

**HAPPY NEWS:  
CENSORSHIP, NATIONALISM, AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY IN CHINA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article examines aspects of China's language ideology regarding the exposure or concealment of negative news and the promotion of positive news, focusing especially on the 2008 riots in Tibet and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Censorship may have many appearances and rationales; in this case the permission to criticize or expose depends on the speaker's identity and the anticipated consequences of the revelation. Strong preference, supported by nationalistic identification and policy, favors the promulgation of "happy news" and seeks to suppress and repress any contrary messages. The intersection of nationalism and a concern for a unified, uplifting message result in what is arguably some of the world's most intense censorship.

Key words: censorship, language ideology, pragmatics, truth, nationalism, linguistic anthropology, Olympics, Tibet, China

## **RESUMEN**

Este artículo examina aspectos de la ideología del lenguaje de China asociados con la exposición o el ocultamiento de noticias negativas y la promoción de noticias positivas. Se concentra en los disturbios de 2008 en el Tíbet y en los Juegos Olímpicos del mismo año en Pekín. La censura puede aparecer o justificarse de distintos modos; en este caso, el permiso para criticar o exhibir depende de la identidad del hablante y de las consecuencias que se espera que tengan las revelaciones. Las preferencias fuertes, reforzadas con identificaciones y políticas nacionalistas, favorecen la promulgación de "noticias positivas" y procuran suprimir y reprimir todo mensaje crítico. La intersección entre el nacionalismo y la preocupación por un mensaje unificado y alentador resulta en lo que puede considerarse una de las más intensas censuras del mundo.



For someone to perform a task solely on the basis of his motives and not bother about its effect is equivalent to a doctor only being concerned with making out prescriptions and not caring whether his patients die as a result....

We judge...doctors by looking at their practice or their results,  
and the same is true of writers.

Mao Zedong, *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*

Over the past five decades since the democratic reform, and with the care of the Central People's Government and the support of the people of the entire country, the people of all ethnic groups in Tibet, as their own masters, have displayed great enthusiasm in building a new happy life, promoting development of the local economy and society in a frog-leaping manner and scoring world-shaking historic achievements in various undertakings.

*Tibet White Paper, 2009*

*Jia chou bu wai yang.*

Keep unpleasant truths within the family.

(Chinese proverb)



Censorship: bad. Freedom of speech: good. These casual, blunt evaluations are played out in subtle ways in real life in a variety of cultures, revealing specific ways people and governments wish to see speech freed or constrained. The specific topics that demand either release or containment reveal much about each particular society; the limits of proper expression are as variable as food practices, body images, or religious ritual.

In the case of two events that occurred in China in 2008—uprisings in Tibet and the Beijing Olympics—we can see evidence of censorship in China. Though many perspectives on censorship are plausible, in this article I look at *language ideology*—beliefs about language practices with consequences and power relations in the world—explaining how the language ideology of censorship operates in China, which emphasizes “happy news.” Here I discuss the ways, according to China’s language ideology, certain speech is regarded as permitted, some as forbidden, some as contested, some as truthful but disproportionate, some as tainted by the identity of the speaker, and some as deplorable because of its effects. I rely on blogs, in addition to other sources, as locations for heartfelt and often unedited portrayals of educated Chinese people, those able to use computers and, often, to write in English, because they address an international audience. The language ideology of censorship intersects in instructive ways with nationalism.

Despite the fact that some views of Chinese censorship can be regarded, relativistically, as simply how they do things far away, in another place, it is also the case that great suffering results from some of China’s policies. The jailing of dissidents, the fear or punishment of reporters, and the justifiable paranoia of bloggers make it difficult to maintain a stance of pure relativism. Further, while it is clearly not the case that “everybody” in China—a complex country of 1.3 billion souls—concur with the policies of the government, in some cases people do. Thus the standard anthropological exercise in explaining how things are done somewhere else also has real-world implications, and it is difficult to avoid choosing sides in what is clearly a lot like a battle. It is helpful, further, to know the principles underlying the observer’s loyalties. In many ways the “Western” or “American” (really United States-ian) language ideology that emphasizes freedom of speech demands equal analysis and unpacking. In such an already-long article I can only point out clear contrasts and leave the full treatment for another occasion.

Here I will show how the values of pride—a kind of “public privacy,” in which local, Chinese foibles are ideally kept within the Chinese family—and of unity play out in the ways information is managed both within China and about China. Pragmatic considerations, with a strong preference for *image*, *order*, and *stability*, are invoked in discussions about whether certain instances of speech should be permitted, in contrast to the assumed US preference for human rights and freedom, with an acceptable degree of disorder.

### CENSORSHIP AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

Censorship may be regarded as the omission, suppression, or deletion of relevant information because of pressure; alternatively it is the erasure, blockage, or failure to produce speech that would otherwise occur (see also Global Integrity Commons 2008, PBS n.d.). (I use “speech” to include all produced expression, whether written or spoken language or images.)

In a broad sense all humans censor, whether to suppress expression of boredom at a professor’s long lecture or dislike of a friend’s new haircut, or to choose to keep unstated facts about, say, government-sanctioned torture in order to avoid punishment. It is evident that “truth” cannot be and is not expressed with absolute freedom and without limits, even if it is clear what truth is.

In no society do all individuals blurt out the entirety of what they think. “Why are you saying that?” can be answered defiantly with “Because it’s true” but the real question involves motivation, and motivation involves anticipated consequences, the effect the speech will have on hearers. Indeed, one of the significant contributions of linguistic anthropology has been to demonstrate variations in limitations on permitted speech, whether through convention, socialization, or even law. Familiar in the United States is the proscription against shouting “Fire!” in a crowded theater. Hate speech is illegal (Lakoff 2000), but unpopular speech is limited not by law but by public reaction. Profanity is highly charged speech usually using colorful terms for sexuality, excrement, and divinity; it is *taboo*—powerful, used only by certain people in certain contexts.

Children are taught to keep certain kinds of facts and truths to themselves, lest they wound someone else's feelings. Silence demanded or lamented is similarly a facet of language ideology. Sometimes government regulation of speech—child pornography, sedition—is desired by citizens; fraudulent commercial claims might be controlled by law enforcement. Even in settings in which a dominant trope of “freedom” reigns, there are limits to that freedom, some of which are internalized; the most effective censorship is self-censorship (Link 2001).

Self-censorship relies on knowing what is acceptable and what is not, whether or not authorities are literally poised at one's door. In 1997, when Hong Kong was handed back to China following a ninety-nine-year lease to Great Britain, anticipatory questions were raised about whether the Hong Kong press and academy would retain their independence and speak freely, even in criticism of the People's Republic of China (PRC), or whether, knowing the dangers, they would refrain from excessive criticism. Most observers agree that the media have remained somewhat free from overt censorship but that a great deal of self-censorship has also occurred (Cheung 2003, Kwok 2008). As knowledge of the extent of surveillance in China increases, it may be the case that self-censorship increases.

There is a long history of self-censorship in China. When I did fieldwork in Kunming in the 1990s, people told me many times that their parents rehearsed with them what kinds of information could be revealed in what circumstances. They had no guiding principle that the whole truth was, in general, the best policy, but rather were taught to consider their audience and the uses to which the information would be put (Blum 2007).

The value of information is not always equivalent. Anthropologist Elinor Ochs shows, for instance, that among Malagasy speakers in Madagascar, control of information produces power yet its dissemination is regarded as immoral (Ochs 1989 [1974]). Men dispatch women to circulate information, themselves remaining blameless. Gossip, similarly, can be conceived as negative information that someone might wish to spread despite the desire of the object of discussion to keep the information from being known (see Haviland 1977, Besnier 1994, Schieffelin 2008). The information may be true—but that is not the point. In traditional Jewish thought, gossip is likened to triple murder (of the speaker, hearer, and object of gossip); praising someone outside their hearing is

considered exemplary (Telushkin 2000). Many of these studies show societies with an implicit grasp of the power of words to affect the world. They acknowledge the audience for particular kinds of speech. This implicit pragmatic understanding contrasts with a less nuanced view that truth trumps all other considerations.

In China one may find similar, longstanding concern about the consequences of speech. Individuals rely on well-socialized notions of acceptability, propriety, and permissibility to know what can be said. Just as in the United States it is considered improper to ask a “lady” her age, so in China it is considered improper—indeed illegal—to circulate stories of China’s errors.

The anthropological question thus must go further than asking whether or not given societies censor, to pursue more specific detail: how do individuals and societies determine what can and what cannot be expressed, by whom and in what circumstances?

In inquiring into censorship it is helpful to include understanding of the broader language ideologies in the society as a whole (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998, Kroskrity 2000), in addition to looking at governmental interference in the circulation of ideas and information.<sup>1</sup>

In *Lies that Bind: Chinese Truth, Other Truths* (Blum 2007), I showed that while in Anglo-American society an ideology that privileges truth prevails, in Chinese society an ideology that privileges relationships and consequences is dominant. In many situations in China, people will choose to anticipate the pragmatic consequences of their talk and will act to bring about desirable results of their speech, despite the otherwise desirable value of truth telling. One aspect of proper socialization in China, and in many other places, is anticipating others’ reactions to one’s own words and deeds; *Theory of Mind* is the term psychologists use to discuss this most human ability (Mitchell and Thompson 1986, Byrne and Whiten 1988, Baron-Cohen 1995, Whiten and Byrne 1997). Thus it is essential to learn what to say, how to say it, and to whom to say it, in what circumstances. Flattery intended to put someone at ease or to make someone feel good (either out of genuine care or calculated manipulation) may be regarded as preferable to the utterance of a painful truth. Happy news is generally preferred to laments, no matter how accurate the latter might be.

Thus censorship and self-censorship share the more widely prevailing language ideology and social norms of China, even while there are countervailing forces. Some of those forces come from within China, as evidenced in the signing of the Charter 08 call for greater freedoms, issued on Human Rights Day (December 10) in 2008, and increasingly from outside China.<sup>2</sup> The more the latter occur, however, the more the issue of censorship intersects with the issue of nationalism.

### CENSORSHIP AND PROPAGANDA IN CHINA

China is often regarded as an authoritarian country with an unacceptable amount of censorship, especially in media. Reporters without Borders (2009a), Human Rights Watch (2009), Human Rights in China (2009), Amnesty International (AIUK Human Rights for China 2009), PEN American Center (2009), The United Nations Universal Periodic Review (2009) and many other humanitarian groups identify China as one of the nations most repressive of journalistic freedom.

The Chinese nation-state is associated with a fifty-year history of state-run efforts to shape information. Sometimes this is dismissed with the English term “propaganda,” a rough—and loaded—translation of *xuanchuan*, which has associations with promulgation, or spreading. (See Brady 2008 for a stellar treatment of contemporary propaganda work.) Advertising is a kind of *xuanchuan*, as is gossip.<sup>3</sup>

Analysts often trace the beginnings of China’s propaganda to the 1942 “Yan’an [Yenan] Forum on Literature and Art.” There, Mao Zedong discussed the tendencies of petty-bourgeois writers to focus on the “dark”—exposing the negative—and exhorted revolutionary writers and artists to take into account the consequences of their writing and other activities and to focus rather on the “bright,” extolling the good (McDougall 1980: 82). Mao’s explicit recognition of the pragmatic consequences of speech, language, and art represents a continuation of the long Chinese tradition of consideration of outcomes of language. Just as Sunzi wrote in his *Bingfa* (“Art of War”) of the importance of avoiding warfare through clever manipulation of others, Mao and more contemporary people are fully aware of the effects that their actions will provoke in others, and are ideally several steps ahead of them. This explicit principle—words have effects, and their

effects should be considered prior to uttering them—is involved in decisions about releasing information.

China has for decades had “internal circulation” (*neibu*) documents (Wu 1993 discusses the range of use of this term, pointing out that not all *neibu* publications are what we would consider “classified”). A secret may be true but it may not be broadcast. From 1999 to 2001, and periodically since then, there was a flurry of detentions of China-born American academics on the grounds that they were revealing “state secrets” (Eckholm 2001; see also Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2003, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 2006, Xinhua 2006). Writing about demographic data, Judith Banister explained in 1987 that “the policy that every datum is a state secret until expressly declassified has stopped or greatly delayed the publication of most statistics” (1987: 15). By 2004, however, China’s National Bureau of Statistics offered a plan for improved “openness,” with implicit recognition that it had been anything but open in the past (Li Deshui 2004, Xue 2004).

But the easiest domain in which to observe Chinese government control and censorship—even more so than in media and academia—is the Internet, about which much has been written.

### THE INTERNET IN CHINA

It is difficult to read all of the plentiful material written about censorship of the Internet in China. The Open Net Initiative (Opennet.net 2009), affiliated with four universities, including Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, declares as its aim to “investigate, expose and analyze Internet filtering and surveillance practices in a credible and non-partisan fashion.” It has a wealth of information about many countries, with a certain clearly pointed interest in China (Opennet.net 2007). (Some scholars and analysts write of the liberatory possibilities of the Internet, as well. See, for example, Yang 2003.)

The notorious Golden Shield project (*jindun gongcheng*), more often referred to as the Great Firewall of China (*Zhongguo Weida Fanghuoqiang*; see, e.g., Deibert 2002, Zittrain and Edelman 2002, Fallows 2008a, 2008b), was implemented in 2002–03 to control, limit, and keep surveillance on Internet activities that might challenge state interests. Relying on a complex combination of hardware, software, servers, filters,

voluntary self-censoring, and an estimated 39,000 human monitors, this shield has been shown to filter out undesirable material regarding certain sensitive political topics, especially those sometimes jokingly referred to as the 3 T's (Tibet, Taiwan independence, the Tiananmen massacre), as well as "unhealthy" subjects, such as pornography (Elgin and Einhorn 2006, Watts 2006, Reuters 2007). Pages can be blocked, connections can be severed, and other consequences can follow the discovery of a user violating the limits of Internet use. At its most severe, people charged as dissidents can be located and jailed, as was the case with writer and literary critic Liu Xiaobo, first charged in late 2008 and sentenced, on Christmas Day 2009, to eleven years in prison (Macartney 2008b, Jacobs 2009b, Watts 2009).

This aggrieved sense of China's repression contrasts with many observers' default assumption that the Internet should, by its nature and origins, lead to greater liberation and freedom. Whether the technology itself *dictates* a particular conclusion about liberalization or restriction of expression is unclear, but it is evident that it *permits* either, depending on how it is set up. Lawrence Lessig, in *Code* (1999) and *Code 2.0* (2006), shows how the very architecture—the code—in which the Internet is constructed facilitates regulation by governments and other entities (see also Kalathil and Boas 2003).<sup>4</sup> Lessig points out that the Internet is *made*, not *found*, and that the precise manner in which it is made in each setting depends on certain decisions stemming from the values and norms of the decision makers. Some emphasize the liberatory aspects, others the need for control. The Panoptic possibilities of the Internet have been especially realized in China, as Lokman Tsui (2003) demonstrates. (Gorman 2005 considers criticism of China's Internet censorship a form of "China-bashing." See below for discussion of this idea.)

Borrowing Lessig's ideas and Michel Foucault's use of Jeremy Bentham's idea of the Panopticon, Tsui looks at the four modalities of regulation of the Internet in China: the law, the market, social norms, and Internet architecture itself (see also Lessig 2006: 123). He spells out how control is demanded not only from the government but also from people (as in the regulation of pornography and "bad manners," regulation desired by a majority of the population; see also Jakarta Post 2007, Deborah Fallows 2008, Lee 2008, Xinhua 2008a). The Chinese Communist Party has demanded uniformity rather than

diversity, and control of the Internet is one way in which it can attempt to attain such uniformity.

It should be evident that the hopeful dictum “information wants to be free” (open and unconstrained, as well as without cost), is not universally shared.<sup>5</sup> Ideas about the sharing of information are in flux everywhere, from discussions of intellectual property and copyright to notions of artistic creativity (Barlow 2003, Lessig 2004, Hyde 2007, Lethem 2007).

Further, the architecture, or informational structure, of the Internet facilitates surveillance. All activities on the Internet can be traced to particular Internet Protocol, or IP, addresses, which in turn can almost always be connected to specific locations. Savvy users in China and in other repressive countries sign on to proxy servers; the government has designed programs to chase them. Initially this took twenty-four hours, but by 2003 was down to about 15 minutes (Tsui 2003: 74). By 2010 such proxy servers were an open secret. One website I discovered offered a dozen pages of possible servers, each existing for only a few hours or days. (I will not list this source just in case it is somehow trying to escape detection.) A huge commercial market for Internet “filtering circumvention tools” now exists; Roberts (2009) discusses the fact that these commercial products may sell their data.

It is not only the government that oversees Internet use. In 2006, for instance, 500 students at Shanghai Normal University alone volunteered to “guide” the Internet use of fellow students, turning them away from offensive or controversial topics and toward those deemed acceptable (French 2006). They regarded this as their contribution toward building a “harmonious society.” Such work also gave them “points” in the patriotic and nationalistic—and careerist—game still operating within the Communist Party in China.

The Chinese population varies in its attitudes toward Internet censorship. French (2005) and Simons (2007) report on the clever ways that Internet users attempt to elude the censors, from the technical use of proxy servers or deliberate misspellings to the more subtle uses of sarcasm, parody, and humor. In the summer of 2007, the government shut down 18,401 websites (Ford 2007), while countless others popped up. The government urges self-restraint on the Internet, a plea with which some Chinese citizens are surely willing to comply (e.g., Sinn 2007).

Other forms of communication are overseen as well. For instance, the Voice over Internet service Skype has a chat component, which, it was discovered, has been seeking messages containing sensitive terms such as “democracy,” “Falun Gong” [the outlawed religious/martial arts group], or Taiwan independence (Hachman 2008, LeClaire 2008, Markoff 2008, Singel 2008). The complicity or resistance of foreign companies—Yahoo, Google, eBay (owner of Skype)—has become a tough issue with few easy answers (see Basu 2007).

A 2009 campaign against pornography is widely viewed as a pretext for censoring dissent (Morozov 2009, Reporters without Borders 2009b). Many individuals resist but, as I write, the government is not relaxing at all its hold against “harmful information” (Jacobs 2009), claiming to protect the nation and its representation.

### **CHINESE NATIONALISM**

Nationalism is the sense of belonging to a unit conceptualized as a nation-state and of deriving a substantial portion of one’s identity from that belonging. One’s own fate is thus intertwined in a meaningful, personal sense with that of the nation. Its reputation is one’s own. One is willing to act in ways that may threaten one’s own well-being in deference to that of the nation.

Chinese nationalism is a fairly recent invention, dating either from around 1912, when the Chinese empire ended, or from 1949, when the People’s Republic of China was founded. In either case, it has taken the usual work of institutions such as schools to inculcate a feeling of belonging and of identification with a large unit (see, e.g., Anderson 1991, Gries 2004). Outside challenges to China’s integrity or reputation aid in coordinating such sentiment, as do some internal struggles to define China’s unity (Blum 2001).

Since the late 1980s, with China’s increased connection with the outside world, Chinese nationalism has made many noteworthy appearances. One occurred during the 1999 efforts to force Slobodan Milošević’s Serbian troops to leave Kosovo and to permit ethnic Albanian refugees to return home. NATO bombed an area of Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and hit the Chinese embassy, leading to the death of three Chinese journalists. Chinese anger worldwide was immediate and powerful, with protests in

Yugoslavia and in many Chinese cities, and elsewhere. The Chinese claimed that the attack was intentional and intended to demonstrate Western power. The US claimed it was a mistake, based on outdated CIA maps of the city, and had been intended to target a military supply storehouse. Ordinary citizens, stirred up by the government, which refused President Clinton's apology, were outraged (Gries 2001) and threatened retaliative measures to avenge the killings of their innocent compatriots. The economist-turned-social critic He Qinglian (2008) describes government coordination that aimed to erase all traces of its existence, so that individual protesters were advised to appear autonomous, not scripted by government. Ultimately the government, which had stirred up the trouble, had to work to dampen the ardor of nationalistic Chinese.

Several years ago my university showed the film *Blind Shaft*, a fictional (but plausible) account of coal mining in China and of a pair of tricksters who feigned a kinship relationship with miners they arranged to have killed on the job in order to exact payment from management (Li Yang 2003). At the screening Chinese students shouted at the filmmaker, Li Yang (who later said this was common), asking why he chose to represent China this way to foreigners when there were so many positive things to report. The mandate to present a positive face, especially for outsiders, seemed morally compelling to critics of work like Li's. The implicit tension is over motivation, as Mao said so long ago, the decision about whether to focus on the "dark" or the "bright." Why reveal negative elements of contemporary China, whether they are genuine or not? Why select the negative? In Li's case, he wants to call attention to and perhaps improve the plight of the defenseless mine workers. In the case of the Chinese students, they want "foreigners'" views of China, and in turn of themselves as representatives of their nation, to be positive, focusing on all the good that exists in their country.

One could select any number of other incidents through which to observe China's language ideology as it plays out in censorship and nationalism. Two events in 2008—one entirely lamented and one welcomed by the Chinese government—illustrate some of the issues involved in both repression of information and emphasis on positive information and speech. The events were linked through temporal proximity but also through the ways they were used to tell a certain story of modern-day China.

Table 1 provides a timetable of the relevant events that occurred that year.

**TABLE 1****SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN CHINA, 2008**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
March 10–14	Uprising in Tibet
March 24	Olympic Torch relay begins
April 11–15	Dalai Lama visits Seattle/University of Washington
May 12	Sichuan earthquake
August 8	Opening day, Beijing Olympic Games

**TIBET UPRISING, 2008**

Everything about the situation in Tibet is subject to disagreement, from its past, to its present, to its desired future. Detailed scholarly and political arguments about thousand-year-old history center on the exact nature of the “China” (Huaxia)-Tibet interactions: were they tributary, or sovereign, or suzerain? (China was not a nation-state at the time, so the relations between the Chinese empire and the Tibetan empire could never have been nationalist. See Smith 2008, Sperling 2008.) What did a marriage between a Tibetan princess and a Chinese official signify? Was Tibetan society an oppressive, theocratic slave society or was it a heavenly, peaceable kingdom? Was Britain’s recognition of Tibet’s independence in the early twentieth century meaningful? Was China’s invasion of Tibet in 1950 and again in 1959 a violent advent of colonialism, or did China have the right to enter and transform Tibet? Have China’s actions in Tibet since then benefited Tibet by increasing life expectancy and bringing “modernity” to a backward, brutish society, or have they amounted to cultural genocide? These are just a handful of the unsolved questions raised by academics, politicians, human rights activists, and increasingly by nationalistic Chinese students abroad—usually science and engineering students. A Beijing museum opened in April 2008 displaying precisely the official version of this history (Yardley 2008d), to appreciative and largely accepting crowds.

In March 2008 violent events occurred in several parts of Tibet, precipitating worldwide discussion of the Tibet issue.

On March 10, 2008, the Dalai Lama issued a statement supporting the observance of Tibetan National Uprising Day (Dalai Lama 2008). It was the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the failed Tibetan resistance to China's entrance into Tibet in 1959, which had ended in the exile of the Dalai Lama.

Three hundred Tibetan Buddhist monks from Zhaibung Monastery led a commemoration of this event in downtown Lhasa (People's Daily Online 2008a). On March 14 "several" Tibetans, including Buddhist monks, attacked Han Chinese (viewed by many Tibetans as unrightful occupiers) police (People's Daily Online 2008b) and set fire to as many as 300 locations (see also Ren 2008). There were several deaths, and then the inevitable military crackdown, followed by "reeducation" (AFP 2008) and a fairly complete news blackout for several months (Ku 2008).

The Dalai Lama suggested that those initiating the violence may have been Han soldiers dressed as Tibetan monks (*Hindustan Times* 2008). A blogger who called herself/himself "anti-cctv" [CCTV is China Central Television] supported this suggestion, writing on March 4, 2008: (All blog posts appeared originally in English. Punctuation and grammar are copied exactly from the original posts; spelling has been corrected).<sup>6</sup>

The main claim of the dramatic story told last week by the Dalai Lama's translator—that the Chinese regime incited the riots in Lhasa—has lately found corroboration from other sources.... This is not the first time that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sent policemen to act as rioters in civilian protests in Tibet to stir up violence and frame the protesters. (anti-cctv 2008)

Author "Anger" writes back on the subject "To those who believe what Dalai said was true, you have been cheated":

Don't look at Chinese Government in old way, they may have done something some time back but time has changed. They are not as silly as you guys imagined that they must have made army act as rioters.... Only Dalai has the motive to make this riot then force Beijing to compromise. (Anger 2008)

Given the upcoming Olympics, "Anger" finds government incitement implausible, since officials do not want any reason to have to talk to "Dalai."

The March 2008 riots led to worldwide scrutiny of China and its policy toward Tibetans. Many felt that the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which were to open in August, presented an ideal opportunity to call attention to Tibet's situation. The riots and world reaction to them were followed by intense expressions of nationalism by Chinese living abroad as well as in China. If foreigners criticized Chinese actions, they were often in turn accused of "China bashing," and fairly sophisticated discussions about the nature of news representation ensued.

Discussions and arguments center on many points. I have divided the central focus of many blogs into five categories: 1) contesting truth, 2) questioning writers' motives (including their interest in "splitting" China), 3) questioning speakers' worth, 4) the results, effects, or consequences of the speech, both internal and external, and 5) defending China against criticism. As these categories are exemplified below, keep in mind the notion of the "bright" and the "dark" as well as the importance for China of its image, order, stability, and unity.

***Contesting Truth*** Anti-anti-Chinese sentiment was fierce outside China. Many Chinese students studying in the United States, for instance, were furious about the way American students tended to support Tibetan independence, in their view in ignorance of the real facts surrounding Tibet's history and China's contributions to the improvement of life in Tibet. At a Tibetan film festival at my own university a group of Chinese graduate students came prepared with posters and figures about "the real situation" of Tibet. They disputed even the number of people counted as Tibetans.

A large number of disputes, naturally, concerned the truth or veracity of media accounts. In 2008 CNN, one of the few foreign media outlets permitted to work in Tibet, reported on the Tibetan riots. (Others, such as *Epoch Times*, relied on reports that probably came via cell phone from Tibet to Dharamsala, location of the Tibetan government-in-exile (Central Tibetan Administration) and a substantial Tibetan population.) Chinese anger erupted when someone noticed that the images transmitted had cropped out evidence of Tibetan rioters, focusing instead on Han Chinese police brutality. Accusing CNN of lying by omission, an individual—not the government—established an "Anti-CNN" website on which reporters were targeted by name, with

death threats and other forms of violence hurled electronically. This persisted, with increasing hatefulness, until the government began to urge the nationalistic fervor to subside. (Some of the coverage of these events can be found in Associated Press 2008a, Bristow 2008, Jacobs and Wang 2008, Mendoza 2008, Plate 2008.)

At approximately the same time a CNN commentator, Jack Cafferty—known for his offensive style—commented on the contemporaneous scandal of China exporting contaminated products. He said that while some things have changed, “I think they’re basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they’ve been for the last fifty years” (Mostrous 2008). He insisted that he was referring to the government, not to the Chinese people, as “goons and thugs.” Nonetheless, Chinese fury was immediate.

Chinese generally protested the accuracy of Cafferty’s remarks and assumed they were intended to wound. Some simply praised China, warning against the dangerous effects of criticism. One blogger suggested:

Learn some Chinese if you really want to know China and its people....The Chinese language is so advanced after thousands of years of refinement and the translation of it is so difficult. If you can speak and read Chinese language you can know that China used to be a country of poetry. All the leaders MUST be able to write poetry in the most strict rhymes and meters. And Chinese people are peaceful and hard-working.

Think twice before you criticize anyone else. because if you judge someone before you know them, the condemned may be yourself. ...

Welcome to China. The world is smaller than you think. The gap between us is much smaller than you think. We are nicer than you think. (Hou 2008)

Westerners in general, appealing to the distinction between government and people, and supporting the idea of the right to express unpopular opinion, supported both Cafferty and CNN, complaining that Chinese are too thin-skinned or can’t take criticism. One person calling her-/himself Wu jaing yue from Walnut, California, supports Cafferty: “I don’t think Jack should apologize, cause he telling the truth. China only show the good side of themself, but always avoid the bad side. The junk China make are junks!” (Wu 2008)

Both Cafferty and CNN apologized, but the foundation was laid for a firestorm of blazing anger toward CNN, citing a litany of misdeeds. Not only did the anti-CNN.com website attract hundreds of comments, but a “hacking group” that planned to attack

CNN's website, using the name "Revenge of the Flame," drew government attention. It disbanded in mid-April, apparently under official pressure (Jongsma 2008).

CNN.com issued a statement on its website, explaining that two allegations—photo cropping and inadvertently twice referring to Tibet as a "country" instead of an "autonomous region"—account for the animosity directed toward it by "bloggers," a group formidable enough to be named explicitly:

CNN has been singled out for criticism for our coverage of events in Tibet through an anti-CNN.com Web site and elsewhere...CNN refutes all allegations by bloggers that it distorts its coverage of the events in Tibet to portray either side in a more favorable light. We have consistently and repeatedly shown all sides of this story. The one image in question was used wholly appropriately in the specific editorial context and there could be no confusion regarding what it was showing, not least because it was captioned: 'Tibetans throw stones at army vehicles on a street in the capital Lhasa'.

We have also published images showing violence by Tibetans against the Chinese. A March 18 story shows Tibetan youths attacking a Chinese man.

Additionally, we have published video from the Chinese media apparently showing Tibetans attacking Chinese interests in Lhasa. (CNN.com 2008)

With a list of stories covered and images used over the period, CNN made claims to "balance" and multiple perspectives.

But the greatest fury was directed at CNN and other western media as liars—and imperialists.

CNN is a bag of lies. The truth are: The monks are NOT representative of the Tibetan people. The monks want back the good old days when they ruled Tibet with an iron fist. The monks are a means to an end of the West which has made it ultimate policy to postpone the rise of China. The West would like to consider itself the saviour of the world. On the contrary, the West is THE instability and root-cause of all sorts of problems, including terrorism, that now face the human race. The West is does everything with a hidden agenda, which can be summarized as follows: We the whites must rule the planet Earth. The western media is an utter liar. (CNNisabagoflies 2008).

To illustrate the "truth," a YouTube video was quickly posted to show the eternal connection between China and Tibet.

By April 29, a Facebook group, “Tibet WAS, IS, and ALWAYS WILL BE a part of China”—started just forty days earlier, and in English—had 27,000 members. Another group, with 803 members, urged readers:

Do you know what really happened in the Tibet protest in March 2008?  
Do you know the true face of the Western Media when reporting the riots?  
Do you know who is the biggest liar in 2008?

You will find your answers to all these questions by joining this group. You’ll find hardcore photos, recordings and videos that will reveal the astonishing truth of the Tibet protest and the disgusting truth about Western Media. ...

The sole purpose of this group is to denounce the violence used by some Tibetans against Han and Muslim Chinese during the March 14 Tibet unrest and to expose the naked truth that the Western media distorted the truth and misled people to believe that the Chinese government used cruel forces against the protestors. (The Truth of Tibet Protest & Shame On Western Media 2008) (See also Yardley 2008c.)

Many entries in this group’s blog, as on many blogs, are filled with profanity and expressions of violence. But what is especially salient are the repeated claims about truth and lies.

***Questioning Writers’ Motives*** Another category of blogs focused on the speakers’ motivation for their words and imputed to them anti-Chinese intentions. In response to CNN’s statement about its balanced portrayal, a blogger attacked on multiple fronts, using all the expressiveness available in anonymous Internet writing (exclamation points, capital letters, profanity that slips through the filters):

CNN show no pity for those victims in Tibets and never care about the lives of others. Their main objective is to break China apart, but unfortunately, making false news will make Chinese even stronger and more united than ever. Their so call free media is propaganda while the state controlled medias of China is to maintain stability lives of the people and regions. I fully support the peaceful news from China. I can only describe those reporters and journalists from CNN are cold blooded, extremely vicious and worst than animals. They are inhuman!!

CNN should not exist. CNN is not allowed into China. f\*\*\* OFF CNN!  
So do all other biased western medias. (time\_flies2000 2008)

In “time\_flies2000”’s focus on the charge that all Western media are biased and motivated by the purpose of “break[ing] China apart,” and praise for China’s media on the grounds that it aims “to maintain stability [i.e., stable] lives of the people and region,” we see evidence that speech can be evaluated on the grounds of speakers’ intended goal, as inferred by the evaluator.

Attacking the quality of the news found on CNN, another blogger attempted to protect the Chinese people from the malevolent intentions of the Western media:

CNN has no credibility in its reports. Its intent is clear, only to tarnish the Chinese Government with its distorted news reports. Such reports are junk and can only fool the poor readers of the so called democratic society of the western world where the ma\*\* media are under the tight control of the capitalists. Do not expect CNN to make any apology because it will carry on with its mission of cheating and telling lies. Remember its lies have caused the downfall of Iraq and brought miseries to million of Iraqi people today. So, Chinese people be careful. Don’t fall in love with the western democracy. It is all hypocritical [hypocritical]. (bang 2008)

Appealing to Chinese unity, suspicion of the Dalai Lama’s real power, and national ideals, bloggers in great numbers attributed malevolent “splittist” motives and intentions to CNN, showing the importance of claims about speakers’ intention in judging their speech.

***Questioning Speakers’ Worth*** A third category of blogs aims to delegitimize speakers’ right to speak because of previous misdeeds, either on the part of the speaker or an entity (nation) with which the speaker is associated. Ad hominem collective attacks (even on corporate entities) are certainly powerful. Such an entry came from aksoh: “CNN is an old greedy prostitute that can lie anything in order to sell their rotten body and soul! They have never admitted any mistake that they made because they don’t know what is ‘SHAME’” (aksoh 2008).

Though this emotional blogger erred on the size of China’s population (it is 1.3 billion, not 1.6 billion), s/he was clear in criticizing CNN’s conspiracy and the nature of the “speaker”:

If they do not admit that they are conspirators, then they have to find out they are IDIOTS because you are drawn on by the conspirators!! Let us tell you, be HONEST, be OBJECTIVE, be RESPONSIBLE and be a HUMAN!! YOU ARE NOT WELCOMED BY 1600000000 CHINESE PEOPLE, INCLUDING TIBETANS, OK?? (bxj 2008)

It is not only nationalism that justifies the attacks against CNN, but distrust of the colonial past and modern human rights record of the United States and Britain:

Why don't you mention Britain and America?....Most problems in contemporary world were created by these two countries, including the problem in Tibet (Britain invaded Tibet in 1903/1904 and semicolonized Tibet). India-Pakistan conflict (Britain colonized India), Palestine-Israel conflict, just mention a few here. America is no exception, with numerous bad human rights record....We have seen through you Western hypocrisy and support our government [more] than ever before. (peaceloving 2008)

The lengthy reaction of another blogger to the frequent comments of "Rainer" draw together many of the points expressed by critics questioning the speaker's worth:

Rainer is a typical westerner representing bigotry, ignorance, hatred and prejudice against China (I want to add that some westerners, though not many, are friendly to China. We appreciate them). Rainer, if you know any Chinese language or just watch the pictures in the video...,you will see if Tibet is a nation or has always been part of China. Even Dalai Lama himself thinks Tibet is part of China....

Rainer, if you still think China represses **another nation**, you are not stupid but just an enemy of the Chinese people....

Tibet issue has been taken advantage by the West for dozens of years by Western governments and media, and of course, this is the reason why all the Western media have the same voice on Tibet...

You Western guys always take it for granted that Chinese are brainwashed by our government. You are wrong. Many of us have studied and are studying or working in North American and in Europe. And most of us have master's degree and doctorate. I myself am one of them. We know we need more democracy in China....When you westerners take for granted Chinese don't have human rights, we just laugh. We feel very free to do what we want in China today. If you don't believe, welcome to see in person. We don't need you Westerns to appear to be our saviors. Our country does have problems and need improvement, as every of your country does, but we believe we ourselves can solve our problems and do not need your arrogantly pointing hands at our government and intervene with our own affairs. (olympics 2008)

A common response is that the person voicing a critique has no right to do so because her/his own country has also been guilty of such injustices. The website danwei.org published a comment on March 28 that similarly appealed to China's history of humiliation:

Looking into the history, China has been so many times robbed and occupied by armed European bandits organized by their governments, and China has never invaded any other country.

How dare a formal bloody invader, who still holds so many treasure robbed from China and shamelessly show in its national museum, compare peace-loving China with Nazism?? Who is Nazism?? History tells the truth!

Please stop mislead your home people and the world, which only builds up hate between peoples. (Li Huang 2008)

In 2008 one of the Chinese students' frequently repeated responses to Americans' reproach over China's policies toward Tibetans was to point to the US treatment of Native Americans, and sometimes even of Hawai'ians and annexation of Hawai'i. A fascinating problem, this points to ideas of legitimacy for speaking. (Many of those criticizing China had also marched against the US war in Iraq, and were vocal critics of their own government, just as they may have criticized Sudan and Indonesia and Israel for treatment of minority populations.)

***Results, Effects, Consequences of Speech*** The fourth category of blogs focuses on the merits of speech evaluated not in terms of its intrinsic truthfulness but by the effects it produces. In this sense bloggers are very much in line with Mao's emphasis on the "bright" because it gives readers or hearers hope and confidence.

It is meaningless to discuss whether the British media tells the truth or not.

However, the certain thing is that there is a trend that the British media places too much emphasis on the unrest in Tibet making people feel situation worse than it really is.

A seemingly worse situation may make both side take more radical action which may make situation really worse. Yes the situation is worse [bad], but it is the fault of Western media which must be responsible for the extra casualty caused by its news.

I think a good media not only make people know what happened around the world, but also make people live a better life. However, British media only makes trouble in Tibet even though it claims that what he does is just telling truth. ("eye," Changsha, China, 2008)

“Eye” explicitly states that “good media...make people live a better life”—something quite beyond simply stating facts about the world. “Eye” also makes clear that media may be judged on the basis of the consequences of their reports. Improper emphasis—even if in some simple sense true—can in turn cause undesired effects.

***Defending China against Criticism*** The final category of blogs, and other action and speech, is defense against criticism of China, which is often regarded as “blaming” or “bashing” or “treachery.” In some cases, anyone criticizing China is regarded as an enemy of China. As the Tibet events intertwined with the upcoming Olympics, a columnist for the London *Times*, Simon Barnes, reported that some people found China’s 2008 Olympics comparable to the 1936 Berlin Games (Barnes 2008). The Chinese foreign minister called this “an insult to the Chinese and world people.” Then, tarred by association, other *Times* employees were bombarded with threats and vindictive comments. One *Times* journalist, Jane Macartney, wrote that she was the “most hated woman in China” because she worked for the same paper as Barnes (Macartney 2008a). As of several days after that event, more than 11,335 comments about this had been posted on sina.com. Comments vacillated between attacking China-bashing in general and focusing on the specifics of Barnes’s article, between accusations of lack of objectivity and resentment of Western criticism of China, between defending China’s record on Tibet and charging/counter-charging “brainwashing.”

When u westerners buy those so called toxic toys, cheap Chinese products, have u thought of the plight of those Chinese migrant works who get exploited by yr big corporation? They work 60 to hrs a week for 50 cents an hr and some even does not get paid for their work. What about the environmental degradation that killing the Chinese pple as a result. Don’t blame everything on China! On the other hand those monks who demonstrate against the government receiving stipend for praying whole day and do nothing for Tibetan ppl. That is the reason y [why] majority of Chinese is on the side of the government. If we are brainwashed and nationalist, y [why] there were demonstration against our government in 1989! It does not make sense. (Vincent Chin, Oakland CA, 2008)

This might be considered in part ad hominen—how can Westerners complain when they benefit from China’s cheap labor?—and in part a challenge to the accuracy of the accounts.

A self-identified Chinese-American writer, proud of her/his Chinese identity, claims that “Now the whole world hates the Chinese, Especially when China is becoming an economic superpower” (PissedoffatCNN 2008). The charge is jealousy, and its manifestation is writing that is critical of China, the rival of the criticized speaker (CNN standing in for the US).

One of the puzzling events in this saga occurred when a Chinese student at Duke University, Qianyuan (Grace) Wang, who had a Tibetan roommate, publicly encouraged fellow students to discuss the issue of Tibet’s relationship to China. Having grown up in China, it had never before occurred to her to consider a Tibetan viewpoint different from that of Han Chinese, who almost uniformly see their contributions to Tibetan life as positive.

Wang stood on the steps at Duke, confronting an angry group of Chinese students. They accused her of lack of patriotism. Within hours, Internet sites called for her death, and for that of her parents. In an increasingly common format, her private information (such as identification card number, telephone number, and address) was posted, along with that of her parents in China. Feces were thrown at the door of her parents’ home (Ton 2008). Wang was reviled and accused of being “a traitor” (NPR 2008, Shen 2008). Her parents went into hiding, though Wang claimed she felt safe at Duke.

At Dickinson State University, in North Dakota, Chinese students surrounded—nonviolently—a car sporting a “Free Tibet” bumper sticker. They stated that they just wanted to discuss with the driver the reasons for her sympathy for Tibet, arguing that much Western opinion about Tibet is misinformed (Associated Press 2008d).

In these two episodes the intersection between nationalism and censorship is especially close. The willingness of young Chinese graduate students abroad to defend their country may be surprising but is easily explained, says Joshua Kurlantzick, by the benefits they themselves have derived from their government (2008).<sup>7</sup>

Criticism must be limited, whether by Chinese or foreigners: Chinese columnist Zhang Ping (pen name Chang Ping) wrote in the *Southern Metropolis Daily* that the media should be permitted greater freedom in its coverage of the riots in Tibet. Chinese commentators accused him of being a traitor. In May 2008 he was fired (Reuters India 2008).

The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences conference, scheduled to take place in July 2008 in the far southwestern city of Kunming, in Yunnan province, was cancelled in May (Bodeen 2008a). According to Bodeen, one Chinese sociologist who had participated in planning the event said, “We have postponed the July conference, but I am not at liberty to tell you the reason why.” Several participants suspected that the cancellation was related to anthropologists’ research on ethnicity, including discussion of Tibet, and sympathy more often directed toward ethnic minorities than toward the majority, ruling Han. The state did not wish to risk having a group of prominent international scholars—6,354 people were planning to attend—criticizing China from within just as it sought to recover from the Tibet events of the spring.

Less than a month after the events in Tibet, the Dalai Lama was scheduled to speak at the University of Washington (UW). He speaks frequently at universities, to huge, enthusiastic audiences. At the University of Michigan in April 2008, tickets—available principally to students—sold out within hours.

The Dalai Lama is reviled and scapegoated by China. He is depicted as a wolf in monk’s clothing. His supporters are always referred to as the “Dalai Clique” (*dalai paixi*), much as Odysseus was referred to in the *Odyssey* as “wily Odysseus,” repeating a nickname, or epithet, that reinforces an official view of the subject. The Dalai Lama was blamed for the uprisings in Tibet. His talk of peace and compassion, which he has conveyed consistently for decades throughout the world, is regarded in China as a subterfuge, fooling gullible Westerners, while his genuine motive, as depicted in China, is independence from China and a challenge to China’s sovereignty—this despite his repeated protestations that he seeks, simply, autonomy (granted in China’s Constitution [Davis 2008]), not independence. (See, e.g., Xinhua 2008b, in which the statement that he seeks only autonomy is seen as a lie because he also wants PLA [People’s Liberation Army] troops withdrawn from Tibet.)

Because sentiment following the Lhasa events was still so raw, his Washington visit became sensitive. A large number of Chinese students at UW petitioned the president of the university, Mark Emmert, who agreed to hear them. The consul general of the PRC, Gao Zhansheng, wrote to Emmert to explain:

The Dalai Lama is not a religious figure only, but also a political figure in exile engaged in activities of splitting Tibet from China. The Dalai clique has never abandoned its position on “Tibet Independence” over the past several decades. Recent violent incidents in Lhasa and other areas of China conducted by separate forces for “Tibet Independence” are the latest proof. Even Chinese foreign missions including those in the US had been victims of violent attacks. The Chinese Government is therefore strongly opposed to Dalai’s splitting activities around the world and hoping that relevant countries stay alert on his activities and attempts. (Letter from Gao to Emmert, March 25, 2008, supplied by Perry Link)

What followed was a threat that UW’s educational cooperation with China might be curtailed if it met with “the Dalai, attend[ed] any functions held for him, [or] provid[ed] any venue for his activities.”

On the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* website, hundreds of bloggers made comments. One summed up a mainstream American viewpoint:

Be glad that you can study in a free country. Be happy that America hopes this will educate you to take knowledge back to your country and broaden the horizons of those who could not come to America. Thank American companies for providing your countrymen work in their plants that pay less wages and have taken away jobs from Americans in America. Why should we coddle China? It's your responsibility to take your knowledge gleaned at our universities and make changes in your own country, specifically changes concerning human rights! But don't come to America and try to stop anyone from their right to free speech! As they say, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.” And no this is not about dislike of a country's people, but a dislike of corrupt governments. (unregistered user a )

Another speaks differently but also on behalf of free speech:

The Dalai Lama has the same right to free speech as any UW student, Chinese or not Chinese, or any non UW student. Not more, not less.

Chinese students have the right to say that Tibet will always be a part of PRC, I respect that, but others, Dalai Lama included, also has the right to say the contrary to those willing to listen, and I also respect that. Fundamentally, nobody has to listen any of those two, have a different opinion, care or not care about Tibet.

More importantly, this is the attitude taken by the Constitution. Fortunately... (Tarim 2008)

And another suggests that the Chinese students are taking advantage of their situation in the United States:

Americans are concerned about the lies of our own Government, regarding Iraq and other issues. We are equally concerned about a Government that has sold our collective souls to the Chinese, at the expense of our health and welfare. Lead toys, poisoned pet food, poisoned medications. Sound familiar? China has gotten this far because of our own corrupt institutions, from the Clinton years until now. Of course, a little backlash, and the Chinese government like any power hungry empire scrambles to crush free thought and free speech. Perhaps the only solace I have is that I can post this with a 95% reasonable certainty that I shall not be dragged out in the middle of the night by secret police and the like. Could those Chinese students requesting censorship at the university make the same claims in their homeland? (unregistered user b)

The Chinese students successfully convinced the UW president that the Dalai Lama should not be permitted to speak about political matters, nor to receive questions about politics. His visit was to be purely about religious and spiritual matters. Nevertheless, large and well-organized protests by Chinese students were held outside the venue where he spoke. Just a day earlier, the Olympic torch had gone through San Francisco, met by demonstrations deploring China's treatment of Tibetans.

The Tibetan situation demonstrates the importance to the Chinese of promoting the happy news about Tibet's improved situation and the internalized admonition to tell a single story about it. It shows five ways contestation may arise about the worth of speech. It was especially urgent to focus on the positive and to suppress negative viewpoints because world attention was soon to be directed at China as it hosted the 2008 Olympic Games. This was to be China's big moment, its international *début* as a contemporary, credible world power.

### **BEIJING OLYMPICS, 2008**

In 1993 China was rebuffed in its bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games, a source of shame and anger for China. It considered this a rejection of its claim to be an equal, important "player" on the world stage. With increased determination, it tried again, and in 2001 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded the 2008 Olympics to Beijing. Nationwide celebrations were both spontaneous and officially supported (BBC 2001), but clearly heartfelt, with China's modern nationalism bolstered by the competitive aspects of the Olympic bid and by China's recent economic "rise," also recognized by its WTO entry in 2001.

There was global concern about many issues, such as that the Chinese regime might not be stable, or that recognition of China's global arrival might undercut international efforts to improve China's human rights record. Images of the "Genocide Olympics," emphasizing China's support of the Sudan and implicit acceptance of the Darfur massacres, were spread by ordinary people and given voice by Hollywood celebrities such as Mia Farrow and Steven Spielberg. Spielberg cancelled his plan to serve as artistic advisor for the Olympics in February 2008 (Bone 2008, Cooper 2008). Human Rights in China, Human Rights Watch, and many other humanitarian organizations protested China's hosting of the Games. The International Olympic Committee expressed hopes—unofficially, since the Games are supposed to have nothing to do with politics—that China's human rights record would improve as a result of the Olympics, paralleling the increased democratization that followed South Korea's hosting of the 1988 Olympics. One of the dominant concerns was that China's freedom of speech be expanded, that dissidents be released from prison, and that the press be granted access in greater measure than in the past.

At the same time, China frequently reiterated that the Olympics should not be politicized.

A simple sweep of the history of the Games since their "revival"—with a mix of classicist and orientalist motives (Brownell 2008: 23–28)—in the late nineteenth century by Pierre de Coubertin and the first Games in Athens in 1896, shows that this rhetoric of nonpoliticization accompanies case after case of politics in the Olympics. Examples include the Berlin Games of 1936, the murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Games in 1972, the US boycott of the Moscow Games in 1980, and the 1984 Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Games. The "Olympic Truce," a kind of conventional agreement to suspend political discussion around the events of the Olympics, is a traditional part of the official Olympic movement (Olympic.org 2009).

By some accounts, the national pride that accompanied the awarding of the Olympic Games was dwarfed only by people's pride in China's economic progress (Cody 2008a). Haugen discusses some of the ways the bid for the Olympics intersected with Beijing's—and China's—efforts to present the city as modern and international, "a very natural choice" for the hosting (2008). Cull (2008) describes the use of the Games for

“public diplomacy,” which inevitably involves competing motives and agendas.

Despite all the global focus, and the explicit aspirations of the IOC that China’s human rights be improved, by all accounts China’s freedom of speech failed to improve as a result of the world’s attention.

But in the process, many interesting and relevant events occurred.

From the urban construction that included the demolition of old neighborhoods to the torch ceremony, from the opening ceremony to the specific participants and their ages, dueling interpretations arose as to what the events and portrayal of the events indicated about China. We can see evidence of what information was revealed and what concealed; what was highlighted and what overlooked; what was foregrounded and what hidden—some literally, as housing that could not be renovated in time or migrant laborers forced to return home (Cody 2008); what was enhanced, and why.

Criticism and free expression were the two master tropes governing Olympic events.

By the time we reach the Olympics just months after the Tibet episode, the dominant reason for promoting speech was to tell the positive story—the happy news—about China’s progress. Any contrary attention was regarded as criticism from which China should be defended and from which China’s true friends would refrain. The language ideology promoting positive coverage is joined by willingness to suppress—to censor—the dark or the non-bright. We see it in the coverage of many events related to the Olympics.

### **THE OLYMPIC TORCH AND OPENING CEREMONIES**

Far from eternal and timeless, the first Olympic torch appeared at the 1928 Olympics; the first torch ceremony took place in 1936—a hokey ceremony invented, many claim, to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Nazi regime but given the sheen of tradition,<sup>8</sup> as in Hobsbawm’s “invention of tradition,” of timelessness and ancient Greece. The torch ceremony leading up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics was designed to demonstrate the universality of the Olympics and China’s claims to particular territories. Those critical of China’s treatment of Tibet and Tibetans found the timing ideal: the torch was to be displayed worldwide, from its initial lighting in Athens on March 24 to its global

circulation in twenty countries. Opposition peaked in April, less than a month after the violent events in Tibet had directed scrutiny toward China. Non-Chinese opposing China's hosting of the Olympics, those supporting the cause of Tibetan independence or autonomy, or those just resenting China's ascendancy without acquiescing to Western Europe's notions of freedoms and human rights, welcomed the opportunity to express their views. The torch ceremony was disrupted in several places, most prominently in Paris.

In turn, Chinese anger at the French for coverage of protests at the Olympic torch ceremony resulted in boycotts of the French department store Carrefour, with a nationalist tit-for-tat reminiscent of the US renaming of French fries as "freedom fries" following the French rebuff of US war efforts in Iraq. The government was unable to prevent 66 percent of the population from supporting such a boycott (Reuters 2008b). Ultimately nine Chinese scholars deplored the nationalism and xenophobia that caused the boycott, urging their fellow citizens to resist government-controlled sentiment and to focus on genuine patriotism, including "love of freedom" and attention to genuine issues, such as poverty (R. Li 2008).

***Accusations of Lying*** There were dozens of opportunities to witness conflicting accounts of Olympic-related events. One especially noteworthy discrepancy of interpretation, revolving around the question of authenticity versus verisimilitude (and the emphasis on happy news), is apparent in reactions to the revelation that the fireworks in the opening ceremony were enhanced digitally when they were broadcast to the rest of the world (Spencer 2008). This practice was taken as deceptive by those invoking authenticity, and defended by others as enhancing the experience for viewers, while protecting reporters in the television helicopter.

How *should* we regard the news that the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Olympics on August 8 was enhanced? As faked? Touched up? The actual live ceremony, which included fireworks above Tiananmen Square, was of course real. But those seeing it on television—which is to say almost everyone except Beijing residents in certain locations—saw a composition that included live and computer images carefully juxtaposed. The head of the visual effects team, Gao Xiaolong, explained how hard they

had worked to ensure that the audience would experience it *as if live*, in a way that would not have been possible without the effects, because for safety reasons they could not have had an actual helicopter with camera operators in the necessary place above the fireworks (Spencer 2008).<sup>9</sup>

In another strange twist, the Opening Ceremony also featured an adorable young pigtailed singer, Lin Miaoke, who was later revealed to have been lip-synching to the actual vocalizations of another. Some report that the singer, seven-year-old Yang Peiyi, had crooked teeth and thus was not suitable to represent China to the entire world (Macartney and O'Connor 2008). This combination of a splendid but average-looking singer and a cute-as-a-button average singer was taken as duplicitous by Westerners (see, e.g., Collins 2008, Yardley 2008b). Comments on the *Times Online* website ranged from arguing that the West has its share of lip-synching, as in Audrey Hepburn in the film version of *My Fair Lady*, to arguing that everything in China is faked, to charges that those who suspect China of duplicity are brainwashed by the anti-Chinese, anti-Communist US government. Was it just entertainment, like a rock singer lip-synching during the Superbowl, or was it government propaganda, like the 1930s Nazi government's orchestrations? Was this China-bashing or virtuous protection of truthfulness (Macartney and O'Connor 2008)? Some bloggers argued this enhancement of the experience merely reveals Chinese hospitality; as the host, China wanted their guests to have maximal enjoyment and would take whatever steps necessary to ensure that.

For the Chinese New Year televised variety show, one of the most popular evenings of TV all year, a new law was established in December 2008 forbidding the use of lip synching, despite the commonness of such practices in the past (Associated Press 2008b, Reuters 2008c). This seems a direct response to international criticism of the Olympic ceremony's mixing of a pretty face and a pretty voice.

One Olympic story that was not publicly discussed in China was the injury of classical Chinese dancer Liu Yan (Barboza 2008), who suffered paralyzing spinal damage after a platform malfunctioned during a rehearsal at the Bird's Nest, Beijing's National Stadium. Censors removed the story from news sources (Xin and Loftus 2008).

Another controversy lay in the ages of the Chinese gymnasts. While gymnasts are generally small and thin, looking young for their age, these sprites seemed positively prepubescent, which would be against the age limit (16) of the International Olympic Committee. The accusations of lying (China lies again!) and China-bashing (The world hates China!) were typical.

### **MEDIA AND THE OLYMPICS: OPEN AND SHUT**

When the IOC granted China the opportunity to host the Olympics, the twin concerns of human rights and freedom of speech were central. China promised that journalists could cover the Olympics with a minimum of censorship. In the end media coverage itself became a significant story in foreign media. The Chinese media version of events, China's reaction to the coverage by foreign media, and China's efforts to limit and then permit Internet access all point to divergent language ideologies, in which foreign journalists often sought to uncover the greatest number of secrets, especially negative secrets, while China sought to promote the best coverage of happy news.

In titles like the following (see Table 2), we can see the skepticism of the foreign press about China's promises: "China Says It Welcomes Reporters to Cover Beijing Olympics in 'Fair' and 'Objective' Way" (Associated Press 2007). Placing "fair" and "objective" in quotation marks—an ambiguous meaning between literal quotes and an implied "so-called"—suggests that the AP considers these China's euphemistic version of fair and objective, not quite the same as European notions, much as Soviet realism is not quite realistic, and China's socialism is not quite the same thing as Marx's.

It is evident that the foreign media regarded freedom of speech as a central element in the Olympic story, and that China found this obsessive and frustrating. Why not focus on their skilled athletes and many medals? On their creative and ambitious new buildings and stadia? On the number of people removed from poverty? On increases in higher education? Clearly China's official media, with their roles as government mouthpieces, have a different mandate than do foreign media, as oppositional, a fourth estate, as uncovering hidden truths, and certainly as commercial enterprises seeking sensation, scoops, novelty, and other aspects of originality that can draw in

readers/viewers. Ideals if not always realities, independence, individual viewpoint, and fragmentation dominate “Western” media, while Chinese media tend to be encouraged to favor uniformity and adherence to official positions, designed to have the consequences of encouragement, increased status, and social stability.

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**TABLE 2**

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**EXAMPLES OF WESTERN MEDIA FOCUS ON CHINA’S  
REPRESSION OF SPEECH**

<i>Article Title</i>	<i>Date (All 2008)</i>	<i>Source</i>
Chinese President Calls for Stepped-Up Propaganda Work Ahead of Olympics	January 23	Associated Press 2008c
Before Olympic Games, China Quells Dissent	January 29	Yardley 2008a
Athletes Face Olympic Ban for Criticising China	February 10	Leapman and Powell 2008
Beijing Olympic Organizers Say Athletes Should Follow IOC Rules After Free Speech Dispute	February 12	Associated Press 2008a
Free Speech Criticism Mounting for Beijing Olympics	February 16	Chang 2008
Europe Wants China to Explain Possible Restrictions on Freedom of Speech at Beijing Games	March 13	Associated Press 2008e
Press Watchdog Chief Targets Olympics	April 8	Associated Press 2008g
Journalists Group Appeals to China to Allow Unrestricted Coverage Around Olympics	April 14	Associated Press 2008f
China Demolishes Mosque for Not Supporting Olympics: Group	June 23	Reuters 2008a
China: Olympics Media Freedom Commitments Violated	July 7	Human Rights Watch Asia 2008
Before Games, China Puts Conflict on Hold	July 8	Drew 2008
Pre-Olympics Security Sweep Nets Foreigners, Chinese Alike	July 9	Johnson 2008
China Pledges Media Freedom at Olympic Games	July 10	Yuan 2008
China Tightens Controls as Games Loom	July 11	Bristow 2008b

## FRIENDLY CRITICISM? CASTING STONES, CHINA BASHING, AND CULTURAL RELATIVITY

Criticism is a common aspect of the public sphere. It can be made out of loyalty, engagement, or hatred. It can be suppressed or expressed for reasons of friendship or affection, or even of tactics.

In a general framework, we might ask on what basis one country, or individuals within one country—and these are of course two entirely different things—might have a “right” to voice criticism of another country. Who has a right to speak?

In the case of China, one of the dominant issues on which outsiders engage in criticism is human rights and religious freedom. (Other common topics are China’s environmental policies and subsets of human rights, economic inequality and the status of women.) Such critiques also sort people by their perceived attitude toward China.

***“Friends” or Foes*** Since at least the 1950s, some people have been identified as “friends of China” and others as unwelcome and likely unreasonable non-friends (see Brady 2002, 2003). By 1962, for instance, China had definitively “split” from the Soviet Union, which had been its model “older brother” in socialism, for a variety of reasons, some of which included the Soviet criticism of the Chinese manipulation of production and harvest data. Just preceding the definitive split, each time the Soviet leaders were mentioned, critical comments were included.

From the time of the 1949 Revolution on, the United States and some other countries that had opposed China’s Communist orientation were essentially forbidden from any involvement in the country, and much “propaganda” regarding the “paper tiger imperialism” of the US was ardently absorbed by Chinese citizens who were easily mobilized around common enemies—one of the effective features of nationalism. A handful of “friends of China” were, in contrast, permitted to live in China, such as Rewi Alley, a New Zealander who made a home there, and Sidney Shapiro, who was lionized as an intellectual treasure, the quintessential go-between.

Those seen as “fellow travelers” were welcomed, generally with the expectation that their reports would be sympathetic to Chinese Communist efforts. Some prominent

fellow travelers include Simone de Beauvoir, Edgar Snow, Agnes Smedley, Owen Lattimore, Roxanne Witke, Jan Myrdal, and André Malraux (Caute 1988).

Much as Israel demands recognition of its right to exist prior to conversing, so China demanded recognition of its legitimacy and of its claims that there is a single China. Thus countries that sought to engage with China had to renounce their recognition of Taiwan. The United States began such a process in the early 1970s with Nixon's "ping pong diplomacy"; the process was finalized in the 1979 Shanghai communiqué, which indeed recognized only the People's Republic of China. Even high schools and universities in the United States must acknowledge "one China" if they wish to have their Chinese studies supported by a Confucius Institute (the Office of Chinese Language Council International, or Hanban); this is officially required by contract. I heard of one eminent college preparatory school in the Midwest that was forced to remove Taiwanese flags from its hallway display of flags of the world because its handful of Chinese students expressed heartbreak at seeing them. Even though this school had resisted applying for a Confucius Institute, it feared the ire of Chinese who heard about the flag.

China refuses to accept criticism from other countries, dismissing it as "interference in its internal affairs." Revelation of social problems is "revealing state secrets" and on that basis social scientists, journalists, and activists have been imprisoned for their writing. Modern China has a long history of surveillance of intellectuals and of repression of certain ideas—in part because of the recognition of the potential consequences, such as revolution, that ideas possess.

***China Bashing*** In the eyes of the Chinese government and indeed of most Chinese citizens, any negative comment is regarded as "China bashing." When John Pomfret, who writes for *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post*, wrote "China Bashing is Back," he elicited eighty-eight pages of comments—350 in all, most in the week following the initial post (Pomfret 2008). He suggested that focus on the negative aspects of China is like the animosity directed—and orchestrated—against the USSR at the height of the Cold War.

George Koo writes in the *San Jose Mercury News*, "How Dare the West Use the Olympics to China-Bash" (Koo 2008). He argues that media complicity provided a

willing audience for these disturbances, demonstrating that “the Western press sees China through blinders.” The Western press is not permitted—indeed, how dare it!—to challenge limitations. Also, its claims are inaccurate; it sees the facts incorrectly.

In a fascinating editorial in *Online Information Review*, G. E. Gorman argues that Western criticism of China’s Internet censorship is “China-bashing” precisely because in every country, “internet content is censored” and that “it is apparent that almost everyone is engaged in some form of internet censorship for one reason or another” (2005: 453). Gorman argues that since problems with excessive control exist in the countries of the critics, those countries should not engage in “bullyboy tactics” (454) such as those proposed by American politicians to force China’s openness. Gorman concludes on a note of cultural relativism, invoking an unstated understanding of variations of language ideology: “[I]n an increasingly global society in which differences may rub shoulders uncomfortably, we must learn to live with the reality that there are differing national and regional interpretations of what constitutes acceptable content. Every society may well have different normative assumptions, so there can be no absolute understanding of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ censorship” (455).

The Chinese government’s “White Paper” on Tibet issued on March 2, 2009, just prior to the anniversary of the 2008 uprising, alleges that the basic problem in the misleading “Tibet issue” is that Western countries use it to undermine and split China, because they fear China’s increasing power (State Council, People’s Republic of China 2009). As a document it is virtually unprecedented, as it includes sociological analysis of thirteenth-century Tibetan culture (“serf” culture) as well as twenty-first century Western media. It was followed almost immediately by the announcement of a new holiday: Serfs’ Emancipation Day (Graham-Harrison 2009, Subler 2009, Xinhua 2009, Xinhuanet 2009, Zhou 2009).

**Loyal Criticism** Blogger “olympics 2008” wrote, “Rainer is a typical westerner representing bigotry, ignorance, hatred and prejudice against China (I want to add that some westerners, though not many, are friendly to China. We appreciate them).” If “friendly” suggests only praising without criticizing, then it is likely that few Westerners, with their different language ideology, would represent such a group. If the purpose of

media is to spread happy news about accomplishments, to drum up enthusiasm and optimism, to improve an image, to add face, then it is no surprise that Western media are seen in China as not fulfilling their proper role. If the criterion for friendship is keeping private and unspoken any failings, then many Westerners are not appropriate friends. If the speaker must belong to a blemish-free group with which s/he identifies, in order to make critical observations, then no one would ever have a pass with which to speak. (Many Westerners critical of China are equally critical of their own governments and societies.) If nationalism is the primary component of identity, then each speaker is regarded as a representative of her/his nation at all times.

Given all these assumptions, it is no wonder that in the discourse that passes for interaction between Western media and China, we largely find a set of loud voices shouting past each other. Each voice is doing what is right and proper in its own sphere, given its own assumptions about the proper role of speaker and speech. But because they differ, they are not likely to persuade each other of much. In that sense, it makes less sense to speak of “censorship” in terms of media (though it does apply in discussions of the Internet) and more to speak of incompatible goals of speech. In China, happy news is good news, and anybody who wants to promote anything else is, by definition, no friend.

China has a longstanding struggle between those who would constrain speech and those who have something they wish to say no matter how unpopular. A classical case is that of the pre-Qin poet-statesman Qu Yuan (c. 340–278 BCE), whose criticism of his “lord” resulted in his exile (Schneider 1980). He wrote laments and poetry that nonetheless gave the advice his lord needed to hear, in a locus classicus of the loyal critic. Even if correct, his voice and words were not welcome. Qu Yuan is commemorated in the Dragon Boat Festival, when people throw packets of rice into the river, recalling that he drowned himself in sorrow.

As Qu Yuan persisted in his critique of his leader despite the price he paid—exile, loss of status, and eventually death—he became a hero after the fact, an inspiration to later generations who found themselves out of power and silenced.

## THE STORY WE TELL

Silencing of truths is not always bad. When a country is at war it must rely on surprise for its strategies. Children are often shielded from news that might alarm them. Out of consideration for a loved one's feelings we might refrain from voicing every negative opinion. But the media are different. Their role—in the West—is fearlessness. Digging up negative information is part of their mandate—"muckrakers" being some of the most respected journalists. They can go too far, certainly, in getting the balance wrong and in conveying an unrepresentative impression. Debates over that are legitimate, as in some of the blogging discussions over the truth of the situation in Tibet.

The Chinese language ideology that guides both speech in China and speech about China, however, focuses its attentions elsewhere. It largely aims to support its national goals of increased prestige, spreading the happy news of progress in a unified, authorized fashion. Those who wish to challenge this official story of cultural improvement become, by definition, illegitimate and ill intentioned. To be a friend of China, whether within the country or outside, is to subscribe to the story of China's happy news. To resist this is to risk being silenced, ignored, insulted, or vilified as an enemy. The next years will reveal how China not only takes its place in the world community but how it deals with stories that challenge its singular happy face of inevitable progress, improvement, and control over the territories it claims by occupation and by narrative.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Censorship has not been treated in linguistic anthropology as an aspect of language ideology, which has focused more commonly on issues of identity and standardization, concepts of nationalism and challenges to language dominance, or even ideas of temporality and history using “languages” as the entities to be considered (e.g. Inoue 2004). The question of who selects what is uttered, and on what basis, however, is very much a matter of language ideology.

<sup>2</sup> It is clear that language ideologies may differ depending on which entities hold them. Language ideologies are evident in the uses of language by individuals, in the ways individuals discuss language, in the behavior of groups, and in the actions of larger entities. The actors in such events may be individuals, acting among other individuals. Or they may include governments with varying degrees of authoritarianism, or laws regarding freedom of speech and expression. In the case of China, it is common to speak of the government as if it is a monolithic entity, and of the people as if they are entirely passive victims. But governments exist not only above people but derive in some sense from within people, and though there can certainly be tension and repression, revolt or acquiescence, it may be helpful to examine both ordinary people’s actions and those of collective entities. The actors in the Chinese case should not be reduced to flattened caricatures of the Chinese government; “the people” also play a role, as do particular individuals, and “the government” is similarly not monolithic. We would do well to disambiguate the agents of the promulgation of happy news.

<sup>3</sup> In spring 2009 an argument about whether *xuanchuan* is best regarded as “propaganda” arose after a writer in *The Telegraph* called China’s 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Patriotic Campaign “propaganda.” An Australian journalist, Peter Foster, replied forcefully in *China Daily*, stating that using the term “propaganda” as the translation of *xuanchuan* automatically brings up sinister associations (Bandurski 2009, Foster 2009a, 2009b, Ramzy 2009, Whiteley 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Lessig challenges the common assumptions that the Internet would automatically confer freedom and that cyberspace could not be controlled by governments. “Cyberspace, the story went, could *only* be free. Freedom was its nature” (Lessig 1999: 5). He never made that assumption and has shown that the constitution of the Internet in each setting depends on its underlying values.

<sup>5</sup> This saying has been attributed to dozens of sources, including Stewart Brand. It is pithy and arresting—giving *information* volition. Some argue that it has been misinterpreted, given the ambiguity of *free*, meaning both ‘unfettered’ and ‘without monetary cost.’ Such sayings are evidence that at some level people want to be able to express something about the new roles of

information in the Internet age, but like all sayings, proverbs, bromides, clichés, etc., it cannot be taken as descriptive of the world, but rather more like a wish, or prescription.

<sup>6</sup> Use of blogs as ethnographic data is increasingly acceptable within anthropology and other social sciences (see, e.g., Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, and Cui 2009). Though I cite journalistic sources and refer to occasional events to which I was witness, the bulk of my sources are blog posts. Blog posts are written within a cultural and linguistic ideological framework that is consistent—though perhaps because of anonymity they sometimes represent extremes. Nonetheless, in this case what I found fits well with research on language ideology that I have conducted in China since the 1980s. The topic of this paper came to me rather than my seeking it. I was glued to my computer for much of 2008, mesmerized by the China-related events and what they were taken to mean.

<sup>7</sup> One of the frequently mentioned foundations of American higher education is freedom of speech, which includes freedom to disagree. This is more easily invoked than enacted, of course, and many other principles such as freedom from hatred may interfere with this ideal, but essentially all participants in higher education would champion in the abstract the desirability of freedom of speech. Chinese students at US universities often mention freedom of speech when they wish to curtail Americans' discussions of Tibet. There are several cases that challenge this absolute ideal. One is that of Ward Churchill, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder, who, just after September 11, 2001, compared the workers in the World Trade Center to “little Eichmanns,” was disinvited from speaking at Hamilton College and several other places. A flood of investigations into his scholarly merit, his political alliances, and even his tenure-worthiness revealed much about the underbelly of American universities. There are other cases as well. Someone who is denied the right to speak, in the name of public safety, for example, is often “unpopular”—but are such people unworthy of being heard? The rights to speak, publish, be heard, and so forth are part of the US language ideology, but they intersect with things like the cost of police in cases of “politically incorrect” speech.

<sup>8</sup> Few prominent journalists or scholars compared the China of 2008 to the Berlin Olympics in 1936, but some quieter voices did, such as Joe Randazzo writing in the *Burlington Free Press* (April 18, 2008). An article in the *New York Sun* recounted Jewish efforts to link the two Games, including an exhibit on the Nazi Olympics that opened in April 2008 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Gerstein 2008). Simon Barnes's recounting of such efforts led to vitriol against the *Times* of London, as mentioned in the body of the article.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, at the inauguration of US President Barack Obama on January 20, 2009, the

musical arrangement by Yo-Yo Ma, performed by four top musicians, was “prerecorded” to ensure that it came off perfectly (Wakin 2009). Worries over the weather and how the instruments might react to the cold led the producers to conclude that this was the prudent approach. There was no public outcry.

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