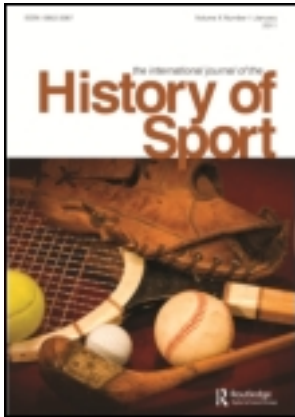


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Brazil - Beijing Changes the Way Mega-media Events are Presented: Perspectives of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

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Focusing on the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the influential Brazilian newspapers O Globo, with a daily circulation of 281,800 and Folha de São Paulo, with a daily circulation of 257,800, reported the results of the competitions, commented on Chinese culture and history and criticized the Chinese government. In Brazil last year, these newspapers' sales increased by 11.8 per cent and were the highest in Latin America with around 4.39 million newspapers circulating every day in Brazil. In order to compare the contents of the influential newspapers O Globo and Folha de São Paulo, we translate some relevant passages of the Olympic news and reports and criticize both Brazilian daily newspapers. We also examine the print media's reports on the Beijing Olympics in August 2008. The results aim to show fragments from the texts published between 1 and 25 August 2008, in A Tarde, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the state of Bahia, Brazil. We also analyse video related to the Beijing Olympics available on YouTube and examine comments and news articles on Brazilian sites during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. In line with international trends, the Brazilian media emphasized the performance of the athlete Liu Xiang.

Introduction

The Brazilian newspapers *O Globo* and *Folha de São Paulo* are two of the most representative and influential papers in Brazil and belong to hegemonic media groups. The first paper is headquartered in Rio de Janeiro while the second is in

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São Paulo. Each city pursues its own culture-specific aims and specific interests. For example, Rio de Janeiro intends to host the 2016 Olympic Games. The city administration promoted the 2007 Pan-American Games and witnessed an influx of international tourists. 'According to the accepted stereotypes, *paulistas* (people from the state of São Paulo) are hardworking and entrepreneurial; *cariocas* (residents of Rio de Janeiro) carefree and fun loving.' [1] Because of its cultural differences and media influence, we chose both daily newspapers to compare a random selection of issues reported before, during and after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Both newspapers have online versions available all over the world. Nevertheless, the following selections come mainly from the print versions. [2]

To understand the impact on communication of a global sport event such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games as portrayed in the Brazilian mass media, we need to examine media coverage of the Olympic torch lighting ceremony and torch relay by daily papers, private TV networks and the Internet. Our group of researchers, in international and intercultural cooperation with students of the research group Cultural Spectacles and Society (ECUS) under my direction, dedicated their time, selecting and analysing files and archives of Brazilian mass media before, during and after the XXIX Olympiad in China. [3]

On the basis of interdisciplinary research criteria we analysed the headlines, pictures and content of two of the most influential daily newspapers in Brazil and a local one in the state of Bahia, which is widely distributed throughout Brazilian territory. We also focused on the content of two major privately owned and open TV networks and on national cable TV transmissions. Furthermore, we observed and analysed specific websites and compared them with videos concerning the Beijing Summer Olympics available online on YouTube.

The selection of articles and digital files we studied extends from March to November 2008, but we continued to follow publications and transmissions concerning the Brazilian campaign to win the approval of IOC as a host city for the summer Olympiad in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro (RIO 2016). In this sense the Brazilian media's representation of the Beijing Olympic Games and its impact show particular and interesting aspects of media content in the press, TV and the Internet.

The audiovisual strategies used in the transmissions of the Beijing Olympic celebrations (Cultural Olympiad) and the available videos of the events on the Internet are predominant factors in the event's representation. The key moments of the Beijing Olympiads are the opening and closing ceremonies, which are later analysed in an interdisciplinary approach.

The Beijing Organizing Committee for the games of the XXIX Olympiad faced new technical and technological challenges for the TV transmission of the giga-sport event because it was the first to be broadcast using HDTV systems. Therefore only the best international teams in close cooperation with artists, technicians, engineers and other Chinese specialists were trusted to prepare the venue and technological equipment for the national stadium in Beijing which, as the stage for Chinese culture and sports tradition, hosted the opening and closing ceremonies.

Brazilians reaffirmed their interest in the XXIX edition of the summer Olympic Games in Beijing when the Republic of Brazil's president attended the opening ceremony in the Bird's Nest stadium and asked that the president of the People's Republic of China support project RIO 2016. Political topics, commentaries and ideological tendencies in the media will also be considered, as well as journalistic commentaries in the most influential television networks during the live transmission of the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony (BOOC) and of the pre-recorded transmissions aired with a delay due to the time difference between China and Brazil.

Expectations

In a 4 August report entitled, 'Prospective medals in China', Renato Mauricio Prado, an *O Globo* Beijing correspondent, wrote: 'What are the real chances for Brazil to win medals in Beijing? Ask a member of the Brazilian Olympic Committee and he will flee from the answer like the devil from a cross.'

On 6 August, Gilberto Scofield Jr., *O Globo's* Beijing correspondent, wrote the following in a report with the headline 'One more round against the press':

Censure – Beijing closed Tiananmen Square to journalists and reporters are rising up. The Chinese government decided yesterday to impose new restrictions against the press in Beijing and on journalists in the rest of the country. Now, foreign and Chinese reporters who intend to do interviews or take pictures in Tiananmen Square need to request the government's authorization within 24 hours. The decision was made a day after the newspaper covered worldwide protests of Beijing citizens forced to leave the Qianmen region because of the construction of the Olympiad enterprise. The decision was also due to international coverage of terrorist's attacks in the city of Kasghar.

One day before the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony, on 7 August, Dorrit Harazim, *O Globo's* Beijing correspondent, said in a headline: 'The utopia of controlling 100% of a nation. Vigilance – second communist country hosting the Olympic Games, China lives in a very different world than Moscow in 1980.' He continued:

As the host of the second Olympiad in history in a communist country, China's president Hu Jintao may feel overburdened. He needs to simultaneously manage the invasion of 20,000 curious journalists, the complaints of the IOC about not keeping freedom promises, air pollution in Beijing, protests in the upper-class parts of the capital, and the seed of worry of Islamic terrorism at the (at the moment) far-flung borders of the country.

In a report with the headline, 'President Lula arrives in Beijing with an agenda that includes Rio-2016 and Doha', Leonardo Valente said the following:

When the Olympic opening ceremony begins tomorrow in Beijing, Chinese diplomats will be as happy as an athlete who breaks a record and wins a gold medal. The reason is the successful work that began months ago that will result in a huge

audience full of the most important world leaders, including some of the fiercest critics of the communist regime.

The report showed the uncertainty of the Brazilian media; the news was similar to that published by many other newspapers throughout the world and belonged to the campaign against China promoted by Western media companies before the mega-sport event in Beijing. After the Beijing Olympic Games began the reports in Brazil changed; the competitions and medal board became the top news stories.

On 18 August, *O Globo's* Beijing correspondent Ary Cunha reported news about Brazilian athlete César Cielo and his popularity in the Beijing streets the day after he won a gold medal in the swimming competition. Other news items were the success of the Jamaican Olympic teams, Michael Phelps's records and the gold medal winners. On Phelps's victories *O Globo* correspondent Dorrit Harazin in Beijing said in a headline: 'Phelps' Republic – Swimming: If he were a country he would rank fifth on the medal board'. However, it should also be noted that Chinese Olympic athletes were rarely given prominence in the Brazilian press and TV networks.

O Globo's correspondent in China, Marcelo Viana, said in a 21 August headline: 'All for the unwon medal. Today, the women's volleyball team faces China, to mark history'. Viana continued:

Today, the Brazilian women's volleyball team will try to make history. Victory over China, in Beijing, will make a dream that the team had been pursuing for two decades come true for the first time in the history of the Olympic Games. With just 15 medals, the Brazilian Olympic teams were not successful at the Beijing Olympic Games. Brazil won more medals (91) in the Beijing Para-Olympic Games. The case of the Brazilian women's volleyball team winning over China and USA was a dream comes true after 20 years.

Criticism in the Media during the Games

A few days after the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony, Western mass media reported intensely on the dubbing of young singer Lin Miaoke and the pre-recorded giants' fire footsteps. In a frustrating attempt to belittle the success of the ceremony, *O Globo* and Globo Online as well as other international news agencies said in a story with the headline 'A ceremony "made in China". Farce – young girl who sings at the opening of the Games just dubs the voice of another child' that 'Details revealed by the BOOC showed that the third most visited place in the country (after the Great Wall and the Forbidden City) is the forged products' paradise (the Silk Street Pearl Market, a giant street market) where not everything is what it appears to be'. [4]

Three days later, *O Globo* launched another sharp criticism. In its 16 August edition, the Brazilian newspaper said in a headline: 'Medals and polemic emerge

throughout the country of the games. Farce – age of gymnast is questioned the day that the organization confirms new fraud in the opening party’ and continued:

As the difference in medals won increases for the USA, China faces new controversy. Yesterday, both controversies occurred at the same time. The first related to the gymnast, He Kexin, a member of the sextet that won the gold medal in the asymmetrical bars in the women’s gymnastics competition and who was younger than permitted. The host denied this information. The other controversy was about the origin of the children who participated in BOOC. China said the children represented the 56 different ethnic groups in the country, but, in truth, all the children belonged to the Han ethnic group, which make up 92 per cent of the Chinese population.

During the first week of the Beijing Olympics the Western mass media tried to convince the world that many parts of the BOOC and even parts of the Olympic competitions were forged. [5] However, journalists expressed the preconceptions of the world’s audience and did not garner the expected response. Most likely, the qualities of the Olympic opening and closing ceremonies, the performances and the number of medals conquered by Chinese athletes, the organization and the perfection in hosting the games, the security, cultural diversity and beautiful landscapes are some of the reasons why all attempts to diminish the historical importance of the Beijing Olympiad failed. In fact, in an attempt to achieve the best sound-visual quality, most parts of the opening and closing ceremonies were dubbed. The audiovisual projects of both ceremonies were splendid, and the integration of visuals, sounds, history, plot, mythology and Chinese culture especially impressed the world with its splendour. This splendour shocked many people who didn’t realize that it was possible to achieve such spectacular dimensions in the Olympics. Certainly nowhere else was it possible to inspire thousands of volunteers to take part for as long as they did in the Beijing Olympic Games. The technology, artistic attributes and mass synchronization of participants broadcast all over the world was forever impressed in the imagination of the global audience. [6]

More Brazilian Media Interpretation

One of the symptomatic reports published by *Folha de São Paulo* illustrated how another conservative newspaper in Brazil reported and interpreted Chinese history. In a 21 August article entitled ‘The red mandarin’, about Chinese historical events, a reporter for *Folha de São Paulo*, Pedro de Picchia wrote: ‘Mao Tse-Tung, one of the toughest leaders of the twentieth century; he considered human beings a statistic and, until his death, was the master of Chinese tragedy’. In the article Pedro de Picchia tried to give a panorama of Chinese history. However, he didn’t compare different bibliographic sources; the result is a display of partiality, full of his own ideological interpretations.

The next day, on 22 August, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* covered the Brazilian athletes who won medals. The story featured Bruno Prada and Robert

Scheit, who won silver medals in yachting, and the defeat of the Brazilian women's soccer team by the USA. The headline said: 'America's defence beats Brazilian talent once again.' In the same edition *Folha de São Paulo* reported that soccer's 'king', Pelé, was 'ambassador' for the RIO 2016 Olympics. The headline was 'Pelé says that candidature is an incentive'. The special Beijing correspondent of *Folha de São Paulo* wrote: 'Despite the Brazilian performance at the Beijing Olympics, since last night we have eight medals, among them a gold one. Pelé believes that the candidature to host the 2016 Olympic Games has already had a positive impact.'

On 23 August, *Folha de São Paulo* reported the Olympic medals table: China was in first place with 89 medals; USA in second with 102 medals; Great Britain in third with 44 medals and Brazil in 26th place with 12 medals. Finally, on 24 August, *Folha de São Paulo* international correspondent Fábio Seixas reported:

The Chinese national anthem is playing in Beijing University gymnasium. Three Chinese flags are raised and reach the top at the end of the anthem. An official laughs, satisfied. Just two hours and 34 minutes before the start of the final men's team ping pong competition, the celebration begins. The image is emblematic: a rehearsal for the most rehearsed event of the games. It was pursued perfectly: in the match for the bronze medal China's Wang Liqin gave Swedish athlete Jorge Persson no chance and won 4 to 0. The third Chinese flag guaranteed the win, because the other two were a foregone conclusion. In a nation that counts 6 million federal players, China just needs to choose the best of them. In a country where 5-year-old children are sent to training centres that create the world's greatest champions and where sports are used for diplomacy, everybody knows that the champion will turn into a hero. Because of Liu Xiang's injury in athletics, a battle followed. [7]

Some Considerations

As we have pointed out, the Globo and Bandeirantes networks' broadcast of the BOOC in Brazil often contained biased interpretations, stereotypes and criticisms of the Beijing Olympic Games. These problems occurred more frequently and forcefully in the television broadcasts, newspapers and Internet websites of the most influential and hegemonic Brazilian media groups. Despite Brazil's strong media system, because of media dependence, the cooperation between national and international news agencies mainly reproduced Western media tendencies that spread bias in emerging and poor countries. However, the high quality of the Beijing Olympic Games organization, the success of the BOOC and closing ceremony (BOCC), the involvement of engineers, artists and the many volunteers showed contemporary tendencies used to organize the spectacular issues, which were only achieved through discipline, long and intense rehearsals and hope for better times. Certainly, the XXIXth Olympic Games in Beijing profoundly changed the way that a media gigaspectacle of sports and scenic arts was represented to the people who had seen and heard parts of Eastern culture, but who had no personal experience of it, resulting in misinterpretations in the West.

Olympic Games Reports in the *A Tarde* Newspaper [8]

This section aims to show fragments from the reports on the Beijing Olympics by presenting texts published in the print media. The sample included reports published from 1 to 25 August in the newspaper *A Tarde* from Salvador and the state of Bahia, Brazil. This period covers the time before, during and after the Olympics because the event generated news before and after the games. Before the Olympics started, the newspaper increased the space dedicated to the event and continued covering the event after its conclusion. We chose this newspaper because it has the largest circulation, with around 17,000 copies distributed daily and 50,000 copies distributed on Sundays. The paper has a 95 per cent readership in the State of the Bahia, Brazil.

Along with fragments from the reports, we aim to discuss images of the Beijing Olympic Games published in the news. The most published subjects and the valorization of facts in the construction of the texts accentuate eventual omissions. Significant parts of the approach to the Olympic Games present a picture of the athletes' performances during the games but this aspect is not relevant to this paper, except for the fact that the Chinese athletes became examples of omission, while Western athletes such as Michael Phelps from the United States or Usain Bolt from Jamaica became part of history. The Chinese results instead are published without showing their profile as if they were all the same and incapable of having a face.

The main aim of this exercise is to show opinions in the reports about the event and, at the same time, build an image of China. Our approach will consider the following parameters:

- (1) Did the Brazilian media highlight China's top level classification? How did the media evaluate this?
- (2) What did the Brazilian media emphasize during the Olympics? What were their favourite sports? What world records were broken? What were the messages in the reports of the games and specific sports?
- (3) After the closing ceremony, what was the general view about the games of 2008? What subjects did the media highlight?

Recurrent Themes

A Tarde emphasized four themes in its coverage of the Beijing's Olympic Games and these themes received more attention than other issues that were initially highlighted but faded away. For example, the initial worry about air pollution in Beijing disappeared from the news after the opening ceremony. The four highlighted themes are the treatment of the press that covered the Games, the 'humbug' of the opening ceremony, the visibility of Tibet and China's accomplishments in the Games.

The Press

The general opinion in the West was that restricting press freedom was pointless because the critical demonstrations surrounding the Beijing Olympic Games were still covered, yet there was still some concern even although foreign reporters were granted the freedom to hold interviews without authorization. Afterwards, the 6 August edition published two pieces about the treatment of the press. On page 3 of the edition, a short piece called 'Beating' discussed the arrest of two Japanese journalists reporting the attack that left 16 policemen dead in the Chinese region of Xinjiang. The other article in the edition, entitled 'The Press suffers other restrictions in China', spoke about the closing of Tiananmen Square, a place mostly used for protests in Beijing, to show the hostility of the Chinese security towards foreign journalists.

The newspaper also announced that it would hire a journalist to cover cultural issues in China but this was never confirmed; some reports were published on different days but these never became a regular feature. The newspaper said that the journalist would write 'every Wednesday' even although he was scheduled to write only on two Wednesdays during the Olympic period.

In general, newspapers tended to be more critical and insistent about negative aspects of China. The journalist criticized the lack of freedom for the press and cited the Square of the People, or Square of the Insane People, as the place where the foreign press could get images and hold interviews with the Chinese people without authorization from the Chinese authorities. [9]

Tibet

A Tarde noted that the Beijing Olympic Games brought Tibet increased visibility. The organizers of the Olympic Games realized that the games would be used as a way to talk about China's politics. *A Tarde* showed images that indirectly suggested that it supported the demonstrations and protesters who had been attacked and persecuted. Protesters were placed on the same level as the Beijing journalists who were deprived of freedom of speech by a repressive political regime.

Demonstrating its position, the newspaper featured the Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, who encouraged and appealed to the Chinese people, suggesting that the sports event promote peace. On 8 August an article about the opening ceremony called 'A millenarian show' published in the sports section announced: 'Even during the worse moments of the uprising in Tibet, last March, the religious leader always affirmed that the "old and powerful nation", China, deserved to keep the games.'

The international news agencies, including *A Tarde*, published images of pro-Tibet demonstrations even although for this reason some of the Olympic competitors and events would be overlooked because of this editorial decision. For example, the French Press Agency (AFP) offered 55 different images of pro-Tibet demonstrations in the 8 August edition, while it offered only 53 images of the preparations for the

first matches and the beginning of the women's soccer game that preceded the opening ceremony. [10]

The 'Humbug'

A *Tarde* also talked about what it called the 'humbug' in the opening ceremony. The girl who appeared to be singing was only dubbing. The real singer who, according to the report 'China's little lie', was not considered 'pretty enough' to take part in the ceremony. The newspaper showed photos of the two girls, Yang Peiyi, who 'lent the voice', and Lin Miaoke, who was 'capable of enchanting the public'. The content was ironic in its treatment of the subject calling it a 'fraud', and ignoring similar circumstances in other sports events. For example, in Barcelona, Spain, the competing archer shot an arrow that didn't even get close to the target but another archer made the shot for him. Also, because Western culture does not understand the high expectations of the Chinese and because 'humbugs' are common in contemporary shows when sounds, lights, choreography and music have to be synchronized, it is necessary to re-define the concept of 'humbug'.

In the same edition the effect of the fireworks display was published, as always, from an unfavourable angle, implying that the Chinese had cheated. This part can be found in the report 'Tricks: Not everything was live during the ceremony'.

The vice-president of the games, Wang Wei, claimed that pre-prepared images of the games were necessary to achieve a more 'theatrical' result. This opinion is expressed in the following excerpt from the report by journalist Leandro Silva about the closing ceremony: 'Special effects and even the set-ups were to be expected. After all, the simulations of fireworks using computer graphics or the exchange of the girl singers showed that the Chinese don't have such a strong commitment to the truth.' [11] In addition to the 'humbug' approach to the opening ceremony, the newspaper presented a general report of the event, complimented the 'impeccable organization of the games' to reflect public opinion and published the comments of representatives of the four candidates to host the 2016 Olympic Games.

In this way the opinion of Ichiro Kono, director of the Tokyo candidacy, about technological innovations and the new features in the infrastructure at the Water Cube was given. Patrick Ryan, responsible for the Chicago candidacy, said that the role of the volunteers was worthy of mention because they had shown a friendly and open-minded attitude and served as an example for the youth of the world. Mercedes Coghén, council member for the Madrid candidacy, was impressed by everything she had seen in Beijing but highlighted that the transportation system for athletes, spectators and journalists was 'exceptional'. [12]

The Success

The success of the Olympic Games and the favourable coverage of its organization, the infrastructure and the magnificent opening and closing ceremonies were followed

by China's leadership in the medal table: not even *A Tarde* used the American method of tallying each country's total gold, silver and bronze medals instead of the traditional method that only counted each country's gold medals, which put the Chinese in first place.

A print media study revealed that one reason for the Olympics' success was the 119 Project, which corresponded to China's goal of winning gold medals in a methodical way. However, with greater conceptualization, the newspaper mentioned that there were irregularities in the participation of the Chinese, as the following excerpt from the 15 August edition observed: 'Whatever one says about the age limit of the Chinese gymnasts, the fact is that China does not appear, so far, to be the leader on the medal board with more than double the gold medals of the United States, because of false identities or other tricks.' [13]

The Biggest Festival of Sports

The content of the *A Tarde* newspaper did not highlight China's high position in the medal table even though it constantly updated the number of medals won with the collaboration of other real-time media in the *A Tarde* group, as shown on the website www.atardeonline.com.br. In inserts the newspaper discussed expectations about US citizen Michael Phelps breaking world records and performances by Brazilian athletes even although the discussions often lacked any sporting merit and did not attempt to profile the Chinese champions.

After the closing ceremony, the enormous Chinese effort told the world that it was just as capable as any Western country and able to put on the biggest festival of sports ever seen. The newspaper content studied focused on repressive aspects such as the lack of freedom and also on different culture such as the exotic Chinese food and habits.

Keywords

'2008 Olympic Representations' Results [14]

Two websites containing 23 different video files were consulted. Some files were repeated with different headings and those not related to the Beijing Olympics were not used.

- Heading: 'Série Vinhetas – Pequim 2008'
- Duration: 0:02:57
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0jtSQYYfJE>

We selected the following examples since they combined many representations from different national posters:

- Heading: “Vinheta Beijing 2008”
- Duration: 0:00:15
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDZx7ZhCzvA>

According to user ‘fabiosardinha’, this contribution was created and used as a thesis on a master’s degree course in digital design of interactive media at InfNET.

Keywords: ‘2008 Olympics Opening Ceremony’

This time the research field was extended to 154 files on eight pages. Some videos were repeated with different headings. Also, a group of videos feature songs from China. Files not related to the Beijing Olympics were included in the above number but were not used in this research.

Results (page 1, 21 October 2008)

- Heading: ‘Abertura das Olimpíadas de Pequim, 2008’
- Duration: 0:03:05
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izlPssbJb7U>

A sample that was repeated a few times with different headings contained images of the opening ceremony and of the Chinese people. The music used in this file is important because it is so powerful. Unfortunately, it is cut off at the end of the file.

- Heading: ‘Imagens da cerimônia de abertura das Olimpíadas 2008’
- Duration: 0:03:55
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFderDT012U>

This file clearly shows the preparation for a PowerPoint presentation. The background music is emotional. Some of the images in the sample are similar to the ones in the previous file.

- Heading: ‘Teste abertura olimpíadas Beijing 2008’
- Duration: 0:02:40
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHIIdcIR65rM>

An amateur filmed a part of the fireworks being tested at the Bird’s Nest stadium. The file was published by the user ‘andreribeirooli’.

- Heading: ‘O ACENDER DA PIRA – OLIMPIADAS 2008’
- Duration: 0:04:46
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IS-AdPvCFM>

Another amateur video filmed by one of the spectators watching the event on the SporTV channel. It is interesting to note that after the torch was lit, the person handling the camera suddenly cut to a commercial.

Results (page 2)

- Heading: 'Olympics Beijing 2008 – Hoisting of the Olympic flag - Beijing 2008 Olympics Beijing 2008 – *Hasteamento da bandeira olímpica* – Pequim 2008'
- Duration: 0:03:24
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkRcxj2aA8c>

Shows the moment when the Olympic flag is displayed next to the Chinese flag. The images are transmitted by Globo TV and posted by the user 'thiagosoler'.

- Heading: 'Pequim 2008'
- Duration: 0:05:41
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JckXt1hE7yk>

This file contains scenes of the opening ceremony commented by Pedro Bial, and transmitted 8 August 2008 by the national TV news programme *Jornal Nacional*.

- Heading: 'Depois da Magnífica Abertura das Olimpíadas vem os Protestos'
- Duration: 0:01:39
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEx-zCyX-ic>

News displayed on Globo TV reported demonstrations in parts of Asia and Europe that protesters say are because of China's foreign policies and the lack of human rights.

Results (page 3)

- Heading: 'Olimpíadas 2008'
- Duration: 0:03:02
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgLDhA31mOc>

This is an amateur recording of Globo's transmission of the end of the Olympic Opening Ceremony.

Results (page 4)

- Heading: 'Numerologia: o dia 08/08/08 e a abertura da Olimpíada Pequim'
- Duration: 0:04:36
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBKIcPKMMqc>

A news item from the program *Zen Style* (TV Com) discusses the choice of the date of the opening ceremony and what it means in numerology. The researchers did not focus on the other aspects discussed in the video.

- Heading: ‘Chinese National Anthem Beijing 2008’
- Duration: 0:01:18
- Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxfiXhtbZQ>

Display of the flag and the Chinese national anthem.

Liu Xiang and the Brazilian Media in the Beijing Olympics [15]

On 18 August 2008, there was sadness and disappointment at the Bird’s Nest stadium. The ruthless photographic lenses and 91,000 people witnessed Liu Xiang give in to his pain. According to his coach, the pain had been constant for six or seven years but on this occasion he reached his limit and gave up shortly after the start.

The reporters from the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper, Adalberto Leister Filho and Fábio Seixas, reported the declaration of Sun Haiping, Liu’s coach since he was 12 years old:

On Saturday the pain returned after an intense training session. We were worried. It is accumulated tension that has plagued him for six or seven years and it has continued to increase. There was great pressure and expectations from the Chinese people for his performance. But the pain was too much, or he would not have given up.

Emotion and Support

Liu Xiang decided to take the risk and take part in the race. After he fell, Nara Alves, a special reporter from the IG website reported the following:

The thousands of people who crowded the stadium were silent in an attempt to understand what had happened. When leaving the track the athlete received a standing ovation at the Chinese auditorium, like a hero. The sound of the crowd was deafening and touching. The speaker on the Chinese television cried, live, while he described the scene. I also cried for the first time during the games and unfortunately understood what was happening. And it was not only me.

This text continued with the reporter talking about Liu’s coach’s emotional interviews with reporters, employees and coaches.

Controversy

Although the Brazilian news channels said that Liu Xiang was a hero, the newspaper *Gazeta do Povo*’s approach deserves special attention. In the news article published by *globo.com* and the previously mentioned newspaper, opinions concerning Liu’s

attitude are divided. The article demonstrated that there was discomfort and disillusionment about Liu's injury and circulated the image of Liu Xiang as 'Liu, the fugitive'. The article showed that the people had been disappointed with the mystery surrounding Liu's injury and, therefore, were upset to learn of the gravity of the situation during the race. In the same news article, a defender of Liu said: 'You are as Chinese as Liu Xiang is. How can you insult a Chinese?'

The news article also debated censorship and mentioned that censorship in the country caused the most acrid comments to be quickly removed from the national forums.

Marketing

The website www.sportmarketing.com.br looked at Liu from a commercial perspective and examined his ties to sponsors and corporations. As regards his performance in Beijing, it said that Liu will continue to be an icon and marketing phenomenon for many years to come and that the sponsors do not intend to pull out of the contracts. For example, through Nike's slogan in periodicals and magazines: 'Love the competition, love the dignity, love the honour, love the failure. Finally, love the sport, through the pain.' Liu's notoriety grew after his victory in Athens and since then he has become one of the most familiar faces in China. He is the ideal model for campaigns to expand business in China.

Idolatry

The website www.pequim.abril.com.br also published a news article about Liu Xiang and other athletes who achieved the expected results in Beijing. After mentioning the failure of some of the athletes, the site pointed out something important: the humanity of the athletes in times when athletes are idolized.

News Agencies

After research and data were collected, the international news agencies' penetration of the Brazilian media was clear. The Spanish agency, EFE, appeared the most in Brazilian sites followed by AFP, the French agency. However, the participation of the Brazilian sites in these major events gradually increased with the following Brazilian sites and agencies sending out their own news teams to Beijing: UOL; Lancepress; State agency (AE); *Folha de São Paulo*; iG; Globo.com.

Health Conditions

Liu Xiang's current health condition was reported in the national media. The Yahoo Notice website discussed the ideal treatment for Liu Xiang. The article said that in October Liu would be in the United States. Opinions about the best treatment for Liu

were divided. The site reported that a Chinese specialist recommended surgery as an ‘efficient and fast method’. On the other hand, the coach Sun Haiping disagreed with that idea and supported treatment based on massages and traditional Chinese medicine.

Gu Baogang

The website www.globoesporte.com published Liu’s first coach Gu Baogang’s declarations. Gu said that the enormous pressure of the public, officials and excessive training was the main reason for his injury. Baogang felt sad about the situation and suggested that, if the training had been ‘easier’, the injury would not have been so serious. He said Liu was a victim of the enormous pressure that officials place on athletes. ‘They say that they demand the gold, or else it doesn’t mean anything. Xiang is still a boy and excessive pressure was put on him.’ Baogang continued to say that continuing to expose Liu in the media would be harmful to his career and that it was best for him to train outside China. The reaction of the Chinese government to Liu is what worried Baogang most and he said:

My concern is that officials contest Xiang’s decision and blame him for it. They need to understand the situation because he has already achieved many goals. If they want him back to compete, they will need to encourage and console him. They cannot put pressure on him, because nobody wins all the time. Injuries are inevitable.

Hope in the Future

About his future in sport, Liu seemed to feel sufficiently secure and confident. On the Terra website, he said:

I am still young. I have a lot of strength and I will come back next year. I did not feel depressed after I saw the finals. Instead, I felt as if I was born again. I will go for a duel with Robles [Dayron Robles, winner of the competition]. I am not the type of person who gives up at the first obstacle. I never give up easily. I will be back.

Concluding Remarks [16]

By selecting and analysing the media content of influential Brazilian newspapers using interdisciplinary perspectives and by comparing news stories and Internet videos concerning the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, we may have appeared to emphasize the international news agencies’ sharp criticisms against the Chinese political regime. The news reported in the Brazilian media was similar to many other newspapers in the world and often contained biased interpretations, stereotypes and criticisms of the Beijing Olympics. Although the reports in the Brazilian press began to focus on the competitions and medal table after the Olympic Games began, the Chinese Olympic athletes were rarely displayed.

Hosting the Olympic Games ‘provides the Olympic city and nation with an extraordinary opportunity both to take its own temperature and be subjected to

intensive diagnosis by the media of other nations'. [17] A global sport-media-event such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games provides a perfect moment to study the impact of international communication, which is essential in understanding cultural trends. Technologically enhanced media changed the way in which the global audience viewed and heard the Olympics. The relationship between screen media, virtual space, press reports, Internet content and social expectations allowed us to analyse parts of the intense plot of culture-specific, transnational and global tendencies and the collective cultural significance of the Games.

'One of the grand myths in the modern memory of the ancient Olympic Games is that warring states would suspend hostilities so that the Games could take place.' [18] However, before the Beijing Olympics began the world media had already focused on the Tibetan conflict and the protesters at the torch lighting ceremony and torch relay. Jacques Rogge, IOC president, who usually doesn't comment on political subjects, said that what was happening in Tibet was not consistent with Olympic values. However, On 12 May 2008, the violent earthquake in the Sichuan province shocked the world, causing the global mass media to change its focus, supporting the earthquake victims and China's national mourning. After the Olympic Games began the international mass screen media and the international press praised the quality of the Beijing opening ceremony and the organization and performances. They also reported the number of medals the Chinese athletes won and their perfection in hosting the games.

The spectacular sound and visuals of the Beijing Olympic Games were presented at the opening and closing ceremonies. The composition of images, plots and scenes was accurately prepared, long rehearsed and performed in a brilliant production lasting about an hour. A spectacle such as the BOOC created a fictional dimension that overwhelmed reality. The quantitative change in the distribution of Chinese television is clearly accompanied by a qualitative shift in its content production and presentation. However, screen media can influence countries in two ways. One way is to boost a country's national image by increasing its visibility and audibility so that it can make exchanges with the international community. The other way is that it can modify reality by adding fictional and glamorous appearances to produce illusions of stability and global power. The power of propaganda and political exploitation in international athletic competitions has been explored in the West since the Berlin Olympics. [19] Also,

at the close of the 20th century, the growing entertainment value of the Games, together with the accompanying contributions from sponsors, promise new dimensions to the politics of the Games. All interested parties – the IOC, sponsors, equipment makers – want sporting events to be seen [heard] by as large an audience as possible. [20]

Therefore, art and music are important for the Olympic Games. 'In classic Greek times, both art and music were incorporated into the Games. Many athletes' feats were accompanied by flute music as noted in a painting of the period.' [21] The IOC

encourages the host country of the Olympic Games to stage beautiful opening and closing ceremonies. The Chinese achieved this during the BOOC in the Bird's Nest. The Olympic Hymn by Spiros Samaras was officially adopted in 1958 and is played at every new Olympiad. However, other hymns and musical themes are played during the games, such as the national anthems of the participant nations. Music was a fundamental part of the spectacle during the Olympic Games in Beijing: Chen Qigang composed and directed the ceremony's soundtrack and the transnational song 'You and Me' was the climax for the world audience, symbolizing hope for global freedom and peace.

Music also serves as an interface between nations and people of different and distant cultures and plays a primary role in all the Olympic Games. Furthermore, the audiovisual plots of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games may be remembered as 'sonorous games of visuals', a virtuoso effort to transform the national Bird's Nest Stadium into a handsome arena to stage the 'Culture Olympiad' of China. For a gigantic venue such as the Bird's Nest, not only technology and special effects are needed to stage the opening and closing ceremonies. Great sound projects involving the spectators in fascinating plots of sound-visuals and myths are necessary. Fiction and reality interact and the result of that interaction between sound-visuals, culture, economy, identity, politics and advertisement are mass art productions that the international mass media use to transmit their ideology.

However, the efforts of the athletes remain the most emotional part of the Olympic Games and were the greatest moments of Beijing transmitted all over the world. The thousands of people crowded into the stadium were silent as they tried to understand what had happened to Liu Xiang at the very moment he had waited all his life for. 'The reporter on live Chinese television cried while he described the scene'.

After the Beijing Olympic closing ceremony, the effort to host the XXIX Olympics was registered as the key moment for China in relation to the West. The newspaper, Internet and screen media content we analysed focused on the repressive apparatus, lack of freedom and on aspects of the exotic culture. Despite critics of the Chinese regime and culture, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, with their perfect organization, were a rare opportunity for Brazilians to understand the complexity of hosting a mega-sports event and to see and hear material concerning the challenges surrounding the organization of the games. After the Beijing Olympics, the Olympic Games, as a global sport spectacle, conquered a sophisticated international media dimension. The organizers of the next editions will have to recognize the qualitative records broken by the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad.

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Notes

- [1] Page, *The Brazilians*, 12.
- [2] See also <http://oglobo.globo.com/esportes> and <http://www.folha.uol.com.br>, accessed 12 Oct. 2008.
- [3] Members of our group of researchers include: In Brazil: Dr Leonardo Boccia (Speaker), associate professor of scenic arts, Universidade Federal da Bahia; Dr Paulo César Alves, full professor of social science, Universidade Federal da Bahia; Dr Edilene Matos, adjunct professor of communication and semiotics, Catholic University of São Paulo; Dr José Cláudio Oliveira, adjunct professor of museology, Universidade Federal da Bahia. In Germany: Dr (USA) Peter Ludes, full professor of mass communication/integrated social science, Jacobs University Bremen; Dr Immacolata Amodeo, associate professor of art and art history/history and theory of art and literature, Jacobs University Bremen. In Italy: Dr. Ferruccio Marotti, full professor of theatre history, arts and spectacle sciences, Università di Roma La Sapienza.
- [4] 'Our findings support the claims of NWICO [New World Information and Communication Order] in that international news about Third World countries has a tendency to be negative. Only 20 per cent of all news about Europe and 36 per cent of all news about U.S. was negative. In contrast, 66 per cent of all news about Africa and 51 per cent of all news about Latin America was negative. These findings show a tendency in the Latin America dailies to present industrialized countries in a better light than developing countries': *Lozano et al.*, 'International News in the Latin American Press', 91.
- [5] 'My point is that directors and reporters are not simply presenting a neutral reality to their audiences. Journalists come to their investigations with some preconceived notions about China that are negative. Where do these notions come from? They are drawn from limited sources because there is very little information on Chinese sports in English. When what they know about China does not suffice, they draw on what they know about the former Eastern bloc. One important source of their preconceptions is other journalists. Journalists hang out together at sporting events, read each other's writing, and exchange opinions. In the absence of other reliable information, once stereotypes are generated they gained a life of their own': Brownell, *Beijing's Games*, 162.
- [6] 'The greatest legacy of the Beijing Games will be its human and cultural legacy. There are three themes for the Olympic Games: the high-tech Olympics, the green Olympics, and renwen Olympics. Renwen is difficult to translate. Blending people and culture, it is formed of the characters for ren, "human," and wen, "literature, culture." Normally it is translated as the "humanistic Olympics": *ibid.*, 189.
- [7] 'This is a worldwide problem, not just a Chinese problem. However, much journalistic coverage implies that the exploitation of Chinese athletes is a distinctly Chinese problem; perhaps they find it particularly offensive in China because they think that Chinese children are being exploited in the name of the state and that this is somehow less acceptable than when they are exploited by their own families': *ibid.*, 154.
- [8] By Lidia de Teive e Argolo, Pós-cultura UFBA and Paulo Roberto Leandro, Pós-cultura UFBA. Correspondence to: lidia.argolo@gmail.com, or culturas@ufba.br

- [9] Gilbert Scofield Jr., *O Globo* agency, 'Anonymous amuse all the people at the Square of the People', *A Tarde* Sport Club supplement, 7 Aug. 2008, 5.
- [10] Samples collected from the site of the AFP, with authorized password for use of the publisher of sport.
- [11] Leandro Silva, *A Tarde* Sport Club, 2008, 3.
- [12] *A Tarde* Sport Club supplement, 24 Aug. 2008, 2.
- [13] Gilbert Scofield Jr., 'Accusation – China accused of not respecting the minimum age', *A Tarde* Sport Club supplement, 15 Aug. 2008.
- [14] By Jose Figueiredo Gomes, EMUS/UFBA. Correspondence to: mus@ufba.br (files accessed 20 Oct. 2008).
- [15] By Pedro Fonseca, EMUS/UFBA. Correspondence to: pepedrodro@hotmail.com
- [16] By Leonardo Vincenzo Boccia.
- [17] Tomlinson and Young, *National Identity and Global Sports Events*, 197.
- [18] Senn, *Power, politics, and the Olympic Games*, 36.
- [19] 'Most contemporary observers tended to agree that Nazi regime had produced a remarkable model for the political exploitation of international athletic competition in general and of the Olympics Games in particular': *ibid.*, 62.
- [20] *Ibid.*, 286.
- [21] Guegold, *100 years of Olympic Music*, 4.

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