

3 The Governance of China's Networked Spectacles

At the office of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony organisers, I am going over the scenes of the event with a member of the creative group who was involved in putting the various elements of the massive performance together. We have just discussed how the team turned the two concepts 'harmony' and 'civilisation' into meaningful messages for audiences that might not know much about China, and this has led us to the question whether certain parts of the team's original plans had not made the final cut. I tell her how I had learned that an earlier plan to include large shadow puppets had to be scrapped (China.org 2008), and that there had been speculations abroad that this was because these 'monster puppets' in the shape of terracotta warriors would have seemed too threatening (see Barmé 2009: 80), that there were concerns that foreign audiences would associate them with an ominous, martial China. 'No, that's not what happened', she laughs. The lighting would not have worked, she tells me.

I must seem sceptical, because she laughs again, reassuring me that this is really what happened. She points out that there had indeed been careful oversight from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to check that no elements of the ceremony would clash with official public diplomacy ambitions, and that elements of the ceremony were also screened for foreign audiences. This was why there had been no dragons in the ceremony. In the view of the organising committee, foreign viewers would see dragons as mostly evil creatures, like those that populate Tolkien's fantasy world; in China, dragons are creatures that bring luck. But that meaning does not travel, she tells me. As for the shadow puppets, the problem was not political, but purely technically: 'we just couldn't get it to work'.

It is not my intention to establish what 'really' happened in the case of the cancelled shadow theatre performance. More importantly, the discussion shows how arguably innocuous issues can become

highly political during networked spectacles, and how they can lead to speculations about how authoritative actors dictated meanings. However, the organisation of such events is frequently complicated, and the decisions that shape the final outcomes may not always be the result of calculated political strategising. China's networked spectacles involved many actors with diverse ideas about what these events should communicate and how they should be set up, and this chapter turns to these complexities by exploring how various stakeholders organised influential spectacles in China.

I begin by discussing the CCP's cultural governance strategy, focusing in particular on attempts to augment traditional, top-down modes of propaganda and censorship with more horizontal components that outsource regulatory activities to private actors. I describe these organisational practices and strategies in the language of network theories that I introduced in the introduction, better to highlight the often creative and collaborative ways in which stakeholders are calibrating and reconfiguring complex political processes, and to make tangible how power works within these contexts. In subsequent chapters, I show what meanings and emotions these networked activities facilitate, but here I limit myself to the ways in which the authorities set the network parameters within which various actors then switch themselves and others into communication processes, and within which they attempt to programme the discourses that proliferate through the networks.

To illustrate these activities, the chapter first discusses how media and culture have traditionally been managed in China, and how the authorities have progressively changed their regulatory approach to the networked cultural governance strategies that today characterise political communication in the PRC. This also includes a discussion of how capitalist economic arrangements fit into this picture, and it addresses controversies over whether PRC governance strategies should be considered 'neoliberal'. Next, the chapter analyses how various actors came together to create and broadcast the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, a process that reflects a strong interplay between state and non-state actors within the PRC's regulatory set-up. Finally, the chapter shifts its focus to the Shanghai Expo, laying out what went into designing the exhibition territory and its pavilions.

3.1 Media politics in contemporary China

Ever since its early days as a revolutionary party, the CCP has considered it part of its prerogative to manage culture and media. The reasoning was Marxist-Leninist: as China's vanguard, it was the responsibility of the Party to reform not just the country's means of production, but also the mind sets of its people. 'Culture' needed to emancipate the Chinese masses and immunise them against bourgeois ideology, so the argument went. China's media workers consequently became charged with maintaining the ideological and spiritual wellbeing of the people.

Under Mao's rule, these activities fell under the broader banner of 'thought work'. Mao himself spelled out his understanding of culture in his famous speech in Yan'an (Mao 1942), and the arguments in this speech would remain programmatic throughout his rule. They would later find their most radically totalitarian interpretation during the Cultural Revolution, with Mao and his closest associates emphasising a strict vision of art and culture that allowed only orthodox socialist realist expressions in the service of perpetual revolution.

The imperative to manage culture and carefully regulate the activities of media workers has remained an important part of the CCP's governing model, even after the PRC opened its doors and started its process of reform. China's leaders may have abandoned many of Mao's more radical ideas, replacing ideological orthodoxy with pragmatism, but the Marxist-Leninist conception of culture on which Mao based his ideas remains influential to this day. Especially after the tumultuous events of 1989, i.e. the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the democracy protests in major cities across China that culminated in the Tiananmen Massacre, party leaders felt compelled to renew their role as the sole keepers of China's ideological health. As Brady (2008: 1) has pointed out, 'in the post 1989 period, propaganda and thought work have become the very life blood ... of the Party-State'; they have become an important way for the CCP to try and legitimate its continuing one-party rule.

In the post-Mao era, Chinese regulators have progressively updated the focus of their media management. The CCP has moved away from previous totalitarian ambitions to manage any and all cultural expressions. Instead, it now attempts to 'guide public opinion'. Actors in the party's sprawling propaganda system (see Shambaugh 2007) have creatively adapted to the challenges of a market-driven environment saturated with information. The party's cultural management today

embraces an approach that cleverly combines, on the one hand, top-down hierarchical decrees, advanced censorship techniques, and highly didactic propaganda with, on the other hand, more indirect interventions into Chinese cultural production and consumption processes.

An important factor in this has been the introduction of capitalist market principles, which have radically changed how China's media function today. In the wake of the general economic reforms, the PRC opened its state-dominated industries to market forces and urged managers to experiment with a profit-oriented rationale and foreign management principles (for an introduction see Naughton 2006: ch.4). This may at first sight contradict the CCP's avowed commitment to Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought. However, the reasoning behind these market reforms remains in line with Marxism, even as it relies on an arguably provocative interpretation of Marx's historical materialism.

Rather than insisting on the Maoist idea that society needs to be moved through its historical, developmental phases by means of *revolution*, the Party now emphasised *evolution*. Drawing their lessons from successful advanced socialist countries e.g. in northern Europe, the reformers decided that China needed to experience fully what they viewed as the crucial historical stage before socialism: capitalism. Capitalism is an economic arrangement in which the means of production are owned privately and are worked by wage labourers, and in which goods and services are traded for profit in competitive markets, using a commonly accepted medium of exchange and following the logic of supply and demand. The idea was that, by strategically introducing the core elements of this arrangement into the Chinese economy, the contradictions of capitalism would reveal themselves, and as Chinese society worked through and addressed these contradictions, a gradual adjustment of production processes would unfold until society became fair and equitable. Managing this process and ensuring that it took the right shape would become part of the CCP's *raison d'être*.

An open question, and a matter of some controversy, is whether — or to what degree — China is today capitalist. For the most part, the Chinese economy relies heavily on markets and the idea of private ownership to generate profits (see Zweig 2014: 204-205 and Naughton 2006: 301-304). The waters are muddied, however, by the large number of state-owned enterprises that operate in China and the continuing influence of the party and state in economic affairs. As Joseph Fan and his colleagues write

in their introduction to a compilation of studies that examine capitalism in China: 'strategically placed state-owned enterprises (SOEs), SOE-controlled pyramidal business groups, and ubiquitous party cells, party Secretaries, and party committees leave Lenin's "commanding heights" firmly and exclusively under the control of the Chinese Communist Party' (Fan et al. 2013: 2).

PRC leaders continue to insist that the country remains 'on the socialist road', but they have also qualified their 'market socialism' as having 'Chinese characteristics'. Regardless of such labelling practices, the Chinese economy is effectively a market economy that relies heavily on capitalist structures, even if capitalism in China takes on a different shape from, for instance, that in North America or Europe. Then again, this is arguably an example of how adaptive capitalism is. There are many different capitalisms across Europe or the Americas as well, so it should come as no surprise that Asian contexts also feature diverse capitalist practices and arrangements.

A related question is whether China is 'neoliberal'. Neoliberalism is an ideology that emphasises personal responsibility, efficiency, private property rights, and the presumed ability of allegedly unregulated, competitive markets to bring about the best in self-interested individuals (for a discussion see Treanor 2005). As such, neoliberalism promotes capitalism, though not every capitalism must necessarily be underpinned by neoliberalism. Nonini (2008) has criticised that scholarship frequently fails to appreciate this distinction, and that this leads to a conflation of the two concepts. He writes that the term neoliberalism 'risks being used to refer to almost any political, economic, social or cultural process associated with contemporary capitalism' (ibid.: 149). Similarly, Kipnis (2007: 387) asks, 'does anyone ever describe non-neoliberal capitalism?' Such criticism then also extends to China's capitalism, which Nonini points out is strongly state-led and frequently accompanied by popular resistance against marketisation. He argues that 'processes of neoliberalization are largely absent' in China (Nonini 2008: 149) and questions whether 'the Chinese population has widely incorporated neoliberal subjectivities and practices' (ibid.: 147).

Nonini is no doubt right that neoliberalism has by no means become a hegemonic ideology across China, and his interventions provide a helpful reminder that capitalism and neoliberalism do not necessarily collapse into one, globally shared economic and ideological set-up. He is also right that many CCP cadres explicitly reject and criticise neoliberalism.

For instance, a 2013 Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere (translated in ChinaFile 2013) warns against neoliberalism, alongside other foreign ideas such as democracy, universal values, and civil society. According to the document, neoliberalism celebrates ‘unrestrained economic liberalization, complete privatization, and total marketization’; the authors go on to warn against neoliberal advocates who believe ‘macroeconomic control is strangling the market’s efficiency and vitality and they oppose public ownership, arguing that China’s state-owned enterprises are “national monopolies,” inefficient, and disruptive of the market economy, and should undergo “comprehensive privatization”’. The goal of neoliberal reasoning, according to the communiqué, is to ‘change our country’s basic economic infrastructure and weaken the government’s control of the national economy’.

However, does such commentary really mean that neoliberalism and its policies are truly absent in China today? The communiqué ironically trailed plans by the Xi administration to extend economic liberalisation (ibid.), so it might be wise to take the content of the document with a grain of salt. Aside from the fact that the document may not speak for all CCP cadres, its inventory of key terms also seems designed to conflate various challenges to one-party rule and turn them into a singular, loathsome antagonist: ‘the West’. Such practices to construct enemies and seed the descriptions with vapid hot-button terminology are not new in CCP rhetoric, but they say very little about the actual ‘current state of the ideological sphere’ which they claim to assess.

I would argue that neoliberalism is now firmly part of the ideological mix that shapes politics in China (see also Joseph 2014: 160). Neoliberal discourse indeed informs many political, economic, and individual activities in the PRC. However, this is not to say that neoliberalism is ‘hegemonic’ in China, but rather that regulators frequently combine neoliberal techniques with authoritarian and other managerial practices. Neoliberal policy is indeed frequently authoritarian, in China as much as elsewhere. In theory, such policies aim at deregulating economic processes, establishing free trade, and making social interactions more efficient; to achieve these goals, neoliberal policy promotes (at least nominally) austerity, privatisation, and a laissez-faire approach to the economy. However, in practice, neoliberal policy often consists of invasive audit cultures, expansive bureaucratisation, fiscal interventions that benefit the wealthy, and draconian state-backed violence, particularly when private ownership rights are in question (see also Graeber 2015: 31).

Harvey (2007: 19) calls this a 'creative tension', and he makes the case that 'when neoliberal principles clash with the need to restore or sustain elite power, then the principles are either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognizable'.

In the Chinese context, neoliberal policies are part of the governing toolbox that CCP cadres deploy to regulate life in the PRC. Frank Pieke makes this clear in his discussion of the PRC's governance approach, which he calls 'neo-socialist'. As he describes it, 'under neo-socialism, innovative neo-liberal and home-grown governmental technologies cut right at the heart of the Party-state itself, serving to support, centralize, modernize, and strengthen the Party's leading role in society' (2016: loc243). The PRC's media and cultural industries are prime examples of this combination of neoliberal and more traditional 'governmental technologies'. Party and state leaders expect media organisations to function according to the same rules of the market that govern state-owned enterprises in other sectors of the economy. At the same time, the CCP retains control of China's liberalised media and cultural sectors through various governing mechanisms.

3.2 The CCP's cultural governance strategies

One might expect the imperatives of market liberalisation in China to undermine party control of the media, and such expectations have indeed informed much of the speculation, and at times wishful thinking, about China's ostensible transition towards liberal democracy. As Pieke (2016) points out, and as I have also argued in an analysis of cyber politics in China (Schneider 2018: ch.8), it is unhelpful to imagine democracy as the inevitable endpoint of modern social development that is brought about, deterministically, by market forces, new technologies, free flows of people and information, or some other (neo)liberal MacGuffin. Instead, I have suggested that we turn to Lewis Mumford's (1964) arguments about democratic and authoritarian technics, which political actors combine, juxtapose, and ultimately deploy in their attempts to manage social processes (see also Göbel 2011). Pieke (2016: 118) suggests something similar when he argues:

Democracy and dictatorship are best used as shorthand references to a range of governmental technologies that can be combined

and recombined in real-life political systems regardless of their purported ideological charge.

This indeed seems to be the approach that the CCP has adopted in its reform efforts, and it extends to the party's management of media and culture. In these contexts, the CCP management techniques encompass several interconnected strategies. One of these is for state institutions to intervene directly in cultural spheres. Such interventions are generally rare, since they can discredit regulators, draw attention to unwanted issues, and reveal the full scope (or limitations) of state power. Nevertheless, when it comes to issues that leading cadres consider to be 'sensitive' (*mingan* 敏感), the CCP can rely on the full power of the state to censor unwanted discourses and infuse media networks with 'correct' statements. Sensitive issues include any kind of 'yellow' topic, i.e. pornography, violence, drugs, and gambling, which conservative cadres view as negative influences on the minds of the masses, and especially of youths. It also includes 'black' topics, i.e. politically sensitive issues that might challenge the rule of the party or endanger 'social stability' (*shehui wending* 社会稳定; see Sandby-Thomas 2011). Certain areas remain wholly blacklisted, most notably the so-called 'three Ts', which refer to the political status of Tibet and Taiwan, as well as the legacy of the Tiananmen Massacre. In other areas, the terrain of what constitutes an acceptable or unacceptable political topic can shift radically as former taboos become green-lit, usually as certain leaders or factions of cadres re-orientate their policy priorities in those areas, or — conversely — as a previously innocuous public debate threatens to get out of hand. At the time of writing, such shifts in priority characterised debates on topics like air pollution, food and work safety issues, corruption, and interpretations of certain episodes in China's revolutionary past, but by the time this book goes to press the range of publicly acceptable discourses is likely to have shifted again.

For Chinese media workers, this creates serious challenges as they try to manoeuvre China's ever-changing discursive waters, while constantly being forced to balance the bottom line with the party line (see Zhao 1998). This may very well be the point: the confusing mix of freedoms and restrictions creates uncertainties (see Hassid 2008) and a context in which actors need to manage themselves and act efficiently, which allows regulators to remain in the background and avoid intrusive interventions into the sector as much as possible. To this end, the CCP's governance

approach selectively blends neoliberal rationales of self-discipline with traditional philosophical components and other discourses in an effort to encourage certain kinds of behaviour. Neoliberal discourses thus exist next to normative domestic discussions about the 'quality' (suzhi 素质) of citizens (see Anagnost 2004, Jacka 2009, Woronov 2009, and Sun 2009), which draw their reasoning from pre-modern Chinese thought. The various discourses can at times align, though Kipnis (2007) rightly points out that they do not always merge into a singular, neoliberal disciplinary formation. I will return to self-disciplining strategies below, and I will illustrate such discourses and practices in later chapters; in the current context, it is important to understand that actors in the media industry constantly have to adjust their behaviour to a moving, invisible line of what is permissible.

A second technique for managing China's media ecology is to rely on the market dynamics that the party has unleashed, and to leave it to commercial incentives to guide the behaviours of media and cultural producers. By liberalising sectors such as fashion and lifestyle, the CCP has allowed the incentives for producing acceptable content to shift away from overt state and party interventions. Instead, incentives now primarily come from the public demand for entertainment formats and the advertising revenues this demand generates, relayed to media workers in the form of viewer ratings, reader subscriptions, webpage views, retweets, and other metrics of business success.

Where market incentives alone are not sufficient to guide how actors produce, share, and consume cultural artefacts, the party uses a number of indirect measures to retain control of public discourse. This includes the various channels through which CCP cadres remain linked to state agencies like news conglomerates, TV stations, museums, or production studios (see Lieberthal 2004: ch.7). Personnel management plays a particularly important role, and the party has the last word when it comes to assigning media workers to key nodes in China's networks of cultural production. Editors, producers, journalists, and so on are frequently themselves party members, which means they are required to maintain party discipline, but even if they have not themselves joined the CCP, their positions depend on the good graces of party committees and superiors, who sanction behaviour through managerial techniques such as work assessments, promises of financial bonuses, chances for promotion, and the ever-present threat of demotion or redundancy. As the party experiments with new social management techniques, for

instance rolling out social credit management systems in numerous pilot cities (see Koetse 2018 and Liu 2018 for nuanced discussions), these incentive structures are bound to become more important yet.

In combination with market mechanisms and career incentives, the party further relays its ideological preferences through a sophisticated state licensing system that allows only approved non-state organisations and individuals to create and sell cultural content with mass appeal. The state then also maintains numerous regulatory agencies that specify what types of content can be disseminated in particular segments of the market, for instance placing legal limits on TV programming that goes too far in depicting the underbelly of society or that encourages too much audience participation. In this way, the party uses the state to define, for example, what can be aired during the lucrative prime-time period on Chinese television, which in turn creates commercial pressure for private producers to create only the kind of content that state-owned TV stations will buy and air during that period (I have discussed these dynamics in detail in Schneider 2012).

The party's media controls have then become largely indirect. The party has effectively positioned itself in such a way that it can inject the networks of cultural production with specific demands that will filter through lengthy chains of principals and agents down to private actors who have to conform to these imperatives if they hope to make a profit. Viewed at a distance, the CCP's techniques of control have become more obscure, often leaving the impression that cultural producers are following the seemingly inescapable invisible hand of the market, but this should not detract from the fact that it is the party that leverages this logic to ensure politically acceptable discourses.

Closely related to these managerial techniques is the party's willingness to outsource processes of cultural meaning-making to non-official actors. This means soliciting the expertise of private production companies, public relations firms, advertisers, IT experts, and so on. It also means giving the consumers of media more leeway to make sense of the rich, diverse galaxy of symbols they face, and to provide sanctioned (and carefully monitored) spaces for peer-to-peer interactions, for instance through private social media corporations like Tencent or Sina. By setting the rules of these interactions at the macro level, the CCP is able to outline what is or is not acceptable discourse once these varied actors start circulating their own symbolic assemblages through the newly opened sub-networks of, for instance, social media.

Importantly, China's leaders try to avoid overt coercion and instead attempt to negotiate and reason with media producers, consumers, and users in order to create a consensus as to what media management in China should achieve. In my own interviews with Chinese media workers, I found it telling how frequently even critics of the CCP's media management made the case that, ultimately, some form of content control was necessary to ensure the moral guidance of audiences, who were frequently viewed as prone to spreading and believing incorrect information, especially in the form of so-called online rumours (*wangluo yaoyan* 网络谣言). These arguments about the dangers of spreading rumours seem to have gained further traction in the wake of anxieties in Europe and North America about 'fake news'. Where actors remained unconvinced by such paternalistic and frequently alarmist reasoning, selected draconian measures against individuals or companies usually inspire the required level of self-censorship among media workers and consumers more broadly to prevent them from pushing the boundaries of the permissible too far — a tactic that is known in Chinese as 'killing the chicken to scare the monkeys' (*shaji jinghou* 杀鸡儆猴).

Today, the CCP delegates much of the responsibility for media control to societal actors, many of whom seem willing to adopt the moral discourses that the CCP spreads through China's networks of social interactions. My point here is not that media workers necessarily internalise, believe, or actively support these discourses; we do not know what ultimately goes on in people's heads. My point is that these discourses create powerful guides to behaviour, and that actors reproduce them as acceptable statements on how cultural production should work in China. Importantly, it is not the discourses themselves that 'act' in this way; it is the set of people who are tied together in networks of media production, and who enforce the values of the network through a combination of administrative techniques, discursive statements, and peer pressure.

Ultimately, the CCP's political decision-making then comes to rest to no small degree on its ability to generate 'consent elicited by the construction of shared meaning', to use Castells' words (2009: 12). Where agents are not convinced, they are confronted with the strong constraints that these shared meanings generate in conjunction with economic incentives. If reluctant actors do not wish to risk being isolated from important social interactions or losing the means to secure a livelihood, they need at least tacitly to comply with their assigned roles as keepers of moral rectitude.

In this sense, the party's regulatory activities are less examples of governing, i.e. of regulating society through policy decisions, enforced through executive branches of the state. They are more examples of 'governance', that is: the regulation of society through indirect means that involve actors beyond the state (Stoker 1998). These 'public-private collaborations' (Donahue & Zeckhauser 2008) are not limited to domestic actors but include international organisations and enterprises as well. In the case of China's networked spectacles, the result of these practices is a multi-tiered approach to event management in which party and state move in and out of organisational networks, at times regulating matters directly, at other times providing symbolic and discursive resources for non-state agents to make their own regulatory choices in line with the network's overall mission.

Considering how strongly this approach relies on constructing cultural contexts through networked interactions and discursive moves, it seems appropriate to call it 'cultural governance', a term I am adapting from Michael Shapiro (2004) and William Callahan (2006) to refer to regulatory activities through which actors attempt to govern society by adjusting the cultural parameters in which politics take place (see also Schneider 2016).

In the kind of complex communication networks that the CCP attempts to manage, power accrues with actors who are able to link different groups of people together, for instance by connecting media networks, trade networks, financial networks, logistic networks, security networks, and so on, and who are able to infuse those networks with their own values, meanings, and interpretations. While party actors are not the only relevant agents in China's networked cultural sectors, they remain well positioned to exert such power.

3.3 Organising the Olympic opening ceremony

How precisely the interactions between different actors generate the switching and programming power that Castells envisages becomes evident in the Hu-Wen administration's approach to organising networked spectacles like the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo in the late 2000s. During the 2008 Summer Olympics, for instance, party and state agencies made effective use of their switching power to strategically delegate responsibilities and collaborate with non-state actors to manage

a complex, dynamic media environment. Take the example of the opening ceremony, which took place on 8 August 2008.

The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony was designed to present China's re-emergence as a Great Power to audiences both at home and abroad. It was a large-scale collaborative public relations effort that was initiated, coordinated, and executed by the Chinese state, under the leadership of the party, but which involved input from a variety of actors, ranging from numerous state agencies and CCP organs to private agents.

To show how this process worked, I have traced the interactions between the different actors and the decisions they made, based on my interviews with organisers and media workers who had been involved in creating the event. These various stakeholders planned the opening ceremony for over four years, spending several hundred million RMB in the process. Under the auspice of the Ministry of Culture (文化部), a creative team came together as early as March 2004 to draw up a 20-page plan for the opening ceremony. Based on this outline, the ministry commissioned 11 internal and 2 external proposals, which the creative team evaluated in 2005 and 2006. The final synergy of the leading proposals drew from two themes: civilisation (*wenming* 文明), a theme that the organisers regarded as central to the original Greek Olympic spirit, and harmony (*hexie* 和谐), a key political concept of the Hu Jintao administration, which I will examine in detail in chapter 6 (for a discussion of this concept see Barmé 2009: 78).

By April 2005, the team had refined the motto of the games, abandoning the earlier slogan 'harmony is precious' (*he wei gui* 和为贵), first in favour of the slogan 'one world, one future', and finally settling on 'one world, one dream'. In early 2006, the director's team under the leadership of renowned film-maker Zhang Yimou (张艺谋) came together for the first time to assess how the planning process should progress.

In September 2006, the Ministry of Culture created a sub-unit, the 'Opening-Closing Ceremony Department' (奥组委开闭幕式工作部), which would become responsible for managing the cultural activities associated with the games. This department was headed by Zhang Heping (张和平), a Beijing-based arts professor and member of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference. The size of this team fluctuated between 30 and 40 members. Their task was to oversee various working groups (production, public relations, and so on) and later coordinate the event with other state actors, such as the municipal police department and transit authorities.

The core unit within this department that designed, planned, and executed the actual ceremony was the ‘Opening-Closing Ceremony Command Centre’ (开闭幕式运营中心). During peak times, it employed up to 800 individuals. The members of this command centre refined the ceremony, developed the various acts, and expanded the event to include new themes such as environmental sustainability. In August 2006, two years before the event, the first rehearsals started. By the time the rehearsals moved to the final staging site in June 2008, the ceremony had expanded to include 20,000 performers. The scale of the project prompted members of the creative team to joke that the newly built National Stadium had been designed poorly, since it was almost too small to host all the performers.

As the actual event neared, the command centre ‘field-tested’ the opening ceremony and various related cultural products. For instance, the *Fuwa* (福娃; literally: ‘good-luck dolls’) were tested in elementary schools and kindergartens before becoming the official mascots of the event (for an analysis of the *Fuwa*’s symbolic meaning see DeLisle 2008: 35). The opening ceremony itself was staged for three different groups of critics: a committee of art advisors that included film directors Chen Kaige (陈凯歌) and Lee Ang (李安) as well as US producer Quincy Jones; a group of Chinese citizens that was meant to represent all walks of life; and the responsible CCP Leadership Small Group, which at the time was under the direction of rising political star Xi Jinping. This last group also included members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose explicit task was to point out any aspects of the ceremony that might offend foreign audiences or relay a negative impression of the PRC’s foreign policy agenda.

Once approved, the final performance was prepared for telecasting by Beijing Olympic Broadcasting (BOB), a joint venture between the Chinese side (the official Beijing Olympics Committee for the Olympic Games, or BOCOG) and the Olympic Broadcasting Service of the International Olympic Committee (see Brownell 2008: 186). This joint venture used new broadcasting technologies that had themselves required various levels of negotiation and compromise to implement, for instance between creative and technical personnel (see Liang 2013).

Domestically, the visual discourse of the event, with all its possible interpretations, was disambiguated for viewers by China Central Television (CCTV) and its two commentators, who framed the visuals with carefully rehearsed statements that were scripted in advance and

meticulously rehearsed (see also Brownell 1995 for an earlier assessment): the phrases relay the official propaganda discourse without any random colloquialisms, and the intonations of the speakers also closely resemble those of actors giving official speeches or performing in socialist-realist theatre. The result was a series of official propaganda statements that left little doubt about how the proceedings were meant to be interpreted.

The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony illustrates how the CCP recruits various stakeholders to create a spectacle. In this case, the result was a well-rehearsed representation of the administration's agenda to create a 'harmonious society', fusing traditional Chinese cultural symbols with images of a young and joyous China. I will return to the ceremony and the seemingly hegemonic narrative that the event relayed in the next chapter, but it should be stressed that regardless of how we assess the performance, the final cultural product was the result of complex negotiations in which the party took a leading role, but in which no single actor dictated the discourses top-down. Instead, CCP agents linked themselves and their party and state associates to private creative and technical personnel, creating the network that would provide the infrastructure for organising the various elements of this event. By providing the general guidelines within which state and private actors then collaborated, the CCP ensured that the final product struck all participants as at least acceptable, possibly even as convincing and worthwhile, and ultimately as a common-sense representation of contemporary China on the world stage.

3.4 International networks at the Shanghai Expo

A similar collaboration took place at the site of the Shanghai World Exposition two years later, though this collaboration included an even broader range of actors, foreign and domestic, who had to construct their public discourses within overlapping institutional frameworks. Most notably, these included organisers of national, corporate, and city pavilions, each comprising teams of core event managers, PR professionals, and diplomatic protocol officers, and later involving an array of logistics experts, architects, engineers, artists, and film directors. In many cases, the work of these teams started as early as four years before the actual event. When the expo opened its door to the public on 1 May 2010, between 200 and 800 different people had been

involved in designing, constructing, and administering each of the major expo pavilions, drawing on a combination of public and private funding in the range of 30 to 60 million Euros per pavilion.

I will explain in more detail below how pavilion organisers and their teams negotiated the political and commercial interests that fuelled their event projects, but it is worth already pointing out here that they did so within the general guidelines provided at two levels of organisation: the regulations handed down by the Bureau of International Exhibition (BIE), headquartered in Paris, and the national and provincial regulations of the PRC, coordinated and implemented by the Bureau of Shanghai World Expo Coordination (上海世博会事务协调局), or Shiboju (世博局). The Shiboju was a temporary state institution composed of staff from various public security and logistics agencies in China, as well as foreign affairs and media workers, and it went about its organisational activities under the auspices of the CCP.

The Shanghai Expo illustrates how the Chinese state and the party managed complex cultural processes by taking an indirect approach and providing general rules of cultural production rather than attempting to regulate systems of meanings directly. While a delegation of the Shiboju checked all expo exhibitions in early 2010 to ensure that participants had not put any politically sensitive topics on display (e.g. references to the political status of Tibet or Taiwan), there were, to my knowledge, no major conflicts between the censors and the respective pavilion teams over exhibition content. The pavilion staffers and organisers I interviewed in 2010 were overall positive about their interactions with the Chinese organisers and censors, and they repeatedly told me that they had not encountered any overt criticism of their exhibits.

This was true even for organisers who had intentionally designed their exhibitions as interventions into what they perceived as dominant Chinese discourses. An example was the Spanish pavilion, which told a postmodern, avant-garde story of Spanish modernity that clashed with official Chinese accounts of what modernity might mean. I will analyse these exhibits and the discursive conflicts they contain in detail in chapter 7. Yet even organisers who had designed such provocative content noted that the Shanghai organisers were overall accommodating, finding for example no fault with didactically challenging exhibits.

It is an open question why the authorities allowed such critics to prevail. The censors may not have understood the thrust of the argument, or they may have concluded that visitors would not be swayed by the often

fairly abstract, artistic interventions. Maybe they decided that letting some critics have their way would serve as an example of the host's benevolence and inclusiveness. Whatever the motivations, the Chinese administrators effectively provided the space for discursive construction and then watched that construction unfold within the theme of the event, seemingly content in the knowledge that the various overlapping interests and institutional constraints would overall generate a core narrative; a narrative about a neoliberal, capitalist world in which nation-states exist in harmony and develop their economies through urbanisation and transnational trade, and in which the PRC functions as a central partner as it progresses on its road towards national revival.

Indeed, many foreign participants at the Shanghai Expo shared at least some of the organisers' basic assumptions about world fairs and their purpose, and they had no intention of rocking the boat with controversial or disruptive displays. To most exhibitors, the need for easily digestible public diplomacy outweighed any potential agenda of contradicting the discursive parameters that the domestic organisers had set for the event. Most pavilions at the expo integrated the neoliberal, internationalist message in part or as a whole into their own visions of a 'better city, better life', and communicative practices frequently remained located within this overarching expo discourse.

This is itself the outcome of networked practices: the Chinese hosts were able to create a network of agents who would be involved in organising this specific event, but this did not entail drawing the organisational framework up from scratch. Not all actors were new to the world-fair genre. Indeed, the Shiboju and its staff could rely on existing mass event networks, periodically maintained and reconfigured at international conventions, trade fairs, and of course the recurring BIE world fairs. National pavilion teams, for instance, were frequently staffed by experienced event planners and diplomats who knew each other from past events, and many maintained long-standing contacts with their colleagues in other pavilion teams. When I visited the expo, there was a sense of community among staff members, who frequently interacted with each other not just professionally but also socially.

In that sense, the staff at the Shiboju 'plugged' themselves into existing networks, while also creating new linkages between potential partners and domestic actors. They managed to set the agenda for the event, but they did so using the symbolic and discursive resources that already permeated these networks, i.e. conceptual elements from

internationalist, cosmopolitan, and capitalist discourses. It should then come as no surprise that so many of the pavilion exhibits told similar stories, and that they seemed to reinforce key statements about the world at the start of the 21st century.

3.5 How Shanghai's Expo territory came to be assembled

The sense that the Shanghai Expo told a coherent, unified story was arguably strongest at the level of the expo territory itself. As I have mentioned in the introduction to this book, visitors frequently commented on the geopolitics of the set-up. The event covered a space that was roughly ten times as large as Disneyland Paris, and that stretched across two sites: the northern zones that were home to the pavilions of multinational corporations, Chinese state-owned enterprises, and the various urban best practice exhibits, and the southern zones that contained the national pavilions, theme pavilions, and exhibits of international organisations.

With 189 national exhibitions, the expo relayed a strong internationalist discourse in which the central actors were nations and their sovereign states. Informed by this discourse, the expo territory became a miniature model of the world, which generated a sense of geography through the way that national pavilions were arranged in the expo space. Pavilions were clustered together according to the respective nation-states' location in specific world regions such as Europe or Asia, loosely captured by zones A (Asia), B (Europe), and C (America and Africa). The expo territory also at times modelled geographical proximity between countries, for instance placing together the pavilions of Germany and Poland, Greece and Turkey, and Sweden, Denmark, and Finland.

A major example of geopolitical representation was the Chinese national pavilion and its position vis-à-vis the pavilions of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Looking at the China Pavilion from the east, visitors would find the 'mainland' represented by a massive elevated plateau on their left, with China's red national pavilion next to the smaller exhibition buildings of the two special administrative regions. To the right lay the Taiwan Pavilion, separated from the mainland by a broad, elevated walkway that curved along the plateau much like the Taiwan Strait curves along the coast of China.

Despite these representations of geography, the territory did not recreate any existing world map, e.g. of the Mercator type. Any world map that tries to represent earth's geographical features in two dimensions is by its very nature warped, but the expo territory arranged countries into entirely original positions. This at times produced peculiar effects. For instance, Iran and North Korea, two states that former US-President Bush had made part of his 'axis of evil', were stashed away together in the far south-east corner of the territory. Japan and China were positioned at opposite ends of the zone that contained participant countries from Asia, while Russia became situated in the south-west of Europe. The African continent moved to the north-west of this simulated world.

All of this was largely the outcome of administrative idiosyncrasies rather than the result of any overarching plan: the authorities allowed participants to select the exact position of their lot within the assigned zone on a first-come-first-served basis. What is more, the varying budgets of different participants defined what kind of lot they would be able to lease, allowing national participants to present themselves in pavilions of varying sizes (see Huang & Kuang 2010). This included the largest lots of 3,000-6,000 square metres (for participants who asked to build their own pavilions), medium-sized lots of 500-2,000 square metres (for participants willing to rent and then decorate an exhibition hall), and small exhibition spaces within larger joint halls, each measuring between 200 and 325 square metres.

The type of lot reflected what financial resources each participant country was able and willing to invest. The cost of self-built pavilions ranged from 30 to 60 million Euros, and that kind of budget was generally available only to wealthy OECD countries, which in turn shaped the picture of the world that emerged at the Shanghai Expo. To show what that picture looked like, it helps to imagine a traditional map of the world, and to then re-size each nation-state to reflect not its geographical territory but the size of its exhibition space at the expo. I have calculated these relations by combining the lot sizes provided in Huang & Kuang (2010) with my own extrapolations based on the official Expo map (see also Schneider 2014b: 104-105). The result is depicted in Figure 3.1.

Since the cartogram relates pavilion lot size to actual geographical territory, it by default produces an exaggerated effect where nation-states with very large or very small territories are concerned: countries such as the USA, Canada, Russia, and Australia appear exponentially smaller, despite hosting the largest type of national pavilion that was available,



Figure 3.1: The Miniature World of the Shanghai World Expo 2010. Image © F. Schneider 2013.

whereas small countries such as the island states of the Caribbean take up correspondingly more space. Nevertheless, the figure reproduces the general impression a visitor would receive while travelling this miniature world, and two observations are worth noting in this regard.

Firstly, wealthy industrialised countries such as the European members of the OECD, Japan, and South Korea take up a significant part of the territory, while developing countries in the Americas, Africa, and Asia are marginalised. Secondly, the figure highlights the dominant role of the host. The PRC was represented at the event with a space of 160,000 square metres (Xinhua 2008), which included the China Pavilion itself, the park area surrounding it, the provincial exhibition spaces located in the large hall within the plateau's foundation, and technically also the Hong Kong and Macau pavilions. Throughout world fair history, host exhibitions have traditionally played a more central role than those of other participants — one need only recall the iconic relevance of the Eiffel Tower at the 1889 Paris Exposition (Johnson 2002; Jackson 2008: 46-49). Yet the massive presence of China at this event stands in marked contrast to the self-presentation of host countries at preceding world fairs. This is also reflected by the comments of the foreign pavilion organisers I interviewed, who argued that the Chinese authorities were portraying their nation-state as the centre of the world through the use of architecture and lot size regulations, and that the degree of hierarchy that this created was unique in recent expo history.

Such arguments illustrate how organisational practices and administrative choices, as idiosyncratic as they may be, shape physical

objects (here: the physical environment of the expo territory), and how those who interact with that environment generate meanings about this experience. It is before this backdrop that discursive statements emerge about China’s rise as a Great Power at the centre of the world. Recall how such complex processes draw from sets of inputs as they systematically assemble a network of new meanings. Figure 3.2 maps the actor-network of this specific case and the conceptual blending process to which it gives rise.

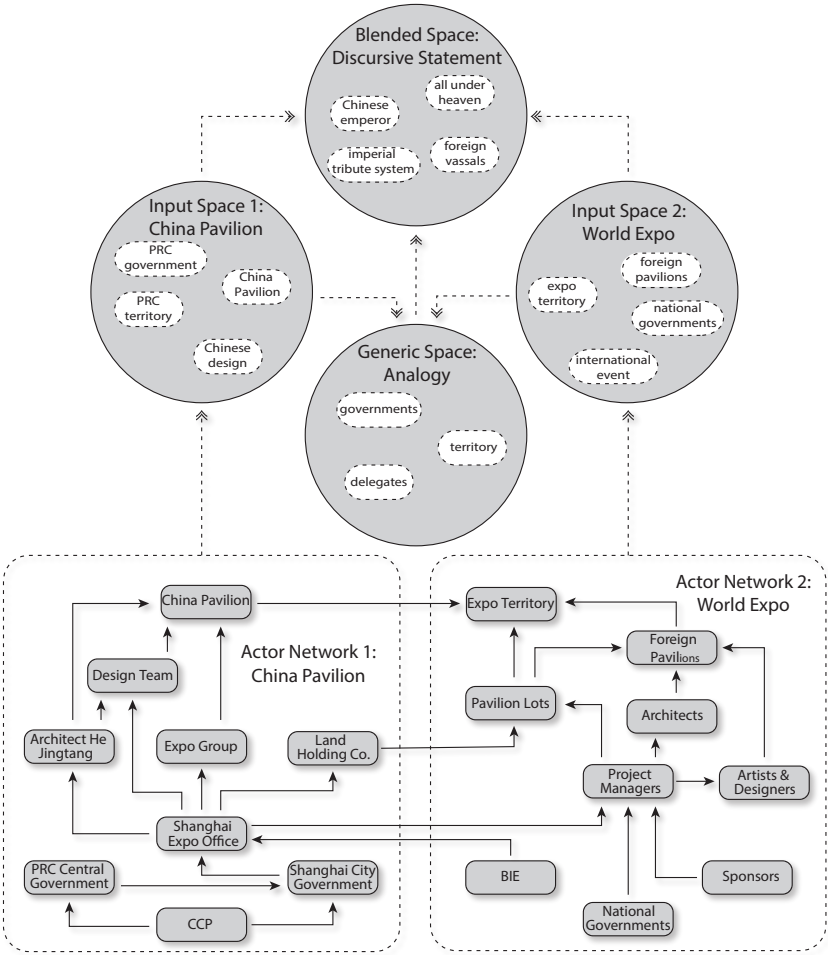


Figure 3.2: Blended Meanings of the China Pavilion as Emperor of All-Under-Heaven. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

The bottom of the figure provides an actor-network that tracks Chinese organisational processes (left) and foreign planning activities at world expos (right). At the centre of these Chinese efforts stands the ‘mega-event flagship’ (see Deng 2013) of the China Pavilion, designed by an architectural and design team headed by He Jingtang. The design process is plugged into circuits of interaction between party and state actors, at the central and municipal levels, but ultimately they involve the Shiboju, or Shanghai Expo Office, and two of its subsidiaries, the Expo Group and the Land Holding Corporation (*ibid.*). These processes are in turn subject to the rules and regulations that the BIE has established for world expositions. They also connect with foreign planning activities through the Shiboju’s administrative procedures and, important in this specific case, the lot regulations for the expo territory.

I will discuss below the processes that shape foreign pavilion constructions. Here, I am interested in the way that these chains of interaction create the final assemblages at the territory itself, and how the combination of towering China Pavilion, territorial arrangement, and foreign presence creates the impression of China ruling the world at the Expo (Minter 2010b). This rationale is mapped in the top part of the figure. One input space draws together categories and assumptions about the China Pavilion and its meanings, using concepts from Chinese politics and architectural design. The second input space bring together concepts related to the expo as an international event. Commonalities between these two meaning-making spaces are then combined, in the generic space, using the frame of geopolitics to turn buildings and territories into a miniature world of nation-states. Finally, a narrative emerges in which the map becomes coterminous with the territory: Shanghai’s Expo park is all under heaven, the China Pavilion is its imperial ruler, and foreign pavilions are delegates to the all-powerful imperial court.

Note how the blended meaning establishes closure by introducing the idea of the imperial tribute system, a concept that is itself absent from the input spaces, but that becomes available thanks to the way in which the Chinese designers ‘flagged’ imperial history as a source of meaning-making in their pavilion design (see also chapter 6). In that sense, this interpretation implies actors and intentions that are not borne out by the actual activities on the ground: foreign pavilion organisers had diverse assumptions and intentions about their presence at the Shanghai Expo that did not neatly fit into the idea of delegates to an imperial court. Chinese media workers and state officials remained committed to their

own discourse of how the PRC would never seek hegemony in the world, and the idea that the Communist Party might be part of a new feudal order would have been deeply offensive to party cadres. Yet, the complex interactions in the run-up to the event created territorial configurations that lent themselves to such a conceptual blend between expo pavilions and world politics, providing the resources for other actors such as foreign journalists to generate narratives of foreign dignitaries paying homage to an autocrat.

3.6 Building a Shanghai Expo pavilion

I have so far discussed how Chinese actors tapped into existing organisational networks to organise the Shanghai expo, and how these processes allowed certain meanings to emerge about the geopolitical relevance of the expo territory. It is worth examining in more detail the chains of interactions that led to this outcome, specifically the activities of foreign participants as they planned and constructed national pavilions and exhibits. To explore this dimension of the expo, I interviewed organisers of various pavilions to trace how they assembled and managed their various exhibitions, and I have condensed these interviews to chronologically reconstruct how national pavilions generally took shape. Allow me then to describe the path of Alice, a hypothetical pavilion organiser, as she goes about overseeing the design, construction, and functioning of a large national pavilion.

Alice has a background in event management and tourism, and she has been working for a private company that organises exhibits and fairs. Over the past decade, she has been involved in various expositions, including world fairs. In 2002, she notes with interest that the BIE has awarded the 2010 World Exposition to the city of Shanghai. In the spring of 2006, the national government of the country where Alice's company is located sends out a call for applications for its national pavilion at the impending Shanghai event. The pavilion will be commissioned by the country's ministry of foreign affairs, and it will receive a combination of public and private funding. Alice gathers a team of creative designers, consisting of professionals from several companies that each specialise in separate aspects of the project: branding, interior design, architecture, and construction. Together, this consortium brainstorms how to connect the Shanghai Expo theme 'better city, better life' to the country they

mean to represent. They meet with government officials and advisors in academia, cultural sectors, and commerce to hear suggestions and inform themselves about any relevant requirements that core stakeholders might have.

Over the course of the year, Alice's team draws up a draft proposal, which includes the conceptual framework for the pavilion and its exhibits, as well as a list of the companies with which the team will collaborate. In 2007, the government's search committee conducts a first screening to check the feasibility of the various proposals, and later that year the committee narrows down the pool of applicants. Alice and her collaborators are shortlisted, and they proceed to develop their proposal in more detail until, in early 2008, the search committee comes together to make its final decision. The vote is in Alice's favour, and she signs a formal contract to organise the country's national pavilion. At this point, representatives from the national government also sign a participant contract with the BIE.

Now the practical work begins. The architectural bureau to which Alice outsources the building design process spends the rest of 2008 planning the construction in detail, in line with the parameters set in the successful application. This also means contacting the Chinese authorities at the Shiboju and arranging the area on which the pavilion will later be built. Within the zone designated for participants from their specific geographical region of origin, Alice's team is able to reserve one of the coveted spots along a main thoroughfare.

As Alice joins a delegation to Shanghai, she also registers her pavilion as a Chinese company, so that she can start sub-contracting Chinese suppliers for the construction process. In late 2008, she attends a ceremony to break ground on the expo lot in Pudong. At this point, the interior design team is already in continuous exchange with the architects. The pavilion will later feature large video installations, and filming for these sub-projects is also underway at this point, though most of the process of designing the actual exhibits and their contents does not start until early 2009, when the foundations of the pavilion have been laid down.

During this time, Alice also organises surveys in China to see what the public there expects from this particular country's national pavilion. This feedback, together with input from various government officials at home, is handed over to several famous artists who will realise their own

vision for the pavilion exhibits within the general outlines that Alice and her team provide.

Since the national pavilion will receive a substantial amount of its budget from the private sector, Alice has to negotiate both conceptual and practical issues with industry representatives throughout this phase of the project. 2009 starts fairly hectically, as Alice and her team meet with representatives of up to 30 companies and multinational corporations, carefully balancing the various needs and expectations.

For about the first half of 2009, the Chinese contractors are busy constructing the pavilion. Throughout this time, Alice and her colleagues coordinate practical matters with representatives of the Shiboju, ranging from transport to fire safety. Alice also collaborates with other pavilion organisers, many of whom she knows through her participation in past international events. Where the various pavilion organisers share her goals, she joins collaborative efforts to streamline bureaucratic processes between the foreign participants and the Shanghai side, for instance ensuring swift visa access and journalist accreditation for visitors from Alice's country. At the same time, she represents her company's interests by building personal relations with Chinese officials, and she occasionally bypasses the official Shiboju to get direct access to the departments that are responsible for issues such as logistics and transport.

By spring 2010, the largest part of the exhibit is installed, and the Shiboju is sending a delegation of censors to check that the content does not breach any PRC laws. Since Alice's pavilion showcases her country as a potential trade partner and tourist destination for Chinese audiences, the exhibits are largely uncontroversial, and showing the Chinese officials around is a mere formality. Alice is nevertheless concerned about a modern history exhibit that a renowned activist-artist put together, and which she thinks might upset the censors, so she denies the delegation access to that part of the pavilion, claiming that the exhibit is still under construction.

As Alice prepares for the grand opening of the expo in May 2010, her pavilion's exhibits are ready as planned. From April onwards, her full staff of caterers, press spokespersons, drivers, and guides is on site. Throughout April, they are going through trial runs with test audiences, and on 1 May 2010 the pavilion officially opens its doors to the public. Over the coming months the pavilion will not only see tourists file through the exhibits, but it will also host diplomatic, cultural, and trade delegations as well as journalists in its office spaces.

At the end of October, when the massive spectacle finally comes to a close, roughly 50,000 people will have passed through the pavilion exhibits each day, 98 per cent of them Chinese. Alice will have hosted over 200 business events that attracted nearly 20,000 entrepreneurs. She will also have hosted more than 2,000 cultural performances, featuring hundreds of artists, and she will have welcomed about 8,000 VIP delegates over the course of the six months. These will have included several heads of state and about three dozen ministers or ministerial-level officials.

The process I have described here of course varies, depending on the country of origin. Between the 189 national participants at the Shanghai Expo, a couple of general differences deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, the numbers of visitors and delegations were not all as high as for Alice's hypothetical pavilion, which I have modelled on the largest national pavilions, such as the Australian pavilion, which saw every tenth expo visitor pass through its exhibits (see Harrison 2010). Smaller pavilions saw far fewer visitors.

Secondly, not all parties mustered the finances to host such a large pavilion, with many smaller countries opting for pre-built, standardised constructs, or for a booth in a larger exhibition hall. In some cases, the financial crisis had a major impact on pavilion finances. While most pavilions had earmarked funding years before the crisis hit, some had to significantly scale back their efforts as resources suddenly dwindled away in 2008 and 2009.

Thirdly, the degree to which pavilion organisers collaborated with, and relied on, commercial sponsors varied from pavilion to pavilion. Some pavilions were largely financed by their respective nation-state governments, usually through a combination of ministries, e.g. of commerce, foreign affairs, and culture. Others were financed solely through commercial sponsors (see below). The effects of such commercial financing also varied greatly. While some companies were happy to take a hands-off approach and simply contribute to the effort, in exchange for acknowledgement, product placement, and chances to participate in commercial endeavours at the final site, others had their own ideas about exhibit design and pressured pavilion organisers to arrange the exhibits according to their own rationales.

Finally, the timing of the design phases and the importance of different stakeholders during these phases varied. For instance, the German and Japanese pavilions collaborated strongly with enterprises from their respective countries, closely integrating products and company narratives

into their exhibits and shows early on. Other pavilions, like the Spanish one, handed the core design responsibilities over to famous Spanish artists, who worked largely independently of government and industry control.

3.7 The discursive horizons of networked spectacles

Despite these differences, it is nevertheless useful in this context to conceptualise the decision-making process in the general terms I have narrated above, since such a description highlights what constraints the chain of interactions imposed on the organisers and their communication strategy. The construction of discourses at the Shanghai Expo took place within overlapping organisational networks, each with its own demands. These networks provided the institutional boundaries that defined what could and could not be communicated, and the creativity to design discursive statements was consequently limited to the realm where all institutional frameworks overlapped (see Figure 3.3); a space which I call the discursive horizon.

The first set of constraints is located at the international level. The plans of expo participants have to conform to international institutions, in this case the general guidelines of the BIE, which is represented at the event by a steering committee. The BIE aims to 'ensure the smooth running of the Expo' (BIE 2011), and to this end it regulates the 'rules and procedures concerning international exhibitions' (BIE 1928/1988: Protocol §1). This means that the BIE controls, for instance, who is allowed to participate in a world expo, what qualifies as an acceptable expo theme, and what obligations the host and the participants have (*ibid.*: Conventions).

The second set of constraints is created by actors in the pavilion's country of origin. The most readily apparent constraint is that the project has to adhere to a certain budget. As mentioned above, the US pavilion is an interesting example of how domestic legislation connects to pavilion finances: US federal legislation prohibits the use of public funds at world exhibitions (Minter 2010a), which created major planning difficulties for the US pavilion organisers and almost prevented the USA from being present at the event at all — an outcome that might have taken on powerful (and for the US embarrassing) new meanings within the context of the politically charged miniature world that the expo presented. In

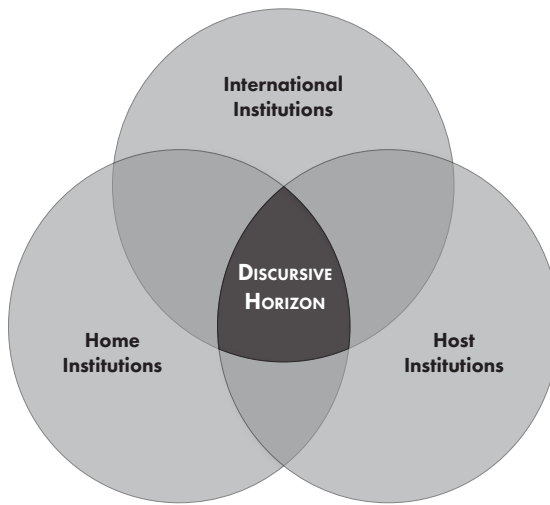


Figure 3.3: Overlapping Institutional Frameworks and the Discursive Horizon at the Shanghai World Exposition. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

addition to such legislative matters, the economic downturn of the world economy after 2008 also affected many pavilion budgets. For instance, the Polish pavilion had to reduce its scope fundamentally on short notice: whereas the building was originally supposed to feature an elaborate glass exterior, the organisers had to settle for a less expensive paper-cut design in the end, after their budget had been reduced by about 70 per cent.

At the level of domestic constraints, the pavilion content also has to reflect the overall public relations strategy of the respective government and any relevant private sponsors, while simultaneously remaining committed to the vision that the various designers and artists pursue during their design work. This may lead to clashes between creative visions and the intentions of those who commissioned the pavilion, as was the case with the controversial Spanish exhibition designed by Basilio Martín Patino, who referred to the 2004 Madrid train bombing, and by Isabel Coixet, who displayed a disturbingly uncanny oversized animatronic baby (*Expaña Expone 2010*). Such factors provide the institutional framework at home.

Finally, the project has to adhere to Chinese rules and regulations, which include both national-level legislation and local regulations, as well as the overall theme that the Chinese organisers have set (in this case: ‘better city, better life’) and which the Shiboju coordinates and

implements through its various members. These members in turn range from officials in public security and foreign affairs to state media workers, party propaganda experts, university academics, and administrators from logistics administrations such as fire departments. Their interpretations of Chinese regulations, their organisational practices, and their plans for the overall expo form the third set of constraints to which all participants have to adhere.

Overall, the overlapping constraints create a limited area of possibilities for creating discursive statements, though it should also be pointed out that this bounded space still gives unlimited opportunities to combine symbolic elements into new and emergent meanings. Moreover, the various pavilion organisers and designers frequently reinterpreted or actively pushed back against certain constraints, expanding their discursive horizon in the process. Nevertheless, the incentives at networked spectacles like the Shanghai Expo were strongly stacked in favour of discursive assemblages that aligned with the host organiser's vision for the event.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how various actors came together to organise the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and the Shanghai Expo. These processes took place within complex networks that the Chinese authorities assembled domestically, and they were linked to existing international event networks. On the part of the ruling CCP, this involved long-standing practices of media management, including the various mechanisms through which the party manages state actors, and a number of 'hard' controls that state actors at times apply to processes of cultural production. It also, however, involved less intrusive measures that relied on public-private partnerships, delegation to non-state actors, and market forces. I have described this combination of strategies as 'cultural governance', an approach that attempts to regulate social processes by indirectly regulating the cultural resources from which those processes draw.

As a result of this approach, actors with at times different views and interests joined the process of assembling the events and their discourses. The PRC's administration under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao seems to have been fairly content to let these attempts play out

within broad constraints, many of which coincided with values already imbued in the international networks with which actors were familiar.

In subsequent chapters of this book, I examine more closely how actors fed different, often contradictory discourses into China's networked spectacles. Yet, despite complex and often antagonistic interactions, and despite the discursive ruptures and fractures that these interactions created (see chapter 8), there was also a sense that an overarching narrative emerged out of these events. The networked practices at spectacles like the expo reproduced many of the discourses familiar from genres like sporting competitions and world fairs. In the case of the Shanghai Expo, the idiosyncratic interactions of thousands of organisers and event planners led to an event territory that to many observers seemed like a miniature version of the world, inviting interpretations about China's role in international politics that the PRC's leadership may not have intended, and that in fact clashed with the state's foreign policy strategy and the ruling party's self-perception. Rather than view the PRC as a peaceful and responsible partner in international relations, foreign journalists and event participants continued to rely on frames of imperial ostentation as they blended available semiotic resources into their own meanings.

Collective meaning-making may then not always have coincided with official CCP discourses, and yet these official discourses are a central part of China's networked spectacles. Before turning to some of the contestations that accompanied these spectacles, it is worth asking what state and party actors were communicating, and what relevance these official representations play in Chinese politics. These are questions that the next chapter explores.