

Our Olympic Games?

Transnational Chinese Overseas Identity and the Beijing Olympic Games 2008

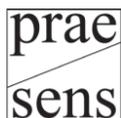
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Abstract

This paper is based on a research project, in which I investigated the question of Overseas Chinese identity in Austria by means of analysing articles on the Olympic Games 2008 in Beijing, drawn from the Chinese-language magazine China Weekly (Zhōngguó rén Bào) published in Vienna, in Austria. In order to get to know more about the points of reference conveyed in a newspaper or magazine, I singled out the different narratives in the reports and put them into the spatial, social, socio-economic, political and historical context in which Overseas identity is formed. As a massive international sports event with enormous media coverage, the Olympic Games stir up emotions and create notions of belonging. This paper tackles the question of how a Chinese-language magazine deals with the sensitive issue of nationalistic sentiments, given that its readership is heterogeneous, living on the interface of the cultures of two nation-states. It furthermore investigates the relationship between modern sport, nationalism and transnationalism.

This paper is meant as a contribution to the study of Overseas Chinese, as well as other research fields. By looking at China from the vantage point of the Overseas Chinese, their role and place in the Chinese world, we can draw further conclusions on Overseas Chinese transnational identity and its formation. Additionally, the respective findings make for a better understanding of the relationship between China and the rest of the world.

Keywords: Olympic Games Beijing 2008, transnationalism, Overseas Chinese media in Austria



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The importance of studying Overseas Chinese identity

Introduction

This paper starts with a simple and self-reflective question in its title, the answer to which turns out to be extraordinarily complex. In the summer of 2008, the People's Republic of China (PRC) hosted the 29th Olympic Games. Everybody around the globe followed this big event. In the month before the official opening of the Games, newspapers and magazines reported on the preparations, and the events that accompanied these preparations—such as the Tibet riots and the protests around the Olympic torch relay—became an important narrative in the social and political discourse. While Western media displayed a rather negative image of China, China itself conveyed a completely different message. The discrepancy between the Chinese and Western media could not have been greater. As a highly politicised event, the Olympic Games arouse nationalistic sentiments. On the other hand, globalisation and technological progress have changed demographic characteristics, lifestyles and migration patterns. This challenges the relevance of existing categories and concepts—in particular those of nationalism—used in social science to explain social and political contexts. Looking at the Olympic Games from this perspective, questions of nationality, nationalism and belonging should be debated again and their relevance scrutinised.

This paper investigates the identity of Overseas Chinese (*huáqiáo* 華僑, *huárén* 華人, *huáyì* 華裔) living in Austria by means of analysing newspaper articles on the Summer Olympic Games 2008 in Beijing, drawn from the Chinese-language magazine *China Weekly* (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 中國人報) between August 11 and August 25, 2008. *China Weekly* is published in Vienna by the Association of Qingtian Overseas Chinese (*Àodìlì Qīngtián tóngxiánghuì* 奧地利青田同鄉會). The analysis singles out the different points of reference that form Overseas Chinese identity with respect to the sense of belonging as reflected and conveyed by the reports on the Olympic Games.

The theoretical approach I draw on is a study on transnationalism by Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc (Basch et al. 1993). Transnationalism or transnational social fields are understood as relations between social experiences in two different societies. It is a process in which migrants establish and maintain multi-local relations and exploit social fields which traverse geographical, cultural and political borders (Han 2006: 153).

Given that the Olympic Games as an international, large-scale sporting event have a strong appeal to nationalism, the question of how a Chinese-language magazine and the Overseas Chinese community in Austria deal with the sensitive issue of

nationalism and nationalistic sentiments in this context becomes an extremely interesting topic of analytical research.

In a modern, interconnected and globalised world, the search for the self is gaining more and more momentum. The growing importance of this issue is also reflected in national and international politics. In the first decades of the 21st century, national discourses on migration in Western European countries have become increasingly polarised. The individual is subjected to an ever more confusing, fragmented and decentralised world. Technical progress has provided one part of the world population with high mobility, and new developments in telecommunications have made communication over vast geographical distances possible. Before the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1989, the world was divided along an ideological front; today the world population can be classified into those who have benefited from globalisation and those who have not. Thus, new socio-economic relations have influenced migration flows and altered the respective forms of migration, including motives for migration, types of migrants, migrant lifestyles, and so on.

Migration is no new phenomenon, yet today's global migration is characterized by a higher intensity and mobility. It has become an experience, an endless process, far more than just moving from one place to another. Instead of being a single event, it is a way of living (Pieke et al. 2004: 8).

Migrants in every part of the world differ in migratory, historical, socio-economic and cultural background, and in place of origin. Yet they mostly live together in well-organised social networks that provide their members with all sorts of services (schools, cultural events, media, home products, and so forth), and help newcomers to get their bearings with such things as the bureaucracy of settling in. In many cases the community even acts as employer for its members. Hence, social spaces are created where migrants are able to preserve their traditions and cultures. Looking at Chinese migration in particular, one finds that Chinese identity outside China is perpetuated by three pivotal institutions: Chinese social networks, trade relations, and Chinese-language media (Sun 2005: 68).

Why is the research on Overseas Chinese so important? Given that today over 33 million Chinese are living outside their homeland or place of origin (Kwok 2008), Overseas Chinese have become important economic players and role models for the PRC (Weggel 1999; Weidenbaum 1996). By looking at China from the vantage point of Overseas Chinese and their role and place in the Chinese world, this paper gives not only an insight into which points of reference form or are influential on the formation of Overseas Chinese identity, but also helps to get a deeper understanding of the relations between China, the global Overseas Chinese community, and the rest of the world.

Overseas Chinese in Austria

The exact number of Overseas Chinese living in Austria is hard to tell, mainly for two reasons. One is the definition of Chinese migrants in official statistics. No distinction is made with regard to the place of origin, which could be the PRC, Taiwan, Vietnam or elsewhere. Furthermore, official statistics refer to the place of birth in order to define someone as Chinese, thus excluding a significant number of those of Chinese descent, but born overseas. The second difficulty that arises is the obscure figure of Chinese migration. In order to get a deeper understanding of the Overseas community, it is advisable to look at the registered cultural associations, as their structures and numbers reflect more accurately the heterogeneity of an Overseas Chinese community in a specific country.

According to official statistics, as of May 19, 2011, a total number of 9,902 Chinese citizens were living in Austria, of whom 5,913 declared Vienna as their residence (Statistik Austria Bevölkerung am 1.1.2010 nach detailliertem Geburtsland und Bundesland, May 19, 2011). However, the population census referring to the place of origin and the current place of residence does not distinguish between Taiwanese and Chinese from the PRC. Interestingly, the statistical evaluation of asylum applications distinguishes between the two.

As mentioned above, due to the unrevealed number of Chinese migration we do not have an exact figure of how many members the Overseas Chinese community in Austria consists of. According to estimates by researchers and members of the community, the number is much higher than shown in official statistics (see Kwok 2008; Chen 2010; Zhao 2010).

[T]aking into account the younger generation that was born in Austria, ethnic Chinese holding a citizenship different from the PRC, asylum applicants and illegal migrants, the Chinese community has approximately 30,000 members (Zhao 2010).¹

The majority of the Chinese living in Austria come from Qīngtián 青田 county in Zhèjiāng 浙江 Province, from elsewhere in the province, and from the city of Wénchāng 文昌 in Hǎinán 海南 Island. Over the last years, Chinese from less developed provinces like Fújiàn 福建 and from the Dōngběi 东北 region have migrated to Austria. Additionally, between 2002 and 2006 a strong migration flow of pupils and students was recorded (Zhao 2010). Zhao explains this by Vienna's international status as the "capital of music". Housing famous universities and schools such as the Wiener Konservatorium, the Johann Sebastian Bach Musikschule Wien, the Konservatorium Wien, and the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna is a very attractive migration destination (Zhao 2010).

1 Quotations from German and Chinese were translated in English by the author. The original texts are added in footnotes.

The literature distinguishes between four categories of Chinese migrants who have migrated after 1978: (1) ‘Students-turned-immigrants’ are students who remain in the receiving country after their graduation, (2) ‘chain migrants’ move to countries/places where they have relatives, (3) ‘emigrating professionals’ are a category of migrants that bring knowledge and expertise to their new countries of residence. Finally (4), there are ‘illegal immigrants’ (irregular immigrants), who arrive without valid documents or who remain in the receiving country despite their expired documents (overstayers) (Zhao 2010).

Unlike other global cities, such as New York and London, Vienna does not have a Chinatown in its original terms. Shops, restaurants, Chinese import and export enterprises, translation bureaus, Overseas Chinese institutions and associations are scattered all over Vienna. The area around the famous Naschmarkt near the city centre has the highest concentration of Chinese culture and products. A small number of Chinese-speaking kindergartens and Saturday schools are important institutions for the promotion of language abilities of Overseas Chinese children, and the provision of cultural activities. The three biggest schools are the Educational Centre for Chinese Language in Vienna (Bildungszentrum für chinesische Sprache in Wien) founded in 1997 with approximately 600 pupils, the Chinese School (Chinesische Schule) founded in 1995 with approximately 400 pupils, and the Taiwanese School (Taiwanische Schule) founded in 1970 with approximately 59 pupils (Zhao 2010). Besides language classes for children and adult education, these institutions also offer cultural classes such as calligraphy.

Whereas before 1978, the majority of Chinese immigrants engaged in the restaurant business, the socio-economic backgrounds of the members of the community and their professionalisation are much more diversified today. Import-export trade business and translation services are further occupational areas that have been established. However, the restaurant sector still prevails—and not only in terms of the work force. Chinese or “pan-Asian” restaurants dominate Vienna’s urban image (Zhao 2010).

Chinese-language print media

Clutching at straws

It is no coincidence that new communication technologies have been developing in and around electronic mass media. Both have become deeply intertwined with our daily life, private as well as professional. Various national statistics give evidence of the important role of (electronic) mass media, their reach, consumption and function as primary sources of information (see Statistik Austria Information Society, No-

vember 17, 2010). Internet and communication technologies enable us to communicate over huge distances and to gather information very quickly and easily through various information channels, and—as we witnessed during the Jasmine Revolution in the Northern African countries in 2010–2011—they are a very effective means to organise groups and promote their vested interests. Thus, the ubiquity of both mass media and communication technology makes them important constituents in the process of identity formation.

In the past, ethnic communities relied exclusively on print media that were often confined to a limited territorial space like a country or a city in order to exchange information among their members. Despite the seemingly unlimited possibilities that new electronic media offer in terms of cross-linking and communicating between ethnic communities around the globe today (Karim 1998: 1), print media still fulfil some particular functions within the Overseas Chinese communities that the Internet is not able to perform: first, the Internet requires knowledge of how to use a computer, the possession of or access to one, and private or public access to the Internet. It therefore excludes those people from the information society who lack knowledge or access to the Internet. (Ethnic) print media, on the other hand, are far less excluding and selective in their readership. Second, due to the locally bound characteristics of ethnic print media—production, consumption and distribution—, they still maintain a certain degree of attractiveness. With their locally specific content they address a local Chinese readership and try to convey a conception of a local ‘we’ as a community (Feichtenschlager 2005: 91). Third, print media are more lucid and neatly arranged in their content, yet fourth, they are still adapted to the rise of new electronic media and exploit the possibilities and advantages of them for their own purposes. Articles and reports are often drawn from online websites and/or satellite television.

One finding of my analysis showed that the articles in *China Weekly* were mainly drawn from other media sources—in particular electronic media. Only a small proportion was edited by local contributors. These articles were foremost news on Austria, reports related to the local Overseas community, or special commentaries. Some articles and commentaries were based on interviews and information drawn from the Austrian media. The majority of the reports in *China Weekly*, though, were drawn from online Chinese-language media, both from the PRC and from other Overseas Chinese online media.

The diversity of sources used reflects how close ‘the local’ and ‘the global’ have grown after the emergence of new electronic media. It displays a highly dynamic and pluralistic image of the Chinese world. Despite the constant struggles for financial resources, newspapers, magazines and other forms of ethnic print media have not become extinct after electronic media came to dominate the media landscape. A reason for their survival, might be the possibility they yield to clutch at straws in an ever more confusing and diversifying world that we are losing grip of.

When discussing the importance of Chinese-language media for Overseas communities, we first have to consider that language is an important factor in the process of identity formation in every community, independent of its size. In the case of Chinese, the written language obtains a very special role, as the linguistic map of China consists of numerous dialects, and their speakers are united by the common use of standardised characters. Hence, Chinese people *speak* different dialects or local languages, but they *read* the same characters. In ancient China as well as today, Chinese characters have contributed to the integration of the Chinese empire (see Trappl 2004: 60).

Today, the speakers of Chinese dialects and of Mandarin or standard Chinese have spread all over the world, and the geographical distances have grown. Despite the growing importance of English as the global *lingua franca*, Chinese characters have maintained their integrative function within the heterogeneous and scattered Chinese-speaking world.

Chinese Overseas print media—the Mirror of Erised

The happiest man on earth would look into the mirror
and see only himself, exactly how he is.

(Rowling 1998: 245)

In the Harry Potter novel series written by Joanne K. Rowling, the Mirror of Erised is a magic mirror that does not just show the simple reflection of the person standing before it, but instead reflects ‘the deepest and most desperate desire of our hearts’ (Rowling 1998: 245). Looking into The Mirror of Erised is a self-reflective process in which the relation between mirror and spectator is reciprocal, dynamic and evolving. Similar to this continuing (re-)formation of the self, Chinese-language media are

not simply reflective or representative of a particular diasporic Chinese imaginary but [are] in fact constitutive of it. Processes of media production, representation and consumption are integral to the formation of a Chinese diasporic imagination (Sun 2005: 69).

In her master’s thesis, Feichtenschlager analysed an Overseas Chinese newspaper in Austria from the vantage point of a networking platform. She singled out three fundamental pillars that constitute the information supply in Overseas Chinese print media: first, they provide their readership with news, stories and information about their place of origin. Second, news from other Overseas Chinese communities and the global Overseas Chinese community are strongly emphasised. Third, print media provide their members with relevant migratory information, i.e. flight schedules, points of contact or information (Chamber of Commerce, migration service, labour market service) (Feichtenschlager 2005: 90).

Nevertheless, the role of Chinese-language print media in the Overseas Chinese community in Austria is not limited to a networking function within the community. The dimensions of their consumption and production go beyond the ‘borders’ of the ethnic community. They are to be seen in the context of a complex interrelation between Austria, China, and the global Overseas Chinese community, constituting three points of reference that are important in the formation of Overseas Chinese identity—which, again, influences media consumption, representation and production.

The transnational Chinese media sphere²

In the last century, technological progress and the development of new electronic media and telecommunications led to profound social, economic and political changes. They intensified mobility and communication over great distances, and consequently altered the forms of migration, as well as the lives and activities of migrants.

Even though transnational relations were not a new phenomenon that exclusively occurred in the late 20th century, yet their intensity and forms have changed significantly (Fernández de la Hoz 2004: 8; Yang 2006: 190). This ‘new social interwovenness’ determines identities of migrants (Pries 1997: 34); their lives, social environments and expectations will never be limited to one place again (Pieke et al. 2004: 18). Therefore it is important to

[re-conceptualize] the relationship between the study of Chinese identities and place-bound theorizations of a pre-global social science, implied in such terms as territory, region, nationality and ethnicity (Nonini et al. 1997: 5).

Until the 1980s the dominant theoretical approach in migration studies was the integration of migrants into society (Han 2006: 149). However, with the intensification of economic globalisation and the overall ‘pervasion of capitalism’ (Han 2006: 154) a new category of migrant appeared. The ‘transnational migrants’ and their activities were first focussed on and categorised in post-colonial studies by Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc (1993). In contrast to the traditional migrant, who moved to a place in order to stay there, the transnational migrant is distinguished by criss-crossing border activities, both physically and virtually, and the exploitation of social fields that link the country of origin with the country of destination (Han 2006: 150).

In their joint work, Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc show how the theory of transnationalism or transnational social fields understands migration as a so-

² This term is borrowed from Sun 2005, page 65.

cial experience with political, economic and cultural dimensions, and a nation-building process between two or more nation-states; it is a process that is embedded in the changing circumstances of global capitalism. In *The Global City* (2001), Sassen argues that the shift of production into low-wage countries was a 'trans-territorialisation of factories' that created a bigger flow of labour migrants.³

As a consequence, the concepts and definitions of nation-state and citizenship have been subject to this changing environment. The new transnational lifestyle has drawn the attention of governments, which now try to support and influence their Overseas citizens (Fernández de la Hoz 2004: 8). Hence, transnational communities influence the politics of both their country of origin and their country of residence (Portes 2001: 5). The PRC is no exception. By providing institutional support, migration is fostered and supported, which in turn reinforces nationalism and nation-building (Pieke et al. 2004: 191). This new conception of a nation-state and its citizens finds its theoretical conceptualisation in post-colonial studies as 'de-territorialised nations' (Han 2006: 154) or 'unbound nations' (Han 2006: 152). Sending countries look at transnational migrants as citizens of their own nations, citizens who consider themselves as belonging to the nation of their ancestors, politically, economically, culturally as well as socially (Han 2006: 154).

Overseas Chinese media are transnational fields, because they are enterprises established by Overseas Chinese with the purpose of linking the sending country with the receiving country. Their conveyed images and news influence the way Overseas Chinese perceive of themselves and of Chinese people in other parts of the world (Sun 2005: 75). The 'Chinese transnational media-sphere' (Sun 2005) is a pivotal economic, social and cultural institution in the transnational Chinese community, and therefore has a part in forming Overseas Chinese identity. For Tang (2004: 14), Chinese-language media interweave and interact between three entities. They are 'a cultural space for the negotiation and interaction of the identities of homeland, the host country and Overseas Chinese community' and facilitate 'the construction of transnational citizenship in the era of globalization' (Tang 2004: 19).

The meaning of sporting events for China

The nationalistic and patriotic factor

During the Olympic summer in the PRC, the ubiquity of the Olympic Games in everyday life manifested itself in innumerable screens in public spaces broadcasting Olympic-related advertisements and competition news, as well as newspapers

3 For a competent overview of Basch's et al. and Sassen's approach, see Han 2006.

packed with Olympic reports and images. People were excited that the Games were taking place in their country and everybody watched and discussed the competitions and China's performance. Whoever visited the PRC in the run-up to the Games could not have failed to notice that the means and ends of Beijing 2008 went far beyond the prestigious task of hosting *the* international sporting event.

‘同一個世界，同一個夢想’ (*tóng yīge shijie, tóng yīge mèngxiǎng*), ‘One World, One Dream’, the slogan of Beijing 2008, was meant to catapult China and its population onto the international stage of the 21st century; it should become the opening ceremony of a new and modern China that would not only meet the expectations of the international community but exceed them! Hence, hosting the Games was a national task that required the Chinese population to discharge its duties as patriotic citizens who cheer for their nation and support its concerted efforts. Beijing 2008 turned into a nationwide patriotic movement (Zhū 2008: 2).

Modern sports and the nation-state

Modern sports in China have revealed themselves as a means to foster national stability and unity. The success of Chinese contestants in international sports, particularly in basketball and swimming, are important symbols for China's rise and promoted consolidation within the country (Close et al. 2007: 161). Nationalism is a logical consequence—if not a purpose—of sporting events.

[T]he whole thing is bound up with the rise of nationalism—that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige ... sports is one of the main causes of international rivalry; big-scale sport is itself, I think, merely another effect of the causes that have produced nationalism (Orwell 1945).

But who are the leading actors of nationalism in sporting events—the contestants, the audience, the politicians or the media?

For athletes in certain disciplines there is no greater honour than competing for an Olympic medal; the aim is to be the best, the gain is mostly both financial reward and national pride.⁴ When participating in an international event they are the representatives of their nations. However, their relationship with the country they are representing and their own national identity is not in all cases clear and unambiguous, as some have a migrant background. A number of Austria's most famous athletes, who participated in the Olympic Games in 2008, either are immigrants or have at least a different cultural background. The two table-tennis players Liú Jiā 劉佳 (female) and Chén Wèixīng 陳衛星 (male), and the swimming star Mirna Jukic (with

4 The limited space of this paper does not allow for a more detailed discussion of the economic aspects of sports. Big sporting events are an important source of income, short term and long term.

Croatian origins) are three examples of Austria's top Olympic athletes with migrant backgrounds. By the same token, the Austrian weightlifter Matthias Steiner, who had moved to Germany for personal and sports-related reasons. He ultimately won the gold medal and brought the honours back to the country who hosts him and promoted his career, that is Germany.⁵

However, the main actor in international sporting competitions is the audience, which finds its national heroes in athletes, through which nationalism is perpetuated. They get exalted by competitions and are convinced—at least for a short time—that running, jumping and kicking a ball are national virtues or at least reflect them (Orwell 1945). Hence, in accordance with Juvenal's dictum *panem et circenses*, international sporting events satisfy the audience's needs to bound up with their nations and, thus, promote a common sense of nationality, while backstage politicians and statesmen pursue their own political agendas.

Big international sporting events are a stage for politicians, providing a 'representative public sphere' (Brownell 2008: 85). In history, the Olympic Games of 1936 in Nazi Germany and the Football World Championship in Brazil in 1956 serve as pellucid examples in this context. In both cases, Adolf Hitler and President Getúlio Vargas used the stage to demonstrate and promote respectively nationalistic ideology and national unity (see Bernecker et al. 2000).

Providing a backdrop for the display of political power, the Olympic Games have a strong political appeal for those nations where the establishment or the maintenance of national unity and/or the demonstration of state power and its sovereignty are important legitimising factors for the political regime and the political elite. Moreover, they attract geopolitical entities, particularly those that want to *qualify* (emphasis added) as nation-states (Close et al. 2007: 67). Furthermore, international sports events are potential cultural resources influencing international relations between states with different vested interests (Hargreaves 1992).

Looking at China's history after 1949, the big sports events of the last 60 years reflect varying power constellations and are intrinsically linked with the process of the PRC's political legitimisation as a nation-state.

5 The complex, historically rooted self-awareness of Austrians in relation to Germany made the Olympic victory of an Austrian competing for the German national team a tantalising experience, which was widely discussed in Austrian society and media.

Table 1 Power circles of the PRC and big sporting events

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Declaration of the PRC 1949 | First National Workers Games 1955 |
| 20th anniversary of the PRC 1969 | First Chinese National Games 1969 |
| The PRC's rise and its political and economic importance for Asia | 11th Asian Games 1990 |
| The PRC's rise as a global power | Olympic Games 2008 |

Source: Brownell 2008: 88.

In the publicity campaigns that preceded the Olympic Games, China tried to convey the image of a modern nation-state. Infrastructure, organisation and Chinese citizens should not only meet the world's expectations, but clearly exceed them. In order to convince even the last remaining sceptics, a comprehensive campaign was launched that aimed at (1) convincing the world of China's power and its position as a *global player*, (2) preparing the Chinese population to become world citizens, and (3) creating a new and modern Chinese identity. The media in and outside China were intended to become the stage where the PRC of the 21st century was (re)constructed and discussed (de Kloet et al. 2008: 8).

Ultimately, Beijing 2008 was a historic event and success. According to Zhū, this success was due to three preconditions: the PRC was able to activate and make use of all its human, financial and material resources, it spared no costs, and was able to revert to a patriotic popular movement (Zhū 2008: 1).

Since the end of the 19th century, nationalism and patriotism have been strong political forces directed both inwards and outwards. They have served as a means to unify the country and build a strong and self-assured nation standing up against external powers. They are a strong force in the PRC's state-building process. Thus, the idea of hosting an enormous international event like the Olympic Games fell on fertile ground among the political elite and the Chinese population.

In the light of the intimacy between sports and nationalistic feelings in China, the question of how these sports events plays into transnational identity is of vital interest for academia.

Turning back to the object under investigation—that is Overseas Chinese media—the following questions guided my analysis: How does the Chinese-language magazine deal with the sensitive subject of nationalism? Where do the reports take their bearings? If sports and nationalism are in a mutual relationship, how to construe the relationship between sports and transnationalism? How do people who live in transnational spaces between two or more cultures position themselves when it

comes to cheering for the successes and crying for the failures of a nation's contestants? Finally, how do Overseas Chinese media transport, represent and reflect this position?

Narratives of Beijing 2008 in Western, Chinese and Overseas media

My analysis of *China Weekly* highlighted the diverging characteristics of sports news in national and Overseas Chinese media. Its results give an indication of the complex formation of Overseas Chinese identity and of the way Overseas Chinese perceive themselves and their position within the relations between China and the world. The findings also show how national feelings and feelings towards other nations are constructed, conveyed and reflected. Additionally, it revealed stunning limitations in how Western societies perceive China, and their attitude towards the PRC's position as a new global player.

In order to go into the depths of the discourse, my analysis of *China Weekly* required the consultation of further sources and the singling out of the differences with regard to the respective narratives. After the Olympic Games 2008, online media archives and Google became useful and efficient tools to find articles on the topics concerned. Consequently, layout, original placement and size were not replicable in relation to other articles; they are, however, significant, because they reveal the 'validity' of the respective report and the topic within the magazine.

Before and after Beijing 2008

Before we turn to the articles in *China Weekly* published while the Olympic Games were in progress, it is important to identify the prevailing discourses in the PRC and the West during the preparation period.⁶ Only through comparing the narratives of national Chinese media, Western and Overseas Chinese media, can we understand how they relate.

Hosting the Olympic Games is neither a mere task of organising a large-scale international sports event, nor solely a colossal media event. According to Close et al. (2007: 127), such events 'have usually been seen as a useful means for pursuing a political agenda'. What kind of political agenda did the PRC pursue? How is the agenda of the Olympic Games embedded in the realm of international relations, and what do the Games of 2008 tell us about China's position in the international community?

6 This paper lacks the discourse analysis of *China Weekly* before the opening of the Olympic Games, since my research focussed on the period while the Games were in progress.

After the success of China's bid was officially declared in 2001, Beijing's hosting of the Summer Olympic Games 2008 was a widely discussed issue in Chinese and Western media. Eventually, the reports reached their climax in 2008; riots in Tibet that arose in March, and the protests around and during the Olympic torch relay were particular ingredients that added fuel to the flames. Western politicians, contestants and citizens expressed sharp criticism of China's human rights violations, environmental policies etc.

Within the PRC, the Olympic Games had become a national task. The Games were everywhere. In the seven years following the successful bid, the Olympics became an important issue in the lives of the Chinese people; 'Everything for the Olympic Games!' (Zhū 2008: 2).⁷ According to Zhū, the people's dedication to and identification with the Games accounts for a new style of popular movement: a politically guided national consensus. Hence, the attitude towards Beijing 2008 had become a yardstick of patriotism. Zhū concludes that only the equation of this national consensus with patriotism can explain the vehement reactions towards the Tibetan riots and the Olympic torch relay events (Zhū 2008: 2).

Various researchers have investigated the campaigns launched after 2001. They unanimously agree that the PRC availed itself of the opportunity to position the Chinese state and culture in the world. China's economic success and rise should be reflected in the success of its athletes and in its ability to organise an event of this scale. The success of the Olympic Games should become the 'pivotal arena in which China's position in the world is being negotiated, not just by China, but by the world at large' (de Kloet et al. 2008: 9). The PRC tried to demonstrate its will and dedication to peace, friendship and civilisation. Through a 'symbolic show window' (Ren 2008: 180) the rest of the world was to be convinced of China's economic, cultural, social and political performance and transformation, its desire to push further reform and development, its devotion to the Olympic ideal, the Games' contribution to its modernisation, China's commitment to environmental protection, and the idea of civil participation and social benefit (Polumbaum 2003: 68).

In the course of advertising and campaigning, the three dominating discourses were: (1) the modern civilised citizen, (2) harmonious coexistence, and (3) Beijing becoming global (de Kloet et al. 2008: 11). The campaigns reflected China's rise as a global player, concomitantly acknowledging the influence of Western concepts in modern China (architecture and lifestyle), but still trying to focus on the essentials of Chinese culture and history. What reformers and revolutions during the 20th century failed to achieve became the parameter of China's growth and development in the CCP's media campaign: the resolution—or mitigation—of the century-old dichotomy of tradition and modernity. To promote Beijing as an upcoming global city, self-orientalising tactics were used to invoke a historical Chineseness—the Forbidden

7 The original Chinese text is as follows: 一切爲了奧運 (*yìqié wèile Àoyùn*)

City, the Great Wall. On the other hand, future-oriented imageries such as skyscrapers and shopping malls referred to the successfully modernising and developing China (de Kloet et al. 2008: 7).

In juxtaposition to Chinese narratives, the dominant narratives of the Western media discourse were bilateral relations and human rights. In this context the prevailing topics as identified by de Kloet et al. (2008: 28) were

Beijing as a hypermodern city; the stringent control with which urban planning, citizens, and sportsmen are confronted; human rights; the Tibet issue; China's international policies; the assumed pollution of China and in particular Beijing; the forced removals due to the building of the Olympic premises; and the labour conditions of migrant workers.

The relatively fierce hostility in the Western media towards China during the Olympic Games is best shown in its reporting on the opening ceremony. Astonishment and compliments appeared alongside critical comments on its pompous arrangements. In the Austrian and German media, online newspapers placed photo galleries with stunning images of the ceremony. In contrast to these glamorous pictures, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* presented a rather gloomy picture of the ceremony: 'hundreds of brown-grey drummers march up, a rather threatening formation' (Gödecke 2008).⁸ In general, Western media used a lot of military terms in its reports on the opening ceremony. This should not only point to the fact that China is still an authoritative regime or even a dictatorship (Matussek 2008), but even highlight the inherent danger that springs from a rising China, with suggestions of a war that China could fight against Western countries.

Both Western and Chinese newspapers and magazines published articles and photos of the opening ceremony, and online magazines and newspapers carried photo galleries showing images of the spectacular fire works and performances. Taking a different approach, *People's Daily* (*Rénmín Rìbào* 人民日報), the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), published a range of photos with Hú Jǐntāo 胡錦濤 in his official duty as head of state in its August 8, 2008 edition. The composition of these photos is always the same: Hú Jǐntāo shaking hands with other heads of state, who are either looking into the camera or into each other's faces (*Rénmín Rìbào* 2008: 1).⁹

Reproducing Hú Jǐntāo at eye level with other heads of state sends a clear message and reflects how China imagines itself in relation to the rest of the world. In addition to that, the counterparts in the photos chosen were all representatives of

8 The original German text is as follows: 'Lässt hunderte grau-braune Trommler aufmarschieren, einen bedrohlichen Block'.

9 One of these pictures was copied into *China Weekly*, accompanied by an article headlined: "The world congratulates China" (*Shìjiè zhùfú zhōngguó* 世界祝福中國) (*Zhōngguórén Bào* 2008: 23).

emerging or developing countries, which is consistent with the PRC's alignment in international relations.

While the Chinese discourse incorporated China's thousands-of-years-old culture into the context of its claim to nation-statehood, the Western discourse exclusively focussed on political issues that concerned modern China and its impact on the world. Both discourses thus discussed China's position in the world. However, by referring to its achievements as an old civilisation, the PRC set forth the tradition of Chinese historiography of the early 20th century: Influenced by the power shift in East Asia in the mid-19th century towards Japan as the new centre, and facing the superiority of Western powers, China's national historiography opted for a new alignment, national historiography became world historiography. The empire should be replaced by an outstanding nation and particularity should become an efficient means to compete with other nations (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2006: 2).

The term particularity always implies a reference to the universal. It does not implicate dropping out of the universal system, instead it is rather a positioning within the specific framework of the universal. Thus, the search for particularity is at the same time the search for the universal (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2006: 2).¹⁰

China's successful hosting of the Olympic Games and the outstanding performance of its athletes rattled the West. The ingredients for its success were a highly competitive sport system and the three particular preconditions that were discussed above (see Zhū 2008: 2). Ultimately, Beijing 2008 served as useful means to the PRC to write world history and to position itself as a global player.

Overseas Chinese media narratives—Beijing's golden performance

The Olympic Games 2008 in Beijing were a big success, records in several disciplines were broken, the Games were watched by a large audience, the organisation of the Chinese National Olympic Committee was almost flawless, and the host nation shone with outstanding performances by its athletes, who won 100 medals, of which 51 were gold. With this golden performance the PRC left the two nations, the United States and Russia, that had dominated the Olympic Games for over half a century far behind.

The front pages of three editions of *China Weekly* during the period of the Games reflected the enthusiasm of the Overseas community and their perception of Beijing 2008. They were loaded with images expressing the grandeur, success and emotions

¹⁰ The original German text is as follows: Der Begriff der Partikularität impliziert den Bezug zum Universellen. Er beinhaltet nicht ein Ausscheiden aus dem System des Universalismus, sondern eine Positionsbestimmung in dem von ihm vorgeschriebenen Rahmen. Insofern ist die Suche nach dem Partikularen auch immer eine Suche nach dem Universellen.

of the Olympic Games. The images furthermore contain the main narratives of the reports in the magazine that were also metonymic with the spirit of the international Olympic movement: pride, success, internationalism, and friendship/love.



Source: *Zhōngguó rén Bào* 62,
 August 11, 2008



Source: *Zhōngguó rén Bào* 63,
 August 18, 2008



Source: *Zhōngguó rén Bào* 64,
 August 25, 2008

Articles on Beijing 2008 in *China Weekly* covered the following topics: the opening ceremony, Austrian athletes, Chinese athletes, Overseas Chinese athletes, international athletes, anecdotes, the closing ceremony. The narratives singled out in the content analysis were: (1) Chinese civilisation—development and progress, (2) ‘One World, One Dream’—the Olympic spirit and internationalism, (3) peace and war—the mystic of the Olympic ideal and fulfilling the duty to the state, (4) state symbolism, (5) competition and record, (6) debating the system—Western criticism and the Overseas Chinese position, (7) the three communities—Austria, China and the global Overseas Chinese community, (8) China the new superpower and anti-Americanism.¹¹

The outline of the differences between Western and Chinese media reports highlighted above are the narratives on which the Overseas Chinese discourse is based; it took place on the interface of the PRC and Western argumentative fields. However, not being able to claim their adherence exclusively to one side or the other, they live in, what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls, a “third space”, subjected to the influence of the different cultures of two nation-states, and the ethnic community. In this sense, the Overseas Chinese sense of belonging is also shaped by the global Overseas Chinese community.

¹¹ Ultimately I no longer agree with the term ‘anti-Americanism’, and from today’s perspective I would use the expression ‘China the new superpower, competing with the United States’.

The following section will discuss the interaction of the ‘three communities’ represented in the articles analysed. In the process, transnational identity is deconstructed and it becomes clear how the ‘three communities’ relate to each other.

The ‘three communities’ and the de-territorialised Chinese nation-state

The traditional structuralist definition of a nation-state refers to a territory, the people (citizenship), and the monopoly on a legitimate use of force (Nohlen 1998: 606). Its citizens refer to it in historical, ethnic, political and/or cultural terms. Nationhood is also conveyed by means of symbols and signs, as they are important vehicles of communication and information, their content has to be universally valid, accepted and known. By doing so, they are intended to facilitate communication and send a clear message.

In the following I differentiate between the symbolic representation of the state, firstly in general articles on Beijing 2008, and secondly in sports news.

China Weekly displayed China’s statehood by means of three symbols. First, the official representatives: the head of state, Hú Jǐntāo, officially opening the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing and welcoming other visiting heads of state (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 62 2008f: 23); and the official representative of the Chinese state in Austria, Ambassador Wú Kěn 吴愆¹² (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 62 2008b: 7). Second, the two Olympic stadiums, commonly called the ‘bird’s nest’ and the ‘cubicle’. They were the spatial centre embodying the heart of the Olympic Games, where athletes performed and the audience cheered. Concomitantly, they functioned as backdrops for displaying the Chinese state and its power (Brownell 2008: 81). Their immense constructions embody the work and money invested by the Chinese government and the Chinese people. Hence, they symbolise China’s rise and the significance of the Olympic Games for China. Finally, the most common symbol of a recognised nation-state is the national flag. All three editions of *China Weekly* repeatedly placed photos showing athletes waving the Chinese flag. Not surprisingly, the majority of the photos bearing the Chinese flag showed athletes celebrating their victory.

In sports competitions, nations are primarily represented by the participating athletes, whose successes and failures stir up emotions among the audience. What kind of emotional message does *China Weekly* convey with regard to Chinese and Austrian athletes? How are the athletes of the ‘three communities’ concerned represented in the magazine, in quantity as well as in quality?

According to my findings, there was no ‘nationalistic dilemma’ at all. The magazine took up a very favourable position towards Austrian athletes, cheering for their few successes and sympathising with their failures. *China Weekly* adopted a con-

¹² Wú Kěn was ambassador from November 2007 to August 2010.

ciliatory and friendly tone towards Austria and its athletes. This conciliatory encounter seems to be an important message to the Overseas Chinese living on the interface of Austrian and Chinese culture.

Two articles serve as illustrative examples. In table tennis, the Austrian and PRC table tennis teams were drawn in one group and hence stood in competition with each other. Surprisingly, the reports in *China Weekly* did not take this competing situation into account at all; on the contrary, they emphasised the peaceful coexistence of these two cultures and nations, and defined the draw as a ‘fateful alliance’ (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 62 2008a: 5).¹³ The same article also reported on Werner Schlager, the Austrian table tennis player. When arriving at the airport in Beijing he was welcomed like a ‘superstar’ by his Chinese fans. *China Weekly* quotes him thus:

When I got off the plane I really felt good, the people gave me a very warm welcome, I think Beijing is already well prepared [for the Olympic Games] (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 2008a: 5).¹⁴

The second report focussed on the table tennis player Liú Jiā, who as a child had moved to Austria after failing the high competitive sports system in China (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 62 2008c: 5). Once again, the report depicted conciliatory relations between Liú Jiā and her homeland and Austria. This stands in contrast with an article published in *Der Spiegel*, in which the life of the table tennis player is put in a gloomy and displaced light (Grossekathöfer 2008: 120).

Given the outstanding performance of PRC athletes, it is only reasonable that an Overseas Chinese magazine should keep abreast of these plentiful successes. However, despite the friendly, peaceful and acknowledging relationship with Austria, the Overseas Chinese community’s sense of belonging to China is explicitly expressed. The chairman of the Overseas Chinese Committee, Zhāng Wéiqīng 張維慶, concludes: ‘We celebrate the Chinese team, we cheer for China!’ (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 64 2008: 6).¹⁵ The headline on *China Weekly*’s front page of August 11, 2008 proclaims: ‘At this moment we are proud of China!’¹⁶; while a report on the Chinese basketball team’s victory over Germany concludes: ‘But most important, we won!’ (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 63 2008b: 23).¹⁷

13 In Chinese culture, ‘fate’ (有緣 *yǒuyuán*) is believed to play a lot into relationships; there is a common understanding that an ill-fated relationship is bound to fail.

14 The original Chinese text is as follows: 下了飛機得感覺非常好，人們熱情有禮，我覺得北京已經完全準備 (*xià le fēijī de gǎnjué fēicháng hǎo, rénmen rèqing yǒuli, wǒ juéde Běijīng yǐ-jīng wánquán zhǔnbèi*).

15 The original Chinese text is as follows: 我們為中國隊慶祝 (*wǒmen wéi zhōngguó duì qìngzhù*).

16 The original Chinese text is as follows: 這一刻，我為中國驕傲 (*zhè yí kè, wǒmen wéi zhōngguó jiào'ào*).

17 The original Chinese text is as follows: 但是最重要的是，我們贏了 (*dànshì zuì zhòngyào de shì, wǒmen yíng le*).

As these quotations highlight, *China Weekly* understands the global Overseas Chinese community as part of China. Yet, the conception of what this China is cannot be confined to territorial borders.

The PRC and its leadership put much effort into organising and hosting Beijing 2008. Yet its success was also due to contributions made by Overseas Chinese all over the world, and their achievements were attributed as such: either as athletes competing for their country of residence, or as donors for the construction of the two Olympic stadiums, or simply as enthusiasts cheering for the Chinese nation and its athletes. According to *China Weekly*, Overseas Chinese donated an amount of 940 million rénminbì (US\$145 million). The list of donors was published online, with the most generous donors having their names engraved on a panel that was placed in the swimming stadium (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 63 2008a: 17). In another article a member of Toronto's Overseas Chinese community, who had decorated their shop with Chinese flags and Olympic emblems, is quoted as saying:

Since we cannot go to China and participate in the Olympic Games, we build up publicity, and give the homeland mental support (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 62 2008e: 17).¹⁸

Decorating his shop with Chinese emblems illustrates how this Overseas Chinese in Canada defined his relationship with China, and what being Chinese meant for him. The Chinese nation is traversing its territorial borders, thus being part of it is not a question of one's place of residence, or even birth, but of being born Chinese and of one's affiliation towards China. Belonging to this 'global Chinese nation' also bears responsibilities, such as promoting Chinese culture.

With respect to the highly sensitive Taiwan issue, the headline of one article in *China Weekly* proclaims: '[T]he opening ceremony of the Olympic Games from the perspective of Taiwanese fellow countrymen' (*Zhōngguó rén Bào* 62 2008d: 16).¹⁹ In accordance with *China Weekly's* concept of Chinese transnational citizenship, it is reasonable that Taiwan as a bastion of Chinese culture is also comprised in the concept of the 'global Chinese nation'. However, we have to bear in mind the political sensitivity of Taiwan and PRC relations and consider, therefore, the political dimension of such a statement. The PRC adheres to the One China Policy, which means that it claims to be the sole legitimate representative of the Chinese nation-state, with Taiwan a part of its territory. Since transnational migration is institutionally supported by the PRC, and the *China Weekly* is published by an official Overseas Chinese community, namely the Association of Qingtian Overseas Chinese, the magazine represents to a certain extent the official political line of the PRC. The

18 The original Chinese text is as follows: 因為儘管不能中國參與奧運，在這裡也要造勢，給予祖國精神上的支持 (*yīnwei jǐnguān bù néng zhōngguó cānyǔ àoyùn, zài zhèlǐ yě yào zàoshì jǐyǔ zǔguó jīngshén shàng de zhīchí*).

19 The original Chinese text is as follows: 臺胞觀奧運會開幕式 (*táibāo guān Àoyùn kāimùshì*).

above quotation is also to be understood as a political statement either in accordance with the editors' convictions and political affiliation, and/or required out of structural constraints.

In conclusion, my analysis has shown that *China Weekly* conveys the perception of Overseas Chinese as part of a large global Chinese nation. This idea is also embodied in a column titled 'Overseas Chinese' (*huáqiáo*), where Overseas matters are discussed in this sense. On the other hand, the magazine explicitly defines Overseas Chinese as belonging to the Chinese nation and culture by displaying the symbols of Chinese statehood. However, it becomes obvious that this self-image is distinct from that of Chinese citizens living inside the borders of the PRC, as the Overseas lifestyle is shaped by two nation-states and their cultures, and the interrelation of 'three communities'.

Conclusion

Sun, specialist on the Chinese media, states that Overseas Chinese media exert the function of a mediator. They mediate and negotiate diverging interests within the community, society and the government of the country of residence (Sun 2005: 3). Yet the influence of Chinese-language media on the greater part of society is questionable for reasons of linguistic barriers. Few people outside of the Overseas Chinese community speak and read Chinese, and/or are interested in an ethnic magazine. In addition to that, national mainstream media normally have no vested interests in referring to ethnic media in their reports. However, the Overseas Chinese media serve as a negotiator between diverging cultural points of view and national feelings within the Overseas Chinese community. This is clearly shown in the 'fateful alliance' of Austrian and Chinese table-tennis teams drawn into one competing group, as shown above.

The analysis revealed that the conception among Overseas Chinese of China as a cultural entity and nation-state is more complex than mere state symbolism and goes far beyond the legal and territorial borders of the PRC. In the case of *China Weekly*, the sense of belonging to this entity is expressed via economic, political, social and cultural activities. Overseas Chinese actively contribute to the rise and success of China and consider themselves as a part of a 'global Chinese nation'. Their transnational lifestyle is situated on the interface of two nation-states and their respective cultures, and is formed by the interrelation of 'three communities'.

In ancient China, Chinese relations—in political, social and economic terms—were determined by a sensitive balance between centre and periphery, in which the presence of the centre is a precondition for the empire's unity. The greater the distance, the larger the measure of autonomy for the periphery. Modern Chinese politics are still influenced by this logic (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2004: 82). According to

the perception reflected in *China Weekly*, Chinese people, regardless of their place of birth and residence (PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Overseas), all belong to the 'global Chinese nation' which defines itself without territorial borders. This conception, nevertheless, embodies the sensitive balance of centre-periphery relations, and therefore conveys a recognition of the PRC as its centre.

The Olympic Games 2008 in Beijing owed their success to the concerted efforts of a unified global Chinese community. Centre and periphery have made their respective contributions, whether through investments, work force, or by spreading the Olympic spirit of Beijing 2008.

The analysis has shown that the sphere of Chinese influence goes far beyond China's borders. It is supported by an enlightened, pluralistic and progressive community overseas that is eagerly contributing to the rise and achievements of the Asian hegemon.

The Olympic Games 2008 were a historic event and sent a clear message to the rest of the world about China's position in the international community. In the 21st century, China has regained its self-esteem—this time as a nation-state—being aware and self-assured of its position as a global player.

One and a half centuries after its defeat by Western imperialism, China has reverted to a position in which it is challenging the superiority of Western nations. Nevertheless, this article has shown that the impact of this newly won status and self-awareness has not lead to a more controversial, but a clearly conciliatory attitude among the members and representatives of Overseas Chinese communities.

In the light of globalization and the resulting social transformations, the subject of self-awareness is clearly an important issue to tackle. We should be very careful when addressing the issues of culture and sense of belongingness, and lift them out of the limits nationalism. National borders do not unambiguously reflect homogeneous national cultures, as they are not only the result of historic nationalistic aspirations but also a product of historical events based on political decision-making. The increase and intensity of cross-border activities of many people has changes their life-styles and influenced their perceptions of their own cultures.

Today, it is becoming ever more clearly that many emerging issues cannot be solved by insisting on national borders, instead their solutions lie on international and global level. In this sense, we should continue our efforts in discussing and contesting the category of the national, its changing contents, and its significance for our societies. By breaking the shells of nationalism we will be able to step out of our own cultural rigidities that will foster dialogue and yield better solutions for social problems.

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GLOSSARY

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| Àodili Qīngtián tōngxiánghuì Chén Wèixīng Dōngběi | 奧地利青田 同鄉會 陳衛星 東北 | Association of Qingtian Overseas Chinese in Austria Austrian table tennis national team player (male) northeastern region of the PRC comprising the three provinces of Liáoníng 遼寧, Jílín 吉林 and Hēilóngjiāng 黑龍江 province on the East coast of the PRC island in the south of the PRC general secretary of the Communist Party of China, president of the People's Republic of China, chairman of the Central Military Commission Overseas Chinese: <i>Huáqiáo</i> refers to Overseas Chinese settled abroad, still retaining their Chinese citizenship. <i>Huárén</i> refers to Overseas Chinese abroad who have been naturalised there or have acquired a foreign nationality. <i>Huáyì</i> refers to persons with Chinese descent (Poston et al. 1990: 482) |
| Fújiàn Hǎinán Hú Jǐntāo | 福建 海南 湖錦濤 | Overseas Chinese: <i>Huáqiáo</i> refers to Overseas Chinese settled abroad, still retaining their Chinese citizenship. <i>Huárén</i> refers to Overseas Chinese abroad who have been naturalised there or have acquired a foreign nationality. <i>Huáyì</i> refers to persons with Chinese descent (Poston et al. 1990: 482) Austrian table tennis national team player (female) Qīngtián, county in Zhèjiāng Province on the East coast of the PRC <i>People's Daily</i> , a newspaper under the authority of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party official currency of the PRC 'One world, one dream', slogan of the Summer Olympic Games 2008 city in Hǎinán Province Chinese ambassador in Austria, November 2007 to August 2010 current chairman of the Overseas Chinese Committee of the Austria-China Association Zhèjiāng, province on the East coast of the PRC <i>China Weekly</i> |
| <i>huáqiáo, huárén, huáyì</i> | 華僑, 華人, 華裔 | |
| Líu Jiā Qīngtián | 劉佳 青田 | |
| <i>Rénmín Rìbào</i> | 人民日報 | |
| rénmínbì <i>tóng yīge shìjiè,</i> <i>tóng yīge mèngxiǎng</i> Wénchāng Wú Kěn | 人民幣 同一個世界, 同一個夢想 文昌 吳浬 | |
| Zhāng Wéiqìng | 張維慶 | |
| Zhèjiāng <i>Zhōngguó rén Bào</i> | 浙江 中國人報 | |