BEIJING OLYMPIC GAMES AND CHINA’S NATIONAL IMAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Introduction

National image and cultural identity are one of the most important preconditions for a nation and its importance have been increased with the development of globalization and become a part of soft power of nation.

National image is concerned with the attitudes and policies of other countries towards your own while the cultural identity involves the internal cohesion and social stability.
Introduction

National image is based on cultural identity.

National image

Cultural identity

Cultural identity is enhanced by national image
Introduction

With China’s emerging as world economic power the issues of its national image and cultural identity have drawn increasing attention from both insides and outsides the country.
Introduction

Although China has a long history of five thousand years but its national image perceived by other countries, especially the Westerners, started from the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368) when Italian traveller Marco Polo (1254~1324) visited China and described his impression in *The Travels of Marco Polo*. 
SEVEN MAJOR CHANGES IN THE WESTERN VIEW

Yuan, Ming (1368-1644)
Early Qing Dynasty (1616-1911)
SEVEN MAJOR CHANGES IN THE WESTERN VIEW

Declined Empire
Poor race

Brilliant
Mysterious

The Opium War (1840)
The end of the Qing Dynasty (1911)

Yuan, Ming (1368-1644)
Early Qing Dynasty (1616-1911)
SEVEN MAJOR CHANGES IN THE WESTERN VIEW

- Promising and emerging nation
- Declined Empire Poor race
- Brilliant Mysterious

The Republic of China (1912-1949)
The founding of P.R. of China (1949)

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Seven Major Changes in the Western View

- **Terror Confusion**
  - The founding of P.R. of China
  - "Cultural Revolution" (1976)

- **Promising and emerging nation**
  - The Republic of China (1912-1949)
  - The founding of P.R. of China (1949)

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   The "Cultural Revolution" (1976)

5. Nixon's visit to China in 1972
   The early 1980s

6. Promising and emerging nation

7. Declined Empire
   Poor race

8. Brilliant Mysterious

9. Idyllic

10. Terror Confusion
SEVEN MAJOR CHANGES IN THE WESTERN VIEW

- Brilliant Mysterious
- Declined Empire Poor race
- Promising and emerging nation
- Terror Confusion
- Idyllic
- Opening "demonized"

1. The Opium War (1840)
   The end of the Qing Dynasty (1911)
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3. The founding of P.R. of China (1976)
   The "Cultural Revolution" (1976)
4. Nixon's visit to China in 1972
   The early 1980s
5. The mid-1980 '9 • 11' event, 2001
Seven Major Changes in the Western View

1. Declined Empire - Poor race
2. Promising and emerging nation
3. Idyllic
4. Terror Confusion
5. Opening "demonized"
6. Developing but troubled

Timeline:
- The Opium War (1840)
- The end of the Qing Dynasty (1911)
- The founding of P.R. of China (1949)
- The "Cultural Revolution" (1976)
- Nixon's visit to China in 1972
- The early 1980s
- "9 • 11" event, 2001
- Since 2001
Introduction

Obviously, China’s image in Western views is a changing process.

With China’s fast economic growth, the “China Threat Theory” spread over.

“How China is perceived by other nations – and the underlying reality that perception reflects—will determine the future of China development and reform.”

——Joshua Cooper Ramo
Introduction

Beijing Olympic Games came in this particular background and it was naturally used to promote the image that China intends to be perceived by the world.
In 2002 China formally proposed that the first 20 years of this century would be an important strategic opportunity period since peace and development remain the main trend of the world; new scientific and technological revolution in full swing, economic globalization going deep, national capacity and the market economy system formed during the reform and opening up period.
“If we don’t grasp it, it will slip away. We are determined to secure a peaceful international environment and a stable domestic environment in which to concentrate on our own development, and with it to help promote world peace and development.”

—Premier Wen Jiabao’s Harvard speech 2003
1. Beijing Olympics: opportunity for reshaping national image and cultural identity.

2. Meanings of the Olympics to China

Means for disseminating cultural meanings
Olympic s are an nique media event, available for all sorts of mass media , as Dayan pointed out “The Olympics tend to be no longer envisaged as ‘event-on-their-own’” “They are not seen a messages but as media.” As the host China would like to use the unique media to project the vision that it intended to let the world to perceive as its image.
1. Beijing Olympics: opportunity for reshaping national image and cultural identity.

2. Meanings of the Olympics to China

- Means for cultural meanings dissemination
- Common platform for transnational communication
**Common platform for transnational communication**

The Beijing’s Olympics had not only provided the world with a common platform for various groups to express their views on the same subjects but also stimulated them to do so.

There were all sorts of point views on China, covering a very broad range of social dimensions. Although the views were diversified even contradictory but they did play the crucial role in bridging the cultural cap between China and world communities.
1. Beijing Olympics: opportunity for reshaping national image and cultural identity.

2. Meanings of the Olympics to China

- Means for cultural meanings dissipation
- Common platform for transnational communication
- Large scale of mass communication
Large scale of mass communication

Olympics are media event but also a largest occasion for ordinary people around the world to communicate face in face. It has special meaning for China for athletes, spectators and other ordinary persons’ personal experiences in the host nation would enable them to know China better.
II. What national image China intends to reach

1. Recourses for national image and cultural identity

Universal value of Olympic Movement and world community
II. What national image China intends to reach

1. Recourses for national image and cultural identity

Universal value of Olympic Movement and world community

Chinese traditional culture
II. What national image China intends to reach

1. Recourses for national image and cultural identity

- Universal value of Olympic Movement and world community
- Chinese traditional culture
- Current Chinese reality
II. What national image China intends to reach

2 National image of the Beijing Olympics
Slogan: One world One dream  
Torch relay: Journey of Harmony  
Opening ceremony stressed harmony

Harmony
Slogan: One world One dream

同一个世界 同一个梦想
One World One Dream
Torch relay: Harmonious Journey
Opening ceremony stressed harmony
Olympic projects reflect the cooperation between China and world

Harmony  Opening -up
Venue: **National Stadium**;  
Designer: Herzog & DeMeuron (Swiss) and China Architecture Design Institute
Venue: National Aquatics Center

John Pauline (Australia)
“Among more than 100 countries China had the most university students studied in other countries, about 14% of total number of global mobile students”

——UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) indicated in May 31, 2006
During the last 30 years, China has sent 1.36 million students studying overseas and the about 80% of presidents of the university affiliated to the Ministry of Education and 81% of academicians had overseas studying
The Olympic Games provides such an ideal platform not only due to its unique size and influence but also their restrict requirements for the hardware and software.
National image of the Beijing Olympics

Harmony  Opening-up
Achievement  Tradition

Tradition is always a fundamental factor for cultural identity and attractiveness for rest of the world, which is also an essential force for national cohesion.
National image is a final result of interaction between China and the rest world, especially the dominated Western countries.

It is interesting to see that a great gap between the China to perceive itself and to be perceived by western countries in terms of its national image which was typically reflected in the overseas torch relay.
III. Controversies related to China’s image

1. Torch relay controversies

The overseas torch relay, entitled Journey of Harmony, was started April 1st 2008, intended to light the passion and share the dream but turned out to be serious controversy.
III. Controversies related to China’s image

1. Torch relay controversies

Torch relay in London
III. Controversies related to China’s image

1. Torch relay controversies

Torch relay in Paris
III. Controversies related to China’s image

1. Torch relay controversies

April 7th, a torch bearer wheelchair girl being attacked
French shop Carrefour in China became the victim, a scapegoat being boycotted and had to close for a while.
Personal letter of apology from President Nicolas Sarkozy to a wheelchair-bound Chinese girl:

“I was shocked to see what happened during the torch relay,” “It is understandable that the Chinese people feel hurt. I hereby strongly condemn what they did.”
"So I think our relationship with China has certainly changed," "I think they're basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they've been for the last 50 years."

——The CNN commentator Jack Cafferty who offended all Chinese in his commentary on the relay
In the days following his remarks, the Legal Immigrant Association launched an online petition condemning his statements as "racist" and "despicable" and demanding that CNN discipline Cafferty and apologize to the Chinese people. Nearly 45,000 people had signed it in one week.
“Beginning with 2008, China and the world looked at each other in a way of re-discovery and awareness and the both sides were waked up with surprise. When we used the Olympics to prove our achievements and eager to be recognized by the world, but found that the world did not have such intention, and even did not pay due attention to the thought at all. So we are disappointed and angry. While the world once again trying to use their standards to evaluate China, also surprised to find that the Chinese people were totally impatient.”

——One article seems expressed the feeling of the Chinese youth.
In general the image of China described by the Western media is negative. The Beijing’s Olympic Games did not seem to change the situation though they drew more attention from the media.
III. Controversies related to China’s image

2 China’s image in Western media

Negative overall picture of China

Figure, News Reports on China in the Three Newspapers (Jun. 25th – Sep. 25th, 2004) (the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Christian Science Monitor)
3. REASONS FOR CONTROVERSIES

Human right vs. Sovereignty

It is worth to note that almost all controversies between China and Western world are generally related the human right in the Western side and sovereignty in Chinese side.
3. REASONS FOR CONTROVERSIES

It is interesting to note that the basic tone of western media on China has not changed too much over decades in which China has been experiencing the unprecedented social change.
China has changed in the last 30 years faster than any nation in history. “China Every step of reform creates problems, leaving the government overstretched and Chinese society increasingly pressured. China’s image has failed to keep up with these changes.”
Fast social shifts in China during the decades have significantly changed China’s national image and culture identity. China needs to reshape its national image and cultural identity not only for the world but also for its own development. 2008 Beijing Olympic Games provided China such opportunity and China took it to project its own vision as an emerging peaceful power with unique cultural characteristics. However the national image depends not only what China intended to but more importantly on how outsiders perceived, and especially how the overseas media to present China to the world.
Final Remarks

The 2008 Olympics had not changed China’s image too much, at least in the views of the dominate western media. But the Games made both China and the world rethink the importance of each other and to re-establish their position in each other's eyes. So the Games may result in not only cultural tolerance but also better cross cultural understanding. China and the world have been profoundly linked together, antagonism and separation will pay a heavy price for both sides. So it is necessary for China and the world to cooperate each other to shape its national image and cultural identity since we are in the same global village. We should have such wisdom and skill.
Thank you!

ONE WORLD
ONE DREAM