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# Asia Pacific: PERSPECTIVES

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*Asia Pacific: Perspectives* is a peer-reviewed journal published at least once a year, usually in April/May. It welcomes submissions from all fields of the social sciences and the humanities with relevance to the Asia Pacific region.\* In keeping with the Jesuit traditions of the University of San Francisco, *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* commits itself to the highest standards of learning and scholarship.

Our task is to inform public opinion by a broad hospitality to divergent views and ideas that promote cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the dissemination of knowledge unreservedly. Papers adopting a comparative, interdisciplinary approach will be especially welcome. **Graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit their work for consideration.**

\* 'Asia Pacific region' as used here includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the Russian Far East.

## A Hard or Soft Landing for Chinese Society? Social Change and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

by Charles S. Costello III

### ABSTRACT

The Beijing Olympics promise to bring positive changes to China's ideological landscape and act as a positive agent for change. With less than two years remaining, the Beijing Olympic Committee (BOC) has reached all of its milestones leading up to the games and has estimated it will spend 40 billion dollars in construction and infrastructure improvements, more than three times the amount spent on the Athens Games in 2004. Despite the early successes however, the Chinese government's actions do not always embody the lofty goals of Chairman Mao's frequent assertion that "in sports, it is the friendship, not the victory, that counts." Beijing's old hutong neighborhoods, rich with long cultural traditions, continue to be demolished at an unprecedented rate to make way for hotels, new apartment complexes and shopping malls. Will the hard-line rhetoric of the Communist government prevail as the world watches or will a softer more diplomatic, more polished government emerge and stand as a legacy of these Olympic Games?

The Summer Olympics are the only sporting event that truly brings the entire world together. Unlike the World Cup of soccer, where thirty-two qualifying countries compete in the final tournament, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) invites every country in the world to participate in a spectacle like no other. With the 2006 World Cup in Germany completed, the Summer Olympics in China will now be the focus of the sporting world as Beijing races towards the completion of the Olympic venues. It looks as though they will complete the preparations in more than enough time and plan to spend a record 40 billion dollars or so doing it. They are moving so fast that the IOC has asked them more than once to slow down and reevaluate some of their designs and concepts. The IOC president, Jacques Rogge, early on advised the Chinese to pace themselves, lest they spend money too quickly and allow the games to get too grand. "I am usually in the position of telling people to hurry up. I am now saying, 'Slow down.'"<sup>1</sup>

Since the Olympic Games were awarded to Beijing in the summer of 2001, the Chinese have made unprecedented economic and cultural investments in their preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games, reaching all of the milestones outlined by the IOC. But despite the pace and early successes, their actions do not always share the lofty goals of Chairman Mao's frequent assertion that "in sports, it is the friendship, not the victory, that counts."<sup>2</sup> Numerous articles have examined the Chinese governments' policies and whether or not

the Olympics can be an agent for positive change in China and perhaps even a peacemaker for the world. While some continue to condemn China for its human-rights record and its seeming unwillingness to change how "human-rights" are defined, others argue that the Olympics are already bringing about more cultural openness to China and improving human rights. Still others wonder if the Chinese are really interested in the true ideals of Olympism,<sup>3</sup> or are the Games simply a venue for accelerated economic development? Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, wrote consistently that high-minded international sport, especially the Olympic Games, could foster individual and collective goodwill, and even contribute to world peace.<sup>4</sup>

Is it too naive to think that in a world with the internet and space adventure trips on the horizon, that sports, in particular the Olympic Games, might influence world peace? Although the history of the Olympic Games dates back over 2000 years when Greece held Olympic festivals, the question remains whether the concepts on which the modern games were founded are still valid in the 21st century. Jacques Rogge, the IOC chief, was quoted recently as saying, "The IOC is absolutely clear that it wants full respect of human rights....It is however not its task to monitor human rights; we are not equipped to do that."<sup>5</sup> Despite the big money and corporate sponsorships that now dominate a once "amateur" sporting event, the Olympics can be an agent for positive change and improved human rights for China and the world at large. Whether it is the impact of modern technology, corporate dollars, or the improvement of human rights, the question remains whether it will be a hard or soft landing for Chinese society as a result of the 2008 Summer Olympics. Will the hard-line rhetoric of the Communist government prevail as the world watches or will a softer more diplomatic, more polished government emerge and stand as a legacy for these Olympic Games

These questions and many more were on my mind in 2005 as I arrived in Beijing, on one of their biggest national holidays, May 1st. This holiday known as May Day or International Workers Day is meant to honor the working class or labor movement and Communist China is no exception. In modern Beijing, this day did stand for labor, with many job sites working around the clock to tear down and rebuild a new Beijing (see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> I soon came to find that when it comes to construction in Beijing these days, "location, location, location," often means "eviction, eviction, eviction." Old hutong neighborhoods, rich in long-standing cultural traditions, are being demolished to make way for developments such as new shopping centers, hotels and parks. This development, coupled with growing labor concerns and a flood of nationalism that could threaten the games themselves are among the many challenges still facing the Beijing government.

Even though a myriad of construction projects continue in the preparation of the games, including the Olympic facilities themselves, if you didn't know Beijing was going to be the host for the 2008 Summer Olympics, you would be hard pressed to find any evidence of the Olympics themselves. As

**Note** –This report includes a series of online photo essays that can be found at [www.marilark.com/beijing/beijing\\_index.html](http://www.marilark.com/beijing/beijing_index.html)

of the summer of 2005, many of the major hotels didn't seem to know where the Olympic stadium or the Olympic village was located and none of the maps in any of the major hotels had this information printed on them. I wanted to visit the Olympic sites, even if they were simply open fields, but had a hard time even getting a hotel or taxi driver to take me there.<sup>7</sup> The dust from the many construction sites and the large cranes that litter the expressway from the airport straight into the downtown tell a different story: the Olympics are indeed fueling much of the construction boom in and around Beijing.

**Figure 1:**



Despite the general lack of evidence signaling the arrival of the Olympic Games in Beijing, a visit to Tiananmen Square provides concrete examples of the coming spectacle. As I entered the main square, vendors, (many of them elderly ladies) immediately accosted me, selling an assortment of kites, postcards, pirated Nike hats, Olympic logo items and even plastic Olympic medals. The Beijing Olympic Committee (BOC) has since cracked down on those vendors selling pirated Olympic logo items, threatening to fine those caught selling the items several times more than they would for other pirated items such as Adidas or other well-known brands.<sup>8</sup> As you make your way across the square towards the row of large flags marking the center an indication that the Olympics are arriving soon comes into view. It is from here where you can see the large clock with the Olympic logo, counting down to the exact point when the Olympic Games begin, at 8:00 in the evening on August 8, 2008 (see Figure 2).<sup>9</sup> When the Olympics were awarded to Beijing in July of 2001, the opening ceremonies were scheduled a couple weeks earlier. After further review, stating the extreme heat of late July as the primary reason, the BOC managed to get the opening ceremonies moved to take full advantage of the number "8" coming together; the eighth year, eighth month, eighth day, eighth hour and perhaps even the eighth minute. The Chinese are famous for their symbolism and this date and time is no exception. The number eight is a lucky number, of which the Chinese have many, because it sounds

like the word for good fortune, and consequently is favored, especially by businessmen.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 2:**



I wondered initially if my trip was poorly timed, arriving during the biggest holiday week of the year, May 1-8, when most of the governmental offices were closed including those of the Beijing Olympic Committee. But since I wanted to talk to the people of Beijing, an unintended benefit of the holiday was that more people would be taking time off. As a result, I was able to make contact prior to my trip with a married couple, two Chinese nationals who were both competitive athletes at one time. I met Yang, who works for the Ministry of Sports and helps organize international sports exchanges, and his wife May at the posh Beijing Hotel (a beautiful facility with all of the amenities you would expect and only a couple of blocks from the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square.) They came by bicycle and so did I as they had recommended, so we hopped on our bikes and headed out to get a bite to eat (see Figure 3).<sup>11</sup> They were both dressed casually and looked like athletes.

**Figure 3:**



By chance we rode our bikes close to Yang's former neighborhood, a hutong that now partially sits in the shadow of a building under construction. A portion of the hutong remains, and in Yang's opinion, his family was given a fair price for their property. As we passed by on our bicycles, his wife chimed in, saying that "most of the people are quite happy to get payment for their hutong property." Many of these buildings are in fact sadly run down, full of the dust of Beijing. Their brick walls are crumbling, often with concrete patchwork slapped on in an attempt to keep the walls from further decay (see Figure 4).<sup>12</sup> Although there are still many well maintained and livable hutongs all over Beijing, those in the downtown area are disappearing at an increasingly rapid pace. Even if most people go willingly, some are being forced out or evicted from their homes against their will. Recent cases in the United States concerning property and the law of eminent domain remind us that this is an issue in many countries, not just in China.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 4:**



As we reached the local restaurant, Yang and May both talked about their time as athletes in China. They are both still in good shape, Yang lifting weights, jogging and both of them riding their bikes when they can around town. May teaches swimming and remembered that after a long and hard day of athletic training, she was required to go watch army movies at night. She started her sports career as a swimmer in Shenyang when she was eight or nine years old, competing for the city in national meets. Later on she joined the PAL (Army) pentathlon team and competed for a number of years. I found them both to be very pleasant and open about their experiences. As we went our separate ways I left the restaurant on my rented bicycle, heading back towards the Beijing Grand hotel where the new Beijing, the land of cell phones, rock music and corporate icons, enveloped the flat landscape bordered by the wide avenues, cars, busses and hundreds of bicycles. In this "new" Beijing, I was often approached by college-aged students, at first making conversation and then finally telling me about their "exhibition" which I learned the hard way was a front for selling their art

work to the gullible tourist. Others were a front for a jewelry store or even still a massage parlor. I did however use these encounters as an opportunity to ask them what they thought of the Olympics. Most of them thought the Olympics were a good thing but some felt money was being diverted from important projects, many of them hurting the farmers in the greater Beijing area.

The Olympic Games have surely been an agent for the physical transformation of Beijing. Riding a bike around the city is one of the best ways to experience its complexity and energy, but it is not for the faint of heart. Despite the traffic, pedestrian, and environmental hazards, I felt most at ease on the bike because it seemed as if people accepted me more as a local, even as my fellow foreigners puzzled over why someone like themselves would risk his life on a bike. As I rode through the city, I saw few playgrounds, no soccer fields, basketball courts or even much grass at all. I wondered where all the kids were playing, or perhaps where the Chinese Olympians of the future were practicing. I rounded a corner on my bike near the east side of Tiananmen Square where I did see some kids playing soccer, but the game was on the concrete courtyard in front of one of the national buildings that borders the square. Perhaps this is a local access point to sports where the young Chinese athletes refine their skills and gain the passion one needs to "get in the zone," or experience the flow of non-action called wu wei, as the philosopher Chuang Tzu might have said.

As with most big cities, the downtown is not where you typically find outdoor sport facilities, but on another bike tour, this is where I stumbled upon a large athletic complex made up of several soccer fields and at least ten full-size outdoor basketball courts crowded with young athletes (see Figure 5).<sup>14</sup> The soccer fields were not real grass, which would be quite exotic in downtown Beijing, but were well-appointed fields with what looked like new artificial turf. The soccer fields were not crowded with players, but Yao Ming, the Houston Rockets basketball star from China, would be proud to see the hard fought games being played on the basketball courts all day long. The athletic complex was sponsored by a consortium of local and international companies such as Nike (Suzhou) Sports Co., Ltd., Yue Yuen Industrial Holdings (Limited) and a number of athletic shoe companies. As I continued on my bike tour, I soon found myself behind a big group of high school aged kids, all wearing sweat suits and carrying backpacks stuffed with balls and tennis rackets as they headed out for the day. I was curious where these kids were going so I followed them to what appeared to be a school. It was a Saturday, so perhaps they were heading to school anyway or maybe it was a special sports day. Most likely they belonged to intramural sports clubs that practiced on Saturdays.

### Sports and the Olympic Movement in China

China's history in the modern Olympics dates back to the first Los Angeles Summer Games in 1932 with one athlete, Liu Changchun, a track and field participant who was eliminated in the preliminary rounds of the 100- and 200-meter dashes. They took part in the 1936 Berlin Games, and

again when the games resumed after World War II in 1948 in London. After the Communist victory in China in 1949, sports were deemphasized, especially on the international front. Consequently, from the 1952 games in Helsinki through the 1980 Moscow games, mainland China did not take part. During these years, "China" in the games meant Taiwan.

**Figure 5:**



In the late 1970's and early 1980's, sports in the post-Mao era began to change on a national level. They were no longer interested in ping-pong diplomacy, when many of the national level sporting events were staged "friendship" competitions. During the Mao Zedong years, Beijing boycotted just about every international sports event, refusing to share the same venue with fellow Chinese across the Taiwan Strait. China did participate in a few staged events, 'Friendship First, Competition Second' was the theme of these so-called events that were called the "Friendship Games."<sup>15</sup> As a result of the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1979 between the United States, China rejoined the IOC after an eleven-year absence due to the unsatisfactory resolution of the "Two China Problem."<sup>16</sup> In the second Los Angeles games in 1984, the mainland Chinese reappeared, although Taiwan appeared as Chinese Taipei.<sup>17</sup> Despite a last minute boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics by most of the communist contingent, China competed, winning its first Olympic gold medal. The women's volleyball team became national heroes, and went on to dominate the international volleyball scene, winning three world titles. This was the beginning of what is now an Olympic "gold rush" for the Chinese. Their athletes continue to gain confidence in themselves in the international sporting arena.

Building on its success in the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, the mindset of the Chinese athlete was beginning to change as was the attitude of many of students, intellectuals, workers, and regular citizens that later led to the democracy movement of the late 1980s. With the changing culture in the mid 1980's came a shift in the psychology of sports and competition. Susan Brownell, author of *Training the Body for China*, looked further into what social scientist

Marcel Mauss, in 1939, described as "body techniques" (1995:30). As an athlete herself participating in the 1986 National College Games of the People's Republic of China, she reflected on how "body culture reflects the internationalization and incorporation of culture. Body culture is embodied culture."<sup>18</sup> Some have said that the Confucian values of the general population were not meant for competition. Chinese sports scholar, Lu Yuanzhen, has argued that sports training could help transform this traditional mentality. "In a sense, competitive sport not only has actual significance in stimulating the national spirit, but also has a deep value in shaping the character of a new generation of the people."<sup>19</sup>

After hosting the successful Chinese National Sports Games in 1987 (with then IOC president Juan-Antonio Samarach in attendance), the world watched in the summer of 1988 as South Korea played host to the Olympic Games in Seoul. The games were very successful and, as a result, China began to seriously consider its own bid for the 2000 games. They put together a strong proposal, but the year 2000 games were awarded in 1993, only four years after the Tiananmen Square "incident" that occurred in the spring of 1989. Despite a close vote (they lost to Sydney by two votes) the international community just wasn't ready for a Chinese Summer Olympics. China decided not to bid for the 2004 games, with Athens being a strong sentimental favorite after losing the bid for the 100-year anniversary games in 1996 to Atlanta. The fact was that China wasn't ready in the year 2000 and would have to wait for their time to come. It also appeared that you had to first lose to later win in the bidding, as Athens did in its 2004 bid after losing in 1996 to Atlanta. In the meantime, China had reinvented itself as one of the top medal-winning countries, winning twenty-eight gold medals in the 2000 Sydney games and thirty-two in the recently completed 2004 Athens games. Their resurgence at the Olympic stage has drawn worldwide attention. They have over 17,000 athletes in their elite training system while the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) system only has capacity for 1,000 athletes on a permanent basis.<sup>20</sup>

### **Destruction of the Hutongs**

As Beijing continues to transform itself on a daily basis, racing to put on a show the world will never forget, the pace of change itself comes with its own set of cultural problems as the city and the suburbs grow rapidly. And with that rapid change, it is "old Beijing" that is in large part being demolished to make way for the new China. I spent a lot of time in old Beijing, the hutongs south of Tiananmen Square and those north of the Forbidden City, where I wandered on my bicycle to escape the traffic and noise of the "new" Beijing, the land of cars, gaudy department stores and new "villages" that are quickly replacing the hutongs. These hutongs were full of children and old residents alike and, although they were dusty and crumbling to a certain degree, they have a charm and quiet unlike the "new" Beijing.

As the hutongs continue to be replaced, suicides and attempted suicides were part of a wave of almost daily protests that swept cities across China from September to

December 2003. In the Human Rights Watch account, cases were reported where Beijing residents attempted suicide in direct protest of the construction related to the Beijing Olympics.<sup>21</sup> Going back to Confucian ethics, suicide became throughout Chinese history a “moral commentary on immoral conditions where the suicide is the only strategy for dealing with dire social circumstances.”<sup>22</sup> China generally has a high rate of suicide and so these instances only added fuel to the fire of unfair practices concerning the buildup to the Olympics. Many of those evicted were landowners who claimed they were not given fair compensation for their land, especially those residing in Beijing. With the paltry sums they are receiving as compensation, most of them are not able to afford an apartment in the neighborhoods from which they are being evicted. Local officials point out that these residents are in fact being paid fairly for their property and the developers and the government should expect them to leave their property as agreed.

Is this destruction of old Beijing being brought on by the pending Olympic games or is it simply a result of the change that is taking place all over China as its economy continues to grow and modernize? In Beijing it appears to be the former, as these quiet and graceful neighborhoods continue to be demolished at an unprecedented rate. I couldn’t help but wonder whether the founder of the modern Olympic games, Pierre de Coubertin, would be happy with what he would see as the Olympics continue into the 21st century. Is the Beijing government staying true to the definition of Olympism as defined by the International Olympic Committee (IOC)?

“Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole, the qualities of body, will, and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example, and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.”<sup>23</sup>

Riding a bicycle around the hutongs, one is immediately transported to an old world. These neighborhoods at mid-day are very quiet except for the call of an occasional vendor selling something from his cart, the singing of small birds from within cages hanging outside, or the sounds of generational families living together (see Figure 6).<sup>24</sup> Many of the hutongs in the downtown area are depressingly dirty and seem to be falling apart. Was this because the residents had already succumbed to a local developer and their hutong was soon to be replaced by a high-rise business park, department store, or an apartment building? The remnants of the broken hutongs are usually cemented or walled off to seal the old neighborhood. These new dividing walls are often laced with broken glass to keep the hutong residents from climbing over and entering the new buildings.

Other hutongs are ready to be transformed, crumbling behind walls that announce the beginning of the end for many of these neighborhoods. Sometimes a portion of the hutong remains livable, but you wonder how long they will last as they hobble along with the dust and rubble of nearby construction. As Sean Gallagher of openDemocracy points

out, “According to UNESCO, in the past three years a third of the 62km squared area that makes up the central part of the old city has now been destroyed. This has displaced close to 580,000 people – one and a half times the total population of Washington D.C.”<sup>25</sup> The occasional rickshaw is likely now a tourist attraction and in the north part of the city, where groups of rickshaws provide tours of the historic hutong neighborhoods. However, most of those hutongs that remain in the downtown area do not have such “tours” and are literally cut in half, sometimes by a new street, a new office building or perhaps a new apartment complex or hotel.

**Figure 6:**



### Labor Pains

With this construction boom comes jobs, and plenty of them. The laborers are often from outside Beijing, as evidenced by the shantytown living quarters thrown up near the construction sites. It is not easy to get proper work permits for this increasing trend towards day laborers and migration to and from the countryside to the cities. And sometimes even when a worker has documentation, it is hard to get paid on a regular basis. In the documentary, “Concrete Revolution,” Guo Xiaolu details the construction industry in China and the dark side of the paving over of Beijing.<sup>26</sup> Early in the morning, many of these laborers are dropped off in vans while others live in small cramped quarters, oftentimes in the neighboring hutong or what’s left of it. Telephones are set up near the work site to allow the laborers to call home. Restaurants on wheels appear early in the morning to feed the crews as they get ready to work—most of them showing up for work between five and six o’clock in the mornin—and appearing again at seven or eight o’clock in the evening when workers depart.

As workers of all ages appear on the job site with shovel or pickaxe in hand to start their shift, some grab a bite to eat as the sounds of cracking eggs, the twirl of the spatula, and the exchange of money are drowned out by the sounds of heavy equipment running nearby. I was struck by the enormous, noisy, dusty cranes towering above the job sites. The meaning of the word “crane” dovetailed rather ironically

with the elegant whooping cranes of old China, made famous in landscape paintings. I was a little nervous at some of the job sites since a foreigner with digital camera in hand is not a welcome visitor. Photographing the workers and the conditions of the construction site is not the kind of thing a developer wants to publicize. Consequently, I was waved off most job sites before I could get close enough to photograph anything or anyone. Despite not speaking the language I was told to leave a couple of times and other times I just clicked pictures as I rolled along on my bicycle (see Figure 7).<sup>27</sup> Many of the new construction projects have fancy names and colorful billboards, such as Glory City, the name of a huge residential complex in the downtown southeast of Tiananmen Square. Whether it is on a Sunday morning or Friday evening, the flow of workers, sounds, and citywide change is constant.

**Figure 7:**



### Human-Rights and Government Control

As Beijing accepted the Olympic flag from Athens, the Communist government realized more than ever that it would be under increased international scrutiny over the next four years on everything from human rights to its labor policies. The extraordinary preparation by the Chinese brings to the foreground important social issues, the most glaring being human-rights violations. On the one hand, the Chinese political establishment adopted the term “human rights” as a sign of its modernity. On the other hand, aided and abetted by the traditional vagueness of international human-rights law, the definition of human rights has been tailored to the interests of the Chinese regime.<sup>28</sup>

Can there be one universal definition of “human rights” that applies to all countries and people? China, for the most part, doesn’t think so and argues that they have a right to their own definition based on their history and culture. To some degree, they are still arguing that human rights are an internal affair. Just after the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Xiao Tian, deputy secretary general of the Chinese Olympic Committee, when asked to comment on the upcoming games

said, “We hope to concentrate mainly on sports performance rather than human rights. I’m sorry to tell you the understanding of human rights differs as far as nationalities, history, culture and religions (are concerned), and maybe conflict will arise in discussion of this topic. I’m sorry, I cannot elaborate further.”<sup>29</sup> On the positive side, there is continuing dialogue about human rights both in international conferences and in publications. However, China continues to act in ways that contradict their newfound willingness to discuss human rights. As a result, the government continues to be criticized by Chinese dissidents abroad, by NGO’s like Amnesty International, and by Western governments.<sup>30</sup>

Soon after the closing ceremonies in Athens, Human Rights Watch launched a “China Olympic Watch” website to monitor issues of censorship and rights abuses in China leading up to the games.<sup>31</sup> But things are different in China than they were in Greece. While compensation for property rights remains a hot issue and workers are without a doubt being exploited, construction in Beijing is meeting or exceeding all milestones laid out by the IOC. Leading up to the Olympic Games in the summer of 2004, Greece was not finished until literally the last minute. If even a broken piece of pottery was unearthed, all construction at the site had to stop to bring in experts to see if it was part of an archeological treasure. Beijing, on the other hand, has pursued unconstrained development with what on the surface appears to be little thought for preserving ancient artifacts. In one of the few incidents reported publically in May 2004, artifacts were unearthed at one of the Olympic venues and construction was halted to excavate as many as 48 ancient gravesites dating back to the Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 24).<sup>32</sup> A city more than two millennia old must have hundreds of archaeological sites that have been submerged under new construction, but information about their fate is scarce.

It is a “good news, bad news” scenario when dealing with China’s Olympic preparation so far. On an economic level, China continues to do the right things, effectively cooling their growth to avoid a hard landing that can come with such unprecedented economic development. One of the areas that were impacted early was the construction of the marquee Olympic venues. The BOC continually reevaluated plans and at one point were considering whether to scrap as many as half the new venues for the Olympic games. Yan Huang, who is leading the planning and construction side of Beijing’s Olympic bid said at the time, “There is a real debate going on about these big projects – whether it’s appropriate to be spending so much money on them and hiring foreign architects instead of Chinese.”<sup>33</sup> Athens spent an unprecedented \$12 billion on the 2004 games and early estimates from Beijing are in the range of \$37 billion. Most of the venues will be ready for the “practice” games in 2007 leading up to the opening ceremonies on August 8, 2008.

China has also made great strides athletically as evidenced by the success of their Olympic team in Athens games. Their great leap forward occurred in Athens when Liu Xiang won not only the 110-meter hurdles but beat all rivals in a world-record-tying 12.91 seconds. Most of the

Chinese reporters and officials were equally shocked because this victory came four years early.<sup>34</sup> Not only did he win the race, he was well ahead of the silver and bronze medal contestants. After the Chinese team's performance in Greece, winning 32 gold medals, second only to the United States which won 35, the goal now is winning, not simply participating or making friends as Chairman Mao may have encouraged. Gu Yaoming, general secretary of the Chinese Olympic Committee (COC) said, "To have a successful Olympic Games, first we have to have good facilities and management, and second our athletes should win more medals. I don't say in the year 2008 we can pass the United States. But we will try."<sup>35</sup> With these unprecedented victories comes an increased Chinese nationalism, but not always in positive ways. For example, at the Asian Cup soccer tournament in the summer of 2004 just prior to the Athens Olympics, Chinese fans heckled and booed the Japanese team and the Japanese national anthem during the final match, which the Chinese team lost 3-1. Additionally, in spring of 2005, protests were held throughout China regarding Japanese textbooks and their interpretation of history. This combined with Japan's wartime occupation of China and its reluctance to apologize properly in the eyes of the Chinese make some question whether nationalistic passions will interfere with the nation's ability to host a safe and friendly 2008 Olympics.

Meanwhile Beijing's rapid urban expansion continues and the costs keep rising, with a total estimate now close to \$40 billion, more than three times that of the 2004 Athens Games. Tourism will increase as a result of the Olympic Games, but the many natural and manmade tourist attractions—the Great Wall, the 2,200-year-old Terra Cotta Army at Xi'an, and Guilin with its beautiful scenery—already are drawing more and more tourists each year. The tourism industry in Beijing has benefited tremendously since the July 2001 announcement of the successful Olympic bid, with travel in and around Beijing made easier by many infrastructure improvements. By 2006, Beijing will have revamped some 200 km, or 124 miles, of inner-city roads to form an expressway system and, at the same time, complete the fifth and sixth ring roads around the city.<sup>36</sup>

As the preparations for the games continue and the business climate improves with the recent devaluation of the yuan, most companies, if they haven't done so already, are asking themselves what their China strategy is, and if they don't have one, why not? All areas of the economy are being targeted, including the high tech industry. Visa, the credit card company, has paid dearly, as most marquee sponsors have, for the right to use the Olympic rings and logo in its advertising. And with over one billion potential users of credit cards in the future of China who can blame them? They are one of many marquee sponsors that hope to use the Beijing Olympics to launch their products to the Chinese consumer. In 2003, there were 22 million personal computers sold in China, the second largest market for personal computers in the world after the United States. In 2003 alone, the Chinese telecom market had over 269 million wireless phone

subscribers, with over 1.7 billion instant messages being sent.<sup>37</sup> Another marquee sponsor, fast-food giant McDonald's announced in February 2004 that it plans to nearly double its restaurants in China before the 2008 Summer Olympics. McDonald's operates 580 restaurants in China, but plans to increase that number to 1,000 by the time the 2008 games begin. The company has also signed an eight-year renewal to sponsor the Olympic Games for an undisclosed sum until 2012. The company also said it signed up Chinese basketball star Yao Ming of the Houston Rockets as an official spokesman. He will participate in promotions tied to the Olympics.<sup>38</sup>

### Looking towards the future

As globalization makes the world smaller and smaller, we are seeing instances of what University of Chicago anthropologist Arjun Appaduari calls "postnational formation," a social engagement of sorts that is masked in the multinational organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) such as the IOC<sup>39</sup> Using the IOC in this instance, are the Olympic Games a form of nationalism that all Chinese can share? Or are the Olympics becoming a part of this postnational formation, as patriotism and nationalism get lost in the global community? Can sporting events such as the Olympic Games act an agent for positive change in China and the world at large? Or will political "events" threaten to overshadow the games themselves?

Without a doubt, politics play a part in the hosting of the Olympic Games and Beijing will be no exception. Since the first Olympics in 1896, a torch, lit in Olympia by the sun, is used to light the flame in the opening ceremonies of the games. In modern times, this torch is often carried from coast to coast and the flame is guarded closely. The Chinese aim to "top the world" as they had promised in their winning bid by carrying the torch to the world's highest peak of Qomolangma (Mt. Everest) as part of the Olympic Torch relay. Liu Jingmin, vice president of the BOC, said Beijing would honor its promise. "Beijing has promised in its bidding reports that the holy fire of the Olympics will reach the world's highest peak, and we are now preparing for the unprecedented relay."<sup>40</sup> Even the exiled Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama concluded that to award the Games to China would be an act of gentle diplomacy, bringing it into the international family and forcing the Communist regime to subscribe to stricter civil rights standards.<sup>41</sup>

Nationalism can indeed bring out the best or the worst in people, and act as an agent for change as in the example at the 2004 Asian Cup given earlier. We can also see how these sporting events can impact other areas of society beyond sports. For example, at the Asian Cup games, special "Red Card" t-shirts worn by 22 children highlighted the "Red card to Child Labor" campaign as part of the halftime show of the semi-final match between China and Iran. This campaign was organized to bring the message that child labor is unacceptable to people beyond the reach of traditional lobbying methods. There are estimated to be more than 130 million child workers in the Asian and Pacific regions.<sup>42</sup> With the



world watching, the impact of these additional programs can far outlive the Olympic Games.

In today's Beijing, hordes of young school-aged kids can be found at large sports complexes running track, or playing soccer and basketball as they dream of being the next Yao Ming, or Liu Xiang, winner of the gold medal in the 110-meter hurdles in Athens (see Figure 5). They walk differently than their parents, eat different food, listen to different music and are growing up in a new world, with a new culture outwardly evident in their new body culture. Their parents too are growing up in this transformed China, one that is changing both physically and mentally.

The new mindset works hand in hand with the changing body culture and confidence of the Chinese athletes and the general population. As we have seen, it is relatively easy to change the physical appearance of a city, and for that matter the physical appearance of a new generation of people, but it is a more difficult and consequently a slower process to change the culture of social expectations about the economy, politics, and lifestyles. As the mindset of the "new" China continues to evolve, one can only hope that the Olympics act as an agent for positive change. The question remains however, will China flourish or will the Olympic Games be a mere footnote in the continuing legacy of China's Communist Party? Is it possible for the true ideals of Olympism to be realized in spite of the success of the games themselves, in particular the ideas of "the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles?" These ideas of "Olympism" are strikingly similar to Chairman Mao's simple assertion that "in sports, it is the friendship, not the victory, that counts."<sup>43</sup> In the end, perhaps Mao's statement is the best advice. Despite the politics, the rapidly changing landscape of Beijing, and the slow progress on human rights, the Olympics promise to bring positive changes to China's ideological landscape, which in the long run will be the principal legacy of these games. In other words, the hard-line promises to soften. Stay tuned, as China opens slowly and lands softly in 2008, preparing to host the biggest party the world has ever seen.

#### ENDNOTES

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3. Bromwell, Susan. *Training the Body for China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. pg. 31. "Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole, the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles."
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6. (Figure 1) I visited this jobsite at 10:00 pm and at 5:30 am, this photo being taken May 8, 2005 at 6:14am. Cranes could be seen working at all hours of the day and night with workers quarters located in the crumbling neighborhood of the hutong bordering this development called "Glory City."
7. With two years remaining before the 2008 Games, many of the Olympic venues are nearing completion unlike the Athens games where construction continued days before the 2004 Games began. The main Olympic green is located between the third and fourth ring road north of Tiananmen Square. Visit this website for more information: <http://en.beijing2008.com/46/67/column211716746.shtml>
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9. (Figure 2) This countdown clock can be seen from Tiananmen square as it counts down to the exact time the Olympic Games begin.
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11. (Figure 3) This is the bike I used, a classic Beijing bike that got me around town without any problems. I loved the springy leather seat and the old fashioned bell on the handlebars.
12. (Figure 4) This is a picture of the hutong near Yang's old neighborhood. It is slated for a hotel and most of the hutongs nearby are already demolished.
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14. (Figure 5) This sports facility sponsored by a consortium of sports companies including Nike had a number of astroturf soccer fields and more than 20 basketball courts and was in the middle of downtown Beijing. Every basketball court was full with teams waiting on the side for each court.
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23. Bromwell, p. 31. (as referenced in the International Olympic Committee 1991:7)
24. (Figure 6) This photo is from the hutong neighborhood north of the Forbidden City. Many hutongs have courtyard in the center of the unit, with a tree and bird cages often hung from the eaves or even the branches of a tree.
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27. (Figure 7) This photo of day laborers eating breakfast was taken "on the sly" while slowly pedaling my bike near this job site in the early morning. As you can see, this photo was taken as 6:03am.
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