

## 5 Designing Chinese Nationalism

The camera circles around a construction site. Steel girders are lowered onto a base. Sparks fly as the pieces are welded together. Off-screen, a male voice explains:

The Bird's Nest, the Water Cube, and the other Olympic sites not only feature unique designs, but also Olympic architecture of world-class technological prowess. In terms of materials, technologies, construction, and many other related elements, they embody the Chinese people's ability to put into practice their dream of blazing their own new trails.

鸟巢、水立方等奥运场馆不但造型别致更是具世界级技术难度的奥运建筑。在材料、技术、施工等诸多环节都体现了中国人自主创新梦想实践能力。

An animation shows the steel frame of Beijing's National Stadium taking shape step by step, then the camera switches to shots of construction crews welding steel into place, transporting materials, measuring the site, and assembling the girders. The voice continues:

The Bird's Nest steel structure is unparalleled in the world. Before the Bird's Nest, no one in China had ever produced such high-strength rolled steel. To ensure that the construction of the Bird's Nest went smoothly, the project's scientific staff had to tackle three key technological challenges before the new type of rolled steel could be manufactured. It not only had to exceed unprecedented thickness and size, it also needed to possess the desirable anti-seismic qualities, temperature resistance, welding properties, and so on. China's own innovative rolled steel was hard as nails as it propped up the Bird's Nest. The exterior steel structure of the Bird's Nest required 42,000 tons of rolled steel. The whole construction, including the concrete and the screw threads, required 110,000

tons of steel. Using not a single kilogramme of foreign steel, the Bird's Nest became genuinely 'made in China'.

鸟巢的钢结构是世界上独一无二的工程。在鸟巢之前，国内从未生产过这种高强度的钢材。为了保障奥运工程的顺利施工，工程的科研人员经过三次技术“攻关”才研制出了新型的钢材材料。它不仅在钢材厚度和使用范围上都前所未有，而且具有良好的抗震性、抗低温性、可焊性等特点。中国自主创新的钢材撑起了鸟巢的钢筋铁骨。鸟巢外都钢结构的钢材用量为4.2万吨。整个工程的总用钢量包括混凝土中的钢材、螺纹钢等达到11万吨。没有使用一公斤外国钢铁，鸟巢成为了地地道道的“中国造”。

The narrative goes on to illustrate the engineering feats required to build the National Aquatics Centre, then the camera returns to a studio where the female host of the architectural programme, Wu Xiaoli (吴小莉), concludes:

The Olympics have seen a century come and go, and they are still going strong. For a city, for a nation, the Olympic Games are about more than who hosts the contests or who wins the gold medals. More importantly, they are about showing that particular city's cultural essence and national culture. No matter whether it is the Bird's Nest, the Water Cube, or some other Olympic building, they are monuments of Olympic history, and they are the greatest examples of modern construction in the new city of Beijing, and they will inevitably have a profound influence on the future lives of 17 million Beijing citizens.

“奥林匹克”历经百年而不衰，奥运会对于一个城市，对于一个国家来说不仅仅在于谁举办了赛事，谁赢得了金牌。更重要的是通过奥运会能够展示这座城市的文化精神和民族文化。无论是鸟巢、水立方还是其他的奥运场馆建筑，它们不但是奥运历史上的纪念碑，也将是新城北京最具代表的现代建筑标识，必将深远影响1700万北京市民未来的生活形态。

This scene is part of a TV documentary on famous buildings in China's capital, co-produced by several Cantonese cultural enterprises and Hong Kong's Phoenix TV; the documentary became part of the officially

endorsed line of Olympics souvenirs available at the Olympic event sites that I discussed in the previous chapter. The programme, titled *New Beijing* (Liu & Wong 2007: time code 24:21), illustrates how officially approved cultural products made sense of mass event infrastructures, using the lens of nationalism. The documentary explicitly attempts to inspire pride in the Bird's Nest stadium and other architectural marvels in Beijing, presenting these buildings as symbols of national achievement. In a similar vein, the architects of the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion justified their fusion of selectively curated pre-modern concepts and state-of-the art engineering as quintessentially 'Chinese'. The designers describe the building as encapsulating the 'Chinese spirit' (*Zhongguo jingshen* 中国精神; SCAT 2010: 16 & 41) and the idea of a 'contemporary spirit with Chinese characteristics' (*Zhongguo tese, shidai jingshen* 中国特色, 时代精神; *ibid*: 16).

Statements and symbols of the Chinese nation were ubiquitous during China's networked spectacles. I have already discussed how the authorities provided a framework of semiotic resources during these important events, and how they tried to ensure that these resources were stacked and staged in ways that created an overarching official narrative of national revival. These activities, which involved state and non-state actors alike, produced a multitude of discursive statements that frequently reworked the ideological parameters the CCP had set for these events, and this was also true for the many meanings that actors constructed about the nation, and the strategies they deployed to invite an emotional investment in the idea of national belonging.

China's networked spectacles are, at their core, nationalist events. In this, they closely follow the general pattern of such spectacles around the world, and of mass events throughout modern history. Adopting the same strong focus on nation-states as principle actors in political affairs, the Chinese authorities built their own events strongly around ideas related to the Chinese nation, its unity under the leadership of the CCP, and its place in a Westphalian international society of sovereign nations. This emphasis on the Chinese nation-state stretched across the event discourses, even extending to the meaning-making processes surrounding the physical event infrastructure itself, particularly the iconic buildings in Beijing and Shanghai mentioned earlier.

China's networked spectacles were full of statements that signalled belonging to the Chinese nation, and official actors frequently used the opportunity to produce nationalist discourse to redefine what the

Chinese nation should stand for at the outset of the 21st century. This chapter examines some of this creative ideological work. It first briefly sketches how scholarship has traditionally made sense of nationalism and media, before discussing how various official Chinese actors have been constructing a repertoire of discursive resources in the service of the imagined community that is the nation. Next, I discuss how symbolic resources are deployed to personify the nation and cast it in the role of a family member. This also includes a closer look at activities that frame the nation and its state as benevolent. Next, I examine discursive strategies that seemingly remove state actors from the process of constructing the nation, and I explore in more detail how such actors invite emotional investment in the imagined community they have drawn up. Finally, I show how actors reimagined the nation's past during China's networked spectacles, and I conclude with a discussion of how official discursive practices at these spectacles were geared towards creating opportunities for participants to partake ritually in the experience of belonging to the imagined community of the nation.

## 5.1 Mediating the Chinese nation

Nations and their driving ideology, nationalism, are intimately tied to networked communication and interaction. Nations are what Benedict Anderson (2006) has famously called 'imagined communities': groups of people whose members do not all know each other, but who believe they share certain commonalities, such as a collective language, history, race, or set of values and institutions. These presumed commonalities provide the foundation for members' sense of provenance and shared destiny. Historically, it has been elites (Gellner 1983/2006 & 1997) such as intellectuals, artists, politicians, bureaucrats, and merchants who utilised existing discursive tropes (Shapiro 2004, Smith 1993 & 1998) to mobilise large masses of people in the service of building the nation-state (Breuilly 1993), that is: a set of modern political institutions that draws its *raison d'être* from the idea that its subjects are a united and sovereign group, inhabiting a collective homeland that requires autonomous, representative government (for discussions of this history see the contributions in Breuilly 2013).

This is not to say that nationalism is a wholly elite-based ideology, designed strategically by agents in the service of the nation-state to

legitimate their political agenda, although such activities certainly make up an important part of nationalism. As nation-state institutions become the norm for governing large numbers of people, and as official actors and the subjects of the nation-state interact over time, nationalist ideas gradually enter the realm of common-sense background knowledge, becoming seemingly trivial (Billig 2009), but actually forming a powerful framework for understanding the world. Media have traditionally played an important role in this process, allowing state actors to circulate the markers of national association widely. This has involved modern mass-media technologies, such as print and broadcasting, which have provided elite actors with the ability to communicate in vernacular language, using shared symbols to reach a national audience (Anderson 2006). It has also included the ability of state actors to take charge of semiotic resources associated with the nation: by assuring that national coins, stamps, and flags circulate through national networks, by constructing statues and monuments, and by naming streets and squares after prominent members of the nation, state actors have infused public space with 'banal' symbols and turned 'background space into homeland space' (Billig 2009: 43). Any actors wanting to take action on issues related to these national frameworks of understanding will have to position themselves vis-à-vis the parameters that nationalism provides, whether to evoke and reinforce these parameters or challenge and change them. Over time, across diverse and numerous chains of ritual interactions, actors thus shape what the components of nationalism mean, creating a fluid yet bounded set of concepts and representations that inform the politics of their nation-state.

In the Chinese case, attempts to establish a framework of national meanings that could become the foundations of a modern nation-state date back to the late Qing Dynasty, and they paved the way for the nation-building efforts of the Nationalist Party as well as the Communist Party during the Republican period (for discussions of nationalism in these historical contexts see Duara 1997, Mitter 2004, and Zarrow 2005). The legacies of these attempts to construct a unified Chinese nation have informed the politics of the PRC to this day (see Dirlik 2011a and Hughes 2006), as well as politics in various other Chinese territories, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese diaspora around the world. This has made Chinese nationalism a discursive domain of continuous contestation, and to this day the idea of 'Chineseness' is subject to very different interpretations. These range from attempts to critically assess cultural

and linguistic traditions in the service of a cosmopolitan pan-Chinese community to projects that define China along culturally essentialist and frequently racial lines (see Dirlik 2011a; Leibold 2010 has discussed Han chauvinism).

In the PRC, the ruling CCP has forcefully tried to take charge of nationalist discourses. In the post-Mao era, the leadership emphasised what Zhao Suisheng (2004) has called 'pragmatic nationalism', an avowedly non-aggressive form of nationalist discourse that was meant to place CCP ideology on a broad nationalist footing and generate popular support without alienating potential trade partners abroad. Through party and state media, as well as through school curricula, the leadership emphasised China as a multi-ethnic country that has sought to find its rightful place in the world, following the so-called century of humiliation (He 2007, Wang 2012). As Peter Gries (2004) has shown, this state-led nationalism has been reappropriated by bottom-up forces in China, leading to often xenophobic public movements that target perceived enemies of the nation, and that at times challenge the CCP's leadership role when nationalists feel the authorities are mishandling matters of national importance (see Nyíri et al. 2010 for the case of the Beijing Olympics).

Ongoing scholarly debates about nationalism in contemporary Chinese politics revolve around the unresolved question of whether and how popular nationalist sentiments, elite activities, and policy-making are connected. The answers range from claims that nationalism in no way informs CCP politics (Jie 2016) via arguments that the CCP and its 'smart state' (Reilly 2012) consist of rational actors who skilfully manage and manipulate nationalist sentiments (Weiss 2014), to assessments that emphasise how bottom-up nationalism has come to inform and even drive Chinese policy-making (Gries et al. 2016).

In my own work (Schneider 2018), I have traced the discursive construction of the Chinese nation across various digital realms, arguing that Chinese nationalism is today filtered through digital technologies and reprogrammed through digital networks. Actors recursively construct the meaning of the Chinese nation through search engines, websites, online encyclopaedias, microblogs, and other digital media, and this involves the authorities with their substantial switching power in digital networks, but it also involves actors as diverse as software designers, website editors, bloggers, celebrities, and online commentators, all of whom engage in their own programming activities within the pre-

designed technical affordances of digital media networks. In the end, this provides the stages on which actors perform their politics, and I consequently side with Gries and his colleagues (2016) when they argue that nationalism in today's China is not easily managed by the authorities, despite considerable efforts, but that it powerfully informs what official actors can or cannot do.

While my present study of China's networked spectacles does not explore the digital dimensions of such activities, it continues my earlier argument that, in China, diverse actors continuously shift the parameters of ideologies such as nationalism through their networked interactions (see also Schneider 2018: ch.2). As I will show in chapter 8, a good example of this is how various actors reappropriate the discursive resources that the state has flagged for use in nationalist representations. However, before exploring those activities, it is worth asking how official actors generate such a repertoire of nationalist signs in the first place, and how they try to ensure that the use of these signs aligns with their preferred politics.

## 5.2 Designing the watch signs of official discourse

The Chinese authorities have long understood that the unity required to fuel a nation has to be communicated. Networked spectacles provide an ideal occasion for flagging the nation to diverse domestic audiences, and events like the Beijing Olympics, the 60th Anniversary, and the Shanghai Expo became important discursive moments for elite actors to try to evoke and spread recognisable signs of the nation in the service of their politics, or to design wholly new signs as part of their nation-maintenance activities. This is a core task of the CCP's propaganda system, the complex network of party and state institutions that is switched into all major media and mass communication activities in China (see Shambaugh 2007). Several important organisations sit at crucial nodes in that propaganda network, specifically two committees that make programmatic choices, and two agencies that implement CCP propaganda and provide feedback on its effectiveness. The two committees are the Central Leading Group for Propaganda (中央宣传思想领导小组), which coordinates ideological work across the network, and the Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilisation (中央精神文明建设指导委员会), which is the main steering committee

for designing CCP ideology. The two agencies that implement the party's propaganda directives are the Central Propaganda Department (中央宣传部), charged with the practical propaganda efforts as well as media control and censorship, and the Central Policy Research Office (中央政策研究室), which among other things protocols all major CCP congresses, drafts party decrees and speeches, and is responsible for designing major ideological concepts like 'scientific development' or the 'China Dream'.

There is significant overlap and continuity between these organisations, especially on the personnel side: for instance, Li Changchun simultaneously served as the head of the leading group for propaganda and the spiritual civilisation commission, Liu Yunshan became his successor as the head of the leading group for propaganda after a decade of running the propaganda department, and at the time of writing Wang Huning, the man believed to be responsible for many of the party's ideological innovations since the Jiang Zemin period (see Hu 2013), is serving simultaneously as the director of the policy research office and chairman of the spiritual civilisation commission.

The cadres who staff these central party committees and agencies design the general direction of CCP ideology, decide what semiotic resources should be used for promoting that direction, and establish what acceptable, correct discourse on political topics should look like. This includes approving the set of phrases and slogans that form the backbone of official propaganda texts, known in Chinese as *tifa* (提法). This official CCP rhetoric is likely to seem stilted and arcane to outside observers but, as Gang (2012) has argued, it serves as a set of recurring 'buzzwords' or 'watch words' that flag official ideological positions. Examples include phrases like 'harmony' or 'scientific development', which have powerfully been deployed by CCP actors in their efforts to programme networks and set the parameters for making and implementing policy (see Ohlberg 2015 for additional interesting *tifa* examples and Brady 2008: 100-101 for a discussion).

I would argue that much like these 'watch words', Chinese political discourse also contains what might be called 'watch signs', that is symbols that serve as convenient shorthand for ideological concepts or statements. Examples include the trope of dancing minorities that is so frequently deployed in official propaganda to signal ethnic unity (see Landsberger 2016b), or the socialist-realist hero gaze that illustrates steadfast dedication to the socialist road (see Landsberger 2016a and 2016d for examples from different time periods). Such visual tropes unite

a plethora of background assumptions in convenient signposts, and these signposts can be used much like the linguistic tropes of Chinese *tifa* to shine a light on important waypoints in the CCP's ideological work.

Discourses about the nation are particularly rich contexts for exploring the use of such 'watch signs', especially considering how strongly the construction of imagined communities relies on actors establishing a recognisable set of community markers. Take the example of how the CCP has used occasions like natural disasters to promote a set of visual tropes that signal national unity under the party's leadership. My colleague Hwang Yih-jye and I have analysed such tropes in our study of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (Schneider & Hwang 2014b). We found that the discourse was saturated with both linguistic and visual cues that pointed towards a small set of ideological meanings, most notably the ideas that the Chinese people were united through the catastrophe, that a vibrant Chinese civil society stood ready to cushion the blow of the tragedy, and that the party and its People's Liberation Army (PLA) were successfully spearheading the relief efforts, demonstrating that the leadership remained close to the needs of the masses. The party leveraged specific phrases to embody this representation of their efforts, for instance 'in unity, there is strength' (*wan zhong yi xin* 万众一心) and 'putting people first' (*yi ren wei ben* 以人为本), and it provided visual cues in its own propaganda to evoke these sentiments. This included frequent images of relief workers carrying victims on stretchers across rubble, as well as people joining hands, or hands reaching out across rubble. These tropes circulated throughout the various disaster representations, for instance through the news, but they were also adopted in many cultural products that were not part of official propaganda. For instance the blockbuster disaster movie *Aftershock*, directed by Feng Xiaogang and released in 2010, utilised the same iconography and made many of the same discursive statements about the nation and the challenges it faces. It deployed the readily available semiotic resources familiar from official discourse to create rich emotional tapestries for making sense of the nation's progress, using iconic natural disasters as its lens.

Figure 5.1 shows examples of these visual callouts from three different cultural products, two of them part of the networked spectacles I am analysing here: the 2010 film *Aftershock*, the musical production *Road to Revival* that was staged for the 60th anniversary of the PRC, and the feature film *The Road to our Beautiful Life* that was part of the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion. Disaster tropes such as hands reaching out (left) or

relief workers carrying victims across rubble (right) were indeed deployed all throughout China's networked spectacles. At the expo, the state-owned People's Insurance Company of China decided to build into its pavilion floor various miniature models of famous floods, landslides, and earthquakes that had taken place in China. The Chinese Red Cross Society showed footage of disasters around the world, including slow-motion scenes from the Sichuan earthquake relief efforts, underscored with sentimental music. The official theme pavilion 'City Being' contained a feature film that showed scenes from famous squares around the world, and China was represented in this segment by Wenchuan Square in the earthquake-stricken region. Similar emotional triggers were also part of the anniversary parade and the cultural products that accompanied it. As a whole, these references to the disaster inspired associations with the imagined community of the nation while at the same time legitimating the authorities' developmental agenda (see Schneider & Hwang 2014b for a longer discussion).

A particularly common discursive move was to portray relief efforts as a kind of war, and anyone involved in these efforts as a 'combatant' (zhanshi 战士). Whether linguistically, visually, or acoustically, disaster discourses during these events connected the input space of the natural calamity with the input space of military engagement; a strategy that has also, in the past, been applied to other ostensible national challenges, such as the 'battle' against communal diseases. Stefan Lansberger (2016c), for instance, has covered the 2003 'people's war' against SARS in his propaganda poster collection, and Zhang Xiaoling (2006) has analysed the news coverage that accompanied the outbreak in China.

Militarist symbolism is not new in Chinese political discourses, or in discourses more generally. Creating analogies with wars adds an alarmist, existentialist dimension to the issue at hand, and it demands that the community come together as one in such a time of need. A particularly evocative example of how the official disaster discourse during China's networked spectacles tried to activate this martial input space was the *Road to Revival* musical, which featured a scene specifically about the Sichuan earthquake. In this scene, male relief workers in uniforms stood united as they extracted a young girl in a red dress from imaginary rubble. While the scene was accompanied by a sentimental song and the atmosphere was generally more muted than that of other scenes, the visual tropes recalled the militarist and highly gendered discourse that official media had been communicating.



Figure 5.1: Disaster Tropes Across Three Cultural Products: the film *Aftershock* (top), the musical *Road to Revival* (middle), and the China Pavilion feature film *The Road to our Beautiful Life* (bottom). Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

The use of disaster tropes highlights how the authorities have used their staged spectacles as occasions for infusing wider networks of cultural production with symbols that evoke the imagined community of the nation and that lend themselves to constructing narratives of suffering and heroism. The ways these symbols are juxtaposed as part of a militarist input space to public meaning-making efforts allows actors to securitise calamities like floods and earthquakes, suggesting that these events are national crises that require on the one hand extraordinary solidarity on the part of citizens and on the other hand exceptional degrees of state interventions. Using China's networked spectacles as a vehicle, the authorities implied that these efforts could only succeed if the nation remained united under the leadership of the ruling party.

It is worth noting that throughout China's networked spectacles much of the communicative effort to construct an official narrative around the nation was geared towards hiding the fact that such efforts

were taking place at all. In many staged attempts to represent the nation, official actors strategically downplayed their own role in creating such representations. Take the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, which repeatedly obscured the fact that state and party actors, together with their commercial partners, were actively redefining knowledge about the Chinese nation. This was in part achieved through intense pathos, an issue I return to later. It was also achieved through the visual sleights-of-hand that the director's team employed and through the language that framed the event for domestic viewers.

Visually, the performances were tightly planned and organised to ensure that viewers would not notice the transitions between the elaborate arrangements of people and props. As one of the organisers told me, and as journalists from Taiwan also reported (see chapter 8), the director's team faced the task of moving thousands of actors on to and off the stage, and this task was made more challenging by the fact that the team was aiming to create organic transitions that would not interrupt viewer immersion. This may seem like an understandable practical concern, but it has conceptual implications: to create a 'natural' feeling for a performance is itself an artistic choice, informed by a particular understanding of performative arts. Realist and postmodern strands of theatre, for instance, might intentionally allow viewers to witness transitions to shatter the illusion of natural immersion and draw attention to the performance as an artifice. This is the famous Brechtian estrangement effect ('*Verfremdungseffekt*'), which aims to push viewers to distance themselves from the event and its narrative (the seminal treatment of Brecht is arguably Jameson 1998).

For the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony the designers opted for a naturalising approach that tried to keep the illusion of the performance intact, and the broadcaster CCTV extended this rationale to its telecasting. When the two commentators described what audiences were witnessing on stage, they avoided any explicit reference to the fact that it was a team of performers who were arranging and enacting various interpretations of cultural artefacts. Instead, the commentators described how these cultural artefacts simply 'emerged' (*chengxian* 呈现) before the viewers' eyes. Central performers such as the pianist Lang Lang 'become the focus of our gaze' (成为我们瞩目的焦点). The tranquil scene of Taiji performances 'appears' (*chuxian* 出现). This neutralising language entirely removes the organisers from the event and, by extension, suggests that the subtle rearrangement of national symbols and the shifts

in meanings are natural. This practice was also on display at the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion, which opted not to place Chinese leaders at the centre of its narrative but instead suggested that the pavilion represented the imagined community of common Chinese people, for instance by displaying stereotypical Chinese living rooms, or by designing its feature films around the stories of seemingly 'normal' Chinese.

### 5.3 The nation as a person

The earthquake scene from the 2009 musical production *Road to Revival* illustrates how the watch signs of Chinese official discourse circulate during networked spectacles like the 60th anniversary of the PRC, but it also showcases a particular communication strategy for making statements about the nation: the use of 'synecdoche'. A synecdoche is a rhetorical device that suggests a part should stand for the whole, or vice versa. The relief workers are extracting not just a young girl, but a girl in a red dress that stands for the entire nation. Such personification was widespread during China's networked spectacles, where both the nation and the nation-state were regularly represented as people.

This is visible in the ways Chinese news media reported the national anniversary. Take mainstream newspaper front pages on 1 October 2009, the day of the event, as examples of how various papers took the officially approved national symbols and contextualised them within stories of the nation-state as a person. The Czech blogger Gabor (2009) has captured a selection of these front pages on his website, and I have reproduced this image here, to illustrate a number of discursive practices that generally characterised this reporting (Figure 5.2).

A number of commonalities immediately catch the eye: the front pages overwhelmingly use the colours red and yellow, and they reproduce national symbols like the PRC flag, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, and the official logo of the event (a red number 60, with a partial representation of the national emblem at its centre, itself a stylised facsimile of the Gate of Heavenly Peace). Attempts to put this symbolism to use to anthropomorphise the nation play a major role in the reporting: numerous newspaper front pages personified the nation-state for their readers by, for instance, wishing the PRC a 'happy birthday' (*shengri kuaile* 生日快乐 or *huadan* 华诞). Some opt to address the nation-state directly, with one newspaper using the formal honorific pronoun for 'you' (*nin* 您). The



Figure 5.2: Selected Chinese Newspaper Front Pages on the Day of the PRC's 60th Anniversary (reproduced from Gabor 2009).

news discourse further uses language related to the age of living things, e.g. opting for the character that counts years of age (*sui* 岁) rather than years in a calendar (*nian* 年) to discuss how 'old' the PRC is, or describing how the PRC has 'grown up' or 'matured' (*chengzhang* 成长).

These are all important discursive moves, since they suggest that nation-states deserve to be treated like people. In the Chinese context, the metaphor is more powerful yet, with the media workers at major Chinese newspapers frequently connecting such personifications with statements about China as the 'ancestral land' (*zuguo* 祖国), a term that can be translated into 'fatherland' or 'motherland', depending on the context, and that is indeed subject to substantial gender politics in Chinese political discourse. For instance, popular TV drama series about famous dynastic rulers frequently connect these men to paternalistic discourses in which benevolent rulers act as strict yet kind father figures to their subjects (for an example see my own discussion of the series *The Great Han Emperor Wu*; Schneider 2012: ch.2). In other contexts, cultural products such as the multi-media opera *Road to Revival* contain segments that use women to represent the nation, e.g. when the nation is 'raped' by foreign invasion or becomes the 'victim' of natural disaster, as discussed earlier.

Nationalist discourses and symbolism are thus closely entwined with gender discourses in modern China, and they connect with and reproduce representations of masculinity and femininity that are by no means innocent. It is usually the nation (the community of people) that is represented as a nurturing woman in need of protection, and it is in turn the nation-state (the ruler over that national community) that is represented as a strong fatherly figure; these interrelated interpretations generate a sexist context in which paternalistic, authoritarian policies become more plausible and more easily justifiable (for a discussion of how political discourses rely on father and mother figures more generally see Lackoff & Johnson 1987/2003).

Even where the discourse is not explicitly gendered, the move to present the nation-state as a family member provides an important input space for meaning-construction about the nation. This input space is readily available across nationalist discourses in China more generally, which are rife with metaphors of family relations. For instance, one of the nationalist songs that accompanied China's networked spectacles was Jackie Chan's performance of *Country*, a song that played with the fact that the Chinese word for 'country' or 'nation-state' (*guojia* 国家)

is a combination of the characters for 'state' (*guo* 国, also sometimes translated as 'country') and for 'home' (*jia* 家, also translated as 'family'). It features lyrics such as 'only if the country is strong will our home be prosperous' (有了强的国, 才有富的家), and 'this state is my state, this home is my home, I love my state, I love my home, I love my... country' (国是我的国, 家是我的家, 我爱我的国, 我爱我的家, 我爱我.....国家). Through such a fusion of concepts, first of 'state' and 'country' (from *guo* 国 to *guojia* 国家) and then of 'country' and 'family' (from *guojia* 国家 to *jia* 家), the song conflates modern political institutions and more perennial elements of the human lifeworld, in this case family relations.

This longstanding discourse of the nation-state as a home, and potentially as a family member, lends itself to further discursive activities, for instance when actors take the personified nation to imply specific meanings about the PRC and its role in world politics. Organisers of international events like the Olympics and world fair were heavily involved in such activities, which were often highly complex. The actors had to anticipate potentially different perceptions of nationalism among diverse audiences. The events needed to appeal to Chinese viewers in the PRC and in other Chinese-speaking regions, covering a broad spectrum of ideological positions and complex identity practices associated with ideas of 'Chineseness'; they also needed to appeal to foreign observers, again covering a broad range of positions vis-à-vis China: the nationalist symbolism needed to be acceptable to audiences without much knowledge of the PRC, but also to audiences highly critical of Chinese nationalism and, potentially, also to audiences who might find nationalist themes offensive in principle.

The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony is an excellent example of how organisers tried to cope with this dilemma, and how they creatively reframed the meaning of the Chinese nation. Recall the girl in the red dress singing the revolutionary song *Ode to the Motherland*. The organisers reportedly went to great lengths in casting this specific child to play the role, and they went as far as having her lip-sync the song, which was sung by a different girl entirely. Much has been made of the perceived duplicity and 'fakeness' of this performance (e.g. Branigan 2008), but such discussions say more about the critics' understanding of authenticity and their appeals to orientalist tropes about a deceitful 'East' than about discursive practices in China. More significant in the present context is the way the organisers intentionally tried to imbue the scene with a sense

of ‘cuteness’, and the fact that this then had different implications for domestic and foreign consumption of nationalist symbolism.

In each case, the girl functions as a synecdoche, in this case a person standing in for the Chinese nation. For domestic viewers, the ‘in-group’ of national discourses, the cute girl implies that the nation is an object worthy of love: ‘cute’, *ke’ai* (可爱) in Chinese, literally translates into ‘loveable’. For foreign viewers, the girl puts the nationalist symbolism of this segment into a different frame: the potency of state symbols such as the PRC flag, the soldiers, and the anthem are meant to become diluted, while the innocent cuteness of the child-actor is placed centre-stage. Emphasising a cute girl potentially counteracts prejudices that the PRC might be a threat, and it instead turns China into a benign nation — an idea that connects with narratives of peace and harmony (see also chapter 6).

The song that the girl sings is also relevant in this context. For domestic audiences, it serves as a reference to China’s revolutionary past, a time now steeped in nostalgia. And yet it is not the original *Ode to the Motherland*. The song has been edited for the occasion, emphasising national pride while at the same time de-emphasising China’s revolutionary past.

The original ode was composed by Wang Shen (王莘) in 1950, and it consists of seven verses. It contains phrases such as ‘those who dare to cross us, we shall call for their deaths!’ (谁敢侵犯我们就叫他死亡) and ‘our leader Mao Zedong guides the way forward’ (我们领袖毛泽东指引着前进的方向). Not only have these verses been omitted here, the event organisers also changed a line in the first verse. The original wording was ‘the heroic people have stood up!’ (英雄的人民站起来了). For the Olympics, this has been replaced by a line from a later verse: ‘we love peace, we love the homeland’ (我们爱和平, 我们爱家乡). It would be hard to argue that the organisers made this change for diplomatic reasons, since only a Chinese-speaking audience would be able to know the meaning. I find it more plausible that it is the domestic audience that here receives a lesson in what it means to love the homeland today. Revolutionary zeal is replaced by the ideal of harmonious coexistence. This is a general trend throughout China’s networked spectacles under Hu Jintao’s rule, and I will show additional examples in chapter 6. Importantly, the organisers have used the opening ceremony’s flag-raising ceremony to signal national unity and investment into an imaginary homeland while at the same time reprogramming the nationalist discourse and revisiting what investment in a homeland should ultimately mean.

The organisers have achieved no mean feat: they have turned nationalism (*aiguo zhuyi* 爱国主义) into what I would call cute nationalism (*ke'ai guo zhuyi* 可爱国主义), a seemingly inoffensive symbolic representation of the nation that suggests benevolence and innocence, and that lends itself to being filled with meanings and emotional attachments from a broad range of audiences. It is the quintessential reinvention of nationalism for a networked society: a free-floating signifier, open to innocuous interpretations and yet recognisable as a trope that can be redeployed during new interactions to elicit a vague sense of unity, fill those interactions with meanings, and justify specific policy stances.

#### 5.4 Reimagining China's past

The way that actors reworked the meaning of the Chinese nation during China's networked spectacles was not limited solely to branding the nation and its state as benevolent, amicable family members and benign entities in international affairs. These representations were accompanied by concerted efforts across different media to recalibrate the Chinese nation's historiography. As Guibernau (2004: 134) has pointed out, creating a sense of belonging requires the construction of a shared past. To the CCP, it is inordinately important to provide a 'correct' reading of this past, and consecutive leaderships have continued the longstanding tradition (Mittag 2009) of conceptualising the relevance of Chinese history within the context of their own political agenda (see also Weigelin-Schwiedrzik & Schneider 2009). The networked spectacles of the Hu period are particularly interesting in this regard. They provided spaces for actors to, on the one hand, use very subtle communicative strategies to reinterpret modern history while, on the other hand, allowing often radical departures from previous interpretations.

One such example is visible in the propaganda blockbuster film *The Founding of the Republic* (Han & Huang 2009), released on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the PRC, which heavily revamped the meaning of founding figure Mao Zedong and his political ideology. In one scene (at time code 01:38:47), after the PLA has secured Beijing, Mao finds himself without his cigarettes and without a way to procure new ones. Walking through the old streets of the city and then sitting down with his allies for a meeting, he vents his frustration.

Mao Zedong: Not a shop is open in two blocks. Comrade Chengjun, you're the county committee secretary, this can't go on.

Chengjun: After entering the city, rumour had it that the capitalists and merchants were all exploiters and that we should punish them. They're so scared, no one is open for business.

Zhu De: This is no small matter. We're the best in the world at revolutions, but we've got nothing on them when it comes to economics.

Mao Zedong: Can't even get smokes without the merchants let alone market prosperity. We need them back.

毛泽东：转了两条街，没看见一个商店开门营业。成俊同志，你是县委书记，这可不行了。

成俊：进城后，传信说资本家和商人全是剥削阶级，要革他们的命。吓得这些商人买卖全不敢做了。

朱德：这不是个小问题。闹革命，我们天下第一。搞经济，我们可比不了他们。

毛泽东：没了商贩，连香烟都买不到，还谈什么市场繁荣啊。要把人家请回来。

This short scene is an example of the ideological work that takes place within official political discourse. The propaganda film reinvented what founder Mao Zedong should stand for. Indeed, my translation above follows the Chinese original as much as possible, but the official English subtitles even have Mao explicitly stating 'we need the *capitalists* back' (my emphasis).

The film is profoundly anachronistic, but that is in many ways beside the point: as an official cultural product, it interprets the PRC's past in the present, suggesting a particular understanding of contemporary affairs and justifying the politics of the day. The film goes on to reframe the relationship between Mao Zedong and his historical antagonist Chiang Kai-shek, suggesting a grudging respect between the two men as well as close similarities in their general approach to politics. In that sense, the

film also framed political activities across the Taiwan Straits, laying the ideological groundwork for potentially warmer, more respectful cross-straits relations that were developing between the Hu-Wen administration on the mainland and Ma Ying-jeou administration in Taiwan at that time.

In *The Founding of the Republic*, Mao is reimagined to the point that he ends up effectively endorsing the reform era's embrace of capitalism. Indeed, it remained a major puzzle for the creators of official cultural products throughout China's networked spectacles how they could retain the nationalist relevance of the PRC's founding figure and of the early revolutionary periods of the country's modern history, while at the same time legitimating the present leadership's de facto rejection of Maoist politics in favour of an overwhelmingly capitalist, urban, and often neoliberal modernity. Official actors generally addressed this problem in one of two ways: either by downplaying, and at times deleting, the relevance of the Mao era, or by reinterpreting that era in the context of reform-era developments.

The practice of removing Mao from the PRC's history was, for instance, on display during the Olympics opening ceremony, which eschewed any explicit references to Mao and his legacy, choosing instead to relegate revolutionary themes to the short flag-raising ceremony, and then only in the obscured form of the heavily edited and sanitised revolutionary song I have discussed above. In its representation of historical achievements, the event otherwise skipped the Mao years, instead showcasing only pre-modern and contemporary themes.

In contrast to this, the 60th anniversary parade drew more explicitly from Mao-era symbolism, but it also subtly de-emphasised the Mao era, instead showcasing primarily themes of the reform era and the Hu-Wen period. Hwang and I (2009) have calculated how much time the organisers of the parade allotted to different topics during the two-and-a-half hour march, and even if we include all floats that related in some form to the founding of the PRC under Mao Zedong, Mao-themed elements accounted for only about a fifth of the event. This stands in stark contrast to the proportion of Mao's actual rule over mainland China: by 2009, he had ruled for nearly half of the PRC's 60-year history. The parade referred to Mao only selectively, turning the chairman into a nostalgia trigger rather than a signifier of specific ideological statements. Indeed, Mao-era catastrophes like the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) were ignored during the parade.

A similarly ambiguous relationship with the first three decades of PRC history was on display in a number of places throughout the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion. For instance, the curators of the 'Reminiscence' section, which showed how PRC living rooms had changed throughout the decades, opted to start their displays only in 1978, the year that Deng Xiaoping's administration launched its policy of reforms and opening up. While the installation that was meant to represent a 1978 living room contained various paraphernalia that evoked the Mao era through their iconography, such as kitschy propaganda postcards, vintage marriage certificates framed by socialist realist representations of revolutionaries, and family pictures of people in Sun Yat-sen suits, there is curiously no single picture of Mao Zedong himself. The revolutionary backdrop is downplayed, and the emphasis is placed on the seemingly unstoppable march towards increased prosperity, arguably captured most powerfully in how the home appliances changed from one installation to the next (see also Wallis & Balsamo 2016: 42): radios, TVs, and refrigerators became updated, and they were joined by desktop computers, laptops, and other digital gadgets as time progressed.

In a similar vein, the official guidebook to the pavilion almost entirely omits the Mao era from its representations of PRC history: a timeline that is meant to depict the 'Memory of China's Urbanisation' (中国城市化记忆) starts with the year 1949, the year that Mao founded the PRC, stating (Shiboju 2010: 14):

The founding of New China placed China in a new starting position for modernisation and urbanisation. From the agrarian reform, the rebuilding of the infrastructure that had been destroyed by war, and other reconstruction plans began the construction project of imagining China's future cities.

新中国的建立使中国站在了现代化和城市化进程的新起点上，从土地改革、恢复被战争毁坏的基础设施等重建计划着手，开始设想中国未来城市的建设计划。

The next entry in the time line is then the year 1978, and the accompanying text features only a single short sentence on the late 1970s before shifting the focus to the 1980s (*ibid.*):

At the close of the 1970s, China faced a stable international political environment, allowing China to develop its external environment by implementing the reform and opening up policies. By the mid-1980s, the reforms that had started in the countryside had led to a high-tide of development for township enterprises and small towns, and the opening-up policy further accelerated the urbanisation of China's south-eastern coastal regions.

1970年代末，中国相对稳定的国际政治环境为中国实施改革开放创造了外部环境；从农村开始的改革促成1980年代中期乡镇企业和小城镇发展的高潮，而对外开放则加速了中国东南沿海地区的城市化。

After setting the stage in these terms, the guidebook then proceeds to list 19 major achievements over the subsequent three decades, including the years when CCTV first aired its New Year's Gala (1983), when the first email was sent from China (1987), when the first supermarket opened (1994), and when the PRC hosted its two recent networked spectacles: the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and now the Shanghai Expo in 2010. I have reproduced this time-line in Figure 5.3 below.

A very similar rationale to this timeline is visible in the highly stylised feature film *The Road to our Beautiful Life*, which reproduces similar timelines to those on display in the subsequent exhibit as well as in the guidebook; the film omits any negative connotations with the past, only hinting at the revolutionary period as the origin of national success, and otherwise reducing 'China' to a 30-year story of modern development. This is explicit in the shot that shows Shanghai's highly developed skyline, accompanied by the phrase '30 years China'.

It is noteworthy that the film nevertheless uses the iconography of the Mao years to make this point: the characters are the kind of socialist realist figures familiar from martyrs' memorials and other revolutionary representations; they are not characters in their own right, but instead serve as templates for the Chinese people as a whole. Visually, these figures are framed in ways that evoke much earlier CCP propaganda. The movie is filmed in highly saturated colours, making the images look like Mao-era propaganda posters. The camera dynamics contribute to this impression through low-angle hero shots and slow-motion camera movements, reproducing the perspectives of such posters and signalling the iconography as worthy of special attention. These visuals

| Year | Chinese         | English                                                  |
|------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1979 | 第一条电视商业广告播出     | First TV commercial aired                                |
| 1980 | 第一家个体工商户出现      | First private business licensed                          |
| 1981 | 第一条地铁正式开通       | First subway opened                                      |
| 1982 | 新中国第一次参加世博会     | P.R.C. participated in the World Expo for the first time |
| 1983 | 中央电视台举办首届春节联欢晚会 | First CCTV New Year's Gala held                          |
| 1984 | 居民身份证诞生         | First Resident ID card issued                            |
| 1985 | 第一张人民币信用卡出现     | First RMB credit card issued                             |
| 1987 | 第一封电子邮件发出       | First e-mail sent                                        |
| 1988 | 第一条高速公路建成通车     | First expressway opened to traffic                       |
| 1990 | 首家证券交易所开业       | First stock exchange opened                              |
| 1992 | 第一个电影节开幕        | First film festival opened                               |
| 1993 | 粮票制度取消          | Food coupon system abandoned                             |
| 1994 | 第一家超市出现         | First supermarket opened                                 |
| 1995 | 开始实施每周40小时工作制   | '40-hour work week' introduced                           |
| 1996 | 第一家网吧出现         | First Internet cafe opened                               |
| 2002 | 第一个博客网站开通       | First blog website launched                              |
| 2007 | 第一列车组火车正式运行     | First CRH train went into operation                      |
| 2008 | 第29届夏李奥运会在北京举办  | 29th Summer Olympic Games held in Beijing                |
| 2010 | 中国2010年上海世博会举办  | World Expo 2010 held in Shanghai                         |
|      | 记忆还将继续          | There are more to expect...                              |

Figure 5.3: Timeline of China's National Achievements, as presented by the Shanghai Expo Guidebook (Shiboju 2010).

are further accompanied by a pathos-laden music score that resembles revolution-era music and operas. Filtered through the lens of these recognisable tropes, the director and his team reinvent China as a land of iconic worker-heroes who, over the past three decades, have been busy building a green, hypermodern utopia. This enterprise seems to embody a non-distinct revolutionary heritage, but at the same time it endorses a capitalist modernity that has little to do with the agenda of the PRC's founding cadres.

The Mao era is not the only part of Chinese history that receives a make-over in China's networked spectacles. Pre-modern history is integrated into Chinese nationalist discourse as an important, immutable antecedent of contemporary success. During the Olympics opening ceremony (see also Barmé 2009) and throughout the official Chinese Shanghai Expo exhibits, but also in the road-to-revival cultural

products that accompanied the 60th anniversary celebrations (Schneider & Hwang 2014b), the discourse fused a series of historical developments, recognisable symbols, and famous figures, creating a sense of a unified national heritage and placing today's China in a direct line of succession with this imagined past. Considering how strongly CCP ideology previously criticised the pre-modern era as a backwards feudalist society, it is indeed remarkable how unapologetically contemporary actors place this feudal past in the service of their political projects at the start of the 21st century.

Throughout the networked spectacles that the Hu-Wen administration hosted, the pre-modern past was leveraged to legitimate contemporary practices. As discussed in chapter 4, the architectural design team behind the Shanghai Expo's China Pavilion, for instance, justified many of its engineering choices by drawing from pre-modern concepts, artefacts, iconographies, and text passages to link contemporary practices to carefully selected precursors. The same practice was also on display in the pavilion's main exhibition halls, where official actors presented contemporary China in civilisational terms, drawing a linear path through history in order to make sense of the past. In this view, history starts in the pre-imperial times of famous sages like Confucius, whom I will return to in the next chapter. Chinese civilisation then continues onwards, to the first unification of the territories that would form what later became known as China.

Recall the display of the 'National Treasure', the bronze horse and chariot figurine from the Qin period. The choice of displaying a piece of the Terracotta Army so centrally is telling. The artefact is a reference to the conquest of the first emperor, Qinshihuang (秦始皇), who united the disparate kingdoms of the region to form the first dynasty. The Qin was a short-lived and notoriously brutal period in dynastic history that was reviled by many later commentators (for discussions see Fairbank & Goldman 2006: 54-57 and Gernet 1972/2002), but it has frequently served modern politicians and intellectuals as a foil for rationalising autocratic politics in the service of national glory. The Qin emperor has been praised by Republican and PRC historians alike, and Mao himself reportedly thought highly of the first emperor's achievements, particularly his anti-intellectualist purge of scholars (Lieberthal 2003: 71). Accounts from the early 21st century then also frequently frame Qinshihuang as a hardened realist who ultimately did right by the nation. Examples include the 2002

marital arts epic *Hero*, directed by Zhang Yimou, and the 2001 television drama series *Qin Shi Huang* (Sina 2006).

In the China Pavilion, the Qin dynasty provided the backdrop before which the nation's civilisation unfolded. The Bronze Chariot Number One is the first and largest of the 'civilisational crystals' presented from pre-modern times. The artefacts cover 'eight core groups of cultural artefacts' (一八组文物为核心) that 'serve as inspiration for today' (表现...对今天的启示; Shiboju 2010: 76): metal casting, silk production, porcelain wares, paper printing, urban economy and life, traditional medicine, architecture, and artefacts associated with trade along the Silk Roads and maritime trade routes. Each of these categories serves the curators as a lens through which to explain contemporary developments and make claims about the Chinese nation, but the last category is particularly interesting; it exemplifies the practice of constructing a linear, modernist narrative out of selected pre-modern artefacts, but it also connects with performances that showcased the Silk Roads and Maritime Silk Roads during the Olympics opening ceremony two years before, effectively creating a context for national policy (Figure 5.4).

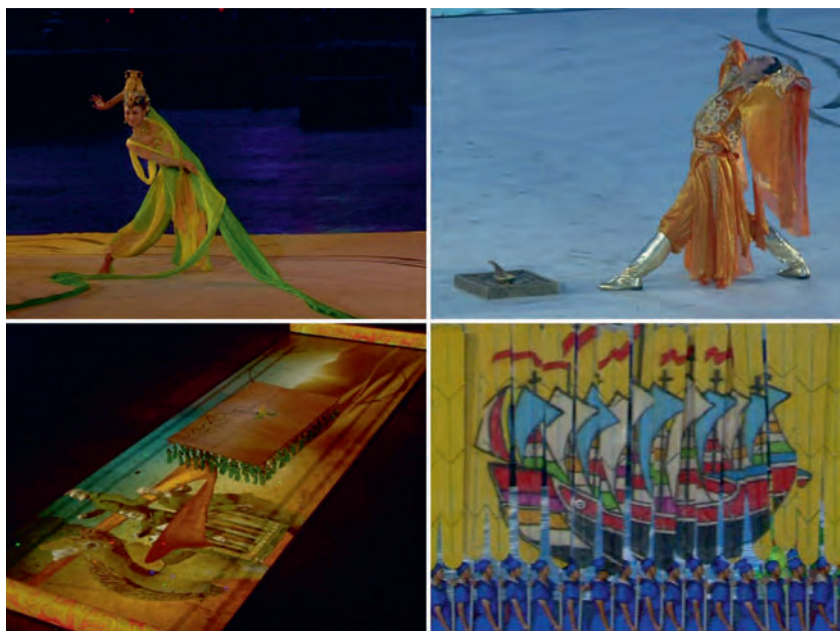


Figure 5.4: Images of the Silk Roads (left) and Maritime Silk Roads (right) during the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony. Images assembled from screenshots of online footage.

In the China Pavilion, the topic is represented by a silver sacrificial vessel from the Han (206 BC - 220 AD) and a glass vessel from the Northern Yan (409 - 436 AD), each of which is meant to illustrate the bilateral transfer of crafting techniques between the Chinese and Roman worlds at the time. The guidebook to the exhibit places these artefacts into contemporary perspective for visitors (Shibojū 2010: 83):

The Maritime Silk Road is a passage for transport, trade, and cultural exchange between ancient China and foreign countries. The Maritime Silk Road initially formed during the Qin and Han period, was further developed during the Wei, Jin, and North-South Dynasties, flourished during the Song and Tang period, and transformed during the Ming and Qing periods. The star constellations may have turned, but the 'Northern Dipper' after which today's Northern Dipper Satellite Navigation System is named, is still the same constellation that was used by the compass that opened up the maritime trade routes, letting humanity's global village grow smaller.

海上丝绸之路是古代中国与外国交通贸易和文化交往的海上通道。海上丝绸之路初步形成于秦汉时期，发展与魏晋南北朝时期，繁荣于唐宋时代，转变于明清时期。斗转星移，今日的北斗'卫星如同当年开拓海上贸易之路的罗盘，让人类的地球村变得更小。

Such depictions of Chinese maritime trade already foreshadow later projects like the Belt and Road Initiative under Xi Jinping's leadership, which also imagine contemporary trade and development in the region as a logical, linear extension of pre-modern practices. Note, here, how the quotation also connects its national historiographic discourse to the idea of scientific progress, and by extension to globalisation (indirectly referring to, and misrepresenting, McLuhan's famous 'global village' idea). The compass, as one of the major pre-modern Chinese inventions, is presented as the natural precursor to the highly advanced satellite system that the PRC was developing during the first two decades of the 21st century, implying continuous progress through time and a sense that this progress is owed to Chinese ingenuity.

This modernist fusion of nationalist and scientific discourses was ubiquitous across China's networked spectacles, and it is arguably

a major part of the CCP's ideology today. In the China Pavilion, the exhibition marched visitors past the artistic and scientific achievements of numerous dynasties before arriving in modern times, where it provided only a very brief and generally rosy impression of the PRC's revolutionary past before quickly ushering the audience towards the main focus of the presentations: a contemporary period of revival and a glorious science-fictional future where Chinese inventiveness and scientific prowess promise to solve the nation's problems.

It might be tempting to dismiss this narrative as reductionist, or as anachronistic, but this would again miss an important point of China's networked spectacles, and of political communication in the PRC more generally. The carefully selected elements from the past lend themselves to a reshuffling of meanings in the present, and they provide the resources for making a number of discursive moves that ultimately pave the way to specific policy choices, for instance those related to the 'harmonious society' concept (see chapter 6). Importantly, these pointers towards pre-modern history rely on recognisable components, and they require a certain 'buy-in', on the part of audiences, to the idea of the nation. Reimagining the nation's past is not merely a cognitive, communicative activity; it relies heavily on emotional investment and social interaction.

## 5.5 Ritual entrainment and the governance of emotion

How, then, do the symbols and narratives of the nation become objects of emotional investment? In practice, this happens through two interrelated processes: continuous mass-media priming and chains of ritual interactions. In Foucauldian terms, the first process might be considered 'discursive' and the second 'social', and both of these dimensions were in evidence during China's networked spectacles.

Ideologies like nationalism require a certain willingness to accept the broad parameters of the ideational framework as common sense, and it is in this context that the programming activities of actors with privileged access to mass communication networks are important. Switched into the networks at powerful, authoritative nodes like mass media corporations or state information agencies, media workers translate their understanding of ideological imperatives into an assemblage of recognisable signs, layering these components in different modes and

imbuing them with cues for emotional reaction. As such processes unfold over extended periods of time, flanked by media usage in classrooms and homes, public spaces and work places, the array of emotionally charged symbols enters into the background of everyday interactions, but it nevertheless leaves those who have continuously interacted with those symbols 'primed' to understand their emotional force in moments when these symbols become the focus of heightened attention (see also Althaus & Coe 2011, Iyengar et al. 1982, Krosnick & Kinder 1990, and the contributions in Molden 2014).

Recall the flag-raising ceremony during the Olympics opening ceremony. One of the most striking aspects of this sequence was its emotional force. Even an unsentimental viewer would be hard pressed to dismiss the pathos of the proceedings. This pathos is manufactured (see Carroll 1998) to tap the 'structures of feeling' (Callahan 2010: 19) that underlie national identity construction. In this particular case, the emotional effect of the sound and images has been carefully engineered to evoke nationalist sentiments. Throughout this four-minute performance, TV audiences have been shown Chinese flags for roughly two minutes, and they have been exposed to the colour red for over three. The symbolic colour is as much a sign of the nation as are the melodramatic music, the lyrics, the CCTV announcement, the children in ethnic attire, the flag, the soldiers, the Chinese leaders on the dais, the flag-waving and cheering Chinese audience, and the little girl in the red dress I discussed earlier. The TV editors' montage ensures that all of these elements come together 'naturally', in what Alexander has referred to as a coherent fusion (2006: 29). This barrage of symbols ensures that the significance of the moment does not go unnoticed, while the redundancy in meanings ensures that the message is relayed unambiguously (see Barthes 1977): the Chinese nation is proudly hosting this international event.

Stacking various signifiers helps to 'programme' the meaning of the ritual, but it does not fully account for the emotional impact itself. That impact relies on audiences of different orders of the spectatorship process recognising specific symbols and the emotional weight assigned to them during the ritual. The proceedings are designed to address the expectations of Chinese viewers, or at least what the organisers believed those expectations to be. These viewers, in turn, had been primed for years to regard this moment as a significant national occasion. As discussed in chapter 2, commentaries and news reports in the national media had continuously built up to this event, and China's leaders had repeatedly

framed this moment as a national achievement. This is precisely what Dayan & Katz (1992: 17) have in mind when they describe such events as powerful interruptions to daily life, that is as formal rituals that deserve special attention (hence the name opening *ceremony*).

While the presentation of national symbols during an interruption of profane normality lends them an air of the sacred, the symbols themselves work precisely *because* of their profane normality. The audience has not only been primed for several years to expect this event, it has also been primed for decades to recognise the national symbols through which the event makes itself intelligible. This is the kind of normalisation of national symbols that Billig (2009: 38) discusses when he writes of ‘flagging’ activities, and that I have discussed in chapter 2. Saturating public life with symbols of the nation moves them to the background of everyday life while also keeping them ever present: flags hang from government buildings, students sing national hymns in school, TV news anchors announce national policies, the national emblem graces every social security card in the country, and each banknote features the face of the nation’s founder. Through this overexposure, citizens forget that they are continuously reminded of their nationhood. The reminders ‘hardly register in the flow of daily attention, as citizens rush past on their daily business’ (ibid.: 38). The effect is that these ‘forgotten reminders’ can be activated or ‘flagged’ as needed, providing instantaneous access to a pool of emotions that national ideology has associated with them over the years.

While this construction of ‘banal nationalism’ is as much apparent in Chinese daily life as in China’s patriotic education campaigns (Zhao 2004: 218–227), it is by no means a particularly Chinese phenomenon. All of the above mechanisms are used widely in other nation-states, whether in the Americas, Europe, East Asia, or elsewhere in the world, and they are visible throughout the history of the modern mass event. It is in fact the very normality that national symbols possess in a world of nation-states, as well as the universal emotions they appeal to (feelings of home, belonging, safety, etc.), that allow the organisers of networked spectacles to effectively ‘fuse’ various performative elements into a compelling nationalist narrative. It is the reason foreign observers may feel similarly moved by a cute Chinese girl singing an ode to her motherland to the domestic audience. The symbolic language of the spectacle is familiar. It is understood inter-nationally because the world of nation-states has created ‘assumptions about what a nation is: as such it is a theory of

communication, as well as a theory about the world being “naturally” divided into such communities’ (Billig 2009: 63).

The flag-raising moment of the Olympics indeed promised that all humankind would come together as ‘One World’ with ‘One Dream’ – only this dream was not about sports or a collective humanism. It was about the audience’s collective sense of modern nation-ness. This, then, is one of the opening ceremony’s main accomplishments: that it is able to cleverly draw from nationalist primes and invite such understanding while addressing both Chinese and foreign audiences.

The cultural artefacts that represent nation-ness become emotionally charged through the mechanisms of ritual interaction. As I discussed in chapter 1, people assemble ‘culture’ or ‘society’ through their open-ended social and communicative interactions with each other and the objects of their social worlds. These interactions form ‘rituals’ when they prompt actors to focus their attention and their emotions, and in such moments the actors produce ‘a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership’ (Collins 2003: 612). An important component of such a ritual is what Collins refers to as ‘entrainment’, using a metaphor from biology that normally describes how, for instance, cicadas match their bodily rhythms to environmental cues. In human ritual interactions, the participants also match each other’s bodily cues and activities, mirroring each other’s behaviours and responding to social rhythms, and the more complete this process of synchronisation is, so Collins argues, the more emotionally satisfying and powerful it becomes. Examples include groups of people shouting, cheering, or moving in unison, for instance during sports events.

Networked spectacles are noteworthy sites of ritual entrainment; they are designed to elicit collective responses such as cheering and applause, often prompting participants to launch into such expressions ‘spontaneously’, but actually cueing these emotional moments through carefully designed event dynamics. The Olympics opening ceremony contained numerous such moments during which audiences were prompted to react with expressions of collective awe, for instance during the fireworks, the synchronous performances of large numbers of actors, or the rare moments of planned interruption, such as when the men manipulating the complex movable typeface during the scene ‘Script’ emerged from their hiding places to provide a rare peek behind the scenes of this complex performative arrangement. Similarly, the China Pavilion’s feature films during the Shanghai Expo used filmic

elements like camera angles, musical scores, and editing dynamics to build entrainment and lead viewers to important moments of national identification within the films, for instance the moment when *The Road to our Beautiful Life* pauses its depiction of break-neck development and urbanisation to immerse viewers in a slow-motion assemblage of visual disaster tropes that construct a singular moment of national unity, in this case the Sichuan earthquake. When I attended a screening of this feature film in July 2010, the audience was indeed transfixed by the visual and acoustic spectacle, and the emotional tensions in the theatre were palpable, with several audience members around me bursting into tears at the depiction of national solidarity.

Not all ritual interactions need to be this monumental. Entrainment also occurs in everyday situations (see Goffman 1967), such as the kind of non-interactions that take place between the patrons of a café (see Woldoff et al. 2013) as they seemingly ignore each other and go about their business, reading the paper, drinking their coffee, or working on their laptops. Nevertheless, those present in the café still contribute to the general atmosphere through their minute social signals, creating emotional attachments and interpersonal meanings. Of course, places like cafés are also designed to yield certain effects (Waxman 2006), and they play important roles in social and economic orders (Davidson & Rafailidis 2011), even if patrons and staff are not necessarily aware of these dimensions of their casual interactions. Similarly, some of the most interesting interactions during China's networked spectacles were small-scale, for instance the everyday encounters between volunteer workers and event visitors which the state was relying on to present a positive image to foreigners and encourage self-discipline among its citizens (Chong 2011). In fact, I would argue that the lengthy interactions involved in recruiting, training, and testing volunteers during these events already served as an important opportunity for everyday entrainment and, ultimately, initiation into communal sentiments (see Zhuang & Girginov 2012 on volunteer selection during the Beijing Olympics). Such activities are no less important for the construction of emotions and nationalist discourse than the planned tear-jerker moments in mass communication products like feature films, core exhibits, or official telecasts. Much like I have described attempts to manage the cultural parameters in which politics unfold as cultural governance, we may think of such efforts to regulate the emotional textures of communal understanding as emotional governance.

The daily activities at the Shanghai Expo territory are a case in point: the organisers staged daily mock national days for different participating countries, and they hosted parades and musical performances throughout the day. These activities served as reminders that the main actors at the event were nation-states, but they also invited visitors to participate as official actors symbolically staged the event's 'internationalness'. A particularly playful example was the 'expo passport' (Figure 5.5). Visitors could purchase this facsimile of an actual passport and then pretend to 'travel' to different countries by visiting national pavilions and gathering 'visa' stamps. In such instances, the movement across the territory, the activity of standing in line, or the sudden 'stampedes' caused by stamp-hungry passport holders as they struggled to be first in line at some pavilion, all revolved round the tangible object of the passport, allowing visitors to project their experiences and emotions onto this symbol of nationness. Incidentally, this symbol would later sell at exorbitant prices on e-commerce sites, as visitors with 'complete' stamp collections sold their expo passports at prices equivalent to those of a new iPhone (CNN 2010). Such sales of event paraphernalia provide a reminder of how nationalism is also intricately linked to capitalist consumption patterns.



Figure 5.5: The Expo Passport. Playing World Citizen at the Shanghai Expo 2010. Image © F. Schneider 2019.

In that sense, investment in the idea of being a member of a nation was not merely communicated to visitors through the expo exhibits or the accompanying mass media messages, it was actively practised by the visitors themselves, who were invited to enact the activities of citizens travelling through this imaginary, miniature world. It is precisely such ritual interactions that make the kinds of 'watch signs' I have discussed above more than just cognitive devices that connect to existing maps of background knowledge. They become elements in chains of ritual interaction as actors deploy or handle them within their meaning-making efforts. As Collins (2004) puts it, the actors 'charge' these artefacts with emotional energy, imbuing ideological concepts with personal feelings through interaction, and this ultimately creates the 'pathos formulae' that Müller & Kappas (2011) have explored.

For tropes such as those that constitute national narratives, this entails the long-term usage I have discussed earlier. The practice of 'playing' citizen with an expo passport gains meaning because of the continuous exposure to the idea that humans should be nationals, encapsulated powerfully in the objects of actual passports and visa stamps. Priming and ritual interactions work together. The PRC anniversary parade illustrates this, showing how a ritual 'on the ground' is communicated through mass communication technology to relay a series of recognisable primes for the imagined community while at the same time encouraging ritual entrainment, albeit at a distance. When Hu Jintao travelled past the troops to engage in staged dialogue, the exchange provided an opportunity for the broadcaster CCTV to stage the segment as a rhythmic pattern of 35-second narrative units, each cycling through the same camera angles and shot lengths. The march of the troops across Tiananmen Square was similarly designed as a cycle of recurring visual patterns. Such repetition invites 'parasocial' engagement (Giles 2002), that is a sense of interaction with people and situations that are only known indirectly, at a distance, through mass communication technologies (for examples and discussions see Boyle & Magnusson 2007, Frederick et al. 2012, Madison & Porter 2015, 2016, and Schiappa et al. 2007). TV viewers do not personally know Hu Jintao, and they are unlikely to know the soldiers or the spectators depicted on screen. Yet, through the sense of collective ritual, carefully designed by the event organisers and the media workers at the national broadcaster CCTV, they are invited to imagine themselves as affiliates of these fellow citizens, and consequently as part of the nation, which is itself a parasocial entity.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how elite actors, especially the authorities, design and circulate recognisable symbols of the nation, how they narrate the nation's history, and how they tweak the meanings that surround the nation and its state. Throughout China's networked spectacles, this entailed a marked shift in Chinese historiography, and a reinterpretation of what the Chinese nation should stand for. Through substantial ideological work, official actors imagined the nation as a benevolent family member, presenting 'China' to audiences at home and abroad as 'lovable' (*ke'ai* 可爱). They also systematically broke with the PRC's revolutionary past and contextualised the nation within the past 30 years of reform efforts, and especially within the ideological parameters that the Hu-Wen administration had been laying out at the start of the 21st century.

These discursive activities also had an important social dimension, as actors invited audiences to participate actively in the circulation and consumption of national symbols that had long served as 'primes' for communal feelings. The organisers created opportunities for ritual interactions, encouraging participants to associate cultural artefacts and symbolic representations with their own sense of nation-ness, through continuous use. Such emotional governance activities made the artefacts of the nation available as depositories and carriers of the kinds of feelings that drive association with imagined communities like nations: social affirmation, security, certainty, and competence (see also my discussion in Schneider 2018: ch.2). These emotional 'charges' (Collins 2003) then become available to actors to be utilised in the name of national unity, and to pave the way for specific policy initiatives, such as the Hu-Wen administration's attempt to design a 'harmonious society'.