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## **The construction of nationalism in Chinese media events in the reform era: an analysis of online mass communication, 2008-2012**

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## **Chapter 5 Beijing Olympics: Pursuing the Olympic Dream**

Taking the 2008 Beijing Olympics as an example, I will examine in this chapter how the Chinese government conducted patriotic propaganda before and during a scheduled event. By comparing the opening ceremony, one of the key parts of Olympic events, to that of the 2012 London Olympics, I will look at the similarities and differences between the visual presentations of two countries in terms of communication of nationalism (among other values and ideologies). In addition, I will discuss how Chinese audiences reacted to the events on Tianya BBS, one of the most popular Chinese online forums, to examine popular nationalism and evaluate the communication effect expected by the government or the Chinese media. To do so, I will analyze audiences' online engagement presented in the number of clicks and replies of the selected threads in the two Olympics. I will further do discourse analysis on audiences' online comments that further reflect their nationalism.

My findings demonstrate that the Chinese government successfully used heavy propaganda through a series of sub- and parallel events before the Beijing Olympics to increase public engagement and support. In comparison, the London Olympics applied similar communication strategies, most notably in the opening ceremony, with the same goal (to enhance the national image and national identity), but without overtly nationalistic tones. Moreover, as the Beijing Olympics were more about Chinese identity than the London Olympics, online Chinese audiences' reception showed much more nationalism (or national pride) in the former. As I will reveal, the overt promotion of nationalism and national identification through the Beijing Olympics succeeded in strengthening CCP legitimacy.

### **5.1 The Olympic Dream**

The 2008 Beijing Olympics have been one of the most significant mass media events held by the Chinese government in the first decade of the 2000s. Since the point of the Olympics is an athletic competition between various nations, it is a suitable occasion for participating countries to distinguish themselves and foster nationalism and a sense of national identity. What is more, the hosting countries can gain international recognition, increase economic growth, and advance

technology and infrastructure. (Scandizzo & Pierleoni, 2018). For the PRC, the event was important because it witnessed the realization of a social demand, the Olympic dream, established by the government and media and perceived by Chinese people. The government tried to satisfy the social demand to strengthen its legitimacy through the event.

Brady (2009b) has depicted the Beijing Olympics as a kind of mass distraction from various social problems existing in 2008. However, I do not completely agree with this: while the Olympics did draw (part of) the people's attention from social issues to the event, hosting the Games had different aims (such as enhancement of national confidence) rather than just serving as a distraction for social issues. Furthermore, the Chinese government planned the hosting of the Olympics even before 1993 (The PRC lost the first bid in 1993). It is unlikely the government would have intended the Olympics as a distraction for potential social problems at least fifteen years in the future. In addition, the huge number of the people who had actively participated in the event suggested wide public support. By the end of March 2008 (five months before the opening ceremony), the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) had received more than 0.41 million applications for volunteers from Beijing and the rest of China.<sup>68</sup> Although the motivations of volunteers could be internal (altruism and egoism) and external (institutional encouragement or improvements in academic performance) (Bladen, 2010, 785), this high number of volunteer applications suggested a high level of engagement among the populace. Concerning Chinese people's attitudes towards the government related to the event, Zhao Suisheng (2008, 49) indicates that "Although many social, political and economic problems in the PRC worry the Chinese people, they still react adversely to foreign criticism of the Chinese government." Therefore, the people's support for the Olympics and the government was still discernable, and hosting the Olympic event was not "primarily" about distracting from social problems.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, usually the Olympics, a competitive event, would fall—in Dayan and Katz's (1992) definition of media event types—in the Contest category. However, in the case of the PRC, the winning of the bid was far more important than the athletic competition between nations. The contest in the bid in 2001 helped the PRC accomplish the first step of realizing

<sup>68</sup> See <http://english.china.org.cn/english/China/206666.htm>, accessed 12 November 2012.

the Olympic dream (I will detail this in the following part). The Beijing Olympics then represented the second step that concluded the dream. Thus, more like a celebration or what Dayan and Katz (1992) call a Coronation for the nation, the Beijing Olympics worked for a long time to realize the propagated Olympic dream.

### 5.1.1 Conceiving of the Olympic Dream

As China suffered bitter humiliation in the 19th and 20th centuries (see Chapter 2 on the rise of Chinese nationalism for details), the idea of China and the Chinese being weak took hold. This idea is best articulated by Liang (1916/1994, 157), who argued that “we are known by the world as the ‘sick man’ without any physical capability, which provides both Westerners and Easterners with a chance to bully us.” This sickness, or rather, weakness, had a figurative sense, pertaining to the Chinese nation as political power and a literal sense, with the Chinese people being physically weak. This notion of the “sick man of East Asia” (*dongya bingfu* 东亚病夫) took hold in Chinese culture through education, and was articulated in popular culture: for example, the popular martial arts movies, *Fists of Fury* (1972) (*Jingwu Men* 精武门) and *Fearless* (2006) (*Huo Yuanjia* 霍元甲) emphasized on this idea to bolster (a reflection on) nationalism. Due to this notion, physical prowess became a goal within Chinese nationalism.

Modern sports in China, as an invented tradition, play a crucial role in strengthening nationalism (Xu, 2008, 8). The Olympics became a paragon event for the Chinese to show that they were not weak but superior in strength, as demonstrated by their “sports power (*tiyu qiangguo* 体育强国).” Since 1908, when the *Tianjin Youth Daily* published three issues about the Olympics (Zhang, 2008), Chinese people have conceived of an Olympic dream that consists of three parts: sending an athlete to the Olympics, cultivating a group of athletes for the Olympics, and hosting the Olympic event.

The first two parts of this dream were realized not long after, as Liu Changchun, the first Chinese athlete, participated in the Olympics in 1932 in Los Angeles, and the first Chinese delegation attended the Olympics in 1936 in Berlin. However, China was less successful in getting to host the Olympics for a long time: Beijing’s first attempt did not take place until 1993 when they tried for the 2000 Olympics. This bid failed with only two ballots less than its competitor, Sydney. This

dampened the Olympic fans' morale and spirits, but it also strengthened the resolve to win the next bidding. In their second bid, in 2001, Beijing did win the right to host the 2008 Olympics. This became a turning point in Chinese Olympic history, initiating the completion of the third part, thereby the whole of the Chinese Olympic dream.

Hosting the Olympics allowed China to show to the world as a major international power, beyond economic benefits. Billig (1995, 120) suggests that "modern sport has a social and political significance, extending through media beyond the player and the spectator." The Chinese government made great efforts to propagate the Beijing Olympics that would demonstrate the prowess of the PRC's athletes, thereby countering the stigma and the Chinese as weak in contemporary history to both the Chinese populace and international audiences. If the Olympic event was indeed successful in improving national image, for one thing, it would strengthen Chinese people's national confidence; for another thing, the government would gain legitimacy through the organization of the event. In this way, the Olympics would serve as a staged media event to advance nationalism. Focusing on the prior game propaganda and the opening ceremony, I will explore how the Chinese government organized and staged the Beijing Olympics in the following sections.

### **5.1.2 Organizing the Olympic Dream**

As the motto of the Beijing Olympics was "One world, one dream," it seemed that the Chinese government intentionally promoted cosmopolitanism. However, Shirley Cheng et al. (2011, 296) argued that the 2008 Olympics did not increase popular identification with other countries but rather enlarged the cultural distance between China and the Western world. In addition, Sun Yat-sen (1924/1970, 311) had advocated that "We must understand that cosmopolitanism grows out of nationalism; if we want to extend cosmopolitanism, we must first establish strongly our own nationalism." This suggests the Chinese government prioritizing nationalism over cosmopolitanism. The motto established China's image "as a harmonious member of the international family, sharing the same vision with other international members" (Zhang & Zhao, 2009, 248). Furthermore, Chen Ni (2012) also argues that media events such as the Beijing Olympics branded China's image abroad and domestically to show the legitimization of the government. Therefore, the goal of the motto was to promote more nationalism than cosmopolitanism.

The government also established three important themes: Green Olympics (*lüse aoyun* 绿色奥运), High-tech Olympics (*keji aoyun* 科技奥运), and People's Olympics (*renwen aoyun* 人文奥运). Generally, High-tech Olympics, Olympics with cutting-edge technology, were presented in the event since the government widely applied high technologies in the artistic performance and the Games. For example, it used high technologies and new materials to construct the national stadium that shaped a bird's nest.

To put the theme of "Green Olympics" into practice, the PRC spent more than 12 billion US dollars on improving the environment through a series of environmentally friendly initiatives, such as closing polluting factories and building up the Olympic forest park (Berkowitz et al., 2007, 174). According to Jin Liyan, James Zhang, Ma Xingdong, and Daniel Connaughton (2011), these initiatives succeeded in bringing positive changes to people's behavior and support for the green theme and the Olympics. However, solving the environmental problems proved too tricky for the short period in which these initiatives were deployed, and after the Olympics, as the problems were not structurally addressed, pollution still existed in Beijing (Cao et al., 2013).

Finally, the government developed the theme of People's Olympics into an invitation to world audiences to view China's historical culture through Beijing's lens. The claim in the theme that the 2008 Olympics were "people-oriented" suggested that the government valued a high level of participation. The government aimed to shorten the distance between people and the nation and give people a sense of collectiveness and belonging. Yet, the goal of the "people-oriented" Olympics was not always realized: it carried the suggestion for greater openness and less censorship, but people were still under tight control when it came to obtaining information about the Olympics. International communities also criticized the 2008 Olympics for not improving human rights (Manzenreiter, 2010, 34). In short, the three themes changed the nation for a short time to gain public support but did not profoundly change people's lives.

The Chinese government also fostered people's engagement in the 2008 Beijing Olympics through specific programs and events: the Olympic education program (2005-2008), the volunteer

recruitment program (2006-2008), the Olympic torch relay (April-August 2008), and the Paralympics (6-17 September 2008). The preparations for hosting the Olympics started as early as 1993, but then the bid to obtain the 2000 summer Olympics rights failed. In 2001, after winning the second bid, preparations became even stronger than before. Through the Olympic education program, primary and middle school students received direct propaganda education in class. The volunteer recruitment program specifically targeted university students who were the most active group in social activities, so the government enrolled them to win their recognition and support. Contrary to the Olympic education program and the volunteer recruitment program specifically designed to promote state nationalism, the Olympic torch relay and the Paralympics followed a traditional hosting process that enrolled many people in the event. In the following, I will discuss all these programs and events to explore how they increased people's engagement and contributed to the enhancement of nationalism.

#### *Olympic Education Program*

The government launched a Beijing 2008 Olympic education program in 2005, aiming to cultivate “a generation of young students who understand the Olympic spirit, comprehend Olympic knowledge, and possess international vision and habits of civility and politeness” (BOCOG, 2005, cited in Brownell, 2009, 49). Brownell (2009, 44) argues that “Olympic education contained a depoliticized patriotic education that linked national identity with sports heroes rather than political systems and re-situated Chinese national identity within an international community in which it would now take its place as an equal partner.” I would argue that Olympic education was not wholly depoliticized because one of its aims was to train students disciplined during the event. The “habits of civility and politeness” (Brownell, 2009, 49) are characteristics of well-disciplined citizens, as “the moral education of the people has been viewed historically as a function of good government in China” (Landsberger, 2001, 541). Although the political aims were not explicitly indicated in the goals of this program, they implied a patriotic connotation that worked in favor of the government and ultimately contributed to promoting nationalism.

The Olympic education program frequently displayed the official emblem and five mascots of the Beijing Olympics' to build up a friendly national image. The emblem, called “Dancing Beijing,”

resembled a dancing figure and a red seal in the shape of the Chinese character “京,” referring to the capital city, Beijing. As the character was in a stylized calligraphic, it combined traditional Chinese culture elements with the Olympic spirit. Below the characters were the five Olympic rings, indicating the Olympics. The mascots, called “福娃 *Fuwa*” (literally “good-luck dolls,” also known as “friendlies”), expressed, according to Zhang and Zhao (2009, 248), the values of Chinese culture: “grace, peace, and kindheartedness.” Named Beibei, Jingjing, Huanhuan, Yingying, and Nini, each mascot symbolizes a blessing: Beibei stands for the blessing of prosperity, Jingjing for the blessing of happiness, Huanhuan for the blessing of passion, Yingying for the blessing of health, and Nini for the blessing of good luck. Put together, the five names formed a sentence, “Bei-Jing-Huan-Ying-Ni 北京欢迎你” translated into “Beijing welcomes you,” carrying a message of friendship. The emphasis on both emblem and mascots on Beijing was not only because the 2008 Olympics were held there but also because Beijing represented the whole PRC to promote people’s national identity through a synecdoche.

#### *Volunteer Recruitment Program*

Launched in 2005, the Beijing Olympic and Paralympic volunteer program was a top-down initiative. More than 1.5 million volunteers were engaged in the program (BOCOG, 2010, 247). Volunteer service work played a significant role in ensuring a smooth staging of the event, which prompted the government to select the volunteers carefully. Zhuang Juan and Vassil Girginov (2012) point out that the selection of the volunteers was not random, and in fact, depended on applicants’ social, human, and political capital. The selection was carried out in three steps: a stadium-university docking system<sup>69</sup>, volunteer training and testing, and political background checks.

First, the stadium-university docking system entails that one university was assigned to provide the most volunteer force for each Olympic stadium. This allowed BOCOG to maintain working relationships with certain universities in Beijing by giving their students preference to students from universities that were not part of this system (Zhuang & Girginov, 2012, 246). As a result of this system, while volunteers were recruited from all levels of society, students from particular

<sup>69</sup> The system means that one university was assigned to provide the most volunteer force for Olympic stadia, which was adopted by BOCOG to maintain working relationships with universities in Beijing (Zhuang & Girginov, 2012, 246).

universities had a higher chance to be selected.

Second, the government offered a series of training courses that taught foreign languages, related rules, and volunteer work regulations. Besides this, the students were taught etiquette to represent a positive image of the nation to foreigners. The training courses worked as a step in the selection by rejecting students who could not pass the tests to show their ability to cooperate in a team and perform the assigned duties (Zhuang, 2012, 249).

Third, political background checks are a common occurrence in the state- or CCP-related activities; therefore, given the national importance of hosting the Olympics, it was no wonder that such checks were carried out in the volunteer selection program. Checking students' political status (e.g., social relationships and criminal records) was a step for the background checks.

Indicating that “each volunteer acted as a vehicle of power, through which power was being performed in a web of social relations,” Gladys Pak Lei Chong (2011, 52) argues that by using soft power (e.g., establishing certain discourses), volunteer services were a governing strategy for the state: the Olympic volunteers served as model citizens. The recruited volunteers were at the receiving end of Olympic propaganda in the training courses. They also acted as new, grassroots Olympic propagandists themselves. They received education from official initiatives and disseminated official ideas to the populace and foreign audiences when providing volunteer services.

### *Torch Relay*

The torch relay has been a regular activity of every Olympic event since the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. The Olympic flame is lit in Olympia, Greece, the cradle of the Olympic Games, several months before the start of the major event. The torch is then relayed to selected cities and finally reaches its destination, where the Olympic Games are hosted. It is generally carried by runners and other athletes, with certain exceptions (such as being on a boat or airplane).

Although the torch relay is a routine sub-event of the Olympics, the global torch relay only started in the 2004 Athens Olympics because of a change of sponsorship (Horne & Whannel, 2010, 761).

In the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the PRC took this new tradition, organizing the torch relay worldwide. After 2008, this global torch relay was canceled because of “the conflicts between anti-Chinese groups and the advocates of free Tibetans and the sacred fire defense runners supplied by the Chinese government” (Masumoto, 2013, 29). In that case, the torch relay has been confined within the hosting countries to avoid conflicts since the 2012 London Olympics. As a sub-media–event announcing to the world that China was going to host the Beijing Olympics, the torch relay was equal to a preliminary celebration of the realization of the Olympic dream (the opening ceremony was a major celebration).

The torch relay increased people’s engagement in the event and promoted their national identity. It was impossible to allow all audiences to watch or participate in the Olympic Games on the spot. However, the torch relay offered many an opportunity for onsite participation. The selection of the torch bearers was not limited to celebrities or athletes, and common people could also have a chance to participate. Even if most of them were not chosen to relay the torch, they could watch the on-the-spot relay as a kind of engagement. This prompted the local audiences to express patriotic feelings. In my personal observation of the torch relay in Changsha, Hunan on 4 June 2008, I witnessed not only a great level of excitement on seeing the torchbearers but also many people chanting “go China” (*Zhongguo jiayou* 中国加油).

The 2008 torch relay lasted about five months, much longer than that of the 2004 Athens Olympics (78 days) and the 2012 London Olympics (70 days)<sup>70</sup>. The route map, from Olympia to Beijing, covered many famous cities inside and outside the PRC, including Shanghai, London, and Paris. The torch relay served two main propaganda aims of the CCP: one was to announce to the world that China’s Olympic dream was about to come true; the other was to disseminate the local culture of the torch relay cities and make the world know about the nation. Both aims served to promote the people’s nationalism.

It should be noted that the torch relay for the 2008 Olympics did not go smoothly outside the PRC. Western media and Chinese media differently reported the torch relay conflicts in London, Paris,

<sup>70</sup> The shorter period of the London torch relay is due to the route limitation within the hosting country after 2008.

and San Francisco. Activists protested the torch relay in those cities to claim Tibetan and Uyghur independence and address human rights problems, which was covered by the western media as “peaceful protests against a repressive regime and a military crackdown” (Horne & Whannel, 2010, 766). Chinese media then condemned the activists’ attacks “as violent acts against innocent people (especially the disabled ‘heroine’ of Paris, Jin Jing) requiring the restoration of order and stability” (Horne & Whannel, 2010, 766). The attacks ended the torch relay outside the PRC, arousing strong online popular nationalism reflected in BBS discussions (see details in the following sections).

### *The Paralympics*

The Beijing Paralympics were held from 6 to 17 September 2008, about two weeks after the regular Olympics. The two events were designed with the same motto: “One world, one dream,” and a mascot named Fu Niu Lele (福牛乐乐). The Paralympics took shape in an analogical form of the Olympics. Admittedly, the scale of the Paralympics was much smaller, garnered far less popular interest than the regular Olympics, so its influence was weaker. However, as an extension of the main event, the Paralympics were, to some degree, expanded the time duration. The propaganda related to the Paralympics was similar to that of the main event. Especially when the PRC dominated the medal count in the Paralympics, this result aroused the people’s national pride once more.

In conclusion, the Chinese people’s perception of the 2008 Games was different from that of Olympics hosted outside the PRC that did not arrange so many activities for engagement as the Beijing Olympics did through the comprehensive and dedicated organization. As the Beijing Olympics were hosted with the government’s great efforts, heavy coverage in mass communication submerged the Chinese audiences in a sea of Olympic propaganda. Billings et al. (2013) argue that heavy viewers of the Olympic Games demonstrated a higher level of nationalism than lighter viewers. Thus, the Chinese media set up an Olympic agenda through continuous the exposure of Olympics.

### **5.1.3 Narrating the Olympic Dream**

On 8 August 2008, at 8:00 pm Beijing time, the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony started as a magnificent spectacle at the national stadium. Geremie Barmé (2009, 64) indicates that “Intended

for mass consumption, the story at the Games was crafted to speak directly to the world of China's vision of itself." The ceremony narrated the Olympic dream in a grand and magnificent style to global audiences. It announced the realization of China's Olympic dream and proudly showed a rising China to the world.

By reimagining China on the world stage, the opening ceremony served some aims. Cui Xi (2013) indicates that the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony created a national image full of cultural symbols to foster a stable Chinese society. Similarly, Zeng Guohua (2013, 3) argues that "the construction of the ideal China in the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics both to the world and to the people inside China can arguably be summarized as a strategic construction of a 'new' set of Chineseness." In addition, the state aimed to "effectively communicate with the world about its vision of the future and the very course of its internationalization" (Xu, 2008, 225). Besides internationalism, as noted by Jacques deLisle (2008, 31) who points out that nationalism "predictably comes more to the fore as the [2008] Games approach," the narration of the ceremony took on a strong patriotic tone that I will detail in the following section.

To examine how the Chinese government constructed nationalism in the ceremony, I choose the live broadcast that Chinese audiences viewed most. Two companies, the Beijing Olympic Broadcasting Co., Ltd (BOB) and the American National Broadcasting Company (NBC), took charge of broadcasting the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony. The BOB version aimed at audiences in mainland China, while the NBC version targeted the audiences in the US and English speakers in other countries. Chinese audiences who watched the BOB version on CCTV reached 1.1 billion, and audiences in the US watching the NBC version approached 211 million (BOCOG, 2010, 129). I focus on the BOB version in this case study and explore how the narration of the opening ceremonies unfolded the Olympic dream. In doing so, I will discuss the visual presentation, camera angles and movements, and hosts' narrations of the ceremony.

### *Visual presentation*

The opening ceremony created various solemn and majestic scenes. It built up an ancient, friendly, powerful, and innovative national image and promoted national pride and national identification by

introducing Chinese culture, philosophy, ideology, technology, etc. The visual presentation largely embodied the motto (“One world, one dream”) and the three themes (High-tech Olympics, Green Olympics, and People’s Olympics). In addition, concerning constructing nationalism, one of the three elements of nationalism, as I discussed in Chapter 1—collective memories—was strongly reflected in the visual presentation. In comparison, the other two elements, national boundaries and people’s engagement, were not distinct. This was because the motto “One world, one dream” blurred national boundaries, and engagement was heavily scheduled in the prior game propaganda instead of the opening ceremony. In the following part, I will discuss what philosophy and ideology the opening ceremony conveyed; how the artistic performance emphasized Chineseness and branded China’s image; how the opening ceremony highlighted the motto and the themes to reimage China; and how it constructed nationalism by shaping collective memories and enhancing national pride.

The various performances in the presentation aimed to establish a friendly image of the PRC. In the welcome ceremony, 2008 performers recited excerpts from *the Analects*, one of the Confucian classics. Of these, “isn’t it delightful to have friends coming from afar?” (*you peng zi yuanfang lai, buyi le hu?* 有朋自远方来，不易乐乎？) reiterated the meaning of the Fuwa mascots’ names: “Beijing welcomes you (*Beijing huanying ni*. 北京欢迎你).” Another section, called Dream, with three astronauts walking in “space,” exhibited the PRC’s aerospace technology. During this section, a huge ball representing the earth rose, and actors tumbled on its surface. Finally, Chinese singer Liu Huan and English singer Sarah Brightman appeared on the top of the ball, singing *You and Me* (*wo he ni*, 我和你). The image of the planet earth and the lyrics of the song (e.g., you and me, from one world, we are family.) directly expressed the motto “one world, one dream” (Chen et al., 2012, 191). These messages not only showed the PRC’s affability to the world but also presented its ideas of peace, embodied in the argumentations such as “peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*, 和平崛起)” (Zheng, 2005) and “peaceful development (*heping fazhan*, 和平发展)” (Kang & Gung, 2007). Peaceful rise and peaceful development were important political discourses and diplomatic policies developed in the Hu Jintao era, suggesting that the PRC aimed to create a peaceful environment for its development. The presentation shaped friendliness as a crucial aspect of peaceful ideas, indicating that the PRC is completely integrated into the international community with peaceful development (Luo et al., 2010, 1610).



Figure 5.1 The dream section during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony <sup>71</sup>

The opening ceremony emphasized an important Chinese philosophy, Confucianism that cultivates East Asian people's characters, way of thinking, and behavior (Yum, 1988). Confucianism attaches great importance to a hierarchical relationship in both families and the state. People with dominating social status often use this to maintain power and control those at the lower hierarchical system levels. Originating in Confucianism, former President Hu's ruling philosophy of a "harmonious society"<sup>72</sup> stressed the importance of social stability (Chan, 2009, 821). As core ideologies in the Hu era, Confucianism and harmonious society were reiterated in the opening ceremony several times.

As mentioned above, the welcoming ceremony used Confucian classics to show hospitality to global audiences. The recitation of excerpts from *the Analects* in harmony with drumbeats "highlighted the idea of harmony through the accuracy and coordination of the drummers' performance" (Chen et al., 2012, 191). The section of Chinese characters of the opening performance also embodied Confucianism, together with Hu's harmonious society ideology, by demonstrating Chinese writing development. Three thousand performers acting as students of Confucius came on the stage with bamboo slips, the primary media for written texts in China before the paper (see Figure 5.2). They read another famous excerpt from *the Analects*: "Two heads are better than one" (*sanren xing biyou woshi yan* 三人行必有我师焉). After that came the moving blocks demonstrating the movable type

<sup>71</sup> This image is a snapshot of the opening ceremony broadcast on Youku, taken on 12 July 2014. The following images of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony were also taken from Youku on 12 July 2014.

<sup>72</sup> A harmonious society should have these social values: "democratic and ruled by law, fair and just, trustworthy and fraternal, full of vitality, stable and orderly, and maintains harmony between man and nature." (Hu, 2005, 3, cited in Chan, 2009, 821).

printing characters, China's invention of printing. The moveable type showed a big character 和 in both ancient and modern styles (see Figure 5.2). The character 和 referred to “harmony 和谐” and “peace 和平,” once again resonating Hu's political ideology of the harmonious society and peaceful rise of the PRC. Then the image of the Great Wall of China, a world heritage site, presented a sense of magnificence. Finally, the peach flowers grew out of the characters, symbolizing the meaning of romance and prosperity.

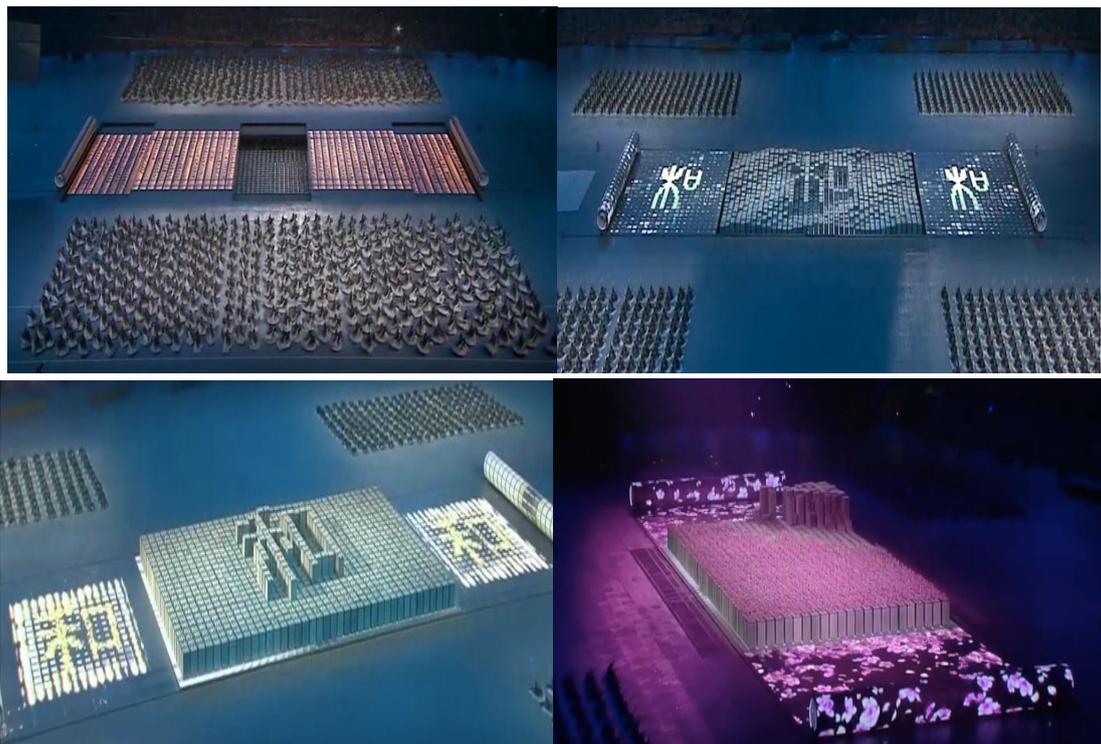


Figure 5.2 Fluid array of 897 movable type blocks that formed three variations of the character 和 during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

Elements of Chinese society, such as culture, history, and inventions, were the core content of the visual presentation, arousing national identity and national pride. For example, the countdown section presented two matrixes with Chinese numerals besides the Arabic numerals: 60 六十, 50 五十, 40 四十...and 1 一 (see Figure 5.3). The huge Chinese numerals displayed an important part of Chinese culture: Chinese characters. It also introduced four Chinese inventions—the compass, gunpowder, papermaking, and printing—to demonstrate the technological excellence of ancient China.



Figure 5.3 The countdown during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

The narration of Chinese history in the opening ceremony focused on collective memories. Specifically, the ceremony highlighted the memories of past grandeur and omitted China's modern history of humiliation, complying with the rule of positive propaganda in the CCP political communication tradition and Chinese culture of auspiciousness in festival-like media events. The Silk Road section of the ceremony focused on one of the most prosperous dynasties in history: the Tang Dynasty, the golden age of ancient China when Chinese culture and economy were outstanding in the world. Mark Edward Lewis (2009) addresses this dynasty as "China's cosmopolitan empire." As the Tang Dynasty represents a powerful state in Chinese history, this section of performances aimed at reinforcing the idea of the restoration of the Chinese nation.

The Ancient Silk Road<sup>73</sup>, the ancient network of trade routes that spanned most of Central Asia from China to the Mediterranean, was depicted as a friendship bridge that connected China with the outside world. Supported by people in green costumes, a dancer elegantly performed Dunhuang<sup>74</sup> Dance on a huge sheet of "paper," conveying the essence of ancient Chinese dance (See Figure 5.4). In addition, actors demonstrated the maritime Silk Road by acting out seafaring navigation with the help of a Chinese invention, the magnetic compass. The performance also displayed trading products, such as chinaware ceramics and tea that were aimed at a better understanding of the past

<sup>73</sup> It exerts a great influence on the current Belt and Road initiative, a development strategy established by the Chinese government in 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Dunhuang was a major stop of the Ancient Silk Road, playing an important part in China's ancient trade.

and at promoting Chinese national pride.



Figure 5.4 Performances connected to the Silk Roads during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

The Li and Yue (Ritual and Music) section presented traditional culture and art (see Figure 5.5). This section demonstrated Chinese poems in the form of songs. Accompanied by Kun opera (*kunqu* 昆曲), the oldest form of Chinese opera, the actors sang a song that dates back to the Tang Dynasty, called *A Moonlit Light on the Spring River* (春江花月夜). On top of two rows of marble pillars (*huabiao*, 华表), lutenists played the lute, a traditional Chinese instrument. On the pillars were yellow dragons that symbolized the Chinese nation.

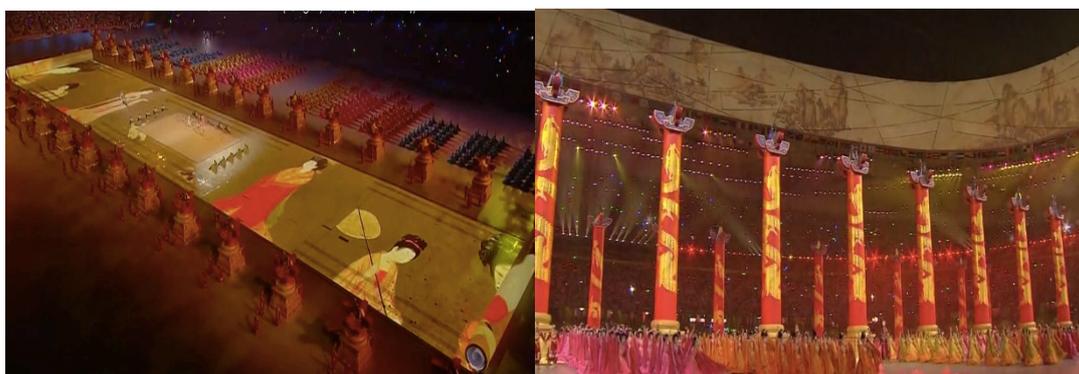


Figure 5.5 Performances connected to Li and Yue during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

The section called Starlight symbolized China's integration with the world and peaceful development. In the middle of a green block made up of actors sat the pianist Lang Lang and a five-year-old girl, Li Muzi, playing the piano, a modern instrument imported from the West. This showed modern China's embrace of foreign artist forms. During the performance, actors' green costumes lit up, resembling stars. The actors moved to form a dove shape from the star light that

symbolized China’s pursuit of peace in modern times. This dove then turned into the Bird’s Nest (the national stadium), twinkling like a massive star. The Bird’s Nest suggested a peaceful, homely place for athletes.



Figure 5.6 The Starlight section during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

In addition to the PRC’s culture, history, and social values, etc., the three themes BOCOG selected— High-tech Olympics, Green Olympics, and People’s Olympics—were integrated into the performances. High tech was broadly applied in the ceremony. For example, as already mentioned previously, China completely designed and built the Bird’s Nest where the ceremony took place. The structure of the Birds’ nest was made of 40,000 tons of steel, of which materials were constructed with high technology that helped the steel support the structure (Berkowitz et al., 2007, 173). Another example is the use of LED technology for the display of huge scenes. This technology was used in the display of huge images, including Chinese characters (see Figure 5.2), the countdown (see Figure 5.3), and the scroll painting (see Figure 5.7), to create visually compelling scenes. A third example is a technology used to coordinate performances. As thousands of cast members performed some scenes, the designers used the “Shenzhou 4000” control system, an

advanced communication system also used for space missions, to coordinate the performances (Dong, 2010, 2807).



Figure 5.7 Scroll painting during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

The theme Green Olympics was mainly narrated in the Nature section of the opening ceremony. Two thousand eight masters performed Taijiquan (太极拳), a popular Chinese martial art. These masters formed a circle around a group of students and a teacher who discussed the environmental protection problems. Because Taiji emphasizes a harmonious relationship between man and nature, it provided the answers to the questions raised by the teacher and the students.

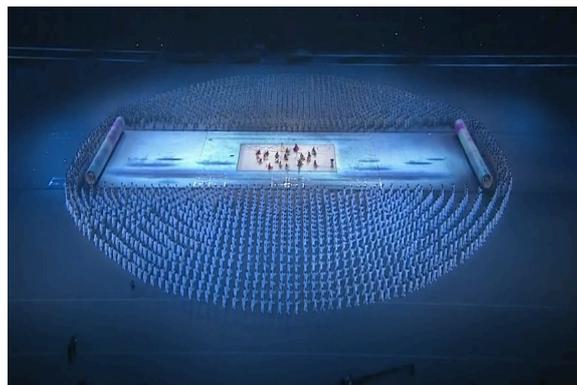


Figure 5.8 The Nature section during the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

The theme of People's Olympics connoted two aspects: culture and a focus on people. The ceremony presented cultural elements: in the form of rituals, music, and operas. However, I found a counterexample of people orientation in the flag-raising ceremony where a nine-year-old girl Lin

Miaoke lip-synced to another girl Yang Peiyi's vocal track, when performing the song "Ode to the Motherland." It helped achieve a better theatrical effect but made some negative impact on the two children (according to the news reports on the related topics). In some sense, for the director, the media effect may be the first important thing, so this went against the theme of people-orientation.

Overall, the visual presentation in the opening ceremony combined the essence of ancient and modern China to impress both domestic and international audiences. Chen et al. (2012) point out that through visual symbols, the opening ceremony reinforced the traditional cultural values of Confucianism—harmony and peace, unity, and power and innovation—to increase China's soft power on the international stage. Based on what has been discussed, the visual symbols presented the image of an open, inclusive, and powerful China that embraced the whole world. This largely upgraded Chinese people's national confidence and satisfaction with the performance.

#### *Camera Angles and Movements*

Besides the visual presentation content (i.e., what was shown), camera angles and movements played an important role in shaping audiences' reception of the Olympic event and, through this, ultimately, contribute to the construction of nationalism. The ceremony juxtaposed several camera angles: bird's-eye views, low-angle views, and high-angle views. Among these angles, bird's-eye views were widely used to present grand scenes of the stadium and the artistic performance to demonstrate a spectacular effect.

Highlighting certain visual elements by framing and/or zooming in is a way to stimulate nationalism if the visual elements are signs with nationalist connotations (examples being a national flag and the state leaders). When Chinese political leaders and officials from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) were present in the broadcasts, all the leaders' names were announced on the speaker without distinction or emphasis. However, the camera went to President Hu at least twice, and each time the camera stayed on him for a few seconds (the first time was 25 seconds, and the second time was 6 seconds). Later, the camera focused once on Juan Antonio Samaranch, who made great contributions to the PRC's return to the IOC, and on Jacques Rogge, the IOC president. However, in both the cases, the duration was much shorter (8 seconds in the case of Samaranch and

7 seconds in Rogge).

A similar situation occurred in the national-flag-raising section. During the Chinese national anthem section, the camera first moved to President Hu and focused on him for a few seconds before panning over to a group shot of high-ranking officials. It also went to stadium audiences, but some showed up so quickly that it was even difficult to identify their faces. When Chinese athletes appeared on stage in the parade of nations, the camera also immediately switched to the president.

Besides framing the president as a significant presence, the media framed Chinese athletes as inspiring. For example, during the parade of Chinese athletes, the camera was set for a short time at a relatively low angle, enabling the athletes to make intimate contact with the camera. Some athletes took up this opportunity and went close to the camera to greet viewers during the live broadcast. This virtually did not happen during the parade of other nations.

President Hu ranked first, then high-ranking Chinese officials, and the stadium audiences third concerning screen time. It might symbolize the different political status of people in the hierarchical system as Confucianism established. The president not only had the most screen time but also was brought into pictures most frequently. During the ceremony, he was shown on camera nine times in total.

In general, the most focus was on the president. The camera often filmed him at a low angle to build up a heroic image that implied the president led all the audiences to witness the big success of the Olympics where the officials had put tremendous effort. Later, the camera focused once on Samaranch who contributed to the PRC's return in the IOC, and on Rogge. With other high-ranking officials, the camera angle was either at eye-level or lower. The angle was eye-level or higher for the (much smaller) amount of screen time for the stadium audiences. The differences in angles, through which the viewer looked up to leading figures, in contrast to the sweeping views from eye level or above of larger groups of the common audiences, could be a subtle way of echoing the hierarchical Chinese political system.

### *Narration by Masters of Ceremonies*

Masters of Ceremonies (MCs) narrated the 2008 Beijing Olympics live broadcasts. A male MC, Sun Zhengping, and a female MC, Zhou Tao, hosted the live show. Working at CCTV, Sun was famous for hosting sports events. Zhou had hosted many important Chinese media events, such as the 1997 Hong Kong return gala and the spring festival gala, making her very experienced in hosting ceremonies. The MCs' narrations in the presentation contained nationalistic elements. First, the MCs used general description with little discussions or comments to glorify China. Second, they applied a poetic narration style showing their happiness for the realization of the Olympic dream and deep attachment to the Chinese nation. Third, they employed a set of rhetoric devices such as parallelism to increase the power of their discourse that stimulated national pride.

The MCs' narrations in the opening ceremony appeared official and were most likely scripted. This has been a distinct feature of broadcasting Chinese ceremonies for a long time, as Susan Brownell observed already in the 1992 Barcelona Olympic telecast in the PRC:

When the Chinese produce their own opening ceremonies, the commentary is written into the ceremony by the choreographers. The choreographers' written text is read during the performances by one of the two MCs. The MCs typically include one male and one female who alternate speaking. The text is well-planned, not spontaneous, and is an integral part of the performance, with the content and timing rehearsed in advance. This text, which includes the choreographers' descriptions of the themes, the numbers of participants, and other information and figures, is published in programs that the spectators are given to read. (Brownell, 1995, 34)

The narration in the live show of the opening ceremony consisted of many narratives. First, when the two MCs introduced a cultural performance to the audiences, they used general abstract descriptions. For example, Sun announced that

中国素以文明古国，礼仪之邦著称于世，几千年来不仅创造了灿烂悠久的历史文化，

更形成了高尚的道德准则和完整的礼仪规范。<sup>75</sup>

China is known as a country where people highly value etiquette. It has several thousand years of splendid history and culture, a set of high moral standards, and complete etiquette norms.<sup>76</sup>

Sun mentioned well-developed moral standards and etiquette norms in China but did not talk more about what these standards and norms were and how people complied with them, lacking details to describe China.

Second, the MCs' voices and tones, especially Zhou, were similar to reading a poem most of the time. It also resonated with what Brownell (1995, 35) noted: "in China such sentimentality, expressed in a semi-classical poetic language, is an integral part of the opening ceremonies. It forms an important part of the audience's appreciation."

When the two MCs spoke in the ceremony, their tone betrayed that they recited scripted lines instead of interacting with the audiences or with each other. However, judging by their narration styles, it is necessary to highlight slight differences between the MCs' narrations. As a professional sports commentator, Sun briefly introduced some background information on the artistic performance, and he did so in a matter-of-fact way. Zhou, who had much experience in hosting similar official mega-media events, narrated propagandistically. Following Sun's announcements, she gave further explanations but adopted a stronger poetic style in a seemingly subjective way. For instance, the beginning of the narration went like this:

孙正平：今天晚上我们将在国家体育场为您现场直播北京第二十九届奥林匹克运动会开幕式的盛况。

周涛：今晚我们将在气势恢宏、气质独特的鸟巢中与您一同见证“同一个世界，同

<sup>75</sup> The announcement is what I have heard and written down based on the live broadcast video. The following examples of MCs' narrations are from the same source.

<sup>76</sup> This example and the following examples are my translations.

一个梦想”的诞生。

Sun: This evening, we will live broadcast the spectacular opening ceremony of the 29th Beijing Summer Olympic Games at the national stadium.

Zhou: This evening, we will witness with you the birth of “One world, one dream” at the unique and magnificent Bird’s Nest.

While the two MCs introduced the same stadium, Zhou used more adjectives (magnificent 气势恢宏 and special 气质独特) to describe it. She also talked about the Olympics theme by using the word “birth (*dansheng* 诞生)” to highlight a sense of novelty. Moreover, “witness with you...” shortened the psychological distance to the audiences. Although Sun’s announcement was plainer than that of Zhou, he still provided few comments or discussions in the narration. His performance was in line with a traditional MC propaganda characteristic, i.e., a minimum of commentary and no negative comments (Brownell, 1995, 33).

Third, in the narration, the MCs used rhetorical devices, including metaphors and parallel sentences. For example, just before the official start of the ceremony, Zhou announced that

就拿这座独一无二的鸟巢来说，是多少个人默默耕耘，是多少双手点滴铸造，是多少颗心倾注热望才能让我们拥有如此华丽的殿堂在此刻迎接四海的宾朋。那些辛劳奉献的建设者，那些微笑周到的志愿者，那些淳朴热情的普通人，都是中国的骄傲，都是奥运的英雄！

At this exciting moment, friends all over the world are welcomed to such a gorgeous palace hall, the unique Bird’s Nest (the national stadium), created by numerous hard-working and dedicated builders, smiling and considerate volunteers, and warm-hearted people. They are all the pride of the Chinese nation and the heroes of the Olympics!

This fragment of Zhou’s narration contains three groups of parallel sentences: 1. 是多少…是多少…是多少; 2. 那些…那些…那些; 3. 都是…都是…。 This type of sentence made the speech

more powerful and enhanced the poetic effect. However, in the narration, Zhou did not mention further information about the efforts the “numerous, hard-working, dedicated builders, smiling, considerate volunteers, and warm-hearted people” made for the Bird’s Nest. The concepts “hands 手” and “hearts 心” in the original sentences are metonymies used to represent the whole concept of “people 人.” Zhou also called the Bird’s Nest a “gorgeous palace hall,” and she likened builders, volunteers, and warm-hearted people [sic] to the heroes of the Olympics. What was more, the MCs narrated the following couplet<sup>77</sup> to add to the poetic style of their presentation:

周涛：今夜，星光灿烂，八月的中国洋溢着如火的热情，诚邀八方来客，广纳四海宾朋。

孙正平：今夜，礼花满天，仲夏的北京绽放着灿烂的心情，见证拼搏奇迹，铸造荣耀巅峰。

Zhou: This evening in August, under brilliant starlight, China enthusiastically welcomes guests and friends from all over the world.

Sun: This evening in midsummer, with spectacular fireworks, Beijing jubilantly witnesses a miracle of struggling and a summit of great honors.

In the two parts of the couplet separately narrated by the MCs, almost every word or phrase was antithetical. For example, “brilliant starlight (星光灿烂)” versus “spectacular fireworks (礼花满天)”: both phrases included four characters and described a scene of prosperity and happiness for celebration. The rhymes in the couplet are: “*reqing* 热情” versus “*xinqing* 心情” and “*binpeng* 宾朋” versus “*dianfeng* 巅峰” generating a poetic effect. This couplet also established an image of an open, enthusiastic, powerful, and confident China. In addition, they used representational strategies such as “our nation (*woguo* 我国)” and “motherland (*zuguo* 祖国),” inviting a sense of belongingness. Their addressing the audiences as “we (women 我们)” or “our (women de 我们的),” implied that both narrators and audiences were members of a shared community.

<sup>77</sup> A couplet refers to a pair of successive rhyming lines that is common in Chinese poems.

In short, the visual presentation and MCs' narration in the opening ceremony placed the Olympic dream in a cultural framework to construct the image of a great China and foster state nationalism. For Chinese audiences, the Olympic dream recurring in the visual presentation aimed to increase national confidence and enhance national identity. The glorious achievements of the past and modern progress represented in the artistic performances aimed to enhance the audiences' identification with the nation and stimulate their nationalism. Following a traditional propaganda style, the MCs applied a poetic way to narrate the opening ceremony to increase national pride. As I have argued, their narration of the opening ceremony was aimed to foster nationalism in Chinese audiences' minds.

## **5.2 London Olympics**

London is the only city that held the Olympics three times, in 1908, 1948, and 2012. The latest one, held from 25 July to 12 August 2012, took place after the Beijing Olympics and drew wide attention from the Chinese, which allows for a comparison. According to CCTV, during the 2012 Games, 1.18 billion reviewers across China watched the broadcast, and most of them watched the official Channel CCTV 1. Altogether 108 million viewers watched the live broadcast of the London Olympics opening ceremony aired in China's early morning, and more than 200 million viewers watched the rebroadcast.<sup>78</sup>

The London Olympics opening ceremony attracted numerous Chinese viewers for three major reasons: first, I assume that the 2008 Beijing Olympics as a moment of national pride had instilled a liking of the Olympics in many Chinese viewers. After four years, many Chinese people wanted to see the differences between the two Olympics. Second, every Olympic event fosters the hosting nation's incentive to unfold the most positive image of their society, culture, and history through its opening ceremony. To promote the British nation image, public diplomacy mainly focused on foreign audiences, among whom the Chinese audiences were the priority (Zhong, et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2013). Thus, the opening ceremony potentially catered to Chinese audiences. Third, Chinese media played an essential role in building up a "creative, innovative, humorous, and amiable image" of the UK by releasing positive news coverage of the event (Zhou et al., 2013, 884).

<sup>78</sup>See <http://english.cntv.cn/special/AD/20120926/102555.shtml>, accessed 10 December 2012.

### 5.2.1 London Olympics Opening Ceremony

The London Olympics opening ceremony was staged on 27 July 2012 at the London Stadium. This section focuses on two core parts of the ceremony—the visual presentation and Chinese hosts’ narrations—and examines how British nationalist elements were constructed in the performances and how Chinese hosts interpreted the presentation to shape Chinese audiences’ understanding of the event.

#### *Visual Presentation*

British stage director Danny Boyle directed the visual presentation, *Isles of Wonder*. Following a timeline from the Pre-industrial Age up to the present, it endeavored to promote Britain’s national image by showing its greatness in a light-hearted style. In doing so, this ceremony presented various aspects of the UK, including the advanced healthcare service system (the National Health Service), popular culture (e.g., Mr. Bean), children’s literature (e.g., *Peter Pan*), and notable British inventions (e.g., the obstetrical ultrasound technology and the invention of the World Wide Web). These achievements exerted a great influence on the UK, even the world. In the following part, I will discuss the sections that showcased the UK, the artistic style, and three elements that constructed British audiences’ nationalism.

The opening section, a two-minute film titled *Journey*, produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), showed a beautiful landscape alongside the famous River Thames. This short video gave audiences a general impression of London and the country with several important landmarks, for example, Big Ben, the London Eye, and the Battersea Power Station. In the end, the journey went to London Stadium, where the London opening ceremony started.

The first part (of two) of the section called *Second to the Right and Straight on Till Morning* celebrated the National Health Service (NHS) founded in 1948 when the former London Olympics took place. Ryan Thomas and Mary Grace Antony (2015, 498) indicate that the British newspaper *the People* described the NHS as a British birthright, “prompting shared cultural identification and drawing battle lines on acceptable political conduct.” The performance featured 600 NHS dancers,

all of whom NHS staff, with children on 320 hospital beds. The beds were arranged to depict, through illuminated blankets, a child's face with a smile and a tear, spelling an acronym "GOSH." These were the logo and name of a children's hospital: The Great Ormond Street Hospital, founded in 1852 and one of the world's leading children's hospitals. In the performance, the doctors and nurses took care of sick children by reading stories and comforting them to fall asleep.



Figure 5.9 The logo of the Great Ormond Street Hospital during the London Olympics opening ceremony<sup>79</sup>

The following part focused on children's literature by combining the characters in literature and hospital scenes. In the scene, a girl read a book on a bed with a torch, when the famous British novelist J. K. Rowling read an extract from *Peter Pan* (or *Peter and Wendy*). After that, a fairy tale world appeared, as a group of villain puppets from British children's literature popped up on the stage, including the Child Catcher (*Peter Pan*), the Queen of Hearts (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), and Lord Voldemort (*Harry Potter*). After the puppets were driven away, the children in hospital pajamas started to jump on the beds and dance with the doctors and the nurses. This suggested that society protected the children through the medical system.

Concerning its artistic style, the show took a buoyant tone, a marked difference from the Beijing show that was notably more solemn. It included, among other sketches, a comical interlude performed by the popular comedic actor Rowan Atkinson as his character Mr. Bean. Humor also

<sup>79</sup> Screenshot from YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4As0e4de-rI>, accessed 16 August 2014. The following figures of the ceremony are from the same source.

existed in other scenes. For example, when the British weather forecaster Michael Fish reported the BBC weather forecast, “Don’t worry about a hurricane,” the rain suddenly poured down. It was an irony of the British weather forecast department, creating a brisk atmosphere in the presentation.



Figure 5.10 Rowan Atkinson in the role of Mr. Bean during the London Olympics opening ceremony

The short film called *Happy and Glorious* was centered on an English fictional character, James Bond. Even more noteworthy was that this film featured Queen Elizabeth II as herself (see Figure 5.11)<sup>80</sup>. The movie featured many British national flags: on the helicopter that the Queen and Bond boarded, on the Queen’s parachute when she and Bond parachuted from the helicopter, on the face of a bus driver waving towards the helicopter, in the hands of audiences looking at the helicopter, etc. The “flagged” nationalist symbols (such as flags) frequently shown in the film, according to Billig (1995), were contributed to stimulated nationalism.

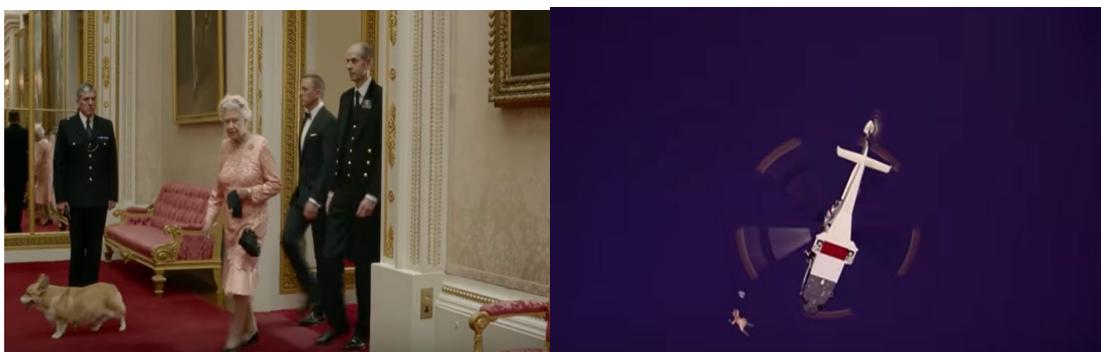


Figure 5.11 Screenshots from *Happy and Glorious* with Queen Elizabeth II in the presence of the character James Bond (left) and a stunt double dressed as the Queen skydiving (right)

<sup>80</sup> It was then proven that Gary Connery was the Queen’s stunt double in the performance of the skydiving.

Although the UK did not systematically conduct the Olympic education program as the PRC, it still aimed to promote people's national identity to consolidate the nation. As I have argued in the theoretical part, three important nationalist elements arouse identity thinking and national attachment: collective memories, national boundaries, and people's engagement. I will identify the three elements in the visual presentation to examine how they construct British nationalism.

Collective memories were mainly narrated at the beginning of the visual presentation, covering the pre-industrial age and the Industry Revolution. The section *Green and Pleasant Land* depicted the pre-industrial age when the stage was transformed into immense green grasslands and a small hill to display rural scenes: children playing outside; people feeding caged animals; groups of domestic animals such as sheep and cattle strolling on the grasslands. The rural scenes affirmed the collective memory of a peaceful life in the pre-industrial age.

However, the villagers' peaceful rural life ended, as workers rapidly built factories symbolized by seven big chimneys. This heralded the coming of the Industrial Revolution, interpreted by the section *Pandemonium*. While not ignoring its negative effects, the performance framed the Industrial Revolution as the most significant economic and technological advancement in history. In doing so and highlighting the UK's role in it, this section constructed the Industrial Revolution as a positive shared memory that instills national pride.

Another feature that shapes audiences' collective memories and constructs an imagined community is a shared religion: Christianity. In the ceremony, the Scottish singer Emeli Sandé sang the Christian hymn "*Abide with Me*," with modern dancers performing in the stage center. This song acknowledged that Christianity is the dominant religion in the UK, although "Boyle claims that it has an appeal to those of all religions and none" (Bryant, 2015, 340).

Besides positive memories, the opening ceremony presented sorrowful memories to arouse a shared national identity. For example, the show included a minute's silence and poppy flowers to commemorate the people who died in the two world wars in the 20th century. A series of photos were displayed to commemorate the victims of the London bombings on 7 July 2005, just one day

after winning the bid to host the Olympics. Although the memories were painful, they may impress the audiences more than pleasant memories.

The ceremony did not stress national boundaries that differentiated the UK from other nation-states but highlighted the UK's constituents, inspiring British audiences' national identity thinking. In the performance, a youth choir led by a solo of 11-year-old boy sang four songs: Jerusalem, Danny Boy, Flower of Scotland, and Bread of Heaven, representing the four countries of the UK: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The soft and emotional tones expressed deep attachment to the nation. During the singing, the four countries' screenshots and the British players' performances in the Rugby Union Games aimed to arouse audiences' national pride.

Concerning British people's engagement, a video in the section *Abide with Me* connected this event to the previous 1948 London Olympics, arousing collective remembrance of the past games. It then presented the torch relay, starting from the ignition of the flame in Greece. The video focused on public engagement and especially gave some close-up shots of handicapped torchbearers, also showing British social humanity. In addition, numerous audiences watched the relay in the streets, suggesting their support for this international event.

The ceremony did not focus on either high technology or the number of volunteers, as did the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony. For example, thousands of people performed the countdown in the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony with high-tech LED displays. In contrast, the 2012 London countdown section seemed much simpler but still creative: ten groups of children came on stage, holding balloons with numbers from 1 to 10 (see Figure 5.12). The balloons consecutively popped, 10 to 1. Although the two ceremonies used different ways to give the presentation, they were aimed to brand their nations on the international stage and thus enhance domestic audiences' national identity.



Figure 5.12 The countdown during the London Olympics opening ceremony

### *Chinese Hosts' Interpretation*

Unlike the Beijing opening ceremony, two teams, Bai Yansong (CCTV 13, the news channel) and Zhang Bin and Sha Tong (CCTV 1 and 5, the comprehensive channel and the Olympic [or sports] channel<sup>81</sup>) mainly interpreted the live broadcast of the London Olympics opening ceremony in the PRC. As the official language of the opening ceremony was English, most Chinese audiences could only understand the ceremony through the Chinese hosts' interpretation.

The two teams interpreted the London opening ceremony in different styles. Bai did not use any poetic language to narrate the events. Instead, he provided plenty of background information and comments on the performance in a matter-of-fact manner. His style of narrating the event was personal rather than following the official Chinese propaganda style. In the official Olympic channel, i.e., CCTV 5, Zhang and Sha's narrations were less formal than that of the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony. However, the two hosts hardly interacted with each other, making their narration style slightly similar to that of the MCs in the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony.

Then, the question is why the hosts' narrations of the two ceremonies (Beijing vs. London) and on two Chinese channels (CCTV 13 vs. CCTV 5) were so different. The most distinct reason was that as the Beijing Olympics, held in the PRC for the first time, was connected with the established Olympic dream, the Chinese government, as an organizer, had an incentive to promote state

<sup>81</sup> CCTV 1 shared the live broadcast of the London Olympics.

nationalism with traditional official propaganda methods (the style of solemnity and majesty). The MCs' narrations in the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony were typical for such patriotic propaganda. In the London Olympics, the PRC—as a participating country—did not have a motivation to enhance nationalism in the same way as during the Beijing Olympics. Concerning the different styles of the two Chinese host teams in the London Olympics opening ceremony, the major reason may be CCTV 5 was officially selected to broadcast the ceremony, which led to a more formal propaganda style.

### **5.2.2 Artistic Performances: London versus Beijing**

The opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics and the London Olympics were designed to be spectacles. Brownell (2013) suggests that they represent the political systems of the Chinese state and the British state, and the London Olympics received even greater attention in the PRC with the expansion of telecommunication. As consecutive events, the two ceremonies used similar strategies to brand their nations, and both attracted large attention from the Chinese, making them comparable in many aspects.

Generally, from the perspective of visual effects, the London Olympics opening ceremony was in some sense not as magnificent as the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony since the PRC invested much more money than the UK. Based on the cost of hosting the Olympics (Beijing: over 40 billion US dollars<sup>82</sup> versus London: 9.25 billion GB pounds<sup>83</sup> approximately equaling 14.5 billion US dollars), it was not difficult to see this difference. The higher cost allowed the Beijing Olympics to create the artistic performance more magnificent.

The design of the two performances bears similarities and differences. In general, both performances spared no effort to introduce their own history, culture, society, and contribution to the world. For instance, the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony celebrated the four Chinese inventions; the London Olympics opening ceremony displayed the Industrial Revolution and the British inventions. For their differences, the former centered on Confucianism were seen as a new form of nationalist

<sup>82</sup> See Zimbalist (2011, 125)

<sup>83</sup> See Evans (2016, 32)

discourse for the governance of Chinese authorities (Cheung, 2012). The latter emphasized individualism with social humanity embodied in cast members' varied costumes, personalized pop music and dance, care for (handicapped) children, and commemoration of the victims in the wars, etc.

Children, usually regarded as the hope and future of a nation, were widely used in both performances. For example, in the national flag-raising ceremonies, the respective national anthems were sung by children. In the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, children participated in various performances, such as the Beijing opera section. At the beginning of the London opening ceremony, children from the four countries of the UK performed the anthem of their respective countries. As this opening ceremony narrated a story of the UK's future (Bryant, 2015, 342), it was not surprising that children were frequently featured on the stage or in the pre-designed videos. Both ceremonies showed children's smiling faces that suggested happiness, peace, and an overall positive atmosphere.

Targeting their domestic audiences, the two opening ceremonies used similar ways to arouse national pride. The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony presented a glorious history by focusing on China's ancient civilization but ignored national humiliation in modern history. Likewise, the London Olympics opening ceremony celebrated the past but never mentioned its colonial history, as Bryant (2015, 342) argues that "Boyle's story of the nation was also notable for the tone of the telling. It was that rarity a story told straight – a celebration of Britain devoid of criticism and without irony".

Some differences between the two ceremonies merit discussions. First, the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony featured a great number of cast members in the same or similar costumes, giving an impression of uniformity. In contrast, the London Olympics opening ceremony had a smaller number of actors/actresses with a more varied array of clothing, reflecting individual British people's personalities and stories. The differences depended on the budget for each event (a larger cast of performers more expensive) and rested with different cultures and values of the two countries. To be specific, the PRC favors unified collectiveness in artistic performances, while the UK prefers to show characteristics of multiplied individualism.

Second, as one of the key elements to improve the stage effect, budgets for the events were different. Why did the PRC rather than the UK use a high budget to create an astounding stage effect? I assume it was for social satisfaction that helped enhance legitimacy. Chinese people attach great importance to “face” (*mianzi* 面子), measuring one’s dignity and respect. As I argued in Chapter 1, the Chinese government hosted the Beijing Olympics to satisfy its citizens, promote national identification, and enhance its legitimacy. One way to achieve this goal was to create a crowd-pleasing spectacle, rather than to optimize the budget and keep spectacle to a minimum to create the image of a government that acted economically. Thus, the Chinese government spent a considerable sum of money on gaining “face” through the spectacle of the opening ceremony, although it experienced an economic recession at the same time. While they led to the Beijing Olympics being the most expensive summer Olympics to date, the splendid stage effects made the government indeed gain “face” for the people. Hyun Bang Shin and Li Bingqing (2013, 568) argue that most media published numerous reports of positive public reactions to the event.<sup>84</sup> In contrast, the British valued the more practical elements of hosting the event without face culture. Due to economic considerations, the London Olympics cost much less than the Beijing Olympics, bring about distinct stage effects.

Third, the styles of the two ceremonies are in sharp contrast. The performance in the Beijing opening ceremony was solemn and majestic. The grand scene aided by high technology and the MCs’ formal narration proved this point. Moreover, the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony took a serious tone in creating a positive image of China. The London Olympics opening ceremony saw a more cheerful tone with elements of self-deprecating humor. It also included heavier, mournful themes: the commemorations of victims in World War I and the 2005 London bombings. The question of why these styles were so different lies in the approach the respective organizing nation took. As already discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Chinese government and media mainly propagated the Beijing opening ceremony as a Coronation— one of the event types defined by Dayan and Katz (1992)—i.e., the crowning achievement of China’s bid to host the Olympics. It was a celebration of Chineseness (de Kloet et al., 2008; Zeng, 2013) that suggests success and happiness, and such

<sup>84</sup> There were negative responses, mainly from marginal population groups, including migrants who were provided the labor force in constructing the necessary infrastructure for the Games but were excluded from living in Beijing due to issues such as unaffordable housing (Shin & Li, 2013).

commemorations were not in line with a happy atmosphere. Therefore, the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony portrayed the positive aspects without mentioning the negative topics. The designers of the London Olympics opening ceremony, despite its lower budget, aimed to exhibit their national characteristics oppositely to the Chinese (light-hearted vs. solemn). It was a way to establish British identity, resonating with what Brownell says (2013, 1321): “Boyle’s opening ceremony, then, deliberately highlighted the chaos of British democracy with the authoritarian order of Beijing.”

Fourth, the cultural performances of the two ceremonies reflect two opposed political systems (Brownell, 2013, 1320). To be specific, the Beijing opening ceremony represented a hierarchical system (e.g., camera movements); the London opening ceremony stressed equality (e.g., Queen Elizabeth II’s parachute jumping) and humanity (e.g., the disabled children’s performance and commemoration of victims). This shaped audiences’ understanding of nationalism in the two countries. The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony emphasized the unified identity of Chineseness, Sinocentric, and ethnic-based Chinese nationalism. However, the London Olympics opening ceremony “highlighted the diversified identity of Britishness, conveying social inclusiveness, cultural hybridity, and civic-based multicultural nationalism” (Lee & Yoon, 2017).

In short, the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics presented a friendly, collective-based, civilized, dignified, dynamic, and technologically advanced nation-state to the world, which changed the stereotypical image of the PRC as a closed and laggard country in the past. This helped improve the confidence of the Chinese people. The opening ceremony of the London Olympics exhibited a humanistic, individualized, humorous, creative, and prosperous state. Myung-Sook Park and Hyae-Syn Tae (2016) suggest that both performances attached great importance to showcasing their national identity. Although the meanings of each performance were different, both performances integrate expressions of their counterpart country. To be more specific, the Beijing Olympics employed westernized expressions in the performance, while the London Olympics used oriental expressions (Park & Tae, 2016, 188).

Since the Chinese government “expects the media to play multiple roles, especially in the

construction of a good image of the Party-state both domestically and internationally” (Zhang, 2011, 193), the media, as the bridge between the government and domestic audiences, take charge of transmitting patriotic propaganda that caters to both domestic audiences’ taste and the government’s interest. As reflected online in the Tianya BBS, Chinese audiences tended to compare the two shows, and many of them favored the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony when they watched the London ceremony.

### **5.3 Tianya BBS and Online Nationalism**

The expansion of the Internet as mass media considerably changed how the media set the public agenda and how people are involved in public affairs. For example, when a media event occurs, Internet media broadcast the event online simultaneously as traditional electronic media. After viewing these broadcasts, Internet users air opinions and express emotions on the Internet by posting threads and comments. A virtual community reduces practical limitations of time and place to voice opinions. Furthermore, due to the anonymous character, commenters feel relatively free and confident to talk and join in various discussions, although in some cases, certain sensitive opinions that offend the government will be deleted or forbidden by web administrators with Chinese censorship mechanism (for details, see Chapter 3).

#### **5.3.1 Development of Chinese BBSs**

A Bulletin Board System (BBS, also referred to as an online forum) is an important online service where users can register and post messages, respond to threads, etc., emerging around 1997 in the PRC. BBSs had been one of the most popular Chinese online platforms for more than a decade around the 2000s. Although social media such as Sina weibo (established in 2009) and Wechat (founded in 2011) gradually started to boom online, eventually leading to the decline of the BBSs, it did not significantly influence the popularity of the BBSs between 2008 and 2012. The BBSs usage rate slightly declined from 2008 to 2012 (2008: 30.7% vs. 2012: 29%), but the number of users saw a significant increase during that period (2008: 91.00 million vs. 2012: 155.86 million).<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup> These statistics are based on the report of CNNIC, see <http://www.cac.gov.cn/files/pdf/hlwtjbg/hlwlzkdctjbg023.pdf> and <https://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201207/P020120723477451202474.pdf>, accessed 29 May 2019.

This shows that BBSs were still the most active online channels for public discussions of mass media events and nationalist expressions between 2008 and 2012 when the Beijing Olympics and the London Olympics in this case study took place.

BBS users expanded from social elites and university students to the populace throughout the first decade of the 21st century. Li Shubo (2010, 67) indicates that the early BBS users were well-educated elites, and that campus BBSs were popular among university students who used it as a resource for searching study information and leisure by discussing shared hobbies. The BBSs of Qinghua University (*shuimu shequ* 水木社区, website: [www.newsmth.net](http://www.newsmth.net)) and Beijing University (*beida weiming*, short for BDWM 北大未名, website: <https://bbs.pku.edu.cn/v2/home.php>) were representative Chinese campus virtual communities. By 2000, BBSs vastly expanded, becoming a major online forum for public discussions. Even eight years later, during the Beijing Olympics, “[a] BBS is the primary way that Chinese netizens access and transmit information online to a large number of people, almost as effectively as mass media” (Xiao, 2011, 204).

In this study, I choose Tianya BBS (<https://bbs.tianya.cn/>) as a research site to explore online nationalism. Tianya BBS, established in 1999 in Hainan, is one of the leading Internet forums among Chinese online communities. It has generated discussions on numerous social and political topics,<sup>86</sup> some of which drew the attention of traditional media and local governments, thereby attracting many Internet users. Xiao Qiang (2011, 204) indicates that by the end of 2007, Tianya BBS had “3.4 million total registered accounts and 100,000–500,000 users online at any one time. The online community has 200,000 daily online users, hundreds of thousands of new posts, and millions of commentaries per day.” Besides, according to statistics from American web traffic analysis company Alexa that specializes in Internet traffic analytics, Tianya’s Chinese traffic rank was 26, and global traffic rank was 141, measured over three months, on 5 May 2012 (see Figure 5.13). In 2008, a study

<sup>86</sup> The debate between Zhou Gongzi and Yi Yeqin (the so-called Zhou Gongzi incident in 2005) and the Death of Wang Yue (the so-called Xiao Yueyue incident in 2010) are notable examples of heated discussions generated by netizens on Tianya BBS. In the Zhou and Yi debate, the main contention was how the rich were defined and whether the rich were allowed to discriminate against the poor. Yi, claiming himself a rich person, posted certain threads to demonstrate this discrimination. Zhou raised various challenges to Yi, accusing Yi of being a parvenu. Zhou won the debate with support from netizens in the end. In the second incident, Xiao Yueyue, an Internet celebrity and proven to be a fake person, was depicted as a fat and obnoxious girl whose strange behavior drew great attention from netizens. The incident showed netizens’ appreciation of ugliness.

by Xinhua Net revealed that Tianya BBS, as one of the three most influential online communities in the PRC (Xiao, 2011, 217),<sup>87</sup> rendered it an excellent platform for online Chinese nationalism during the Beijing/London Olympic events.



Figure 5.13 Alexa's traffic rank of tianya.cn on 5 May 2012<sup>88</sup>

### 5.3.2 An Analysis of Online Nationalism on Tianya BBS

In this study, I compared online expressions of nationalism related to the Beijing Olympics and the London Olympics on Tianya BBS. I selected threads as the data source to evaluate online nationalism. The study includes two phases: the first is a quantitative analysis of netizens' engagement in the Olympic events by investigating the click rate of threads and the number of replies; the second is to explore the content of the replies that present public nationalist sentiments.

#### *Audiences' online engagement*

On BBSs, Internet users discuss various topics by creating a post to voice their opinion and/or express emotions on the subject. Users interested in these topics can read these posts and add their comments, thus forming a thread. The number of clicks each thread has received is one quantifiable measure of audiences' first interest in the topics they discuss; the number of comments per thread is another.

<sup>87</sup> The other two forums are Qiangguo (<http://bbs1.people.com.cn/board/1.html>) and Kaidi ([www.kdnet.net](http://www.kdnet.net)).

<sup>88</sup> See <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/tianya.cn>, accessed 5 May 2012.

To collect data, I separately entered two Chinese keywords, “北京奥运 (Beijing Olympics)” and “伦敦奥运 (London Olympics),” in the search engine of Tianya BBS. I confined the search to threads’ titles and then ordered the results by the number of clicks and by the number of replies, respectively. In addition, I limited the results to threads created in the same year as either the Beijing (2008) or London (2012) Olympics. This means that I regard threads on either of the Olympics created outside the respective Olympic year as not relevant<sup>89</sup>, and I have excluded these threads, even the ones that were being created before the year 2008/2012 but active in those years (i.e., new replies were added to them). Within the search results, I have assessed whether each thread indeed discussed the Olympics, as suggested by the keywords Beijing/London Olympics being part of the title or another topic. The latter were irrelevant to my research, and I have therefore also excluded them from the analysis. In the end, I narrowed my research to the ten most clicked and the ten most replied threads<sup>90</sup>. Table 5.1 illustrates the number of clicks, the number of replies, the date the thread was created, and title of each of the top ten most-clicked threads, and Table 5.2 shows these details for the top ten most replied-to threads. Figure 5.14 and 5.15 are shown to compare the results of the two events in terms of the number of clicks and the number of replies, respectively.

2008 Beijing Olympics (ranked by number of clicks)			
Rank	Number of clicks	Thread creation date	Title of thread
1	636579	19-04-2008	4月19日巴黎街头全法万名华人支持北京奥运大集会直播 Live broadcast of an assembly of ten thousand Chinese people supporting the Beijing Olympics on 19 April in the streets of Paris
2	538297	07-08-2008	开在七夕的北京2008年第29届奥运会开幕式直播贴 Live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics on Chinese Valentine’s Day
3	391124	10-04-2008	全球华人凝聚 北京奥运会旧金山市火炬传递圆满成功 Global Chinese gathering: the torch relay of the Beijing Olympics completed in San Francisco
4	346523	09-08-2008	北京奥运开幕式现场照片美轮美奂(不断更新中) Nice on-site photos of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony (live updated)

<sup>89</sup> The major (sub-) events took place in the year when the Olympics were held, which had a more immediate impact on public opinion than other years, so I confined the publishing time of the threads within the game year.

<sup>90</sup> Overlap exists in the two groups of threads because netizens can click the threads with the highest number of replies.

5	228778	02-04-2008	全程记录 2008 北京奥运会火炬传递活动(时时更新) Recording of the torch relay of the 2008 Beijing Olympics (live updated)
6	195109	30-07-2008	韩媒曝光北京奥运开幕式彩排遭谴责(转载) That South Korean media expose the rehearsal of Beijing Olympics opening ceremony is condemned (reproduced)
7	188674	22-07-2008	北京奥运最引人关注的中国十大巨星和国外十大巨星 The most attractive ten domestic and ten international superstars in the Beijing Olympics
8	159552	23-08-2008	2008 北京奥运会闭幕式图文直播 Live broadcast of Teletext reports of the closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics
9	145932	06-07-2008	参加北京奥运会开幕式的世界各国领导人名单 A list of the state leaders of all countries attending the Beijing opening ceremony
10	144896	07-08-2018	奥运期间的首都机场宛如星光大道,群星北京看奥运,来看看最全的机场撞星记 Beijing Capital International Airport is like the Avenue of Stars during the Olympic time: numerous pop stars come to Beijing to watch the Olympic Games; have a look at the pop stars at the airport

2012 London Olympics (ranked by number of clicks)			
Rank	Number of clicks	Thread creation date	Title of thread
1	577372	27-07-2012	2012 伦敦奥运会开幕式直播讨论帖 Live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics
2	305566	06-08-2012	这坑爹的伦敦奥运会——《八卦来了》奥运号 The cheating London Olympics—“Gossip is coming”: Olympic series
3	283478	13-08-2012	伦敦奥运闭幕式,白岩松吐槽解说针针见血!!CCTV13 开始神吐槽之路 The closing ceremony of the London Olympics: Bai Yansong's criticism is sharp to the point!! CCTV 13 starts criticizing [the ceremony].
4	271811	28-07-2012	伦敦奥运开幕联欢会的吐槽评论已出。(评论转载翻译贴) Complaining about the opening ceremony of the London Olympics (reproduced and translated comment thread)
5	242962	29-07-2012	伦敦奥运会和北京奥运会开幕式图片对比,兼国观的一些神吐槽 A comparison of the pictures of Beijing and London Olympic opening ceremonies and some sarcasm in the section of International Review [of Tianya BBS]
6	233513	04-08-2012	对比下北京的伦敦奥运吃的东西,欢乐贴 A comparison of food in the Beijing Olympics and the London Olympics, fun thread
7	219508	28-07-2012	我擦!!!!伦敦奥运一句话击败中国!!中国奥运完败!!! Oh snap!!!! In one sentence, the London Olympics have defeated China!! The Chinese Olympics are a complete failure!!!
8	181795	29-07-2012	2012 第 30 届伦敦奥运会游泳项目关注讨论帖 Discussion on the swimming event of the 30th London Olympics in 2012

9	153946	01-08-2008	伦敦和北京奥运开幕式对照.....只看图别说话好坏心自知 A comparison of the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics and that of the London Olympics ... don't comment and only view the pictures and you will know the differences
10	152925	28-07-2012	刚看了伦敦奥运开幕式,对比北京奥运开幕式。。。[I] just viewed the London Olympic opening ceremony and compared it to the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony...

Table 5.1 Top ten threads with the highest number of clicks (Beijing vs. London)<sup>91</sup>

2008 Beijing Olympics (ranked by number of replies)			
Rank	Number of replies	Thread creation date	Title of thread
1	13261	07-08-2008	开在七夕的北京 2008 年第 29 届奥运会开幕式直播贴 Live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics on Chinese Valentine's Day
2	4741	19-04-2008	4 月 19 日巴黎街头全法万名华人支持北京奥运大集会直播 Live broadcast of an assembly of ten thousand Chinese people supporting the Beijing Olympics on 19 April in the streets of Paris
3	4621	02-04-2008	全程记录 2008 北京奥运会火炬传递活动(时(实)时更新) Recording of the torch relay of the 2008 Beijing Olympics (live updated)
4	4258	10-04-2008	全球华人凝聚 北京奥运会旧金山市火炬传递圆满成功 Global Chinese Gathering: the torch relay of the Beijing Olympics completed in San Francisco
5	3710	23-08-2008	2008 北京奥运会闭幕式图文直播 Live broadcast of Teletext reports of the closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics
6	2361	30-04-2008	开个北京 2008 年奥运会倒计时 100 天庆典晚会的直播讨论贴吧 Publishing a live discussion thread for the 100-day countdown of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics
7	1752	30-07-2008	韩媒曝光北京奥运开幕式彩排遭谴责(转载) That South Korean media expose the rehearsal of Beijing Olympics opening ceremony is condemned (reproduced)
8	1524	06-07-2008	参加北京奥运会开幕式的世界各国领导人名单 A list of the state leaders of all countries attending the Beijing opening ceremony
9	1314	17-08-2008	2008 中国北京 29 届奥运会闭幕式直播贴!!!!!! Live broadcast of the closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics!!!!!!
10	1294	09-08-2008	北京奥运开幕式现场照片美轮美奂(不断更新中) Nice on-site photos of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony (live updated)

<sup>91</sup> I retrieved the data on 20 July 2014. The retrieved threads were still available on the Internet in 2021.

2012 London Olympics (ranked by number of replies)			
Rank	Number of replies	Thread creation date	Title of thread
1	6891	27-07-2012	2012 伦敦奥运会开幕式直播讨论帖 Live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics
2	4337	30-07-2012	伦敦奥运会男子体操团体决赛直播讨论帖!(23 时 30, CCTV5) Live broadcast of team finals of men's gymnastics at the London Olympics (23:30, CCTV5)
3	3927	13-07-2012	2012 第 30 届伦敦奥运会游泳项目关注讨论帖 Discussion on the swimming event of the 30th London Olympics in 2012
4	3191	31-07-2012	伦敦奥运会体操女团决赛直播贴(今晚 23:30,CCTV5) Live broadcast of team finals of women's gymnastics in the London Olympics (tonight 23:30, CCTV5)
5	3021	29-07-2012	伦敦奥运会和北京奥运会开幕式图片对比,兼国观的一些神吐槽 A comparison of the pictures of Beijing and London Olympic opening ceremonies and some sarcasm in the section of International Review [of Tianya BBS]
6	2721	28-07-2012	刚看了伦敦奥运开幕式,对比北京奥运开幕式。。。. [I] just viewed the London Olympic opening ceremony and compared it to the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony
7	2614	28-07-2012	我擦!!!!伦敦奥运一句话击败中国!!中国奥运完败!!! Oh snap!!!! In one sentence, the London Olympics have defeated China!! The Chinese Olympics are a complete failure!!!
8	2448	28-07-2012	伦敦奥运开幕联欢会的吐槽评论已出。(评论转载翻译贴) Complaining about the opening ceremony of the London Olympics (reproduced and translated comment thread)
9	2269	28-07-2012	伦敦奥运开幕式全面超越北京奥运,有木有! The London Olympic opening ceremony completely surpasses the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony, isn't it [?]
10	2031	13-08-2012	伦敦奥运闭幕式,白岩松吐槽解说针针见血!!CCTV 13 开始神吐槽之路 The closing ceremony of the London Olympics: Bai Yansong's criticism is sharp to the point!! CCTV 13 starts criticizing [the ceremony]

Table 5.2 Top ten threads with the highest number of replies (Beijing vs. London)<sup>92</sup>

Based on Table 5.1 and 5.2, two elements of nationalism: Chinese people's engagement (shown in the torch relay) and collective memories (reflected in the Beijing opening ceremony) received close attention in the Beijing Olympics; the other element of nationalism—national boundaries (i.e., the emphasis of the differences/conflicts between countries)—was largely formed through the

<sup>92</sup> I retrieved the data on 20 July 2014.

comparison between the Beijing Olympics and the London Olympics. In the Beijing Olympics, the creation dates of the top ten threads mainly fall in two periods: April 2008 (the torch relay) and July-August 2008 (the major game event). In the London Olympics, the creation dates of the top ten threads only fall into the period of the games. This suggests that in the Beijing Olympics, as the PRC organized various Olympic propaganda activities (such as the volunteer enrollment and the Olympic education program) and longer torch relay (inside and outside the PRC), it immensely increased Chinese people's engagement. As an important element to construct nationalism, Chinese people's engagement in the Beijing Olympics was much more than that of British people in the London Olympics.

People's engagement in the media event strengthens popular nationalism and increases national identification. This is reflected by the topics of the most viewed and replied-to threads. The torch relay is a popular subject. Among the most viewed threads, the topic of conflicts in the torch relay in Paris ranks the first, and the torch relay in San Francisco ranks the third, just after the thread on the live broadcast of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony. It shows that the interruption of the Olympic dream stirs online opinions reflecting strong nationalism.

In contrast, in the 2012 London Olympics, the Chinese government and media had no prescheduled Olympic propaganda activities, and Chinese people's engagement in the London Olympics was much less than in the Beijing Games. Furthermore, as discussed previously, the route of the torch relay of the London Olympics was confined to the UK, leading to shorter duration. Thus, it brought about less participation of the British in the London torch relay than that of the Chinese in the Beijing torch relay. In terms of the influence of the London torch relay on Chinese audiences, the relay did not raise great attention among them, as no threads are seen on this topic in either of the top ten that mentioned the London torch relay. Instead, besides the London Olympics opening ceremony, Chinese audiences attach importance to the sports programs (Among the most replied threads, three out of ten threads on the London Olympics are about particular sports competitions: one is about swimming and the other two are about gymnastics). This suggests that because the PRC only acts as a participating country in the London Olympics, Chinese audiences' major concern switched to participating in the Games, particularly to the performance of Chinese teams.

As shown in the threads (Table 5.1 and 5.2), Chinese audiences hardly made comparisons between the Beijing Olympics and its predecessor, the 2004 Athens Olympics during the Beijing Olympics. Yet, they frequently compared the Beijing Olympics with the London Olympics (In the most-replied top ten threads, six out of ten threads make such a comparison). By further examining the threads' content, I find that five out of these six regard the Beijing Olympics as better than the London Olympics. It means that after hosting the Beijing Olympics, the event has become a benchmark for Chinese audiences to evaluate the London Olympics.<sup>93</sup> This implies that the Beijing Olympics have largely won public satisfaction as the government expected. Hence the Beijing Olympics strengthened the government legitimacy in this regard.

The number of clicks indicates audiences' surface-level interest in certain topics. Figure 5.14 shows that the number of the most clicked four threads of the Beijing Olympics is higher than that of the London Olympics. For the threads ranking 5–10 regarding the number of clicks, the number of clicks is higher for the London Olympics. The largest difference lies in the threads ranking second: (“live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics” vs. “the cheating London Olympics— ‘Gossip is coming’: Olympic series,” 538297 vs. 305566). The difference between the last threads on the two Olympics is the smallest (144896 vs. 152925). This suggests that Chinese audiences are more concerned with the hottest topics of the Beijing Olympics than those of the London Olympics.

The number of replies reflects audiences' deeper engagement in these topics. The top ten threads with the highest number of clicks show a similar disparity between the London and Beijing Olympics as the top ten threads with the most replies. Figure 5.15 shows that the number of replies for the five highest-ranked threads is higher for the Beijing Olympics than for the London Olympics; it is the opposite for the remaining five threads. The differences in the number of replies between London and Beijing are small, with one exception: the most replied-to thread of the Beijing Olympics has almost twice as many replies as the most replied-to thread about the London Olympics (13261 vs. 6891: Live broadcast of the Beijing opening ceremony vs. live broadcast of the London

<sup>93</sup> The PRC won the most gold medals in its Olympic history in 2008.

opening ceremony). This further supports the result mentioned above: Chinese audiences are more concerned with the hottest topics of the Beijing Olympics than those of the London Olympics, especially in the threads on the opening ceremonies.

The threads on the live broadcast of the opening ceremony have the most replies with both the London and Beijing Olympics. They also rank first (London) and second (Beijing) in most reviewed topics. Discussions on (the live broadcast of) the ceremonies are common in the threads, especially that of the London Olympics, reflected in more than half of the top ten threads (in both most-viewed and most-replied thread groups). Between 2008 and 2012, live streaming<sup>94</sup> did not enter Internet usage, so an important way of sharing the live broadcasts of the Olympic events was to post the live pictures and comments in threads and comment sections of BBSs (videos could not be posted in the threads during that period). Thread starters posted such live broadcasts in the form of threads and comments. Commenters, including the thread starter, then replied by posting related broadcasting information or giving comments. In this way, these threads accumulated close attention from the audiences who looked for updated information of the live broadcast.

This suggests, on the one hand, the opening ceremonies are the most important section of the two Olympic events for Chinese audiences. On the other hand, the audiences are much more concerned with the Beijing Olympics than the London Olympics, not even considering that with the expansion of Internet service and communication devices from 2008 to 2012 many more people joined online discussions in the PRC (the number of BBS users in the PRC grew from 91.00 million in 2008 to 155.86 million in 2012, as mentioned in Section 5.3.1).

<sup>94</sup> Live streaming that started to become popularized in 2015 refers to online media that simultaneously process received information and deliver live broadcasts in real time.

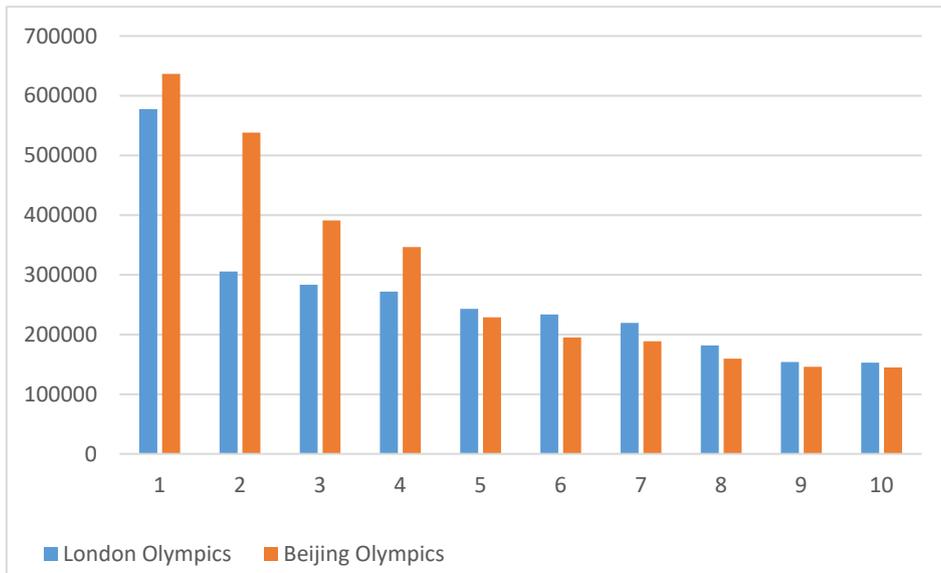


Figure 5.14 Comparison of the number of clicks: the Beijing Olympics vs. the London Olympics

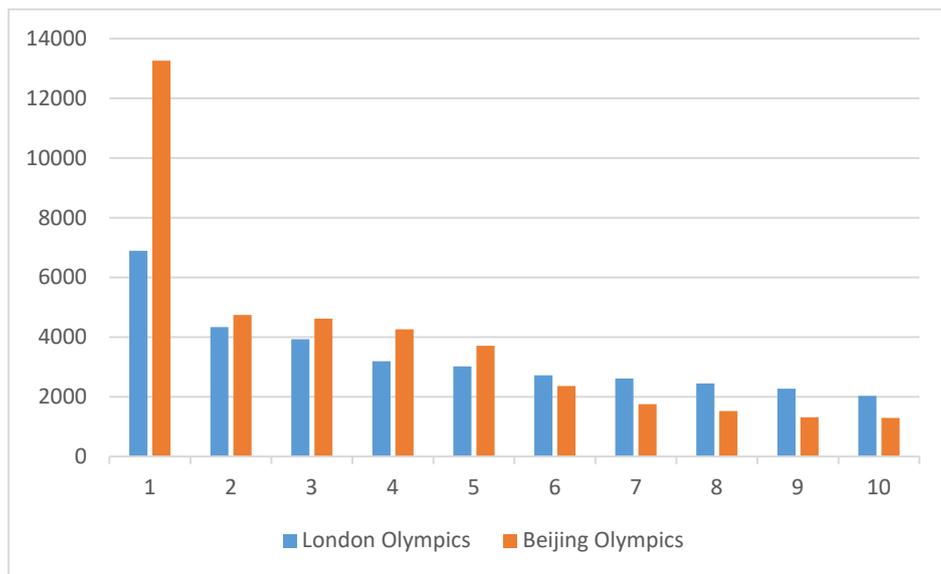


Figure 5.15 Comparison of the number of replies: the Beijing Olympics vs. the London Olympics

### *Analysis of Nationalism of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies*

After examining audiences' engagement of the Olympic events, I performed a content analysis by exploring the discourse of the selected threads on both the Beijing and London Olympics and then selecting certain examples of audiences' comments to analyze how Chinese audiences constructed nationalist discourse to express online nationalism.

I first manually score the comments in the selected threads. Based on the top ten most replied threads

for both Olympics, I identified two groups of threads as the subject for the analysis of online nationalism: two similar topics in each event should be selected; thus, the related comments, to a large extent, are comparable. The most replied-to threads about the opening ceremony meet the requirement discussed above. This shows that the visual presentation of the opening ceremony is directly linked to online public opinion voiced in Tianya BBS discussions. Besides, I also select similar topics of the live broadcasts of the closing ceremonies of the Beijing and London Olympics. I chose four threads in total: one about the opening (A) and one about the closing (B) ceremony for the Beijing (1) and London (2) Olympics. These threads are:

A1. 开在七夕的北京 2008 年第 29 届奥运会开幕式直播帖

Live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics on Chinese Valentine's Day

A2. 2012 伦敦奥运会开幕式直播讨论帖

Live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics

B1. 2008 北京奥运会闭幕式图文直播

Live broadcast of Teletext reports of the closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics

B2. 伦敦奥运闭幕式，白岩松吐槽解说针针见血!!CCTV13 开始神吐槽之路

The closing ceremony of the London Olympics: Bai Yansong's criticism is sharp to the point!!

CCTV 13 starts criticizing [the ceremony]

When a thread becomes popular, the earliest replies are noticed most, so some forum users are enticed to reply as fast as possible to threads they think might attract attention in the hopes of gaining Internet fame. The reply content is usually limited to a statement to declare that they are the first to respond, a so-called first post in English-language Internet environments (where the poster usually only states "first" or a similar phrase). On Tianya BBS, the most common first replies include 沙发 ("sofa"), 占座 ("taking a seat"), and 马克 ("mark") that are meaningless for this study. Thus, I will exclude them in the analysis. What was more, as mentioned in the previous part of this section, thread starters posted live broadcasts of ceremonies by replying to pictures in the comment sections. In fact, they did shape real public opinion. Such replies distorted any popular nationalism analysis, so I selected comments 1001–1100 in each thread to avoid these. After collecting all replies in each of the four threads, I categorized the nationalist sentiments of each into five levels, based on their

content and the tone expressed in them: “very high,” “high,” “neutral,” “low,” and “very low,” and then respectively marked them with 2 points, 1 point, 0 point, -1 point, and -2 points. Appendix 5.1 details the methodology according to which each comment falls into one of these five categories. Table 5.3 shows the total scores of nationalist sentiments reflected in the selected hundred comments in each of the four threads.

Thread	A1	A2	B1	B2
Points	123	71	75	64

Table 5.3 Results of Group A and Group B

The above results reveal that audiences show more nationalism in the opening ceremonies of both Olympics than in the closing ceremonies ( $A1 > B1$  and  $A2 > B2$ ). A possible reason for this is the initial novelty, freshness, and excitement the opening ceremony entails as the start of the event: although the closing ceremony, just as the opening ceremony, features entertaining, artistic performances, audiences may perceive these as repetitive of the opening ceremony, and the novelty has worn off. In the Beijing Olympics, another factor might have been important: more than the closing ceremony, Chinese audiences viewed the opening ceremony as the crowning achievement of realizing the Olympic dream.

Among Chinese audiences, the Beijing Olympics aroused more nationalism than the London Olympics in both the opening and closing ceremonies ( $A1 > A2$  and  $B1 > B2$ ). Why does this happen? Leading up to and during the Beijing Olympics, propaganda was very heavy and lasted for a long time, pushing citizens to immerse themselves in an environment of ubiquitous Olympic propaganda. The Olympic propaganda activities, including the patriotic education program, the volunteer enrollment, and the torch relay, prompted all of society to participate in the Olympic event. Public engagement in such activities increased national identification and nationalism. Audiences’ active online discussions of the ceremonies signify the effectiveness of the propaganda.

Since the London opening ceremony was broadcast at 5 am (China time) on the morning of 27 July 2012, only dedicated Chinese audiences updated the ceremony information live on the respective Tianya BBS threads. Furthermore, the thread starters led audiences to compare the two ceremonies by continuously posting related pictures of the Beijing opening ceremony in the comment sections. The primary comparison focused the content of the ceremony. Many Chinese netizens considered that the Beijing opening ceremony was better than the London opening ceremony. I have identified some characteristics of the comparison that serve as an explanation for this:

1. Cultural differences might have led to Chinese audiences not understanding the essence of the London artistic performances. Comments show some audiences' misunderstanding of British cultural symbols. As they did not understand British history, for example, when they saw the section of Pandemonium, many of them only thought the London ceremony was a mess.
2. Most Chinese audiences were more impressed by the spectacle and grandeur of the Beijing opening ceremony, owing to the far greater budget of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony (Beijing: over 40 billion US dollars vs. London: 14.5 billion US dollars).
3. Since the Chinese government and media propagated the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony as the stage where the PRC realized its Olympic dream, other Olympics—including London—could not reach the engagement level in the Beijing Olympics.
4. Chinese netizens also misunderstood the poppy flowers featured in the London ceremony to commemorate victims during WWI. The flowers reminded them of a historical trauma brought by the British in the Opium Wars, sparking antagonistic emotions towards the London opening ceremony.

Besides those supporting the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, some audiences regarded the London Olympics opening ceremony as better than its predecessor, at least in some respects. For instance, some commenters took a hostile stance towards the PRC's health care system inspired by the London Olympics opening ceremony's emphasis on the UK's NHS. Other replies indicated a predilection to British pop music over Chinese pop music, preferring the London Olympics opening ceremony. However, these negative comments are in small numbers compared to those supporting the Beijing ceremony.

Chinese nationalism is enhanced in the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, as accomplishing the Olympic dream satisfies a social demand. The London Olympics opening ceremony strengthens Chinese nationalism in some sense because it underlines the greatness of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony in comparison. However, the threads on Tianya BBS at the London Olympics opening ceremony reflect less Chinese nationalism than the Beijing opening ceremony. In the following section, I will discuss this discourse of online reactions in more detail.

### *Discourse analysis of comments*

I have awarded each comment in a select sample of a hundred comments in four threads on the opening and closing ceremony with a score to reflect its nationalist statements, from -2 to +2. The scores allowed me to make some general statements on the level of nationalism in each thread and compare which ones showed more nationalist sentiments. To further explore how the comments expressed nationalism, I selected ten comments that typically showed audiences' nationalism from the threads on opening ceremonies of the Beijing and London Olympics<sup>95</sup> to see how audiences constructed nationalist discourses in the thread comments:

### *Examples of comments on the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony*

1.有这么多国内的兄弟一起熬夜看直播,真的很感动。爱我们这个可爱的土地,爱我们这个饱经风桑的母亲。

It is exhilarating to stay up and watch the live broadcast together with so many domestic buddies.

Love our lovely motherland, who experienced many vicissitudes of life.

2.前排就坐!!! 任何排华分裂中国者都得死!!!!

First!!! Anyone who splits China must die.

3.美国老鬼子去死吧,白衣服标志的洋独独们出现在镜头里了!! 啊,看见咱们的红旗了,好多国旗!!

Go to hell, American devils. Foreign separatists in white emerge in the camera!! [I have] seen our red flags, so many flags!!

<sup>95</sup> The same threads as in the previous part. Yet, the comments I selected are not confined to the scope from the 1001st to the 1100th comment, and they belong to the whole comment section of the threads.

4. 双手举棋的中国人，向你们致敬！祖国和你们站在一起。

[I] salute the Chinese with flags in both hands! The motherland stands with you.

5. 我来直播，大家为我们的祖国鼓劲！

I come for the live broadcast. Everyone keeps his finger crossed for our motherland.

6. 群众集体练功？好，集体发功把美国摧毁了！长我民族志气，灭美帝威风。

Do the Chinese populace practice martial arts together? Fine, destroy the US with martial arts! Boost our national morale and puncture American imperialists' arrogance.

7. 感谢在美国支持北京，支持奥运的同胞。

Thank the compatriots in the US for supporting Beijing and the Olympics.

8. 感动，终于看到一个白老外举着咱的国旗支持奥运。

I am so moved to see a white foreigner holding our flags up to support the Olympics.

9. 祖国在我心，怕什么，兄弟们加油！

The motherland is in my heart. Don't be afraid. Go buddies!

10. 人现在还少，但是都分散开了，大家分组围住 ZD 们，这样不论哪一组镜头照 ZD，都能看到鲜红的国旗，海外的同胞们，偶(我)爱你们！

There are only a few scattered people. Let's surround ZD (*zang du*, Tibetan separatists) in groups so that red flags can appear in each camera shot of Tibet separatists. Overseas compatriots, I love you!

#### *Examples of comments on the London Olympics opening ceremony*

1. 一环占座，我脚[觉]得，基本木[没]有可以超越北京的！

I think [the London Olympics] generally cannot surpass the Beijing Olympics.

2. 占座，前几天刚回看了北京奥运开幕式，中国的文化真是博大精深。

[I] reviewed the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony a few days ago. Chinese culture is extensive and profound.

3. 大家何必都这么认真呢？咱们自己已经开过了，经历过了，现在嗑着瓜子轻轻松松看热闹就行了。

Why are we so serious? We have hosted and experienced the Olympics. Now we just sit there to relax and watch the games.

4. 跟体育有关的，俺都喜欢猜一把，看好伦敦开幕式，一定跟北京的不同，一定好看，一

定超过北京的开幕式。

I am interested in anything related to sports. I am optimistic about the London Olympics opening ceremony that must be different from the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, and the former must surpass the latter.

5. 伦敦奥运会倒计时比北京奥运缶阵倒计时弱了很多……

The countdown of the London Olympics opening ceremony is much worse than that of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony.

6. 哎，从已经放的镜头来看，比北京确实差不少呀！

Ah, judging by the broadcast camera shots, [the London Olympics opening ceremony] are much worse than the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony.

7. 阴森森的感觉，咱们天朝那时多霸气

[I have a feeling of] spooky atmosphere [in the London Olympic opening ceremony]. The ceremony of our Tianchao [refers to the PRC, showing national pride] is much more powerful.

8. 表示人呢！人口少完全无气场啊！来天朝借人吧！！精彩在哪里！贝爷是骗子！

Too few people! Insufficient people make [the London Olympics opening ceremony] utter weak!!! Come to *Tianchao* to borrow some people!! Where is the excellent opening ceremony?! Beckham is a cheater!

9. 太不像个开幕式了，节奏太快，也很乱。

[It] does not look like an opening ceremony. It is too fast and in a mess.

10. 罂粟花都出来了，相比欧美媒体，咱中国媒体真是太不把自己当人了。作为鸦片的最大受害者，居然不趁机吐槽？

Poppy flowers come on the stage. Compared to American and European media, our Chinese media really do not respect themselves. As victims of opium, why should we (and Chinese media) not criticize this?

In the examples of the Beijing Olympics, some nouns that patriotically address the Chinese nation and fellow Chinese citizens are common in the selected comments: “祖国 motherland,” “天朝 *Tianchao*,”<sup>96</sup> “兄弟 buddies,” and “同胞 compatriots.” The nouns show up in conjunction with

<sup>96</sup> *Tianchao* is a catchphrase widely used in cyberspace to either express national identification or show disapproval and sarcasm of the Chinese state.

positive verbs, such as love, support, bless, cheer up, and salute. The specific use of these terms shows a discourse of representational strategies to express patriotic emotion. The first-person plural establishes a sense of inclusivity. For example, the word “our” (*women de* 我们的 or *zanmen de* 咱们的) establishes a sense of shared ownership. The first comment on the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony listed above uses “lovely” and “vicissitudes” to describe the commenter’s deep love for the Chinese nation. In comments 3 and 10 on the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony listed above, audiences use inflammatory language towards the US (American devils; puncture American imperialists’ arrogance) and Tibetan activists (ZD). This is an expression of Chinese nationalist sentiments as well.

In the ten selected comments on the London Olympics, a common discussion on comparisons between the two ceremonies of London and Beijing emerges. Generally, many comments praised the Beijing Olympics but criticized the London Olympics. Different from directly expressing their patriotism in the case of the Beijing Olympics (as shown in the first ten selected comments), commenters express nationalism in more indirect ways in the case of the London Olympics (mostly by stressing that the PRC did a “better” opening ceremony than the UK). A lexical difference between the two events also emerges: in the comments on the Beijing Olympics, audiences call the PRC their “motherland”; in those on the London Olympics, they call it “*Tianchao*.” Furthermore, like in the selected ten comments on the Beijing Olympics, audiences employ representational strategies when commenting on the London Olympics. For example, “we” and “our” display a sense of collectivity that illustrates commenters’ attachment to the shared community: the Chinese nation. In this context, the commenters make use of metaphors as well. For example, commenters use poppy flowers—used as a commemorative symbol in the context of the UK’s part in WWI—to evoke the memory of British exports of opium to China in the past, sparking (nationalist) resentment against the UK.

To sum up, commenters’ responses to the London Olympics are largely based on the influence of the Beijing Olympics. They compare the Beijing Olympics to the London Olympics, which may be led by hosts’ interpretation. The commenters on Tianya BBS construct nationalist discourses in similar ways when discussing both the Beijing Olympics and the London Olympics. A difference is

that the national discourses in comments on the Beijing Olympics are more direct, using terms more strongly laden with emotion than comments on the London Olympics. In other words, the discourses on Tianya BBS about the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics impress audiences with direct national pride. In contrast, the same discourses on that of the London Olympics generate the commenters' identification with the Chinese nation mainly by comparing its opening ceremony negatively to that of the Beijing Olympics.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a case study in government-staged media events by examining how the Chinese government organized the 2008 Beijing Olympics, especially how cultural performances during the opening ceremony constructed a patriotic ideal for the audiences. As one of the most important media events for the PRC in the 21st century, the whole Beijing Olympic event was a Coronation, a celebration of the realization of the Olympic dream, fulfilling a social demand established by the government and media. It received wide support from the people, largely owing to the constant propaganda efforts. The prior game propaganda was an implicit form of mass communication of state nationalism and laid a solid foundation for the games to draw broad attention. As a key part of the event, the opening ceremony was designed in a magnificent way to boost national confidence and pride and to prompt more profound love for the nation and satisfaction with the government.

By comparing the London Olympics opening ceremony to that of the Beijing Olympics, I found that, although different in style, the PRC and the UK spared no effort to introduce culture, history, and society to global audiences and build an excellent national image. The London Olympics opening ceremony used methods similar to the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony to arouse national identity, such as frequently showing the national flag. As far as other aspects were concerned, for example, the MCs' high-pitched voice and poetic tone in the narration of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, to a large extent, was different from that of Chinese hosts who interpreted the London Olympics opening ceremony. However, as it was a traditional CCP propaganda style in the Beijing Olympics, Chinese audiences may have accepted it as they are used to that way of narration (no comments on Tianya BBS criticized this point, to my knowledge).

Furthermore, the chapter analyzed online nationalist public opinions related to the two Olympic events on Tianya BBS. The preliminary result in researching Chinese audiences' online engagement in the events shows that the audiences launched more discussion on the Beijing Olympics than on the London Olympics, although Tianya BBS users increased a lot from 2008 to 2012. The analysis of nationalist comments on Tianya BBS relating to the opening/closing ceremonies shows that the Beijing Olympics aroused more nationalism than the London Olympics. Three vital reasons explain this: first, the Beijing Olympics were hosted in the PRC. Second, propaganda was far more pervasive for the Beijing Olympics. Third, the preparations of the Beijing Olympics entailed many opportunities for Chinese audiences to engage, a critical element in constructing nationalism. In short, in the Beijing Olympics, the construction of state nationalism in the form of the Olympic dream was handled by the propaganda apparatus. Through this propaganda, the legitimacy of the Chinese government was maintained and even strengthened.

The quantitative analysis I conducted on online nationalist sentiments presented in Tianya BBS thread comments, with numerical values indicating the level of nationalism, has laid a foundation for further statistical analysis. To conduct a large-scale process of public opinion in media events is a tendency for future online mass communication research. The next chapter will go into detail about this issue.