

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

Spring 5-1-2009

How The Beijing Olympics Has Changed Chinese Popular Television, Entertainment, and People's Everyday Lives

Fei Ye

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone



Part of the [Broadcast and Video Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ye, Fei, "How The Beijing Olympics Has Changed Chinese Popular Television, Entertainment, and People's Everyday Lives" (2009). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 476.

https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/476

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

**How The Beijing Olympics Has Changed Chinese Popular
Television, Entertainment, and People's Everyday Lives**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of
the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

Fei Ye

Candidate For B.S. Degree and Renée Crown University Honors

May 2009

Honors Capstone Project in Broadcast Journalism

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
Robert Thompson

Honors Reader: _____
John Nicholson

Honors Director: _____
Samuel Gorovitz

Date: _____

Abstract

The 2008 Beijing Olympics was one of the greatest achievements for Chinese people around the world. It was an event that changed Chinese popular culture and made the Chinese people proud of themselves. In the past, China had lost its popular cultural identity because of historical upheavals and what cultural identity it did have was dominated by foreign-influenced ideas. Through hosting and preparing for the 29th Olympiad, China rediscovered its popular cultural identity, which I conclude is a reintroduction of its traditional culture. The country was also able to change how others perceived it. To conduct this study, I interviewed experts from the fields of television, Chinese history, Beijing Opera, and journalism.

There was a period when the recirculation of Western-influenced television shows dominated Chinese popular entertainment. For the Chinese to host the Olympics meant so much more than it would have for any other country; therefore, hundreds of television shows and documentaries were produced and China's television producing skills improved. The media also softened their style of reporting. All these changes and improvements throughout the society were a result of China's urge to host the Games. Besides these changes, the Olympics restored to China its popular cultural identity. However, it did not just bring out untouched older traditions and turn them into popular culture. The country reinvented and polished old traditions and made them more appealing to a modern audience. In the future, it will be China that will influence others culturally and lead other nations, and not the other way around.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
What is popular culture?	3
Background on the Chinese Television System and its Development	9
The Olympics: Meaning for the Chinese	13
<i>The response from the Media</i>	18
What went inside of the Olympic shows production?	19
Reintroducing Traditional Culture to Society	24
<i>Why did traditional culture have become popular again?</i>	30
Olympics Influence on Chinese Popular Culture: A Conversation with Yang Lan	35
<i>Chinese Creativity</i>	37
<i>Change in New Reporting</i>	40
The Future of Chinese Popular Culture	42
Sources Cited and Consulted	46

Introduction

The 29th Olympiad took place in Beijing, China in the summer of 2008. According to NBC commentators, it featured one of the most spectacular opening ceremonies that has ever been shown to the world (Ebersol, 2008). With 2,008 drummers and beautiful choreography, the Opening Ceremony enchanted millions of people around the world. This event did not only bring changes to how outsiders view China, but it has affected the entire nation in ways that are hard to describe. This event has changed many things in China including popular entertainment, television and people's lives.

One has to understand the nature of Chinese culture, history, and its way of life before one can understand the impact this international event has brought to the people in the country. Susan Brownell, in "Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China," wrote, as described in the *Olympic Reviews*, "Hosting an Olympic Games has a significant impact on the Host City and its community...the event acts as a vehicle and catalyst which leaves a lasting mark on the city" (Brownell, 2008, p. 180). In China's case, it has left a lasting mark on the entire nation. It is an undeniable truth that this event has influenced Chinese popular culture immensely.

China did not really have a popular cultural identity in the early years of the new millennium, when economic development started to speed up. At that time, there was a recirculation of foreign programs that influenced China. It was borrowing and copying from other countries' television entertainment and other popular media. Therefore, to say that the Olympics in many ways changed Chinese popular culture in the early 21st Century would be correct, because a nation that did not really have a clear definition of its own popular culture is liable to change.

For some people, the Olympics brought out lesser parts of popular culture and enriched people's daily lives by giving new fads to the people. But the true popular culture derived from the Olympics, and brought to the Chinese people, was traditional culture. Since China never really had an exact definition of popular culture, in a way, it was trying to find its identity or definition for a long time, and this Olympic phase, in some ways, has given a an identity to China's modern popular culture through the reintroduction of traditional arts.

In a way this is represented in the ideas and elements that the Opening Ceremony was trying to entail. The performance had very specific elements of Chinese culture displayed in every little detail. And because of those little details, the creative team was able to put on a show that reflected China. It is same as when the television producers whom I talked were trying to find the answer to what popular culture is. And, now, looking back at that event, one could say that China's newly defined popular culture underlay the meaning of the Opening Ceremony. Therefore, if the producers had looked inside themselves and the culture of China, they probably would have been able to define it.

In this paper, I will take the reader on a journey and exploration of how has the Beijing Olympics has affected China's popular television, entertainment, and the cultural aspects of people's lives during the preparation years leading up to the opening ceremony. I will specifically talk about China's lost popular cultural identity by looking at its history and the hardship the country went through, and at how China was able to find itself because of the Olympics. Then, I will analyze the modern day influences of foreign culture in television and reality shows. I will look at why was it especially

important for the Chinese to host the Olympics. Also, because of the nation's desire for the Olympics, the media's response was very strong and positive, producing hundreds of television shows around the topics of the Olympics. Finally, I will take a look at what the future will hold for China's popular culture.

What is popular culture?

Everyone has an answer to this question when it is asked; however, to determine what it means to people and why it is popular to some people and not to others is difficult. In his book *Pop Culture China*, Kevin Latham states, "The word 'popular,' for instance, is itself a rather vague term—popular for whom? Who decides what counts as 'popular?'" (2007, p. 28). Therefore, one has to ask specific questions and break the term down into different segments, in order to have a better grasp of the definition.

If asked, "of what would popular culture consist?," the answers could range from social issues to entertainment and to politics. Anything that could bring great interest to a certain society is as part of its popular culture. Even though it is fairly easy to identify social practices that could be counted as an equivalent to popular culture; however, to give a single definition for many would be impossible.

One author, Tom Gold, has defined popular culture as "cultural products produced for the mass market, which reflect market determined popular taste and are for enjoyment. It is also in contrast to politically contrived directed culture" (Latham, p. 28). Therefore, popular culture is determined based on how a product, a certain element or an idea is received by the people of that certain ethnicity. This is a great example of cultural difference.

A great television show or a product could be extremely popular here in the United

States; however, it might not become popular in China instantaneously. With alterations to fit that particular culture, and people's tastes, it could become popular. Therefore, determining what is popular culture for China is very important in looking into the subject.

Since giving a single definition for popular culture is difficult, defining Chinese popular culture is even more mind-boggling. Latham states, "It is impossible to produce a perfect definition for Chinese popular culture that will cover all eventualities and satisfy all scholars and authors" (p. 28). For a country like China, there are millions of elements one could count as part of its popular culture. Even though, I am looking at only some segment of China's popular culture, giving a broad overview of what it actually entails is important.

Chinese popular culture could be translated to *liuxing wenhua*, *wenhua* literally translated in English as "culture." And *liuxing* is usually translated as fashionable. Therefore, "in *liuxing wenhua* the sense is 'transiently or temporarily popular but possible passing as a fad or fashion'" (Latham, p. 29). Another translation for popular culture in Chinese is *tongsu wenhua*, where *tongsu* means "popular" in the sense of "widespread among the people" but can also have some connotations of vulgarity, low value, or common-ness" (Latham, p. 29). The "people's culture" or *tongsu wenhua* includes television, pop music, entertainment and anything that would represent things that the general public would consume.

It took several decades for the Chinese to have Chinese words that represent the meaning of popular culture, to use and understand them. The term "popular culture" was used very bluntly and carelessly in many ways. "Popular culture' has tended to be

loosely used in writing on the subject in relation to China” (Latham, p. 28). One could also see that, since it was loosely used, people, in a way, did not care too much about its meaning and importance. That is another reason people did not analyze the meaning of popular culture at all.

In the past, China did not have a clear definition of popular culture and did not really know what it entailed. Before the whole phenomenon of the Olympics, China’s popular culture involved consuming traditional culture and in the recent few years, the country was influenced by many Western ideas. However, when asked, What has the Olympics brought in new, or changed in terms of popular culture?, one could give many answers.

When I was asking some of the producers who created many Olympic themed shows what popular culture meant to them, and has it changed compared to the past, no one could really give me a definite answer. In some ways, they did not even quite understand the meaning or the phenomenon of popular culture that was already working its way into Chinese people’s lives. It is then when I realized, because of its population and the myriad of people’s interests, China did not really have a definite popular culture people could identify, but rather it was a vague idea that they were also searching for the meaning of.

Popular culture in the past leading up to early 2000

Popular entertainment in the past few decades, around the time of Communist take-over, revolved around traditional Beijing Operas and just simply consisted of traditional Chinese culture. Ye Jinsen, the famous Beijing Opera actor and director said, from the early dynasties to the early 1960s, Beijing Opera was one of the dominant popular

entertainments (J. Ye, personal communication, January 20, 2009). There, of course were other forms of theater and performances “featured prominently in China’s popular cultural landscape;” however, Beijing Opera was and is still considered the pinnacle of the arts. The roots of contemporary Chinese traditional theatre “are nonetheless usually traced back to the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271-1368)” (Latham, 2007, p. 304). Chinese theater, now mainly represented by Beijing Opera, established itself as a prominent art form. The influence and the importance of the theater and the opera were prominent in the society until the 1960s (J. Ye, personal communication, January 20, 2009).

The 1960s marked a turning point in the Chinese artistic and cultural landscape because that was when the Cultural Revolution took place, which was one of the most complex series of events in recent Chinese history (Latham, p. 11). Because of the movements, revolutions, and wars, China’s tradition had a great impact that left a strong mark on it. This historical era changed China’s popular culture and, in a way, was when the country lost its cultural identity, something that I will discuss more extensively later in the paper. As the years and decades passed and technology and the economy started to grow, television entertainment started to become the focus of people’s lives.

However, television entertainment did not start to be part of people’s lives until the early 1980s. Starting then, there were four phases of Chinese entertainment programming that had invaded Chinese people’s lives (Latham, p. 67). The first phase consisted of variety programs for middle-aged people, which were very popular in the 1980s (Latham, p. 67). The second phase was the game show phase, followed by a quiz and knowledge contest phase in the 1990s, leading up to the 2000s (Latham, p. 67). The fourth phase appeared around early 2000, and came with massive reality show

programming that was not available to Chinese people before. This was the phase influenced the most by foreign television shows.

In the years around 2000, Chinese popular culture was influenced by the outside world and represented a kind of foreign invasion to Chinese people. China did not have a well-established popular cultural identity because of foreign influences. From entertainment to popular music, everything was influenced by other nations. Of course, China did have its own style of entertainment; however, it was not as popular as the shows copied from the Westerners.

In the early 2000s, there were many copycat shows from the West. Two of them were replicas of CBS's *Survivor* and FOX's *American Idol*. The development of reality television in China could be divided into two phases. The first shows, during the turn of the century, "started with experimentation and were almost entirely survival-type programs in which participants in the shows were subjected to various kinds of physical difficulties" (Latham, p. 68). The second phase, which started in 2003, "saw the diversification of the genre into many different types" (Latham, p. 68).

One of the first foreign-influenced television programs was called *Great Survival Challenge*, which was broadcast in June of 2000. This program was copied from the American version of *Survivors*. In the program, three people, who were selected from hundreds of applicants, had to go on a journey to different places in China, "a complete tour of the country's western and northern border provinces – with very limited supplies and money" (Latham, p. 68). The success of the program has continued with a second season. Many parts were similar to the U.S. version; "the series also adopted an elimination format following the lead of CBS's *Survivor*" (Latham, p. 68).

This program really initiated other reality programs. From 2003, there has been a transition that diversified television programming. It changed from survival format types of shows. Hunan Satellite Television, which is China's most commercially innovative provincial broadcaster, has created its own *American Idol*, called *Super Girl*. Li Ruiying, CCTV's News anchor, said that the CCTV is very famous for having the most entertainment shows out there (R. Li, personal communication, December 29, 2008). The *Super Girl* show is also a spin-off from England's *Pop Idol* (Lynch, 2005). This program has attracted 150,000 participants in 12 cities (Latham, 2007, p. 69).

The only difference in the Chinese version of this show is that this competition was open only to talented girls. This was also one of the reasons it became extremely popular. "The competition was literally open to any woman of any age of any ability and from anywhere in China" (Latham, p. 69). In the finale, the winner was chosen by a method similar to that in the Western versions, which used a text message voting system. It attracted "[m]ore than 400 million viewers across the country and achieved an average of 29.54 percent audience" (Latham, p. 69). Li Yu Chun a candidate from Sichuan, who won the contest, has become one of the most popular singers in China, thanks to the show.

The revenue from this show had a reported 60 million Rmb, which is more than 8 and half million dollars (Latham, p. 69). The success of this show resulted in many copycat programs by other channels, and the program has brought new heights to television programming. This new popular culture was influenced by foreign ideology; however, after much governmental criticism, *Super Girl* stopped its programming (Latham, p. 69).

As one can see, this type of program became extremely popular because young Chinese people had never really seen something that powerful, which also astounded the American audiences when it came out. However, because China did not really have a popular entertainment identity, there was a vacuum; therefore, anything new that any other nation had introduced, with a little tweaking to suit its own people, became popular.

Background on the Chinese Television System and its Development

One has to understand China's struggle at television development in order to see its present day glories in television. Watching television is one of the most popular leisure activities for many Chinese people (Latham, 2007, p. 43). Almost every household has at least one television, and the penetration is about 98 percent. In the past, television was the only source for people to get their news, information, and entertainment. However, nowadays, due to the lack of good programming, many young people have turned to the Internet as a source of entertainment and news, which has also fostered the development of Internet websites.

Every medium in China, except the entertainment programs, unless they talk about politics, is government controlled. This includes everything from Internet websites to television stations (R. Li, personal communication, December 29, 2008). After the post-Mao, or Chairman Mao Zedong period, Chinese people became more consumer-oriented and focused on the development of television, which grew at a rapid pace. However, the Chairman Mao years hindered and often stopped the establishment of Chinese television because of the wars, the revolutions, and the movements.

Chinese television developed, starting in the late 1950s, with help from the Soviet Union (Latham, p. 46). The first experimental broadcast was on May 1st, 1958 by Beijing

Television (BTV). Regular scheduled programs “started in September of that year, broadcasting four times a week for two to three hours each time” (Latham, p. 46). Within a couple of years, many major cities in China had also launched television stations. The first few broadcasts were limited not just in material but also in the audience it was able to reach (Latham, p. 46). Beijing Television during that time had only one transmitter, which was only able to cover people in the Beijing area.

Chinese television went through reformations and technological revolutions throughout the decades. After the Chinese-Soviet split, the Russians withdrew and many Russian technicians who were in the process of helping China to develop its television networks left (Latham, p. 46). Thereafter, China was left alone and had to develop by itself.

During the Great Leap Forward in 1957, which was a plan unsuccessfully conducted by Chairman Mao Zedong, where Mao wanted to bring the country’s economic development to the forefront. In his article “China’s Great Leap Forward” William Harms wrote that Mao “and his colleagues pushed for the construction of steel plants across the country” (1996). The government at the time also established communal eating facilities, where people could eat all they wanted, free of charge. “This utopian dream turned into a nightmare as the central leadership grew increasingly out of touch with reality” (Harms, 1996). And because of the unrealistic actions, it set back the country in many ways.

This historical event put a stop to the development of Chinese television until the end of the decade (Latham, 2007, p. 46). All television stations, not including those in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guanzhou, and Shenyang, were shut down. Furthermore, the

start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 forced more closures and stopped the development of other television stations in the country (Latham, p. 46).

During the Mao era, the programming was mainly dominated by the Communist Party's news and political rallies. The only entertainment that was provided to the people were the revolutionary model operas and the modern Beijing Opera, approved by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. However, in the early 1970s the development of television was resumed and moved forward, with more than 30 television stations in the country, one in every province (Latham, p. 46).

China's biggest and most influential television station, the Central Chinese Television Station (CCTV), was launched in 1978, two years after the Cultural Revolution (Latham, p. 46). Even with its development, China's television sets were still limited because of high prices and people's inability to purchase them. It was not until Chairman Deng Xiao Ping's economic reforms kicked in that regular citizens started to become familiar with the concept of watching television on a regular basis.

It was not until the 1980s that people were able to see massive growth in the number of television sets in people's homes. As Latham writes, "The number of television stations exploded and ordinary people started to think of television sets as attainable household appliances" (p. 46-47). In 1983, the number of television stations in China had grown to 52, and at the end of 1988, it was up to 422 (Latham, p. 47). "The television coverage was up to 68.4 percent of the population, already higher than radio coverage" (Latham, p. 47).

The television revolution had many effects, both positive and negative, that influenced people's lives. One is that it brought an opportunity for people to talk and, in

a way, silently form opinions about the Communist party. The negative side was that propaganda now was in every household, and it was much easier for the Communist leaders to communicate and influence their own people about certain issues, swaying people's opinions in the "right" direction, that is, the government direction.

Besides all these new influences and fast development, the television system has also gone through several stages of technological change. The first is that the price of television sets went down, which enabled more people to purchase them, and "more families achieved their dream of owning a color television set" (Latham, p. 48). The second is that cable television came in. This offered "relayed terrestrial television plus extra channels" (Latham, p. 48). For instance, the people living in Guangdong Province, near Hong Kong, could receive Hong Kong television, where they could enjoy shows that were not censored by the government (Latham, p. 48). The third stage was satellite broadcasts, which started, in the mid 1990s. Even in 2006, satellite broadcasts were "not legally received through privately owned satellite dishes" (Latham, p. 49). Only selected areas in Beijing and selected areas in other cities were able to receive BBC, CNN, MTV and other foreign channels. They included the luxury hotels, and "selected residential compounds" (Latham, p. 49).

Terrestrial Television is the backbone of Chinese television broadcasting, with a vast majority of Chinese programming. CCTV is the biggest one, with 12 major channels and four additional ones during the Olympics (R. Li, personal communication, December 29, 2008). These 12 channels range from news to education to entertainment to art to culture and more. Each channel has its specific genre of shows. A few months before the Olympic games, CCTV created a few extra channels for foreigners: for example,

CCTV-E&F for French and Spanish speaking viewers (R. Li, personal communication, December 29, 2008).

Besides CCTV channels, each province has its own channels and is eager to compete with CCTV, providing a range of programming, from news to entertainment to dramas and other matter. However, during the evening news period, from 7 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., most of the provincial television networks broadcast only one kind of news, which is fed to them by CCTV, to allow people to see only government controlled news. This shows that the Chinese government's control over news distribution is extremely tight and monitored, only allowing its people to view one kind of news program at that specific time period everywhere in the country.

During the preparation years for the Beijing Olympics, the media environment started to develop in a faster speed, learning and adopting new ways of adjusting to the people's needs. However, one has to understand what the Olympics truly meant for the Chinese before seeing the changes during those years.

The Olympics:

Meaning for the Chinese

The Olympics carried a special meaning for the Chinese people. Certainly, for a country to be able to host the Olympic games is a great privilege and honor already; therefore, one could say that it is special for anyone who hosts the Olympic games. In other words, when a host country claims that they feel honored to be able to host the games, it is in some way redundant. However, it carried a special message for China and to Chinese people. Author Susan Brownell said that the 2008 Beijing Olympics was the first time the Olympics was hosted by China, which is “the least westernized nation in the

world to yet host them” (2008, p. 177). Therefore, it carried great weight to show the world and the International Olympic Committee that China would contribute a pivotal moment to Olympic history.

China, from the start, has always keenly desired “recognition” on the world stage. It was trying to seek opportunities; however, there were not any because of the troubles the country was going through in the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s. When the opportunity came in 1993 to bid for the 2000 Games, China lost against Sydney, which put the nation into mourning. He Zhenliang, the IOC member from China, China’s senior sports diplomat, and the person ultimately responsible for the success of Beijing’s bid for Olympic Games (known in China as Mr. Olympics), interpreted the loss to mean that “they [Westerners] do not want China to increase its international influence through hosting the Olympic Games, nor to increase the pace of its progress towards establishing itself as a world power” (Brownell, pp. 14, 142).

This statement is not supported firmly; however, it is one interpretation. Even if Westerners were looking at China this way, it would still be understandable and reasonable. Just look at it from the American perspective: one of the most powerful nations in the world that is able and wants to control others certainly **does not want to see the most populous country in the world, which does not listen to them, take over the lead in the international platform.** Especially if that country has a governmental system that is the total opposite of what most of the world has. Combined with the biggest population, it could be extremely influential if it were given the right time and opportunity. Defeating the West and acknowledging China’s power through the Olympics became a goal for China, and the more China was shut down and looked down upon, the more it

wanted to win. This is one of the reasons the Olympics is so much more important and meaningful for the Chinese.

Furthermore, someone who does not understand the Chinese people and what the nation has gone through, over the last few hundred years would not understand why is it so important for the Chinese to be able to host this great international event. And why for the Chinese is more special than to any other countries that have hosted the games before.

Another reason the hosting of the Games by China was special was that China did not really have a sports history, unlike its European counterparts, who created the Olympics. European sports developed “comparatively early and the IOC [International Olympic Committee] was founded in Europe” (Brownell, p. 194). In addition, because of this advantage, there is a sense of Eurocentrism inside the IOC (Brownell, p. 194). Therefore, China always felt intimidated when Europeans would talk about “Olympism” (Brownell, p. 194). He Zhenliang said in his biography, “Even in the modern Olympic Games, the first participants were limited to a dozen European and North American countries” (Brownell, p. 194). And in the recent few decades, there have not been many non-Western countries to host the Games. Because of this scarcity and intimidation from the Europeans, the Chinese people had an even bigger urge to win the bid for the 2008 Olympics.

In Eric Wolf’s book *Europe and the People without History*, Brownell observed that the Western intellectual tradition tended to view Europeans as “‘the people with history’...and primitive societies as pristine—the ‘people without history’” (Brownell, p. 20). Brownell argues that China was written out of the history of sport in the “Western scholarship of the nineteenth century” (Brownell, p. 20). In comparison to the West, the

amount of paper that has been devoted to ancient Chinese sports history “is miniscule” (Brownell, p. 22). Just imagine how a country with over 5,000 years of history would feel about this. The fact that sports history was not well documented in China does not mean that a nation of great age and enormous cultural creativity should be left out. Since then, it was the desire of China to be acknowledged in the Western hemisphere, that their driving force of history be counted in as a “people with sports history” (Brownell, p. 22). This urge again motivated the Chinese to be able to host the Games one day.

China was and is still afraid to show its weaknesses to the outside world. Price Monroe and Daniel Dayan’s book *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, state, “At an interpersonal level, the Chinese concepts translated in the west as ‘face’ (*lian*, a concept of personal honor and moral worth, and *Mianzi*, a concept of social prestige)” (2008, p. 126). In other words, in the Chinese culture, saving one’s face is more important than showing the real truth, and in many ways the Olympic ceremony was also trying to communicate that through its performances. A good representation of this is a little girl lip-synching the national anthem and a series of fake 29 giant footprints created by fireworks making their way to the Bird's Nest National Stadium from Tiananmen Square.

The controversy over the footprints was that what they actually showed on the televised opening ceremony was a digitalized fake footprint firework display and not the actual one during the ceremony. Zhang Yimou, chief director of the opening ceremony, said that they did what they did because of the better quality it wanted to show to the world.

Since China had not really hosted any big international events like this before, it

had to show the world a perfect representation of China, and if that involved creating little bits of untrue events here and there, then they felt that was necessary. Throughout the recent 200-year history of China, with the start of the foreign invasions and colonization, China and its people have been humiliated and looked down upon by others. The Chinese hoped that the Games would “represent an image of a healthy and flourishing China to the world and erase the stereotype of the ‘sick man of East Asia’” (Brownell, 2008, p. 189). Therefore, for the Chinese, this was really a special occasion where it could show the world, it was not weak anymore, and that it can defend itself. The entire nation’s feelings and emotions were represented with national pride and self-actualization. And these kinds of passions did not just burst out on August 8, 2008, but started as early as 1993, when the country was bidding for the 2000 Olympics against Sydney.

With this event, as my interpretations and conversations with Zhang Jigang, co-director and choreographer for the opening ceremony showed, the Chinese wanted to disprove some of the stereotypes that are in people’s minds when thinking of the Chinese people (J. Zhang, personal communication, August 20, 2008). That the Chinese are not creative and only excel in science-related subjects are stereotypes that many Western people believe. This event, in a way, has proven people wrong about that. Even though the commentators noted that the dancers carried out the tasks with extreme precision, Westerners were still wowed by the magnificent originality of the entire show (Ebersol, 2008).

The meaning of China’s hosting of the Olympic games is not just that China wanted to benefit itself and prove to itself what it is capable of, but also to bring attention to the

world and to the IOC members that it should “make room in the Olympic Games for different cultural traditions,” which the West maybe had not been able to accept fully (Brownell, 2008, p. 196). Therefore, the Beijing Olympic slogan “One World, One Dream,” maybe still cannot be applied to the West yet, but it is something that should be striven for in the future.

The Beijing Olympics, in a way, has opened the door for other non-Western nations to be able to begin thinking about bidding for the Olympics. Besides the meaning it has for the Chinese themselves, it also breaks the traditions of Eurocentrism that the IOC was used to. And with this issue, it made China want it even more, which is reflected in the Olympic mood that affected the entire nation, which started after winning the 2001 bid.

The response from the Media

Understanding the urge for China to host the Olympics, one can just imagine the creative and essential force that went into the creation of all the Olympic television shows during the preparation years for the Olympics. During those years, starting in 2002, producers created hundreds of television shows and documentaries revolving around the topic of Olympics. The producers that I talked to from the CCTV channels told me that many people thought that the only reason they had created so many programs related to the Olympics was because of government demand and not because the people really wanted it.

However, Zhang Zhaoxi, a producer from the CCTV Olympic channel, told me that there were both governmental and audience demands. Yes, he said, “CCTV as a government controlled TV station, of course has to promote the party’s needs, but there was, of course, high demand from the audience in the same time” (Z. Zhang, personal

communication, January 4, 2009). Zhang said, “We do care about the ratings in a big way; therefore, if nobody watched our programs, we would have reduced the Olympic programming” (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 4, 2009). CCTV would still have had Olympic programming because of the government’s needs, but it would have been less.

During the 2001 bidding, the Gallup poll calculated a 94 percent “approval rate,” which also showed that the Chinese people were ready for the Games and were eager to participate (Brownell, 2008, p. 189). This high level of anticipation and promise, in a way, was reflected on the Olympic shows that were produced. China’s television burst out with creativity, which was present in the shows during the 7-year span of time.

Many shows that were created by CCTV sports, CCTV Olympic channels and other TV channels dedicated almost completely to Olympic programming, almost 24 hours per day. These shows were televised, as the countdown got closer to the opening ceremony.

What went inside of the Olympics Show production?

One of the main Chinese channels, CCTV-5, the sports channel, which was created in 1996, went through many phases. Zhu Wentao, the producer at CCTV-5 sports channel, said they started with Olympic programming the year after China won the bid for the 2008 Games. “After we won the bid in 2001, we had a meeting to make sure we had a program starting in the year 2002, broadcast every week. One of our first shows was called *Beijing 2008*” (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009). *Beijing 2008*, was a show that talked about how the Chinese government, Chinese Olympic Committee and its athletes were preparing for the Olympics. Zhu also said, “There was a

rise of Olympic shows in the past 7 years” (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009). However, when they have got closer to the countdown, 16 days before the opening ceremony, they really went into a craze of making Olympics shows, non-stop (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

Another thing that many have to understand is the Chinese television rating system. The percentage considered high for a Chinese show might not be considered high at all for an American show. For a television show to reach about 1 to 2 percent in ratings nationwide represents a very good result. A television drama reaching 7 percent would be considered highly rated. To Westerners, these numbers might look very low; however, one has to consider that China’s television penetration rate is about 98 percent, and it has about 1.2 billion viewers. Therefore, the shows that Zhu produced, which reached about 3 percent, represented a very high viewership (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009). However, the 3 percent ratings were not achieved in the beginning years, around 2002, but as “we got closer the Olympics the ratings became extremely high [3 percent]; therefore, the audience were craving more shows” (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

Zhu went on to explain that CCTV-5 also had special shows during the countdown to the Olympics: for example, at 1,000 days, at 500 days, and at 100 days. Even one and a half years before the start of the Beijing Olympics, the sport channel dedicated the 6:30 pm time slot to Olympics shows, with content including the retelling old Olympic stories, biographies, and so forth.

Zhang Zhaoxi, a senior producer at CCTV’s Olympic channel, said that the amount of shows that he created with his team could not be imagined compared to other

country's television stations when they were preparing for the Games. Zhang said, "In my department, we have about 30 other producers including me, and because of the audience demand we each had to produce a 20-minute" show or documentary every day, 365 days a year (Z. Zhaoxi, personal communication, January 4, 2009). Zhang said they entered the Olympic mode starting in the year 2006. If you calculate the time, that equals 219,000 minutes of shows, which is 3,650 hours a year dedicated to Olympic-related entertainment. "Yes, it is a lot of programming but, again, our market and audience are big too, especially with the population and people's interests," said Zhang (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 5, 2009). Therefore, if one looks at it that way, for the producers it was acceptable.

The shows that Zhang's team produced shows ranging in topic from profiles of athletes from all over the world and how the Chinese athletes were preparing for the Games, to retelling the 100 years of China's involvement with the Olympics, and many other subjects. Besides these topics, Zhang's team also produced shows about Chinese culture and traditional art (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 5, 2009). There were many topics they were able to incorporate in their programming, but since tradition defines China, Zhang said, "We should make an effort to produce at least a dozen shows that relate to Chinese traditional art and make that interconnect with China's preparation for the Olympics" (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

Also, because traditional themes were present everywhere in the opening ceremony, it was important for the producers to explain old customs and retell traditional stories for the new generation of young people. "I hope with our shows we were able to tell people about the importance of their own culture" (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January

5, 2009). When I asked him if he felt his shows had any impact or influence on people's popular entertainment and everyday lives, he said, "If there were not any, I would be shocked" (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

Besides the influence these shows had on society, there were other aspects from which the television networks have benefited. The Olympics created a platform for television stations like CCTV-5, CCTV Olympics, and CCTV-9, the English Channel, to exercise their creativity. The equipment and the way Chinese producers make documentaries and shows sometimes lack in quality, in comparison with Western ones. Zhang said that it is not that "we require more creativity or we do not have the potential to make shows of the caliber of those in the U.S.," but because sometimes, they lack the resources, finances, and also the practice needed to make high quality shows (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 5, 2009). Therefore, the Olympics gave them a chance to make that happen. Since they created about 3,650 hours worth of shows per year, they were given sufficient chances to practice their skills. Because the programs were very popular financially, supported by both the government and the advertisers, they were able to update their equipments and redesign their sets.

Furthermore, the channels used different techniques to shoot the shows and documentaries. Zhang said that they incorporated movie styles and used HD cameras to accomplish their work. "One of the reasons we used HD cameras is because we want to preserve these memories forever" and preserve this historical event for the future generations (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

Additionally, there was a need for these shows, even when China was still several years away from hosting the event. Zhu said, it is "because the Olympics is very

important for us, especially for the sports channel here” (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009). It is a great resource that we want to use, expand and also because every one [companies] wants to purchase these shows, too” (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009). In other words, of course, the moneymaking opportunity was very evident and it was one of their goals to enrich themselves further.

We needed these shows because of the advertising and also because there were people who really needed them. We had both financial advantage and demand from the audience. The more shows we had, the more advertising we could draw in. Everyone wanted to produce Olympic-related shows (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

Zhu and other producers said that the range of programs they showed gave them an opportunity to introduce Chinese culture again, and with that, they were also able to link everything to the Olympics, which was something the people enjoyed and craved. The shows did not just allow the Chinese audience to learn and benefit from the history of the Olympics, but they “could also relearn Chinese culture,” which was similar to what Zhang’s team at CCTV’s Olympic channel did (Z. Zhang, personal communication, January 4, 2009).

CCTV also had support from the government. Since the station represents the entire country, one of its main jobs was to promote the Olympics. It was not all just for the money, but also for the nation. Even without any good ratings, their bosses would still have mandated them to make shows like this. “The station is patriotic, and we as Chinese citizens would, of course, like to promote this great event that our nation is hosting” (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009). Therefore, many different

factors played into the creation of the shows.

Because of the great results from the shows, CCTV Sports and Olympic Channels were able to draw in many advertisers; however, that was not their primary goal. The high ratings and great demand from advertisers were the icing on the cake. They did not expect all this great support, in terms of finances and high viewership, but without the government demand as well, it would have not been possible to create a craze for the Olympics and for Chinese culture again.

Other countries who hosted the Games “do not do the kind of work we do, like producing so many shows that relate to Chinese history and people’s love for their country’s being able to host the Games” said Zhu (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009). The event inspired such pride, and the Olympics were so important in the public eye that the station had to make all these kind of shows; “there was no other way around it” (W. Zhu, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

Reintroducing Traditional Culture to Society

A few years passed in the millennium, and as China started to prepare itself for the 29th Olympiad, there was a segment of popular culture that started to reintroduce itself into society: traditional culture. It was during the years of preparation for the Olympics that people saw a slow reintroduction of traditional culture. Before the actual opening ceremony, traditional culture, in a way, made itself known, establishing itself as a popular phenomenon that the Chinese people and the market desperately needed.

However, why did the Chinese people start to love traditional culture again? It was not that they just brought out the untouched old traditional culture and implemented it, but they actually repackaged traditional culture in order to appeal to a modern audience.

That is one of the reasons tradition has become extremely popular again.

Furthermore, as the years passed and as the country started to approach 2008, one could see that, even in regular television programming, which does not include the Olympic shows, a reintroduction of Chinese traditional culture had taken place. It eventually became popular in people's lives and became part of the popular entertainment circle, something that everyone wanted to be a part of.

Many different artistic genres and people have incorporated traditional themes in their creation of their works. Several years before the opening ceremony, all these people and talents merged their individual works with Chinese traditional culture. These people who participated and acted as essential forces in bringing traditional culture to a new platform ranged from singers to educators to foreigners to operas to film directors and to television shows.

Earlier, I mentioned the phenomenon of *Super Girl*, producing such singers like Li Yuchun. Even Li Yuchun incorporated Beijing Opera-themed ideas into her new records in 2007. Several years after she won the competition, because traditional culture started to heat up in China, she even started to dress like characters from Beijing Opera arias and had photographs taken of her in Beijing Opera costumes ("Li Yuchun Shoots," 2007). Sun Ping, a famous Beijing Opera singer and professor at Renmin University said, with Li embracing Beijing Opera like that, which is the pinnacle of opera in China, all young girls started to follow in her footsteps (P. Sun, personal communication, January 15, 2009). Because she is an idol to millions of young people, Li's promotion of the Beijing Opera just made the genre even more popular. When she started wearing Beijing Opera costumes, some young people interpreted it to mean that, since our most famous singer is

interested in traditional culture, we should maybe learn about it, too (“Li Yuchun Shoots,” 2007).

Another musician, Wang Leehom, even though he is a Taiwanese singer, incorporated Chinese traditional music into his pop music. He is a very versatile musician who likes to experiment with different styles. In his 2005 *Hero of Earth* album, he combined Beijing Opera music with rap and pop music (Wang, 2005). This was a new style that many thought was an interesting combination. His fans, through his music, were able to learn about Beijing Opera’s music and singing styles (Wang, 2005).

“Farewell my Concubine,” one of the most famous arias in Beijing Opera, was also remade in collaboration with other forms of art. A few months before the Beijing Olympics, the directors mixed ballet with this aria. This is an example of another genre that incorporated traditional culture. And its success was the result of repackaging it with a different form of art. People are thankful for the Olympics, in a way, because they reintroduced Chinese traditional culture to the people again (P. Sun, personal communication, January 15, 2009).

Even movies followed up with traditional themes. One movie made an impression on Chinese society, with the retelling of the story of the great Beijing Opera singer, Mei Lan Fang, who charmed the world with his performance. *Forever Enthralled*, directed by Cheng Kaige, a famous Chinese director, starred the well-known international actress Zhang Ziyi, who was the lead actress in *Memoirs of a Geisha* (“Forever Enthralled,” 2008). He even said that one of the reasons he released the movie after the Olympics was that he knew that, since traditional culture had become popular again, having a movie retell such a fascinating story would implant another strong force of cultural identity into

people's minds (P. Sun, personal communication, January 15, 2009).

Another great and influential person, Yu Dan, has reinvented the teachings of Confucian and Mencius. She is a 41-year-old media scholar based at Beijing Normal University. A PRLog press release states, "Between studying the ancient analects of Confucius and giving television lectures, she's a media advisor for some of China's best television producers" ("Yu Dan's multimillion," 2008, para. 8). She became so popular that now she is considered one of the richest talk show hosts, lecturing people about traditional literature both on television and in books, which are one of the most sought-out commodities by young college students and adults. "Her first book Yu Dan's Thinking of The Analects of Confucius immediately sold 12,600 copies in the 24 hours...within a year it had sold over 4 million copies across China" ("Yu Dan's multimillion," 2008, para. 2).

All the young people love her books, which has prompted a new generation of traditional culture lovers. She has reinvented and repackaged traditional philosophy for a younger generation. "She offers a radically new insight into the ancient wisdom that has defined the lives and culture of literally billions of people in the world today" ("Yu Dan's multimillion," 2008, para. 3)

"Yu Dan's fresh, modern and controversial interpretation of the Analects presents a clear alternative view to which the new generation of Chinese can relate and understand" ("Yu Dan's multimillion," 2008, para. 6). If she did not revise the old tradition into a new and simple form, I do not think she would have become that popular, and Confucius's teachings would not be part of the popular culture that people consume now. Yu Dan brings "Confucius's ideas up to date and back to life, showing that they are

highly relevant to the modern world” (“Yu Dan’s multimillion,” 2008, para. 6).

Therefore, taking her as an example, one can see that by reinventing and repackaging traditional culture, it is possible to allow tradition to survive, and eventually become extremely popular, in the 21st Century.

Because of her strong influence and popularity, Yu Dan’s books will finally be published in English this year. The Chinese publishing company, the Zhonghua Book Company will cooperate with Macmillan Publishers in order to bring her ideas to the English-speaking world. With this opportunity, her work will not just be promoted in China “but also all over the world. It will also introduce to global literature the profound and valuable teachings of Confucius and Mencius” (“Yu Dan’s multimillion,” para. 13).

Besides Yu Dan’s show on CCTV-10, the science and education channel, there has been a series of other kinds of lecture-type shows that talk about historical events and the teachings of Taoism and Confucius (“CCTV-10 Homepage,” n.d.). These shows have also gained moderate success. One of the programs is called Lecture Room; however, its literal translation is “Lecture Forum from A Hundred Schools of Thought” (“CCTV-10 Homepage,” n.d.). The show invites scholars to provide lectures on various disciplines, and in the few years leading up to the Olympics, there was a focus on Chinese history and Chinese culture, as more and more people started to become interested in China’s past (“CCTV-10 Lecture,” n.d.).

One can see that during the Beijing Olympics’ opening ceremony, traditional Chinese culture was present everywhere. Most people think that they were promoting cultural elements in the ceremony to introduce China to the world. Others have claimed that because young people started to pick up on the fad of Chinese traditional culture

before that, the ceremonies had more cultural components in it and fewer modern elements, which is an interesting take (R. Li, personal communication, December 28, 2008).

Furthermore, several foreigners have become so skilled with Chinese, that they have become celebrities in China. Da Shan, also known as Mark Rowswell, a Canadian immigrant, is one of the most famous foreigners in China. Rowswell's rise to fame came with his interest in *xiangsheng*, a popular form of comic dialogue, and because he mastered Chinese like a native speaker, he has appeared on numerous television programs, bringing attention to his ability to excel in Chinese word play ("Who is Dashan," n.d.). "These days, Da Shan's face is everywhere on Chinese billboards and television...some 80% of Chinese people have heard of him," according to Renminbi.com ("Fame at Last," 2009, para. 3). He is also known to be a great television host and Master of Ceremonies, participating in major events; for example, the CCTV's Spring Festival Gala, which takes place every Chinese New Year ("Who is Dashan," n.d.).

Da Shan's success fostered several shows based on Chinese as second language speakers who compete on their Chinese knowledge and speaking skills. Some of the contests "aim to enhance China's leading role in Chinese language teaching and deepen foreign students' understanding of Chinese language and culture" ("Foreigners show," 2006, para. 10). However, in the past few years, there have been shows that tested foreigners' knowledge of China's history and tradition. These did not just focus on their language skills, but also on their knowledge about exquisite traditional art of China. There have also been competitions testing foreigners' Beijing Opera singing skills (P.

Sun, personal communication, January 15, 2009).

Sometimes people wonder what is it about foreigners that interest Chinese viewers. One thing is that it is easier to become famous in China if you are a foreigner who speaks Chinese, because “foreigners who can speak Mandarin hold curiosity value for the Chinese audience” (“Fame at Last,” 2009, para. 5). Another reason is because the Chinese society is so homogeneous that foreigners who speak the language well capture people’s attentions. It is obviously interesting to hear a non-Asian person master the Chinese language; therefore, all these shows became extremely trendy.

After the success of these kinds of shows, the Chinese people started to feel ashamed of themselves, realizing that they, as Chinese did not even know as much about the traditional history or culture of their own country as a person who had not even been born there. This pressed many people to start to relearn their history, and it was also one of the factors that helped to transform traditional culture into popular culture.

Why did traditional culture become popular again?

During the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony, there were many different cultural and historical aspects of China that were projected to the audiences of the world. During the ceremony, people were ecstatic, especially when the Chinese national anthem was sung by thousands of Chinese people in the stadium. The atmosphere was filled with love and patriotism. I was present at the opening ceremony, and that was a moment when I truly felt that Chinese people were united. The Games showed China in the most positive way possible. Even though the ceremony showed a condensed 5,000-year history, it did point out the most important aspects that defined China’s arts, creations,

and rise to power. An article, “Beijing dazzle: Chinese history, athletes on parade as Olympics begin,” stated, “A traditional scene from a Chinese opera ensued, featuring portrayals of Terracotta soldiers...[and] traditional landscape paintings were projected onto a huge scroll” (2008, para. 16 & 18). The ceremony highlighted the showed Chinese inventions of gunpowder, printing, papermaking, compass and many more. However, it was not those two hours of the opening ceremony that changed the way Chinese people appreciated traditional culture; it did not become popular over night. It was everything leading up to the event that really caused the change. One has to understand China’s cultural history before one can understand the kind of feeling and pride it carried out during the opening ceremony.

The opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympics in Greece also dealt with traditional culture and history that of the Greeks; however, it did not become too popular afterwards because traditional culture has always been part of the Greek culture and the Greeks’ everyday lives.

However, it was different for China because of the Cultural Revolution and other revolutionary upheavals over the past 100 years, which almost wiped out all traditional culture (P. Sun, personal communication, January 15, 2009). During the Cultural Revolution, the Communists suppressed and terminated all the teachings of Confucius, which represent the epitome of traditional teaching. Greece also certainly had hardships of their own; however, their culture and tradition did not go through such turmoil, as in China. This is one reason why China’s traditional culture had such a comeback.

During the Cultural Revolution, Beijing Opera had to change its content using all kinds of revolutionary themes that in no way talked about tradition of any kind. Ye

Jinsen, the famous Beijing Opera actor and director who went through the Cultural Revolution and other social changes said, at that time, if people ever mentioned traditional culture or thought of it, the Red Guard would have assumed that they were against the party's principles (J. Ye, personal communication, January 20, 2009). That kind of belief indicated that an individual wanted to go back to the *Feng Jian* period. *Feng Jian* in English is translated as "feudalism;" however, it does not carry the same meaning in English. It refers to the time period when emperors ruled China, which is considered "old unscientific" times (P. Sun, personal communication, January 20, 2009). Therefore, people should relinquish that kind of thinking, because all the emperors were failures, in the government's mind (P. Sun, personal communication, January 20, 2009).

Under Communist rule, the dynasties were the shame of China's past; therefore, anything that the emperors considered good was bad in the eyes of the Communist government (J. Ye, personal communication, January 20, 2009). That included history, exquisite culture, and fine art. Because of this negative principle, anyone who embodied traditional culture was bad and had to go to reform school to cleanse their mind (J. Ye, personal communication, January 20, 2009). One could just imagine, how could any kind of tradition survive with this kind of negative ideology?

And during times like this, unfortunately, art suffered the most. Latham said, "The prominence of the theater and performance in the overall Chinese popular cultural landscape has diminished over the last century," and this is the result of all the historical changes that took place in China (2007, p. 301). Therefore, this is not an excuse for China's forgetting its traditions, because the people who treasured these arts were brainwashed, and traditions were wiped out of people's minds.

For Greece and other countries that have hosted the Olympics before, even though they celebrated their history and culture, there was not such a great influence on their society, because they did not go through the historical changes that China did. In the recent few decades, they did not endure cultural upheavals like the Cultural Revolution in China. Therefore, their traditional culture was able to remain intact.

Because of these movements, and because of the absence of traditional culture in China, its reintroduction and reinvention seemed extremely new to the Chinese people, and especially to a younger generation who did not grow up so vividly with all the traditions. Therefore, it became popular again with new ways of retelling history.

On the other hand, because of all these historical and traumatic social changes in its society, China only knew of itself, and when it opened its doors to the West in the 1970s, everything was extremely new. It was as though you kept a person in a dark room for years and suddenly released him or her to the daylight. The world would be unknown to that person. Therefore, the tremendous new ideas that the Westerners had been utilizing for years were so new to the Chinese that they also changed the Chinese society. Hence, in this way, too, the Chinese had forgotten about traditional culture.

During the 1970s, when China first opened its doors to the West, the Chinese people claimed that “even the moon in America is shinier than in China” (P. Sun, personal communication, January 15, 2009). This phrase represents an overt obsession with the Western world and foreigners, because everything they had was better than what China possessed at the time, the country was so behind in development. Because of this ideology, there have been strong foreign and Western influences in every area of life for the Chinese, from technology to entertainment to books to television, which the Chinese

people were fascinated with. This was one of the reasons shows like *Super Girl* and *Survival Challenge* were copied in the area of television.

Another way the Beijing Olympics helped China to realize its culture was through one of its major themes. According to Zhao Qizheng, the Vice Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and Dean of the School of Journalism and Communication of Renmin University, the three themes presented at the Olympics were the high-tech Olympics, the green Olympics, and the most important one; the *renwen* Olympics. These three themes were the driving forces behind the changes to Chinese society. However, the third and most important theme, the *renwen* Olympics has fostered one of the greatest legacies the Olympics have brought to the country (Q. Zhao, personal communication, January 4, 2009). The term *renwen* Olympics is hard to translate. It is a combination of the characters *Ren* 人, with a literal translation of “human,” and *wen* 文, “literature or culture.” “Normally it is the translation for the academic ‘humanities’ and thus it is sometimes translated as the ‘humanistic Olympics’” (Brownell, 2008, p. 189). However, it also has two more aspects to it. They are the “people’s Olympics and the cultural Olympics” (Q. Zhao, personal communication).

The “people’s Olympics” means that the Olympics is everyone’s and not just the government’s, but it has a more individualistic meaning to it. The “cultural Olympics” refers to a kind of blending of Chinese culture with globalization (Q. Zhao, personal communication, January 4, 2009). It means that the Chinese people should personalize the Olympics and bring out the traditions of China. This is a great example of looking at how the Olympics pioneered a new way for people to interpret Chinese traditional culture.

The only way to make the Olympics cultural was to look into the country's heart, which should not reveal foreign-influenced ideas and concepts, but something characteristically Chinese. Therefore, the Olympics' influence on the popularity of traditional culture is not such a surprise, because with the creation of the themes and the responsibility the Beijing Olympic Committee placed on the people, it could have been expected to happen.

The Olympics' Influence on Chinese Popular Culture

A Conversation with Yang Lan

Yang Lan is China's Olympic image ambassador and a famous talk show host. Her show, called *Yang Lan One-on-One*, has been the epitome of talk shows in China (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). She was part of the development of the Olympics, both on the government and the sports side, and also on the media side. Yang said that the Olympics did not just bring in a whole wave of popular culture to China, but also brought another level of interest in copyright, creativity, and the development of the communications field in China.

One of the many things that I discussed with her during our interview was copyright infringement. She said that Chinese people finally understood the importance of the *Ao Yun* (the Olympic logo in Chinese characters) copyright. Before, the Chinese people and television stations all wanted to use the logo to make money. But because of the Olympics, they had a new understanding of what copyright actually entails (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

Yang meant that China and the Chinese people thought that, since they were hosting this event in their country, the Olympics belonged to them and they could do whatever they wanted with its name, image or logo. They thought they owned

everything, from the logo to television copyrights and other sorts of things. However, they discovered that “[e]ven the media cannot use the copyrighted logos when broadcasting and creating their shows” (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). Yang said, during the creation of a show, the producers wanted to use the *Ao Yun* logo. “They just did not understand that you cannot use it without proper permission” (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

In my own experience, I saw food products carrying the Olympic logo on packaging in the earlier years, before 2008; however, after a few months, the packaging was changed because lawsuits were filed against companies misusing the Olympic logo without permission. A Chinese article, “Misusing the Olympic logo to advertise” stated, some of the companies including travel agencies were trying to draw in more people to travel to Beijing by using the Olympic logo without permission on their advertisements (Zhang, 2008). Brownell wrote that, “[l]arge-scale production of knockoff products did take place, but they were dealt with when exposed” (2008, p. 186). Some of the companies said that they were just following the normal procedure of advertising their products; however, if they were not an official sponsors, they could not use the logo.

Furthermore, because of some of the marketing strategies that the Chinese used, they “slid under the IOC’s radar screen” (Brownell, p.186). The *Ao Yun*, in Chinese characters, became extremely popular “in names of companies, restaurants and products, which could have been considered a kind of ‘ambush marketing,’” but because of the language differences, it was hard for the IOC to detect who was actually using the *Ao Yun* wrongfully (Brownell, p. 186).

Everyone knows that China has one of the greatest problems with pirated DVDs

and CDs around the world, and because of that issue, copyright laws were not set up well and they were not strong enough to be imprinted on business people's minds. Therefore, one could see infringements happening everywhere, with the selling of even Olympic-related pirated CDs and DVDs. However, Yang said that, the Olympics, brought out in people the sense and meaning of copyright protection (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). "It is a lesson learned for the media and for the business people, that it's an official item, and they were told by the government that it cannot be used without proper credit" (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

The Olympics has taught the media and the people about what copyright entails. With this event, people's understanding of copyright has matured, especially on the part of the media and the television stations. They also misused the logo and the Olympic words in Chinese that had been copyrighted, but the event undeniably clarified their understanding (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

Chinese Creativity

Besides the copyright infringement problem that the Olympics changed, there are other aspects and more innovative areas of Chinese society that were also changed because of the Olympics. It includes the creative minds of Chinese directors and people. This Olympics, in a way, enlightened their musical and artistic skills.

The birth of Olympic songs, and bringing in international creativity, had an enormous impact on Chinese popular culture. The type of composition style changed after bringing in foreign talent, because the audience for China was not its own people or its Asian neighbors, but the world. "It is very hard to accomplish that because it has to be

international, but the creative team did not quite know how to do it” (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). Creating songs for the Olympics was extremely hard because the composers had to bring an international style to the process, and in the beginning the Chinese composers did not understand it. “Twenty years ago, during the Asian Games, people already had the concept of creating a more non-Asian type of ceremony, but even with music, the Chinese people could not accomplish it” (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). Therefore, they had to start to learn from foreign composers about composing styles, which led to a change in the musical understanding of popular culture.

Along with music, there were changes in creativity in storytelling, choreography, and stage production styles that Chinese artists had to get used to. In the past, the Chinese people learned dance, art, and culture from other Asian countries like Korea and Japan. However, as mentioned before, the Olympics were for the world to see; therefore, the meaning behind the choreography of the Olympics opening had to appeal to everyone (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). “Before, during big performances, Chinese choreographers only knew the Asian style, but with the Olympics, their creativity was taken to a new height” (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). The event influenced people’s views on dance and creativity and changed popular culture by broadening its mindset to different concepts. From this, even dance classes in universities around China changed their curriculums, analyzing more dances from countries that lead in this field (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

The Chinese government was also trying to change a stereotype that has stuck with Asians for many years. “Some foreigners would describe the Chinese people as ‘stone

minds' with no creativity, only succeeding in science. But now their [the Chinese] thoughts have opened up to many different views, especially the creative force that went into the lighting of the Olympic torch" (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

Li Ning, China's star gymnast, who had won six world championships and several Olympic gold medals, was given the honor to light the torch for the 29th Olympiad. Even the NBC commentators during the opening ceremony were amazed at this new concept for lighting the torch (Ebersol, 2008). Li Ning, who was the last torchbearer, was raised to the rim of the stadium. He ran around the rim of the stadium while suspended and as he ran, an unrolling scroll was projected, showing film clips of the flame's journey around the world (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). As he approached the cauldron, he lit an enormous wick, which then transferred the flame to the cauldron. The flame then spiraled up the structure of the cauldron before lighting it at the top.

Because of this event, foreign people now have a new understanding of the creative potential of the Chinese people (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). In the past, foreigners understood China through media reports and their own prejudices. However, in the Olympics, they were given the opportunity to see the possibilities its citizens and young people were able to bring to the stage. Therefore, foreigners were able to develop a new understanding of China's new, young generation. They were able to see and observe that young Chinese people's thoughts are similar to theirs. The Chinese are very open to new ideas and not as conservative as they were thought to be in the past (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

A few years prior to the opening ceremony, there was a popular phrase that many Chinese were familiar with, which is “link up with international standards” (Brownell, 2008, p. 189). This time around, the changes in China’s television, entertainment, and people’s lives will not be forced by the Other, but China itself will change, “so that it may play a key role in the global society of the twenty-first century” (Brownell, p. 189). This, again, explains the state that China was trying to reach on its own. With the new generation of people who want to change the image of China, the situation became apparent with the newly defined popular television and entertainment in Chinese society. This is represented in the fact that, the more popular entertainment and television can be influenced by Chinese culture, the more tradition those areas will be able to represent. Therefore, bringing in traditional culture is an essential force for influencing other countries and people.

Change in News Reporting

The way China’s news reporting on its own people changed during the Olympics (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). Harsh criticism, which people accepted from the Chinese media in the past, was eased up and led to a more balanced reporting on some of the events. Liu Xiang, the defending Olympic champion in the men's 110m hurdles, and an icon of Chinese sports, limped out of the Bird's Nest stadium during the first round heat (Xia, 2008). Yang said that 10 or 20 years ago, the media would have bashed him for his cowardliness, and the Chinese people would have despised him forever (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). “Liu Xiang was the dream athlete for all the Chinese people because Asians aren’t known for being

able to excel in short distance running,” and for him to win and break world records was the most astounding and remarkable feeling that could ever have been granted the nation (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). Therefore, for him to back up and not even finish running his race when his own country was hosting the Olympics could have been the most shameful thing he could ever have done in his life. This was what many thought the news media would have said. However, it did not happen, both on the part of media and the people.

There is an old Chinese saying that “if you are going to die, you *must* die in the front of the battle line,” and people used an alternate version during competitions, saying, “If you are going to die die, you *must* die in competition” (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). Yang said that, in the past, Liu Xiang would have known that, even if he was injured and clearly knew that he was unable to finish the race (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). However, because of his country and the hopes everyone had bestowed on him, he would still have had to run the race and probably collapse on the runway. Back then; turning back was not an option.

Yang said that it was an inhumane way to treat people; however, this Olympics shone a different light on the ways reporters were writing about these events (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). One article, “Liu Xiang quits games, but never out,” from the government-controlled news agency, Xinhua News, gave a balanced and fair portrayal of his backing out of the competition (Xia, 2008). In an article by Xia Xiaopeng, there were many quotes that reflected what the nation was really feeling. There were many who said, “‘We support you, you are still the best.’ ‘You have tried your best. You are still the champion’” (Xia, 2008, para. 11).

Also, millions of netizens were saying, ““Don't blame Liu Xiang. We can not imagine how hard he has tried”” (Xia, 2008, para. 13). Yang said that it is astounding how people managed to feel this way, because people would not have said the same in the past (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). The above words indicate that people’s hearts were able to contain more compassion than hate, and reports like this show that China’s media are progressing. There is still a long way that China’s news reporting needs to go; however, at least the Olympics have made a contribution to steering the media toward covering stories accurately.

Yang further stated that, in China, it is usually the media that implement and alter people’s opinion and views about certain things; however, now that is not quite true any more. “The media do not influence the people anymore or vice versa, but they have a more collaborative relationship now” (L. Yang, personal communication, January 7, 2009). It is not so much an issue of who will change whose opinion; instead, the media and its citizens have melded together like yin and yang, not one manipulating the other, but working together to arrive at more powerful conclusions. However, one could still say that the government is instilling its ideologies into the media, forcing the press to follow them, but at least the media are smoothing out, and reporting harsh and negative news is not their main priority anymore.

The Future of Chinese Popular Culture

“The more tradition you possess, the more you appeal to the world.” The former Hungarian president, Göncz Árpád, with whom my family was very close, said this (Á. Göncz, personal communication, May 20, 1997). He meant that because you have your uniqueness, your own identity, you are different from the rest, and the more you stand out,

the better you are. Therefore, if China keeps enriching and fostering its traditional culture, the more appealing it will be to the world, which will result in respect. This also means China should not copy others but should use its own 5,000-year-old culture to influence others.

However, people should not forget that sometimes you should learn the positive sides of others and use that knowledge to create and further your own culture to make it popular. Furthermore, by just retelling and reusing your own traditional culture without inventing it anew, it will not succeed. You have to polish it and make it more appealing to a modern audience. The world is advancing, and if your country wants to go along with it, it has to clearly match up with its potentials. Therefore, since China has already converted traditional culture into popular culture, it has to use modern ways to keep it popular, because young people's mind change fast, and they follow new things very quickly. Therefore, if you do not keep up with the fast change, you will lose them.

To predict the future of Chinese popular culture, I think it will be influencing the world, rather than the other way around. Traditional culture is becoming the new popular culture. It is evolving the way fashion has evolved, bringing back styles from the 1970s and the 1980s. This trend has, in a way, already started. The recent popular culture of China, which is traditional culture, has started to branch out to other countries like the U.S. In recent news, the famous Beijing Opera adaptation, "Red Cliff," from the great Chinese historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, was displayed in Times Square, and amazed Americans. "The 45-minute Chinese show was projected with English subtitles across eight screens in the south end of Times Square, known as the 'crossroads of the world'" (Xie, 2009, para. 1). Harumi Gondo of UPIASIA.com wrote an article

saying that “thousands of viewers were moved by what was happening in Times Square” (Gondo, 2009, para. 14). Also clear was the kind of message “Red Cliff” was promoting. “China is clearly making an effort to broaden its image...in reaching out with its ancient culture” (Gondo, 2009, para. 15). Certainly, it is still very difficult for many foreigners to understand Chinese traditional culture, and there are still some cultural gaps between the two countries; however, with this example, one could at least see that traditional culture is branching out and is, in a way, influencing the lives of others.

Thanks to the Olympics, the Chinese people have found their own identity again. A nation’s popular culture is its own identity in some way. In other words, during the turn of the century, the popular cultural influences in China were almost all foreign, from both the West and the other Asian countries like Korea and Japan. Through that process, China, in a way, lost its own culture, because everything was dominated by foreign influences. However, finally, with the influence of the Olympics on television and entertainment, China has finally reestablished its identity in the modern world, which is based on its own traditional culture made popular.

China’s influence on the world is also perceptible through the influence of the most important theme of the Olympics, which is *renwen* or the cultural Olympics (Brownell, 2008, p. 189). People could consider the popular cultural influence that China will bring to the West as a second goal the theme was trying to convey. The point is, this phenomenon “propel[s] the Olympic Movement to become a truly transcultural, transnational, global cultural system” (Brownell, 2008, p. 192). Therefore, one could see that China’s urge to influence others, and not the other way around, could have been a goal and a legacy it was trying to accomplish at the start of the Olympics. China and its

people are ready to be the leaders of the world and not the followers anymore.

The force of popular culture is greater than people think; it influences people's lifestyles, it influences technology, and it influences the desire for ideas, objects, and items. In the future, it will be China's popular culture that will influence the world and not the other way around. Because of China's fast economic development and its globalization and internationalization, it will be the next powerhouse of the world, which has been a topic for many years already. As for my topic, what and how the Beijing Olympics influenced Chinese popular television and entertainment, I have only one comment, which is: Thanks to the 2008 Olympics, China has finally reclaimed its own identity again, which is defined by its own traditional culture.

Sources Cited and Consulted

- Beijing dazzles: Chinese history, athletes on parade as Olympics begin. (2008, August 8). *Cbc.ca*. Retrieved April 10, 2009 from, <http://www.cbc.ca/olympics/story/2008/08/07/olympics-ceremonies.html>
- Brownell, S. (2008). *Beijing's games: What the Olympics mean to China*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- CCTV-10 Homepage. (n.d.). CCTV.com. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from, <http://www.cctv.com/homepage/profile/10/index.shtml>
- CCTV-10 Lecture Room. (n.d.). CCTV.com. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from, <http://www.cctv.com/program/bjtt/01/index.shtml>
- Ebersol, D. (Executive Producer). (2008, August 8). *Beijing 2008: Opening Ceremony* [Television broadcast]. Beijing: NBC Olympics.
- Fame at Last. (2009, April 11). Renminbi.com. Retrieved April 13, 2009, from <http://www.renmenbi.com/fame-last>
- Foreigners show off Chinese talent. (2006, July 20). *NEWSGD.com*. Retrieved April 3, 2009, from <http://www.newsgd.com/culture/culturenews/200607200018.htm>
- Forever Enthralled. (2008, November 24). Randomwire.com. Retrieved April 5, 2009, from <http://www.randomwire.com/2008/11/24/forever-enthralled/>
- Gondo, H. (2009, March 17). Beijing opera gets lukewarm response. *UPI Asia.com*. Retrieved April 6, 2009, from http://www.upiasia.com/Society_Culture/2009/03/17/beijing_opera_gets_lukewarm_response/8228/
- Harm, W. (1996, March 14). China's Great Leap Forward. In *The University Chicago Chronicle*. 15(13). Retrieved April 2, 2009, from <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/960314/china.shtml>
- Latham, K. (2007). *Pop culture China!: media, arts, and lifestyle*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc.
- Li Yuchun Shoots MV in Peking Opera Costume. (2007, May 28). *Crienglish.com*. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from http://www.china.org.cn/archive/2007-05/28/content_1212166.htm
- Lynch, D. (2005, May 26). China under spell of mighty 'Super Girl.' *USA Today*. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2005-05-26-supergirl_x.htm

Price, M. E., & Dayan D. (Eds.). (2008). *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the new China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Wang, L. (2005). *Heroes of Earth* [Sound recording]. Taipei, Taiwan: SONY Music Taiwan.

Who is Dashan?. (n.d). Dashan.com. Retrieved March 21, 2009, from <http://dashan.com/en/whois.htm>

Xia, X. (2008, August 18). Liu Xiang quits games, but never out. *Xinhuanet.com*. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/18/content_9467768.htm

Xie, T. (2009, March 17). Times Square Has a 'Red Cliff.' *Crienglish.com*. Retrieved April 2, 2009, from <http://english.cri.cn/6666/2009/03/17/1261s465187.htm>

Yu Dan's multimillion-copy bestseller will be published in English for the first time in 2009. (2008, April 17). *PRLog*. Retrieved March 11, 2009, from <http://www.prlog.org/10064919-yu-dan-multimillion-copy-bestseller-will-be-published-in-english-for-the-first-time-in-2009.html>

Zhang, Y. (2008, April 30). Misusing the Olympic logo to advertise. *Hexun.com*. Retrieved April 12, 2009, from <http://news.hexun.com/2008-04-30/105662069.html>

Ye, Jinsen. Personal Interview. 20 Jan. 2009.

Yang, Lan. Personal Interview. 7 Jan. 2009

He, Zhen Liang. Personal Interview. 28 Dec. 2008.

Zhao, Qi Zheng. Personal Interview. 4 Jan. 2009.

Zhu, Wentao. Personal Interview. 5 Jan. 2009

Zhang, Zhaoxi. Personal Interview. 4 Jan. 2009.

Li, Ruiying, Personal Interview. 29 Dec. 2009.

Sun, Ping. Personal Interview. 15 Jan. 2009.

-J.G. Zhang, personal communications

http://www.waikato.ac.nz/library/learning/g_apaguide.shtml#Audi

-a description of the project; --- abstract/intro

-a discussion of the methods used; the people I interviewed

-a discussion of the project's significance./find identity, china is not ashamed of itself

Written Summary of Capstone Project

The Beijing Olympics was one of the greatest achievements for Chinese people around the world and it is an event that changed Chinese popular culture. In the 21st Century, it was also one of the biggest accomplishments that made the Chinese people proud of themselves. In the past, China has lost its popular cultural identity because of all the historical upheavals within its own country that took place, it was, in a way, destroyed its culture and people were confused because of all the foreign influenced ideas.

There was a time period in Chinese television where the recirculation of Western-influenced television shows dominated Chinese popular entertainment. Through hosting and preparing for the 29th Olympiad, China has found its popular cultural identity again, which I conclude is the reintroduction of its traditional culture. The country was also able to change how others perceived it in the past. In order to arrive to this discussion and analysis, I interviewed experts from the fields of television, Chinese history, Beijing Opera, and journalism. For the Chinese to host the Olympics meant so much more than for any other country; therefore, hundreds of television shows and documentaries were produced and, China's television producing skills improved. The media also softened their way of reporting.

All these changes and improvements throughout the society were because of China's urge to host the Games. Besides these changes, the Olympics gave China its popular cultural identity back. However it did not just bring out the untouched old

tradition and turn it into popular. The country reinvented and polished old traditions and made it more appealing to a modern audience. In the future, it will be China that will influence others culturally and leading other nations and not the other way around of being the follower.

The 29th Olympiad took place in Beijing, China in the summer of 2008. According to NBC commentators, it featured one of the most spectacular opening ceremonies that has ever been shown to the world (Ebersol, 2008). With 2,008 drummers and beautiful choreography, the Opening Ceremony enchanted millions of people around the world. This event did not only bring changes to how outsiders view China, but it has affected the entire nation in ways that is hard to describe. This event has changed many things in China and was one of the major events that brought different things to the people including popular entertainment, television and people's lives.

One has to understand the nature of Chinese culture, history, and its way of life before one can understand the impact this international event has brought to the people in the country. Susan Brownell, in "Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China," wrote, as described in the *Olympic Reviews*, "Hosting an Olympic Games has a significant impact on the Host City and its community...the event acts as a vehicle and catalyst which leaves a lasting mark on the city" (Brownell, 2008, p. 180). In China's case, it has left a lasting mark on the entire nation. It is an undeniable truth that this event has influenced Chinese popular culture immensely.

China did not really have a popular cultural identity in the early years of the new millennium, when economic development started to speed up. At that time, there was a recirculation of foreign programs that influenced China. It was borrowing and copying

from other countries' television entertainment and other popular media. Therefore, to say that the Olympics in many ways changed Chinese popular culture in the early 21st Century would be correct, because a nation that did not really have a clear definition of its own popular culture is liable to change.

For some people, the Olympics brought out lesser parts of popular culture and enriched people's daily lives by giving new fads to the people. But the true popular culture derived from the Olympics, and brought to the Chinese people, was traditional culture. Since China never really had an exact definition of popular culture, in a way, it was trying to find its identity or definition for a long time, and this Olympic phase, in some ways, has given a an identity to China's modern popular culture through the reintroduction of traditional arts.

In a way this is represented in the ideas and elements that the Opening Ceremony was trying to entail. The performance had very specific elements of Chinese culture displayed in every little detail. And because of those little details, the creative team was able to put on a show that reflected China. It is same as when the television producers whom I talked were trying to find the answer to what popular culture is. And, now, looking back at that event, one could say that China's newly defined popular culture underlay the meaning of the Opening Ceremony. Therefore, if the producers had looked inside themselves and the culture of China, they probably would have been able to define it.

I also talked about the history and meaning of popular culture in the Chinese society. What was popular culture before and what happened to it now, and the major influences the Olympics had on it. Why was the Olympics so meaningful for Chinese

society and culture. All these questions are questions that the reader has to understand to see the importance the Olympics had on the Chinese. Throughout the seven years for China to prepare for this major international event, television networks across China have created myriads of game shows, talk shows, and other kind of community activities for the public. For talk shows, most of the time the interview evolved around the topic of Olympics. During these seven years, about 50 to 60 percent of the shows on the television were about Olympics; therefore, it has affect young people's cultures and lives in great ways.

Besides the television influences, there were other factors that had an influence on Chinese popular culture. For example, merchandises, games, and many other things. However, again all these outside factors were mostly derived from television and Internet influences of the young people.

Most of my research was done with interview. For my topic interviewing people were the most essential part to get the best understanding for the topic. For example, China's Olympic image ambassador and famous talk show host, Yang Lan. Also I interviewed producers who have came up with Olympic show ideas, and major journalists who knew about popular culture and Chinese media history. The journalists were from both the China Central Television and from Beijing Television. I also talked to scholars and experts from China who have background knowledge about Chinese popular culture. Other professionals that I have interviewed were famous Beijing Opera directors and performers who were able to give me an insight on the traditional aspect of China. Besides talking to professionals, I will also do research on the history of Chinese television, popular culture, and television shows from the past, through books and

Internet databases. I will also talk about why it was so important for China to host the Olympic games and how the popular cultures have evolved throughout the years. In the past China did not have a clearly defined popular culture, and therefore, having such a big international event like the Olympics has influenced it tremendously.

The significance of this project is that China was able to reclaim its popular culture identity again without really knowing it. Bringing traditional culture back was not a plan the Communist Party impleted in their agendas but it was something that flew in the society.

The force of popular culture is greater than people think; it influences people's lifestyles, it influences technology, and it influences the desire for ideas, objects, and items. In the future, it will be China's popular culture that will influence the world and not the other way around. Because of China's fast economic development and its globalization and internationalization, it will be the next powerhouse of the world, which has been a topic for many years already. As for my topic, what and how the Beijing Olympics influenced Chinese popular television and entertainment, I have only one comment, which is: Thanks to the 2008 Olympics, China has finally reclaimed its own identity again, which is defined by its own traditional culture.

