 2011), for instance at 'imperial expos' and insidious colonial 'human zoos' (see Figure 2.3). Examples include the exhibits at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London with their breakdown of foreign cultures into colonial resources and raw materials (Greenhalgh 2011: 98 & 103), the 'displays' of actual Apache and Igorot tribespeople at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis (Gilbert 2009), or the many 'Völkerschau' colonial events in Germany, where organisers like zookeeper Carl Hagenbeck showcased 'savages' from Austronesia, Lapland, Northern Africa, or Greenland (Dreesbach 2005). Examining American expositions at the close of the 19th century, Rydell (1984: 6) writes:

> World's fairs existed as part of a broader universe of white supremacist entertainments; what distinguished them were their scientific, artistic, and political underpinnings. Whether or not they were the most important sources for shaping racial beliefs, they certainly were among the most authoritative. International expositions, where science, religion, the arts, and architecture reinforced each other, offered Americans a powerful and highly visible, modern, evolutionary justification for long-standing racial and cultural prejudices.

Roche (2003: 57-64) has chronicled similar practices in Britain, highlighting the dominance of imperialist themes during a series of expo events in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, culminating in the 1924/1925 British Empire Exhibition in London's Wembley Park. His assessment of the ideological thrust of such events is worth quoting here in full (Ibid.: 60):

Figure 2.3: Colonial Exhibitions and Human Zoos. Left: Image titled 'Chief El Capitano and Archers in Negrito Village', 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (Missouri History Museum, public domain); Right: Poster for the 1928 Human Zoo in Stuttgart (public domain).

> ... imperial expos were ideological vehicles used to impress national publics, and also to present an image to other imperialist powers. They typically displayed the cultures of their colonies as different, exotic and interesting, but also as flawed, inferior, stagnant or otherwise 'in need' of the imperial nation's intervention to control their destinies. Connected with this they typically developed and promoted a uniquely national 'civilizing mission' ideology involving notions of the imperial nation's scientific and technological superiority enabling them to create tangible improvements and 'progress' through transformation and land use, culture and people in the colonies. The British, French and Americans all had their own particular versions of this 'progress-bringing' 'civilising mission' as a thematic running through and connecting both their imperial expos and their more conventionally internationalist expos.

Imperialist ambitions and colonial practices infused the world fair genre with strong racist and orientalist currents, relaying the host country's 'civilising mission', and often putting the naked bodies of 'primitives' on display to fuel European and American colonialist rationales. It has been one of the core criticism of world expositions that such racist, and frequently sexist, fantasies remain undercurrents in contemporary iterations, albeit in subtler guises. William Callahan (2012: 256), for

instance, outlines the recurring practice at the Shanghai Expo 2010 of telling ostensibly cosmopolitan stories of intercultural exchange through the trope of inter-civilisational marriages between European or American men and Chinese women, reproducing subtle power relations through gendered and racially charged stereotypes, 'suggesting that this is the proper global harmony of East and West'.

Imperialist and colonialist representations with their many insidious racist and sexist themes have indeed continued to shape the narratives of mass events throughout their history, but they have also interacted in complicated ways with other themes, for example when proponents of universal suffrage or of workers' rights promoted more egalitarian ideas through sports or exposition genres. Indeed, mass events are full of such tensions, which should not come as a surprise: such events provide diverse social and political groups access to conduits of power (Roche 2003: 39), providing microcosms in which the social, political, and economic contradictions of the times come to be reflected. In a way, they allow actors to create what Jameson (2007: 15) has called 'utopian enclaves': spaces in which alternatives to the mainstream can be imagined and acted out.

This is particularly evident in the way capitalism informs mass events and their depiction of modernity. Organising mass events is made possible through state and industry investments, and capitalist actors in turn use these events to turn a profit while simultaneously promoting discourses that justify their preferred modes of production and consumption. These discourses are often steeped in modernist tropes of technological progress, urban development, and large-scale industrial or urban achievements (factories, edifices, bridges, etc). Just take as an example the industrialist exhibits that are regularly placed at the centre of modern world expositions (see Figure 2.4 for a historical example). What is more, mass events generate 'box office' revenues and function as trade shows, create big business opportunities for merchandising and advertising, and are also generally flanked by commercial activities in the tourism industry (Yu et al. 2012).

Yet as unabashedly capitalist as these events may be, they also provide spaces to reassess prevalent modes of development, for instance by moving away from economies of scale and emphasising ecologically sustainable local production and consumption patterns. They also offer unions and labour groups an opportunity to promote their causes, and

Figure 2.4: Quintessential Modernity: The 'Gallery of Machines' at the 1889 Exposition Universelle Internationale in Paris. Image in the public domain through the US Library of Congress (tag: PD-old-auto-1923).

they shine a spotlight on the relationship between professional and amateur activities, for instance in sports.

Another recurring thematic tension surrounds the role of nations at mass events. Nationalism is very much on display at world fairs, where 'national pavilions' have been a core feature since the 1876 Philadelphia expo (Roche 2003: 45). During Olympic Games and other large sporting events, contests are frequently framed as standoffs between national teams or athletes. A case in point is the antagonism that frequently accompanies competitions between East Asian national football or baseball teams (see Mangan et al. 2013), but such nationalist antagonisms also fuel sports spectatorship more broadly. The fervour that medal tables generate among supporters of Olympic national teams serves as a reminder of this nationalist dimension in an ostensibly cosmopolitan sports endeavour (see Van Hilvoorde et al. 2010). As Rowe and his colleagues write (1998: 133), 'there is surely no cultural force more equal to the task as creating an imaginary national unity than the international sports-media complex.'

Many mass events are decidedly inter-nationalist in this sense, meaning that they portray the world as naturally divided into nations that compete — but also cooperate — with each other on fair and equal terms. Nations, their states, and the idea of 'countries' are often conflated at mass events, and Penelope Harvey (1996: 50-51) has made the case that this is not per se a contradiction, at least not within the European and American model of society that provides the conceptual building blocks for modern mass events. She writes:

> The model depends upon a metaphor of scale, whereby the larger unit, whether this is taken to be a national or an international community, reproduces the form of its constituent parts. Both part and whole function as self-contained, coherent, bounded entities which are mutual transformations of each other through simple principles of aggregation and disaggregation. These principles of equivalence between social units (individuals, nations, states, etc.) tend to naturalize a particular form of sociality in which each individual unit is deemed to hold a particular identity which can be represented and contrasted with other similar units. Thus, while individual units differ from each other, there is an equivalence in this difference.

However, international mass events have also been instrumentalised in the name of supra-nationalist endeavours, most notoriously by Nazi Germany, but also during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and the United States of America each tried to co-opt the Olympic movement as part of their superpower ambitions (cf. Roche 2003: 112-115). Such attempts have at times departed radically from the egalitarian and individualist models of sociality that Harvey describes, and it is an open question whether contemporary iterations also betray such supra-national motives: some observers have for instance made the case that Chinese mass events are instances of a wholly different supra-national world model (see Barabantseva 2009, 2012), one that starts from the level of 'all under heaven' (*tianxia* 天下; see Zhao 2005), and then extends cosmological rationales to various other relations (e.g. between state and citizen, between husband and wife, between father and son).

I will return to such arguments in later chapters, especially in chapter 6, but it is important to note here that the constituent parts and themes of mass events do not always connect neatly. This is apparent

from the tensions between nationalist and cosmopolitan discourses: sitting alongside inter-nationalist and supra-nationalist themes, mass events also have a dimension that emphasises unrestrained transnational exchanges between individual people, civil society groups, and enterprises.

Take, for example, the theme of the Beijing Olympics, which explicitly envisaged an event that would bring transnational participants and audiences together as 'One World' sharing 'One Dream', or the way that the Shanghai Expo mascot I discussed in the introduction uses the Chinese character for people (*ren* 人) as inspiration. In a similar vein, the 2010 expo logo resembles three people holding hands, forming the Chinese character for 'world' (*shi* 世). Such thematic choices sit awkwardly next to nationalist flag-raising ceremonies at sporting events and displays of international power hierarchies in the form of exposition pavilions.

In all of this, modernist conceptions of science, technology, and design run through the mass events, conceptually connecting discourses of neoliberal capital, industrial nation, and cosmopolitan citizens of the world. Parades and ceremonies frequently feature floats, performances, or speeches that evoke technological development and progress, but the most arresting visual representations of this discourse are found at world expositions, where organisers create futuristic visions of what society should become. Again, these visions are never entirely unified. Greenhalgh (2011: 235) points out how ideas about design and architecture have created contradictions at post-war world expositions:

> Most [expos] were the site of tensions between a number of visions of design and architecture: design as a means of supporting an expanding capitalist economy, design as a disinterested art form, design as a vehicle for political propaganda, design as an enlightenment tool for the creation of a better world. More simply, they celebrated the clash of material pragmatism with idealist utopianism. Never was the desire to improve the world more completely intertwined with the determination to make money.

Mass events indeed weave together civilisational messages with nationalist glorifications, racist prejudices, and sexist stereotypes, but they also juxtapose and contrast seemingly dominant visions of materialist, capitalist modernity with alternatives: with idealistic design choices, promises of egalitarian futures, and spaces for diverse interactions. This

makes mass events highly complex, multifaceted, and ultimately messy affairs that are, in Greenhalgh's words, 'all too human' (ibid.). But how do visitors interact with these many thematic tensions, and what happens to this complexity once *mass* events turn into *media* events, that is: once actors with access to mass media distribution networks relay meanings about such events, turning them into 'high holidays of mass communication' that hang 'a halo over the television set' (Dayan & Katz 1994: 1)?

2.3 From mass event to media spectacle

I have so far discussed mass events, that is: large-scale events designed and staged to attract mass participation by mobilising modern subjects as citizens and/or consumers. The genre of the mass event has traditionally been patronising in its messages, often explicitly and unapologetically so: opening ceremonies, parades, and exhibits are meant to teach, to showcase, to convince, and sometimes to preach. An open question is whether these didactics can have the desired effect, but also how the planned and organised mass event 'travels' as it is communicated more widely, using modern information and communication technologies like newspapers and broadcasting. What happens when the mass event becomes a *media* event?

Arguably the seminal work on media events is Dayan & Katz's (1994) study of ceremonial events that are televised live, such as sports competitions, royal weddings, state funerals, high-profile diplomatic exchanges, and so on. As Dayan & Katz show, such events become a crucial part of public life. The broadcasting becomes an almost sacred moment that commands the attention of national and international audiences. It interrupts and disrupts everyday activities, but it does so in a highly planned and advertised fashion, which in turn makes televised events an excellent vehicle for community building, political discourses, and the construction of historic moments. Dayan & Katz outline the stories that govern such media events, which they classify into 'contests, conquests, and coronations'; each of these genres provides communicative and narrative tools to create arguments about contemporary society and inspire various kinds of loyalty.

Dayan & Katz's account was pathbreaking at the time of its publication, and even though its cases and its singular focus on television may seem anachronistic now, the many insightful observations about how audiences

experience historic events through television can tell us much about mediation and media psychology. As Sonnevend (2018: 125) writes in her appreciation of Dayan & Katz's book, 'there are still moments that glue millions and occasionally billions to screens, there are still events that are discussed for years to come, setting a standard for future occasions'.

I will pick up some of these threads below, in my discussion of media priming and framing, but I will otherwise depart from Dayan & Katz's work in two important ways. Firstly, I trace many of the social and discursive practices surrounding mass events to domains that lie outside television broadcasting (for a similar update of iconic events in the context of transnational mediation see Sonnevend 2016). TV still plays a major role in how audiences experience mass events today, but so do digital reproductions of, interventions into, and alternatives to the classic broadcasting process, e.g. in the form of edited DVDs or Youtube videos. I have also analysed cultural products such as exhibitions, newspaper articles, online commentaries, PR materials, and so on, which requires attention to wider realms of mediation.

Secondly, and maybe more crucially, my interest goes beyond mediation; it lies with the various ways in which actors negotiate, collaborate, but also contest and challenge the meanings that get assembled at mass events. I am interested in how this multitude of actors uses mass events to experiment with and establish forms of governance. This is arguably a dimension that Dayan & Katz sidestep, and it is for this reason that my own analysis focuses primarily on networks.

Nevertheless, mediation is an important component of contemporary mass events, and the term 'media event' rightly draws attention to this dimension. Much of what was true for televised mass events at the time that Dayan & Katz published their work remains true today. For instance, it is important to call into mind the different audiences that play a role during mediated events.

As Rauer (2006: 260) explains, 'audiences' interact with mediated events and their messages at three levels. The 'first-order audience' includes the people who witness the event first-hand, for instance the visitors to a world fair or the stadium crowd at a sports event. Members of this audience are an important element of the spectacle, since they participate directly and become part of the performance or activity. Their interactions create the kind of 'entrainment' that Collins (2004: 85) discusses: bodily experiences, often based on collective rhythmic activities, such as cheering, laughing, applauding, enacting a 'wave',

hugging, singing, etc, and which create a large part of the emotional dynamics that make networked spectacles so powerful (see also chapter 5 in this book). As Collins writes (ibid.: 75), 'this is essentially what the lure of the game-spectacle is all about: the pleasure of those moments of having one's own emotions raised by a noisy crowd expressing the same thing.'

The 'second-order audience', following Rauer (2006), consists of the media workers who filter, rework, and relay the event on the ground. These specialists create the mass-media product that will then circulate through media networks, providing semiotic signposts for how to understand the event, and blending different potential meanings to create discourse. Through these interactions, media workers of course also witness the staged spectacle as participants, making choices as to what elements to represent and in what way, and their interactions can lead them to feel swept away by the entrainment that the event encourages. Second-order actors of this sort are not removed from the spectacle, they do not stand outside it as disaffected observers; they are part of the events interaction ritual chains.

Finally, the 'third-order audience' consists of viewers and readers who experience the event through media, e.g. through newspapers, radio, and television broadcasts, and increasingly through digital relay technologies associated with the internet. Importantly, these audience members are not passive consumers either; they blend various meanings as they experience the mediated event, and they interact with others, relaying their impressions through their bodily reactions and discursive statements, for instance as they watch the event unfold in a pub, celebrate it at a friend's place, read about it in the news while sitting in a café amidst strangers, or comment on it at the office after having watched it at home, alone, with a cold alcoholic beverage.

In that sense, all of these actors, whether they are part of the first, second, or third order audience, collaborate in creating the discourses through their actions, for example by cheering or booing (first order), by assembling information and commenting on the event (second order), or by discussing the event with other media users (third order). Today, digitally enabled third-order audiences may even feed their own discourses back into the media production cycle, for instance when commenting on Youtube videos, 'liking' certain articles on social media, or micro-blogging live and directly to members of first-, second-, or third-order audiences as events unfold in real time.

Rauer's distinction between different orders of audiences is a reminder that networked spectacles involve a staggering number of people, in different roles, who all participate in constructing discourses. This is not to say, however, that the meanings that emerge through such events are arbitrary, or that generating these meanings is a free-for-all. Not all participants are equal. Organisers of networked spectacles have the power to set the guideposts within which discourses are subsequently constructed, and gatekeepers in the mass media are positioned at crucial nodes in the complex communication networks that allow them to decide if and how the event is relayed to a mass audience.

I have discussed above how network theory might shed light on how power works during these processes. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to point out two interrelated mechanisms that allow media workers to create the mediated event and assemble its discourse in ways that encourage specific interpretations. These are the ability firstly to construct the event as a spectacle and secondly to rely on certain psychological mechanisms to affect other actors: priming audiences with symbolic meanings, setting the news agenda once the event occurs, and framing the issues that revolve around the event.

2.4 Programming the spectacle

Mass events are a genre of entertainment, but they are also what Jäger (2004) has called 'discursive events'; they are opportunities to highlight specific issues and revamp their meanings. There are of course many more types of discursive events than those I discuss in this book, many of which come to function as 'natural' rather than 'formal' rituals (Collins 2004: 70). Natural disasters, wars and crimes, major accidents, or the activities of celebrities can all become discursive events in their own right. These are occasions for actors in positions of power to legitimate authority, rationalise social processes, and construct risks (see also Beck 1992).

Discursive events provide opportunities to politicise certain issues, i.e. turning them into problems that then require state action and the allocation of public resources (see Edelman 1988: ch.2). They can even lead to a process that scholars from the Copenhagen School of international politics have called 'securitising': the construction of issues as existential threats that require emergency measures that take place

outside the sphere of established rules (Wæver 2004). Discursive events can be occasions to stage a collective crisis.

These processes can play a role in any event that becomes relayed through discourses, mediated to a large audience, and constructed as spectacularly important. Mass events are particularly interesting in this regard because they are explicitly designed to be spectacular, and positively so. Such large-scale spectacles require a certain degree of 'buy-in' on the part of the audiences. Mass events encourage participants and viewers to suspend their disbelief; they prompt audiences simultaneously to view the spectacle as exceptional while accepting its premise and its messages as so crucial that they potentially become unquestionable. Spectacles consist of discursive manipulations that invite audiences to switch off their critical faculties and embrace coherent yet artificial narratives, at least for a time. I believe this is what Guy Debord (1967/2010: 12) meant when he wrote:

> The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than 'that which appears is good, that which is good appears'. The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

To Debord, the degree to which he believed society had embraced the spectacular was a matter of profound concern. While one might take issue with Debord's interpretation of spectators as passive audiences, much of his criticism is worth taking seriously.

That said, it is also important to acknowledge that spectacles are able to generate a 'monopoly of appearance' only because they are highly appealing and indeed rewarding. They have to be, otherwise they would not succeed. Witnessing and experiencing a spectacle is profoundly gratifying, since it promises to sweep us up in a comfortable, immersive bubble of fun and wonder. This is why we are able to engross ourselves in theme parks, fun fairs, blockbuster movies, page-turner novels, triple-A video games, and so on. The spectacular is enjoyable, both on a personal level and as a social event. Our interactions at such events imbue them with meaning and 'emotional energy' (Collins 2004: 68), which makes them memorable.

However, spectacles contain within them two major elements that make them ideological, in the pejorative sense that they promote a false consciousness of social relations that ultimately threatens to reinforce systems of oppression. The first issue here is that the spectacular is created through material processes that are frequently linked to acts of exploitation, e.g. when modern spectacles like theme parks or blockbuster movies are created within a capitalist economy that enables commercial elites to extract profits by deploying wage labour. Our pleasure as members of the audience is built on numerous invisible moments of alienation for those who are producing the spectacle for us: the builders and teamsters, caterers and technicians, turnstyle workers and cleaning personnel, and the many people who had to make way for the gentrification of entire event territories, e.g. through forced evictions.

The second issue is that spectacles artificially construct a sense of significance; spectacles do violence to anyone setting priorities in their lives that differ from those that the spectacle dictates. As a practical example, just try to avoid the attention-vortex of whatever TV series, sporting event, or celebrity scandal currently demands public engagement. It can be done, but it comes at the price of communal judgement and potential social isolation. These two dimensions of the spectacle have been a matter of serious concern for scholars of popular culture, fuelling much criticism by French poststructuralists like Debord, but also by critical theory scholars from the Frankfurt School or British Cultural Studies. In this line of argument, spectacles are designed in ways that reproduce inequalities while encouraging conformity.

Regardless of how we assess the power of pop-culture spectacles, my point here is that similar operations are at play in politics more broadly. As Edelmann (1988: 7) writes, 'regimes and proponents of political causes know that it takes much coercion, propaganda, and the portrayal of issues in terms that entertain, distort, and shock to extract a public response of any kind'. He goes on to explain how spectacles generate meanings, presciently foreshadowing the discussions about 'post-truth' and the nature of fact that would emerge three decades later (ibid.: 10):

> Accounts of political issues, problems, crises, threats, and leaders now become devices for creating disparate assumptions and beliefs about the social and political world rather than factual statements. The very concept of 'fact' becomes irrelevant because every meaningful political object and person is an interpretation

> that reflects and perpetuates an ideology. Taken together, they comprise a spectacle which varies with the social situation of the spectator and serves as a meaning machine: a generator of points of view and therefore of perception, anxieties, aspirations, and strategies.

Edelmann has political events in mind, such as elections, debates, scandals, and the like, but the dynamics he describes are similar to those that characterise the spectacles I examine in this book. For instance, the ways in which Olympic Games or World Exhibitions make certain discourses salient and the degree to which they infuse recognisable symbols with pathos follow the patterns that Edelmann has identified for explicitly political spectacles. However, not all of Edelmann's spectacles are planned and staged as 'media events', to return to Dayan & Katz's (1994) terminology. The difference is that media events are designed as a kind of public holiday. They are intentional interruptions of everyday life.

2.5 The psychology of networked spectacles

In contrast to discursive events like natural disasters or high-profile political scandals, the kind of networked spectacles I have in mind are planned and staged well in advance. They retain the characteristic of other media spectacles, but the way in which they are designed allows organisers and media outlets to expose audiences over extended periods of time to the symbols and messages that relate to the event. These events function like public holidays that interrupt what people perceive as their normal everyday activities, as Dayan and Katz have shown (1994: 7 & 11-12, emphasis in the original):

> ... advanced notice gives time for anticipation and preparation on the part of both broadcasters and audiences. There is an active period of looking forward, abetted by the promotional activity of the broadcaster. ... The interruption, when it comes, has been elaborately advertised and *rehearsed*. It entails a major commitment of manpower, technology, and resources on the part of the organizers and broadcasters. It comes not as a complete surprise — as in major newsbreaks — but as something long anticipated and looked forward to, like a holiday. In order to make certain that

> the point of this ritual framing will not be lost on the audience, the broadcasters spend hours, sometimes days, rehearsing the audience in the event's itinerary, timetable, and symbolics. Even one-time events can be ritualized in this way.

Dayan and Katz describe here what social and political psychologists call 'priming' (see Iyengar et al. 1982; Domke et al. 1998), that is: an attempt to anchor meanings, associations, and emotions through continuous exposure to certain signs. Priming takes places over long periods of time and in often banal ways (Billig 2009), for example through continuous low-key interactions with national flags or the symbols we encounter on coins, bills, stamps, and other everyday objects.

Through priming, we are each socialised into a shared cultural repertoire, a minimal consensus of what should be 'normal' background knowledge across a society. Actors involved in staging networked spectacles draw from this repertoire, and they also seed new symbols that circulate in the run-up to the event, until these symbols become recognisable stand-ins for the event itself. Mascots and flags are good examples of this, and I will discuss a number of cases related to China's networked spectacles in the subsequent chapters, especially in chapter 5, which explores national symbols. Importantly, state agencies, large corporations, and in particular mass media organisations are in a position to establish and circulate seemingly banal symbols that can become the foundation for a spectacle's iconography, generating the 'monopoly of appearance' that Debord was concerned about.

Once symbols and their meanings have entered into the accepted collection of background meanings, they can be used strategically to evoke certain feelings and create particular effects. They become available as a resource for cultural production, and they provide a convenient set of anchor points for the construction of the public agenda (see McCombs 2004). By covering major events in the TV news or on newspaper front pages, media organisations draw attention to the events, increase their salience, and turn them into the kind of special holidays that Dayan and Katz (1994) have analysed. Continuous priming constructs the event as a historic moment in the minds of potential spectators, and once the actual occasion arrives, it becomes reasonable that the event would monopolise public life.

There is then a two-fold connection between priming and agenda-setting: on the one hand, the news media can fulfil their agenda-setting

role only if there already is a public consensus about the general relevance of the impending spectacle. As McCombs (ibid.: 13) writes:

> the public is not a collective automaton passively waiting to be programmed by the media. The pattern of media coverage for some issues resonates with the public. For other issues, there is no relevance.

That relevance is constructed over long periods of time, and it is negotiated between a multitude of actors. On the other hand, the media workers and journalists who make the networked spectacle salient in public discourse need themselves to be convinced that the event warrants that kind of coverage. That conviction may be grounded in commercial rationales, organisational incentives, or ethical considerations, but it is also primed over an extended period. Priming, in that sense, is the result of lengthy interaction ritual chains that involve recurring symbolic resources, but in such a way that these resources remain the focus of low levels of attention, moving them progressively into the 'background' of social rituals. As members of their societies and as the 'second order audience' of the networked spectacle, journalists are thus socialised into the meanings that relate to the event, much like anyone else; their decisions on whether or not then to report the spectacle is informed by the understanding of its historic importance that they have arrived at in the run-up to the actual event.

The final mechanism through which networked spectacles act as 'meaning machines' (Edelmann 1988: 10) is through a process that communication scholars call framing. Whereas agenda-setting is the act of convincing people that a particular issue is worth thinking about, framing is the act of pushing a particular interpretive framework on that thought process. It is an activity through which agents try to guide the perception, understanding, or interpretation of a piece of information by drawing on a set of signs and forcing a specific code onto the communication process.

To give a practical example, it makes a difference whether I speak of digital technology in language that suggests individual liberty, empowerment, and progress, or if I speak of the same technology in language that suggests deteriorating social relations, cultural or moral decline, and mental illness. Similarly, consider how a news source can warp the discourse on refugees arriving in a country by seeding its report

with words like 'flood', 'hoards', 'chaos', etc., as opposed to 'chance', 'energetic', 'skilful', and so on. Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 43 & 120) describe how most meaning-making processes utilise 'frames', by which they mean that actors 'recruit' certain basic concepts or relations from exiting cultural tropes and entrenched background knowledge into their conceptual efforts. These processes need not be sinister, but in mass communication actors frequently deploy frames strategically, trying to invite audiences to accept the meanings that these frames imply as self-evident.

Spectacles themselves become frames in this way, not just through the use of certain word groups, but also through the use of visual and acoustic cues. This is how Beijing's Olympic Summer Games can become either an example of 'One Dream' or 'the genocide Olympics'. Framing enables people, or groups of people, to tell certain stories about the spectacle.

What is more, the 'meaning machine' that is the networked spectacle pulls together so many different discourses that it becomes the ideal site for framing all manner of issues. Environmentalism, economics, culture and society, politics... any topic that can legitimately be associated with the spectacle can become the subject of elaborate framing work, allowing different actors to create their preferred interpretation of the issue. Recall how actors at imperial expos framed their colonial ambitions: presenting foreign peoples as 'savages' and using the language of the civilising mission were precisely what generated a discourse that could be deployed in support of imperialist practices and that frequently overrode any potential ethical concerns, ultimately encouraging contemporaries to view these practices as dictated by common sense.

To sum up, I believe it is helpful to view networked spectacles as complex assemblages of meanings whose range extends much farther than the sites of the event itself. They are, as Latour (2004) would argue, never entirely 'local'. Through various media technologies, the discourses about the event and the issues related to it travel to much broader audiences than the people 'on the ground'. The events become occasions for discursive work within widespread networks.

It would be easy now to view these spectacles as technologies of mass persuasion, especially since they are at times intended to be precisely this. The Chinese government, for instance, is unapologetic about the idea that news media should 'guide public opinion', a phrase that implies a moral imperative of the party and state to frame issues of public relevance, and this rationale extends to China's networked spectacles.

The many interlocking mechanisms and layers of communication that these spectacles draw from may even suggest that they are indeed powerful tools of indoctrination, especially in the hands of a leadership that is so strongly focused on didactic 'thought work' and strategic communication. However, this would be a misrepresentation of how communication works and what role different people play during such events. As Roche writes in his discussion of early world fairs (2003: 76-77):

> Expos, particularly imperial expos, clearly involved the production of ideological and propagandist discourses by powerful elites intended to 'inform' and 'educate' (or, more cynically, dominate and/or hegemonise) the masses in general and the new urban industrial working and middle classes in particular. However, the messages themselves were often ideologically complex, were carried in spectacular symbolic and dramatic forms open to varied interpretations, and their effects on public attitudes were also complex and ambiguous. ... Rather than seeing this simply as ideological propaganda intended to fool the masses, it is more realistic to see much of this as expressing the perceptions, values and idealism of contemporary elites, authentically expressing the fact that they were as 'fooled' (if this is the language we must use) as the masses by the almost magical productivity and powers of the new capital-labour relationship they had constructed.

I have quoted this passage in full because I believe Roche is right when he warns against overestimating the potential of mass events to 'fool' specific target audiences. This is precisely why the terminology of discourse theory and conceptual blending is helpful: discourse is communicated background knowledge; we all rely on such knowledge, and it can prime us with assumptions, focus our attention on certain issues, and frame the way we discuss them. This is not, however, to say that we are slaves to discourse. Discourse also enables, though it arguably enables different actors to very different extents. Occasions like networked spectacles allow some agents to position themselves politically and re-calibrate political discourses in ways that are beneficial to their personal or organisational projects. Indeed, if we follow the logic of discourse theorist Michel Foucault, discursive practices interact in constant feedback loops with social practices. Being able to stage, engage with, and ultimately

use staged spectacles in certain ways is a matter of positioning oneself centrally in networks, enabling collaboration among allies, preventing perceived antagonists from taking part, and programming the interaction networks with discourse. In short: it is a matter of power.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how large-scale events enable diverse actors to interact with each other, create meaning, and ultimately experience entrainment: a process of bodily engagement that makes meanings memorable and powerful. Particular sites for such interactions are mass events, that is, staged rituals that encourage large-scale participation and that are closely tied to modern modes of being, thinking, and producing. Such mass events draw many of their practices and meanings from pre-modern antecedents, but they also differ markedly from such earlier events, relying for much of their meaning-making on modern concepts such as capitalism, the individual, the metropolis, or the nation, even as such concepts may not always fit together neatly.

With the advent of modern forms of communication, mass events have largely unfolded their relevance through the way that media organisations have mediated their meanings. Events like modern sports spectacles or world expositions are not merely experienced by first-order audiences 'on the ground', though this level of interaction is still crucial to generate the emotional force that such events frequently relay. Actors like journalists, producers, editors, camerawomen, and so forth, plug into event networks and relay their own discourses to much broader audiences, who in turn draw conclusions about the event and its themes based on these media resources, but also through their interactions with other actors across the various 'orders' of audience.

Staged spectacles like national anniversaries or the Olympics sit on top of social interactions, background knowledge, and the idiosyncrasies of human psychology. As such, they promise actors who are able to position themselves centrally in a spectacle's production and dissemination network to seed selected symbols, make certain discourses salient, and encourage meaning-making within specific frames. Networking a spectacle is a matter of power.

This is not to say that the discursive and social processes of a networked spectacle can be dictated and controlled 'top down'. The idea

that the networked spectacle can serve as an effective vehicle to guide opinion may nevertheless be enticing to stakeholders, whether these actors are well-meaning or not. The activities of such stakeholders, for instance within the state or among branches of industry, invite complex interactions that range from negotiation and collaboration to resistance and rejection. In China, the ruling party has creatively sought to channel these interactions for its own purposes, and it is these processes of governance to which the next chapter turns.

3 The Governance of China's Networked Spectacles

At the office of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony organisers, I am going over the scenes of the event with a member of the creative group who was involved in putting the various elements of the massive performance together. We have just discussed how the team turned the two concepts 'harmony' and 'civilisation' into meaningful messages for audiences that might not know much about China, and this has led us to the question whether certain parts of the team's original plans had not made the final cut. I tell her how I had learned that an earlier plan to include large shadow puppets had to be scrapped (China.org 2008), and that there had been speculations abroad that this was because these 'monster puppets' in the shape of terracotta warriors would have seemed too threatening (see Barmé 2009: 80), that there were concerns that foreign audiences would associate them with an ominous, martial China. 'No, that's not what happened', she laughs. The lighting would not have worked, she tells me.

I must seem sceptical, because she laughs again, reassuring me that this is really what happened. She points out that there had indeed been careful oversight from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to check that no elements of the ceremony would clash with official public diplomacy ambitions, and that elements of the ceremony were also screened for foreign audiences. This was why there had been no dragons in the ceremony. In the view of the organising committee, foreign viewers would see dragons as mostly evil creatures, like those that populate Tolkien's fantasy world; in China, dragons are creatures that bring luck. But that meaning does not travel, she tells me. As for the shadow puppets, the problem was not political, but purely technically: 'we just couldn't get it to work'.

It is not my intention to establish what 'really' happened in the case of the cancelled shadow theatre performance. More importantly, the discussion shows how arguably innocuous issues can become

highly political during networked spectacles, and how they can lead to speculations about how authoritative actors dictated meanings. However, the organisation of such events is frequently complicated, and the decisions that shape the final outcomes may not always be the result of calculated political strategising. China's networked spectacles involved many actors with diverse ideas about what these events should communicate and how they should be set up, and this chapter turns to these complexities by exploring how various stakeholders organised influential spectacles in China.

I begin by discussing the CCP's cultural governance strategy, focusing in particular on attempts to augment traditional, top-down modes of propaganda and censorship with more horizontal components that outsource regulatory activities to private actors. I describe these organisational practices and strategies in the language of network theories that I introduced in the introduction, better to highlight the often creative and collaborative ways in which stakeholders are calibrating and reconfiguring complex political processes, and to make tangible how power works within these contexts. In subsequent chapters, I show what meanings and emotions these networked activities facilitate, but here I limit myself to the ways in which the authorities set the network parameters within which various actors then switch themselves and others into communication processes, and within which they attempt to programme the discourses that proliferate through the networks.

To illustrate these activities, the chapter first discusses how media and culture have traditionally been managed in China, and how the authorities have progressively changed their regulatory approach to the networked cultural governance strategies that today characterise political communication in the PRC. This also includes a discussion of how capitalist economic arrangements fit into this picture, and it addresses controversies over whether PRC governance strategies should be considered 'neoliberal'. Next, the chapter analyses how various actors came together to create and broadcast the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, a process that reflects a strong interplay between state and non-state actors within the PRC's regulatory set-up. Finally, the chapter shifts its focus to the Shanghai Expo, laying out what went into designing the exhibition territory and its pavilions.

3.1 Media politics in contemporary China

Ever since its early days as a revolutionary party, the CCP has considered it part of its prerogative to manage culture and media. The reasoning was Marxist-Leninist: as China's vanguard, it was the responsibility of the Party to reform not just the country's means of production, but also the mind sets of its people. 'Culture' needed to emancipate the Chinese masses and immunise them against bourgeois ideology, so the argument went. China's media workers consequently became charged with maintaining the ideological and spiritual wellbeing of the people.

Under Mao's rule, these activities fell under the broader banner of 'thought work'. Mao himself spelled out his understanding of culture in his famous speech in Yan'an (Mao 1942), and the arguments in this speech would remain programmatic throughout his rule. They would later find their most radically totalitarian interpretation during the Cultural Revolution, with Mao and his closest associates emphasising a strict vision of art and culture that allowed only orthodox socialist realist expressions in the service of perpetual revolution.

The imperative to manage culture and carefully regulate the activities of media workers has remained an important part of the CCP's governing model, even after the PRC opened its doors and started its process of reform. China's leaders may have abandoned many of Mao's more radical ideas, replacing ideological orthodoxy with pragmatism, but the Marxist-Leninist conception of culture on which Mao based his ideas remains influential to this day. Especially after the tumultuous events of 1989, i.e. the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the democracy protests in major cities across China that culminated in the Tiananmen Massacre, party leaders felt compelled to renew their role as the sole keepers of China's ideological health. As Brady (2008: 1) has pointed out, 'in the post 1989 period, propaganda and thought work have become the very life blood … of the Party-State'; they have become an important way for the CCP to try and legitimate its continuing one-party rule.

In the post-Mao era, Chinese regulators have progressively updated the focus of their media management. The CCP has moved away from previous totalitarian ambitions to manage any and all cultural expressions. Instead, it now attempts to 'guide public opinion'. Actors in the party's sprawling propaganda system (see Shambaugh 2007) have creatively adapted to the challenges of a market-driven environment saturated with information. The party's cultural management today

embraces an approach that cleverly combines, on the one hand, top-down hierarchical decrees, advanced censorship techniques, and highly didactic propaganda with, on the other hand, more indirect interventions into Chinese cultural production and consumption processes.

An important factor in this has been the introduction of capitalist market principles, which have radically changed how China's media function today. In the wake of the general economic reforms, the PRC opened its state-dominated industries to market forces and urged managers to experiment with a profit-oriented rationale and foreign management principles (for an introduction see Naugthon 2006: ch.4). This may at first sight contradict the CCP's avowed commitment to Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought. However, the reasoning behind these market reforms remains in line with Marxism, even as it relies on an arguably provocative interpretation of Marx's historical materialism.

Rather than insisting on the Maoist idea that society needs to be moved through its historical, developmental phases by means of *revolution*, the Party now emphasised *evolution*. Drawing their lessons from successful advanced socialist countries e.g. in northern Europe, the reformers decided that China needed to experience fully what they viewed as the crucial historical stage before socialism: capitalism. Capitalism is an economic arrangement in which the means of production are owned privately and are worked by wage labourers, and in which goods and services are traded for profit in competitive markets, using a commonly accepted medium of exchange and following the logic of supply and demand. The idea was that, by strategically introducing the core elements of this arrangement into the Chinese economy, the contradictions of capitalism would reveal themselves, and as Chinese society worked through and addressed these contradictions, a gradual adjustment of production processes would unfold until society became fair and equitable. Managing this process and ensuring that it took the right shape would become part of the CCP's raison d'être.

An open question, and a matter of some controversy, is whether — or to what degree — China is today capitalist. For the most part, the Chinese economy relies heavily on markets and the idea of private ownership to generate profits (see Zweig 2014: 204-205 and Naughton 2006: 301-304). The waters are muddied, however, by the large number of state-owned enterprises that operate in China and the continuing influence of the party and state in economic affairs. As Joseph Fan and his colleagues write

in their introduction to a compilation of studies that examine capitalism in China: 'strategically placed state-owned enterprises (SOEs), SOE-controlled pyramidal business groups, and ubiquitous party cells, party Secretaries, and party committees leave Lenin's "commanding heights" firmly and exclusively under the control of the Chinese Communist Party' (Fan et al. 2013: 2).

PRC leaders continue to insist that the country remains 'on the socialist road', but they have also qualified their 'market socialism' as having 'Chinese characteristics'. Regardless of such labelling practices, the Chinese economy is effectively a market economy that relies heavily on capitalist structures, even if capitalism in China takes on a different shape from, for instance, that in North America or Europe. Then again, this is arguably an example of how adaptive capitalism is. There are many different capitalisms across Europe or the Americas as well, so it should come as no surprise that Asian contexts also feature diverse capitalist practices and arrangements.

A related question is whether China is 'neoliberal'. Neoliberalism is an ideology that emphasises personal responsibility, efficiency, private property rights, and the presumed ability of allegedly unregulated, competitive markets to bring about the best in self-interested individuals (for a discussion see Treanor 2005). As such, neoliberalism promotes capitalism, though not every capitalism must necessarily be underpinned by neoliberalism. Nonini (2008) has criticised that scholarship frequently fails to appreciate this distinction, and that this leads to a conflation of the two concepts. He writes that the term neoliberalism 'risks being used to refer to almost any political, economic, social or cultural process associated with contemporary capitalism' (ibid.: 149). Similarly, Kipnis (2007: 387) asks, 'does anyone ever describe non-neoliberal capitalism?' Such criticism then also extends to China's capitalism, which Nonini points out is strongly state-led and frequently accompanied by popular resistance against marketisation. He argues that 'processes of neoliberalization are largely absent' in China (Nonini 2008: 149) and questions whether 'the Chinese population has widely incorporated neoliberal subjectivities and practices' (ibid.: 147).

Nonini is no doubt right that neoliberalism has by no means become a hegemonic ideology across China, and his interventions provide a helpful reminder that capitalism and neoliberalism do not necessarily collapse into one, globally shared economic and ideological set-up. He is also right that many CCP cadres explicitly reject and criticise neoliberalism.

For instance, a 2013 Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere (translated in ChinaFile 2013) warns against neoliberalism, alongside other foreign ideas such as democracy, universal values, and civil society. According to the document, neoliberalism celebrates 'unrestrained economic liberalization, complete privatization, and total marketization'; the authors go on to warn against neoliberal advocates who believe 'macroeconomic control is strangling the market's efficiency and vitality and they oppose public ownership, arguing that China's state-owned enterprises are "national monopolies," inefficient, and disruptive of the market economy, and should undergo "comprehensive privatization"'. The goal of neoliberal reasoning, according the communiqué, is to 'change our country's basic economic infrastructure and weaken the government's control of the national economy'.

However, does such commentary really mean that neoliberalism and its policies are truly absent in China today? The communiqué ironically trailed plans by the Xi administration to extend economic liberalisation (ibid.), so it might be wise to take the content of the document with a grain of salt. Aside from the fact that the document may not speak for all CCP cadres, its inventory of key terms also seems designed to conflate various challenges to one-party rule and turn them into a singular, loathsome antagonist: 'the West'. Such practices to construct enemies and seed the descriptions with vapid hot-button terminology are not new in CCP rhetoric, but they say very little about the actual 'current state of the ideological sphere' which they claim to assess.

I would argue that neoliberalism is now firmly part of the ideological mix that shapes politics in China (see also Joseph 2014: 160). Neoliberal discourse indeed informs many political, economic, and individual activities in the PRC. However, this is not to say that neoliberalism is 'hegemonic' in China, but rather that regulators frequently combine neoliberal techniques with authoritarian and other managerial practices. Neoliberal policy is indeed frequently authoritarian, in China as much as elsewhere. In theory, such policies aim at deregulating economic processes, establishing free trade, and making social interactions more efficient; to achieve these goals, neoliberal policy promotes (at least nominally) austerity, privatisation, and a laissez-faire approach to the economy. However, in practice, neoliberal policy often consists of invasive audit cultures, expansive bureaucratisation, fiscal interventions that benefit the wealthy, and draconian state-backed violence, particularly when private ownership rights are in question (see also Graeber 2015: 31).

Harvey (2007: 19) calls this a 'creative tension', and he makes the case that 'when neoliberal principles clash with the need to restore or sustain elite power, then the principles are either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognizable'.

In the Chinese context, neoliberal policies are part of the governing toolbox that CCP cadres deploy to regulate life in the PRC. Frank Pieke makes this clear in his discussion of the PRC's governance approach, which he calls 'neo-socialist'. As he describes it, 'under neo-socialism, innovative neo-liberal and home-grown governmental technologies cut right at the heart of the Party-state itself, serving to support, centralize, modernize, and strengthen the Party's leading role in society' (2016: loc243). The PRC's media and cultural industries are prime examples of this combination of neoliberal and more traditional 'governmental technologies'. Party and state leaders expect media organisations to function according to the same rules of the market that govern state-owned enterprises in other sectors of the economy. At the same time, the CCP retains control of China's liberalised media and cultural sectors through various governing mechanisms.

3.2 The CCP's cultural governance strategies

One might expect the imperatives of market liberalisation in China to undermine party control of the media, and such expectations have indeed informed much of the speculation, and at times wishful thinking, about China's ostensible transition towards liberal democracy. As Pieke (2016) points out, and as I have also argued in an analysis of cyber politics in China (Schneider 2018: ch.8), it is unhelpful to imagine democracy as the inevitable endpoint of modern social development that is brought about, deterministically, by market forces, new technologies, free flows of people and information, or some other (neo)liberal MacGuffin. Instead, I have suggested that we turn to Lewis Mumford's (1964) arguments about democratic and authoritarian technics, which political actors combine, juxtapose, and ultimately deploy in their attempts to manage social processes (see also Göbel 2011). Pieke (2016: 118) suggests something similar when he argues:

> Democracy and dictatorship are best used as shorthand references to a range of governmental technologies that can be combined

> and recombined in real-life political systems regardless of their purported ideological charge.

This indeed seems to be the approach that the CCP has adopted in its reform efforts, and it extends to the party's management of media and culture. In these contexts, the CCP management techniques encompass several interconnected strategies. One of these is for state institutions to intervene directly in cultural spheres. Such interventions are generally rare, since they can discredit regulators, draw attention to unwanted issues, and reveal the full scope (or limitations) of state power. Nevertheless, when it comes to issues that leading cadres consider to be 'sensitive' (*mingan* 敏感), the CCP can rely on the full power of the state to censor unwanted discourses and infuse media networks with 'correct' statements. Sensitive issues include any kind of 'yellow' topic, i.e. pornography, violence, drugs, and gambling, which conservative cadres view as negative influences on the minds of the masses, and especially of youths. It also includes 'black' topics, i.e. politically sensitive issues that might challenge the rule of the party or endanger 'social stability' (*shehui wending* 社会稳定; see Sandby-Thomas 2011). Certain areas remain wholly blacklisted, most notably the so-called 'three Ts', which refer to the political status of Tibet and Taiwan, as well as the legacy of the Tiananmen Massacre. In other areas, the terrain of what constitutes an acceptable or unacceptable political topic can shift radically as former taboos become green-lit, usually as certain leaders or factions of cadres re-orientate their policy priorities in those areas, or — conversely — as a previously innocuous public debate threatens to get out of hand. At the time of writing, such shifts in priority characterised debates on topics like air pollution, food and work safety issues, corruption, and interpretations of certain episodes in China's revolutionary past, but by the time this book goes to press the range of publicly acceptable discourses is likely to have shifted again.

For Chinese media workers, this creates serious challenges as they try to manoeuvre China's ever-changing discursive waters, while constantly being forced to balance the bottom line with the party line (see Zhao 1998). This may very well be the point: the confusing mix of freedoms and restrictions creates uncertainties (see Hassid 2008) and a context in which actors need to manage themselves and act efficiently, which allows regulators to remain in the background and avoid intrusive interventions into the sector as much as possible. To this end, the CCP's governance

approach selectively blends neoliberal rationales of self-discipline with traditional philosophical components and other discourses in an effort to encourage certain kinds of behaviour. Neoliberal discourses thus exist next to normative domestic discussions about the 'quality' (*suzhi* 素质) of citizens (see Anagnost 2004, Jacka 2009, Woronov 2009, and Sun 2009), which draw their reasoning from pre-modern Chinese thought. The various discourses can at times align, though Kipnis (2007) rightly points out that they do not always merge into a singular, neoliberal disciplinary formation. I will return to self-disciplining strategies below, and I will illustrate such discourses and practices in later chapters; in the current context, it is important to understand that actors in the media industry constantly have to adjust their behaviour to a moving, invisible line of what is permissible.

A second technique for managing China's media ecology is to rely on the market dynamics that the party has unleashed, and to leave it to commercial incentives to guide the behaviours of media and cultural producers. By liberalising sectors such as fashion and lifestyle, the CCP has allowed the incentives for producing acceptable content to shift away from overt state and party interventions. Instead, incentives now primarily come from the public demand for entertainment formats and the advertising revenues this demand generates, relayed to media workers in the form of viewer ratings, reader subscriptions, webpage views, retweets, and other metrics of business success.

Where market incentives alone are not sufficient to guide how actors produce, share, and consume cultural artefacts, the party uses a number of indirect measures to retain control of public discourse. This includes the various channels through which CCP cadres remain linked to state agencies like news conglomerates, TV stations, museums, or production studios (see Lieberthal 2004: ch.7). Personnel management plays a particularly important role, and the party has the last word when it comes to assigning media workers to key nodes in China's networks of cultural production. Editors, producers, journalists, and so on are frequently themselves party members, which means they are required to maintain party discipline, but even if they have not themselves joined the CCP, their positions depend on the good graces of party committees and superiors, who sanction behaviour through managerial techniques such as work assessments, promises of financial bonuses, chances for promotion, and the ever-present threat of demotion or redundancy. As the party experiments with new social management techniques, for

instance rolling out social credit management systems in numerous pilot cities (see Koetse 2018 and Liu 2018 for nuanced discussions), these incentive structures are bound to become more important yet.

In combination with market mechanisms and career incentives, the party further relays its ideological preferences through a sophisticated state licensing system that allows only approved non-state organisations and individuals to create and sell cultural content with mass appeal. The state then also maintains numerous regulatory agencies that specify what types of content can be disseminated in particular segments of the market, for instance placing legal limits on TV programming that goes too far in depicting the underbelly of society or that encourages too much audience participation. In this way, the party uses the state to define, for example, what can be aired during the lucrative prime-time period on Chinese television, which in turn creates commercial pressure for private producers to create only the kind of content that state-owned TV stations will buy and air during that period (I have discussed these dynamics in detail in Schneider 2012).

The party's media controls have then become largely indirect. The party has effectively positioned itself in such a way that it can inject the networks of cultural production with specific demands that will filter through lengthy chains of principals and agents down to private actors who have to conform to these imperatives if they hope to make a profit. Viewed at a distance, the CCP's techniques of control have become more obscure, often leaving the impression that cultural producers are following the seemingly inescapable invisible hand of the market, but this should not detract from the fact that it is the party that leverages this logic to ensure politically acceptable discourses.

Closely related to these managerial techniques is the party's willingness to outsource processes of cultural meaning-making to non-official actors. This means soliciting the expertise of private production companies, public relations firms, advertisers, IT experts, and so on. It also means giving the consumers of media more leeway to make sense of the rich, diverse galaxy of symbols they face, and to provide sanctioned (and carefully monitored) spaces for peer-to-peer interactions, for instance through private social media corporations like Tencent or Sina. By setting the rules of these interactions at the macro level, the CCP is able to outline what is or is not acceptable discourse once these varied actors start circulating their own symbolic assemblages through the newly opened sub-networks of, for instance, social media.

Importantly, China's leaders try to avoid overt coercion and instead attempt to negotiate and reason with media producers, consumers, and users in order to create a consensus as to what media management in China should achieve. In my own interviews with Chinese media workers, I found it telling how frequently even critics of the CCP's media management made the case that, ultimately, some form of content control was necessary to ensure the moral guidance of audiences, who were frequently viewed as prone to spreading and believing incorrect information, especially in the form of so-called online rumours (*wangluo yaoyan* 网络谣言). These arguments about the dangers of spreading rumours seem to have gained further traction in the wake of anxieties in Europe and North America about 'fake news'. Where actors remained unconvinced by such paternalistic and frequently alarmist reasoning, selected draconian measures against individuals or companies usually inspire the required level of self-censorship among media workers and consumers more broadly to prevent them from pushing the boundaries of the permissible too far — a tactic that is known in Chinese as 'killing the chicken to scare the monkeys' (*shaji jinghou* 杀鸡儆猴).

Today, the CCP delegates much of the responsibility for media control to societal actors, many of whom seem willing to adopt the moral discourses that the CCP spreads through China's networks of social interactions. My point here is not that media workers necessarily internalise, believe, or actively support these discourses; we do not know what ultimately goes on in people's heads. My point is that these discourses create powerful guides to behaviour, and that actors reproduce them as acceptable statements on how cultural production should work in China. Importantly, it is not the discourses themselves that 'act' in this way; it is the set of people who are tied together in networks of media production, and who enforce the values of the network through a combination of administrative techniques, discursive statements, and peer pressure.

Ultimately, the CCP's political decision-making then comes to rest to no small degree on its ability to generate 'consent elicited by the construction of shared meaning', to use Castells' words (2009: 12). Where agents are not convinced, they are confronted with the strong constraints that these shared meanings generate in conjunction with economic incentives. If reluctant actors do not wish to risk being isolated from important social interactions or losing the means to secure a livelihood, they need at least tacitly to comply with their assigned roles as keepers of moral rectitude.

In this sense, the party's regulatory activities are less examples of governing, i.e. of regulating society through policy decisions, enforced through executive branches of the state. They are more examples of 'governance', that is: the regulation of society through indirect means that involve actors beyond the state (Stoker 1998). These 'public-private collaborations' (Donahue & Zeckhauser 2008) are not limited to domestic actors but include international organisations and enterprises as well. In the case of China's networked spectacles, the result of these practices is a multi-tiered approach to event management in which party and state move in and out of organisational networks, at times regulating matters directly, at other times providing symbolic and discursive resources for non-state agents to make their own regulatory choices in line with the network's overall mission.

Considering how strongly this approach relies on constructing cultural contexts through networked interactions and discursive moves, it seems appropriate to call it 'cultural governance', a term I am adapting from Michael Shapiro (2004) and William Callahan (2006) to refer to regulatory activities through which actors attempt to govern society by adjusting the cultural parameters in which politics take place (see also Schneider 2016).

In the kind of complex communication networks that the CCP attempts to manage, power accrues with actors who are able to link different groups of people together, for instance by connecting media networks, trade networks, financial networks, logistic networks, security networks, and so on, and who are able to infuse those networks with their own values, meanings, and interpretations. While party actors are not the only relevant agents in China's networked cultural sectors, they remain well positioned to exert such power.

3.3 Organising the Olympic opening ceremony

How precisely the interactions between different actors generate the switching and programming power that Castells envisages becomes evident in the Hu-Wen administration's approach to organising networked spectacles like the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo in the late 2000s. During the 2008 Summer Olympics, for instance, party and state agencies made effective use of their switching power to strategically delegate responsibilities and collaborate with non-state actors to manage

a complex, dynamic media environment. Take the example of the opening ceremony, which took place on 8 August 2008.

The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony was designed to present China's re-emergence as a Great Power to audiences both at home and abroad. It was a large-scale collaborative public relations effort that was initiated, coordinated, and executed by the Chinese state, under the leadership of the party, but which involved input from a variety of actors, ranging from numerous state agencies and CCP organs to private agents.

To show how this process worked, I have traced the interactions between the different actors and the decisions they made, based on my interviews with organisers and media workers who had been involved in creating the event. These various stakeholders planned the opening ceremony for over four years, spending several hundred million RMB in the process. Under the auspice of the Ministry of Culture (文化部), a creative team came together as early as March 2004 to draw up a 20-page plan for the opening ceremony. Based on this outline, the ministry commissioned 11 internal and 2 external proposals, which the creative team evaluated in 2005 and 2006. The final synergy of the leading proposals drew from two themes: civilisation (*wenming* 文明), a theme that the organisers regarded as central to the original Greek Olympic spirit, and harmony (*hexie* 和谐), a key political concept of the Hu Jintao administration, which I will examine in detail in chapter 6 (for a discussion of this concept see Barmé 2009: 78).

By April 2005, the team had refined the motto of the games, abandoning the earlier slogan 'harmony is precious' (*he wei gui* 和为贵), first in favour of the slogan 'one world, one future', and finally settling on 'one world, one dream'. In early 2006, the director's team under the leadership of renowned film-maker Zhang Yimou (张艺谋) came together for the first time to assess how the planning process should progress.

In September 2006, the Ministry of Culture created a sub-unit, the 'Opening-Closing Ceremony Department' (奥组委开闭幕式工作部), which would become responsible for managing the cultural activities associated with the games. This department was headed by Zhang Heping (张和平), a Beijing-based arts professor and member of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference. The size of this team fluctuated between 30 and 40 members. Their task was to oversee various working groups (production, public relations, and so on) and later coordinate the event with other state actors, such as the municipal police department and transit authorities.

The core unit within this department that designed, planned, and executed the actual ceremony was the 'Opening-Closing Ceremony Command Centre' (开闭幕式运营中心). During peak times, it employed up to 800 individuals. The members of this command centre refined the ceremony, developed the various acts, and expanded the event to include new themes such as environmental sustainability. In August 2006, two years before the event, the first rehearsals started. By the time the rehearsals moved to the final staging site in June 2008, the ceremony had expanded to include 20,000 performers. The scale of the project prompted members of the creative team to joke that the newly built National Stadium had been designed poorly, since it was almost too small to host all the performers.

As the actual event neared, the command centre 'field-tested' the opening ceremony and various related cultural products. For instance, the *Fuwa* (福娃; literally: 'good-luck dolls') were tested in elementary schools and kindergartens before becoming the official mascots of the event (for an analysis of the Fuwa's symbolic meaning see DeLisle 2008: 35). The opening ceremony itself was staged for three different groups of critics: a committee of art advisors that included film directors Chen Kaige (陈凯歌) and Lee Ang (李安) as well as US producer Quincy Jones; a group of Chinese citizens that was meant to represent all walks of life; and the responsible CCP Leadership Small Group, which at the time was under the direction of rising political star Xi Jinping. This last group also included members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose explicit task was to point out any aspects of the ceremony that might offend foreign audiences or relay a negative impression of the PRC's foreign policy agenda.

Once approved, the final performance was prepared for telecasting by Beijing Olympic Broadcasting (BOB), a joint venture between the Chinese side (the official Beijing Olympics Committee for the Olympic Games, or BOCOG) and the Olympic Broadcasting Service of the International Olympic Committee (see Brownell 2008: 186). This joint venture used new broadcasting technologies that had themselves required various levels of negotiation and compromise to implement, for instance between creative and technical personnel (see Liang 2013).

Domestically, the visual discourse of the event, with all its possible interpretations, was disambiguated for viewers by China Central Television (CCTV) and its two commentators, who framed the visuals with carefully rehearsed statements that were scripted in advance and

meticulously rehearsed (see also Brownell 1995 for an earlier assessment): the phrases relay the official propaganda discourse without any random colloquialisms, and the intonations of the speakers also closely resemble those of actors giving official speeches or performing in socialist-realist theatre. The result was a series of official propaganda statements that left little doubt about how the proceedings were meant to be interpreted.

The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony illustrates how the CCP recruits various stakeholders to create a spectacle. In this case, the result was a well-rehearsed representation of the administration's agenda to create a 'harmonious society', fusing traditional Chinese cultural symbols with images of a young and joyous China. I will return to the ceremony and the seemingly hegemonic narrative that the event relayed in the next chapter, but it should be stressed that regardless of how we assess the performance, the final cultural product was the result of complex negotiations in which the party took a leading role, but in which no single actor dictated the discourses top-down. Instead, CCP agents linked themselves and their party and state associates to private creative and technical personnel, creating the network that would provide the infrastructure for organising the various elements of this event. By providing the general guidelines within which state and private actors then collaborated, the CCP ensured that the final product struck all participants as at least acceptable, possibly even as convincing and worthwhile, and ultimately as a common-sense representation of contemporary China on the world stage.

3.4 International networks at the Shanghai Expo

A similar collaboration took place at the site of the Shanghai World Exposition two years later, though this collaboration included an even broader range of actors, foreign and domestic, who had to construct their public discourses within overlapping institutional frameworks. Most notably, these included organisers of national, corporate, and city pavilions, each comprising teams of core event managers, PR professionals, and diplomatic protocol officers, and later involving an array of logistics experts, architects, engineers, artists, and film directors. In many cases, the work of these teams started as early as four years before the actual event. When the expo opened its door to the public on 1 May 2010, between 200 and 800 different people had been

involved in designing, constructing, and administering each of the major expo pavilions, drawing on a combination of public and private funding in the range of 30 to 60 million Euros per pavilion.

I will explain in more detail below how pavilion organisers and their teams negotiated the political and commercial interests that fuelled their event projects, but it is worth already pointing out here that they did so within the general guidelines provided at two levels of organisation: the regulations handed down by the Bureau of International Exhibition (BIE), headquartered in Paris, and the national and provincial regulations of the PRC, coordinated and implemented by the Bureau of Shanghai World Expo Coordination (上海世博会事务协调局), or *Shiboju* (世博局). The Shiboju was a temporary state institution composed of staff from various public security and logistics agencies in China, as well as foreign affairs and media workers, and it went about its organisational activities under the auspices of the CCP.

The Shanghai Expo illustrates how the Chinese state and the party managed complex cultural processes by taking an indirect approach and providing general rules of cultural production rather than attempting to regulate systems of meanings directly. While a delegation of the Shiboju checked all expo exhibitions in early 2010 to ensure that participants had not put any politically sensitive topics on display (e.g. references to the political status of Tibet or Taiwan), there were, to my knowledge, no major conflicts between the censors and the respective pavilion teams over exhibition content. The pavilion staffers and organisers I interviewed in 2010 were overall positive about their interactions with the Chinese organisers and censors, and they repeatedly told me that they had not encountered any overt criticism of their exhibits.

This was true even for organisers who had intentionally designed their exhibitions as interventions into what they perceived as dominant Chinese discourses. An example was the Spanish pavilion, which told a postmodern, avant-garde story of Spanish modernity that clashed with official Chinese accounts of what modernity might mean. I will analyse these exhibits and the discursive conflicts they contain in detail in chapter 7. Yet even organisers who had designed such provocative content noted that the Shanghai organisers were overall accommodating, finding for example no fault with didactically challenging exhibits.

It is an open question why the authorities allowed such critics to prevail. The censors may not have understood the thrust of the argument, or they may have concluded that visitors would not be swayed by the often

fairly abstract, artistic interventions. Maybe they decided that letting some critics have their way would serve as an example of the host's benevolence and inclusiveness. Whatever the motivations, the Chinese administrators effectively provided the space for discursive construction and then watched that construction unfold within the theme of the event, seemingly content in the knowledge that the various overlapping interests and institutional constraints would overall generate a core narrative; a narrative about a neoliberal, capitalist world in which nation-states exist in harmony and develop their economies through urbanisation and transnational trade, and in which the PRC functions as a central partner as it progresses on its road towards national revival.

Indeed, many foreign participants at the Shanghai Expo shared at least some of the organisers' basic assumptions about world fairs and their purpose, and they had no intention of rocking the boat with controversial or disruptive displays. To most exhibitors, the need for easily digestible public diplomacy outweighed any potential agenda of contradicting the discursive parameters that the domestic organisers had set for the event. Most pavilions at the expo integrated the neoliberal, internationalist message in part or as a whole into their own visions of a 'better city, better life', and communicative practices frequently remained located within this overarching expo discourse.

This is itself the outcome of networked practices: the Chinese hosts were able to create a network of agents who would be involved in organising this specific event, but this did not entail drawing the organisational framework up from scratch. Not all actors were new to the world-fair genre. Indeed, the Shiboju and its staff could rely on existing mass event networks, periodically maintained and reconfigured at international conventions, trade fairs, and of course the recurring BIE world fairs. National pavilion teams, for instance, were frequently staffed by experienced event planners and diplomats who knew each other from past events, and many maintained long-standing contacts with their colleagues in other pavilion teams. When I visited the expo, there was a sense of community among staff members, who frequently interacted with each other not just professionally but also socially.

In that sense, the staff at the Shiboju 'plugged' themselves into existing networks, while also creating new linkages between potential partners and domestic actors. They managed to set the agenda for the event, but they did so using the symbolic and discursive resources that already permeated these networks, i.e. conceptual elements from

internationalist, cosmopolitan, and capitalist discourses. It should then come as no surprise that so many of the pavilion exhibits told similar stories, and that they seemed to reinforce key statements about the world at the start of the 21st century.

3.5 How Shanghai's Expo territory came to be assembled

The sense that the Shanghai Expo told a coherent, unified story was arguably strongest at the level of the expo territory itself. As I have mentioned in the introduction to this book, visitors frequently commented on the geopolitics of the set-up. The event covered a space that was roughly ten times as a large as Disneyland Paris, and that stretched across two sites: the northern zones that were home to the pavilions of multinational corporations, Chinese state-owned enterprises, and the various urban best practice exhibits, and the southern zones that contained the national pavilions, theme pavilions, and exhibits of international organisations.

With 189 national exhibitions, the expo relayed a strong internationalist discourse in which the central actors were nations and their sovereign states. Informed by this discourse, the expo territory became a miniature model of the world, which generated a sense of geography through the way that national pavilions were arranged in the expo space. Pavilions were clustered together according to the respective nation-states' location in specific world regions such as Europe or Asia, loosely captured by zones A (Asia), B (Europe), and C (America and Africa). The expo territory also at times modelled geographical proximity between countries, for instance placing together the pavilions of Germany and Poland, Greece and Turkey, and Sweden, Denmark, and Finland.

A major example of geopolitical representation was the Chinese national pavilion and its position vis-à-vis the pavilions of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Looking at the China Pavilion from the east, visitors would find the 'mainland' represented by a massive elevated plateau on their left, with China's red national pavilion next to the smaller exhibition buildings of the two special administrative regions. To the right lay the Taiwan Pavilion, separated from the mainland by a broad, elevated walkway that curved along the plateau much like the Taiwan Strait curves along the coast of China.

Despite these representations of geography, the territory did not recreate any existing world map, e.g. of the Mercator type. Any world map that tries to represent earth's geographical features in two dimensions is by its very nature warped, but the expo territory arranged countries into entirely original positions. This at times produced peculiar effects. For instance, Iran and North Korea, two states that former US-President Bush had made part of his 'axis of evil', were stashed away together in the far south-east corner of the territory. Japan and China were positioned at opposite ends of the zone that contained participant countries from Asia, while Russia became situated in the south-west of Europe. The African continent moved to the north-west of this simulated world.

All of this was largely the outcome of administrative idiosyncrasies rather than the result of any overarching plan: the authorities allowed participants to select the exact position of their lot within the assigned zone on a first-come-first-served basis. What is more, the varying budgets of different participants defined what kind of lot they would be able to lease, allowing national participants to present themselves in pavilions of varying sizes (see Huang & Kuang 2010). This included the largest lots of 3,000-6,000 square metres (for participants who asked to build their own pavilions), medium-sized lots of 500-2,000 square metres (for participants willing to rent and then decorate an exhibition hall), and small exhibition spaces within larger joint halls, each measuring between 200 and 325 square metres.

The type of lot reflected what financial resources each participant country was able and willing to invest. The cost of self-built pavilions ranged from 30 to 60 million Euros, and that kind of budget was generally available only to wealthy OECD countries, which in turn shaped the picture of the world that emerged at the Shanghai Expo. To show what that picture looked like, it helps to imagine a traditional map of the world, and to then re-size each nation-state to reflect not its geographical territory but the size of its exhibition space at the expo. I have calculated these relations by combining the lot sizes provided in Huang & Kuang (2010) with my own extrapolations based on the official Expo map (see also Schneider 2014b: 104-105). The result is depicted in Figure 3.1.

Since the cartogram relates pavilion lot size to actual geographical territory, it by default produces an exaggerated effect where nation-states with very large or very small territories are concerned: countries such as the USA, Canada, Russia, and Australia appear exponentially smaller, despite hosting the largest type of national pavilion that was available,

Figure 3.1: The Miniature World of the Shanghai World Expo 2010. Image © F. Schneider 2013.

whereas small countries such as the island states of the Caribbean take up correspondingly more space. Nevertheless, the figure reproduces the general impression a visitor would receive while travelling this miniature world, and two observations are worth noting in this regard.

Firstly, wealthy industrialised countries such as the European members of the OECD, Japan, and South Korea take up a significant part of the territory, while developing countries in the Americas, Africa, and Asia are marginalised. Secondly, the figure highlights the dominant role of the host. The PRC was represented at the event with a space of 160,000 square metres (Xinhua 2008), which included the China Pavilion itself, the park area surrounding it, the provincial exhibition spaces located in the large hall within the plateau's foundation, and technically also the Hong Kong and Macau pavilions. Throughout world fair history, host exhibitions have traditionally played a more central role than those of other participants — one need only recall the iconic relevance of the Eifel Tower at the 1889 Paris Exposition (Johnson 2002; Jackson 2008: 46-49). Yet the massive presence of China at this event stands in marked contrast to the self-presentation of host countries at preceding world fairs. This is also reflected by the comments of the foreign pavilion organisers I interviewed, who argued that the Chinese authorities were portraying their nation-state as the centre of the world through the use of architecture and lot size regulations, and that the degree of hierarchy that this created was unique in recent expo history.

Such arguments illustrate how organisational practices and administrative choices, as idiosyncratic as they may be, shape physical

objects (here: the physical environment of the expo territory), and how those who interact with that environment generate meanings about this experience. It is before this backdrop that discursive statements emerge about China's rise as a Great Power at the centre of the world. Recall how such complex processes draw from sets of inputs as they systematically assemble a network of new meanings. Figure 3.2 maps the actor-network of this specific case and the conceptual blending process to which it gives rise.

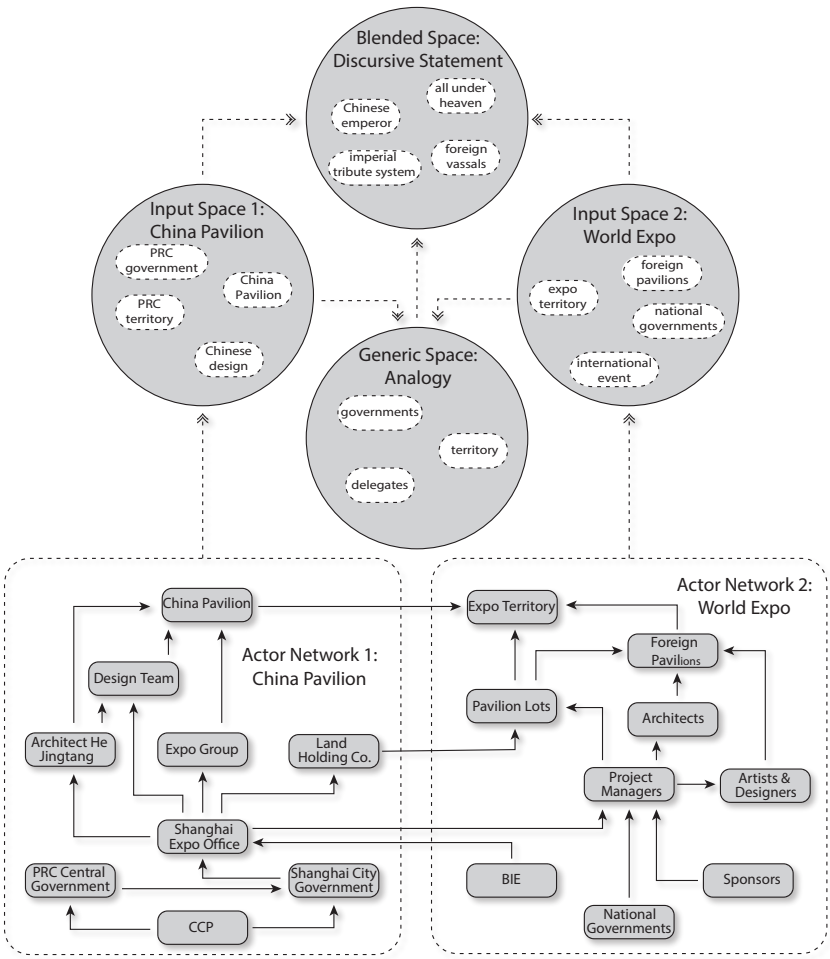

Figure 3.2: Blended Meanings of the China Pavilion as Emperor of All-Under-Heaven. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

The bottom of the figure provides an actor-network that tracks Chinese organisational processes (left) and foreign planning activities at world expos (right). At the centre of these Chinese efforts stands the 'mega-event flagship' (see Deng 2013) of the China Pavilion, designed by an architectural and design team headed by He Jingtang. The design process is plugged into circuits of interaction between party and state actors, at the central and municipal levels, but ultimately they involve the Shiboju, or Shanghai Expo Office, and two of its subsidiaries, the Expo Group and the Land Holding Corporation (ibid.). These processes are in turn subject to the rules and regulations that the BIE has established for world expositions. They also connect with foreign planning activities through the Shiboju's administrative procedures and, important in this specific case, the lot regulations for the expo territory.

I will discuss below the processes that shape foreign pavilion constructions. Here, I am interested in the way that these chains of interaction create the final assemblages at the territory itself, and how the combination of towering China Pavilion, territorial arrangement, and foreign presence creates the impression of China ruling the world at the Expo (Minter 2010b). This rationale is mapped in the top part of the figure. One input space draws together categories and assumptions about the China Pavilion and its meanings, using concepts from Chinese politics and architectural design. The second input space bring together concepts related to the expo as an international event. Commonalities between these two meaning-making spaces are then combined, in the generic space, using the frame of geopolitics to turn buildings and territories into a miniature world of nation-states. Finally, a narrative emerges in which the map becomes coterminous with the territory: Shanghai's Expo park is all under heaven, the China Pavilion is its imperial ruler, and foreign pavilions are delegates to the all-powerful imperial court.

Note how the blended meaning establishes closure by introducing the idea of the imperial tribute system, a concept that is itself absent from the input spaces, but that becomes available thanks to the way in which the Chinese designers 'flagged' imperial history as a source of meaning-making in their pavilion design (see also chapter 6). In that sense, this interpretation implies actors and intentions that are not borne out by the actual activities on the ground: foreign pavilion organisers had diverse assumptions and intentions about their presence at the Shanghai Expo that did not neatly fit into the idea of delegates to an imperial court. Chinese media workers and state officials remained committed to their

own discourse of how the PRC would never seek hegemony in the world, and the idea that the Communist Party might be part of a new feudal order would have been deeply offensive to party cadres. Yet, the complex interactions in the run-up to the event created territorial configurations that lent themselves to such a conceptual blend between expo pavilions and world politics, providing the resources for other actors such as foreign journalists to generate narratives of foreign dignitaries paying homage to an autocrat.

3.6 Building a Shanghai Expo pavilion

I have so far discussed how Chinese actors tapped into existing organisational networks to organise the Shanghai expo, and how these processes allowed certain meanings to emerge about the geopolitical relevance of the expo territory. It is worth examining in more detail the chains of interactions that led to this outcome, specifically the activities of foreign participants as they planned and constructed national pavilions and exhibits. To explore this dimension of the expo, I interviewed organisers of various pavilions to trace how they assembled and managed their various exhibitions, and I have condensed these interviews to chronologically reconstruct how national pavilions generally took shape. Allow me then to describe the path of Alice, a hypothetical pavilion organiser, as she goes about overseeing the design, construction, and functioning of a large national pavilion.

Alice has a background in event management and tourism, and she has been working for a private company that organises exhibits and fairs. Over the past decade, she has been involved in various expositions, including world fairs. In 2002, she notes with interest that the BIE has awarded the 2010 World Exposition to the city of Shanghai. In the spring of 2006, the national government of the country where Alice's company is located sends out a call for applications for its national pavilion at the impending Shanghai event. The pavilion will be commissioned by the country's ministry of foreign affairs, and it will receive a combination of public and private funding. Alice gathers a team of creative designers, consisting of professionals from several companies that each specialise in separate aspects of the project: branding, interior design, architecture, and construction. Together, this consortium brainstorms how to connect the Shanghai Expo theme 'better city, better life' to the country they

mean to represent. They meet with government officials and advisors in academia, cultural sectors, and commerce to hear suggestions and inform themselves about any relevant requirements that core stakeholders might have.

Over the course of the year, Alice's team draws up a draft proposal, which includes the conceptual framework for the pavilion and its exhibits, as well as a list of the companies with which the team will collaborate. In 2007, the government's search committee conducts a first screening to check the feasibility of the various proposals, and later that year the committee narrows down the pool of applicants. Alice and her collaborators are shortlisted, and they proceed to develop their proposal in more detail until, in early 2008, the search committee comes together to make its final decision. The vote is in Alice's favour, and she signs a formal contract to organise the country's national pavilion. At this point, representatives from the national government also sign a participant contract with the BIE.

Now the practical work begins. The architectural bureau to which Alice outsources the building design process spends the rest of 2008 planning the construction in detail, in line with the parameters set in the successful application. This also means contacting the Chinese authorities at the Shiboju and arranging the area on which the pavilion will later be built. Within the zone designated for participants from their specific geographical region of origin, Alice's team is able to reserve one of the coveted spots along a main thoroughfare.

As Alice joins a delegation to Shanghai, she also registers her pavilion as a Chinese company, so that she can start sub-contracting Chinese suppliers for the construction process. In late 2008, she attends a ceremony to break ground on the expo lot in Pudong. At this point, the interior design team is already in continuous exchange with the architects. The pavilion will later feature large video installations, and filming for these sub-projects is also underway at this point, though most of the process of designing the actual exhibits and their contents does not start until early 2009, when the foundations of the pavilion have been laid down.

During this time, Alice also organises surveys in China to see what the public there expects from this particular country's national pavilion. This feedback, together with input from various government officials at home, is handed over to several famous artists who will realise their own

vision for the pavilion exhibits within the general outlines that Alice and her team provide.

Since the national pavilion will receive a substantial amount of its budget from the private sector, Alice has to negotiate both conceptual and practical issues with industry representatives throughout this phase of the project. 2009 starts fairly hectically, as Alice and her team meet with representatives of up to 30 companies and multinational corporations, carefully balancing the various needs and expectations.

For about the first half of 2009, the Chinese contractors are busy constructing the pavilion. Throughout this time, Alice and her colleagues coordinate practical matters with representatives of the Shiboju, ranging from transport to fire safety. Alice also collaborates with other pavilion organisers, many of whom she knows through her participation in past international events. Where the various pavilion organisers share her goals, she joins collaborative efforts to streamline bureaucratic processes between the foreign participants and the Shanghai side, for instance ensuring swift visa access and journalist accreditation for visitors from Alice's country. At the same time, she represents her company's interests by building personal relations with Chinese officials, and she occasionally bypasses the official Shiboju to get direct access to the departments that are responsible for issues such as logistics and transport.

By spring 2010, the largest part of the exhibit is installed, and the Shiboju is sending a delegation of censors to check that the content does not breach any PRC laws. Since Alice's pavilion showcases her country as a potential trade partner and tourist destination for Chinese audiences, the exhibits are largely uncontroversial, and showing the Chinese officials around is a mere formality. Alice is nevertheless concerned about a modern history exhibit that a renowned activist-artist put together, and which she thinks might upset the censors, so she denies the delegation access to that part of the pavilion, claiming that the exhibit is still under construction.

As Alice prepares for the grand opening of the expo in May 2010, her pavilion's exhibits are ready as planned. From April onwards, her full staff of caterers, press spokespersons, drivers, and guides is on site. Throughout April, they are going through trial runs with test audiences, and on 1 May 2010 the pavilion officially opens its doors to the public. Over the coming months the pavilion will not only see tourists file through the exhibits, but it will also host diplomatic, cultural, and trade delegations as well as journalists in its office spaces.

At the end of October, when the massive spectacle finally comes to a close, roughly 50,000 people will have passed through the pavilion exhibits each day, 98 per cent of them Chinese. Alice will have hosted over 200 business events that attracted nearly 20,000 entrepreneurs. She will also have hosted more than 2,000 cultural performances, featuring hundreds of artists, and she will have welcomed about 8,000 VIP delegates over the course of the six months. These will have included several heads of state and about three dozen ministers or ministerial-level officials.

The process I have described here of course varies, depending on the country of origin. Between the 189 national participants at the Shanghai Expo, a couple of general differences deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, the numbers of visitors and delegations were not all as high as for Alice's hypothetical pavilion, which I have modelled on the largest national pavilions, such as the Australian pavilion, which saw every tenth expo visitor pass through its exhibits (see Harrison 2010). Smaller pavilions saw far fewer visitors.

Secondly, not all parties mustered the finances to host such a large pavilion, with many smaller countries opting for pre-built, standardised constructs, or for a booth in a larger exhibition hall. In some cases, the financial crisis had a major impact on pavilion finances. While most pavilions had earmarked funding years before the crisis hit, some had to significantly scale back their efforts as resources suddenly dwindled away in 2008 and 2009.

Thirdly, the degree to which pavilion organisers collaborated with, and relied on, commercial sponsors varied from pavilion to pavilion. Some pavilions were largely financed by their respective nation-state governments, usually through a combination of ministries, e.g. of commerce, foreign affairs, and culture. Others were financed solely through commercial sponsors (see below). The effects of such commercial financing also varied greatly. While some companies were happy to take a hands-off approach and simply contribute to the effort, in exchange for acknowledgement, product placement, and chances to participate in commercial endeavours at the final site, others had their own ideas about exhibit design and pressured pavilion organisers to arrange the exhibits according to their own rationales.

Finally, the timing of the design phases and the importance of different stakeholders during these phases varied. For instance, the German and Japanese pavilions collaborated strongly with enterprises from their respective countries, closely integrating products and company narratives

into their exhibits and shows early on. Other pavilions, like the Spanish one, handed the core design responsibilities over to famous Spanish artists, who worked largely independently of government and industry control.

3.7 The discursive horizons of networked spectacles

Despite these differences, it is nevertheless useful in this context to conceptualise the decision-making process in the general terms I have narrated above, since such a description highlights what constraints the chain of interactions imposed on the organisers and their communication strategy. The construction of discourses at the Shanghai Expo took place within overlapping organisational networks, each with its own demands. These networks provided the institutional boundaries that defined what could and could not be communicated, and the creativity to design discursive statements was consequently limited to the realm where all institutional frameworks overlapped (see Figure 3.3); a space which I call the discursive horizon.

The first set of constraints is located at the international level. The plans of expo participants have to conform to international institutions, in this case the general guidelines of the BIE, which is represented at the event by a steering committee. The BIE aims to 'ensure the smooth running of the Expo' (BIE 2011), and to this end it regulates the 'rules and procedures concerning international exhibitions' (BIE 1928/1988: Protocol §1). This means that the BIE controls, for instance, who is allowed to participate in a world expo, what qualifies as an acceptable expo theme, and what obligations the host and the participants have (ibid.: Conventions).

The second set of constraints is created by actors in the pavilion's country of origin. The most readily apparent constraint is that the project has to adhere to a certain budget. As mentioned above, the US pavilion is an interesting example of how domestic legislation connects to pavilion finances: US federal legislation prohibits the use of public funds at world exhibitions (Minter 2010a), which created major planning difficulties for the US pavilion organisers and almost prevented the USA from being present at the event at all — an outcome that might have taken on powerful (and for the US embarrassing) new meanings within the context of the politically charged miniature world that the expo presented. In

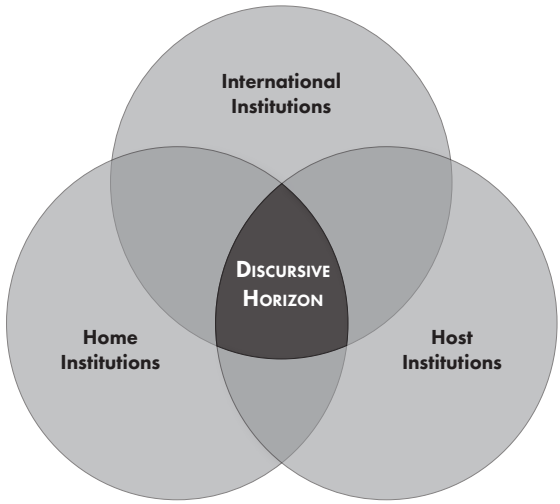

Figure 3.3: Overlapping Institutional Frameworks and the Discursive Horizon at the Shanghai World Exposition. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

addition to such legislative matters, the economic downturn of the world economy after 2008 also affected many pavilion budgets. For instance, the Polish pavilion had to reduce its scope fundamentally on short notice: whereas the building was originally supposed to feature an elaborate glass exterior, the organisers had to settle for a less expensive paper-cut design in the end, after their budget had been reduced by about 70 per cent.

At the level of domestic constraints, the pavilion content also has to reflect the overall public relations strategy of the respective government and any relevant private sponsors, while simultaneously remaining committed to the vision that the various designers and artists pursue during their design work. This may lead to clashes between creative visions and the intentions of those who commissioned the pavilion, as was the case with the controversial Spanish exhibition designed by Basilio Martín Patino, who referred to the 2004 Madrid train bombing, and by Isabel Coixet, who displayed a disturbingly uncanny oversized animatronic baby (Expaña Expone 2010). Such factors provide the institutional framework at home.

Finally, the project has to adhere to Chinese rules and regulations, which include both national-level legislation and local regulations, as well as the overall theme that the Chinese organisers have set (in this case: 'better city, better life') and which the Shiboju coordinates and

implements through its various members. These members in turn range from officials in public security and foreign affairs to state media workers, party propaganda experts, university academics, and administrators from logistics administrations such as fire departments. Their interpretations of Chinese regulations, their organisational practices, and their plans for the overall expo form the third set of constraints to which all participants have to adhere.

Overall, the overlapping constraints create a limited area of possibilities for creating discursive statements, though it should also be pointed out that this bounded space still gives unlimited opportunities to combine symbolic elements into new and emergent meanings. Moreover, the various pavilion organisers and designers frequently reinterpreted or actively pushed back against certain constraints, expanding their discursive horizon in the process. Nevertheless, the incentives at networked spectacles like the Shanghai Expo were strongly stacked in favour of discursive assemblages that aligned with the host organiser's vision for the event.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how various actors came together to organise the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and the Shanghai Expo. These processes took place within complex networks that the Chinese authorities assembled domestically, and they were linked to existing international event networks. On the part of the ruling CCP, this involved long-standing practices of media management, including the various mechanisms through which the party manages state actors, and a number of 'hard' controls that state actors at times apply to processes of cultural production. It also, however, involved less intrusive measures that relied on public-private partnerships, delegation to non-state actors, and market forces. I have described this combination of strategies as 'cultural governance', an approach that attempts to regulate social processes by indirectly regulating the cultural resources from which those processes draw.

As a result of this approach, actors with at times different views and interests joined the process of assembling the events and their discourses. The PRC's administration under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao seems to have been fairly content to let these attempts play out

within broad constraints, many of which coincided with values already imbued in the international networks with which actors were familiar.

In subsequent chapters of this book, I examine more closely how actors fed different, often contradictory discourses into China's networked spectacles. Yet, despite complex and often antagonistic interactions, and despite the discursive ruptures and fractures that these interactions created (see chapter 8), there was also a sense that an overarching narrative emerged out of these events. The networked practices at spectacles like the expo reproduced many of the discourses familiar from genres like sporting competitions and world fairs. In the case of the Shanghai Expo, the idiosyncratic interactions of thousands of organisers and event planners led to an event territory that to many observers seemed like a miniature version of the world, inviting interpretations about China's role in international politics that the PRC's leadership may not have intended, and that in fact clashed with the state's foreign policy strategy and the ruling party's self-perception. Rather than view the PRC as a peaceful and responsible partner in international relations, foreign journalists and event participants continued to rely on frames of imperial ostentation as they blended available semiotic resources into their own meanings.

Collective meaning-making may then not always have coincided with official CCP discourses, and yet these official discourses are a central part of China's networked spectacles. Before turning to some of the contestations that accompanied these spectacles, it is worth asking what state and party actors were communicating, and what relevance these official representations play in Chinese politics. These are questions that the next chapter explores.

4 *Staging China's Revival*

It is twenty minutes past eight in the evening in Beijing, and millions of TV viewers across the world are tuned in to the opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. In the recently constructed Bird's Nest Stadium, a little Chinese girl dressed in a red dress takes the stage and sings a Chinese song: the *Ode to the Motherland* (*Gechang zuguo* 歌唱祖国).

> The red five-star flag waves in the wind.
> How the song of victory resounds,
> Praising our beloved motherland.
> Henceforth we shall stride towards prosperity and strength!
>
> 五星红旗迎风飘扬，
> 胜利歌声多么响亮；
> 歌唱我们亲爱的祖国，
> 从今走向繁荣富强。

The camera closes in on the scene from a distance and slowly circles round the girl. It then cuts to the stadium floor, where children dressed in the traditional attire of China's ethnic groups carry the PRC's national flag across the stadium. Viewers of the state-run domestic network CCTV are informed in Chinese that 'the air above the Bird's Nest stadium reverberates with the loud praise for our motherland, while 56 ethnic minority children enter the hall, clustered around the red five-star flag'. The camera now switches back and forth between long shots of the flag-bearers, extremely wide angles of the stadium floor (now bathed in red light), views of stadium spectators waving miniature Chinese flags, and low-angle shots of the singing child. The girl launches into the second verse of her song:

> Across the high mountains, across the plains,
> Across the surging Yellow and Yangtze Rivers,
> This vast and beautiful territory

Is our beloved homeland.
We love peace, we love the homeland.
Our unity and friendship are strong as steel!

越过高山，越过平原，
跨过奔腾的黄河长江；
宽广美丽的土地，
是我们亲爱的家乡，
我们爱和平，我们爱家乡，
我们团结友爱坚强如钢。

The 56 children have reached the far side of the stadium, where they hand the flag to eight soldiers. The men goose-step up red stairs and fasten the flag to a flag pole. An announcement in English, French, and Chinese instructs the stadium audience to rise for the national anthem of the PRC. One of the soldiers throws the flag into an artificial stream of wind, while a 224-member choir of ethnic minority singers performs the *March of the Volunteers* (*Yiyongjun jinxingqu* 义勇军进行曲). As the flag rises, the camera shows the saluting soldiers, the (Chinese) stadium audience, and the CCP Politburo members on the honour dais. Once the anthem concludes, fireworks colour the sky above the stadium red and yellow, while the audience below applauds enthusiastically.

This scene was part of a concerted effort by the PRC's authorities to showcase what the Chinese nation should stand for at the start of the 21st century. Under the leadership of the CCP, networked spectacles like the Beijing Olympics provided various actors with an opportunity to design these festivities in ways that would inject new vigour into conceptual categories like 'the nation' while simultaneously revising past policy strategies and the basis of the party's legitimacy to rule China. China's networked spectacles promised to provide a staging ground for such reassessments and a way to communicate the party's mission to audiences both at home and abroad.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the organisational practices that shaped China's networked spectacles under the Hu-Wen administration were not governed top down by a single actor, even if they often drew from hierarchical network structures that had served Chinese authorities well in the past. These practices allowed for delegation, cooperation, and negotiation, creating diverse semiotic resources and discursive statements. That said, the authorities had a specific vision for these

spectacles, and their programming activities within the event networks were geared towards relaying this vision through fairly clear discursive statements.

These discourses may have been created by state and party actors whose potential influence on Chinese society is substantial, but I hesitate to call the discourses that these actors generated 'hegemonic', in the sense that they became dominant. It is hard to say how common or widely accepted such discourses really were. What is more, for a discourse to be hegemonic actors would have to create statements that serve the status quo, relay entrenched meanings, and reinforce common-sense assumptions. However, as I show in subsequent chapters, the authorities frequently designed their messages to *shift* the status quo, *alter* existing meanings, and *recalibrate* previously accepted knowledge. Terms like 'hegemonic' vs 'counter-hegemonic' do not adequately capture these communicative moves.

In what follows, I will then instead refer to these communication practices as official discourse, that is the collection of statements designed and communicated by actors associated with authoritative political organisations such as, in the Chinese case, the party or the state. Official discourse is ideological, in the sense that it infuses networks with the ideals of political organisations. This can happen indirectly and subtly, and it may not always involve strategic considerations on the part of the actors who are involved. Like everyone else, official actors also draw from available communicative resources, some of which may not comply with the received wisdom of what official ideology should entail. In that sense, not all official discourse is necessarily propaganda (i.e. statements by actors explicitly meant to communicate the position of their political organisation), though moments like the flag-raising ceremony described above illustrate that propaganda played an important role during China's networked spectacles. More often than not, official discourse was less straightforward, frequently inconsistent or contradictory, but always highly creative in how it assembled familiar symbols and tropes into meanings.

Before turning in the next chapters to the many ways in which official actors recalibrated the PRC's official discourses during networked spectacles, for instance by designing nationalist discourses or defining what a 'harmonious society' should look like, this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding this ideological labour. I will walk readers through three core spectacles of the Hu-Wen era: the Beijing Olympics

opening ceremony (2008), the PRC's 60th anniversary parade (2009), and the official Chinese exhibits at the Shanghai Expo (2010). I will discuss each of these events in turn, focusing in particular on how the spectacles were staged, what communicative resources they drew from to compile their messages, and what background knowledge they attempted to activate through their use of specific symbols. The chapter concludes with various cultural activities that flanked the events in the run-up and aftermath. As I will show, the networked spectacles followed a general narrative that can best be summarised under the official propaganda term 'great revival' (*weida fuxing* 伟大复兴), which has played an increasingly important role in Chinese political discourse since roughly 1999 (Zhang 2013).

4.1 The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

If we accept that Olympic Games are political events, then their opening ceremonies serve as their primary political statement. The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony (CCTV 2008) was indeed such a statement, but not necessarily of the kind that observers outside China had expected at the time. Many foreign commentators had thought the event would be steeped in the tropes and symbols of Chinese communism, and that it would unapologetically celebrate CCP politics. As it turned out, the opening ceremony took a rather different approach, and it is telling that, for instance, journalists reporting for Germany's main state TV channel, the ARD, were then surprised that the event had not, as one broadcaster put it, been 'a propaganda show' (ARD 2008).

It is possible that the lack of traditional CCP imagery and references to political figures such as Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping caused some observers to miss the subtler political messages that the organisers staged in Bejing's National Stadium. Under the arguably masterful direction of Chinese film-maker Zhang Yimou, this spectacle managed to tap into both the positive imagination of the international community and the perceived cultural heritages of Chinese viewers to define what 'China' might stand for at the start of the 21st century (see also Gries et al. 2010: 214).

The key focus throughout the opening ceremony was on China as a unified nation with a longstanding history of technical and cultural achievements. As Zhang Yimou and his team unfolded a 147-metre long

scroll in the centre of the stadium, they simultaneously unfolded a vision of China that stretched from the invention of gunpowder to the foundation of the first printing press, from the Han Dynasty's regional trade along what would later become known as the Silk Roads to the Ming Dynasty's nautical expeditions, from terracotta warriors to landscape painting, and from traditional Chinese instruments to modern concert pianists.

History, or rather historiography, has long served Chinese leaders as a justification for present-day politics (Mittag 2009, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik & Schneider 2009): not only do references to past glories instil a sense of pride in domestic audiences, they also place the current leadership in the context of a long line of successes. The opening ceremony utilised such a linear, modernist blueprint to guide viewers through historical achievements that culminated, ultimately, in the first Chinese manned spaceflight.

This linear narrative carried an array of tropes that romanticised Chinese history and culture, and the organisers used extravagant visuals to arrange what the parameters of Chinese 'civilisation' should be today. This included colourful flowing dresses of Tang Dynasty ladies, powerful ancient drum performances, dream-like fairy creatures flying through the stadium, and elegant martial arts routines. These set pieces cleverly evoked patterns of meaning for both domestic and foreign audiences, providing a nostalgic foil of national splendour at home and arguably tapping into orientalist fantasies abroad.

At the same time, the organisers had embedded the glamorous Chinese performances in international values such as peace and respect for the environment that promised to make the ceremony intelligible for foreign observers and give the spectacle a non-threatening tone. The performances ambitiously fused Chinese folklore and modern values, telling a story of national success and harmony through the language of the international mass event.

I will not narrate the entire performance here. Full versions as well as highlight reels are available through major online video streaming platforms such as Youtube, and Barmé (2008) has provided a step-by-step account of the ceremony. I am interested here in the specific communication strategies that the organisers used to present their vision of China in the world. The director's team had set out to 'brand' the very identity of the Chinese nation, and a crucial component of this effort was the way the organisers relied on child actors to tell the story of

contemporary China, a strategy that has long played an important role in CCP propaganda efforts (see Donald 1999: 97).

An example of this is the flag-raising ceremony that I described at the start of this chapter (Figure 4.1). In it, China's ethnic groups are represented by 56 children, who harmoniously hold hands as they carry the national flag across the stadium floor. The message of ethnic unity is not new: the CCP has for decades evoked imagery that shows minority groups united around one of the nation's most revered symbols, the flag. In this case, this familiar imagery has been recast in a way that suggests innocence, an issue I will examine in more detail in chapter 5: the statement about national unity was relayed through cute children holding hands.

Figure 4.1: The Beijing Olympics Flag-Raising Ceremony. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

These 56 ethnic groups were united in their effort to carry the flag, but also by the little Han-Chinese girl with her pigtails singing the *Ode to the Motherland* as the other children — reportedly themselves Han Chinese (Spence 2008b), but wearing the traditional attire of specific minority groups — marched across the stadium floor. In her red dress and singing

a revolutionary song, the girl represented both the (Han) Chinese people as well as their communist vanguard. For all intents and purposes, she became the Chinese nation, collapsing state, party, and people into a single symbol. Her role in the ceremony was pivotal, and she would later reappear at another crucial moment, imbuing the event with a recurring theme of youthful innocence that reflected official narratives of national rejuvenation.

The use of children continued throughout the entire ceremony, ensuring that the momentum of cuteness was never entirely lost: in one of the concluding sequences, which was titled 'Starlight' (*xingguang* 星光), internationally renowned pianist Lang Lang was accompanied on the grand piano by a five-year-old girl. Dancers around them formed the shape of a white dove. Later in the sequence, as the dancers arranged their bodies to construct a miniature model of the Bird's Nest Stadium, the girl in the red dress made her second appearance: suspended on wires, she sailed across the stadium, waving at the audience as she was seemingly carried into the sky by a Chinese kite.

In the subsequent sequence, 'Nature' (*ziran* 自然), a group of children dressed up as elementary school students took a mock lesson in environmental protection while 2,008 martial artists performed Taiji movements around them. Towards the end of the sequence, the children used crayons to colour in a traditional Chinese landscape. As the painting rose to the sky, featuring a large smiley face in place of the sun, the children cheered and waved.

Finally, as the performative part of the opening ceremony drew to a close, popular singers Liu Huan and Sarah Brightman performed the event's theme song *You and Me* (*Wo he ni* 我和你) from the top of an artificial globe. Below them on the stadium floor, 2,008 actors opened up umbrellas that displayed the happy faces of children from all around the world. As the performance concluded, fireworks reportedly formed 2,008 smiley faces in the skies above the stadium.

While this use of children is certainly not new in political communication, the organisers here chose to deploy this visual trope to create specific meanings. The trope coincides with distinctly modernist discourses: the children can be viewed as representing China's future, and it is telling that they played a role in sequences that dealt with modernist and contemporary issues such as nationalism, economic development, urban construction, international relations, and environmental protection — themes that I will analyse in more detail in the next chapters. In

contrast, no children appeared during the four sequences that showcased the cultural achievements of pre-modern China (i.e. the invention of gunpowder, paper, the written script, and the compass). We do not see any children playing ancient Chinese instruments or performing martial arts either. This is an interesting way to frame modernity, not just as a linear journey forward through time, but one of 'rejuvenation' (*fuxing* 复兴).

There is another dimension to the use of this trope throughout the opening ceremony, and this dimension connects to a more general shift in CCP ideology under the leadership of Hu Jintao. The laughing children holding hands provide semiotic resources for reimagining modern China as place of harmony. The idea of a 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) was first introduced to official CCP discourse in 2004, during a plenary session of the party's central committee (see China Daily 2010), and together with the 'scientific development outlook' (*kexue fazhan guan* 科学发展观) it subsequently became one of the two core ideological concepts of the Hu era. Both concepts were later written into the PRC constitution, and they remained programmatic throughout Hu's tenure as General Secretary of the party (for discussions see Chan 2009, Geis & Holt 2009, Hong 2010, and the contributions in Zhao & Lim 2010).

In chapter 6, I will discuss in more detail how different actors created concrete meanings for this concept. Here, it suffices to stress a particular strategy through which the opening ceremony organisers made that concept a salient part of the event's political discourse. Throughout the opening ceremony, the performances suggested that harmony was a continuous theme throughout Chinese culture, and that it is indeed central to China's past, present, and future. One sequence was explicitly dedicated to creating this sense of continuity: the segment 'Script' (*wenzi* 文字) showed the evolution of the Chinese character for harmony (*he* 和) from its pre-modern to its contemporary form.

This set-up allowed the organisers to bridge the kind of awkward inconsistencies that Harvey (1996) has criticised in mass events: instead of creating tensions between, on the one hand, a linear, modernist narrative of progressive change and, on the other hand, a conservative narrative of immutable national culture, the segment construed a pure ideal of harmony that remained at the centre of this imagined Chinese civilisation, even as its instantiation took on new forms throughout the ages, adapting to changing circumstances. The press guide to the event

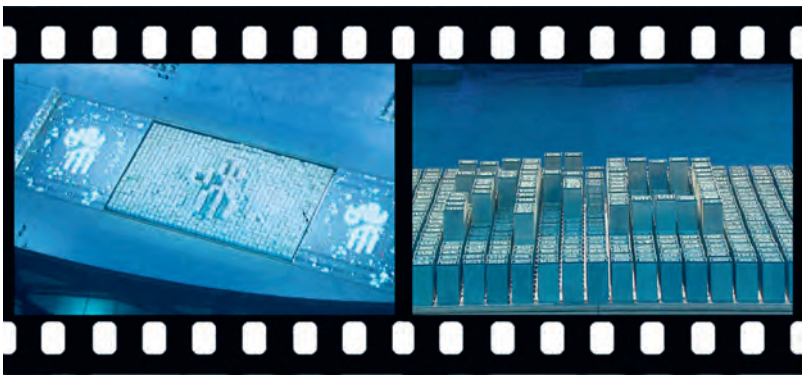

Figure 4.2: The Evolution of the Character 'He' in the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony 'Script' sequence. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

suggests this interpretation in its own explanation of the performance (BOCOG 2018a: 33, emphasis and errors in the original):

> This is modern type of Chinese character 'He'. All three words represent not only **the evolution process of Chinese characters**, but also Confucius' idea of humanism, that is, 'Harmony is Precious'.

Before such a backdrop, actors who invoked the concept of 'harmony', for instance the opening ceremony organisers or the Hu-Wen administration, then presented themselves as having merely dipped into a continuous civilisational river to pull out existing concepts, rather than having invented and calibrated such concept as part of their discursive work. Through such communicative choices, the actors involved in constructing political discourses to some extent naturalise the concepts they use and legitimate their meanings through appeals to a supposedly shared tradition. Similar communication patterns were also on display at the networked spectacles that the authorities staged the year after the Olympic Games: the 60th Anniversary of the PRC, in 2009.

4.2 The PRC anniversary parade

The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony was about branding the Chinese nation, laying out a continuous historical narrative for China, and framing the present (and future) through cute children. It was about

the rejuvenated Chinese nation. These efforts continued a year later, at the PRC's elaborate 60th anniversary celebration, though arguably with a more domestic audience in mind. On 1 October 2009, at 10:00 am, the PRC launched a massive televised parade along Beijing's Chang'an Avenue. Nearly 10,000 soldiers and 100,000 civilians would march across Tiananmen Square, past thousands of carefully vetted volunteers and invited guests. Picking up where the Olympic narratives had left off, the event told stories of national unity, harmony, and CCP leadership.

My colleague Hwang Yih-jye and I have analysed the anniversary parade in detail (Hwang & Schneider 2011), and I will limit my present discussion to a description of the proceedings and a study of the core communicative strategies that informed the parade. I will return in the next chapters to some of the themes that Hwang and I traced in our earlier study. My goal here is to show how the anniversary celebrations drew on the iconography of China's revolutionary past, reproducing several rituals that have come to form part of the CCP's repertoire of symbolic interactions, but how the event organisers also juxtaposed revolution-era iconography with new elements, in the process often subtly adding meanings and discursive resources to the established canon of communist signs.

The celebrations began with three generations of Chinese leaders (Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping) walking the red carpet and taking their place on the podium above the famous Gate of Heavenly Peace. Together with other members of the CCP's leadership, specifically the members of the party's highest organ, the Politburo Standing Committee, they then observed the flag-raising ceremony opposite the Gate, in front of the Martyrs' Memorial on Tiananmen Square. Following this ritual, PRC President and CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao proceeded to inspect the troops (see Xinhua 2009d): riding along Chang'an Avenue, China's top leader passed formation after formation of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers. During this ride, he engaged the troops in a ritualistic exchange of slogans from the back of a 'Red Flag' limousine — a tradition familiar from the previous 13 PLA military parades that the PRC had witnessed since its founding (see Hung 2007, Sun 2001, and Ye & Barmé 2009). The famous exchange has China's commander-in-chief address the soldiers with 'hello comrades' (*tongzhimen hao* 同志们好), and they reply 'hello chief' (*shouzhang hao* 首长好) in carefully rehearsed unison. This line is then followed by a second exchange: 'comrades, you have worked hard' (*tongzhimen xinku le* 同志们辛苦了), asserts the commander-in-chief, to which the soldiers respond 'we serve the people' (*wei renmin fuwu*

为人民服务), an emblematic phrase, dating back to Mao, that captures the party's self-perception and one of its core legitimating arguments (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: The Ritual of Troop Inspection during the PRC's 60th Anniversary. Figure adapted from screenshots of online footage.

After Hu Jintao completed his version of this exchange, repeating the famous phrases ten times, he returned to the balcony at the Gate of Heavenly Peace to give an eight-minute speech that highlighted recent economic achievements, national unity, and the importance of CCP rule. Hu's speech was then followed by the military parade itself, with 14 square formations of soldiers and 30 blocks of top-of-the-line military equipment traversing the square (China Daily 2009), in each case saluting the leaders on the podium in carefully choreographed synchronicity. This display of martial prowess was succeeded by a civilian pageant, which had been prepared by the same director as the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony: Zhang Yimou. The civilian component of the parade included a segment that paraded large portraits of past Chinese heads of state

across the square, framed by famous propaganda slogans. It then showed major achievements in PRC history, covering political, economic, social, and technological themes. Following this sequence of highlights, the parade featured floats for each of the PRC's provinces or administrative regions, and it concluded with displays of ethnic unity and transnational harmony.

Much like the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, the PRC anniversary parade presented a linear narrative of history that moved from a distant but glorious ancient period through more recent phases of turmoil and humiliation on to a modern present that is marked by renewed glory. The use of symbols was particularly relevant to this endeavour, especially since the pre-modern era was represented only indirectly, through cultural references. Hu Jintao's speech pointed towards this non-distinct past by praising China for '5,000 years of history', a number that will have been familiar to audiences as the official CCP's position on how far back the origins of the nation should be located. The speech linked this mythological past to the idea of rejuvenation that had already played such an important role in the Olympics opening ceremony discourse the year before, with Hu extolling 'the Chinese nation's bright prospect on the road to revival'.

More generally, the parade discourses were at their core modernist, concerning themselves only with the pre-modern past in the form of symbols that suggested a vague, glorious past. References to modernity were much more specific, and symbolic numbers again played an important role in this regard. The soldiers who carried the PRC flag during the flag-raising ceremony took precisely 169 steps up to the flagpole, one for each year since the start of the First Opium War in 1840, reminding audiences of the year that the party leadership considers to be the start of a 'century of humiliation' at the hands of foreign powers. The idea of national humiliation provides an important foil for contemporary Chinese nationalism (Gries 2004: ch.3, Wang 2012), and more specifically for the revival narratives of recent leadership generations (Callahan 2010: ch.2): it was the CCP, so the rationale goes, that overcame this lost century and set the country on its path towards well-deserved glory.

The 60 years of PRC history were then also frequently referred to, e.g. through a 60-gun salute during the flag-raising ceremony, the 60 floats of the civilian pageant, the 60,000 white doves that were released into the sky at the end of the event, but also the licence plate numbers of the limousines used during the troop inspection, which read V-01949 and V-02009 (see

Xinhua 2009f). The event further evoked China's revolutionary past through the PLA orchestra that played famous revolutionary songs, but of course also through the location itself: the Gate of Heavenly Peace had provided Mao with the stage for announcing the foundation of the PRC in 1949, and his portrait still adorns the monument and overlooks the famous site (for a history of the square and its iconography see Wu 2005). The event further pointed towards this founding mythology through the choice of attire that master-of-ceremony Hu Jintao wore for the occasion: whereas the other CCP cadres wore western suits, Hu was dressed in a 'Mao suit', or rather a 'Sun Yat-sen suit', as the attire is known in Chinese. The suit served as a reminder of modern China's Republican heritage, placing the current leadership into a timeline that extended beyond the famous founding date of the PRC and that connected Sun's revolution, Mao's revolution, and the present administration within the overarching theme of China's road to revival.

To fill this overarching narrative with meaning, the event organisers used a number of communicative mechanics that served to frame the proceedings. Aside from building important symbols into the parade, for instance as part of specific floats and formations, the director's team also had the parade pass before a backdrop of volunteers in the square who would flip colourful flashcards, creating a large 'human screen' that could display relevant slogans as the formations moved past (Figure 4.4). For domestic audiences, these slogans and the activities on the square were then further framed by the CCTV commentators, who disambiguated the event and provided the intended interpretation. Through these interlocking mechanisms, the organisers stacked various semiotic markers to shape the political discourse of the parade. For instance, the segment that showcased Mao's portrait was presented as the 'creation of heaven and earth' (the official title of that segment, relayed to audiences through CCTV), and its relevance became enmeshed with the general background slogan that 'socialism is good' (presented by the volunteers in the square). The Deng era, in turn, would become 'the story of spring' (segment title), linked to the background statement 'emancipate the mind'.

Importantly, the more recent periods under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were presented as a future-oriented transition into the 21st century, with Jiang's formation (titled 'walking into a new era') accompanied by the background slogans 'striding into the next century' and 'proceed with the times'. Such discursive statements may seem vacuous, but they generate the frame through which the organisers then made sense of the Hu

Jintao period, which coincided with flashcard displays of the 'scientific development' concept, and which carried the somewhat awkward title 'carry forward the cause, and charge ahead into the future'. In this way, the organisers of the anniversary festivities attempted to make the most recent leadership generations and their rule over China intelligible to audiences as a new historical stage in a linear progression through time, and as a crucial step towards national revival.

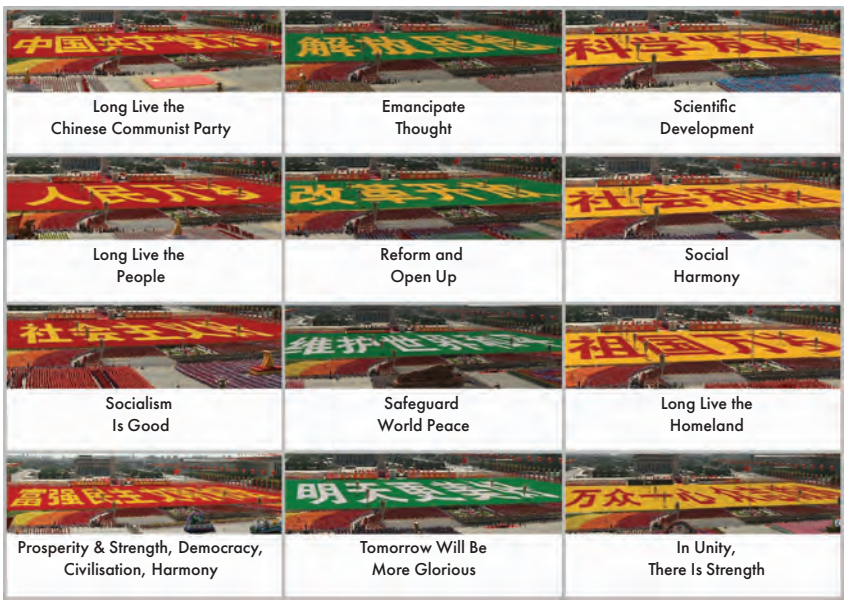

Figure 4.4: Crucial Slogans Framing the PRC's 60th Anniversary Parade on Tiananmen Square. Figure adapted from screenshots of online footage.

This period would then be filled with new meanings, which I return to in the next chapter. The idea of revival was deeply woven into this ideological work. Much of the remaining parade was arranged to imbue the present with a sense of rejuvenation and, much like during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, director Zhang Yimou used the trope of children to bring together various meaning-making moments and create an overarching sense of unity and future-oriented drive (see also Xinhua 2009c). This was particularly evident towards the end of the event. The last floats included an arrangement of 'young pioneers' who performed on drums and, finally, a formation of children carrying balloons. During

this final formation, which was arranged around a flower basket and the slogan 'long live the motherland', the volunteers in the square displayed characters that read 'tomorrow will be even more glorious' while a choir of children sang 'we are the future of communism'. The parade concluded with the children releasing their balloons into the air and running towards the Gate of Heavenly Peace, where they waved their colourful wreaths at the leaders in the stands, who waved back benevolently.

This display of paternalistic leadership may seem quaint, but it is part of a wider effort that aims to define such leadership before diverse audiences, in various contexts. At the height of the Hu-Wen period, the CCP was re-imagining itself as a kind of 'Volkspartei', a political organisation that claimed to represent broad interests across the political spectrum and work for a shared common good. It was using the communicative resources at its disposal to set the ideological parameters for its legitimacy. Framed as 'service to the people', the CCP reaffirmed its role as a benevolent parental figure for 'the people', and it tied its mandate to rule China to modernist developmental achievements and the promise of an even better future. The parade served as the staging ground for a particular vision of this future, presented vaguely during the event as bright and glorious, but defined in more detail during the Shanghai Expo a year later, and heavily evoked during the Xi Jinping period through the focus on the 'China Dream'.

4.3 China's crown jewel

At the World Exposition 2010, the hosts enshrined official discourses in a number of state-organised or state-commissioned buildings and exhibits, generally following the script of 'national rejuvenation' that had already governed the meaning-making efforts at the Beijing Olympics and PRC anniversary. The most prominent of the expo's edifices was the iconic China National Pavilion (*Zhongguo guan* 中国馆, see Figure 4.5), also known as the 'Oriental Crown' (*Dongfang zhi guan* 东方之冠), which was flanked by the smaller pavilions of the Special Administrative Regions Hong Kong and Macau. The China Pavilion itself was home to a large, three-part exhibition on 'Chinese Wisdom in Urban Development' (城市发展中的中华智慧, summarised in Chinese in Shiboju 2010), and its foundations housed 31 Chinese regional and provincial exhibits (some of which are presented in Oriental Morning Post 2010: 248-303).

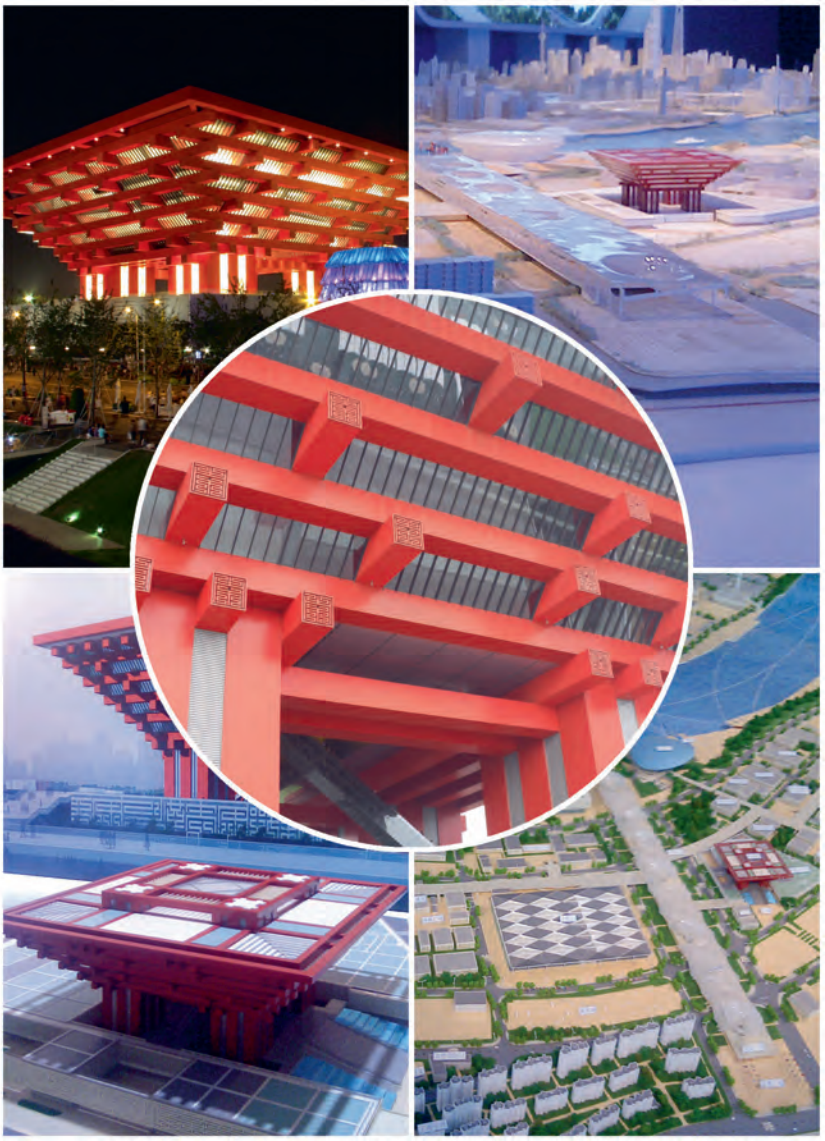

Figure 4.5: China's National Pavilion and its Replicas. All images © F. Schneider 2010, except top left (adapted from George Lu 2010 / Flickr / CC2.0). https://www.flickr.com/photos/gzlu/4991646142

I return to the main exhibition below, but first the architecture of the edifice deserves attention, since it is already such a spectacular example of political communication in its own right. Commentators frequently focus on the prominent position of the building and its towering shape

(see also my discussion in the previous chapter), but I am here more interested in the symbolic features that the creators embedded in the edifice and the communicative and design choices they made to tell a story through architecture (presented in the design studio's official guide to the pavilion, SCAT 2010).

Thematically, the architectural design follows similar parameters to those that also informed the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, that is a strong emphasis on harmony and civilisation. The designers present their plans as bringing into unity 'the cosmos and humankind' (*tianren heyi* 天人合一; SCAT 2010: 30), and they tie their endeavours to a similarly linear narrative of the past to the one that also informed China's networked spectacles in 2008 and 2009, describing the China Pavilion as combining 'traditional structures and contemporary deductions' (传统构架，现代演绎; SCAT 2010: 41). The project's meaning is anchored to pre-modern concepts such as 'heaven' (*tian* 天) and 'harmony' (*he* 和), as well as to selected cultural artefacts from the past. The beams of the building, for instance, use a pre-modern construction technique known as dougong (*dougong* 斗拱) brackets, a system of interlocking wooden supports that would tie beams and roofs together in the imperial architecture of, for instance, the Tang and Song dynasties, and famously visible in the Ming-era edifices that form the Forbidden City in Beijing.

The inverted pyramid-like structure of the China Pavilion is also meant to resemble the coronal caps (*guanmao* 冠帽) of dynastic rulers, and as a whole it emulates the shape of an ancient ritual vessel (*ding* 鼎). The architectural team further referred to the lunisolar calendar with its 24 solar terms, which were engraved into the pavilion's facade in traditional seal script. The characters now adorn the building's base and the endpoints of its beams. Through these strategies, the designers have woven elements that they considered part of a Chinese civilisational legacy into the construction, using either pre-modern components like the ritual vessel or the coronation cap as metaphorical models for the structure (hence the term 'Oriental Crown'), or literally using contemporary versions of pre-modern architectural practices in their project.

The building serves as a contemporary symbol of Chinese civilisation, and it interprets this civilisation as being primarily about harmony. The discourse of harmony for instance reappears in the various technologies that the architectural team brought to bear in order to ensure an energy-efficient design: rooftop gardens, natural air conditioning

and plumbing, and environmentally friendly construction materials all imply a harmonious relationship between human culture and the natural environment. Symbolically, the concept of harmony also informs the colour choice for the building. The building uses seven hues of red, which the designers reportedly selected in collaboration with the China Academy of Art, after an extensive colour analysis of traditional monuments like the Forbidden City (ibid.: 76). The four shades used in the roof design are stacked across the structure to ensure that the colour 'gradually becomes lighter towards the ground, which increases the sense of hierarchy and space' (并由上到下通过渐变的手法由深到浅，以增加整体 "中国红" 的层次感，空间感) (ibid.: 45). As a whole, these hues then form the colour 'China Red' (中国之红), and to the designers they embody the Confucian phrase *he er bu tong* (和而不同), which they translate into 'harmony in diversity'.

I will return to this phrase and its many meanings in chapter 6, since it is at the centre of official efforts to conceptualise what a 'harmonious society' should be. Importantly, the architects embedded their efforts within wider communication practices that imagine Chinese civilisation as a continuous linear narrative of national revival, and they enshrined in their construction two concepts that were crucial to such imaginations during China's networked spectacles under the Hu-Wen administration's leadership: civilisation and harmony. These themes were then also woven into the exhibition inside the building.

4.4 A tour of the China Pavilion

The China Pavilion was designed as an impressive discursive statement about contemporary China and its role in the world, and during the Shanghai Expo it housed an exhibition that further developed, showcased, and explained the themes of the event. This exhibition was called 'Chinese Wisdom in Urban Development' (城市发展中的中华智慧), and it transposed the discourses familiar from the Olympics and the 60th PRC Anniversary to the genre of the world fair (for an official introduction to the exhibition see Shiboju 2010).

Ascending the towering China Pavilion via its escalator system, visitors would enter the exhibition at the top floor of the building. There, visitors were guided first through the core exhibition 'The Footprints' (in Chinese called 'Eastern Footprints', *Dongfang zuji* 东方足迹), which

included one of two specially produced feature films. The pavilion cycled through screenings of *The Road to our Beautiful Life* (in Chinese: 'process' or 'journey of experience'; *Licheng* 历程), directed by Fan Yingwei (范英伟), and *Harmonious China* (*Hexie Zhongguo* 和谐中国), directed by Zheng Dasheng (郑大圣). Each film was arranged across three connected screens, allowing the directors to juxtapose different visual elements and present interlocking parts of their films across the front half of the 700-seat auditorium. The films were meant to showcase 'the story of spring' (*chuntian de gushi* 春天的故事), marking the beginning of the pavilion's tour through contemporary China's urban development and, by extension, also metaphorically symbolising the country's start on a journey of national revival.

The film *The Road to our Beautiful Life* presented a highly stylised story of four generations experiencing the rise to prominence of contemporary, urban China. Starting in a pristine rural past, a son leaves his father's ancestral lands to build the New China. He joins a wave of young people who rush across the countryside and gather at a cliff, gazing into the distance at the city that is their destination. The film then presents a number of set pieces, each portraying heroic construction and developmental efforts, and ultimately showing the achievements that these efforts have led to: impressive fictional cityscapes and real-world edifices like the Bird's Nest Stadium in Beijing.

During this period of construction, the young man meets his future wife, and the two have a son. The next part of the film follows the boy growing up: as he runs along a street of adults celebrating what is probably the Spring Festival, time 'flies by' in the form of years, projected as overlays onto the screen. The boy enters a revolving door, and as it turns more numbers fly by. In the cinema, the screens to the left and right of the main action show various achievements throughout China's reform-and-opening-up period. The boy emerges a young man, only to be stopped in his tracks by an event that has become a watershed moment in contemporary Chinese historiography: the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in Sichuan Province. The young man volunteers to join the relief effort, and at the site of the disaster he meets his future wife, whom he saves from the rubble. They, too, have a son.

The short film concludes with the grandfather visiting his family in Shanghai, travelling on a tourist bus along the Bund in amazement as CCTV headlines pass by in time, again highlighting numerous important achievements of the past years. In the end, the grandfather holds his

newly-born great-grandson in his arms to bombastic music, with his son's and grandson's families each watching him joyously from across the two flanking screens. The camera then cuts to a digital image of a highly developed Shanghai skyline, informing readers that '30 years China' (*30 nian Zhongguo* 30年中国) has created 300,000 new cities and 300 million new urban citizens. Finally, the point-of-view camera flies through a canyon in a utopian green landscape, arriving at a science-fictional city of glass high-rises that sits atop a gigantic waterfall. A caption reads:

> In the future, we will return to the green, we will return to nature. Our life in the city will become more glorious.
>
> 未来，我们会回到绿色，回到自然。我们的城市生活会更美好。

The second feature film, *Harmonious China*, provided a less bombastic vision of modern China, but despite the different filmic and narrative choices, it connected with similar themes (see also Hubbert 2017: 53-56 for an analysis). Following an opening scene in which landscape paintings morph into contemporary Chinese skylines, the film presents its narrative in three segments, each starting with a famous Confucius quotation that is presented on-screen in Chinese characters, accompanied by English translations (see Shiboju 2010: 28-31; the translations and any language errors are taken from the original):

> While standing by a river, the Confucius said, 'What passes away is, perhaps, like [t]his. Day and night it never lets up.'
> 子在川上曰 逝者如斯夫不舍昼夜
>
> The Confucius said, 'The gentleman agrees with others without being an echo.'
> 子曰 君子和而不同
>
> The Confucius said, 'Follow my heart's desire without overstepping the line.'
> 子曰 从心所欲而不逾矩

The first segment of the film is built around a Chinese living-room scene that is presented on the centre screen, and that changes over time as

images of everyday life throughout the years pass by on the screens on the left and right: sepia-coloured photographs from the 80s and 90s showing people taking boat rides and buying the first mobile phones, colour images of university graduations, and so forth. The second segment is also constructed around the passage of time, but in this case showing everyday scenes throughout a day in China. Starting at 07:30 am, the film shows people practising Taiji in the morning, a boy marvelling at a window cleaner around noon, a couple getting married in the afternoon, and a Chinese opera performance at night, concluding with a street cleaner sweeping the streets in a night-time park at 11:30 pm. The third segment then rounds out these stories about time. It shows an hour glass and a counter that spins forward through the years, while the images on screen provide a glimpse into China's future. City images are overlaid with animations of plants and butterflies, and the iconography ultimately returns to its trope of the landscape painting that started the film, now showing an animated painting of a futuristic, green city as birds fly by. The entire film is underscored with classic Chinese instrumentation.

These roughly eight-minute-long films set the tone for the rest of the exhibition. They introduced visitors to the central concerns of the exhibit — harmony, civilisation, a linear passage of time, a glorious future — and then released them into the first segment of the exhibition proper, which was called 'Reminiscence'. In Chinese, the exhibition carried the poetic title 'glancing back at time' (*Suiyue huimou* 岁月回眸), interestingly eschewing more common Chinese phrases for 'looking back' (e.g. *huigu* 回顾) and opting instead for a flowery phrase taken from Tang poetry: Bai Juyi's famous 'Song of Eternal Regrett' has the concubine Yang Guifei 'glancing back' at Emperor Xuanzhong, setting in motion a tragic love story that will have been familiar to many Chinese visitors from their high-school textbooks. The exhibits themselves were not directly related to poetry or literature, but they combined trinkets from the past decades: much like the sequence in the film *Harmonious China*, the exhibits showcased Chinese living rooms and how they had changed over the course of the previous four decades (Figure 4.6).

The historical retrospective continued in the subsequent section, 'River of Wisdom' (*Zhihui de changhe* 智慧的长河), which contained an ingenious animated version of the scroll 'Along the River During the Qingming Festival' (*Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河图), a famous painting that depicts the bustling life in a Song-era city generally believed to be the Northern Song capital Kaifeng. The section also featured a series

Figure 4.6: Three Decades of Chinese Living Rooms. The China Pavilion's 'Reminiscence' Exhibition Area. Images © F. Schneider 2010.

of historical artefacts (the 'Crystals of Civilisation', or in Chinese 'civilisational heritage', *wenming chuancheng* 文明传承). Most prominent among these was a piece from the Terracotta Army, the 'Bronze Chariot Number One' (*Yi hao tong chema* 一号铜车马), which was presented as the core 'National Treasure' (*Guo zhi guibao* 国之瑰宝) of the pavilion.

These historical exhibits were followed by a modernist section titled 'Land of Hope', which showcased a field of bio-engineered 'super-green rice', examples of rural and urban tourist sites, and an animated image of an apartment building in which various families went about their affairs 'under the same roof' (*tongyi wuyan xia* 同一屋檐下). These displays of contemporary achievements rounded out the exhibit on the upper floor of the pavilion, and visitors were then guided along a walkway to the second set of installations, passing 98 children's paintings (Figure 4.7) that had reportedly been selected from 5,000 entries into a nation-wide painting competition called 'imagining a new life — future cities and life through my eyes' (畅想新生活 — 我心目中的未来城市和生活; Shiboju 2010: 118).

Arriving on the next floor down, visitors would enter an exhibition that was modelled on theme-park rides, with carriages transporting

Figure 4.7: Children's Paintings 'Imagining a New Life', Displayed in the China Pavilion during the Shanghai Expo. Images © F. Schneider 2010.

passengers along rails through a stylised world of architectural design practices. The exhibit, called 'The Dialogue' (in Chinese: *Xunmi zhi lü* 寻觅之旅, 'journey of discovery'), connected ancient Chinese designs and practices to contemporary construction projects. Visitors were introduced to pre-modern bricklaying and roofing techniques, to classic window and door designs, and to engineering practices in bridge-building and traffic management. These elements were then presented as antecedents of high-profile construction projects like the Donghai Bridge outside Shanghai or national plans to construct an interlinking highway network.

Leaving the themed ride, visitors would then descend to the final level of the China Pavilion's exhibition space, entering five rooms that each displayed an element of the authorities' approach to sustainable 'scientific development'. This included a 'Warning from Nature' (*Ziran jingshi* 自然警示) in the form of an installation that dynamically projected

global environmental statistics onto a wall (CO_2 emissions, rising sea levels, changing temperatures, and so on). It also included a 'Proper Exploration' of environmental issues (*qun zhi you dao* 取之有道, a term adapted from a Ming-era Daoist text), which consisted of a hall displaying innovations in green energy production, such as wind power, solar power, algae-based biofuels, and smart energy networks. A subsequent section then demonstrated 'Measured Consumption' (*yong zhi you jie* 用之有节, again a quotation from a classic work, the Song-era text called Zizhi Tongjian), demonstrating technologies and practices for reducing carbon emissions, avoiding plastic waste, and improving recycling practices. An installation about the reforestation of China's countryside, called 'Return to Simplicity' (*fanpu guizhen* 返璞归真, an idiom dating back to Warring States texts), completed the presentation of environmental issues. At the centre of the display floor lay, in a circular room, the concluding segment of the exhibition, called 'Fountain of Illumination' (*ganwu zhi quan* 感悟之泉): a garden of lotus flowers, surrounded by walls of cascading water that morphed into various symbols and phrases. Visitors thus left the pavilion in front of a backdrop of expo slogans and China Pavilion exhibition titles, formed by water, and underscored with the sounds of classic Chinese instruments.

Across its three floors, the feature exhibition of the China Pavilion presented a multi-layered story of national revival. This story was told through multiple media, and it combined a complex series of tropes and symbols to imply a continuous movement forward for the Chinese nation — a movement that ultimately led to hypermodern utopian cityscapes in some non-distinct green future. All the while, this bright future was anchored in the past through recourse to selected symbols of ancient wisdom, providing a contemporary take on the idea of 'making the past serve the present' (*gu wei jin yong* 古为今用), a famous Mao quotation, but also a sentiment that has shaped roughly a century of Chinese discussions on how to create a native version of modernity (see Dirlik 2011b).

4.5 Framing China's networked spectacles

I have so far provided a tour through the official elements of the three major networked spectacles that the Hu-Wen administration organised during its tenure. During each of these events, the party, state, and private actors collaborated to organise an official narrative about China's

role in the world. To this end, they cleverly arranged ritual interactions and deployed available discursive resources across various media types to make their official statements intelligible to diverse audiences, both at home and abroad. However, such activities do not exist in isolation; they are not confined to the events alone, but they require communicative work in the run-up, to prepare the ground for the actual spectacle (see Dayan & Katz 1994), and sustained efforts after the events, to keep the discourse alive through continuous ritual interactions.

The authorities made excellent use of the discursive opportunity that networked spectacles provide: through their influence in Chinese news media, and their ability to infuse cultural production networks with values and incentives, they created a barrage of related reporting that set the stage for the actual events. Internationally, the Chinese authorities deployed official news outlets to create symbolic capital abroad and signal to potential foreign partners that the PRC was open for business and tourism, for instance in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics (Preuss & Alfs 2011). Domestically, Xinhua News Agency inundated audiences with event-related information, for instance about the Shanghai Expo, on which the agency ran more than 2,600 news items in the year before the event, as a query for 'Shanghai shibo hui' (上海世博会) on the news aggregator Factiva reveals. For the national anniversary the year before, Xinhua had released more than 800 items on the term 'national anniversary' (*guoqing* 国庆), and the year before that, it produced nearly 11,000 Chinese-language news items about the Beijing Olympics (*Beijing Aoyunhui* 北京奥运会). This reporting of course also focused on sports and lifestyle issues, but it was frequently nationalistic. As Han (2010) has shown for the Olympic torch relay in 2008, Chinese news media generally flanked the controversies with reports that provided a nationalist frame for China's Olympic ambitions.

Aside from this flood of official news reports in the run-up to China's networked spectacles, the authorities also used public space to prime audiences for the relevance of these events. Some of these activities were arguably banal, such as putting up Haibo statues across Shanghai in preparation for the expo, but recall again the subtle impact that such banal flagging can have on community sentiments like nationalism. Figure 4.8 shows a flower pot that was used in public spaces in Shanghai in 2010, and which resembled the expo's China Pavilion, itself a national symbol (see above).

Figure 4.8: China Pavilion Flower Pot, Shanghai 2010. Image © F. Schneider 2010.

The 60th anniversary was similarly preceded by extensive propaganda campaigns, often infusing public discourse with specific event-related markers and themes. In the Beijing metro, the public service monitors showed messages that citizens had purportedly sent in to voice their congratulations, such as the one I have reproduced in Figure 4.9, and which roughly translates as:

> Black-and-white, colour, LCD;
> Hand fan, electric fan, air-condition;
> Land line, pager, mobile phone;
> Warm food and clothing, comparatively well-off living standards, harmony!
> The common people's lives change, the country develops with big strides;
> A golden age coincides with the Chinese nation's birthday, the motherland strides forward with head held high!

I am in no position to assess whether such comments truly came from ordinary citizens. It is at least conceivable that they had been designed by

Figure 4.9: Beijing Metro Display of Citizens' Congratulatory Text Messages during the PRC's 60th Anniversary. Image © F. Schneider 2009.

propaganda workers, considering how closely such comments mirrored both official language and propaganda themes, e.g. the metaphor of the country steadily 'striding forward' through time. Then again, such phrases are so well-known that it is at least conceivable that citizens would use them in messages intended to get public air time. Whoever the producers of these messages may have been, their relentless efforts ensured that public spaces across China were inundated with discursive statements that presented the officially approved themes of China's networked spectacles.

The themes of the anniversary were further developed in a range of official cultural productions that my colleague Hwang Yih-jye and I have analysed in our study of how official actors narrated stories of national rejuvenation at the time (Schneider & Hwang 2014a). This included a blockbuster movie production that retold the story of *The Founding of the Republic* (*Jianguo daye* 建国大业), placing the early Mao years into the

context of national celebrations 60 years later. While the film itself was arguably convoluted, stringing together a series of committee meetings and political speeches, it was nevertheless designed for mass appeal: the film was laced with cameos of famous stars, prompting cinema-goers to see if they could spot their favourite actors among the multitude of Chinese celebrities. This strategy seems to have paid off at the box-office, where the film ranked as the third most popular film in 2009, reportedly raking in 420 million RMB (Douban 2009), which at the time was equivalent to 42 million Euros. It will not have hurt the financial returns that party members were required to watch the film, that the censors blocked foreign blockbusters from screening at the same time, and that state organisations bussed their employees to collective screenings.

Another cultural product that laid the ideological groundwork for the anniversary celebrations was a CCTV documentary series about China's modern history. In six episodes, the TV production covered the humiliations that the nation had suffered at the hands of foreign powers, starting with the Opium Wars, and then narrated the story of China's revival, walking viewers through the achievements under the guidance of consecutive CCP leadership generations. The same subject matter was further developed in a special multi-media opera, titled *Road to Revival*, which was staged at the Beijing Opera House in 2009. Combining tropes from revolutionary opera with contemporary musical and theatre elements, the show provided a highlight reel of important moments in official CCP historiography, focusing strongly on emotive imagery and music, and disambiguating the stylised performances by having two narrators explain each scene through recourse to official language.

Chinese cultural governance thus extended across different media types to generate an official discourse outside the immediate anniversary festivities themselves, and this was also the case a year later, when a plethora of media reports signalled to audiences what themes and symbols would matter during the Shanghai Expo. Chinese public spaces were again saturated with propaganda posters, statues, and public service announcements, and all state media outlets flanked the world fair with updates and reports.

Throughout all three events, official discourses were frequently self-referential; the PRC anniversary parade included two floats that celebrated the Beijing Olympics, and the float symbolising Shanghai already featured a miniature model of the China Pavilion. At the Shanghai Expo itself, Olympic symbolism was part of the official Chinese expo

exhibitions, for instance in the many references to the iconic national stadium in Beijing. Indeed, the edifices erected for China's networked spectacles played an important role in permanently enshrining the legacies of these events in public spaces. By constructing iconic buildings such as Beijing's National Stadium (*Guojia tiyuchang* 国家体育场) and the National Aquatics Centre (*Guojia youyong zhongxin* 国家游泳中心), respectively nicknamed the 'Bird's Nest' (*Niaochao* 鸟巢) and the 'Water Cube' (*Shuilifang* 水立方), the city government of Beijing provided spaces that could easily be used in follow-up events, framed by the symbolism of national success. For instance, to ensure that the momentum of the Beijing Games was not lost, the Chinese state called for a campaign to keep the spirit of the Olympics alive. Under the direction of the Beijing Olympic City Development Association (BODA; 北京奥运城市发展促进会), the authorities continued to organise sporting and cultural events, academic conferences, as well as exhibitions related to the Beijing Olympics in the year following the original sporting event (BODA 2010: 32). A particularly recursive example was a gala concert that the Beijing Symphony Orchestra organised on 6 August 2009 at the Olympic Green, to mark the first anniversary of the Beijing Olympics. The event featured a host of stars performing a total of 22 songs, ranging from Chinese sports anthems to nationalist songs such as *Rejoicing China* (*Huanle Zhongguo* 欢乐中国), the *Ode to the Motherland*, and the patriotic song *Nation* (*Guojia* 国家), performed by Jackie Chan (see also chapter 5).

Much like the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion, which now serves as an art museum, Beijing's Olympic stadiums have become national symbols in their own right, ready to be appropriated and disseminated by state and non-state actors alike. Both the National Stadium and the National Aquatics Centre serve as tourist attractions, mainly for domestic travel groups. Despite relatively steep ticket prices at the time (50 RMB for the Bird's Nest, 30 RMB for the Water Cube), the Bird's Nest Stadium alone saw 20,000 to 30,000 visitors per day in the first year after the Games, generating roughly 300 million RMB in revenues (Li 2009). What is remarkable is that the two buildings had fairly little to offer the respective visitors. In the Water Cube, tourist groups filed through the corridors of the building and across the stands of the different aquatic sites. In the Bird's Nest, a large screen played promotion videos while visitors tested what it felt like to sit in the ranks, or to touch the impressive steel beams that form the outer shell of the complex. During my own visit in 2009, both sites were filled with busy chatter and the flashlights of cameras,

but they offered no cultural activities or exhibits. In essence, they had become memorials: reminders of the nation's achievements in 2008.

The main activity that both sites offered the tourist visitors was shopping. The Bird's Nest featured a large gift shop that sold a broad range of souvenirs, such as documentaries of the original Games, Karaoke DVDs with the Chinese songs featured during the event, mascots in different sizes, and miniature Bird's Nest stadiums in gold, silver, and as plush toys. Similarly, in the entrance hall of the Water Cube, various vendors sold trademarked Water Cube accessories (Yin 2009): swim suits, key chains, jewellery, and even bottles of special Water Cube water that had allegedly been shipped in from glaciers in northern Canada (Figure 4.9). The national symbols have become brands in their own right and function as part of the replicable series of signs that are so characteristic of nationalist narratives (Anderson 2006: 185). The Olympic sites have not only been turned into places of remembrance, they have been transformed into logos, endlessly reproduced and proliferated through the logic of the market. While this process has been facilitated by the state, it is not under complete state control. The state has created spaces for the consumption of national symbols, and has switched private entrepreneurs into the distribution network of national meanings, but in the end it is the tourist consumers who fuel this industry of nationalism. Hooked by the state-organised networked spectacles, citizens now go on pilgrimage to state-constructed sites to purchase the building-blocks of their national identity, a dynamic that arguably also drives 'Red Tourism' in China more generally (see Zhao & Timothy 2015).

Figure 4.10: Marketing the Symbols of the Nation: Water Cube Water, sold at the Beijing National Aquatics Centre in 2009. Image © F. Schneider 2009.

This illustrates an important strategy of official propaganda at networked spectacles: to establish a repertoire of recognisable symbols that can then be dropped into new contexts to signal national belonging and legitimate the leadership of the CCP. The three spectacles I have discussed here contained elements that promised to serve official actors as long-lasting discursive resources for future propaganda efforts.

4.6 Conclusion

As the discussions above already suggest, official Chinese efforts to stage networked spectacles were marked by a certain continuity, with specific symbols and themes reappearing across all three cases. Discourses about the nation, harmony, civilisation, or sustainable development played a role throughout, and the next chapters will take a closer look at the specific meanings that actors constructed around such themes. Importantly, these themes did not exist in isolation; they were connected through an overarching narrative about China's 'road to revival' (*fuxing zhi lu* 复兴之路), which played a role in CCP propaganda efforts beyond the spectacles themselves. Through their concerted efforts, the authorities ensured that the grounds for this narrative had been properly prepared in the run-up to the events, for instance through cultural products that preceded and flanked the spectacles, and they made sure that the legacy of that narrative would remain visible once the events had concluded. Buildings like the China Pavilion in Shanghai or the Bird's Nest Stadium and Water Cube in Beijing serve as reminders of China's success in staging networked spectacles, ensuring that these moments of national rejuvenation remain ever-present parts of the urban infrastructure, frozen in time.

What, then, were the precise statements that actors made, regarding the official themes and concepts that characterised the road-to-revival story? As it turns out, discursive parameters that the authorities provided through their cultural governance efforts allowed for highly creative ideological work that frequently shifted meanings and recalibrated core concepts, and these activities can tell us much about changing understandings of China's politics at the beginning of the 21st century.

5 *Designing Chinese Nationalism*

The camera circles around a construction site. Steel girders are lowered onto a base. Sparks fly as the pieces are welded together. Off-screen, a male voice explains:

> The Bird's Nest, the Water Cube, and the other Olympic sites not only feature unique designs, but also Olympic architecture of world-class technological prowess. In terms of materials, technologies, construction, and many other related elements, they embody the Chinese people's ability to put into practice their dream of blazing their own new trails.
>
> 鸟巢、水立方等奥运场馆不但造型别致更是具世界级技术难度的奥运建筑。在材料、技术、施工等诸多环节都体现了中国人自主创新的梦想实践能力。

An animation shows the steel frame of Beijing's National Stadium taking shape step by step, then the camera switches to shots of construction crews welding steel into place, transporting materials, measuring the site, and assembling the girders. The voice continues:

> The Bird's Nest steel structure is unparalleled in the world. Before the Bird's Nest, no one in China had ever produced such high-strength rolled steel. To ensure that the construction of the Bird's Nest went smoothly, the project's scientific staff had to tackle three key technological challenges before the new type of rolled steel could be manufactured. It not only had to exceed unprecedented thickness and size, it also needed to possess the desirable anti-seismic qualities, temperature resistance, welding properties, and so on. China's own innovative rolled steel was hard as nails as it propped up the Bird's Nest. The exterior steel structure of the Bird's Nest required 42,000 tons of rolled steel. The whole construction, including the concrete and the screw threads, required 110,000

> tons of steel. Using not a single kilogramme of foreign steel, the Bird's Nest became genuinely 'made in China'.
>
> 鸟巢的钢结构是世界上独一无二的工程。在鸟巢之前，国内从未生产过这种高强度的钢材。为了保障奥运工程的顺利施工，工程的科研人员经过三次技术"攻关"才研制出了新型的钢材料。它不仅在钢材厚度和使用范围上都前所未有，而且具有良好的抗震性、抗低温性、可焊性等特点。中国自主创新的钢材撑起了鸟巢的钢筋铁骨。鸟巢外都钢结构的钢材用量为4.2万吨。整个工程的总用钢量包括混凝土中的钢材、螺纹钢等达到11万吨。没有使用一公斤外国钢铁，鸟巢成为了地地道道的"中国造"。

The narrative goes on to illustrate the engineering feats required to build the National Aquatics Centre, then the camera returns to a studio where the female host of the architectural programme, Wu Xiaoli (吴小莉), concludes:

> The Olympics have seen a century come and go, and they are still going strong. For a city, for a nation, the Olympic Games are about more than who hosts the contests or who wins the gold medals. More importantly, they are about showing that particular city's cultural essence and national culture. No matter whether it is the Bird's Nest, the Water Cube, or some other Olympic building, they are monuments of Olympic history, and they are the greatest examples of modern construction in the new city of Beijing, and they will inevitably have a profound influence on the future lives of 17 million Beijing citizens.
>
> "奥林匹克"历经百年而不衰，奥运会对于一个城市，对于一个国家来说不仅仅在于谁举办了赛事，谁赢得了金牌。更重要的是通过奥运会能够展示这座城市的文化精神和民族文化。无论是鸟巢、水立方还是其他的奥运场馆建筑，它们不但是奥运历史上的纪念碑，也将是新城北京最具代表的现代建筑标识，必将深远影响1700万北京市民未来的生活形态。

This scene is part of a TV documentary on famous buildings in China's capital, co-produced by several Cantonese cultural enterprises and Hong Kong's Phoenix TV; the documentary became part of the officially

endorsed line of Olympics souvenirs available at the Olympic event sites that I discussed in the previous chapter. The programme, titled *New Beijing* (Liu & Wong 2007: time code 24:21), illustrates how officially approved cultural products made sense of mass event infrastructures, using the lens of nationalism. The documentary explicitly attempts to inspire pride in the Bird's Nest stadium and other architectural marvels in Beijing, presenting these buildings as symbols of national achievement. In a similar vein, the architects of the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion justified their fusion of selectively curated pre-modern concepts and state-of-the art engineering as quintessentially 'Chinese'. The designers describe the building as encapsulating the 'Chinese spirit' (*Zhongguo jingshen* 中国精神; SCAT 2010: 16 & 41) and the idea of a 'contemporary spirit with Chinese characteristics' (*Zhongguo tese, shidai jingshen* 中国特色，时代精神; ibid: 16).

Statements and symbols of the Chinese nation were ubiquitous during China's networked spectacles. I have already discussed how the authorities provided a framework of semiotic resources during these important events, and how they tried to ensure that these resources were stacked and staged in ways that created an overarching official narrative of national revival. These activities, which involved state and non-state actors alike, produced a multitude of discursive statements that frequently reworked the ideological parameters the CCP had set for these events, and this was also true for the many meanings that actors constructed about the nation, and the strategies they deployed to invite an emotional investment in the idea of national belonging.

China's networked spectacles are, at their core, nationalist events. In this, they closely follow the general pattern of such spectacles around the world, and of mass events throughout modern history. Adopting the same strong focus on nation-states as principle actors in political affairs, the Chinese authorities built their own events strongly around ideas related to the Chinese nation, its unity under the leadership of the CCP, and its place in a Westphalian international society of sovereign nations. This emphasis on the Chinese nation-state stretched across the event discourses, even extending to the meaning-making processes surrounding the physical event infrastructure itself, particularly the iconic buildings in Beijing and Shanghai mentioned earlier.

China's networked spectacles were full of statements that signalled belonging to the Chinese nation, and official actors frequently used the opportunity to produce nationalist discourse to redefine what the

Chinese nation should stand for at the outset of the 21st century. This chapter examines some of this creative ideological work. It first briefly sketches how scholarship has traditionally made sense of nationalism and media, before discussing how various official Chinese actors have been constructing a repertoire of discursive resources in the service of the imagined community that is the nation. Next, I discuss how symbolic resources are deployed to personify the nation and cast it in the role of a family member. This also includes a closer look at activities that frame the nation and its state as benevolent. Next, I examine discursive strategies that seemingly remove state actors from the process of constructing the nation, and I explore in more detail how such actors invite emotional investment in the imagined community they have drawn up. Finally, I show how actors reimagined the nation's past during China's networked spectacles, and I conclude with a discussion of how official discursive practices at these spectacles were geared towards creating opportunities for participants to partake ritually in the experience of belonging to the imagined community of the nation.

5.1 Mediating the Chinese nation

Nations and their driving ideology, nationalism, are intimately tied to networked communication and interaction. Nations are what Benedict Anderson (2006) has famously called 'imagined communities': groups of people whose members do not all know each other, but who believe they share certain commonalities, such as a collective language, history, race, or set of values and institutions. These presumed commonalities provide the foundation for members' sense of provenance and shared destiny. Historically, it has been elites (Gellner 1983/2006 & 1997) such as intellectuals, artists, politicians, bureaucrats, and merchants who utilised existing discursive tropes (Shapiro 2004, Smith 1993 & 1998) to mobilise large masses of people in the service of building the nation-state (Breuilly 1993), that is: a set of modern political institutions that draws its raison d'être from the idea that its subjects are a united and sovereign group, inhabiting a collective homeland that requires autonomous, representative government (for discussions of this history see the contributions in Breuilly 2013).

This is not to say that nationalism is a wholly elite-based ideology, designed strategically by agents in the service of the nation-state to

legitimate their political agenda, although such activities certainly make up an important part of nationalism. As nation-state institutions become the norm for governing large numbers of people, and as official actors and the subjects of the nation-state interact over time, nationalist ideas gradually enter the realm of common-sense background knowledge, becoming seemingly trivial (Billig 2009), but actually forming a powerful framework for understanding the world. Media have traditionally played an important role in this process, allowing state actors to circulate the markers of national association widely. This has involved modern mass-media technologies, such as print and broadcasting, which have provided elite actors with the ability to communicate in vernacular language, using shared symbols to reach a national audience (Anderson 2006). It has also included the ability of state actors to take charge of semiotic resources associated with the nation: by assuring that national coins, stamps, and flags circulate through national networks, by constructing statues and monuments, and by naming streets and squares after prominent members of the nation, state actors have infused public space with 'banal' symbols and turned 'background space into homeland space' (Billig 2009: 43). Any actors wanting to take action on issues related to these national frameworks of understanding will have to position themselves vis-à-vis the parameters that nationalism provides, whether to evoke and reinforce these parameters or challenge and change them. Over time, across diverse and numerous chains of ritual interactions, actors thus shape what the components of nationalism mean, creating a fluid yet bounded set of concepts and representations that inform the politics of their nation-state.

In the Chinese case, attempts to establish a framework of national meanings that could become the foundations of a modern nation-state date back to the late Qing Dynasty, and they paved the way for the nation-building efforts of the Nationalist Party as well as the Communist Party during the Republican period (for discussions of nationalism in these historical contexts see Duara 1997, Mitter 2004, and Zarrow 2005). The legacies of these attempts to construct a unified Chinese nation have informed the politics of the PRC to this day (see Dirlik 2011a and Hughes 2006), as well as politics in various other Chinese territories, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese diaspora around the world. This has made Chinese nationalism a discursive domain of continuous contestation, and to this day the idea of 'Chineseness' is subject to very different interpretations. These range from attempts to critically assess cultural

and linguistic traditions in the service of a cosmopolitan pan-Chinese community to projects that define China along culturally essentialist and frequently racial lines (see Dirlik 2011a; Leibold 2010 has discussed Han chauvinism).

In the PRC, the ruling CCP has forcefully tried to take charge of nationalist discourses. In the post-Mao era, the leadership emphasised what Zhao Suisheng (2004) has called 'pragmatic nationalism', an avowedly non-aggressive form of nationalist discourse that was meant to place CCP ideology on a broad nationalist footing and generate popular support without alienating potential trade partners abroad. Through party and state media, as well as through school curricula, the leadership emphasised China as a multi-ethnic country that has sought to find its rightful place in the world, following the so-called century of humiliation (He 2007, Wang 2012). As Peter Gries (2004) has shown, this state-led nationalism has been reappropriated by bottom-up forces in China, leading to often xenophobic public movements that target perceived enemies of the nation, and that at times challenge the CCP's leadership role when nationalists feel the authorities are mishandling matters of national importance (see Nyíri et al. 2010 for the case of the Beijing Olympics).

Ongoing scholarly debates about nationalism in contemporary Chinese politics revolve around the unresolved question of whether and how popular nationalist sentiments, elite activities, and policy-making are connected. The answers range from claims that nationalism in no way informs CCP politics (Jie 2016) via arguments that the CCP and its 'smart state' (Reilly 2012) consist of rational actors who skilfully manage and manipulate nationalist sentiments (Weiss 2014), to assessments that emphasise how bottom-up nationalism has come to inform and even drive Chinese policy-making (Gries et al. 2016).

In my own work (Schneider 2018), I have traced the discursive construction of the Chinese nation across various digital realms, arguing that Chinese nationalism is today filtered through digital technologies and reprogrammed through digital networks. Actors recursively construct the meaning of the Chinese nation through search engines, websites, online encyclopaedias, microblogs, and other digital media, and this involves the authorities with their substantial switching power in digital networks, but it also involves actors as diverse as software designers, website editors, bloggers, celebrities, and online commentators, all of whom engage in their own programming activities within the pre-

designed technical affordances of digital media networks. In the end, this provides the stages on which actors perform their politics, and I consequently side with Gries and his colleagues (2016) when they argue that nationalism in today's China is not easily managed by the authorities, despite considerable efforts, but that it powerfully informs what official actors can or cannot do.

While my present study of China's networked spectacles does not explore the digital dimensions of such activities, it continues my earlier argument that, in China, diverse actors continuously shift the parameters of ideologies such as nationalism through their networked interactions (see also Schneider 2018: ch.2). As I will show in chapter 8, a good example of this is how various actors reappropriate the discursive resources that the state has flagged for use in nationalist representations. However, before exploring those activities, it is worth asking how official actors generate such a repertoire of nationalist signs in the first place, and how they try to ensure that the use of these signs aligns with their preferred politics.

5.2 Designing the watch signs of official discourse

The Chinese authorities have long understood that the unity required to fuel a nation has to be communicated. Networked spectacles provide an ideal occasion for flagging the nation to diverse domestic audiences, and events like the Beijing Olympics, the 60th Anniversary, and the Shanghai Expo became important discursive moments for elite actors to try to evoke and spread recognisable signs of the nation in the service of their politics, or to design wholly new signs as part of their nation-maintenance activities. This is a core task of the CCP's propaganda system, the complex network of party and state institutions that is switched into all major media and mass communication activities in China (see Shambaugh 2007). Several important organisations sit at crucial nodes in that propaganda network, specifically two committees that make programmatic choices, and two agencies that implement CCP propaganda and provide feedback on its effectiveness. The two committees are the Central Leading Group for Propaganda (中央宣传思想领导小组), which coordinates ideological work across the network, and the Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilisation (中央精神文明建设指导委员会), which is the main steering committee

for designing CCP ideology. The two agencies that implement the party's propaganda directives are the Central Propaganda Department (中央宣传部), charged with the practical propaganda efforts as well as media control and censorship, and the Central Policy Research Office (中央政策研究室), which among other things protocols all major CCP congresses, drafts party decrees and speeches, and is responsible for designing major ideological concepts like 'scientific development' or the 'China Dream'.

There is significant overlap and continuity between these organisations, especially on the personnel side: for instance, Li Changchun simultaneously served as the head of the leading group for propaganda and the spiritual civilisation commission, Liu Yunshan became his successor as the head of the leading group for propaganda after a decade of running the propaganda department, and at the time of writing Wang Huning, the man believed to be responsible for many of the party's ideological innovations since the Jiang Zemin period (see Hu 2013), is serving simultaneously as the director of the policy research office and chairman of the spiritual civilisation commission.

The cadres who staff these central party committees and agencies design the general direction of CCP ideology, decide what semiotic resources should be used for promoting that direction, and establish what acceptable, correct discourse on political topics should look like. This includes approving the set of phrases and slogans that form the backbone of official propaganda texts, known in Chinese as *tifa* (提法). This official CCP rhetoric is likely to seem stilted and arcane to outside observers but, as Gang (2012) has argued, it serves as a set of recurring 'buzzwords' or 'watch words' that flag official ideological positions. Examples include phrases like 'harmony' or 'scientific development', which have powerfully been deployed by CCP actors in their efforts to programme networks and set the parameters for making and implementing policy (see Ohlberg 2015 for additional interesting *tifa* examples and Brady 2008: 100-101 for a discussion).

I would argue that much like these 'watch words', Chinese political discourse also contains what might be called 'watch signs', that is symbols that serve as convenient shorthand for ideological concepts or statements. Examples include the trope of dancing minorities that is so frequently deployed in official propaganda to signal ethnic unity (see Landsberger 2016b), or the socialist-realist hero gaze that illustrates steadfast dedication to the socialist road (see Landsberger 2016a and 2016d for examples from different time periods). Such visual tropes unite

a plethora of background assumptions in convenient signposts, and these signposts can be used much like the linguistic tropes of Chinese *tifa* to shine a light on important waypoints in the CCP's ideological work.

Discourses about the nation are particularly rich contexts for exploring the use of such 'watch signs', especially considering how strongly the construction of imagined communities relies on actors establishing a recognisable set of community markers. Take the example of how the CCP has used occasions like natural disasters to promote a set of visual tropes that signal national unity under the party's leadership. My colleague Hwang Yih-jye and I have analysed such tropes in our study of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (Schneider & Hwang 2014b). We found that the discourse was saturated with both linguistic and visual cues that pointed towards a small set of ideological meanings, most notably the ideas that the Chinese people were united through the catastrophe, that a vibrant Chinese civil society stood ready to cushion the blow of the tragedy, and that the party and its People's Liberation Army (PLA) were successfully spearheading the relief efforts, demonstrating that the leadership remained close to the needs of the masses. The party leveraged specific phrases to embody this representation of their efforts, for instance 'in unity, there is strength' (*wan zhong yi xin* 万众一心) and 'putting people first' (*yi ren wei ben* 以人为 本), and it provided visual cues in its own propaganda to evoke these sentiments. This included frequent images of relief workers carrying victims on stretchers across rubble, as well as people joining hands, or hands reaching out across rubble. These tropes circulated throughout the various disaster representations, for instance through the news, but they were also adopted in many cultural products that were not part of official propaganda. For instance the blockbuster disaster movie *Aftershock*, directed by Feng Xiaogang and released in 2010, utilised the same iconography and made many of the same discursive statements about the nation and the challenges it faces. It deployed the readily available semiotic resources familiar from official discourse to create rich emotional tapestries for making sense of the nation's progress, using iconic natural disasters as its lens.

Figure 5.1 shows examples of these visual callouts from three different cultural products, two of them part of the networked spectacles I am analysing here: the 2010 film *Aftershock*, the musical production *Road to Revival* that was staged for the 60th anniversary of the PRC, and the feature film *The Road to our Beautiful Life* that was part of the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion. Disaster tropes such as hands reaching out (left) or

relief workers carrying victims across rubble (right) were indeed deployed all throughout China's networked spectacles. At the expo, the state-owned People's Insurance Company of China decided to build into its pavilion floor various miniature models of famous floods, landslides, and earthquakes that had taken place in China. The Chinese Red Cross Society showed footage of disasters around the world, including slow-motion scenes from the Sichuan earthquake relief efforts, underscored with sentimental music. The official theme pavilion 'City Being' contained a feature film that showed scenes from famous squares around the world, and China was represented in this segment by Wenchuan Square in the earthquake-stricken region. Similar emotional triggers were also part of the anniversary parade and the cultural products that accompanied it. As a whole, these references to the disaster inspired associations with the imagined community of the nation while at the same time legitimating the authorities' developmental agenda (see Schneider & Hwang 2014b for a longer discussion).

A particularly common discursive move was to portray relief efforts as a kind of war, and anyone involved in these efforts as a 'combatant' (*zhanshi* 战士). Whether linguistically, visually, or acoustically, disaster discourses during these events connected the input space of the natural calamity with the input space of military engagement; a strategy that has also, in the past, been applied to other ostensible national challenges, such as the 'battle' against communal diseases. Stefan Lansberger (2016c), for instance, has covered the 2003 'people's war' against SARS in his propaganda poster collection, and Zhang Xiaoling (2006) has analysed the news coverage that accompanied the outbreak in China.

Militarist symbolism is not new in Chinese political discourses, or in discourses more generally. Creating analogies with wars adds an alarmist, existentialist dimension to the issue at hand, and it demands that the community come together as one in such a time of need. A particularly evocative example of how the official disaster discourse during China's networked spectacles tried to activate this martial input space was the *Road to Revival* musical, which featured a scene specifically about the Sichuan earthquake. In this scene, male relief workers in uniforms stood united as they extracted a young girl in a red dress from imaginary rubble. While the scene was accompanied by a sentimental song and the atmosphere was generally more muted than that of other scenes, the visual tropes recalled the militarist and highly gendered discourse that official media had been communicating.

Figure 5.1: Disaster Tropes Across Three Cultural Products: the film Aftershock *(top), the musical* Road to Revival *(middle), and the China Pavilion feature film* The Road to our Beautiful Life *(bottom). Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.*

The use of disaster tropes highlights how the authorities have used their staged spectacles as occasions for infusing wider networks of cultural production with symbols that evoke the imagined community of the nation and that lend themselves to constructing narratives of suffering and heroism. The ways these symbols are juxtaposed as part of a militarist input space to public meaning-making efforts allows actors to securitise calamities like floods and earthquakes, suggesting that these events are national crises that require on the one hand extraordinary solidarity on the part of citizens and on the other hand exceptional degrees of state interventions. Using China's networked spectacles as a vehicle, the authorities implied that these efforts could only succeed if the nation remained united under the leadership of the ruling party.

It is worth noting that throughout China's networked spectacles much of the communicative effort to construct an official narrative around the nation was geared towards hiding the fact that such efforts

were taking place at all. In many staged attempts to represent the nation, official actors strategically downplayed their own role in creating such representations. Take the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, which repeatedly obscured the fact that state and party actors, together with their commercial partners, were actively redefining knowledge about the Chinese nation. This was in part achieved through intense pathos, an issue I return to later. It was also achieved through the visual sleights-of-hand that the director's team employed and through the language that framed the event for domestic viewers.

Visually, the performances were tightly planned and organised to ensure that viewers would not notice the transitions between the elaborate arrangements of people and props. As one of the organisers told me, and as journalists from Taiwan also reported (see chapter 8), the director's team faced the task of moving thousands of actors on to and off the stage, and this task was made more challenging by the fact that the team was aiming to create organic transitions that would not interrupt viewer immersion. This may seem like an understandable practical concern, but it has conceptual implications: to create a 'natural' feeling for a performance is itself an artistic choice, informed by a particular understanding of performative arts. Realist and postmodern strands of theatre, for instance, might intentionally allow viewers to witness transitions to shatter the illusion of natural immersion and draw attention to the performance as an artifice. This is the famous Brechtian estrangement effect ('Verfremdungseffekt'), which aims to push viewers to distance themselves from the event and its narrative (the seminal treatment of Brecht is arguably Jameson 1998).

For the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony the designers opted for a naturalising approach that tried to keep the illusion of the performance intact, and the broadcaster CCTV extended this rationale to its telecasting. When the two commentators described what audiences were witnessing on stage, they avoided any explicit reference to the fact that it was a team of performers who were arranging and enacting various interpretations of cultural artefacts. Instead, the commentators described how these cultural artefacts simply 'emerged' (*chengxian* 呈现) before the viewers' eyes. Central performers such as the pianist Lang Lang 'become the focus of our gaze' (成为我们瞩目的焦点). The tranquil scene of Taiji performances 'appears' (*chuxian* 出现). This neutralising language entirely removes the organisers from the event and, by extension, suggests that the subtle rearrangement of national symbols and the shifts

in meanings are natural. This practice was also on display at the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion, which opted not to place Chinese leaders at the centre of its narrative but instead suggested that the pavilion represented the imagined community of common Chinese people, for instance by displaying stereotypical Chinese living rooms, or by designing its feature films around the stories of seemingly 'normal' Chinese.

5.3 The nation as a person

The earthquake scene from the 2009 musical production *Road to Revival* illustrates how the watch signs of Chinese official discourse circulate during networked spectacles like the 60th anniversary of the PRC, but it also showcases a particular communication strategy for making statements about the nation: the use of 'synecdoche'. A synecdoche is a rhetorical device that suggests a part should stand for the whole, or vice versa. The relief workers are extracting not just a young girl, but a girl in a red dress that stands for the entire nation. Such personification was widespread during China's networked spectacles, where both the nation and the nation-state were regularly represented as people.

This is visible in the ways Chinese news media reported the national anniversary. Take mainstream newspaper front pages on 1 October 2009, the day of the event, as examples of how various papers took the officially approved national symbols and contextualised them within stories of the nation-state as a person. The Czech blogger Gabor (2009) has captured a selection of these front pages on his website, and I have reproduced this image here, to illustrate a number of discursive practices that generally characterised this reporting (Figure 5.2).

A number of commonalities immediately catch the eye: the front pages overwhelmingly use the colours red and yellow, and they reproduce national symbols like the PRC flag, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, and the official logo of the event (a red number 60, with a partial representation of the national emblem at its centre, itself a stylised facsimile of the Gate of Heavenly Peace). Attempts to put this symbolism to use to anthropomorphise the nation play a major role in the reporting: numerous newspaper front pages personified the nation-state for their readers by, for instance, wishing the PRC a 'happy birthday' (*shengri kuaile* 生日快乐 or *huadan* 华诞). Some opt to address the nation-state directly, with one newspaper using the formal honorific pronoun for 'you' (*nin* 您). The

Figure 5.2: Selected Chinese Newspaper Front Pages on the Day of the PRC's 60th Anniversary (reproduced from Gabor 2009).

news discourse further uses language related to the age of living things, e.g. opting for the character that counts years of age (*sui* 岁) rather than years in a calendar (*nian* 年) to discuss how 'old' the PRC is, or describing how the PRC has 'grown up' or 'matured' (*chengzhang* 成长).

These are all important discursive moves, since they suggest that nation-states deserve to be treated like people. In the Chinese context, the metaphor is more powerful yet, with the media workers at major Chinese newspapers frequently connecting such personifications with statements about China as the 'ancestral land' (*zuguo* 祖国), a term that can be translated into 'fatherland' or 'motherland', depending on the context, and that is indeed subject to substantial gender politics in Chinese political discourse. For instance, popular TV drama series about famous dynastic rulers frequently connect these men to paternalistic discourses in which benevolent rulers act as strict yet kind father figures to their subjects (for an example see my own discussion of the series *The Great Han Emperor Wu*; Schneider 2012: ch.2). In other contexts, cultural products such as the multi-media opera *Road to Revival* contain segments that use women to represent the nation, e.g. when the nation is 'raped' by foreign invasion or becomes the 'victim' of natural disaster, as discussed earlier.

Nationalist discourses and symbolism are thus closely entwined with gender discourses in modern China, and they connect with and reproduce representations of masculinity and femininity that are by no means innocent. It is usually the nation (the community of people) that is represented as a nurturing woman in need of protection, and it is in turn the nation-state (the ruler over that national community) that is represented as a strong fatherly figure; these interrelated interpretations generate a sexist context in which paternalistic, authoritarian policies become more plausible and more easily justifiable (for a discussion of how political discourses rely on father and mother figures more generally see Lackoff & Johnson 1987/2003).

Even where the discourse is not explicitly gendered, the move to present the nation-state as a family member provides an important input space for meaning-construction about the nation. This input space is readily available across nationalist discourses in China more generally, which are rife with metaphors of family relations. For instance, one of the nationalist songs that accompanied China's networked spectacles was Jackie Chan's performance of *Country*, a song that played with the fact that the Chinese word for 'country' or 'nation-state' (*guojia* 国家)

is a combination of the characters for 'state' (*guo* 国, also sometimes translated as 'country') and for 'home' (*jia* 家, also translated as 'family'). It features lyrics such as 'only if the country is strong will our home be prosperous' (有了强的国，才有富的家), and 'this state is my state, this home is my home, I love my state, I love my home, I love my... country' (国是我的国，家是我的家，我爱我的国，我爱我的家，我爱我..... 国家). Through such a fusion of concepts, first of 'state' and 'country' (from *guo* 国 to *guojia* 国家) and then of 'country' and 'family' (from *guojia* 国家 to *jia* 家), the song conflates modern political institutions and more perennial elements of the human lifeworld, in this case family relations.

This longstanding discourse of the nation-state as a home, and potentially as a family member, lends itself to further discursive activities, for instance when actors take the personified nation to imply specific meanings about the PRC and its role in world politics. Organisers of international events like the Olympics and world fair were heavily involved in such activities, which were often highly complex. The actors had to anticipate potentially different perceptions of nationalism among diverse audiences. The events needed to appeal to Chinese viewers in the PRC and in other Chinese-speaking regions, covering a broad spectrum of ideological positions and complex identity practices associated with ideas of 'Chineseness'; they also needed to appeal to foreign observers, again covering a broad range of positions vis-à-vis China: the nationalist symbolism needed to be acceptable to audiences without much knowledge of the PRC, but also to audiences highly critical of Chinese nationalism and, potentially, also to audiences who might find nationalist themes offensive in principle.

The Bejing Olympics opening ceremony is an excellent example of how organisers tried to cope with this dilemma, and how they creatively reframed the meaning of the Chinese nation. Recall the girl in the red dress singing the revolutionary song *Ode to the Motherland*. The organisers reportedly went to great lengths in casting this specific child to play the role, and they went as far as having her lip-sync the song, which was sung by a different girl entirely. Much has been made of the perceived duplicity and 'fakeness' of this performance (e.g. Branigan 2008), but such discussions say more about the critics' understanding of authenticity and their appeals to orientalist tropes about a deceitful 'East' than about discursive practices in China. More significant in the present context is the way the organisers intentionally tried to imbue the scene with a sense

of 'cuteness', and the fact that this then had different implications for domestic and foreign consumption of nationalist symbolism.

In each case, the girl functions as a synecdoche, in this case a person standing in for the Chinese nation. For domestic viewers, the 'in-group' of national discourses, the cute girl implies that the nation is an object worthy of love: 'cute', *ke'ai* (可爱) in Chinese, literally translates into 'loveable'. For foreign viewers, the girl puts the nationalist symbolism of this segment into a different frame: the potency of state symbols such as the PRC flag, the soldiers, and the anthem are meant to become diluted, while the innocent cuteness of the child-actor is placed centre-stage. Emphasising a cute girl potentially counteracts prejudices that the PRC might be a threat, and it instead turns China into a benign nation — an idea that connects with narratives of peace and harmony (see also chapter 6).

The song that the girl sings is also relevant in this context. For domestic audiences, it serves as a reference to China's revolutionary past, a time now steeped in nostalgia. And yet it is not the original *Ode to the Motherland*. The song has been edited for the occasion, emphasising national pride while at the same time de-emphasising China's revolutionary past.

The original ode was composed by Wang Shen (王莘) in 1950, and it consists of seven verses. It contains phrases such as 'those who dare to cross us, we shall call for their deaths!' (谁敢侵犯我们就叫他死亡) and 'our leader Mao Zedong guides the way forward' (我们领袖毛泽东指引着前进的方向). Not only have these verses been omitted here, the event organisers also changed a line in the first verse. The original wording was 'the heroic people have stood up!' (英雄的人民站起来了). For the Olympics, this has been replaced by a line from a later verse: 'we love peace, we love the homeland' (我们爱和平，我们爱家乡). It would be hard to argue that the organisers made this change for diplomatic reasons, since only a Chinese-speaking audience would be able to know the meaning. I find it more plausible that it is the *domestic* audience that here receives a lesson in what it means to love the homeland today. Revolutionary zeal is replaced by the ideal of harmonious coexistence. This is a general trend throughout China's networked spectacles under Hu Jintao's rule, and I will show additional examples in chapter 6. Importantly, the organisers have used the opening ceremony's flag-raising ceremony to signal national unity and investment into an imaginary homeland while at the same time reprogramming the nationalist discourse and revisiting what investment in a homeland should ultimately mean.

The organisers have achieved no mean feat: they have turned nationalism (*aiguo zhuyi* 爱国主义) into what I would call cute nationalism (*ke'ai guo zhuyi* 可爱国主义), a seemingly inoffensive symbolic representation of the nation that suggests benevolence and innocence, and that lends itself to being filled with meanings and emotional attachments from a broad range of audiences. It is the quintessential reinvention of nationalism for a networked society: a free-floating signifier, open to innocuous interpretations and yet recognisable as a trope that can be redeployed during new interactions to elicit a vague sense of unity, fill those interactions with meanings, and justify specific policy stances.

5.4 Reimagining China's past

The way that actors reworked the meaning of the Chinese nation during China's networked spectacles was not limited solely to branding the nation and its state as benevolent, amicable family members and benign entities in international affairs. These representations were accompanied by concerted efforts across different media to recalibrate the Chinese nation's historiography. As Guibernau (2004: 134) has pointed out, creating a sense of belonging requires the construction of a shared past. To the CCP, it is inordinately important to provide a 'correct' reading of this past, and consecutive leaderships have continued the longstanding tradition (Mittag 2009) of conceptualising the relevance of Chinese history within the context of their own political agenda (see also Weigelin-Schwiedrzik & Schneider 2009). The networked spectacles of the Hu period are particularly interesting in this regard. They provided spaces for actors to, on the one hand, use very subtle communicative strategies to reinterpret modern history while, on the other hand, allowing often radical departures from previous interpretations.

One such example is visible in the propaganda blockbuster film *The Founding of the Republic* (Han & Huang 2009), released on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the PRC, which heavily revamped the meaning of founding figure Mao Zedong and his political ideology. In one scene (at time code 01:38:47), after the PLA has secured Beijing, Mao finds himself without his cigarettes and without a way to procure new ones. Walking through the old streets of the city and then sitting down with his allies for a meeting, he vents his frustration.

> Mao Zedong: Not a shop is open in two blocks. Comrade Chengjun, you're the county committee secretary, this can't go on.
>
> Chengjun: After entering the city, rumour had it that the capitalists and merchants were all exploiters and that we should punish them. They're so scared, no one is open for business.
>
> Zhu De: This is no small matter. We're the best in the world at revolutions, but we've got nothing on them when it comes to economics.
>
> Mao Zedong: Can't even get smokes without the merchants let alone market prosperity. We need them back.
>
> 毛泽东：转了两条街，没看见一个商店开门营业。成俊同志，你是县委书记，这可不行了。
>
> 成俊:进城后，传信说资本家和商人全是剥削阶级，要革他们的命。吓得这些商人买卖全不敢做了。
>
> 朱德: 这不是个小问题。闹革命，我们天下第一。 搞经济，我们可比不了他们。
>
> 毛泽东: 没了商贩，连香烟都买不到，还谈什么市场繁荣啊。要把人家请回来。

This short scene is an example of the ideological work that takes place within official political discourse. The propaganda film reinvented what founder Mao Zedong should stand for. Indeed, my translation above follows the Chinese original as much as possible, but the official English subtitles even have Mao explicitly stating 'we need the *capitalists* back' (my emphasis).

The film is profoundly anachronistic, but that is in many ways beside the point: as an official cultural product, it interprets the PRC's past in the present, suggesting a particular understanding of contemporary affairs and justifying the politics of the day. The film goes on to reframe the relationship between Mao Zedong and his historical antagonist Chiang Kai-shek, suggesting a grudging respect between the two men as well as close similarities in their general approach to politics. In that sense, the

film also framed political activities across the Taiwan Straits, laying the ideological groundwork for potentially warmer, more respectful cross-straits relations that were developing between the Hu-Wen administration on the mainland and Ma Ying-jeou administration in Taiwan at that time.

In *The Founding of the Republic*, Mao is reimagined to the point that he ends up effectively endorsing the reform era's embrace of capitalism. Indeed, it remained a major puzzle for the creators of official cultural products throughout China's networked spectacles how they could retain the nationalist relevance of the PRC's founding figure and of the early revolutionary periods of the country's modern history, while at the same time legitimating the present leadership's de facto rejection of Maoist politics in favour of an overwhelmingly capitalist, urban, and often neoliberal modernity. Official actors generally addressed this problem in one of two ways: either by downplaying, and at times deleting, the relevance of the Mao era, or by reinterpreting that era in the context of reform-era developments.

The practice of removing Mao from the PRC's history was, for instance, on display during the Olympics opening ceremony, which eschewed any explicit references to Mao and his legacy, choosing instead to relegate revolutionary themes to the short flag-raising ceremony, and then only in the obscured form of the heavily edited and sanitised revolutionary song I have discussed above. In its representation of historical achievements, the event otherwise skipped the Mao years, instead showcasing only pre-modern and contemporary themes.

In contrast to this, the 60th anniversary parade drew more explicitly from Mao-era symbolism, but it also subtly de-emphasised the Mao era, instead showcasing primarily themes of the reform era and the Hu-Wen period. Hwang and I (2009) have calculated how much time the organisers of the parade allotted to different topics during the two-and-a-half hour march, and even if we include all floats that related in some form to the founding of the PRC under Mao Zedong, Mao-themed elements accounted for only about a fifth of the event. This stands in stark contrast to the proportion of Mao's actual rule over mainland China: by 2009, he had ruled for nearly half of the PRC's 60-year history. The parade referred to Mao only selectively, turning the chairman into a nostalgia trigger rather than a signifier of specific ideological statements. Indeed, Mao-era catastrophes like the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) were ignored during the parade.

A similarly ambiguous relationship with the first three decades of PRC history was on display in a number of places throughout the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion. For instance, the curators of the 'Reminiscence' section, which showed how PRC living rooms had changed throughout the decades, opted to start their displays only in 1978, the year that Deng Xiaoping's administration launched its policy of reforms and opening up. While the installation that was meant to represent a 1978 living room contained various paraphernalia that evoked the Mao era through their iconography, such as kitchy propaganda postcards, vintage marriage certificates framed by socialist realist representations of revolutionaries, and family pictures of people in Sun Yat-sen suits, there is curiously no single picture of Mao Zedong himself. The revolutionary backdrop is downplayed, and the emphasis is placed on the seemingly unstoppable march towards increased prosperity, arguably captured most powerfully in how the home appliances changed from one installation to the next (see also Wallis & Balsamo 2016: 42): radios, TVs, and refrigerators became updated, and they were joined by desktop computers, laptops, and other digital gadgets as time progressed.

In a similar vein, the official guidebook to the pavilion almost entirely omits the Mao era from its representations of PRC history: a timeline that is meant to depict the 'Memory of China's Urbanisation' (中国城市化记忆) starts with the year 1949, the year that Mao founded the PRC, stating (Shiboju 2010: 14):

> The founding of New China placed China in a new starting position for modernisation and urbanisation. From the agrarian reform, the rebuilding of the infrastructure that had been destroyed by war, and other reconstruction plans began the construction project of imagining China's future cities.
>
> 新中国的建立使中国站在了现代化和城市化进程的新起点上，从土地改革、恢复被战争毁坏的基础设施等重建计划着手，开始设想中国未来城市的建设计划。

The next entry in the time line is then the year 1978, and the accompanying text features only a single short sentence on the late 1970s before shifting the focus to the 1980s (ibid.):

> At the close of the 1970s, China faced a stable international political environment, allowing China to develop its external environment by implementing the reform and opening up policies. By the mid-1980s, the reforms that had started in the countryside had led to a high-tide of development for township enterprises and small towns, and the opening-up policy further accelerated the urbanisation of China's south-eastern coastal regions.
>
> 1970年代末，中国相对稳定的国际政治环境为中国实施改革开放创造了外部环境；从农村开始的改革促成1980年代中期乡镇企业和小城镇发展的高潮，而对外开放则加速了中国东南沿海地区的城市化。

After setting the stage in these terms, the guidebook then proceeds to list 19 major achievements over the subsequent three decades, including the years when CCTV first aired its New Year's Gala (1983), when the first email was sent from China (1987), when the first supermarket opened (1994), and when the PRC hosted its two recent networked spectacles: the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and now the Shanghai Expo in 2010. I have reproduced this time-line in Figure 5.3 below.

A very similar rationale to this timeline is visible in the highly stylised feature film *The Road to our Beautiful Life*, which reproduces similar timelines to those on display in the subsequent exhibit as well as in the guidebook; the film omits any negative connotations with the past, only hinting at the revolutionary period as the origin of national success, and otherwise reducing 'China' to a 30-year story of modern development. This is explicit in the shot that shows Shanghai's highly developed skyline, accompanied by the phrase '30 years China'.

It is noteworthy that the film nevertheless uses the iconography of the Mao years to make this point: the characters are the kind of socialist realist figures familiar from martyrs' memorials and other revolutionary representations; they are not characters in their own right, but instead serve as templates for the Chinese people as a whole. Visually, these figures are framed in ways that evoke much earlier CCP propaganda. The movie is filmed in highly saturated colours, making the images look like Mao-era propaganda posters. The camera dynamics contribute to this impression through low-angle hero shots and slow-motion camera movements, reproducing the perspectives of such posters and signalling the iconography as worthy of special attention. These visuals

Year	Chinese	English
1979	第一条电视商业广告播出	First TV commercial aired
1980	第一家个体工商户出现	First private business licensed
1981	第一条地铁正式开通	First subway opened
1982	新中国第一次参加世博会	P.R.C. participated in the World Expo for the first time
1983	中央电视台举办首届春节联欢晚会	First CCTV New Year's Gala held
1984	居民身份证诞生	First Resident ID card issued
1985	第一张人民币信用卡出现	First RMB credit card issued
1987	第一封电子邮件发出	First e-mail sent
1988	第一条高速公路建成通车	First expressway opened to traffic
1990	首家证券交易所开业	First stock exchange opened
1992	第一个电影节开幕	First film festival opened
1993	粮票制度取消	Food coupon system abandoned
1994	第一家超市出现	First supermarket opened
1995	开始实施每周40小时工作制	'40-hour work week' introduced
1996	第一家网吧出现	First Internet cafe opened
2002	第一个博客网站开通	First blog website launched
2007	第一列动车组火车正式运行	First CRH train went into operation
2008	第29届夏李奥运会在北京举办	29th Summer Olympic Games held in Beijing
2010	中国2010年上海世博会举办	World Expo 2010 held in Shanghai
	记忆还将继续	There are more to expect...

Figure 5.3: Timeline of China's National Achievements, as presented by the Shanghai Expo Guidebook (Shiboju 2010).

are further accompanied by a pathos-laden music score that resembles revolution-era music and operas. Filtered through the lens of these recognisable tropes, the director and his team reinvent China as a land of iconic worker-heroes who, over the past three decades, have been busy building a green, hypermodern utopia. This enterprise seems to embody a non-distinct revolutionary heritage, but at the same time it endorses a capitalist modernity that has little to do with the agenda of the PRC's founding cadres.

The Mao era is not the only part of Chinese history that receives a make-over in China's networked spectacles. Pre-modern history is integrated into Chinese nationalist discourse as an important, immutable antecedent of contemporary success. During the Olympics opening ceremony (see also Barmé 2009) and throughout the official Chinese Shanghai Expo exhibits, but also in the road-to-revival cultural

products that accompanied the 60th anniversary celebrations (Schneider & Hwang 2014b), the discourse fused a series of historical developments, recognisable symbols, and famous figures, creating a sense of a unified national heritage and placing today's China in a direct line of succession with this imagined past. Considering how strongly CCP ideology previously criticised the pre-modern era as a backwards feudalist society, it is indeed remarkable how unapologetically contemporary actors place this feudal past in the service of their political projects at the start of the 21st century.

Throughout the networked spectacles that the Hu-Wen administration hosted, the pre-modern past was leveraged to legitimate contemporary practices. As discussed in chapter 4, the architectural design team behind the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion, for instance, justified many of its engineering choices by drawing from pre-modern concepts, artefacts, iconographies, and text passages to link contemporary practices to carefully selected precursors. The same practice was also on display in the pavilion's main exhibition halls, where official actors presented contemporary China in civilisational terms, drawing a linear path through history in order to make sense of the past. In this view, history starts in the pre-imperial times of famous sages like Confucius, whom I will return to in the next chapter. Chinese civilisation then continues onwards, to the first unification of the territories that would form what later became known as China.

Recall the display of the 'National Treasure', the bronze horse and chariot figurine from the Qin period. The choice of displaying a piece of the Terracotta Army so centrally is telling. The artefact is a reference to the conquest of the first emperor, Qinshihuang (秦始皇), who united the disparate kingdoms of the region to form the first dynasty. The Qin was a short-lived and notoriously brutal period in dynastic history that was reviled by many later commentators (for discussions see Fairbank & Goldman 2006: 54-57 and Gernet 1972/2002), but it has frequently served modern politicians and intellectuals as a foil for rationalising autocratic politics in the service of national glory. The Qin emperor has been praised by Republican and PRC historians alike, and Mao himself reportedly thought highly of the first emperor's achievements, particularly his anti-intellectualist purge of scholars (Lieberthal 2003: 71). Accounts from the early 21st century then also frequently frame Qinshihuang as a hardened realist who ultimately did right by the nation. Examples include the 2002

martial arts epic *Hero*, directed by Zhang Yimou, and the 2001 television drama series *Qin Shi Huang* (Sina 2006).

In the China Pavilion, the Qin dynasty provided the backdrop before which the nation's civilisation unfolded. The Bronze Chariot Number One is the first and largest of the 'civilisational crystals' presented from pre-modern times. The artefacts cover 'eight core groups of cultural artefacts' (一八组文物为核心) that 'serve as inspiration for today' (表现…对今天的启示; Shiboju 2010: 76): metal casting, silk production, porcelain wares, paper printing, urban economy and life, traditional medicine, architecture, and artefacts associated with trade along the Silk Roads and maritime trade routes. Each of these categories serves the curators as a lens through which to explain contemporary developments and make claims about the Chinese nation, but the last category is particularly interesting; it exemplifies the practice of constructing a linear, modernist narrative out of selected pre-modern artefacts, but it also connects with performances that showcased the Silk Roads and Maritime Silk Roads during the Olympics opening ceremony two years before, effectively creating a context for national policy (Figure 5.4).

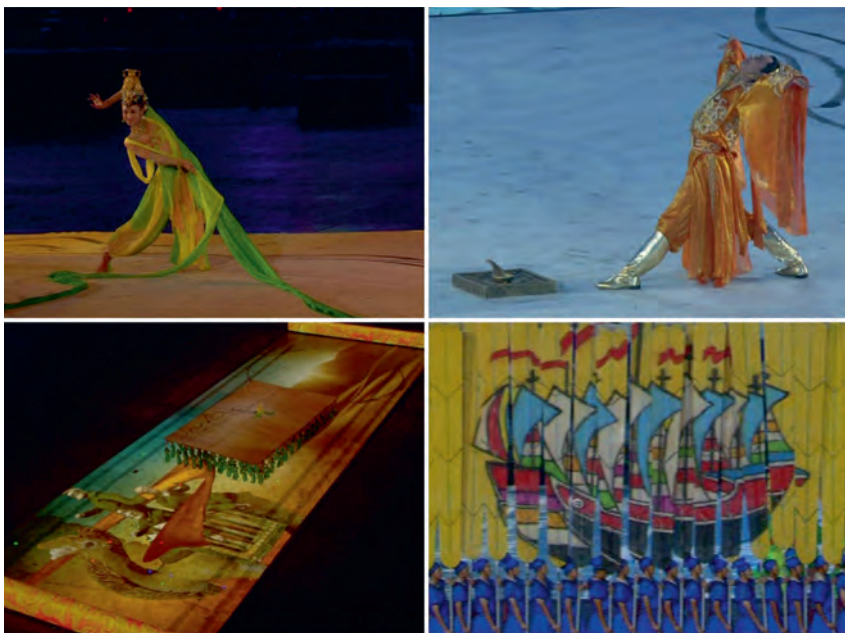

Figure 5.4: Images of the Silk Roads (left) and Maritime Silk Roads (right) during the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

In the China Pavilion, the topic is represented by a silver sacrificial vessel from the Han (206 BC - 220 AD) and a glass vessel from the Northern Yan (409 - 436 AD), each of which is meant to illustrate the bilateral transfer of crafting techniques between the Chinese and Roman worlds at the time. The guidebook to the exhibit places these artefacts into contemporary perspective for visitors (Shiboju 2010: 83):

> The Maritime Silk Road is a passage for transport, trade, and cultural exchange between ancient China and foreign countries. The Maritime Silk Road initially formed during the Qin and Han period, was further developed during the Wei, Jin, and North-South Dynasties, flourished during the Song and Tang period, and transformed during the Ming and Qing periods. The star constellations may have turned, but the 'Northern Dipper' after which today's Northern Dipper Satellite Navigation System is named, is still the same constellation that was used by the compass that opened up the maritime trade routes, letting humanity's global village grow smaller.
>
> 海上丝绸之路是古代中国与外国交通贸易和文化交往的海上通道。海上丝绸之路初步形成于秦汉时期，发展与魏晋南北朝时期，繁荣于唐宋时代，转变于明清时期。斗转星移，今日的北斗'卫星如同当年开拓海上贸易之路的罗盘，让人类的地球村变得更小。

Such depictions of Chinese maritime trade already foreshadow later projects like the Belt and Road Initiative under Xi Jinping's leadership, which also imagine contemporary trade and development in the region as a logical, linear extension of pre-modern practices. Note, here, how the quotation also connects its national historiographic discourse to the idea of scientific progress, and by extension to globalisation (indirectly referring to, and misrepresenting, McLuhan's famous 'global village' idea). The compass, as one of the major pre-modern Chinese inventions, is presented as the natural precursor to the highly advanced satellite system that the PRC was developing during the first two decades of the 21st century, implying continuous progress through time and a sense that this progress is owed to Chinese ingenuity.

This modernist fusion of nationalist and scientific discourses was ubiquitous across China's networked spectacles, and it is arguably

a major part of the CCP's ideology today. In the China Pavilion, the exhibition marched visitors past the artistic and scientific achievements of numerous dynasties before arriving in modern times, where it provided only a very brief and generally rosy impression of the PRC's revolutionary past before quickly ushering the audience towards the main focus of the presentations: a contemporary period of revival and a glorious science-fictional future where Chinese inventiveness and scientific prowess promise to solve the nation's problems.

It might be tempting to dismiss this narrative as reductionist, or as anachronistic, but this would again miss an important point of China's networked spectacles, and of political communication in the PRC more generally. The carefully selected elements from the past lend themselves to a reshuffling of meanings in the present, and they provide the resources for making a number of discursive moves that ultimately pave the way to specific policy choices, for instance those related to the 'harmonious society' concept (see chapter 6). Importantly, these pointers towards pre-modern history rely on recognisable components, and they require a certain 'buy-in', on the part of audiences, to the idea of the nation. Reimagining the nation's past is not merely a cognitive, communicative activity; it relies heavily on emotional investment and social interaction.

5.5 Ritual entrainment and the governance of emotion

How, then, do the symbols and narratives of the nation become objects of emotional investment? In practice, this happens through two interrelated processes: continuous mass-media priming and chains of ritual interactions. In Foucauldian terms, the first process might be considered 'discursive' and the second 'social', and both of these dimensions were in evidence during China's networked spectacles.

Ideologies like nationalism require a certain willingness to accept the broad parameters of the ideational framework as common sense, and it is in this context that the programming activities of actors with privileged access to mass communication networks are important. Switched into the networks at powerful, authoritative nodes like mass media corporations or state information agencies, media workers translate their understanding of ideological imperatives into an assemblage of recognisable signs, layering these components in different modes and

imbuing them with cues for emotional reaction. As such processes unfold over extended periods of time, flanked by media usage in classrooms and homes, public spaces and work places, the array of emotionally charged symbols enters into the background of everyday interactions, but it nevertheless leaves those who have continuously interacted with those symbols 'primed' to understand their emotional force in moments when these symbols become the focus of heightened attention (see also Althaus & Coe 2011, Iyengar et al. 1982, Krosnick & Kinder 1990, and the contributions in Molden 2014).

Recall the flag-raising ceremony during the Olympics opening ceremony. One of the most striking aspects of this sequence was its emotional force. Even an unsentimental viewer would be hard pressed to dismiss the pathos of the proceedings. This pathos is manufactured (see Carroll 1998) to tap the 'structures of feeling' (Callahan 2010: 19) that underlie national identity construction. In this particular case, the emotional effect of the sound and images has been carefully engineered to evoke nationalist sentiments. Throughout this four-minute performance, TV audiences have been shown Chinese flags for roughly two minutes, and they have been exposed to the colour red for over three. The symbolic colour is as much a sign of the nation as are the melodramatic music, the lyrics, the CCTV announcement, the children in ethnic attire, the flag, the soldiers, the Chinese leaders on the dais, the flag-waving and cheering Chinese audience, and the little girl in the red dress I discussed earlier. The TV editors' montage ensures that all of these elements come together 'naturally', in what Alexander has referred to as a coherent fusion (2006: 29). This barrage of symbols ensures that the significance of the moment does not go unnoticed, while the redundancy in meanings ensures that the message is relayed unambiguously (see Barthes 1977): the Chinese nation is proudly hosting this international event.

Stacking various signifiers helps to 'programme' the meaning of the ritual, but it does not fully account for the emotional impact itself. That impact relies on audiences of different orders of the spectatorship process recognising specific symbols and the emotional weight assigned to them during the ritual. The proceedings are designed to address the expectations of Chinese viewers, or at least what the organisers believed those expectations to be. These viewers, in turn, had been primed for years to regard this moment as a significant national occasion. As discussed in chapter 2, commentaries and news reports in the national media had continuously built up to this event, and China's leaders had repeatedly

framed this moment as a national achievement. This is precisely what Dayan & Katz (1992: 17) have in mind when they describe such events as powerful interruptions to daily life, that is as formal rituals that deserve special attention (hence the name opening *ceremony*).

While the presentation of national symbols during an interruption of profane normality lends them an air of the sacred, the symbols themselves work precisely *because* of their profane normality. The audience has not only been primed for several years to expect this event, it has also been primed for decades to recognise the national symbols through which the event makes itself intelligible. This is the kind of normalisation of national symbols that Billig (2009: 38) discusses when he writes of 'flagging' activities, and that I have discussed in chapter 2. Saturating public life with symbols of the nation moves them to the background of everyday life while also keeping them ever present: flags hang from government buildings, students sing national hymns in school, TV news anchors announce national policies, the national emblem graces every social security card in the country, and each banknote features the face of the nation's founder. Through this overexposure, citizens forget that they are continuously reminded of their nationhood. The reminders 'hardly register in the flow of daily attention, as citizens rush past on their daily business' (ibid.: 38). The effect is that these 'forgotten reminders' can be activated or 'flagged' as needed, providing instantaneous access to a pool of emotions that national ideology has associated with them over the years.

While this construction of 'banal nationalism' is as much apparent in Chinese daily life as in China's patriotic education campaigns (Zhao 2004: 218-227), it is by no means a particularly Chinese phenomenon. All of the above mechanisms are used widely in other nation-states, whether in the Americas, Europe, East Asia, or elsewhere in the world, and they are visible throughout the history of the modern mass event. It is in fact the very normality that national symbols possess in a world of nation-states, as well as the universal emotions they appeal to (feelings of home, belonging, safety, etc.), that allow the organisers of networked spectacles to effectively 'fuse' various performative elements into a compelling nationalist narrative. It is the reason foreign observers may feel similarly moved by a cute Chinese girl singing an ode to her motherland to the domestic audience. The symbolic language of the spectacle is familiar. It is understood *inter*-nationally because the world of nation-states has created 'assumptions about what a nation is: as such it is a theory of

communication, as well as a theory about the world being "naturally" divided into such communities' (Billig 2009: 63).

The flag-raising moment of the Olympics indeed promised that all humankind would come together as 'One World' with 'One Dream' – only this dream was not about sports or a collective humanism. It was about the audience's collective sense of modern nation-ness. This, then, is one of the opening ceremony's main accomplishments: that it is able to cleverly draw from nationalist primes and invite such understanding while addressing both Chinese *and* foreign audiences.

The cultural artefacts that represent nation-ness become emotionally charged through the mechanisms of ritual interaction. As I discussed in chapter 1, people assemble 'culture' or 'society' through their open-ended social and communicative interactions with each other and the objects of their social worlds. These interactions form 'rituals' when they prompt actors to focus their attention and their emotions, and in such moments the actors produce 'a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership' (Collins 2003: 612). An important component of such a ritual is what Collins refers to as 'entrainment', using a metaphor from biology that normally describes how, for instance, cicadas match their bodily rhythms to environmental cues. In human ritual interactions, the participants also match each other's bodily cues and activities, mirroring each other's behaviours and responding to social rhythms, and the more complete this process of synchronisation is, so Collins argues, the more emotionally satisfying and powerful it becomes. Examples include groups of people shouting, cheering, or moving in unison, for instance during sports events.

Networked spectacles are noteworthy sites of ritual entrainment; they are designed to elicit collective responses such as cheering and applause, often prompting participants to launch into such expressions 'spontaneously', but actually cueing these emotional moments through carefully designed event dynamics. The Olympics opening ceremony contained numerous such moments during which audiences were prompted to react with expressions of collective awe, for instance during the fireworks, the synchronous performances of large numbers of actors, or the rare moments of planned interruption, such as when the men manipulating the complex movable typeface during the scene 'Script' emerged from their hiding places to provide a rare peek behind the scenes of this complex performative arrangement. Similarly, the China Pavilion's feature films during the Shanghai Expo used filmic

elements like camera angles, musical scores, and editing dynamics to build entrainment and lead viewers to important moments of national identification within the films, for instance the moment when *The Road to our Beautiful Life* pauses its depiction of break-neck development and urbanisation to immerse viewers in a slow-motion assemblage of visual disaster tropes that construct a singular moment of national unity, in this case the Sichuan earthquake. When I attended a screening of this feature film in July 2010, the audience was indeed transfixed by the visual and acoustic spectacle, and the emotional tensions in the theatre were palpable, with several audience members around me bursting into tears at the depiction of national solidarity.

Not all ritual interactions need to be this monumental. Entrainment also occurs in everyday situations (see Goffman 1967), such as the kind of non-interactions that take place between the patrons of a café (see Woldoff et al. 2013) as they seemingly ignore each other and go about their business, reading the paper, drinking their coffee, or working on their laptops. Nevertheless, those present in the café still contribute to the general atmosphere through their minute social signals, creating emotional attachments and interpersonal meanings. Of course, places like cafés are also designed to yield certain effects (Waxman 2006), and they play important roles in social and economic orders (Davidson & Rafailidis 2011), even if patrons and staff are not necessarily aware of these dimensions of their casual interactions. Similarly, some of the most interesting interactions during China's networked spectacles were small-scale, for instance the everyday encounters between volunteer workers and event visitors which the state was relying on to present a positive image to foreigners and encourage self-discipline among its citizens (Chong 2011). In fact, I would argue that the lengthy interactions involved in recruiting, training, and testing volunteers during these events already served as an important opportunity for everyday entrainment and, ultimately, initiation into communal sentiments (see Zhuang & Girginov 2012 on volunteer selection during the Beijing Olympics). Such activities are no less important for the construction of emotions and nationalist discourse than the planned tear-jerker moments in mass communication products like feature films, core exhibits, or official telecasts. Much like I have described attempts to manage the cultural parameters in which politics unfold as cultural governance, we may think of such efforts to regulate the emotional textures of communal understanding as emotional governance.

The daily activities at the Shanghai Expo territory are a case in point: the organisers staged daily mock national days for different participating countries, and they hosted parades and musical performances throughout the day. These activities served as reminders that the main actors at the event were nation-states, but they also invited visitors to participate as official actors symbolically staged the event's 'internationalness'. A particularly playful example was the 'expo passport' (Figure 5.5). Visitors could purchase this facsimile of an actual passport and then pretend to 'travel' to different countries by visiting national pavilions and gathering 'visa' stamps. In such instances, the movement across the territory, the activity of standing in line, or the sudden 'stampedes' caused by stamp-hungry passport holders as they struggled to be first in line at some pavilion, all revolved round the tangible object of the passport, allowing visitors to project their experiences and emotions onto this symbol of nationness. Incidentally, this symbol would later sell at exorbitant prices on e-commerce sites, as visitors with 'complete' stamp collections sold their expo passports at prices equivalent to those of a new iPhone (CNN 2010). Such sales of event paraphernalia provide a reminder of how nationalism is also intricately linked to capitalist consumption patterns.

Figure 5.5: The Expo Passport. Playing World Citizen at the Shanghai Expo 2010. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

In that sense, investment in the idea of being a member of a nation was not merely communicated to visitors through the expo exhibits or the accompanying mass media messages, it was actively practised by the visitors themselves, who were invited to enact the activities of citizens travelling through this imaginary, miniature world. It is precisely such ritual interactions that make the kinds of 'watch signs' I have discussed above more than just cognitive devices that connect to existing maps of background knowledge. They become elements in chains of ritual interaction as actors deploy or handle them within their meaning-making efforts. As Collins (2004) puts it, the actors 'charge' these artefacts with emotional energy, imbuing ideological concepts with personal feelings through interaction, and this ultimately creates the 'pathos formulae' that Müller & Kappas (2011) have explored.

For tropes such as those that constitute national narratives, this entails the long-term usage I have discussed earlier. The practice of 'playing' citizen with an expo passport gains meaning because of the continuous exposure to the idea that humans should be nationals, encapsulated powerfully in the objects of actual passports and visa stamps. Priming and ritual interactions work together. The PRC anniversary parade illustrates this, showing how a ritual 'on the ground' is communicated through mass communication technology to relay a series of recognisable primes for the imagined community while at the same time encouraging ritual entrainment, albeit at a distance. When Hu Jintao travelled past the troops to engage in staged dialogue, the exchange provided an opportunity for the broadcaster CCTV to stage the segment as a rhythmic pattern of 35-second narrative units, each cycling through the same camera angles and shot lengths. The march of the troops across Tiananmen Square was similarly designed as a cycle of recurring visual patterns. Such repetition invites 'parasocial' engagement (Giles 2002), that is a sense of interaction with people and situations that are only known indirectly, at a distance, through mass communication technologies (for examples and discussions see Boyle & Magnusson 2007, Frederick et al. 2012, Madison & Porter 2015, 2016, and Schiappa et al. 2007). TV viewers do not personally know Hu Jintao, and they are unlikely to know the soldiers or the spectators depicted on screen. Yet, through the sense of collective ritual, carefully designed by the event organisers and the media workers at the national broadcaster CCTV, they are invited to imagine themselves as affiliates of these fellow citizens, and consequently as part of the nation, which is itself a parasocial entity.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how elite actors, especially the authorities, design and circulate recognisable symbols of the nation, how they narrate the nation's history, and how they tweak the meanings that surround the nation and its state. Throughout China's networked spectacles, this entailed a marked shift in Chinese historiography, and a reinterpretation of what the Chinese nation should stand for. Through substantial ideological work, official actors imagined the nation as a benevolent family member, presenting 'China' to audiences at home and abroad as 'lovable' (*ke'ai* 可爱). They also systematically broke with the PRC's revolutionary past and contextualised the nation within the past 30 years of reform efforts, and especially within the ideological parameters that the Hu-Wen administration had been laying out at the start of the 21st century.

These discursive activities also had an important social dimension, as actors invited audiences to participate actively in the circulation and consumption of national symbols that had long served as 'primes' for communal feelings. The organisers created opportunities for ritual interactions, encouraging participants to associate cultural artefacts and symbolic representations with their own sense of nation-ness, through continuous use. Such emotional governance activities made the artefacts of the nation available as depositories and carriers of the kinds of feelings that drive association with imagined communities like nations: social affirmation, security, certainty, and competence (see also my discussion in Schneider 2018: ch.2). These emotional 'charges' (Collins 2003) then become available to actors to be utilised in the name of national unity, and to pave the way for specific policy initiatives, such as the Hu-Wen administration's attempt to design a 'harmonious society'.

6 *The Making of a Harmonious Utopia*

In early 2011, journalists and China commentators were reeling from whiplash as Chinese authorities seemed to be sending mixed signals about the party's assessment of pre-modern culture. Early in the year, Beijing's National Museum of China had erected an almost 10-metre-tall statue of the sage Confucius at its northern gate. Considering how concepts and ideas associated with Confucianism had been gaining popularity throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and considering how the Hu-Wen administration had been evoking this particular heritage of Chinese philosophy over the preceding years (Chan 2009), many were speculating about the symbolic relevance of this statue (e.g. Coonan 2011). Situated on Chang'an Avenue, just half a kilometre from the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the statue left some with the impression that the CCP had 'resurrected Confucius and practically put Mao and Confucius side by side', as Pei Minxin put it; considering Mao's distaste for the sage and his philosophy, Pei concluded that 'Mao must be turning in his grave' (cited in Chen 2011).

Not even four months later, the monumental statue disappeared overnight. Assertions by officials that it had merely been moved, and that this had been planned all along, left many Chinese citizens and foreign observers unconvinced (see China Digital Times 2011), especially since the statue had been removed in such a clandestine way. Speculation abounded, with some wondering whether leftist cadres had successfully agitated against this symbol of an ideology they had long perceived as feudalist and backward (see Jacobs 2011). Others wondered whether the party had been swayed by disgruntled descendants of Confucius, who had viewed this official endorsement of the sage as disingenuous and disrespectful, especially since the CCP had never formally apologised for the persecution of all things related to Confucius during the Cultural Revolution (see Reuters 2011). Whatever the reasons, the statue had become a political issue, closely tied to controversies over the direction

that national culture in general and the CCP's political orientation more specifically should take. As Dirlik (2011b: 2) put it at the time, Confucius powerfully served as 'a symbol of national cultural identity' that was the object of 'both cultural political manipulation and popular desire'.

The curious incident of the Confucius statue came in the wake of the networked spectacles that this book analyses, and of the many attempts to recalibrate official discourses by drawing from the rich traditions of Chinese history (see also China Story 2012). In this chapter, I turn to these activities and I explore how various actors referred to classic Chinese concepts and statements to fill the core official concepts of the Hu-Wen era with meaning: the ideas of a 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) and of 'scientific development' (*keji fazhan* 科技发展). I start with a brief discussion of China's so-called 'Confucian Revival' at the start of the 21st century, and of the political discourses that accompanied this renewed interest in pre-modern philosophy as part of a wider push to invigorate 'national studies', or *guoxue* (国学), and anchor modernity in Chinese tradition. I then explore how China's networked spectacles evoked the idea of 'harmony' in both domestic and foreign affairs contexts, and how various actors used resources from the past to make sense of the concept. This will also include a discussion of official attempts to frame the PRC's foreign policy in terms of harmony and peace. Next, I discuss the way in which the CCP uses the concept of harmony to legitimate its modernist developmental politics, and I conclude by examining the kind of neoliberal hypermodernity that these conceptual activities have frequently come to justify.

6.1 Modernity and the 'Confucian revival'

In contemporary China, the interest in pre-modern Chinese culture and philosophy is intimately linked to the modernity projects of various elites. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, constructing the modern imagined community of the nation requires a sense of national tradition. This is very much in evidence in China, where consecutive generations of Chinese modernists have tried to understand the complex and fragmented dynastic and pre-imperial past from the perspective of the relatively recent invention of China as a modern nation-state.

Arif Dirlik (2011c) has shown how these endeavours roughly fall into one of two schools of thought. The first is a culturally conservative

programme aimed at creating Chinese national identity through activities that could also be called acts of 'collective remembering', that is knowledge-making practices that treat the past as a unified narrative in the service of a group and that do not lightly suffer ambiguities about the past (see Wertsch 2002 for a discussion). Such modern practices of collective remembering tend to follow nativist trajectories that seek to reify history as national history, and in China this has included attempts to elevate certain elements of the past to the status of national essence (*guocui* 国粹) or national soul (*guohun* 国魂), two terms that date back to early modernists at the close of the Qing Dynasty (Dirlik 2011c: 7). At the time, the contemporaries borrowed this terminology from neighbouring Japan, a nation-state they perceived as a template for how to become a modern power without abandoning traditions. In contrast to this, liberal cosmopolitan modernists tried to critically interrogate China's past, questioning the value of traditions, and drawing from foreign scholarly traditions to do so (ibid.: 6). This paradigm famously informed the May Fourth's New Culture Movement (see Mitter 2004), but it has remained an important fixture in scholarly and popular understandings of China's past to this day.

The continuous interplay between these two paradigms in China highlights some of the contradictions involved in becoming modern, and they speak to the complex question of how to situate 'local' forms of knowledge within the now near-global knowledge practices of modernity (see also Gluck 2011). In Dirlik's view (2011c: 4), they illustrate a general modern quest for 'ethno-epistemologies' that actors invoke 'to establish claims to alternative modernities (but only rarely to alternatives to modernity).' He goes on to argue that such attempts to define knowledge and identity through national traditions 'point not to the past but, taking a detour through the past, to an alternative future'; this, as will become clear below, is very much the case for how the Hu-Wen administration and various other actors in China leveraged traditions in the service of their own ethno-epistemologies.

The debates that Dirlik outlines informed a renewed interest in China's past in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and it is before this backdrop that the PRC experienced a surge in 'national studies' (*guoxue* 国学) that has lasted to this day, and that still produces both powerful nativist and cosmopolitan iterations (for discussions see Chen 2011, Gan 2009, Liu 2011, Tong 2011, and Xie 2011). This interest, while not originally state-induced, became a convenient foundation for the authorities' own

attempts to place their state-led nationalism on a broad, popular footing (see also Zhao 2004). Indeed, one of the reasons it was viable for the CCP to launch its patriotic education campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s was that traditional culture was again in vogue in China, especially among cultural conservatives (Makeham 2011).

The 'national studies craze' (see Chen 2011, Xie 2011) has led to a barrage of self-help books and popular cultural products in China, including TV programmes like CCTV's *Lecture Room* (*Baijia jiangtan* 百家讲坛), which has provided pop celebrities like Yu Dan (于丹) with a platform for their feel-good messages (see Makeham 2011: 14). These cultural products are part of a profitable industry, but they also serve actors as vehicles for their political discourses. Yu Dan, for instance, spells out the lessons of her engagement with the Confucian classics in an interview with Osnos (2014):

> We must rely on a strict system to resolve problems. As citizens, our duty is not necessarily to be perfect moral persons. Our duty is to be law-abiding citizens.

Yu Dan's arguments illustrate how the renewed interest in pre-modern philosophy, particularly in its nativist instantiations, is frequently fuelled by the wish to 'civilise' Chinese subjects, reinvent them as 'citizens', and encourage the kind of self-discipline that advocates perceive as crucial for creating stable social relations across the nation. These discourses are then frequently culturally conservative and politically neo-authoritarian (see Sauntman 1992, Van Dongen 2009, and Minzer 2018 on Chinese neo-authoritarianism more generally). A prominent example of this is Zhao Tingyang's (2005, 2006) work, which mines pre-dynastic history for insights into the perceived golden age of the Western Zhou Kingdom (ca. 1040 to 771 BC). The Zhou kings had often served the philosophers of China's axial age (ca. 722 to 221 BC) as a source of anecdotes, reflections, and lessons on how to rule, and Zhao Tingyang mobilises this tradition to outline how these rulers venerated 'all under heaven' (*tianxia* 天下), and how their 'heavenly mandate' (*tianming* 天命) rested on an ideology that connected the cosmos, the world, the rulers, and their subjects through relations of respect and duty. For Zhao, it is a moral imperative to learn from this precedent and transitively apply its rationale (or, rather, Zhao's interpretation of that rationale) to the flawed social relations of our contemporary 'bad world' (see Zhao 2009), so as to govern society

through an emphasis on order (for critiques see Barabantseva 2012 and Callahan 2008).

Such arguments about governance and self-governance, grounded in pre-modern thought, became particularly popular during the Hu-Wen administration. It is hard to say in which direction the causalities ran, but the official endorsement of 'harmony' (*he* 和) arguably signalled that ideological engagement with traditional philosophical concepts was acceptable to the authorities. Political scientists ranging from liberal constructivists (e.g. Qin 2009) to hardened realists (e.g. Yan & Xu 2009) consequently took up the challenge of trying to explain the PRC's role in world politics in terms of pre-modern thought, often constructing their own versions of established political theories like constructivism or neo-realism, but now with Chinese characteristics (for discussions see Hui 2012 and my own work in Schneider 2014a). While these practices have run the gamut of traditional Chinese philosophies, from Daoism through Legalism to Moism, the most commonly evoked sources are arguably the Confucian classics, at least in nativist versions of 'national studies' that celebrate a 'Confucian revival' (*ruxue fuxing* 儒家复兴). As Dirlik writes (2011b: 2):

> At its narrowest, contemporary scholars of guoxue (and their popular constituencies) identify it with ruxue, or what is usually described somewhat misleadingly as 'Confucianism,' and Confucius with the spirit of the nation.

'Confucianism' (*ruxue* 儒学) indeed encompasses a whole array of ideas and practices, some philosophical, others religious, which are all tied in complicated ways to pre-modern antecedents and their modern reinterpretations (see Billioud & Thoraval 2014). It is then best not to understand Confucianism as a unified, coherent set of principles, even if it is frequently portrayed as such by advocates, but rather as a discursive field, a network in which diverse actors create emergent and often idiosyncratic meanings in the service of their respective political projects, using Confucian concepts as their building-blocks.

This has arguably been true throughout history: the writings that are today considered Confucian classics were written and rewritten after the period in which Confucius himself lived (the Spring-and-Autumn period, *chunqiu* 春秋, ca. 722-481 BC), and connections between the actual man's thoughts and later interpretations of the classic works that

became attributed to him are frequently tenuous. Like so many classic texts in Chinese philosophy, the famous Confucian texts were compiled after the sage's death by his disciples, and these texts were then rewritten (and sometimes outright forged) during subsequent periods, for instance during the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD). Later 'Neo-Confucian' scholars, most notably of the Song Dynasty period (960 to 1279 BC), significantly expanded the Confucian framework, and the early 20th century saw yet another round of reassessments that would become part of 'Modern Neo-Confucianism' (*xiandai xin ruxue* 现代新儒学).

More recent interpretations have selectively drawn elements from these precursors to make sense of life and sociality in a rapidly changing China, often augmenting or contrasting their efforts with European, Korean, and Japanese philosophical currents, or with the works of Chinese philosophers outside the mainland (see Berthrong 1998/2018 and Rošker 2016). The result has been a rich collection of discourses under the overarching banner of 'Contemporary Neo-Confucianism' (*dangdai xin ruxue* 当代新儒学), which fits only awkwardly into essentialist understandings of the sage and his legacy (for helpful discussions see the contributions in Hammond & Richey 2015 and Hon & Stapleton 2017, as well as Osno's insightful 2014 journalistic account).

The conceptual frameworks of Confucian thought provide contemporaries with resources for their own political agendas. This has included criticising the institutions of global modernity, especially those that rely on egalitarian mass participation, and instead promoting governance by experts who are awarded their position based on meritocratic selection mechanisms, and whose mandate is to create stability and welfare for all. An example of such 'political Confucianism' is the work of Jiang Qing (2005), but arguably also of Daniel A. Bell (2007, 2008), whose assessment of contemporary Chinese meritocracy (Bell 2015) has been the subject of heated debate (see Bell et al. 2015 for an extended discussion, Nathan 2015 for a critique, and Bell 2015b for the response).

The PRC's authorities have been largely opportunistic in their embrace of 'Confucian' initiatives. The state has for instance opted to name a major part of its public diplomacy efforts after the sage: the Confucius Institutes (*Kongzi xueyuan* 孔子学院, see D'Hooghe 2015: ch.4). The authorities also seem to have initially supported a private initiative to establish a 'Confucius Peace Prize' in 2010 as an alternative to the Nobel Peace Prize, which had been awarded to dissident Liu Xiaobo that year.

The PRC's Ministry of Culture later withdrew its support, prompting the organisers to move their activities to Hong Kong (BBC 2011). From there, they have since awarded the prize to controversial figures such as Vladimir Putin, Fidel Castro, Robert Mugabe, and Hun Sen, and these activities have arguably created no small amount of embarrassment for the PRC's central authorities and their attempts to present China as a responsible stakeholder in international society.

Political initiatives related to Confucius show how complicated the networked processes are through which actors try to generate meanings around China's philosophical traditions. Such initiatives also demonstrate how discourses about Confucian tradition do not necessarily align with the CCP's attempts to appropriate pre-modern Chinese concepts (see Dotson 2011). This is visible in the way that official actors interpreted the Hu-Wen administration's emphasis on the nominally Confucian concept of 'harmony'.

6.2 Harmonising all under heaven

During the Hu-Wen administration, and especially after 2004, official ideology revolved strongly around the idea of a harmonious society (see Chan 2009, China Story 2012, Trevaskes 2012), and actors confronted with the challenge of positioning their activities within official discourse frequently returned to this concept to legitimate themselves and their actions, whether to secure funding, promote certain policies, or intervene in public discourse. This meant that a multitude of actors engaged in meaning-making processes that involved the concept of harmony (Zheng & Tok 2007), and many official actors ultimately planned policy initiatives based on their understanding of this idea (for an overview and assessment see the contributions in Zhao & Lim 2009). This frequently entailed turning to pre-modern sources for inspiration on how to understand what a contemporary Chinese 'harmonious society' might stand for.

As I have discussed earlier, these understandings were frequently based on highly idiosyncratic interpretations of China's past, especially its Confucian heritage, but be that as it may, the networked spectacles of the Hu-Wen period clearly anchored their use of the term harmony in pre-modern classics, using in particular quotations from the famous Confucian *Analects* (论语). For instance, the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony relied on quotations from this work in the segment that

showcased Chinese typesetting, and that was built around a movable typeset that produced the various iterations of the character for harmony I discussed in chapter 4. In order to ensure that the Chinese character *he* (和) was indeed associated with Confucian interpretations, the demonstration was accompanied by a recital of two central quotations from the *Analects*.

> Is it not a pleasure to have friends come from afar?
> 有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎 (Analects 1.1)
> Within the four seas, all are his [the sage's] brothers.
> 四海之内，皆兄弟也 (Analects 12.5)

It is worth noting that, in the original, the first quotation is part of a statement on sagely learning, and the second quotation is part of a discussion about propriety. Here, these text passages are decontextualised to become part of a contemporary, cosmopolitan narrative anchored in pre-modern times. The programme for the opening ceremony makes this clear (BOCOG 2008b: 'Written Character'):

> With the passing of seasons and years, the Chinese people have gone in pursuit of the eternal Harmony [sic].

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, 'harmony' became part of the linear trajectory of history that organisers of China's networked spectacles constructed for these occasions. It became a transitive concept that applied across time, even as it took different forms along the way. In addition, however, the concept was also used transitively to cover numerous social domains and different kinds of relations, following the rationale associated with the idea of 'all under heaven' that I discussed earlier.

During the Beijing Olympics, the opening ceremony organisers applied the concept to a range of spheres which were stacked from large (the world) to small (the individual). This included the natural environment, which was cast into eco-friendly terms for instance by projecting images of forests and waterfalls, as well as by prominently using the colour green in the 'Nature' segment. The relationship between humans and nature was then implied to be 'harmonious', which was symbolically captured in the same segment by young children colouring in a landscape painting of nature while learning about environmentalism in a mock classroom. The

visitor's guide made this connection explicit (BOCOG 2008b: 'Nature', translation in the original):

> We live with the Heaven and the Earth; nature and mankind [sic] are in harmony.
>
> 天地与我并生，万物与我为一。

The original Chinese passage is a quotation from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* (2.9), and the translators have taken some liberties with the original, for instance by including the word 'harmony', which is not in the original. Another translation might read: heaven, earth, and I came into being together; all things and I are one. However, the guide's translation choice emphasises the eco-friendly message that the organisers have programmed into this segment: that humanity and nature should exit in harmony.

During the opening ceremony, the concept further came to have a societal dimension. On the one hand, this included discursive statements about how humanity should strive for world peace, an issue I return to below to show how the harmonious society discourse connected with official attempts to cast Chinese foreign policy as inherently peaceful. On the other hand, the idea of harmony came to imply unity, and especially national or ethnic unity within China. This message was communicated through staged performances such as the children in ethnic attire carrying the national flag, or minorities that 'dance joyously to greet all athletes' (BOCOG 2008a: 45). More subtly, the opening ceremony suggested that harmony might mean social harmony, or even social stability, and this was implied by the large numbers of actors moving in perfect unison for example during the Fou drum performance and the Confucian recital, or as part of the movable typeset that was ingeniously controlled by individual human performers hiding beneath the stage. In one instance, 1,000 performers literally recreated the very fabric of a miniature model of the Olympic stadium with their bodies (Figure 6.1).

While these performances may not have been universally understood as examples of harmony, in some cases even informing anxieties about China (Gries et al. 2010, see also chapter 8), the organisers demonstrably tried to connect the masses of people on stage to harmony discourses. The CCTV commentary, for instance, clarified for domestic audiences that the miniature 'Bird's Nest', formed by human bodies, was indeed

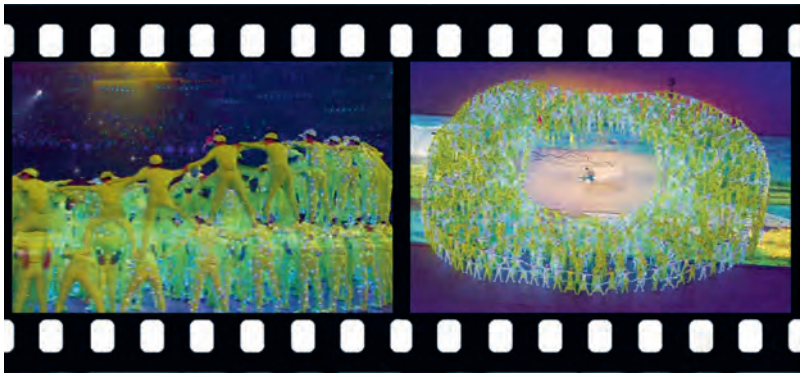

Figure 6.1: Constructing a Stable Stadium and a Stable Society. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

a metaphor for constructing a united, national, harmonious society (minute 61):

> The people dressed in green have set up a green Bird's Nest for us, bathed in starlight, and in a flash this green Bird's Nest becomes glittering and translucent, and delicately beautiful. On the picture scroll, scenes from all around present-day China unfold before our eyes, transmitting the abundant confidence of contemporary society in setting up a harmonious scene in which the people live and work in peace and contentment.
>
> 绿衣使者为我们搭建起绿色的鸟巢星光流转，绿色鸟巢瞬间变得晶莹剔透、精致美丽。画卷之上展现出中国大江南北的时代风貌，传递着丰富的现代社会信心，构建出一幅人民安居乐业的和谐景象。

Finally, harmony extended to self-cultivation practices and individual responsibilities, represented for instance by the Taiji performances and the children studying how to personally protect the environment. While relatively muted during the opening ceremony, the neoliberal implications of this dimension of the discourse would later return more forcefully during other events, especially in the Shanghai Expo's hypermodernist discourses (see below).

Connected through the tropes of Confucian heritage, the organisers of the opening ceremony brought these elements together as a whole that lent itself to creative, ideological work. The Olympic opening ceremony

conceptualised harmony as an ideology that extends from the much evoked 'One World' all the way to the individual.

Interestingly, the performances followed a script that seems to have taken its cues from the arguments of contemporary Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang (2005: 89-90 & 107) that I have discussed above: that all realms of social interaction should be viewed as transitively governed by the same conservative principles. It is hard to say whether the ceremony organisers were influenced by Zhao directly, or whether each party arrived independently at similar interpretations, possibly informed by the push that the Hu-Wen administration had been making in this very direction as it rediscovered Confucian tradition for its own governing purposes. The result is nevertheless a comprehensive reimagining of how a perceived Confucian political category like *he* (和) might connect with contemporary governance in the PRC, and how such a term might come to mean harmony at home while at the same time implying a harmonious (read: peaceful) agenda abroad.

6.3 From peaceful rise to peaceful development

Under Hu's leadership, the state had generally been refocusing its foreign policy directives for some time, abandoning an earlier focus on the ill-phrased 'peaceful rise' concept (see Suettinger 2004 and Glaser & Medeiros 2007), which had arguably evoked too many orientalist 'yellow scare' associations of China resembling a waking dragon or rising leviathan. At the time of the administration's three flagship spectacles (Olympics, anniversary, expo), the central authorities had been well on their way towards a more benevolent-sounding discourse of mutual peace and prosperity, and at that point the recognisable tropes on 'peace' and 'harmony' (*he* 和) blended neatly with earlier policy directives such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These five principles date back to 1954 (see Panda 2014 for a discussion), and they encompass the following (Xinhua 2015):

1. mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,
2. mutual non-aggression,
3. non-interference in each other's internal affairs,
4. equality and mutual benefit, and
5. [somewhat tautologically] peaceful coexistence.

The Olympics opening ceremony of 2008 already suggested that 'harmony' should stand for world peace, and that the PRC would generally strive to achieve such peace, due to the presumably innate cultural heritage of Confucianism. The commitment to peace was built into the performances through symbols such as white doves, foreigners performing alongside Chinese actors, images of foreign children, and ultimately the large globe used during the final segment of the ceremony (Figure 6.2).

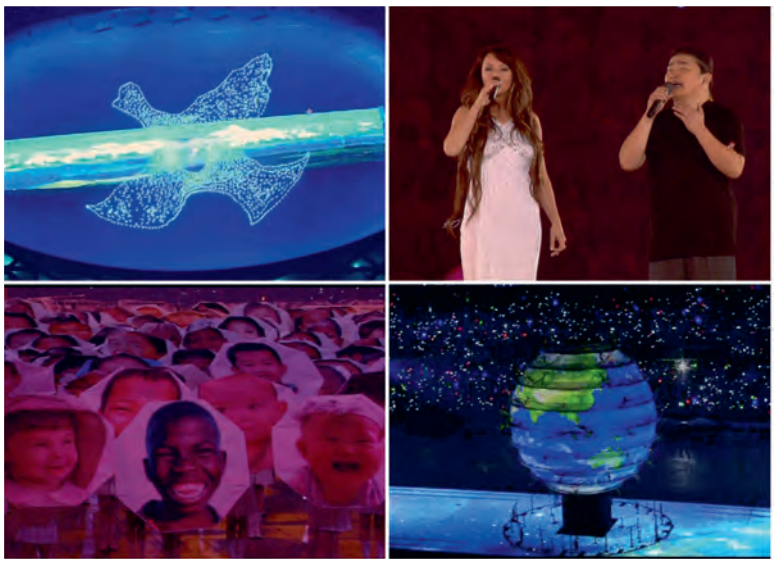

Figure 6.2: Symbols of Global Peace at the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

During that segment, the singers Sarah Brightman and Liu Huan stood atop the globe, holding hands, and singing in Chinese and English:

> Come together,
> Put your hand in mine.
> You and Me,
> From one world,
> We are family.
>
> 来吧！朋友，
> 伸出你的手，

> 我和你，
> 心连心，
> 永远一家人。

The event connected a cosmopolitan discourse on world unity and peace to the idea of China as an inherently harmonious nation-state, and it did so in no uncertain terms, for both domestic and foreign audiences. Examples of this are the official materials and commentaries that accompanied the event. The English-language media guide for foreign journalists explained the concluding elements of the 'Writing' segment, with its display of peach blossoms, as 'romantic and enjoyable, adequately demonstrating the sweet wish of peace-loving Chinese people' (BOCOG 2008a: 33), and the Chinese-language CCTV commentary at that moment in the proceedings (minute 38) concluded that the multitude of blossoms

> ...instantly transports people into a spring-flower-filled, harmonious peach blossom garden paradise that expresses the Chinese people's heartfelt, glorious desire for peace.
>
> 让人们瞬间置身于满园春色和谐的桃花仙境表达中国人热爱和平的美好心愿。

Such statements about harmony as peace informed China's networked spectacles in general, but arguably the most provocative example of how official actors deployed the concept to creatively shift political discourse was the 60th anniversary military parade. During that event, the military equipment was reframed as part of the contemporary agenda for peaceful development. Hu Jintao set the stage for this understanding with his speech, which mentioned 'harmony' three times and 'peace' eight times. The national broadcaster CCTV then expanded on the theme by framing the military parade for domestic audiences and systematically de-emphasised the potential for violence that the armed forces might represent. Instead, the anchors cast the troops and weaponry as tools for peace. This was no small feat, considering that the state was rolling weapons of mass destruction across Tiananmen Square (Figure 6.3).

To sell the PLA as a force for peace, the announcers deployed an arsenal of flowery phrases and euphemistic metaphors, interlinked with 'watch words' that flagged the PRC's policy stance. Take the example of the People's Armed Police (PAP), a paramilitary security division tasked,

Figure 6.3: A High-Tech Force for Peace and Harmony. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

among other things, with quelling any potential domestic unrest by force (see Cheung 1996 for an introduction). CCTV (2009: time stamp 0:58:40) explained that PAP's duties were to 'uphold national security and social stability, and guarantee that the people can live and work in peace and contentment' (维护了国家安全和社会稳定，保障人民安居乐业). The station's anchor then went on to make the case that:

> The officers and men of the armed police use their limitless loyalty and selfless respect for the party and the people to make society harmonious and the people happy by propping up a peaceful sky.
>
> 武警官兵用对党，对人民的无限忠诚和无私奉献，为社会和谐，人民幸福撑起一片安宁的天空。

Harmony here becomes coterminous with social stability (*shehui wending* 社会稳定), and it comes to serve as an indirect justification for the frequently harsh law-and-order agenda of the Chinese state (see Trevaskes 2012 for a discussion). During later segments, as the parade moved on to heavier military equipment, the announcers shifted this focus on 'harmony' from a domestic context to the international stage,

for instance commenting on the PLA navy's formations by reminding viewers of the navy's involvement in United Nations peacekeeping missions (CCTV 2009: time stamp 1:14:00):

> A formation of navy vessels joined several dozen countries from all five continents to carry out escort missions in Somalian waters in the Gulf of Aden, showing the world a positive image as our country took on the responsibilities of a Great Power, making an important contribution to constructing harmonious seas and safeguarding the world's peaceful development.
>
> 海军舰艇编队出访五大洲几十个国家，赴亚丁湾索马里海域执行护航任务，向世界展示了我国负责任大国的良好形象，为建设和谐海洋、维护世界和平发展作出了重要贡献。

This claim to Great Power status was a common feature of the parade's discourse, as was the commitment to a multipolar world order based on national sovereignty. A particularly intriguing statement that drew these elements together accompanied the display of the PLA's nuclear weapons (CCTV 2009, time stamp 1:22:44):

> China has always pursued a policy that rejects a first strike with nuclear weapons, insisting on a nuclear self-defence strategy and not entering into a nuclear arms race with any other country. China is a responsible Great Power that will certainly contribute its strength in the service of world peace and development.
>
> 中国始终奉行不首先使用核武器的政策，坚持自卫防御的核战略，不与任何国家进行核军备竞赛。中国作为一个负责任的大国，一定能为世界的和平与发展贡献自己的力量。

CCTV thus followed the same arguments as other official media outlets, which framed the event in terms of peaceful development and responsible Great Power behaviour. For English-speaking audiences, outlets like the China Daily (2009) or Xinhua News (2009e) made this case, with Xinhua (2009b) quoting the military parade's director Fang Fenghui to disambiguated the display of weapons in the following way:

> Fang said the formation of the phalanxes shows the ongoing transformation of the PLA from a labour-intensive force to a technology-intensive one and its ability to carry out diverse military missions. He said the military parade will 'showcase PLA's firm determination to safeguard national security and interests and maintain world peace.'

Through the official media, state actors thus attempted to calibrate the military discourse in terms of technological advances within the military, treating the display of weapons as a necessary reflection of the changing role the armed forces played in a multipolar world. In this sense, the military parade generated an opportunity for domestic viewers to identify with the imagined community of the nation and feel pride for its achievements while at the same time framing that identification process through the lens of harmony and peace. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the military display was not about military might, despite arguments in the foreign press to the contrary (e.g. Dyer & Anderlini 2009). It was about national unity and a moral imperative to promote peace, designed by the Hu-Wen administration as part of its ideological work to define the meaning of a harmonious society at home and of a harmonious world abroad.

6.4 Reinterpreting the classics

The discussion so far has already illustrated the high degree of creativity required to reprogramme discourses during China's networked spectacles and fit pre-modern concepts like 'harmony' into modernist frameworks for making sense of China. The fact that the PRC's cultural governance approach actively sought to involve diverse actors in these processes (see chapter 3) then also meant that this creative work was open to reinterpretation by actors with often differing agendas and assumptions. Some elements of the discourse neatly slotted into the kinds of 'nativist' ethno-epistemologies discussed above; others created meanings that aligned with cosmopolitan ideas about the Chinese past and present. Take the case of the China Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo, which so powerfully served as an official symbol of national glory, while at the same time providing a site for complex semiotic assemblages.

As discussed in chapter 4, the architectural team contextualised its engineering practices by deploying cultural references, and this included citing (in Chinese) classic sources on matters of harmony. In their architectural guide the design team prominently referred to the Confucian *Analects* that also served the designers of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony as a resource for their meaning-making activities. In one instance, the architectural guide features a painting of Confucius along with a quotation that contains two foundational phrases of the Confucian intellectual tradition, and that appear frequently within the Hu-Wen administration's harmony discourse: *he wei gui* (和为贵) and *he er bu tong* (和而不同). The original quotation in the guide reads (SCAT 2010: 16):

孔子曰：礼之用，和为贵。君子和而不同，小人同而不和。

I will return to the English meaning in a moment, since translating these phrases is by no means straightforward. Interestingly, the architectural guide itself provides only the Chinese original, spelled out in the traditional rendering from right to left, top to bottom, without punctuation marks, but rendered in the simplified character script introduced on the mainland in the 1950s and 1960s (see Figure 6.4). This is a somewhat idiosyncratic choice that on the one hand signals a commitment to historical authenticity (by reproducing the reading direction of ancient scrolls) while on the other hand making the text legible to Chinese audiences who may not be familiar with the traditional character script of the original. The quotation is presented as part of the picture portraying the sage, printed on what looks like aged paper, again suggesting a sense of historicity and serving the creators of the guide to legitimate their interpretation of Chinese antiquity. This is in and of itself a fascinating choice, seeing that the image of the sage has become an object of contemporary political debates, especially in the wake of official attempts to 'standardise' the portrait of Confucius, which in turn is an interesting twist, considering how much of the Confucian tradition was concerned with 'rectifying' names and concepts (see Steinkraus 1980, Tabor 2014).

What, then, can the use of these classic quotations tell us about meaning-making during the design and construction of the China Pavilion? Deciphering the intended meanings behind such use of classic quotations is made more difficult by the fact that classic Chinese is

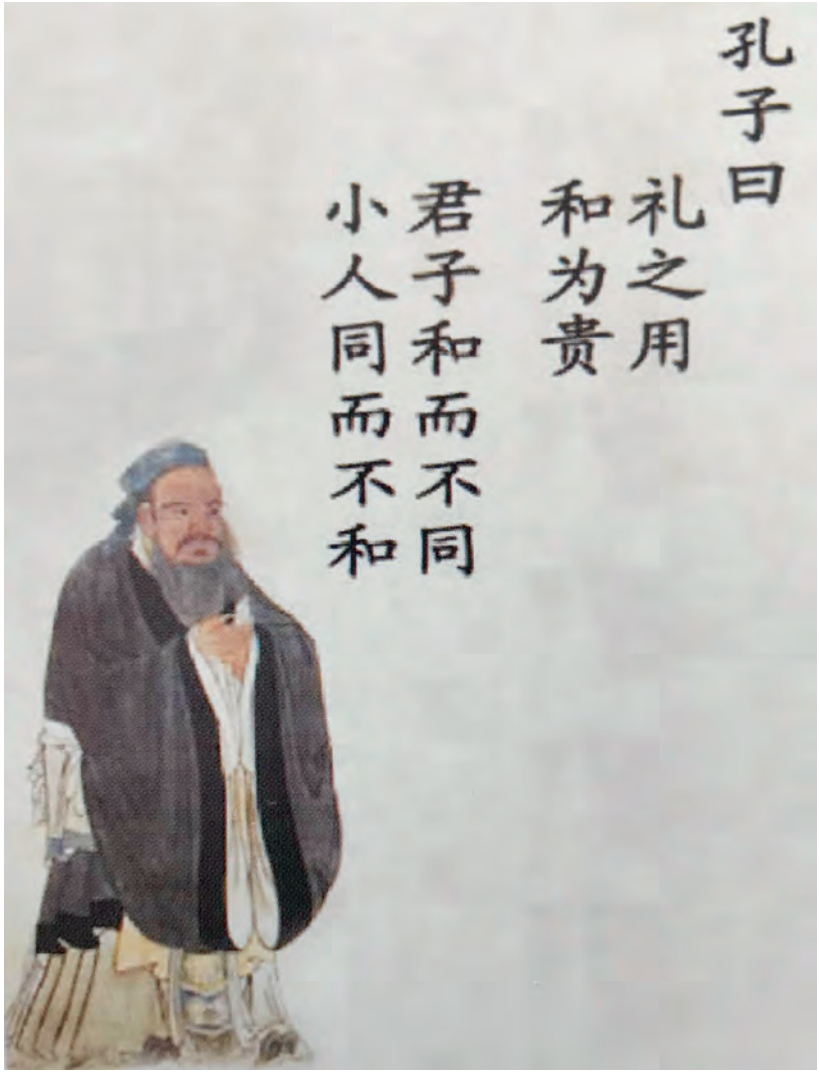

Figure 6.4: Confucian Quotations on Harmony in the Service of Architectural Design (SCAT 2010: 16).

an extremely minimalist and ambiguous language; a fact that to some extent enables precisely the creative translation and blending activities that Chinese actors engage in when they cite classic sources. There are indeed numerous ways to translate quotations from such early materials, whether into contemporary Chinese or foreign languages. A classic translation into English comes from James Legge (1861) and, applied to the text passages that the guidebook contains, the English version would here read:

> The Master [Kong] said: In practising the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized. The superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable.

Legge's somewhat archaic and frequently literal translations are of course also a product of their time: James Legge was a Christian Missionary and Oxford University professor during the Victorian period (see Girardot 2001), and his language choices to some extent reflect this context. Here, Legge's translation draws attention to the fact that the text in the *Analects* was concerned with sagely conduct, and specifically with the question of how to behave in accordance with the principles embodied by pre-modern rituals (*li* 礼).

It is unlikely that the architectural guide has this reading in mind. The editors have juxtaposed two disparate text fragments from the original source (Analects 1:12 & 13:23), implying firstly that these two segments are connected, secondly that both lines were spoken by 'Master Kong', even though the first sentence is actually attributed to a different person, the Confucian disciple Master You (*Youzi* 有子). This already suggests that the creators of the architectural guide were not concerned with issues of actual historicity or text-immanent coherence, but rather with the core commonality between these text fragments: the character *he* (和). This is also implied by the guide itself, which interprets the China Pavilion as an embodiment of *hexie* (和谐), i.e. 'harmony' (SCAT 2010: 30). It seems plausible that the editors understood the quotation in that context. A more likely translation of the quotation might then be the following, which I have here based on translations that the official broadcaster China Radio International prefers when citing Confucian classics (CRI 2011 & 2014):

> Confucius said: In practising the rights, harmony is precious. The superior person aims at harmony but not at uniformity. The mean person aims at uniformity but not at harmony.

Intriguingly, the architectural guide presents these quotations from the *Analects* in juxtaposition with the classic Daoist quotations I mentioned earlier. Again, the authors combine text fragments from two different contexts, in this case quotations from different books, each again dealing with the idea of *he* (和). These sources are the *Dao De Jing* (道德经, section 42.2) and the *Zhuangzi* (outer chapter, 'The Way of Heaven', 13.2). As

was the case with the Confucian quotations, the passages are presented alongside a picture of a sage (presumably Master Lao) on faded paper. The original reads:

> 老子曰：万物负阴而抱阳，冲气以为和。与人和者，谓之人乐。与天和者，谓之天乐。

There are again numerous possible translations. For three different authoritative English versions of the first passage see *Dao De Jing* (n/d), and for a translation of the second passage see Legge (1881). I would here suggest the following:

> Master Lao said: All things carry the principle Yin and encompass the principle Yang; the principle Qi brings them into harmony. To be in harmony with others is called human happiness; to be in harmony with heaven is called heavenly happiness.

The editors here channel two separate classic sources, by separate philosophers, into a single voice: that of the probably fictitious Daoist sage Laozi, whose role in compiling the famous *Dao De Jing* remained contested throughout history (for discussions see Fairbank & Goldman 2006: 53, Gernet 1972/2002: 93-94, and, in Dutch, Ter Haar 2009: 50). Together with the misattributed Confucius quotations, the architectural guide then produces a rather apocryphal understanding of China's past, but this may be beside the point: the designers and architects here imagine what the building means, using discursive resources that the party and state had highlighted as relevant at the time (see also Penny 2012). While the results may be anachronistic, they allow the actors to frame and legitimate their contemporary strategies of sustainable development, and ultimately to appeal to the state agents who needed to select this project plan and approve its funding. To this end, the design strategy positions the project as a meaningful undertaking by 'flagging' popular pre-modern concepts.

The selective mobilisation of pre-modern statements about 'harmony' also provides the architects with a foundation for then demonstrating their eco-conscious (and technologically-minded) prowess. This includes the use of environmentally-friendly materials and energy-saving techniques like a natural ventilation system, solar panels on the building's roof, a system that harvests rainwater, and an energy management system that

features natural air cooling and energy-efficient plumbing (SCAT 2010: 59), all of which are brought into context with the architectural guide's conception of Confucian and Daoist harmonious living. The producers of this officially approved discourse on the China Pavilion demonstrate how parameters provided by the CCP's leadership, such as the focus on 'harmony', come to be reworked to create contemporary meanings and produce novel discourses, in this case about architecture and engineering.

In the end, these attempts to evoke pre-modern sages has little to do with the classics. Recall the design choice to create a multi-layered colour scheme of red hues that would together form the building's characteristic 'China Red' – a dynamic that the designers' architectural guide explicitly describes as again embodying the famous Confucian phrase *he er bu tong* (和而不同), which the book translates into English as 'harmony in diversity' (SCAT 2010: 45). The government, specifically the municipal Shiboju in Shanghai, has used a similar interpretation in its own official guide to the China Pavilion's exhibits, which clarifies what the propaganda officials at that specific government agency wanted the classic phrase to mean in this context: 'it implies a pluralistic, united, harmonious Chinese civilization' (寓意了多远，统一，和谐的中国文化; Shiboju 2010: 127).

The meaning of 'harmony' has here come a long way, from historical arguments that sage-like behaviour might mean that scholars should be agreeable without grovelling, to the contemporary political ideal of China as a society that despite its supposed hierarchical structure encourages diversity and pluralism. Effectively, a set of private and state actors have collaborated to generate political discourse, programming a networked spectacle with their particular cosmopolitan and multicultural interpretation of what 'China' should stand for. Using the China Pavilion as their site of discursive assemblage, and drawing from the approved symbolic resources available at the time, they have blended the input space of pre-modern Confucian meanings with architectural design elements to create an emergent liberal argument about the modern Chinese nation-state as a multicultural society. This illustrates the general degree of conceptual flexibility that characterises political discourses during China's collaboratively produced networked spectacles.

6.5 The logic of urban modernity

The practices I have described so far consisted of attempts to draw from pre-modern Chinese sources to fill the Hu-Wen administration's 'harmonious society' concept with meaning and put it to work in the service of specific modern political projects. It is not my intention to suggest that this strategy only played a role in the context of China's networked spectacles. Osnos (2014), for example, recounts how the Beijing Confucius Temple used CCP slogans to refer to China's pre-modern past and legitimate its own spiritual agenda; he cites the temple's justification for a staged performance that was meant to represent the 'harmonious ideology and harmonious society of the ancient people, which will have a positive influence on the construction of modern harmonious society'. Others have applied the concept of harmony to social and economic matters, for instance Bell and Mo (2014), who have proposed a developmental metric that they explicitly conceptualise as an alternative to US-based Freedom House's index of political and civic liberties in different countries. This measure, which the authors argue is a more holistic indicator of societal wellbeing than its American counterpart, carries the name 'Harmony Index'.

Such appropriation of the CCP's watch words, and in this case of the party's nominally Confucian lingo of harmony, is a frequent feature of Chinese political communication, and I provide additional examples of the ideological drift that this practice encourages in chapter 7. Here, it is worth stressing how the harmony framework connected with modern concerns about economic and social development, captured by the other crucial slogan of the Hu-Wen era: 'scientific development' (*keji fazhan* 科学发展). The PRC's 60th anniversary parade illustrates how official actors juxtaposed their scientific development agenda with the harmonious society idea.

The parade itself was in many ways a stereotypical representation of modern development, anchored firmly in the modern concept of national sovereignty and replete with the recognisable symbols of modernity, such as planes, high-speed trains, cars, and any other human-made artefact with streamlined design that promises to propel its occupants forward (see Figure 6.6). Several floats were explicitly dedicated to such metaphors of progress, for instance the floats on industry and transport. Throughout the pageant, state-led industrial development functioned as an important anchor-point for this iconography.

Particularly blatant cases were the floats that depicted progress in China's various provinces and municipalities, with Beijing, Jilin, Fujian, Sichuan, and Shaanxi each featuring aeroplanes or aerospace technology as part of their presentation, and prominently displaying high-speed trains. It is indeed hard to imagine a more perfect fusion of modernist and traditional concepts than the PRC's bullet trains of 'mark Harmony' (*hexie hao* 和谐号). A particularly interesting example that brought economic development in line with the harmonious society agenda was the Tibet float, which showcased infrastructure projects like highway and tunnel constructions on a large screen, under the title 'Harmonious Tibet'. On CCTV, the commentators clarified for domestic audiences that the float exemplified the 'magical nature and developmental progress of a harmonious Tibet' (神奇自然，发展进步的和谐西藏).

In a similar way, CCTV clarified for viewers that urban development was a crucial part of the harmonious society agenda. One float, designated 'harmonious homeland' (*hexie jiayuan* 和谐家园), showcased a model 'harmonious community' (*hexie shequ* 和谐社区): an urban skyline under a rainbow with a prominently placed 'service centre' to attend to citizens' administrative needs, a 'district council' for citizen participation, and featuring a phalanx of people in wheelchairs to symbolise the state's care for the elderly and infirm. CCTV's commentary stressed that the authorities had been tirelessly labouring to develop these harmonious communities, which constitute 'the glorious homeland and safe harbour of the masses' (人民群众的美好家园和稳性港湾).

This fusion of urban modernity with Confucian harmony continued a year later, at the Shanghai Expo, but now with more explicit references to pre-modern precedents as actors set out to programme the event's discourses about economic sustainability and modern living. The feature films were an example of this, particularly the Confucian-themed film *Harmonious China*, which presented scenes of predominantly urban living under the banner of its three Confucius quotations, including the popular phrase *he er bu tong* (和而不同). Another example was the pavilion's display of ancient artefacts. The guidebook to the China Pavilion's core exhibition makes it clear that a set of these items were meant to illustrate the 'urban economy and citizen's life' (城市经济与市民生活; Shiboju 2010: 80). Describing urban development during the Song Dynasty, the guidebook concludes (ibid.):

> From ancient times to the present, the appearance of the city has undergone huge changes, but throughout the Chinese people's wish for a harmonious life has not changed.
>
> 从古到今的城市面貌发生了巨大的变化，但中国人对和谐生活的诉求始终没有改变。

In the pavilion, this connection between ancient wisdom and contemporary urbanisation was most powerfully presented in the form of the ingeniously animated Qingming Scroll. This 120-metre-wide installation reproduced the urban landscape of the original scroll, but embedded with looped narrative arcs for the multitude of activities that the original depicted. Animated citizens buy wine, ride carts, chase pigs, and pilot boats along the river, and these dynamics loop endlessly through a day-night cycle. As Chow (2012) points out, the design choice itself reflects a commitment to the kind of holistic perspective associated with Daoist thought. His description of the artwork (ibid.: 184) echoes the arguments about ritualistic entrainment, embodied participation, and emergent meanings I discussed earlier:

> ...for spectators, these dynamics are so intricate that the interaction between various impulses can only be perceived collectively. The final image projected to spectators is still full of energy, but it is definitely not the result of a single dominant impulse. The phenomenon again is comparable to the emergent motion of a flock of birds or a school of fish, in which each animate entity is simultaneously steering toward local members of the flock and away from overcrowding.

The exhibit designers made an intriguing choice to illustrate the expo's theme 'better city, better life' by using such a high-tech version of a pre-modern artwork. Indeed, much of the artwork's content is used to extrapolate a continuous tradition of harmonious urbanism that extends to the present. The deputy director of the Shanghai Expo, Zhou Hanmin, made this case in a speech that contextualised this exhibit (Zhou 2012):

> What visitors appreciate in the animation painting is that so many people could get along with each other so harmoniously. The

> harmony and peace depicted by the painting is the epitome of the 5,500-year long Chinese civilisation.

Aside from suggesting that contemporary Chinese urbanism is a direct extension of ancient Chinese practices, and that it is consequently fuelled by a desire for harmony, the organisers also used the Song Dynasty, and specifically the famous Qingming Scroll, as a resource to make discursive statements about what they felt the nature of modern Chinese urbanism should be. It was in this context that the organisers redeploy the symbolic resources of antiquity to generate novel discourses that envisaged urban life as a function of the market economy.

The guidebook to the exhibit, for instance, covers the original painting in four double-page spreads (Shiboju 2010: 48-55), in each case reproducing a section of the scroll and flanking it with annotations that explain various activities related to three topical areas: the city (*cheng* 城), the market (*shi* 市), and the suburb (*jiao* 郊). In the 'city' section, the guidebook points out examples of money exchange and of early advertising, followed by two double-pages dedicated to 'the market', which highlight examples of commerce and trade, for example store signs and shipping activities. One explanation reads (ibid.: 50):

> The Song era's handicraft industry was already highly developed. Many workshops and manufactures appeared, along with an abundance of categories. [The industry's] division of labour was deep and the scope was large. At the time, the 20,000 or more merchants of Bianjing [today's city of Kaifeng] were classified into 160 professions.
>
> 宋时的手工业已很发达，出现了手工业作坊和工场，且门类多，分工细、规模大。当时汴京的两万多商户，分数一百六十行。

The use of phrases like 'division of labour', along with the repeated emphasis on commerce and trade, push a discourse of market-economic activity onto these representations. Before this backdrop, it is intriguing that the guidebook would choose a quotation from the notoriously obscure classic *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing* 易经, sections Qian 1.1 and Kun 2.1) to usher in its discussion of the animated scroll (Shiboju 2010: 44); in this context, that quotation might be interpreted loosely as follows:

> Heaven is in constant motion. The superior person applies themselves ceaselessly;
> The earth is strong. The superior person takes charge of all things through great virtue.
> 天行健，君子以自强不息;
> 地势坤，君子以厚德载物。

What emerges from these exhibits and explanations is a capitalist discourse that associated virtuous behaviour with industrious, urban activity, and that justifies this understanding in pre-modern readings of philosophy and art, idiosyncratic as those readings may be.

6.6 Sustaining the future of modernity

The revival of pre-modern concepts is then indeed not necessarily about the past, but rather about how to design the future, as Dirlik (2011c: 4) has also pointed out. Networked spectacles serve as exceptional spaces that allow various actors to play with ethno-epistemologies to extrapolate utopian visions of the future (see Jameson 2007), and in the case of the Shanghai expo this included official attempts to envisage a hypermodern techno-utopia. To paraphrase Dirlik, this was no alternative to modernity, but it was an alternative modernity. Hubbert (2017: 51) rightly points this out when she writes that the official Chinese expo narratives did not locate 'tradition as antithetical to modernity' but 'instead wed cultural history and heritage to economic growth and technological advancement to offer tradition as a prescription for addressing modernity's putative hazards'.

For instance, many of the installations on the China Pavilion's third exhibition floor, which promoted sustainable development, were steeped in optimism that scientific progress would solve the woes of the planet. These problems were presented as urgent, but ultimately as manageable through technology. This was a scientistic, solutionist approach to politics, one that was interested in fighting the symptoms of modernity but not their causes.

In that vein, the exhibits relied heavily on flowcharts and other visual representations that implied that society might be a machine that had to be fine-tuned for efficiency. Visitors could 'calibrate' some of these processes themselves, 'by touching digital display screens' and manipulating

'parameters such as commuting distance and mode of commute to obtain a calculation of their daily carbon footprint' (Wallis & Balsamo 2016: 43). An extreme example of the mechanistic understanding that the exhibits communicated is the process charts with which the guidebook explains the idea of a 'smart energy network', which in Chinese is called a 'general capacity network' (*fan neng wang* 泛能网). The flow chart (Shiboju 2010: 104) has at its centre the 'Energy Efficiency Controller', which connects various energy production and storage processes through computer relays to three specific domains: housing, transport, and industry. The graphic lists the 'biogas, wind, solar, nuclear, and clean coal' energy sources, and it espouses a 'synergistic optimization across supply and demand sides of various energy forms'. This is the Chinese-language explanation that accompanies the image:

> The general capacity network is based on the technology of energy-efficient systems; it applies capacity and information coupling in the four sectors of energy production, storage, usage, and recycling, and it forms real-time synergies between energy inputs and outputs that cut across time and space; in this manner, it realises optimisation and capacity efficiency throughout the full life cycle of the system; its energy-efficient operating system balances all changes in the flow of energy supply and demand, exploits each step, and optimises time and space, and in this way maximises systematic energy efficiency; ultimately, its output is a kind of self-organising, high-level, systematic smart energy source that is highly efficient.
>
> 泛能网基于系统能效技术，通过能源生产、储运、应用于回收四环节中能量和消息的耦合，形成能量输入和输出跨时域的实时协同，从而实现系统全生命周期的最优化和能量的增效，能效控制系统则对各能量流进行供需转换匹配，梯级利用，时空优化，以达到系统能效的最大化，最终输出一种自组织的高度有序的高效智能能源。

It is telling how strongly this short text relies on words like 'optimise' and 'efficient'; this is a view of systems that is borne out of mechanistic, industrial-age understandings of complexity. It extends Taylorist and Fordist visions of efficient control to the 21st century (see Smith 2016: 207 and Vidal 2016), selling these ideas to the audiences as solutions rather

than problematising them as factors that potentially contributed to the issues these systems are now meant to solve. Note, for instance, how consumerism and industrial production are simply taken for granted as economic realities rather than being an object of critical discussion. The question is not how to rethink the nature of human energy consumption, but how to maintain past patterns of energy consumption under new conditions, so as to ensure economic growth through continuous consumption.

Indeed, the pavilion and its exhibits presented a largely unquestioned, rationalist, and frequently neoliberal narrative of urbanised, industrialised modernity that fits neatly into the tradition of mass events like world expositions, with their modernist discourses, and it is telling that the official Shanghai Expo theme also reflected this focus, at least in the Chinese original. Whereas the organisers translated the event's slogan into English as 'better city, better life', a more accurate translation of the Chinese slogan would be 'cities: making life even better' (城市，让生活更美好). The logic encapsulated in the phrase was that, if only modern urbanisation continued, prosperity would follow naturally.

This modernist discourse was further married to the strong sense that when it came to leading a 'low carbon' life and achieving 'measured consumption', responsibility lay squarely with individual citizens. As the guidebook explains (Shiboju 2010: 109):

> Let every single citizen take action. To start with ourselves, to start with the little things, start now, and to start with what is next to us, is to positively participate in energy conservation and the reduction of carbon emissions, and to make our own contribution to the country's energy conservation and carbon emission targets. [Let us] together create a thriftier, cleaner, and more civilised sustainable glorious life.
>
> 让我们每一个公民行动起来，从我做起、从点滴着手、从现在做起、从身边做起，积极参与节能减排，为实现国家的节能减排目标作出自己的贡献。共同创造更加节约、更加洁净、更加文明的可持续的美好生活。

In the guidebook, this explanation accompanies an illustration of the ideal low-carbon day (ibid.: 108), which provides readers with everyday solutions to environmental problems: taking showers instead of baths,

switching from cars to bicycles, taking the stairs rather than the lift, going to bed earlier to save electricity, etc. In the pavilion itself, this focus on individual action reappeared in calls to recycle waste and avoid harmful consumer products like plastic bags.

My point here is not that these understandings of society and economics are fallacious, though it is worth pointing out that they have been criticised severely for only redressing and restating the foundational problems of modernity in modernist terms, rather than providing serious alternatives to modern modes of living, producing, consuming, and organising (see, for instance, Graeber 2011). My point is that the overarching discourse of harmony provided organisers at the Shanghai Expo with a framework for imagining Chinese modernity, and that among official actors in Shanghai this entailed tying narratives of industrial progress to a neoliberal discourse that placed individual responsibility at the core of sustainable development visions.

6.7 Conclusion

Throughout China's networked spectacles, pre-modern Chinese philosophy has served official actors as an important input space for making sense of modern society, politics, and economics. Extending the longstanding practices of reinterpreting ancient classics, the cadres, media workers, architects, designers, advertisers, and other actors involved in staging these large-scale spectacles filled the official slogans of the Hu-Wen era with meaning and deployed them as part of their own projects. What emerged from such activities was often a conservative, nativist discourse about the supposed timelessness of authoritarian, elitist governance practices in China, but it also included liberal, cosmopolitan statements about the value of pluralism, coated in the veneer of tradition to legitimate progressive arguments. In this, the discursive activities at China's networked spectacles were not much different from the practices that have long driven the quests for meaning in Chinese 'national studies'.

Such creative reinterpretations of antiquity in the service of modern political projects arguably played fast and loose with the source materials, which were hardly concerned with issues like multiculturalism, environmental protection, nuclear deterrence, neoliberal efficiency, or other similarly anachronistic topics. In that sense, these interpretations of Chinese antiquity departed noticeably from their historical templates.

At the same time, they also departed from the contemporary official discourses that the authorities were developing. Even among official actors, the 'harmonious society' and 'scientific development' slogans offered conceptual building blocks to promote diverging agendas.

The men and women who were designing Hu Jintao's harmony discourse seem to have been favouring interpretations that emphasised order and hierarchy (see also Penny 2012), and this stream of ideological work integrated Confucian quotations into a neo-authoritarian vision of contemporary China. Other actors, for instance the designers and architects of the China Pavilion, skilfully referred to this network of meanings but did not simply echo the same interpretations. Through the language of official discourse, these actors assembled specific statements about the sort of 'harmony' that they thought the China Pavilion should stand for, in this case reframing potentially hierarchical understandings of harmony through the use of liberal ideas about diversity and sustainable development.

The Shanghai authorities in charge of the expo and the China Pavilion's exhibitions adopted a similar discourse to that of the pavilion designers in their public-relations materials, explaining China's Confucian heritage to domestic audiences in terms such as unity and plurality, but also extending it to legitimate a neoliberal developmental agenda that sat uneasily next to the more egalitarian propaganda work of the central authorities. In this way, designers and local administrators participated in the contemporary reimagining of China, contributing to the ongoing discourse of what Chinese society might stand for in the 21st century. As the next chapter will show, the horizon of meanings became wider yet as the PRC's cultural governance switched non-official actors into the social interactions that defined its networked spectacles.

7 Contested Nation Branding

Eric Cartman, the whimsical boy from the animated comedy series South Park, is having a nightmare. 'No, no', he screams in his sleep. In his dream, he is trapped in the Bird's Nest Stadium in Beijing during the Olympic opening ceremony. The ominous voice of a TV anchor announces, 'Thousands of ancient Chinese drummers are drumming thousands of ancient Chinese drums, the precision of their movement made even more powerful by their vast numbers'. The drummers beat their drums while Cartman is tossing in his bed – in his mind, he is trying to find a way out of the maze of drums. 'Too many of them!', he gasps. Then he is being flung across the movable typeset that featured in the performance, finally finding himself surrounded by a sea of performers, closing in on him.

As he calls out 'no, leave us alone', his mother enters the room, checking whether her son is all right. Little Eric wakes from his nightmare, crying. 'The Chinese are going to get us! There's two billion of them and with their advances in technology and their growing economy they are going to bring down America', he sobs.

Few popular depictions of contemporary American anxieties about China are as prescient as this lovingly crafted satire by the South Park creators Terry Parker and Matt Stone (2008). Indeed, the short, one-minute segment highlights the tremendous challenge that Chinese PR specialists face as they try to change international perceptions of the PRC during networked spectacles. In the case of the Beijing Olympics, the carefully crafted discourse on harmony unravelled in foreign contexts, where unity at times became reinterpreted as uniformity, fuelling longstanding Orientalist resentments and fears (see also Gries et al. 2010).

This is not to say that China's networked spectacles necessarily slotted into 'China Threat' perceptions among foreign audiences. For the Beijing Olympics d'Hooghe (2015: 253) finds:

> The press generally reported favourably about China's organisation of the Olympic Games and the press facilities, and hailed China's

> Olympic architecture and the opening and closing ceremonies. Furthermore, most visitors were impressed by the friendliness of the volunteers in Beijing and other Olympic cities.

My own screening of Dutch, German, English, and American foreign telecasts suggests something similar. For instance, German television aired brief interview segments with athletes leaving the stadium after the opening ceremony, and these participants enthusiastically praised the organisers and the impressive event (ARC 2008: 004, Beijing time 23:41):

> Athlete 1: 'It was crazy, totally spectacular, and you could enjoy almost every minute there, in that stadium, and, yeah. It was complete crazy for us.'
> Coach: 'That was of course a gigantic festival, or rather, it still is.'
> Athlete 2: 'I sort of still can't really believe it, I think you'll have to sort of reflect on this some more, and, uhm, in, uhm, retrospect examine that some more, but it was, it was sensational.'
> Athlete 3: 'When the fire got lit, well that was… I even had tears in my eyes. So that was really crazy.'
>
> Athlet 1: 'Es war Wahnsinn, war total spektakulär, und man konnte fast jede Minute dort genießen, in diesem Stadium, und, ja. War absoluter Wahnsinn für uns.'
> Trainer: 'Das war natürlich ein gigantisches Fest, beziehungsweise es ist es immer noch.'
> Athlet 2: 'Ich kann's eigentlich immer noch nicht richtig fassen, ich glaub man muss da noch mal so in sich gehen, und, äh, das, äh, rückläufig noch mal betrachten, aber das war, das war sensationell.'
> Athlet 3: 'Als das Feuer entzündet wurde, also das war… da hatte ich sogar Tränen in den Augen. Also das war echt Wahnsinn.'

The impressions that China's networked spectacles made internationally were complex, and they were shaped by the discursive activities of numerous actors switched into the interactions at the events. In this chapter, I ask what ultimately becomes of the carefully programmed discourses once institutionally and ideologically diverse actors start reworking them for their own purposes abroad. I focus explicitly on foreign cultural producers and broadcasters in the context of the Beijing

Olympics, an event that was designed to be consumed internationally. This will include a discussion of how companies and NGOs used the symbols of the Beijing Olympics to make their own statements about the spectacle. Next, I take a closer look at telecasting outside the mainland, specifically at how two ideologically competing television stations in Taiwan broadcast the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony. However, before proceeding to these cases, it is worth turning to a prominent concept that is frequently used to make sense of the Chinese authorities' attempts to brand the nation to foreign audiences through staged spectacles like the Olympics or Expo: the concept of 'soft power'.

7.1 Soft power and nation branding in China

As I have discussed throughout this book, the networked spectacles that the PRC organised under the leadership of the Hu-Wen administration were partly designed to serve as public relations vehicles for the party and state. Such efforts are frequently associated with attempts to generate soft power. 'Soft power' is a term coined by Joseph Nye (2004: 76-77), and it refers to the ability to influence others to develop preferences and interests in ways consistent with one's own. In public diplomacy, the term usually describes a government's ability to influence foreign public opinion in its favour, and to generate goodwill among the citizens of other countries for its foreign policy.

Nye's concept is popular with Chinese administrators and intellectuals alike, who believe (not entirely without cause) that foreign sentiments towards China are marred by threat perceptions, and that they are biased by discourses that hark back to Cold War thinking and orientalist prejudices about a sinister, untrustworthy, and ultimately belligerent and dangerous Chinese state. To many Chinese analysts, these perceptions are generated by the fact that the world does not know or understand the 'real' China (see Latham 2009). Much effort has consequently gone into improving the state's capacities for reaching foreign audiences and promoting a more positive image of the country (see Brady 2008: ch.7, d'Hooghe 2015), for instance in African countries (see the contributions in Zhang et al. 2016).

As a consequence of these discourses within China about foreign anxieties and possible public diplomacy responses, and particularly in the wake of successful cultural diplomacy campaigns that neighbouring

Japan and South Korea rolled out in the 2000s, the PRC government has reoriented its foreign policy strategy to strongly incorporate a soft power dimension (see Brownell 2013: 68 and Li 2009). In 2007, Hu Jintao argued that the PRC needed to 'enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country' (Xinhua 2007), and his administration pursued an extensive cultural promotion campaign in the subsequent years (see Barr 2011 and Cull 2008), which included establishing the Confucius Institutes I mentioned in chapter 6, but also expanding Chinese news services for foreign-language speakers (Zhang 2011: 183-188). It remains controversial whether this strategy has had any positive effects (see Brownell 2019), but the general sentiment behind it continues to shape Chinese foreign policy to this day.

Importantly, the administration's views on soft power were an important driver in how official actors envisaged networked spectacles such as the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo (see d'Hooghe 2015: ch.6 and Wallis & Balsamo 2016: 35-37). That said, and as popular as the term 'soft power' may have become in academic and policy-making circles alike, there are several reasons why it remains problematic as an analytical concept. Of immediate concern should be that soft power was not originally designed with analysis in mind. Nye did not coin the term to explain political behaviour but to influence it. Nye, who has worked both as an academic and a political advisor to successive US Democratic Party presidents and presidential candidates (Clinton, Kerry, Obama), has been a vocal critic of Republican foreign policy and a proactive lobbyist for a stronger US soft-power strategy. To accept that Nye's concept accurately describes a fundamental aspect of international politics would obscure that it was Nye who actively made that concept a feature of such politics, effectively creating a self-fulfilling prophecy and reifying his own theoretical assumptions. One could argue that the most convincing example of soft-power usage has been Nye's ability to convince academics and decision-makers that his ideology was worth adopting as a policy-making framework, but that says little about the actual effectiveness of national strategies to persuade foreign audiences through cultural means.

Ultimately, such strategies are informed by a specific rationale regarding culture and media: in the soft-power worldview, the value of cultural artefacts derives from their utility to help one nation-state prevail over another in perceived struggles over cultural attraction. It is this view that leads Nye to argue that Europe is 'the closest *competitor*

to the United States in soft power resources' (2005: 75; my emphasis). According to such logic, scientific achievements, economic welfare, and cultural expressions matter because they ostensibly provide politicians of a specific nation-state with the ability to sway foreigners to their cause and promote national interests in what is effectively a zero-sum game of cultural appreciation. Culture becomes a resource for manipulating the dynamics of great-power politics.

While such utilitarian and nationalist reasoning provides a reductionist and anti-humanist take on culture, criticism of this rationale is rarely reflected in the work of soft-power advocates. When I attended an international conference in Hong Kong on Chinese Culture on the World Stage (Hong Kong Baptist University, 14-15 June 2012), heated discussion ensued between Chinese scholars and pundits over how to apply Nye's concept; the discussion drew heavily from nationalist and utilitarian tropes about how to make the PRC strong through cultural promotion, how to compete with the US on issues of cultural appeal, and how to identify and secure resources to create the kind of nativist ethno-epistemology I have discussed in chapter 6. A central concern was how to identify the 'essence' of Chinese culture that would generate attraction for the Chinese nation abroad (e.g. the Confucian classics, Daoist philosophy, Tang-era poetry, etc.). The debate did not, however, address whether Chinese culture had an essence to begin with, why such an essence needed active promotion, or why it should be understood first and foremost as an expression of an immutable 'national' culture (rather than, for instance, reflecting regional and historical changes). In short, there was little reflection on the idea that 'national culture' might itself be a discourse that actors evoke during historically-situated interactions.

The fact that soft power has become a central concept in academic debates and policy-making then does not exonerate the concept as an analytical device. Even if nation-states explicitly adopt soft-power strategies, the question still remains how to explain and assess such attempts to shape political attitudes abroad. In the growing corpus of soft-power literature, it remains unclear to me how the causal link is supposed to work between political agents, their cultural policy, the resulting cultural artefacts, the attractiveness that these artefacts possess, and ultimately the political preferences of those who consume these cultural artefacts (see also the criticism in Barr 2011). Considering these concerns, as well as a number of issues raised elsewhere (e.g. in

Zhang 2009), the explanatory value of the term 'soft power' becomes questionable.

In what follows, I consequently do not try to assess the effects of Chinese soft-power strategies on 'national' audiences abroad. Instead, I view the concept as a cultural artefact in its own right; a concept around which actors create networks of meanings through their interactions. The discourse of soft power is relevant because it informs the public relations strategies of China's networked spectacles, and it provides a rationale for organisers as they engage in a political campaign of cultural promotion, and as they ground their activities in Nye's soft-power ideology to increase their legitimacy (see Callahan 2010: 4). As part of their activities, the actors behind China's networked spectacles mobilised the popular discussions of soft power to conceptualise their activities as acts of public persuasion, and as interventions in a foreign discursive environment that many interpreted as hostile. The organisational practices that helped to create and communicate events like the Olympics or the Shanghai Expo were functions of these understandings of soft power.

7.2 Who speaks for China? Human rights NGOs and the Olympics discourse

A particular challenge for the official actors trying to generate soft-power narratives during events like the Beijing Olympics was that these narratives were not entirely under their control. Event-related symbols and their meanings often got away from the organisers as diverse foreign agents joined the meaning-making processes. In some cases, those agents intentionally and explicitly designed their discursive activities as antagonistic interventions meant to challenge the official efforts of branding the Chinese nation as a peaceful stakeholder in international affairs. Instructive examples are the advertising campaigns of rights organisations. Reporters Without Borders published posters titled 'Beijing 2008', in which the organisers replaced the iconic Olympic rings with interlocking handcuffs. Amnesty International used similar symbolism in its own posters, for instance in one image designed by its Slovakian office (Amnesty 2008b), which depicted the Olympic rings as five circles of barbed wire before a bleak sky. This imagery was accompanied by a text that directly referred to the harmonious-society discourse of the time:

> In the name of ensuring stability and harmony in the country during the 2008 Olympic Games, the Chinese government continues to detain and harass political activists, journalists, lawyers, and human rights workers. Get involved.

Another poster, released in Denmark in May of that year (DDB 2008), showed a close-up of a young Asian woman's face, with the PRC flag drawn onto her cheek in the fashion familiar from national sports events the world over, but this flag is smeared by a single tear running down the woman's face. The caption commemorates the 'memory of the Tiananmen Square crackdown' and asks viewers to 'put pressure on China to release the activists and secure a positive Olympic legacy'. In another case, the Hungarian design studio DDB created a poster called *Shot*, which depicted a track race, but with the referee pointing his start gun at a Chinese athlete who kneels in the starting position before an audience of spectators (Amnesty 2008a). The poster is accompanied by an info-text about capital punishment in the PRC. Meanwhile, the Australian section of Amnesty International repurposed the idea of the Fuwa dolls and created its own comic character *Nuwa* (怒娃), or 'Rage Baby', a monkey wearing a red headband like those commonly donned during the 1989 Tiananmen Protests (see Hutcheon 2008).

These campaigns already show how the watch signs of official discourse and the symbols of internationally networked spectacles can come to serve actors who are trying to create counter-discourses. However, this is not where the interaction chains of discursive assemblage ended. These practices provided yet more actors with the chance to switch themselves into the networks of meaning-making, and particularly the affordances of advanced digital information networks ultimately created sites for discursive assemblage that quickly moved in directions not under the control of the original actors who started these processes. Amnesty International's attempts to create and publish materials critical of the Chinese authorities served numerous creatives as an occasion to showcase their visual design skills as well as their commitment to the cause of human rights protection.

One designer (Drent 2008), for instance, created a poster that depicted a sports shoe, but with the red shoelaces repurposed to fold up and bind the front of the shoe, evoking associations with traditional Chinese foot-binding practices. The title of the poster, 'Beijing 2008', uses the same visual trope of barbed wire that Amnesty International deployed in its

own posters, and the footer contains the Amnesty International logo (a candle wrapped in barbed wire) and the same text about the harassment of activists I have quoted above. In another case, two advertising companies expanded the analogy between sports and state violence that DDB had already used in the poster *Shot*, but now transferring that rationale to additional sporting contexts: MUW Saatchi & Saatchi in Slovakia put together a poster series titled 'China is Getting Ready' (an official PRC slogan), which in one instance had a Chinese-looking sports shooter aim his handgun at the back of the head of a kneeling man in ragged prison clothing; two other posters show prisoners dressed in the same rags as they are being beaten and abused by athletes in boxing and wrestling rings, respectively (MacLeod 2008b). In a similar vein, the French advertiser TBWA produced a series of advertisements depicting torture in Olympic sports settings, e.g. Chinese security forces waterboarding a captive in an Olympic swimming pool, a smiling security officer walking away from a prisoner tied to an archery target, and an abused woman chained to a weightlifting barbell (MacLeod 2008a).

These cultural products were not official Amnesty International campaign materials, even if they were labelled as such. In fact, Amnesty International reportedly withdrew the Slovakian campaign and distanced itself from the French 'torture ads' (see Hutcheon 2008, Spencer 2008), but at that time the images had already been uploaded to the internet. It is hard to trace who precisely was responsible for this result; the French advertising agency TBWA later claimed that the images had been the brainchild of a rogue employee working on a pro bono account, and that the campaign was never meant to see the light of day (reported in Fowler et al. 2008). Presumably the controversial advertisements threatened the company's other accounts, e.g. their contract with sports equipment manufacturer Adidas. Be that as it may, once the images made their way online, they powerfully drove debates about Chinese politics in the run-up to the Olympics. Chinese nationalists, for instance, viewed the campaigns as an affront, and they took to social media and online comment sections to curse Amnesty International and its advertising agencies in no uncertain terms. On one Chinese website showing posters from the aborted campaigns (Adfuns 2008), for instance, commentators questioned the 'quality' of 'the French' (法国人怎么这么没素质) and told the producers of the posters to 'go and die' (去死吧). I hesitate to make any claims about the representativeness of such comments; even in nationalist contexts, not all comments on China's internet are necessarily

this chauvinistic (see also Schneider 2018: ch.7). However, these outbursts of online anger demonstrate, as Callahan (2010: 25) has noted, that 'Chinese nationalism is produced and consumed in an interactive and intersubjective process', and this process involves diverse actors across the world who engage in discourses about the Chinese nation in often idiosyncratic ways.

Overall, human rights activists and organisations appear to have been fairly effective as they agitated against the Chinese authorities in the run-up to the Olympics, and their often scathing criticism of the human rights situation gathered steam particularly in the wake of the Tibetan riots in early 2008 (see also d'Hooghe 2015: 241-246). It is telling that the Chinese authorities felt it necessary to reposition their own discourses vis-à-vis this strong focus on human rights. After the Sichuan earthquake, for instance, official media were quick to stress to their own citizens that 'human rights, at their most basic, mean respecting the human right to life and protecting the human right to a livelihood' (尊重人权，最基本的就是尊重人的生命权和维护人的生存权，因为这是一切人权的基础; Luo 2008). Reporting aimed at foreign audiences similarly stressed that the PRC was protecting human rights by 'putting people first' (see Schneider & Hwang 2014b: 645 for examples). Foreign critics had skilfully forced a discourse into the event networks that threatened to shift what the values of the spectacle should be, to the point that official Chinese actors felt the need to respond with renewed programming efforts.

7.3 How China's Olympic symbols were sold

These struggles over symbols and their meanings illustrate that meanings are not easily dictated top-down by official actors, even as these actors labour to create cultural products as forms of soft-power persuasion. The cultural governance approach that the authorities adopted during China's networked spectacles arguably also facilitated struggles, opening the discourses up to diverse meaning-making efforts.

I will discuss in the subsequent chapter how the cultural governance approach of the authorities led to highly diverse discursive statements during the spectacles themselves, with domestic and foreign actors programming their own meanings into the complex networks, even as they had to limit themselves to the discursive horizon that various constraints created during such events. In this chapter, I have so far

argued that this horizon expanded significantly once the event discourses became revamped abroad, for instance by transnational NGOs. Not all of these activities were driven by activist concerns. Much of the programming that went on at China's networked spectacles involved large multinational corporations that intervened in the event discourses for commercial reasons.

For instance, sports equipment companies such as Adidas and Nike, as well as fast-food chains such as McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, used events like the Beijing Olympics as a platform to further promote their brands, both globally and in local Chinese markets. As a general communication strategy, the advertising agencies working for these corporations tended to fuse local event symbolism with globally recognisable symbols of the respective brand, a process also known as 'glocalisation' (see O'Barr 2007 and Sinclair 2008), and this then entailed creating discursive statements about the event, the host country, and the role of the foreign brand in that context. In most cases, these meaning-making activities of commercial actors outside China aligned fairly well with the discourses that the authorities had envisaged. The advertisers generally promoted feel-good narratives that promised to frame their specific commercial products as positive, natural components of the spectacle in question. It should not be too surprising that advertisers were trying to avoid alienating their audiences, but it is revealing that their efforts to stay within acceptable event discourses at times led to cultural content that arguably even outdid the soft-power campaigns of official actors. To achieve their commercial goals, many multinationals decided to tap into Chinese patriotic sentiments to promote their products in the PRC, while retaining the cosmopolitan implications of the Olympic spirit to appeal also to audiences abroad. Two Coca Cola commercials are good examples of this strategy: the spots *Bird's Nest* and *Unity*.

The *Bird's Nest* commercial (Coca Cola 2008a), created by the Amsterdam branch of advertising agency Wieden+Kennedy (see MacLeod 2008b), tells the story of five animated birds, each in the colour of one of the five Olympic rings. The birds collect straws from Coca Cola soft drinks to build a nest, and they carry the straws to Beijing from all around the world, passing famous Chinese sites like the Great Wall and the skyline of Shanghai on their way. Back in the capital, the birds put the straws together to build a miniature version of the National Stadium, and the commercial concludes with the five birds sitting together in their 'Bird's Nest', watching the fireworks go off above the actual Bird's Nest Stadium.

The second television spot, *Unity* (Coca Cola 2008b), was produced by Wieden+Kennedy's Portland office (MacLeod (2008a). It starts as a 40-second animated video of the two basketball stars LeBron James (USA) and Yao Ming (PRC) before morphing into a live-action exchange between the two stars. At the outset of the spot, the two athletes face each other in a mock competition of their two nations. Each draws from a range of cultural symbols to win the fight: James is aided by cowboys, grizzly bears, and an American eagle, while Yao receives support from a dragon, panda bears, and a large fish (a Chinese symbol of prosperity). The two teams confront each other before the backdrop of American and Chinese skyscrapers. Realising that they are evenly matched, each of the stars reaches for his 'secret weapon': a bottle of Coca Cola. Once the two stars discover that they enjoy the same beverage, they exchange Coke bottles and have a drink. The animations melt away and are replaced by real footage of the two men, who now toast to each other – James in Chinese, Yao in English. The advertisement concludes with the campaign slogan, 'unity on the Coke side of life'.

Both these commercials are highly creative combinations of cosmopolitan and nationalist symbols, taken from the context of the 2008 Olympic Games. What is significant here is that each draws from (and arguably reinforces) the discursive elements that shape the official national discourse. The *Bird's Nest* commercial uses the national stadium as a symbol that signifies both China's success and a feeling of belonging: the Bird's Nest becomes a home from which the birds can watch the spectacle, just as the television audiences witness the event from the comfort of their homes. The *Unity* commercial depicts national symbols as resources of individual strength, dipping into essentialist discourses of what might define 'China' or 'America'. What is more, cuteness again plays an important role in how the narratives are presented. Whether it is the little birds and their whimsical attempts to secure construction material for their nests or the cartoon characters in the *Unity* commercial, the nationalist discourse is framed by 'lovable' (*ke'ai* 可爱) imagery similar to that employed during the opening ceremony.

Intriguingly, each commercial implicitly taps into the harmonious society discourses that informed so much of the official political communication surrounding the event, and they produce their own understandings of harmonious co-existence. The national symbols are arranged to tell cosmopolitan and international stories, respectively: the birds come from all corners of the world to witness the Games, just as

foreign visitors and athletes from around the world flock to China for the event, and just as overseas Chinese communities return 'home' for the occasion — whether physically or in spirit. James and Yao set aside their differences by engaging in playful competition, and they ultimately become 'united' by sharing a consumer product. The Olympic spirit, and in this case Coca Cola, is depicted as bringing together different peoples as 'One World'.

What should we make of this commercial use of national symbols? These two advertisements arguably achieve the kind of 'flow' that successful cultural productions require in order to invite buy-in. They are cleverly designed, meticulously produced, and eminently entertaining. One could make the case that they provide the kind of soft-power narrative of which the Chinese authorities have been dreaming. In network terms, the Chinese authorities have successfully switched transnational actors into the network of national meanings. They have also successfully programmed these networks with a range of symbols that carry nationalist connotations, and they have created opportunities for non-state agents to re-use these symbols in commercial, cultural, or artistic contexts that still promote the national interest.

In this view, the commercial actors reinforce the official discourse by drawing from and reproducing these symbols that official actors have either created or occupied for their nation-maintenance projects. To theorists like Michel Foucault (1976), such practices are precisely what sustains discourses in modern societies, which raises questions about whether these discourses should then really be seen as struggles between antagonistic groups trying to occupy the communicative high ground. To Foucault, by excessively focusing for instance on state power in communication practices, we risk 'overlooking all the mechanisms and effects of power which don't pass directly via the State apparatus, yet often sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness' (2007: 179). In this sense, Coca Cola's commercials work because they are grounded in the same idea of *inter*-nationality that also fuels the authorities' conceptualisation of a strong, proud, and harmonious China, and the commercial use of national symbols in turn helps to distribute a handy framework of national meanings to diverse audiences.

While this is certainly an important dimension of how cultural governance encourages the spread of official discourses in network societies, it is also worth pointing out that the commercial actors

are themselves active programmers of discourses. Just as domestic actors in China were reworking official discursive resources to make new meanings, so too did commercial actors reassemble the available symbolism to make sense of the spectacle for themselves and their audiences. What emerged was not necessarily in line with official visions for core concepts like harmony. Nevertheless, we should take Foucault's warning seriously and consider how even interactions that are explicitly conceived of as struggles against official discourse may well reify many of the assumptions that went into making the official discourse in the first place. An interesting question then is what happens to the available discursive threads when foreign broadcasters rework them to weave their own mass media narratives.

7.4 Making sense of China's Olympic efforts in Taiwan

For the Chinese organisers of networked spectacles like the Beijing Olympics, promoting soft power and branding the Chinese nation relied heavily on the first-order audience on the ground and, importantly, the second-order audience of reporters, anchors, and editors in the newsrooms and broadcast centres to relay messages to the third-order audience in front of television sets around the world. The organisers and media workers I interviewed a year after the event were keenly aware of the challenge they faced, especially considering the negative reporting that had preceded the event abroad.

To ensure that their intended, positive messages reached foreign audiences, the organisers took several measures. The first was related to the telecaster Beijing Olympic Broadcasting (BOB), which I mentioned in chapter 3. This joint-venture organisation prepared the visual materials for all foreign broadcasters, with the exception of the American National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and it consequently played a major role in setting the aesthetic and ideological parameters within which foreign stations would then arrange their own commentaries. Within the BOB, the Chinese authorities ensured that PRC officials featured prominently on the board of directors. This 'numerical dominance of Chinese people' ensured that the authorities remained switched into the broadcasting process at a crucial node, even as they experimented with arguably unprecedented forms of international corporation in the broadcasting of an event on Chinese soil (see Brownell 2008: 187).

As a second measure, the Olympic organising committee BOCOG used its position within the networked spectacle to try and programme the discourse through its press conferences, media guides for foreign journalists, press materials like the 32 editions of the Beijing Olympics Newspaper, and previews for selected journalists (see also d'Hooghe 2015: 235-237). In this way, the organisers created conduits for approved information, and in some instances they attempted to tether foreign media workers to these conduits through the promise of preferential treatment and privileged access. This practice was particularly common in interactions with journalists from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The media workers from Taiwan whom I interviewed in fact repeatedly emphasised this cultural proximity and admitted that the relationship between Taiwanese media and their PRC counterparts was much closer throughout the Beijing Olympics than the relationship between Chinese organisers and the foreign press. Through the Beijing International Media Centre (BIMC), established specifically for this purpose by the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office (国务院台湾事务办公室), Taiwanese journalists received additional PR material, the opportunity to attend dress rehearsals, and privileged access to colleagues and organisers in the PRC (interviews in Taipei, July 2009). How successful were these measures at convincing Taiwanese journalists to then relay the desired messages?

To answer this question, I have analysed how two different television stations in Taiwan broadcast the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony (see also Schneider 2019). The first of these stations was China Television (中国电视, or CTV), a broadcaster traditionally associated with the conservative pan-blue coalition of the Nationalist Party (国民党, or KMT); the second station was Formosa Television (民间全民电视, or FTV), whose editorial position leans towards the liberal pan-green camp led by the Democratic Progressive Party (民主进步党, or DPP). My analysis is based on a shot-by-shot protocol (see Iedema 2001) that lists the images shown on the two stations, juxtaposes them with transcripts of the respective Chinese commentaries, and compares the meanings that emerge with the broadcast that aired in the PRC, on CCTV (see chapter 5 and 6). I have augmented this study of the telecast materials with interviews that I conducted with Taiwanese journalists and broadcasting directors in July and August 2009, through which I explored to what extent and in what ways these actors relayed or reworked the original discourse within their respective institutional settings.

How, then, did the two stations relay the images that the BOB in mainland China provided, and how did they discuss the proceedings? Watching the opening ceremony on either of the Taiwanese stations is a very different experience from following the proceedings on the PRC's national broadcaster CCTV. CCTV's series of official propaganda statements contrasts strongly with the way in which the CTV and FTV commentators explain the event. The Taiwanese journalists adopt a telecasting format that is similar in style to that of American broadcasters (see Brownell 1995: 33); the journalists speak freely and largely spontaneously, often repeating certain phrases or adding speech particles such as 'oh' or 'uhm', as well as empty signifiers such as 'well' or 'that' (some examples from the CTV and FTV broadcasts include repeated use of 哦, 啊, 啦, 那么, or 那个).

With regard to the discourse, the effect is significant: Taiwanese television seems to provide spontaneous personal observations rather than canned official announcements, and its commentators speak with all the idiosyncrasies that colloquial speech produces. What is more, the commentators on CTV in particular speak almost throughout the entire ceremony, producing roughly twice the number of spoken words used on either CCTV or FTV. Throughout the broadcast, they add a host of background information that viewers of the other channels do not receive, thus disambiguating how the spectacle should be understood.

Both Taiwanese commentaries offer the potential to reinterpret the ceremony in ways that could very well stand in opposition to what the organisers in Beijing had in mind. At first sight, it indeed seems that the Taiwanese reporters are setting their programmes up as counter-discourses. The example of the flag-raising ceremony is again instructive, since audiences in Taiwan received a very different take on this sequence from CCTV viewers. On the pan-blue station CTV, male sports commentator Mei Shengmin (梅圣旻) explains, 'Alright, next the national flag will enter the stadium, and this little friend will sing the Ode to the Motherland'. The station then relays the first eight shots of the sequence (i.e. the first of three minutes), showing the girl as she sings her first verse and the 56 children as they carry the PRC's flag, but then the station abruptly cuts to commercials and does not return to the events at the National Stadium in Beijing until the first arts performance begins. The flag-raising ceremony itself, as well as the PRC anthem, is omitted on CTV.

FTV similarly cuts to commercials. In the footage that the station kindly made available to me, the female commentator announces, 'So, later on we'll broadcast all of the splendid scenes for you — first we'll take a quick break, and then we'll immediately come back'. Yet where the commercial break should be, the footage instead includes a rare glimpse into behind-the-scenes discussions at FTV that the viewers were not privy to. With the microphone still open, the male announcer speaks to one of his colleagues. Only his side of the conversation is audible, but it is possible to infer what the discussion was about:

> That's something we don't need to talk about. Actually, we don't need to talk; it's fine to just move forward naturally. Good! Because when we cut to commercials, the musical performance continues. Because I think some of these parts we don't need to narrate, it's fine if they see this themselves.
>
> 不用讲这个，甚至我们不用讲话就自然进就好了。好啊！因为他们到时候切广告的时候音乐会直接。因为我觉得有些地方不用讲，他们自己看就好。

As the images keep running, the male announcer starts to whistle along with the PRC's national anthem. The first actual intentional on-the-air statement is then the introduction of the subsequent segment, which starts with the female announcer welcoming the audience back after the commercial break. This intermission suggests that the FTV broadcast team approached the ceremony with a particular attitude: the idea was not to lecture viewers with an ideologically informed interpretation, but to let the images speak for themselves as much as possible. What is more, the fact that the commentator is whistling the PRC anthem suggests that the event struck him as rather casual.

This already hints at a marked difference between the CTV and the FTV broadcasts, and I will discuss additional differences below, but first it is worth exploring a linguistic practice that sets the two Taiwanese telecasts apart from the mainland Chinese broadcast, and that is the use of pronouns. On all three TV channels, the word 'we' (*women* 我们) is one of the most frequently used words (used 37 times on CCTV, 44 times on CTV, and 42 times on FTV), rivalled only by the use of the words 'China' (*Zhongguo* 中国; CCTV: 71, CTV: 50, FTV: 41) and 'Olympics' (*Aoyun* 奥运; CCTV: 32, CTV: 57, FTV: 12). The context in which the pronoun is

used, and how it is juxtaposed with a word like 'China', is important here. Whereas the mainland broadcaster CCTV repeatedly uses 'we' to refer to the Chinese nation (e.g. 'tonight, we send out this radiantly glowing peace dove' or 'let us make a great effort together to keep our promise and give the world a green Olympics'), the Taiwanese stations use the pronoun 'we' alternatively to signify the broadcasting team ('we saw this earlier at the previews', 'we now turn to the next scene', and so on) or to include the broadcasters plus their viewers ('we now see...'). The PRC and its audience are not included as part of this 'we'.

The scene depicting the dream of outer space provides a good example of how the Taiwanese stations instead refer to the PRC, and how they each attempt to position themselves and their viewers vis-à-vis the mainland. This is what the female announcer at FTV says as the segment starts (my emphases):

> Ok, coming up next is the Dream segment. What is called a dream here is, as everyone can see, about astronauts. Well, everyone knows about China's accomplishment of sending the astronaut Yang Liwei into space, so astronauts are relatively important to them during these Olympics. We can see...
>
> 好，马上来进行的就是正式进入到了梦想这个部份了。所谓的梦想大家可以看到就是航天员，那么大家都知道中国在太空的成就航天员杨利伟跃上了太空，所以航天员对他们这次的奥运来讲是相当重要的。我们可以看到现在演员呈现的是在太空当中无重力的状态。

Note that the speaker refers to the PRC as 'China' and 'they', while reserving the pronoun 'we' for herself and her Taiwanese viewers. 'China' is constructed in this comment as an actor distinct from the speaker — an impression further enhanced by the use of evidentiality ('everyone knows'), relativism ('what is called a dream here...'), and the phrase that astronauts are important 'to them during these Olympics'. CTV commentator Jian Zhengguang (简政光) makes remarks that are in a similar vein (my emphases):

> Now astronauts are appearing in the stadium. This represents the recent link between China and the origins of its so-called space science. It seems that the Chang'e-ben-yue satellite that they

> launched into space also is related to this space-flight programme, as are the Mars research projects that they have joined.
>
> 现在现场也出现了太空人，这也是表示中国这两三年这近几年来跟所谓的太空科技又有一些渊源在。像他们有在释放了嫦娥奔月的卫星，都是跟太空科技做一些结合。

Again, 'China' is framed as a distinct other in this narration. This practice resurfaces in the CTV commentary whenever the focus is on the PRC as a state, for instance when the commentators refer to Chinese cadres as 'leaders of the mainland country' (大陆国家领导人); in contrast, the pan-green station FTV never uses the phrase 'mainland' with reference to China). In fact, compared to the FTV commentary, the CTV remarks are far more politically charged, for instance pointing out which Taiwanese politicians were attending the ceremony. The commentary on the pan-blue station, in contrast to that on the pan-green competitor, in fact starts out as explicitly critical of the PRC. For example, the CTV commentators begin their broadcast by pointing out how the run-up to the Beijing Olympics was marred by the uprisings in Tibet earlier that year, and how public opinion only gradually become more positive abroad as China suffered the devastating Sichuan earthquake in May 2008. The scale of the opening ceremony also offers the commentators the opportunity to introduce critical and at times derogatory side-notes. Recall the somewhat condescending remark quoted above about China's 'so-called space-science', which calls into question how seriously the viewers should take this space programme. On another occasion, the anchor takes a stab at the population size on the mainland:

> The mainland with its population of 1.3 billion may not have much, but it has a lot of people. From the beginning the strategy was to use a mass of people. In a moment, they'll present another 2008 people.
>
> 大陆十三亿人口，别的不多，就人最多。一开始人海战术，马上推出了多达两千零八个人。

In short, there is a marked difference in how the pan-green and the pan-blue broadcasters each position themselves with relation to the PRC: FTV constructs a dynamic in which 'China' and 'Taiwan' are distinct units

with a relationship at eye-level. Indeed, as one FTV executive told me in an interview (Taipei, July 2009), it was crucial for the pan-green station to clearly distinguish Taiwan from China, for instance during specific tournaments. CTV, on the other hand, creates the impression of a shared Chinese heritage residing in two distinct states, and it implicitly frames the PRC as inferior to the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan.

7.5 Generating awe among Taiwan's media gatekeepers

The result of these ruptures and incongruencies is that the comments on both FTV and CTV seemingly stand in contrast to CCTV's narrative, which collapses party, state, and the audience into one unit (i.e. the nation) and injects a strong degree of pathos into its commentary. Does this then mean that the organisers in Beijing lost discursive control over the opening ceremony and its meanings as the spectacle was broadcast elsewhere? As it turns out, while the commentaries do in fact include moments of counter-discourse, the Taiwanese broadcasts as a whole largely reproduced the public relations message that the organisers of the opening ceremony built into the event. There were two ways in which this happened.

Firstly, it is apparent from the commentary that the journalists at FTV and CTV were overwhelmed by the splendour they were witnessing. Despite the intentions of the FTV commentators to let the images speak for themselves, and to let the audiences interpret the event as they see fit, the two reporters in fact rarely missed an opportunity to voice their amazement at the opening ceremony. Similarly, the CTV crew quickly departed from initial critical overtones in their reporting and instead provided what is essentially a very dense fan commentary. In both cases, the speakers expressed spontaneous awe (apparent from outbursts such as 'oh' 噢 or 'wah' 哇), described the enthusiasm with which the audience in the stadium were applauding and cheering, explicitly lauded the ceremony and its director Zhang Yimou, and repeatedly referred to the performance as incredibly splendid (*feichang jingcai* 非常精彩) or excellent (*bang* 棒). They were effectively swept up in the entrainment that the ritual produced.

CTV in particular commented in detail on the stage design and the mechanisms behind the performances that viewers themselves could not see, and this commentary was infused with a certain sense of admiration,

suggesting that viewers were witnessing an incredible achievement. Recall the somewhat derogatory CTV statement regarding the mass of performers ten minutes into the opening ceremony, and compare this to the following statements by the commentators an hour later:

> He: We can see that these fast synchronous movements by the 2008 performers in the stadium, as well as their formation changes, are really quite difficult to do. When he first spoke of the difficulties that the opening ceremony faced, Zhang Yimou stated that the biggest challenge was the entrance and exit of the performers. How to make thousands of people disappear in thirty seconds while bringing several thousand new performers onto the stage really gave him headaches. What is more, the entrances and exits have to look good on screen, so he had to think up different ways to do this.
>
> Mei: At the end of the day, this is completely different from the film techniques and atmosphere that he has been working with in the past. The changes in a film scene do not happen in the open like on a stage. Yet what everyone now sees on stage is really perfectly ordered and full of splendour.
>
> 何：我们可以看到两千零八人在场中快速的错身，而过变化队形，有相当的难度。当初张艺谋在讲到开幕式的困难之处，他就说演员的进场和退场是一个最大的挑战。还有怎么在三十秒之内让几千人场中消失，再让几千人进到这个舞台上，真的让他相当伤脑筋。而且还要让进场和退场之间画面要好看，更是让他想了不同的方式。
>
> 梅：毕竟跟他过去指导电影艺术感觉和手法是完全不一样。电影呈现在画面上的大家看到的场景的变化就不像现在是一个开放的舞台，开放的舞台大家现在看到的确是整齐化、色彩炫丽。

Aside from the continuously increasing expressions of awe, there is a second factor that similarly results in the Taiwanese commentators reinforcing the official PRC discourse, and that is the sense of a shared cultural heritage. The segments that showcased pre-modern Chinese history in particular seemed to resonate with the Taiwanese

commentators, leading them to often enthusiastically offer up their knowledge of major Chinese inventions such as moveable type or the compass. A good example is the section on writing, with its strong focus on Confucian-style harmony that I have discussed in chapter 6.

The CTV commentators relay this sentiment when they quote various passages from the Confucian *Analects* and then state that 'of course China is a country of etiquette' and that the performance 'appears to symbolise a continuous stream of culture, flowing through all ages and changes'. What is more, the commentary explicitly reminds the viewers that 'we' (in this case: the commentators and their audience) use the same Chinese character for harmony as the one presented in this segment.

It is quite remarkable that none of the commentators place the references to harmony into perspective by mentioning that the CCP leadership adopted the phrase as a cornerstone of its propaganda to establish a 'harmonious society'. Instead, the female FTV commentator provides a favourable interpretation, remarking how aptly the director uses the symbolism in the opening ceremony:

> Well, the reason the character *he* is used is that Zhang Yimou wanted to stress that Chinese culture specifically states that harmony should reign supreme. Yeah, and successive generations of thinkers have repeatedly discussed this concept. This includes the *Analects*, which state: 'practise the rules of propriety, let harmony reign supreme, and all within the four seas shall be brothers'. The use here is perfect, this is exactly 'letting harmony reign supreme'.
>
> 那么为什么要用「和」字是因为张艺谋想要强调的是中华文化里面有特别说了，就是以和为贵，在历代的思想学者其实一直在反复讨论这个东西。包括论语有说到「礼之用，和为贵。四海之内皆兄弟」。这个作用是恰到好处，就是以和为贵。

The case of FTV is indeed instructive in this context. The commentators repeatedly reiterate, and even praise, the same 'flat' myths throughout the opening ceremony that Barmé (2009) has criticised, and that today inform so much of official PRC historiography. It is ironically the pan-green TV station – a station associated with the DPP's advocacy for Taiwanese autonomy – that relays uncritically the same discourse on Chinese history that the organisers of the ceremony assembled. In fact,

a comparison between the official media guide to the opening ceremony (BOCOG 2008a) and the FTV commentary suggests that the anchors may have drawn heavily from this guide, essentially reproducing the arguments from this manual. Examples include referring to the terracotta warriors as the 'eighth wonder of the world', reframing Columbus' voyage to America as an outcome of the Chinese invention of the compass, or attributing the invention of the kite to the pre-modern philosopher Mo Di.

At other times the commentators go beyond the official press material and introduce their own interpretations of Chinese history and culture, effectively adding to the overall patriotic sentiment that the organisers of the opening ceremony injected into the performances. The following is the FTV explanation of the Great Wall of China, which was emulated and enacted by the performers of the movable typeset:

> The Great Wall is one of humankind's historical world wonders, and that includes that all astronauts have said that from the moon you can see Taiwan... not Taiwan, haha... the only man-made structure you can see from the moon is the Great Wall, so that is why Zhang Yimou mixed the Great Wall into the performance. This is the Great Wall that was built 2000 years ago, in 221 BC, when the first Qin emperor united China.
>
> 长城是人类历史建筑史上一个大的奇迹，包括航天员都说了，从月球可以看到台湾，不是台湾，在月球唯一可以看到的建筑物就是长城，所以张艺谋就把长城这个东西融合在表演里头。在公元前两千嗯两百二十一年前的时候秦始皇统治中国的时候所建造的长城。

While I hesitate to over-interpret the Freudian slip in this passage, the error is nevertheless interesting, since it suggests how central the island of Taiwan is to the worldview of the speaker. However, more important are the numerous simplifications and errors that characterise the statement. Contrary to popular belief, the Great Wall is not, in fact, visible from space, and it was built over an extended period of time, not in 221 BC. I suspect that several factors have come together here, effectively prompting the commentators to make questionable statements while reinforcing the PRC's official public relations message of a strong yet peaceful nation with an impressive history of cultural splendour.

Firstly, the commentators are specialists in sports rather than the history or culture of China. They seem to reproduce their common-sense knowledge of Chinese culture, probably derived from schoolbooks and popular culture, and this knowledge draws from historical narratives and cultural tropes that are pervasive not just on the mainland. Secondly, as one FTV programme director explained to me, the journalists were very careful not to offend the mainland authorities with critical comments, since they were worried about future press access. They consequently focused on sports whenever possible while self-censoring potential political comments. Thirdly, as two Taiwanese journalists told me, most reporters considered the Beijing Olympics to be a sports event with no political meaning. It is hardly surprising that the commentators would then not consider the press materials they were using to be expressions of vested political interests. This combination of unfamiliarity with the subject, the need to self-censor, and the unquestioned shared background knowledge together worked in favour of the mainland organisers: not only was the discourse of a strong yet harmonious China relayed to Taiwanese audiences via local TV stations, the discourse was reproduced by believable speakers in accessible and authentic language, lending the resulting message a credibility that the stilted CCTV broadcast would have been unlikely to achieve in Taiwan.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how various actors outside mainland China assembled the semiotic resources that the networked spectacle of the Beijing Olympics made available to them, and how they used these resources to further their own projects. For the Chinese state and its collaborators, these activities were aimed at 'branding' the Chinese nation, and they frequently related to the ongoing debates within the PRC about how to promote what is often called soft power. This idea of soft power strongly informed the ideological backdrop of China's networked spectacles and their public relations campaigns, but, as I have argued in this chapter, the concept itself has limited analytical value when explaining how such campaigns work. Instead, tracing the interaction rituals and actor-networks in which various actors construct meanings about the spectacle provides a much more fruitful avenue for assessing the power dynamics in transnational mass communication.

In this particular case, several foreign actors were able to insert themselves into near-global media networks and programme their own values into the discourse, drawing on many of the same symbolic resources as the authorities in China. Blending recognisable elements of the official discourse, such actors created statements that at times departed significantly from the official vision of what spectacles like the Beijing Olympics should be about, either commodifying nativist or cosmopolitan narratives for financial gain or creating cultural products that explicitly criticised the Chinese authorities.

Yet, as much as the emergent discourses clashed, there were also instances where the activities of organisers translated into positive messages for foreign audiences that aligned with official Chinese interests. This was true for certain commercial activities, such as the Coca Cola commercial that showed whimsical, animated birds flocking to the Bird's Nest stadium — a cosmopolitan feel-good message that rivalled any that the authorities put on display, and that was to some extent enabled by, and readily usable in, the cultural governance approach that the organisers had adopted. It was also the case that many of the foreign broadcasts of the event relayed the overall sentiments that the organisers had programmed into it, and this was visible on Taiwanese TV, where local gatekeepers were swept away by the impressive spectacle, at least momentarily. The way in which well-planned mass events are able to create 'entrainment' extends to the second-order audiences of journalists and media workers, and in cases where the event organisers are able successfully to fuse the various components of their discourse with the experiences of their audience, the resulting 'flow' can indeed be convincing.

This is not to say that the authorities were successful in their soft-power campaigns. It remains questionable whether the momentary effects of an attractive cultural product or convincing ritual interaction translate into sustainable sentiments that attach to such complicated categories as nation-states, let alone their policies. In fact, evidence from the US suggests that many audiences there experienced heightened concerns about China in the wake of the Beijing Olympics, much like the South Park character Cartman in the scene that opened this chapter. Despite overwhelmingly positive 'feel-good' reporting on NBC, it appears that word-of-mouth and online discussions about cheating Chinese athletes alongside a growing realisation of China's success on the world stage frightened many viewers, leading Gries and his colleagues to conclude

that 'Chinese organizers may have inadvertently contributed to greater American anxiety and wariness towards China' (2010: 230). Such audience reactions notwithstanding, the example of the Beijing Olympics shows how official actors create the vocabulary and grammar of a specific spectacle, how these components then 'travel' through communication networks to shape political discourses abroad, and how carefully managed nodes in these networks can allow the actors to convince others to relay their values through foreign broadcast systems, even as the results may not always be what they intended.

8 Fractured Discourses, Idiosyncratic Interactions

It is another hot summer day at the Shanghai Expo, with temperatures surpassing 40 degrees Celsius in the shade. The waiting times outside most pavilions are so long that it takes several hours before visitors can enter the exhibits. I am looking at the impressive line outside the Australian pavilion, one of the most popular attractions. Waiting times are close to five hours. And yet ever more people are joining the queue.

I am meeting with one of the organisers of the pavilion to discuss how the planning for such an exhibition space worked, but also what messages the Australian pavilion meant to communicate to audiences. 'The message is never delivered by the building. Expos tend to get carried away with the architecture', he tells me as I ask him about the many impressive pavilion designs at the world fair. What, then, did his design team focus on? 'Beaches!' he laughs. 'And furry animals. If there isn't a furry animal in the room, you're doing it wrong. If visitors don't see those things, they think they're in the Austrian pavilion'. Esoteric messages and didactic displays do not work, he believes. 'It's a bulk audience of multiple millions. You need icons and a base message'. Visitors may be pushing a pushchair through the exhibition, he points out, distracted by a crying child and an aggravated spouse. Maybe they had an evening of bad food, and then they had to stand in line in the heat. 'These things influence how the message is received as well'.

The Australian pavilion's core exhibit is straightforward: three children explain to visitors what kind of city they want to live in, and their stories touch on various themes associated with Australia. 'We're trying to build a connection between the straightforward elements and subtler messages'. One goal, my interviewee tells me, was to address the misconception that the laid-back beach life in Australia is a sign of laziness. 'People see the beach but don't realise at what price this life-style comes. The Chinese perception seems to be "it's lucky that it's like that".

Instead, we want visitors to ask what had to happen to make Australia beautiful and relaxed'.

We shift our talk to the popularity of the Australian pavilion. Every 15 minutes, 1,000 visitors entered the exhibits. At the end of each day, 50,000 people had passed through the building. I ask why he thinks people get in line in this heat, queueing for several hours. 'I have no idea why people get in line', he says, somewhat nonplussed. 'Nothing is this good'.

This anecdote from the Australian pavilion shows how even pavilion organisers remained sceptical of their abilities to shape the views of audiences at a world fair, and it suggests that the interactions at such a networked spectacle may not easily collapse into readily digestible didactic messages. It is informed by pragmatic observations about what visitors at world fairs do, and the Shanghai Expo certainly contained its fair share of audience behaviour that raises questions about the effectiveness of such spectacles to communicate clear messages to preoccupied or stressed visitors (see Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1: Expo Tourists. Images © F. Schneider 2010.

Such an assessment stands in stark contrast to the way the Chinese state treated such events. In the previous chapters, I examined how the authorities calibrated the networked spectacles to encourage participants to create discourses and adopt didactic delivery strategies

that would relay the official vision for China's role in the world at the start of the 21st century. While this cultural governance allowed for substantial creativity, often leading to diverse and at times conflicting meanings, it may nevertheless seem as though the overarching narrative remained firmly in place, and that it encouraged a wide range of official and non-official actors to adopt the symbols and codes that the authorities had programmed into the events. In some instances, and as I discussed in the previous chapter, the official discourse even aligned with the assumptions of foreign actors in transnational communication networks, travelling to contexts outside the mainland that had not been governed by the same institutional rationales as Chinese media ecologies.

Despite such findings, there are good reasons nevertheless to remain sceptical of the idea that the official discourses of China's networked spectacles became 'hegemonic'. This chapter turns to the many ways in which carefully planned official discourses fracture, and how they become warped through idiosyncratic interactions. I first take another look at discussions that portray modern spectacles as technologies of mass persuasion, and in particular at arguments that see them as totalitarian simulations that prevent audiences from distinguishing between reality and ideology. Following these conceptual debates, I turn to numerous examples at the Shanghai Expo that illustrate how foreign pavilion organisers challenged what they perceived to be the dominant discourse at that event. Much like the activists' strategies I explored in the previous chapter, such activities were often designed in explicit opposition to the efforts of the authorities. Nevertheless, the world fair provided a somewhat different setting from the international sports event of the Olympics, and at Shanghai's Expo site the various actors had to engage in their communicative activities side by side, each contributing to and at times subverting the meanings that emerged there.

Next, I turn to subtler fractures in the expo discourses, looking at the themed pavilions that the authorities commissioned, which provided diverse assessments of what 'modernity' might mean. These assessments frequently clashed with the official narratives of a beneficial and sustainable Chinese hypermodernity that I discussed in chapter 6. The discursive processes at these themed pavilions already hint at the way that domestic Chinese actors shift official discourses from within the official event networks, but one could argue that these networks are so closely linked to complex transnational meaning-making networks that they are fairly likely to produce divergent discourses. After all, many of

these pavilions were joint ventures between domestic and foreign design studios. However, attempts to reprogramme official Chinese discourses are not limited to such transnational contexts. Similar processes are also in evidence in purely domestic networks, for instance during the 60th anniversary of the PRC. To illustrate this, the chapter concludes with an analysis of how a major Chinese news organisation intervened in nationalist discourses on the day of that specific networked spectacle, and how it adopted the official semiotic parameters in order to shift the discourse in directions that directly contradicted what the authorities had envisaged for that event.

8.1 The hypermodern spectacle: a simulacrum?

As I discussed in the introduction and chapter 2 of this book, a common perception of mass events is that they produce stable, hegemonic discourses, and that the spectacular delivery of these discourses is capable of seducing or overpowering participants with their ideologies. I have mostly eschewed terms like 'hegemonic' or 'dominant' in my own analysis to avoid suggesting that official discourses become all-powerful by virtue of being official. However, considering how actors like Chinese state officials unapologetically try to use networked spectacles to 'guide public opinion', not to mention the degree of effort and resources expended to establish the discourses these actors consider favourable for their own developmental and soft-power goals, it is understandable that critics worry about the power of these discourses. After all, mass events can be occasions for manipulation, and the authorities have made skilled use of this modern genre of mass communication to further their interests.

This worry is compounded by the interactive dimension of many mass events, particularly of exhibitions like world fairs, where visitors enter into elaborate multi-media arrangements, designed to convince them of certain messages (see also my earlier discussion in Schneider 2013a). Mitchell (1989), for instance, has made the argument that the Orientalist representations at the Paris World Fair of 1889 were a 'labyrinth without exit' that created perceptions of the 'world-as-exhibition'. In more recent iterations of the world-fair genre, exhibits have become ever more interactive, and it is telling that a watershed moment in this development was in fact called *Labyrinthe*, a theme pavilion at the 1967 Montreal Expo

that experimented with interactive multi-screen installations to provide visitors with an immersive experience (Expo 67 in Montreal n/d).

Today, interactive installations often make use of advanced digital technologies and game mechanisms to entice visitors, and the perceived intrusiveness of these technologies has ensured that the metaphor of inescapable, labyrinthine mediated spaces remains popular. For instance, Callahan (2012) and Nordin (2012b) both cite their experiences at the Shanghai Expo's Siemens Pavilion as an example of discourses that threaten to trap and co-opt the participants. At the entrance, the pavilion automatically took a picture of each visitor, which was then turned into a digital avatar that would sing the pavilion theme song together with the avatars of other visitors. Callahan (2012: 256) comments that through such mechanisms 'visitors are recruited into the cosmopolitan message of material prosperity'. Nordin (2012b: 114) goes further, arguing that this use (and arguably abuse) of personal images in fact constitutes a violation of the self. In this view, the expo with its interactive technologies is an example of how 'our bodies are more explicitly hijacked by screening, made to do things potentially against our will (and indeed through or in advance thereof), proliferarted, taken apart'. She continues (ibid.: 115):

> Through these technologies of the world/fair, not only our concepts of spatiality and temporality but also our notions of subject and object are displaced. ... We are copies of copies without original, simulacral avatars in virtual hyperreality.

To Nordin this then suggests that the Shanghai Expo functions as a simulation of the world that is so thoroughly overwhelming that it replaces the real with a perfect facsimile of itself. This is what the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard has referred to as the simulacrum. To Baudrillard (1983: 4) modernity is characterised by an endless cycle of self-referentiality, a system 'substituting the sign of the real for the real itself'. The only reality that subjects still have access to, in such a simulated world, consists of the ubiquitous signs that circulate through communication networks. Baudrillard's 'perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation' is the Disneyland theme park (ibid.: 23), which seems to have been at least partially inspired by world fairs (ExpoMuseum n/d). Baudrillard writes (1983: 25):

> Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which is Disneyland. ... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.

For Baudrillard, Disneyland illustrates how the age of simulation works. It marks the end of all meaning, the end of 'the society of the spectacle' that Debord criticised, 'the end of perspective and panoptic space' that Foucault examined, and 'the end of all dialectic' (ibid.: 54 & 70). In this view, theme parks like Disneyland are so absurdly spectacular that they force visitors to abandon any critical view of the world outside the event site. As the simulacrum takes over, 'power is no longer present except to conceal that there is none' (ibid.: 46).

This is a provocative way of envisaging the workings of complex, technologically advanced networks of information and communication. Baudrillard famously took his criticism to the extreme when he asked whether the Gulf War in 1991 had actually happened. 'It is not war taking place over there', he argued, since the only access that audiences in the coalition countries had to this event were the videogame-like images of guided missile strikes that were circulated through global broadcasting networks; instead, the event was 'a masquerade of information' that served as 'the disfiguration of the world', Baudrillard argued (1995: 40). Two decades later, Baudrillard's provocations seem prescient, especially as digital media networks enable actors to divorce their politics almost entirely from any concern about facts. The actions of Donald Trump in the US or the Brexit proponents in the UK are viewed by many as symptoms of a drift towards 'post truth' (e.g. Ball 2017 and Levitin 2017; see also the discussion in Madison & DeJarnette 2018).

While I sympathise with critics of hypermediated politics, I nevertheless remain unconvinced that Baudrillard's idea of the simulacrum is the right heuristic device for understanding networked spectacles. One issue is conceptual: as Eagleton (1991/2007: 166) has pointed out, Baudrillard's rejection of ideology and power deletes the agents from the processes of simulation. Just because it is increasingly difficult in complex communication networks to trace who has power

does not mean that power has disappeared altogether. Another issue is analytical: Baudrillardian arguments about the totality of the simulation may be empirically inaccurate. They potentially ignore the many ruptures that mark the discourses of networked spectacles, and they risk misrepresenting how participants interact with each other and the cultural objects of those spectacles. In short, Baudrillard's critique of the simulacrum is certainly an intriguing intervention into hypermodern media ecologies, but it gets agency wrong, obscuring who tries to manipulate whom, and robbing those who are potentially subject to such manipulations of their ability to make up their own minds. In what follows, I show how actors at China's networked spectacles indeed retain their agency, and how they intervene in communication processes to challenge the seemingly dominant ideologies that characterise these events.

8.2 Subversive expo pavilions

An important site of discursive intervention was the foreign national pavilions at the Shanghai Expo. Almost 200 nation-states had hired architects and designers to brand their own nations through the complex processes I discussed in chapter 3, and the resulting communicative practices often challenged the assumptions that informed the expo's overarching message of global modernity as well as the specific statements that Chinese official pavilions and exhibits created about contemporary China. This frequently happened in ambiguous ways. Take the example of the Dutch national pavilion 'Happy Street', which on the one hand presented the recognisable narrative of liberal modernity governed by nation-states. The technologies that the site showcased – water purification, deep-sea salvage, carbon-neutral construction – were conceptualised as progressive, and, importantly, as Dutch. On the other hand, the design team also understood their work as a critique of urban development practices. The structural designer Rijk Blok (2010) explained this normative ambition as follows:

> A good street should be a street full of life where people can meet, live, work, eat, play and shop. … the solution should not be sought in making more gated communities with only apartments, where people only sleep at night, or planning more industrial areas where

> people only work during the daytime, or large shopping malls, that will only be empty and unsafe at night. On the contrary, a good street should combine all these functions and offer a variety of buildings and activities thus ensuring a better quality of life: 'Better City, Better Life'.

The pavilion itself then represented the urban street as a twisted number eight (a lucky number in China), looping through the air like a rollercoaster, and clustered with haphazardly juxtaposed and often highly stylised buildings. The entire installation was a madhouse of postmodern design choices that escaped any single interpretation. Architect John Körmeling later won the Dutch Design Award, not just for the pavilion's architectural style, but, as the jury put it, also for 'proving that the Dutch have a sense of humour after all' ('het bewijst bovendien dat de Nederlanders toch gevoel voor humor hebben'; Architectenweb 2010).

An even stronger example of a pavilion that was designed explicitly as a discursive intervention was the Spanish exhibit. The theme 'from the city of our ancestors to the city of our children' allowed the designers to deconstruct the usual linear narratives of modernity that were in evidence at other pavilions by providing provocative reimaginations of what Spanish pre-modernity, modernity, and future might look like. Visitors were first guided through a violent, primordial world of meteor showers and storms, from which they were ejected into a fragmented postmodern present, suggestive of a newborn child ejected from the womb into the harsh light of the world. This interpretation was strengthened by a disturbing centrepiece of the pavilion, a large animatronic baby that confronted visitors with the deepest depth of the uncanny valley. Other controversial elements included representations of the Madrid bombings and animated short videos that promoted a pan-Hispanic transnationalism, arguably in direct opposition to Anglo-American globalisation (the videos were captioned solely in Spanish and Chinese).

As a pavilion organiser at the Spanish exhibition told me in an interview, the designs were explicitly intended to stimulate critical thinking. He explained to me that the team decided early on that it wanted 'to present ideas, not propaganda' through 'an emotional rather than intellectual approach'. In direct opposition to what the team perceived as heavy-handed propaganda on the part of the Chinese organisers, they left the responsibilities for the different installation designs to Spanish artists, allowing them to create their own visions on the theme, without

intervention from the Spanish authorities; an approach that, as the interviewee told me, caused much controversy in Spain.

A particularly revealing example of how the Spanish team tried to reprogramme what they perceived to be dominant themes in Chinese discourse was the design of the pavilion uniforms. In the run-up to the event, the organisers had been disturbed by the way in which Chinese society deployed uniforms and insignia, a practice that reminded them of Spain's fascist past. In response, the pavilion organisers decided that the uniforms at their site needed to embody a non-hierarchical approach to organisation, and they employed the Spanish fashion company Zara to create outfits that would defy Chinese expectations.

It is not my intention here to judge these didactics or to assess how successful they may have been at communicating an alternative vision of the world to Chinese audiences. My point is that many participants in the expo's organisation decided to generate meanings that they hoped would challenge visitors and provide alternative narratives to those on display elsewhere at the site. The Spanish efforts were arguably grounded in an enlightenment understanding of art and culture. Other designers were not as explicitly confrontational in their design choices. The Japan Pavilion, for example, picked up on the harmony discourse within China and related it to Japanese harmony discourses that had accompanied past Japanese expo efforts, for instance in Osaka (1970) and Aichi (2005; see Chiba 2010 for an official position). The pavilion's theme was 'WA – Harmony of the Hearts, Harmony of the Skills', with 'wa' being the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character *he* (和).

This commonality then allowed the Japan Pavilion organisers to build a public diplomacy strategy that was aimed at promoting harmony between the Chinese and Japanese people – not an easy task in China, where memories of the Sino-Japanese War and the actions of revisionist, nationalist Japanese politicians frequently cause strong resentments. To achieve their goal, the exhibition designer chose a communication approach that stood in stark opposition to the one that the China Pavilion designers chose on the other side of the expo's Asia zone: the Japan Pavilion would tell stories of how 'connections between people' could lead to a 'harmony of the hearts' (Chiba 2010). The metaphor for a harmonious society was a living and changing organism, represented by the building's architecture, which was meant to resemble a large silk cocoon that changed the hues of its purple exterior depending on the natural light outside. Presenting the building as 'organic' provides

a decidedly different discursive framework from the one that Chinese authorities used to make sense of harmonious design, and I return to this contrast below.

Inside the Japan Pavilion, the idea of harmony was explicitly framed in transnational terms: the core installation was a multi-media theatre and film performance that told the story of the Japanese crested ibis, an endangered crane species. The bird became a symbol of Sino-Japanese collaboration: the efforts to reintroduce the ibis to Japan involved Chinese environmentalists and scientists, and it relied on genetically similar birds from the mainland for breeding purposes. Later, the resulting Japanese breeds would in turn be introduced into China, as part of local environmental initiatives. In this way, the ibis serves as a powerful analogy between the concrete, personal interactions of environmentalists and the relationship between the Japanese and Chinese people more broadly, and it is noteworthy that this discourse downplays the involvement of nation-state actors. Instead, it emphasises cultural flows that transcend national borders, whether it is the exchange of birds or of ideas. As one official argued when describing the silkworm shape of the pavilion (quoted in Chiba 2010):

> the process of spinning silk thread from silkworms was imported from China, thereby symbolising ties between Japan and China. … the foundation of culture in Japan originated from China. Those foundations then developed into something uniquely Japanese, underpinned by harmony between nature and humankind and connections between people.

While statements such as these betray a certain nativist conception of culture (which is here ultimately still presented as 'uniquely Japanese'), they also facilitate cosmopolitan visions of Sino-Japanese harmony and allow the exhibition designers to infuse popular discourses about harmony in China with rationales that do not fit the official PRC position on the concept.

As a final example of such programming activities, consider the case of the USA Pavilion, which I have also examined elsewhere (Schneider 2014b: 109-111; see also Wallis & Balsamo 2016: 40-41 for another discussion). While the pavilion featured unabashedly neoliberal capitalist narratives, not to mention strong nationalist undercurrents, it created a very different discourse about nations and modernity from Chinese exhibits at

the expo, even as it employed the kind of public-diplomacy strategies that American scholars and politicians had promoted as meaningful forms of international persuasion, and that had also informed the soft-power quest at Chinese expo pavilions (see also chapter 7). However, in contrast to China's national pavilion and its exhibition, the US communication approach addressed Chinese audiences directly, in a casual and self-deprecating manner. It suggested to Chinese visitors that authentic Americans from all walks of life respected, and were interested in, China and its people.

This sense of authenticity was cleverly designed, most notably in the arrival hall of the pavilion, where visitors were shown short impressions from the US as they waited to enter the first of the pavilion's two film theatres. The short scenes showed Americans trying to say a simple greeting in Chinese, equivalent to 'hello, welcome to the US Pavilion' (你好，欢迎光临美国馆). The diverse set of people stumbled through various comical mishaps, accompanied by light-hearted music, until they finally managed to get the difficult pronunciation right. This short film then set the tone for the rest of the pavilion: whenever US officials appeared in the subsequent feature film, they directly addressed the audience in Chinese before explaining in seemingly casual yet rhetorically refined ways what the pavilion stood for. The first film at the pavilion started with Hillary Clinton, then the Secretary of State for the Obama administration, addressing her audience like this:

> Ni hao! I'm Hillary Clinton, and it is my great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the American people to the USA Pavilion at Expo 2010. As you explore the pavilion, you will see core American values in action: diversity, innovation, and optimism.

The quotation already illustrates how the pavilion presents the US as a community of shared values, an approach to nation-branding that differs markedly from official Chinese attempts to construct the PRC's national image primarily by referring to a shared history and fate. The rest of the US Pavilion's first feature film expands on this theme, demonstrating the 'core American values' by showcasing ethnically diverse boys and girls who explain their dreams of a green future. These whimsical statements about fantastic technologies are juxtaposed with images of real-world technologies that promise to fulfil these science-fictional dreams (wind energy, solar energy, projects to create affordable housing). They are

further contextualised by talking-head commentaries from the pavilion's various sponsors (representatives of Chevron, Habitat for Humanity, PepsiCo, and so on), who demonstrate that the youthful optimism of these children extends to American captains of industry and leaders of civil society. The message is up-beat, suggesting that America represents endless possibilities and is driven by entrepreneurial teamwork and a deep-seated appreciation of pluralism. In the film, these impressions are finally brought together by former US president Barack Obama in a concluding speech:

> Ni hao! Congratulations to the people of China and Shanghai for hosting this remarkable world expo, which speaks to China's rise as a strong, prosperous, and successful member of the community of nations; a nation that draws on the strength and creativity of its people. Welcome to the USA Pavilion, where we are proud to showcase the spirit that has always defined us as Americans; a nation of immigrants from all corners of the world, working together with a sense of community and common purpose to overcome adversity, and a sense of possibility and optimism that the future is what we make it, that we can build a better life for our children. Of course, these are not simply American qualities, as I said when I visited Shanghai last year. We are bound by our common humanity, and our shared curiosity. This includes the hopes we share with the people of China, and the people around the world, to work together to realise a healthy, sustainable and prosperous future. Thank you for visiting us today, and on behalf of the American people, we look forward to being your partner, and hopefully someday welcoming you and your families to the United States of America.

I have quoted this passage here in full because it contains two crucial discursive moves that generally characterised the communication strategy of the USA Pavilion. The first was to present liberal individualist values as foundational to US national identity, and the second was to then subtly try to naturalise liberalism as universally applicable. In the Obama speech, this is apparent from the strong, liberal-democratic understanding of 'community', which is then explicitly sold as self-evidently universal.

The exhibition followed this pattern throughout. It was imbued with a strong liberal discourse, which implied that the problems of the planet

could be solved by individuals through creative optimism. The second feature film, called *The Garden*, represented this argument in the form of a heart-warming story of a community that comes together to improve the environment. The communication approach could hardly have been more different from the one that informed the bombastic feature films at the China Pavilion: in *The Garden*, a young girl tries to create a community garden in the backyard of her bleak apartment block. To this end, she elicits the aid of her neighbours, who are each comically different individuals with their own strengths: a hulking bodybuilder, an old immigrant, a black hardware store owner, a group of street kids, and a Chinese lady. After a series of setbacks, the members of this community realise that they can overcome adversity by each contributing their diverse personal strengths to the project and working together. Close-up camera angles, a confined mise-en-scène, and a folksy acoustic guitar song all create a sense of intimacy.

The strong liberal messages were then packaged in ways that were meant to connect specifically with Chinese audiences at a personal level. In numerous cases, the feature films and the commercial exhibits in the final hall of the pavilion featured Americans of Chinese ancestry or presented the stories of successful Chinese immigrants to the US. One commercial display, for instance, cleverly presented the 'old hundred names' (*laobaixing* 老百姓), the common Chinese surnames that in China also serve as a metaphor for 'common people'. Zooming in on individual characters, the video installation would then show famous American citizens who shared that specific last name. In another case, commercial advertising featured a Chinese woman using an oversized brush to paint calligraphy, emulating a scene from the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony. In this way, state and commercial actors in the US tried to use their access to the communicative network of the world fair to programme the discourse of that spectacle with liberalist values, using Chinese cultural tropes to anchor their ideology within existing discourses in the PRC.

8.3 Modernity revisited

It was not just foreign national pavilions that creatively reworked the discourses of the world fair. Particularly intriguing sites of semiotic assemblage were the official theme pavilions (see also my earlier analysis

in Schneider 2013a: 7-12). These five pavilions were examples of the kind of cultural governance outcomes I discussed in chapter 3: they had been commissioned and approved by the Chinese state, but they had not been designed by the Chinese propaganda department. Instead, the authorities relied on a wide range of domestic and foreign actors to put together these core exhibitions, often collaboratively, and for the largest part these actors indeed retained creative control over their projects.

This is not to say that the five pavilions were divorced from official propaganda narratives. In fact, two of the five pavilions were organised by official actors, and they indeed closely followed the scripts of China as a hypermodern, harmonious civilisation, effectively connecting with the narratives of other official exhibits like those in the China Pavilion. An example of this was the Pavilion of Footprints (*Chengshi zuji guan* 城市足迹馆), which had been created by the Shanghai Museum 'to explore the footprints left in urban history to bring out the wisdom of human civilization', as the official guidebook to the theme pavilions puts it (Xu 2010: 76). It contained cultural artefacts from around the world that illustrated how cities evolved throughout history, giving it an arguably transnational dimension, but overall the narrative of the exhibition was firmly rooted in a dichotomy between 'East' and 'West', with every achievement outside China juxtaposed with a domestic example. Local urban-planning precedents were envisaged as part of a linear national narrative, as elements in 'a 5000-year history of wonders and shocks', as one exhibit was titled. The pavilion also reproduced the 'harmonious society' understanding that the Hu-Wen administration preferred, with one exhibition space featuring a large character for 'harmony' that then became contextualised by the statement that 'society needs order and government' to flourish.

Another example of a themed pavilion that reproduced the official Chinese discourse was the Pavilion of City Being (*Chengshi shengming guan* 城市生命馆), a joint venture between the China Central Academy of Fine Arts and the London-based design consultancy Land Design Studio that mostly told a straightforward story of modernity and progress. Visitors were guided through large halls that featured, for instance, a stylised railway station, an underground sewage system, and the physical infrastructure of an electrical system. They were then shown five short films in a 360 degree cinema, each introducing a particular city plaza and the unique 'spirit' (*jingshen* 精神) that infuses that space: the passion of the Tango in Buenos Aires' May Plaza, the energy of street musicians in

Nairobi's Freedom Plaza, the bustle of Bombay's Railway Square, and the elegance of Edmonton's City Square. The Chinese contribution was Wenchuan Square in the city of Hanwang, which witnesses the tear-jerking story of a young boy searching the rubble of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake for his dead father's chess board (Figure 8.2). The film was meant to encapsulate the 'enlightened, tough, and self-reliant' character of this earthquake-stricken Chinese city (豁达坚韧与自强不息; translation in the original film; see also Xu 2010: 51).

Figure 8.2: Feature Film at the City Being Pavilion – A Boy Commemorates his Father, Who Died at 14:28 during the Sichuan Earthquake. Image © F. Schneider 2010.

While these exhibits generally promoted the nationalist and modernist discourses that informed official statements across China's networked spectacles, they were not without ruptures. The portrayals of pipes and cables in the Pavilion of City Being situated these displays of modern urbanism in a somewhat different context from the exhibits about urban systems in the China Pavilion that I discussed in chapter 6. Instead of adopting a mechanistic understanding of such systems, the designers of the City Being Pavilion used the metaphor of a living organism to portray the city. The exhibit was called 'Circulation System: Experiencing the Metabolism of the City' (循环管道： 经历城市代谢, translation in the original); as the guidebook explains, it was meant to 'make people better understand the complexity and vulnerability of the city as an organic living being and the relation between its different components' (the Chinese text is phrased slightly differently, but to the same effect: 人民在行进中，既经历通道，也能得到城市生命系统有机运行且脆弱关联的信息，这些都值得人们对城市生命健康展开思考; Xu 2010: 46-47). This discourse still lends itself to statements about the progressive power of modernity and its technologies, but it

also complicates such statements by tapping into discourses of organic organisation, which imply a wholly different axiom for understanding modernity from the one suggested by mechanistic discourses. As one scholar of organisations has put it, 'mechanistic organizations seek to maximize efficiency and standardization' whereas 'organic organization seeks to maximize satisfaction and development' (Lunenburg 2012: 6). It is an open question whether the curators of these exhibits were trying to make such a paradigmatic statement about mechanistic versus organic urban organisation (see Hage 1965: 305), not to mention whether visitors would have appreciated such a statement and its implications. However, it is intriguing that a core pavilion designed at least in part by official actors would depart from Taylorist and Fordist understandings of organisation on display elsewhere and opt instead to creatively open up discourses about harmony and scientific development that moved in different directions.

Other theme pavilions departed even more markedly from official discursive frameworks, at times providing spaces for alternative imaginations about modernity that could be interpreted as the types of 'utopian enclaves' that Jameson (2007: 15-16) has discussed: spaces 'within which Utopian fantasy can operate' and in which participants in the interactions might adopt 'a kind of mental space in which the whole system can be imagined as radically different' (Jameson 2007: 15-16). The Urban Planet Pavilion (*Chengshi diqiu guan* 城市地球馆), for instance, envisaged the future of urbanism in ways that contrasted markedly with the hypermodern skylines amid green jungles that many official Chinese pavilions presented. The German designers Triad Berlin whom the authorities had commissioned to create this environmental showcase opted for a dystopian approach that featured imagery of urban sprawl, scorched earth, and polluted seas (see Triad 2010 for impressions). To present its critique of how urbanisation depletes resources and harms the environment, the designers chose to adopt the harmony discourse that the authorities had flagged in their own communication practices, embedding their narrative in references to 'ancient Chinese philosophy', specifically the harmony between the traditional five elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. The guidebook explains in English and Chinese (Xu 2010: 64-65):

> They [the five elements] respectively interpret what has happened to mineral resources, natural environment, water resources,

> energy and waste treatment. Overpowering images show urban development undermines people's living environment, and sound an alarm that urban sprawl will wreak havoc on the Earth.
>
> 在这个展区，设计者借用五行的符号，以震感人心的图像和实物表现城市发展带来的人类生存环境的多方面恶化，告诫人们，城市不加节制的蔓延和过度发展的后果可能是地球的毁灭。

This message about the danger that unchecked urbanism poses to 'harmony' was juxtaposed with images of children from around the world, along with bilingual information about their likes and dislikes, their hopes and dreams. Each of the exhibits concludes with the child's answer to the question 'what would be different in the city of your dreams'. Visitors thus learn that five-year-old Bastet from Cairo would like his city to smell better, that four-year-old Emil from Berlin would like there to be more space for animals, that five-year-old Gabriela from Mexico City would like her dream city to be filled with trees, and that twelve-year-old Xu Junhao from Shanghai would like there to be no cars but only forest – hardly an endorsement of 'China's love affair with the car' (Watts 2011) and its impact on urban environments (Zheng 2017).

Granted, the Urban Planet Pavilion also engaged in a fair bit of capitalist solutionism, for instance presenting a 'Road to Solutions' that consisted of low-carbon construction techniques and green energy technologies often designed by (German) multinational corporations. However, the pavilion rejected the interpretation that capitalist modernity would simply fix itself, as exhibits in the nearby China Pavilion suggested. The concluding showpiece of the exhibition was a film titled *The Only Planet We Have*, which aimed to illustrate 'how mankind [sic] existed in balance with the earth for a very long time, and how this relationship ended up in its present fundamental crisis' (Triad 2010). The film's iconography arguably constructed a romanticised vision of nature that contrasted with scathingly critical images of industrialisation, but whatever one might think of the exhibit's ideology and didactics, it did not jell with official discourses in China where the problems of economic development can be solved with more economic development.

The same could be said for the way that another pavilion reimagined global modernity: the somewhat awkwardly named 'Urbanian Pavilion' (*Chengshiren guan* 城市人馆). The authorities had employed the Dutch

exhibition architects Kossmann.dejon to design the exhibition, and the team opted for an up-close and personal answer to their guiding question 'what is the quality of life?' (for an official introduction, see PICNIC 2011). The pavilion told the stories of six families from cities on six different continents (Melbourne, Phoenix, Rotterdam, Sao Paolo, Tema, and Zhengzhou). In non-linear, non-hierarchical installations, the exhibition juxtaposed footage and information about the six families, inviting visitors to identify with their journeys through a representative cycle of everyday life (see Figure 8.3). Visitors would first enter a wax figure cabinet that contained a diorama of each family along with an introductory video about the family members and their respective home city. In the subsequent halls, the exhibition presented five elements of urban life: home (*jiaju* 家居), work (*gongzuo* 工作), connectivity (*jiaowang* 交往), learning (*xuexi* 学习), and health (*jiankang* 健康). Each hall combined personal artefacts and looped video installations of the various individuals going about their routines, often synchronising the short films to suggest that the members of the different households are engaged in similar activities at the same time, across the six continents.

It may then seem as though the exhibits construct a linear narrative of modernity, especially considering how strongly the exhibits use watches and clocks as devices to frame the everyday narratives. Nordin (2012a: 241) has for instance criticised the pavilion for creating a 'sequentialization in time' that she argues portrays some families as more advanced than others: 'we all do the same thing; it is just that some are a bit behind'. Nordin is right to point out that the expo featured 'clocks, ticking pendula, and hourglasses' to repeatedly enforce stories of progress through time, but I hesitate to draw the conclusion that the Urbanian Pavilion provided an easy judgement of the families it portrayed. I have placed footage from the various video instalments on a time-line and have compared the imagery and captions to check whether the organisers framed the narratives to prompt conclusions about who might be more 'advanced'. While some families indeed use more advanced gadgets, e.g. an electric toothbrush in the case of a Dutch entrepreneur, I have not found a sustained effort to use such signs as aspirational markers. In fact, in the introduction to the various households, the families are portrayed during their leisure activities, with the American family playing table tennis, the family from Ghana playing pool, the Brazilian family meeting for a picnic, the Australian couple watching TV at home, the Chinese family meeting for dinner, and the Dutch entrepreneur working

Figure 8.3: Synchronous Everyday Life: Rotating Screen Installation at the Urbanian Pavilion. Images © F. Schneider 2010.

long hours. If anything, there seems to be subtle critique embedded in these depictions, suggesting that the kind of high-octane single life of a Dutch upwardly mobile man is no better (and possibly worse) than the social activities of families in Africa or South America.

Any ostensible endorsement of linear modernity that these video installations might contain ultimately breaks down when confronted with the video captions. Throughout the videos, the designers introduce random facts and statistics about the different life-styles, and so the visitors learn that three minutes of work in Rotterdam buys one

hamburger, whereas eight minutes of work are needed in Zhengzhou. They are informed that the Dutchman works 80 hours per week and spends 40 per cent of his income on housing, whereas the Chinese man works 50 hours and spends 20 per cent of the family income on housing. It seems to me that the designers are setting up various discursive interventions to highlight for visitors that 'quality of life' can take many forms, and can at times remain elusive, even in contexts that might be viewed as 'developed'.

8.4 Fractured visions of the future

Much like the other theme pavilions, the exhibition that was explicitly dedicated to showcasing visions of future cities did not fit into official discourses of hypermodernity. The Pavilion of the Future (*Chengshi weilai guan* 城市未来馆), which had been designed for the authorities by the Spanish design agency INGENIAqed, featured installations by foreign and Chinese artists, and it presented multifarious science-fictional imaginations of future urbanism. As with many other exhibits, some of the pavilion's discourses remained grounded in the familiar stereotypes and problematic assumptions about 'East' and 'West' that are so common at world fairs; Callahan (2012: 255-256) has rightly criticised one installation at the Pavilion of the Future for telling a highly gendered and Orientalist narrative of American or European men and their Chinese wives. At the same time, many of the exhibits complicated such reductionist narratives by constructing provocative utopian discourses. The pavilion designers flagged their utopian ambitions early on, in a hall called 'Dreams and Practices' (*mengxiang yu shijian* 梦想与实践) that paid tribute to important utopian writers such as Thomas Moore, Charles Fourier, and the Chinese philosopher Guanzi (管子). They also welcomed visitors with video installations playing clips from iconic science-fiction films in the section called 'Dreams of Yesterday' (*zuori zhi meng* 昨日之梦), for instance showing scenes from the films *Ghost in the Shell*, *Moebius Strip*, *Immortal*, *The Island*, and *Metropolis*.

The pavilion also featured various avant-garde art pieces that resisted simple modernist interpretations. It showcased nine sculptures, each speaking to a core concept that the designers associated with urban modernity: a peaceful life (*anju* 安居), perfection (*wanmei* 完美), networks (*wangluo* 网络), city planning (*chengshi guihua* 城市规划), basic necessities

(jiben xuqiu 基本需求), nature (*ziran* 自然), sustainable development (*kechixu fazhan* 可持续发展), opportunities (*jihui* 机会), and harmony (*hexie* 和谐). The artworks were frequently ambiguous, taking no clear position on the issues they represented, but instead prompting visitors to derive their own meanings. For instance, the idea of 'networks' was translated into a set of interlinking tubes, the concept of 'city planning' was represented by a huge anthill, and the sculpture for 'nature' was a gigantic Taihu stone made out of stainless steel. In other cases, the sculptures were more explicitly subversive, for instance when 'basic necessities' were represented by an over-sized toilet, or when 'sustainable development' became a scale that had to balance a skyscraper against a tree, suggesting to visitors that one might come at the cost of the other. The sculpture for 'harmony' provides another powerful example of how different actors repurpose official watch words: the artwork consisted of colourful silk strings that formed a dazzling display of constantly shifting colour and light. The artwork avoided any sense of hierarchy or closure, which arguably created a very different sense of harmony from what popular Confucian interpretations had made of the term at the time.

These at times bizarre interpretations of urban concepts were followed by what was probably the most scathingly critical artwork in the pavilion: the 'Fantasy City' installation (*Huanying chengshi* 幻影城市). It consisted of a block of junk that had been suspended from the ceiling, and that was lit in such a way that the discarded refrigerators, televisions, stereos, and car parts cast a shadow on the wall that resembled the skyline of a hypermodern city (Figure 8.4). Reminiscent of Plato's cave allegory, in which inhabitants of a cave do not have access to reality but only to the shadows it casts, the artwork confronted visitors with the illusion of a utopian cityscape, only to reveal to them what that vision is actually made of: a pile of garbage. The guidebook presents a similar interpretation in its Chinese description (Xu 2010: 110, my translation):

> On the one hand it is city rubbish, on the other hand it is a fashionable city, but which one is truly real? This work, titled 'Fantasy City', seems to warn people: as we pursue urban development, and as science and production achieve ever greater successes, we are also destroying our own living space.
>
> 一边是城市垃圾，一边却是摩登城市，哪个才是真实的存在，这个名为幻影城市的作品，仿佛在提醒人们：在追求城

市发展过程中，在技术和生产取得巨大成就的同时，我们也在破坏着自身的生存空间。

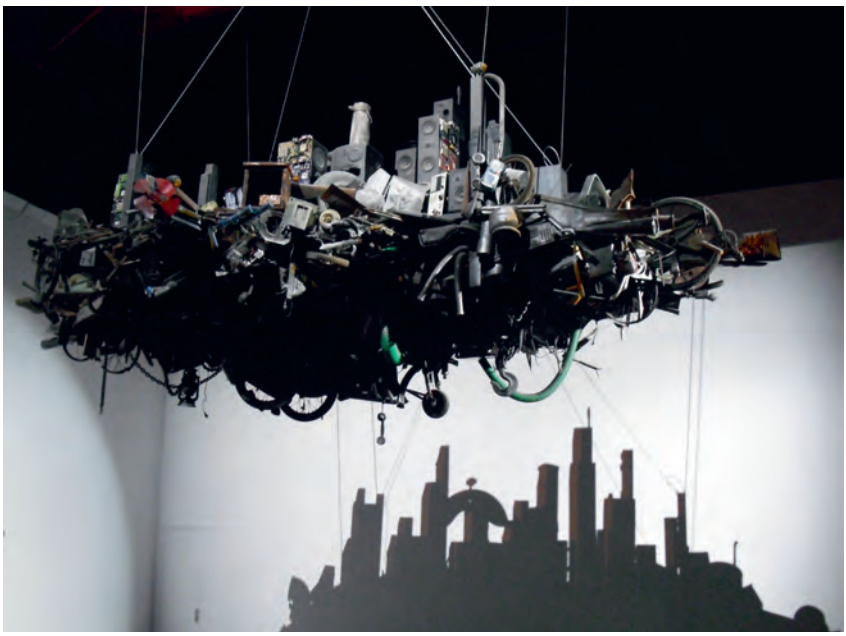

Figure 8.4: 'Fantasy City' Artwork. Image © F. Schneider 2010.

After this vision of a fractured modernity, visitors were guided through a hall that contained dioramas of successful urban-planning examples (showcasing Ningbo, Freiburg, Dar Es Salam, and Canberra), as well as the video of the future wedding that Callahan has commented on. Finally, the tour reaches its feature installation: a utopian vision of five different kinds of cities, designed by the Chinese animation artist Bu Hua (卜桦), and showcased in a hall titled 'Harmony Plaza' (*Hexie guangchang* 和谐广场). The cities were each presented through short FLASH animation films that were projected onto a large screen.

The choice of artist for this centrepiece of the pavilion is already telling: in 2008, Bu Hua had created an animated film called *Savage Growth* (*Yeman congsheng* 野蛮丛生) that provided a psychedelic critique of Shanghai's urban development. In the short film, Bu Hua's alter ego, a little girl dressed in the uniform of a Communist Youth League young pioneer, tries to protect the creatures of her fantasy world against sinister

war planes. As she searches for the origin of this blight, she discovers two hollow statues that are battling each other in a match of who can mass-produce the largest number of modern artefacts like fighter jets. As she observes the two combatants, they each start churning out iconic buildings from Shanghai's Pudong skyline, until they ultimately destroy each other, leaving behind a smoking urban landscape.

For the pavilion videos at the expo, Bu Hua also deploys her alter ego, this time accompanied by a group of children who travel through five different utopian cities: Eco City (*shengtai zhi cheng* 生态之城), Energy City (*nengyuan zhi cheng* 能源之城), Water City (*shui zhi cheng* 水之城), Space City (*taikong zhi cheng* 太空之城), and Intelligence City (*zhihui zhi cheng* 智慧之城). These cities consist of minimalist, open spaces that are sparsely populated but in which the inhabitants live in close connection with each other and nature. The final instalment, Intelligence City, is particularly critical of industrialist modernity: in the film, the children and their animal friends are confronted with acts of environmental destruction, such as deforestation and industrial waste (Figure 8.5). In one case, a tank ploughs across a field, crushing plants with its tracks. Only Bu's alter ego is able to turn back time with her magic flute and bring the science-fictional cities from the other videos into synchronicity, thus saving the planet. This is a very different depiction of the future from the one that Chinese officials were drawing up at the time.

What are we then to make of the expo's official Pavilion of the Future? I believe the exhibition is best understood as a utopian space, 'an imaginary enclave within real social space' (Jameson 2005: 15) in which audiences entertain possibilities, no matter how radical (see also Geuss 2010: 131). It is a space that encourages visitors to blend all manner of inputs into fantastic speculations about the future, providing an experience of creative thinking and potentially critical reflection.

It is important to recall that the mechanisms of conceptual blending do not force specific understandings on actors by virtue of providing specific input spaces. Experiencing the installations at the Pavilion of the Future, or the expo more generally, is not the kind of simulation Baudrillard (1983) envisaged. Mediated experiences such as visiting the multi-media exhibitions at the expo theme park do not abolish reality. They encourage analogies, prompting our minds to take one input space, such as our conception of the international world order, of harmonious co-existence, or of modern cities, and then blend the information from that space with a second input space, for instance our conception of

Figure 8.5: Overcoming Industrial Modernity with Bu Hua's Science-Fictional FLASH Animations. Figure adapted from screenshots.

a theme park, of futuristic space travel, or of a pile of rubbish. What emerges is a complex structure of meanings that is more than the sum of its parts and that has its uses as actors experiment with the insights that these mental exercises provide. However, this blended space still retains its link to the inputs: subjects are capable of distinguishing between the blend, for instance the meanings they attribute to their experiences at the Shanghai Expo, and its inputs, for instance the actual international order and theme parks like Disneyland. What is more, visitors are able to assess the ontological value of each of these units and reflect on their meanings.

This is why a theme park like the Shanghai Expo does not function as a simulacrum. The extravaganza does not force visitors to mistake ideologies outside the expo as unequivocally real because their 'reality principle' has become confused through exposure to an explicitly artificial spectacle such as a world fair. Instead, the utopian spaces of the Shanghai Expo allow those who interact in them to entertain a fantasy and to play out various creative impulses, while simultaneously being firmly rooted in the real world. In this sense, and despite the constraints that the Shanghai Expo Bureau had set in the interest of the Chinese state, the networked spectacle nevertheless enabled the designers of themed

pavilions like the Pavilion of the Future to create highly imaginative science-fiction visions of the future, just as it allowed visitors to enter these visions and creatively explore their possibilities.

8.5 How one state media conglomerate revisited nationalist discourse

The discussion so far has illustrated that while China's networked spectacles offered propaganda specialists the opportunity to carefully define their vision of global modernity and China's role in it, they also offered other actors the chance to reprogramme official discourse in line with their own values. The way that the official theme pavilions went about telling their subversive stories of human connection and environmental consciousness was a case in point. Also, as Callahan has shown (2012), various intellectuals and artists used the occasion of the expo to get involved and create their own political statements, often in opposition to those which the authorities had created. However, such activities were not limited to multicultural collaborations or artistic interventions during transnational events like the expo, which arguably facilitated multifarious interactions and fragmented discourses by virtue of the open-ended cultural governance framework that the authorities used to manage the affair. Attempts to reprogramme the discourses of China's networked spectacles also extended to non-official actors during events that had a more domestic focus, and this was visible during the PRC's 60th anniversary.

In chapters 5 and 6, I showed how official actors used the anniversary creatively to revamp CCP ideology, but I side-stepped the question of how other domestic actors participated in these endeavours. An intriguing case of how such actors reappropriated official frameworks of meaning for their own purposes was the example of state news conglomerate Southern Media Group and its front-page reporting on the day of the anniversary. As mentioned earlier, Chinese news generally adopted the recurring tropes of nationalist discourse to appeal to readers and sell their narratives about the nation's 'birthday', but not all publications simply toed the party line. Many drew from the nationalist discourse only to tell divergent stories, for instance problematising the environmental and social costs of China's networked spectacles.

To appreciate these activities fully, it is important to recall that China's news media industry is overwhelmingly in state hands, and even private outlets have to work within the complicated state-administered system of licences and regulations, ensuring that no media organisation is entirely able to side-step the influences of the CCP's propaganda system. That said, the Chinese news market is extremely diverse (see Stockmann 2012 and Zhao 1998, 2008), and journalistic agendas and methods vary widely, even among the state-owned conglomerates. The result is a news environment that features official propaganda next to tabloid-like current affairs news and hard-hitting investigative journalism that has to work within the constraints of China's political norms (see Repnikova 2017 for an analysis).

The Southern Media Group (南方报业传媒集团) is a famous example of a state-owned news organisation that produces fairly liberal content, including articles that can at times be highly critical of the authorities. The group is built around the official party paper Southern Daily (*Nanfang Ribao* 南方日报), but like most state-owned media conglomerates (see Zhao 2000) it draws most of its commercial revenues from its tabloid and weekend editions: the popular Southern Metro Daily (*Nanfang Dushibao* 南方都市报) and the intellectually-minded Southern Weekly (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末). Both are excellent examples of the strategies that domestic Chinese actors use to intervene in political discourses without triggering the state and party censorship system.

Take the front page of the Southern Weekly on 1 October 2009. That day it featured only a single article (Guo 2009), titled 'Let every Chinese person also stand up!' (让每个中国人也站起来!) – a reference to the phrase 'The Chinese people have stood up' (中国人站起来了), famously but possibly erroneously attributed to Mao Zedong (SCMP 2009). The article is oddly ambiguous. It uses a strongly nationalist and at times militarist rhetoric to extol the great progress that the PRC has made since its foundation, especially in terms of securing the people's livelihood. However, halfway through, the text suddenly shifts gear, departing from the familiar script about the state and party's ability to ensure common developmental rights. Instead, the text starts promoting liberal civic rights. The article can be read as a strong critique of Maoist politics, and of the official nationalist discourse about the nation and its human rights record, and yet this interpretation is not explicit. It has to be inferred by reading between the lines, and by situating the seemingly hyperbolic

endorsements of the article within the context of the paper's well-known liberal editorial stance.

The article is accompanied by an image that is worth closer analysis (see Figure 8.6). It shows the outline of the PRC's territory, including Taiwan, but formed by a mountain range or the mouth of a grotto. The red sky features the sun next to a cloud formation in the shape of the numeral 6, together forming the number 60. Along the 'eastern' edge of the map, a person is abseiling along the cave wall. The image is accompanied by the tag line 'it is possible to look back, but not to turn round' (可以回顾, 不能回头).

Figure 8.6: Southern Weekly Imagery of the Nation on 1 October 2009. Image adapted from ccmccm1988 (2009).

Several meanings are extractable from this set-up. If readers opt to use the patriotic official discourse about the anniversary as the frame for understanding this analogy, then the analogy between the cave and the country becomes a positive story of national renewal: the climber is emerging from a dark cave into the light of a rising sun to then potentially stride into an optimistic future. However, if the reader pays attention to a number of subtle cues in the image, then a different frame can be applied to combine the two input spaces: that of satire.

In such a reading, the climber is rappelling into the cave as the sun sets above, descending into the darkness of China's revolutionary past. Cues that prompt such an interpretation include the deteriorating or decaying font that the graphic designers used to render the caption, the title of the article below, and possibly also the way the rope is fastened to the wall and to the climber (indicating a downward movement, rather than a climb). Once readers make this connection, additional features on the page come into focus as part of an overarching criticism of contemporary Chinese politics. For instance, the number '6' divides the country into an eastern and a western part, evoking the substantial developmental differences between these regions; the climber is attached to the prosperous eastern coast, which is also where the sun is located. Another subtle feature is the way in which the table of contents is rendered on the page, using as bullet points the graphic design of a voting ballot, implying a connection with democratic electoral politics.

The Southern Media Group's other two core publications also designed their front pages in ambiguous terms (see Figure 8.7). The party paper Southern Daily features as its central image a picture of a crowded shopping street, decked out in Chinese flags. Again, a simple patriotic interpretation is available, but the fact that patriotism is here juxtaposed with neon signs and advertising also places Chinese revolutionary imagery in an awkward relationship with the symbols of capitalist consumption. The Metro Daily similarly presents readers with resources for multifarious meaning-making activities. It featured a series of three images showing the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing at different moments in time (1949, 1970, and 2009), creating a seemingly linear progression through time that at first sight reproduces the official discourse on modern progress. The headline reads 'Tiananmen, Witness the Republic Growing Up' (天安门，见证共和国成长). Again, a conventional, mainstream interpretation might associate these images with the same modernist narrative of progress that the authorities were promoting during the

anniversary. However, several elements on the page signal a more critical understanding of the passage of time.

Figure 8.7: Visual Discourses on the Front Pages of the Southern Daily (Top) and Southern Metro Daily (Bottom) on 1 October 2009. Images adapted from Jiang (2009).

Note how the images of Tiananmen are not, in fact, arranged linearly, but rather in a circular pattern, opening up the idea that history might repeat itself rather than move 'forward'. The choice of dates is also telling: the designers could have picked numbers at exactly 30-year intervals, but instead the second image marks the height of the Cultural Revolution, which is still a taboo topic in Chinese public discourse. Finally, while the

contemporary image of Tiananmen is cast in splendid gold light, it is noteworthy that it is a night-time image that features a dark, even gloomy sky; the image is also completely devoid of people, making the set-up a highly impersonal affair. Again, no single interpretation inevitably emerges from these elements, but the design gives readers the space to blend the possible meanings in various ways, opening up potentially critical interpretations of Chinese history and politics.

These examples show how actors critical of official narratives redeploy the watch words and watch signs that the authorities use in their own propaganda to subtly intervene in nationalist discourses, but without stepping outside the parameters of what China's censors find acceptable. In fact, these actors cleverly play with the parameters of mainstream discourse to maximise the chance that their intervention will enter the PRC's networks of political meaning-making. Consider the sequence of decisions that unfolds as such an ambiguous news item reaches the respective censorship office (see Figure 8.8).

The censors will either recognise the satirical message or they will miss it. If they miss it, the article is published. If the censors recognise the critical thrust of the discursive statement, there is always the possibility that they may secretly concur with the message, even if it is politically unacceptable. The ambiguity of the media product allows such censors to turn a blind eye and let the piece be published, safe in the knowledge that they can later deny having understood the subversive message. In that situation, the journalists have cleverly given potential allies in the censorship system an excuse to endorse discourses they would otherwise need to block from entering China's mass media networks. Finally, if the censors recognise the potential criticism and disapprove, they have to make a difficult choice: block the news item and possibly create a scandal (in which case their actions may actually end up drawing more attention to the offensive discourse) or let the item pass. Again, the ambiguity gives the censors an excuse to feign ignorance and let the critics prevail.

Granted, the example of Southern Media Group reporting on the day of the 2009 national anniversary provides only a snapshot of programming practices in Chinese media networks. It should also be pointed out that the discursive horizon of this particular media organisation has shrunk significantly since the organisation was entangled in a censorship scandal in 2014, severely harming its reputation and at the same time allowing conservative Chinese censors to expand their efforts to bring controversial reporting in line with the CCP's official agenda.

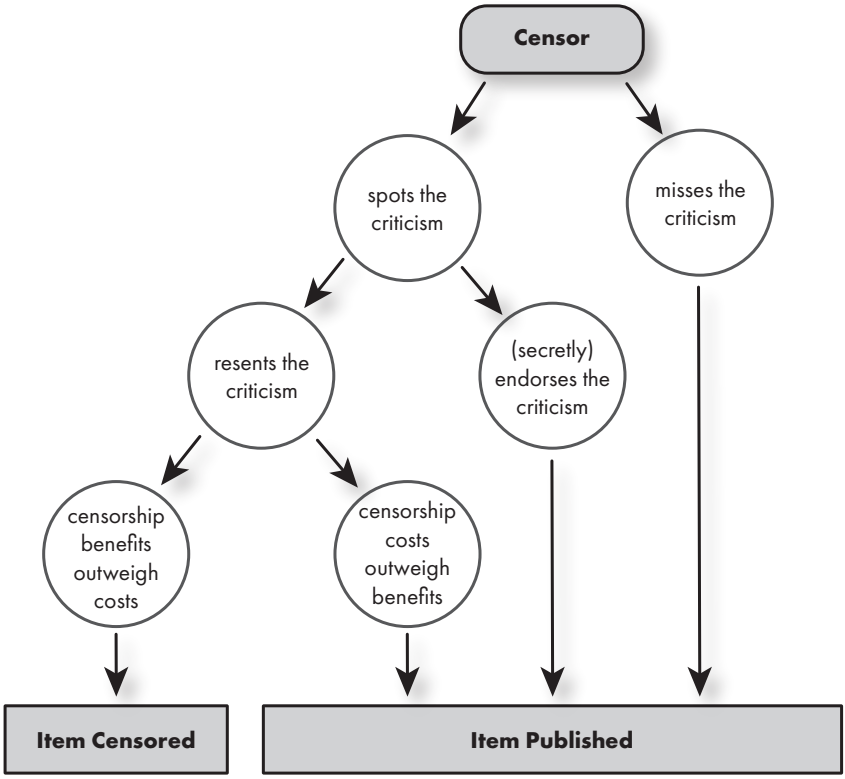

Figure 8.8: The Censor's Dilemma: Judging Ambiguous Political Discourse in Chinese Media. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

Nevertheless, the examples I have discussed here are meaningful, since they demonstrate how Chinese discourses can be reprogrammed from within domestic media networks during a crucial networked spectacle. Even a carefully planned and calibrated national anniversary provides opportunities for actors to fracture, fragment, and generally complicate political discourses.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined different ways in which the discourses of China's networked spectacles became fractured. Despite the efforts of official actors to pull together various discursive strands into a convincing narrative of the modern Chinese nation, the cultural governance

approach that the authorities adopted also relied on actors that did not necessarily share the same agenda as the party or state. The Shanghai Expo was a prime example of how both international and domestic actors went about creating new meanings that departed markedly from the official discourses visible in China's national pavilion. This sometimes meant challenging the official narratives intentionally and explicitly. At other times, it meant subtly shifting the discourse or programming networks with values that promised to unhinge the rationale behind official meaning-making processes, for instance when mechanistic understandings of modernity were reinterpreted through the use of organic metaphors that suggested entirely different conclusions about what social organisation and 'harmonious' living might entail.

Frequently, these subtle reprogramming activities took place within the parameters of official semiotic systems. In the run-up to spectacles like the PRC's 60th anniversary, Chinese propaganda officials and media workers had created symbols for the occasion, developed new frames of understanding, and recruited existing frames into their meaning-making processes. These resources then became available to a multitude of actors as they generated their own discursive interventions. The clever manipulations of China's 'galaxy of meanings' among Chinese newspaper journalists is a case in point, but such activities also extended to interactions in television, across social media, in art galleries, urban planning exhibits, and many other contexts. The multifarious affairs that emerged during these interactions thus defy understandings of semiotic activities as a simulacrum, that is an inescapable machine of circular signification that denies any chance for actors to exert agency over meanings.

What is more, the collaborative and subtle ways in which actors programme meanings during networked spectacles also complicate theoretical arguments about discourses as struggles between those who dominate and those who resist. Such struggles surely take place, especially where actors directly confront certain discourses with antagonistic counter-discourses, but more often than not the process of making political meanings is subtler. Actors collaboratively move discourses along and steer them in different directions, but without any one actor having the power to dictate where the meanings will go.

9 Conclusion: The Legacy of China's Mass Media Events

It is 30 July 2017, and the People's Liberation Army is celebrating its 90th anniversary. In Inner Mongolia, top-of-the-line military equipment and crack troops are lined up along a dusty tarmac strip at the Zhurihe Training Base. An all-terrain vehicle with licence-plate number VA-02017 is driving past the neat line of uniformed soldiers. In the back stands Xi Jinping, dressed in camouflage fatigues. 'Comrades, you have worked hard!', he calls from the back of the vehicle. 'We serve the people!', yell the soldiers in unison (NCTV 2017). Barely a month earlier, Xi had conducted a similar ceremony in Hong Kong, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the territory's return to the PRC in 1997 (see CNTV 2017). Dressed in a classic black Sun-Yatsen suit, he was driving past rows of soldiers, armoured vehicles, and attack helicopters, exchanging the well-known phrases with his troops. The ritual continued for about 20 minutes, until Xi reached the end of the line-up. Then China Central Television cut to a reel of images from around Hong Kong: a PLA soldier hugging a child, a PLA soldier helping an old lady across the street, people cheerfully applauding during a PRC flag-raising ceremony.

Two years earlier, Xi was also driven past PLA formations, greeting the troops and assuring them that they had worked hard, but on that occasion his Red Flag limousine had headed east on Beijing's Chang'an Avenue, the same route that his predecessors had travelled during past ritualistic troop inspections. That year, in 2015, the occasion had been the 70th anniversary of the end of the War of Resistance against Japan, now a national holiday on 3 September. As Xi was circling back towards the Gate of Heavenly Peace, his ride past the tanks and troops was accompanied by the well-rehearsed CCTV commentary familiar to viewers from other official events, with the narrator explaining how the technologically advanced armed forces illustrated the revival of the Chinese nation and its prowess as a Great Power, which would use its weapons to secure domestic borders and safeguard world peace (CCTV 2015).

The parallels between these festivities (Figure 9.1) and the PRC anniversary eight years earlier are striking. Indeed, despite the frequent arguments that Xi Jinping's administration has broken with many of the principles that seem to have informed his predecessors' rule, the mass communication strategy under Xi continues many of the earlier practices. This was also visible in 2016, when the G20 summit in Hangzhou was accompanied by a grand opening ceremony that took many of its cues from past occasions like the Beijing Olympics. The event was again designed by Zhang Yimou, who has become China's resident spectacle director. At the time of writing, it remained to be seen whether he would also direct the opening or closing ceremonies of China's next prestigious networked spectacle: the Beijing Winter Olympics that are scheduled for February 2022.

Figure 9.1: Xi's Parades. Images assembled from screenshots of the CCTV, Xinhua, and CNTV broadcasts.

Throughout this book, I have argued that mass events are an important component of what Gluck (2011) has called 'modernity's grammar'. They allow actors to showcase their modern credentials, they have profound transformative impacts on the host cities, and they promise to serve as vehicles through which elites communicate their ideologies to the much-evoked 'masses'. At the same time, I have suggested that we update our understanding of such events, better to capture how they serve as part of networked politics. Throughout this book, I have made the case

that 'networked spectacles' are all about interactions and connections, and that this is relevant at three levels: firstly, such spectacles are sites where participants engage in chains of ritual activities (Collins 2004) through which they 'assemble the social', as Latour (2005) would put it; at this micro-sociological level, the networked spectacle unfolds all of its complexity and reveals the many idiosyncratic ways in which actors attribute meanings to each other and the objects they encounter, and it reveals how group sentiments and collective background knowledge can emerge from these networked activities. Secondly, networked spectacles create 'local' sub-networks that resourceful actors connect to wider, often transnational communication and interaction networks. At this macro-sociological level, diverse actors may switch themselves and each other into webs of meaning-making to programme discourses and push certain rationales onto their recursive interactions. Finally, like any complex communication process, meaning-making at spectacles like Olympic Games, world fairs, or national commemorations invites actors to blend networks of signs into new discourses (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). The meanings that emerge at this psychological level are not easily managed, even though official actors continuously try to guide them in directions consistent with their political agendas.

As a result of these networked interactions, authoritative discourses often emerge as seemingly 'hegemonic' assemblages of ideological statements, containing forceful claims about the nature of the modern world and the status of different people in it. The spectacular, multi-mediated communication practices at networked spectacles can make the subsequent narratives seem inescapable; they may even appear to drown out reality with barrages of free-floating signs, as Baudrillard (1983) would probably have suggested. As these signs proliferate, often with nearly global reach, actors that were not originally involved in the event's 'local' context on the ground become linked into the networks as second-order and third-order audiences (Rauer 2006), and they spread the event discourses even further through their own interactions. However, contrary to what Baudrillard would suggest, these multifarious interaction chains allow actors to reappropriate the semiotic resources that authoritative agents like states and corporations have designed for the event. At times, audience members and participants indeed adopt and endorse the meanings that organisers programmed into their events. At other times they reject those meanings in favour of new associations. They juxtapose available input spaces of meanings to blend them

creatively into innovative ideas, and they feed those ideas back into the networks, effectively reframing and reprogramming the discourses in distinctive and sometimes wildly eccentric ways.

In China, networked spectacles have become part of the ruling party's repertoire of modern mass communication technologies, and this has had both organisational and ideological implications. In this concluding chapter, I revisit several of the core findings of this book, and I relate them to more recent communication politics under Xi Jinping's administration, a government that has been criticised as reviving the most authoritarian practices of China's past and forcing discursive interactions into carefully controlled spaces. While the discursive horizon in China has arguably shrunk under Xi's administration, I want to suggest a different interpretation, and a different assessment, of these processes. My argument is that Xi's administration is continuing many of the practices that its predecessors established, often in technologically refined ways, but that this then also leads to the familiar multifarious interactions that generally characterise the cultural governance of networked spectacles and that do not readily collapse into a singular discourse.

9.1 The CCP's networked approach to power

At the start of the 21st century, China's networked spectacles served the authorities as important catalysts for national and urban development, and they became occasions for state agents to unleash the powerful transformative effects of this genre of modern politics. This included the infrastructure development projects that accompanied these spectacles in cities like Beijing and Shanghai, but also plans to develop tourism, commerce, foreign trade, and to some extent civic institutions in the form of volunteer work. In this way, China's networked spectacles affected millions of people and left a permanent mark on urban landscapes, for instance in the form of expansive metro networks, new airport terminals, and iconic sports complexes.

Aside from these material effects, the events also offered the administration opportunities to experiment with organisational and communication techniques, and to hone their abilities to conduct ideological work. Continuing the CCP's tradition to view itself as the guarantor not just of material progress but of spiritual wellbeing, the party and state refined their efforts to guide public opinion, and they brought

the party's propaganda system into the new century. This propaganda system has indeed come a long way since the mass-mobilisation and thought-work strategies of pre-reform China (see also Brady 2008). The system still retains some of its 'top-down' structure; it is headed by leadership groups at the centre and reaches down hierarchically into all levels of administration and across all parts of the country. However, the CCP's propaganda experts have long discovered that their didactic messages only work if they are appealing and entertaining. As the national symbolism of the Beijing Olympic Games shows, propaganda in today's China does not so much attempt to control all facets of meaning rigidly. Instead, it tries to comprehensively frame communication processes in a way that allows certain interpretations rather than others. This also means that the state has loosened its monopoly over cultural expressions. It has allowed a network of social, political, and economic actors to contribute to the rich tapestry of meanings in contemporary China.

This process of generating meaning is no longer an act of straightforward governing, but is best described as 'cultural governance', a term I have borrowed from Callahan (2006) and Shapiro (2004), and which I have here interpreted as a collaborative effort between state and non-state agents to regulate the discursive contexts in which political interactions take place. These agents all feed their own understandings of society and the meaning of being Chinese into the networks of contemporary China. China's networked spectacles are a prime example of how these cultural governance activities work. They illustrate how actors insert themselves into existing international and domestic event circuits, switch themselves and others into organisational practices, and at times create new networks to manage event-related activities. During the Hu-Wen era, the consequence was that various forces continuously negotiated the meaning of Chinese modernity and of the nation's identity. Throughout all of this, state agencies and party institutions remained in a strong position to shape these negotiations, prompting a large number of diverse non-state actors to assemble cultural artefacts and still generate surprisingly consistent discourses.

The organisers of the spectacles assured these outcomes through their networking activities and through their efforts to create a shared galaxy of signs that contributors were then invited to use in their own communication practices. Many indeed did. In this sense, the CCP and the Chinese state updated what it meant to be 'powerful' in a rapidly changing network society (Castells 2009) such as China. The authorities

retained their substantial switching power, that is, the ability to include certain actors in the process of meaning-generation, while excluding others. They further exerted significant programming power: through various media and in various modes, the authorities injected selected symbols into communication processes and ensured that these symbols were arranged in ways that relayed unambiguous and highly emotional messages. Finally, the authorities tied the various messages together by supplying a specific set of codes that situated them within the broader discourse; a discourse for which audiences had been primed through long-term exposure, and that authoritative actors 'flagged' as the relevant frames for the ritual interactions that unfolded during China's networked spectacles.

As Collins (2003: 61) has pointed out, 'some groups have more resources for carrying out their rituals than others', and 'these ritually privileged groups have more impressive symbols and fill their members with more emotional energy'. China's ruling elites were precisely such a 'ritually privileged group', able to position themselves at crucial nodes in communication networks and manipulate both material and ideological incentives to align the interests of many different actors with their own. This level of power was particularly evident in cases where the authorities could rely on diverse actors to share similar background knowledge and the seemingly 'banal' symbolism that encapsulated that knowledge during ritual interactions. In such instances, actors frequently reproduced the discourses that the authorities had 'flagged', for instance prompting participants in China's event networks to unapologetically sell the nation as a core component of personal identity-maintenance or promote neoliberal capitalist production and consumption patterns as common-sense features of modernity.

The fact that these ideological positions and the assumptions that inform them are not unique to the Chinese context but are flagged in other societies as part of the kind of global 'Euromodernity' that Dirlik (2011a) has discussed, only made the overall narrative more compelling, both domestically and abroad. In cases where actors were able to fuse the symbols of recognisably local and global modernities, they generated the kind of flow that allowed these blends of meaning to travel transnationally, as was arguably the case during international events like the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo.

9.2 China's cultural governance: learning to live with fragmented discourses

Nevertheless, the fact that the state retained a strong position within networked spectacles should not be mistaken for an indication that the discourses that emerged from these networks necessarily collapsed into unified, stable grand narratives. In fact, even among official actors the meanings of core concepts like harmonious society or scientific development were matters of contention. Some official actors tried to programme the discourses that surrounded such concepts with conservative, nativist meanings; others tried to construct cosmopolitan rationales that implied very different conclusions.

The cultural governance paradigm that the authorities deployed further ensured that the discourses were open to contributions from non-state agents, such as celebrities like Jackie Chan, NGOs like Amnesty International or Reporters Without Borders, domestic enterprises like news organisations or volunteer groups, and large multinational corporations like McDonald's, Nike, Coca Cola, and many more. At times, the messages that these various agents relayed to their publics indeed tied into the official discourse, for instance when Jackie Chan blended the concepts of 'home' and 'nation' to call on all Chinese to love their country, or when Coca Cola sold the idea of a benevolent China in its commercials. However, at other times, the complicated arrangement of symbols that these actors produced sat awkwardly next to the discursive activities of the authorities. Jackie Chan, for instance, has famously offended citizens in China's capital with his nationalist antics, and Coca Cola's Olympic commercials, with their stereotyped use of Chinese national symbols, arguably shifted meanings into new directions.

In a similar vein, participants at the Shanghai Expo were frequently able to stage their own interventions into the spectacle's discourses. The organisational decisions and implementations that led to this outcome were frequently messy, and they contained no small amount of ideological work that did not neatly align with a single, authoritative position designed by propaganda cadres at the central level. The architects of China's national pavilion mined the pre-modern past for allegories that would describe their design practices in terms of the official 'harmonious society' discourse, and in the process they developed a cosmopolitan narrative about diversity and pluralism that moved in intriguingly postmodern directions. In the officially commissioned theme pavilions, foreign

and Chinese collaborators came up with visions of the hypermodern present and the utopian future that departed noticeably from the kind of developmental paradigm that the central authorities seemed to prefer at the time. Simultaneously, the various foreign national pavilions entered the discussion of what China's place in the world might be, by picking up on popular Chinese discourses but infusing them with their own values, for instance promoting American liberalism or radical European enlightenment ideas through cleverly arranged exhibition designs.

That these activities took place in this fashion, within a media ecology that is carefully monitored and guided by the Chinese authorities, shows the degree to which the Hu-Wen administration's cultural governance approach 'leaned' into the ambiguities of networked discourses. Indeed, several of the more contentious exhibition organisers I spoke to were surprised that their intentional interventions into political discourses did not cause any backlash from the authorities. It is hard to say precisely why this was the case. It is possible that censors simply did not recognise the often subtle moments of critique; perhaps they were not worried about visitors being influenced by such messages. It is also plausible that the censors approved of what was on display, for instance as evidence that a confident China could stomach multiple ideological views during its prestigious spectacles. Whatever the rationale, the outcome was overall a pluralistic affair that inspired hope among many of the participants I spoke to that the discourses of 'harmony' might indeed become a justification for a generally more cosmopolitan approach to politics in China.

9.3 From Hu to Xi: the media management of a strongman?

After the close of the Hu-Wen era, this optimism among foreign observers seemed to have initially carried over into the first term of the new president and general secretary Xi Jinping. However, views of Chinese politics quickly regressed to the kind of China Threat perceptions that the previous administration had tried so hard to counter with its soft-power strategies. As Xi's administration tightened control over domestic discourses and rolled out a harsh anti-corruption campaign, foreign observers were quick to cast China's leader as a new Mao. In a Foreign Affairs article, Elizabeth Economy (2014) pointed out how 'Xi has moved quickly to amass political power and become, within the Chinese

leadership, not first among equals, but simply first'. Her description of how 'Xi has made a power grab – for himself, for the Communist Party, and for China' was accompanied by an image of a dragon that greedily smothers the whole world in its clutches. Popular news media reports were equally bleak. In an opinion-editorial in the Financial Times, Jamil Anderlini (2017) described domestic crackdowns under Xi's leadership and concluded that China now looked more like a dictatorship 'than at any time in several decades'. The Guardian's Tom Phillips (2018) provided a similar assessment: 'China's 64-year-old leader has waged war on dissenters, both inside and outside the Communist party, in a drive to establish total control, crushing civil society and jailing rivals to ensure his coronation as China's most powerful leader since Mao at last year's party congress'. When the PRC's National People's Congress extended the term of Xi Jinping's presidency in 2018, Pei Minxin contextualised the move by arguing that the PRC had never been 'your garden-variety dictatorship, but a successor to a totalitarian regime' and that it was today 'both far more ruthless and determined to protect its power than an average dictatorship' (quoted in Frum 2018).

I do not mean to dismiss concerns about the CCP's revitalised authoritarianism under Xi Jinping's leadership. Many of the repressive politics that have come out of this administration have been truly frightening, for instance the detention and 're-education' of Muslims in the western region of Xinjiang. It is understandable that such illiberal activities would prompt many observers to return to the vocabulary of totalitarian dictatorship, and yet there are a number of reasons why casting Xi as a dictator or comparing him to Mao Zedong is ultimately misleading. As Kerry Brown (2017) points out, rightly I believe, it is unhelpful to reduce the complex interactions that make up China's ruling party to a single cadre like Xi, even if that specific man is increasingly holding all the core positions of power in the country. Xi Jinping is also a product of the party and state system, and he was placed in a position of supreme visibility because China's leaders were deeply disconcerted by what they viewed as a crisis of legitimacy at the close of the Hu-Wen period. Brown writes (ibid.: 25):

> Looking solely at Xi as a political figure, wondering at his power and its reach, means being seduced by the symptoms of a system, rather than truly understanding their underlying causes. Xi has only ever spoken in a context where he is within, working for, a party of

> the Party, its servant if you like. And without an understanding of that institutional context, his powers make no sense.

Under Xi, the party has indeed rolled back many of the liberal policies of its predecessors. This is not to say, however, that they have abandoned the cultural governance approach I have described here. If anything, this approach has become more refined. As Pieke has aptly put it (2016: 33),

> ...the Communist Party does not govern. Instead, it leads, controls and inspires all institutions of government and governance. The Party's continued control over the people who lead and administer the institutions of governance continues to be the most vital feature of China's uniquely socialist mode of governance.

In network terms, the PRC's leaders have recentralised many of the country's increasingly distributed networks. While some sub-networks have taken on distinctly hierarchical shapes, for instance in the state-run media, where the Party has forcefully reestablished its ideological monopoly, in other cases such networks have continued to involve diverse actors and agendas, for instance when the leadership switches large corporate actors into its policy-making and implementation processes. Examples are recent state experiments with sophisticated digital monitoring and analytical tools, for which the authorities are recruiting companies like Alibaba and Baidu, and these actors in turn carry their commercial interest into the political interactions.

My colleague Rogier Creemers (2016) has called this a 'strategic nexus' between capitalist enterprises and ruling elites. I would even argue that the CCP has turned itself into a platform: a network that sits between disparate sectors of society and that connects these multi-sided segments through its switching activities (see Steinberg 2017 for a discussion of this platform idea). In that sense, the CCP continues its earlier attempts to create a 'consultative' version of its Leninist politics (Teets 2013), but without abandoning its ability to make use of the 'centralism' implied in Leninist 'democratic centralism' (see also Tsang 2009). As Brown (2017: 23-24) has noted, under Xi Jinping's rule the party is 'the network of networks', an 'epistemic community' that promises to tie together the disparate elements of a complex, hypermodern China.

9.4 Xi's networked spectacles and the future of CCP propaganda

When it comes to how the CCP has been managing China's network society, there have been far more continuities than ruptures with the immediate past. As Zhao Suisheng (2016) points out, 'Under Hu Jintao, the maintenance of political stability became the regime's top goal. Xi has only intensified this trend'. This logic applies not only to the organisational patterns I have discussed, but also to the political discourses that the leadership tries to mobilise for its cause. Specifically, the Xi administration has forcefully continued the Hu-Wen administration's attempts to put the CCP's appeal onto a broader footing by essentially aiming to transform the Party into a 'Volkspartei' that can legitimate itself to constituencies of diverse ideological persuasions, ranging from Maoism through Confucianism to neoliberalism.

The 'China Dream' campaign under Xi Jinping is an excellent example of this. In 2013, the administration published several series of propaganda posters and advertisements that promoted this China dream, and the discourses that these posters tapped into covered the full spectrum of available ideological traditions. Tropes from the Mao era were as much in evidence as semiotic components that harked back to the early modernist period of the 1920s and 1930s, but also to pre-modern ideas such as filial piety and other nominally Confucian virtues (see also my earlier discussion in Schneider 2013b). As Sun (2017) explains this juxtaposition of themes, 'the majority of the visual symbols used in the posters are transposed from the sign systems of Chinese traditional culture and the revolutionary discourse of the Communist Party of China', and with the proliferation of these various signs 'in public spaces, the visual propaganda of the Chinese Dream has turned it into a mundane movement of political culture', that is the banal background resources that I have discussed throughout this book.

Gow (2017) has similarly explored recent propaganda under Xi Jinping, focusing on the 'core socialist values' that the administration launched in 2012. These values have strongly informed the 'China Dream' discourse ever since. Gow describes how the proliferation of the core socialist values relies not just on the state, even though state institutions play an important role in disseminating these concepts. The twelve values are an invitation to civil society actors to join the meaning-making efforts in contemporary China. As Gow writes (2017: 111), 'the strategic

intertwining of Confucian values with those proscribed in the Chinese Dream discourse increases significantly the likelihood that CCP values will find traction with Chinese people and, over time, become constitutive of common sense in contemporary China'.

Indeed, as propaganda efforts continue under Xi, diverse actors are again joining the networks that make 'common sense' of these concepts. These efforts are often aspirational, framing what the core values of Chinese society *should* mean, rather than what Chinese society is *actually* like, but as such they have the potential to provide utopian outlets for the imagination, and possibly for future politics. Take the cases that I have represented in Figure 9.2. It shows an official propaganda poster in Beijing (top), which lists all twelve of the core socialist values, and two paintings near a junior high-school in Shanghai (bottom), which interpret these values in their own way. The paintings take their cue from the watch words of Xi-era discourse, but they creatively come up with their own versions of what those concepts might mean. On the bottom left, the artist or artists decided to interpret the term 'equality' in terms of gender equality, placing a spunky female character in celebratory pose as her side of a scale evens out with her male counterpart. On the bottom left, the painting contextualises the concept of 'liberty' by showing a woman who apparently went shopping during a sale. While arguably an accurate portrayal of what 'liberty' signifies for many in today's China, this neoliberal consumerist interpretation does not sit comfortably with the idea of 'socialist' values.

9.5 Conclusion

China's networked spectacles, during the Hu-Wen administration as much as during the current Xi administration, are far more than mere propaganda statements by a state that has arguably perfected its mass-communication strategy. They are occasions for diverse political and commercial actors to engage in networked politics, legitimate themselves and their agendas, and ultimately recalibrate the very meaning of modernity at the start of the 21st century. As I have argued above, studying these processes in the Chinese context is not just about China. It is also about politics in societies dominated by often transnational capitalist media ecologies. The PRC strategy for how to utilise the networks that constitute these ecologies is one solution to a wider challenge: how to

Figure 9.2: Making Sense of China's Core Socialist Values. Image © Schneider 2018.

govern vast, complex, technologically advanced societies. There are other solutions, each coming up against different problems and constraints. Personally, I remain sceptical whether it is fruitful to recalibrate complex social and communication networks into centralised, hierarchical forms, effectively building them round updated versions of established institutions like nation-states and corporate conglomerates. Be that as it may, if we hope to improve the way human societies work today, we need to explore how different solutions play out, what their potentials are, and where their limits lie.

One important lesson that China's networked spectacles can then teach us is that mass-mediated discourses are never dictated by any individual actor, regardless of how powerfully they are represented in a network of interactions. Discourses still need to be interpreted and reused by audiences. In modern China as much as elsewhere, audiences are active, well-informed, transnationally connected, and in the possession of advanced communication technologies. For some social groups, national symbols may develop a life of their own. Chauvinistic

online discussions or aggressive torch relay demonstrations show that there is no guarantee that citizens will internalise the intended official meanings of the harmonious Chinese nation. While China's networked spectacles during the Hu-Wen era can be understood as an attempt by the Chinese authorities to pragmatically reinvent the Chinese nation as modern, cultured, harmonious, and international, the continuing use of nationalism as a framework of meaning nevertheless remains outside anyone's control. As various actors rework that framework through their own chains of interactions, it ultimately creates a brand that is unmanageable.

Identity formation is a complex process that I shall not discuss in detail here. What is important is that identities are not based on one social role, or one set of values. Individuals draw from a broad range of cultural artefacts to make sense of who they are and how the world around them functions. As media analyst Henry Jenkins has argued, this process is highly creative and remains beyond the control of any social or political institution (2006: 39): individuals venture out into the fields of symbols that the cultural industries have tilled, but they then use the fruits that have grown there as they see fit; audiences are not mere consumers but much more 'poachers' of meanings. Jenkins shows how this process works within American fan culture, and his descriptions of fan reactions to the perceived abuse of 'their' symbols exhibits many parallels to the reaction of, for instance, Chinese nationalists when the symbols of their nation are not deployed in ways of which they approve (ibid.: 55):

> The ideology of fandom involves both a commitment to some degree of conformity to the original ... materials, as well as a perceived right to evaluate the legitimacy of any use of those materials, either by textual producers or by textual consumers.

The Chinese authorities have established their own grammar of modernity as a central frame for understanding China, pointing out to the citizenry that national symbols like the flag, the national anthem, the various national monuments, or the patriotic vocabulary of the state media are central to the nation's cultural and historical 'essence'. In doing so, China's leaders have managed to create a common language that all citizens can share to make sense of the world, but at the same time they have set in motion a process of individual identity formation that in the final instance escapes the control of the governing agents. Even

when the frame of reference is set, the actual users of national symbols communicate with each other and with non-state agents, reprogramming political discourses in the process. After this process has started, any perceived misuse of the framework of symbols, whether by foreign or domestic actors, becomes an attack on the individual's identity and elicits the kinds of strong emotional responses and political (re)actions that we witness from interconnected publics today. Indeed, the Xi era is no different from the preceding Hu-Wen period in this regard, as it is indeed no different from complex discursive activities elsewhere in the world. As Foucault (1978/1990: 101) has put it:

> … discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

My analysis of China's networked spectacles suggests that the discourses that emerged from these events were indeed as 'fragmented' and 'fragile' as Foucault suggested, and that this was the outcome of complicated interactions between a multitude of actors with often diverging interests. As the Xi administration continues many of the cultural governance practices that its predecessor established in China at the beginning of the 21st century, it will remain confronted with the hindrances and stumbling-blocks that ritual interactions perpetually produce, creating spaces for creative meaning-making despite any attempts to control discursive activities through strongman politics.

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Glossary

Actor: any creature or thing that changes its own state or that of another creature or thing.

Blended space: a mental space in which an actor consciously or subconsciously assembles elements of different inputs into new, emergent meanings through a process of conceptual blending.

Capitalism: an economic arrangement in which the means of production are owned privately and are worked by wage labourers, and in which goods and services are traded for profit in competitive markets, using a commonly accepted medium of exchange and following the logic of supply and demand.

Censorship: any authoritative act that intentionally influences the production, release, or circulation of information, based on a claim to protect the public interest.

Complexity: any system of interlinking components that exhibits non-trivial adaptive, emergent, and self-organising behaviours.

Conceptual blending: the complex mental process of creating new meanings out of different inputs by selectively recombining elements from the inputs in line with certain frames.

Context: the span of traceable interactions within a network.

Cultural governance: the process of indirectly regulating society by regulating culture, that is: any authoritative action that aims to manage the symbolic and discursive context within which a political issue is situated.

Cute nationalism: a seemingly inoffensive symbolic representation of the nation that suggests benevolence and innocence and that lends itself to being filled with meanings and emotional attachments from a broad range of audiences.

Discourse: communication practices that systematically construct our knowledge of reality as commonly accepted truths.

Emotional governance: the process of indirectly regulating society by inviting or prompting actors to invest themselves emotionally in certain governing principles, that is any authoritative action that aims

to manage the emotional context within which a political issue is situated.

Entrainment: the process of heightening emotions by synchronising one's behaviour with others.

Frame: any principle that structures and calibrates networks of meaning during conceptual blending processes.

Framing: using sets of signs to force a particular code onto a communication process, thereby guiding the perception, understanding, or interpretation of the communicated information.

Generic space: a mental space in which an actor consciously or subconsciously compares elements of different inputs during the process of conceptual blending.

Governance: any attempt to govern by reaching beyond the level of the state and including private institutions and actors in the process, usually in ways that redefine the governing process in terms of allegedly cost-effective and efficient market exchanges.

Ideology: a system of mental concepts, their values, and their relations that a person or group sets forth as an explanation of and normative guide to the human condition. Ideology can be viewed neutrally, negatively, or positively: neutrally, ideology refers to any framework of thought; negatively, it refers to a collective false conscience maintained by powerful elites to obscure systems of oppression; positively, it refers to sets of ideas that empower the holder to recognise their own interests.

Imagined community: any group of human beings with a common belief in a collective purpose, culture, history, or ancestry, in which some members do not maintain direct personal ties with each other.

Information: any piece of data to which a sentient being has attributed meaning.

Input space: a mental space that serves as an input to an actor's process of conceptual blending.

Interaction ritual chain: a series of interpersonal encounters in which actors create self-reinforcing feedback loops of meaning-making and emotional investment through their mutual focus on shared symbolic resources and processes of entrainment.

Large-scale event: an organised occasion for a large number of actors to witness and/or engage in chains of ritual interactions.

Mass event: a large-scale event designed and staged to attract mass participation by mobilising modern subjects as citizens and/or consumers.

Media ecology: the complex systems of people, hardware, and software that create and spread discourse in various media, according to the logic inherent in the system and its institutions.

Media event: a mass event in which organisers rely on modern broadcasting technologies to relay the proceedings to wider audiences at a previously announced moment in time.

Medium: the container or conduit through which actors transmit or store data or information.

Modernity: a set of human actions and cognitive frameworks that have emerged in Europe during the late middle ages and that actors across the world have since adopted to radically restructure their worlds across increasingly interconnected economic, environmental, political, social, and ideational domains.

Multi-modal communication: communication that combines different levels of symbolic representation to relay its messages, for instance by stacking both visual and acoustic signs in the service of the same communication process.

Nation: any group of people who imagine themselves as a territorially bound community, based on a belief in a collective purpose, shared history, culture, language, and/or ethnic ancestry, and aspiring to maintain or establish political autonomy (i.e., a nation-state).

Nation-state: any state that claims political autonomy in the name of a nation.

Nationalism: the sentiment and cognitive framework in which the nation features as a major element of personal identity and as the primary locus of political organisation.

Neoliberalism: an ideology that emphasises personal responsibility, efficiency, private property rights, and the presumed ability of allegedly unregulated, competitive markets to bring about the best in self-interested individuals.

Neoliberal policies: a set of often intrusive regulations grounded in neoliberalism, theoretically aimed at deregulating economic processes, establishing (global) free trade, and making social interactions more efficient by promoting austerity, privatisation, and a nominally laissez-faire approach to the economy; in practice, a set of measures that strategically concentrate wealth in the hands of a few through uneven

fiscal policy, invasive audit cultures, expansive bureaucratisation, and draconic state-backed violence when private ownership rights are in question.

Network: a system of interconnected actors or things, each represented as a node and connected to other network elements through links.

Network society: a set of diverse actors, such as states, enterprises, and non-governmental organisations, which pursue their agendas within advanced communication and information networks.

Networked spectacle: an elaborate mass event, designed to be aesthetically striking, during which actors use switching power and programming power to reconfigure organisational and ideational networks in the service of their respective political projects.

Nexus: a node or cluster of nodes that connects several sub-networks within a larger network.

Node: an actor in a network.

Parasocial relation: an imagined social relationship that generates an emotional bond in the absence of reciprocal, interpersonal exchanges.

Pathos formula: a trope meant to trigger a specific emotional response.

Priming: the act of anchoring meanings, associations, and emotions through continuous exposure to certain signs.

Programming power: the ability to set the values of a network by infusing it with specific discourse.

Propaganda: intentional communicative action explicitly meant to relay the position of a political actor.

Ritual: a group activity in which members generate a shared reality that invites attachment to the group and its ideology through emotional entrainment and the collective production of symbolic resources.

Securitisation: the construction of issues as existential threats that require emergency measures that take place outside the sphere of established rules.

Sign: something that stands for or points to something else.

Society: disparate sets of highly contextual networks that actors construct through their recurring inter-subjective activities.

Spectacle: an event or scene that spectators find striking due to the elaborate, often multi-modal aesthetics. Here: a staged event intentionally designed to have such an effect.

State: a formal set of political institutions that regulates human behaviour within a given territory through recourse to a monopoly on violence.

Switching power: the ability to establish or interrupt links within a network.

Synecdoche: a rhetorical device that suggests that a part stands for the whole or vice versa.

Technology: any systematic, practical application of human knowledge.

Tifa: Chinese political watch words that flag a specific ideological frame for making sense of politics.

Trope: a recurring pattern of signs that, based on a previously established and social convention, is connected to a specific meaning.

Watch sign: a visual trope that flags a specific ideological frame for making sense of politics.

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