

# The truth about China and the Olympic Games - by Bao Tong

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Chinese leaders need the Olympic Games to be legitimate in the eyes of the world and show off their successes. However, the stability they achieved is a consequence of the Tiananmen massacre. More importantly, keeping up appearances and saving face cannot hide the fact that the government in Beijing is incapable of providing justice to its people. Here is an essay by one of the most influential dissidents in today's China.

Beijing (AsiaNews) &ndash; Bao Tong, 75, is one of the most prominent non-violent pro-democracy dissidents in China today. A former member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and personal secretary to former Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang, he opposed the army intervention in 1989 that led to the massacre in Tiananmen Square. For this opposition he spent seven years in prison. Since 1997 he has been under house arrest, under 24-hour surveillance. His phone is bugged and often disconnected. Before his fall from grace, he worked closely with China's current Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. The essay he gave AsiaNews shows his vast culture and knowledge of Chinese history. In our translation we have tried to help readers unfamiliar with the subject matter with explanations in brackets or in footnotes. AsiaNews is responsible for the translation from Chinese.

## 1. The problem of 'Saving Face'

The Beijing Olympics are a great opportunity for China to show off its splendour to the world. Since the Olympic Games take place every four years, a new venue must be found every four years. It is not that hard for world leaders to deal with the matter if one's psychology is 'normal', not so for China's leaders. For them, I fear it is quite impossible.

Why impossible in China? Because China was awarded the Games after the Tiananmen Square massacre. In support of the Chinese people, the international community continued to condemn and denounce a few 'Chinese butchers,' but to show its friendship to more than a billion Chinese, they picked Beijing to host the Olympics.

This is what comes when peoples are on friendly terms but for those who succeeded the people responsible for the 1989 massacre, the first attitude (condemnation) is symptomatic of a desire to demonise China, embodying the 'not yet extinguished desire of hostile forces to exterminate us'; conversely, the second (awarding the Games) is seen as a lucky break that fell from the sky showcasing all of our transformations. Thus, China like Cinderella can say that it has turned into the most beautiful princess of the story.

For decades some people have referred to the Olympics as the end-all and be-all, as (China's) engine, for the sole purpose of showing off (our) splendour, doing all that is possible irrespective of its cost in human or economic terms. Obviously the splendour in question is not that of the Mothers of Tiananmen [1], or that of the people who submit petitions demanding justice, or that of migrant workers. The splendour that China wants to show is that of a stability that has steamrolled over everything, out of which the current greatness and harmony have oozed. Everyone must understand that this is the result of the massacre. Without it the country would not have risen to new heights; without it

there would not have been the existing harmony.

Hosting the Olympic Games legitimises Chinese-style rule, the best kind there is and the best kind practice can show. Foreigners; Glorify us! Patriots; be proud! When I think about this my blood boils. How can this be considered "normal psychology"?

Athletes, sport enthusiasts, and tourists from every country of the world are joyfully coming to China; they are neither in pilgrimage, nor should they cause incidents. What do they come for? To take part in the competitions, to sightsee, to watch, hear, have fun, enjoy and have new experiences.

What is there in China? There are the Terracotta Warriors buried with Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huang; there is the exotic atmosphere Marco Polo liked so much; there is the China in which the Boxer Rebellion broke out; there is the land pillaged by eight Western powers [2].

Across from the Forbidden City Tiananmen Square has seen the endless ocean of Red Guards under the rule of Mao Zedong; it has seen Deng Xiaoping's tanks and machine guns.

After the collapse of Communism China has become the lonely stronghold left to Marxism, Socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is a world miracle, good enough to enchant millions of tourists and encourage them to go down memory lane. Once they are home they will tell their friends, relatives, even grand-children, from generation to the next, that I was there, in China, in 2008. I was in the Middle Kingdom full mysteries, miracles and magic. . . .

Along with visitors hunting for adventures and curiosities some travellers also try to reflect upon their experiences. They are the citizens of the global village who want to look deep into China; study it carefully. They need to understand China's truth.

If they discover something good, then China will be singled out for everyone's admiration, becoming attractive for others as well. Some might even think about moving to China, taking out Chinese citizenship, enjoying the happiness that comes from being under the guidance of Communist rule.

Still for a long time knowing the truth in China was a hard and embarrassing matter. Why? Because news from China are tightly controlled. Chinese journalists must strictly obey and follow what the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party says; they are told what they can and cannot publish as well as the tone in which they can do it.

Foreign media must also strictly adhere to the directives of the government and the foreign ministry. They are told where they can go; what event they can cover; whom they can interview. And this has been going on for quite a long time.

In order to project a new image ahead of the Olympics, the government at the end of 2006 announced that as of 1 January 2007 foreign media would have the "right" to freely interview people. In point of fact it is more of a privilege since Chinese journalists do not enjoy this "right";.

This said even this type of freedom of the press has been limited to only what is harmonious [3]. Whenever something is not harmonious there is no freedom. Only harmonious citizens are given the right to speak, not those who are not harmonious. For this reason, it is not easy to get to the truth in China, not even for those who have lived in the country for a long time. Imagine those who come for a short stay and take a superficial look!

If the truth cannot be known, one might expect few will be willing to move to China and become subjects of the People's Republic as a result of the Olympic Games. Of that, we can be certain.

As for those who are extravagant with their praise, they are bound to be numerous in the diplomatic corps or inside the government. Of that too, we can be certain. Who says that it is impossible to find the truth in China? Of these two points, we are certain!

## 2. The problem of truth (or how to save face)

A recent murder case can help outsiders understand truth Chinese-style. The body of a young woman from Wengan (Guizhou province) was found in a river. In their outrage people laid siege to the local central police station [4].

For the Xinhua news agency, these people are but an amorphous horde "unaware of the truth." Quite so!

Where there is no press freedom, there can be no truth. That is more than quite likely since Xinhua will have a hard time knowing the truth from Beijing.

The agency did however publish the truth from Guizhou right after the initial event, i.e. the truth as publicly reported by the Provincial Communist Party secretary, the highest local official who has the means to control unrest in Wengan.

The secretary talked about two truths. In the first one he acknowledged that "too often in mining, internal migration, house demolition the rights of the population are violated"; in the second, he noted that "in solving these conflicts and controlling mass unrest, some officials are violence-prone, their methods too careless, including the way they employ the police." Thus it is true that the rights of the population are frequently violated; that the police was used too readily.

The latest incident in Wengan is the outcome of these truths. There is no doubt that the main culprits of the incident are those who have always violated the rights of the community, and that they have carelessly used the police.

It is also important to know these truths in relation to how mines are exploited, resources developed, migrants treated, homes forcibly demolished; all of which are the sparks that light up the thousands of fires of mass unrest.

Figures were released in the past. In 2004 more than 80,000 such cases were recorded; that is almost one every five minutes. To protect harmony though, such figures have not been published since 2005, but nothing suggests that they have declined in number and intensity.

Let us be frank! If this system based on violating the rights of the people and on the careless use of police does not change, there will never be peace. A system that violates collective interests and nonchalantly relies on police repression is the real offender. Put these two evils together and havoc is wrecked in people's life, generating a destructive attitude in which everyone wants a show down, even at the risk of one's own life. What is certain is that this system brings neither lasting security, nor lasting peace.

Yes! In China there is such a dangerous system that violates the rights of the population and too readily relies on the police force. It constitutes a danger to peace from within (its power structure) and without (the population).

In reporting the statement by (Guizhou's) Communist Party secretary Xinhua used the passive form, with no active subject. Who acted against the interests of the people? Who carelessly used the police? Since no active subject

was used, the reader can get into a guessing game. Foreigners might think about organised crime. But ordinary Chinese will get it right away after so many years of training and practice. It is our system. Except for our party and government leaders, no one has such power. And like in a well-rehearsed script the news eventually reported the removal of the district chief, the party district chief, the police chief and the police political officer.

Despite this crackdown against officialdom the interests of the citizens can be still be violated at will. The police can be used at will. This is China's truth. Because all Chinese leaders, except for those supreme leaders who receive a Mandate from Heaven, all the others are appointed, from the top to the bottom. Elections are pure theatre. Rao, Sun and Yu; one appointed the other [5]. Emperor Qin drew up provinces and districts and their administrators served at the emperor's pleasure.

Mao Zedong taught that the "Qin's system has been enforced by a hundred generations." The system is too beautiful, for this "I advise you not to insult Qin." All protected officials, not tested in a "direct election," get positive feedback from their superiors. As long they keep their nose clean and are well controlled, what Lao Bai Xing (the ordinary man or woman in the street) can touch them?

(Note: This is why the central government has objected to direct elections based on universal suffrage in Hong Kong. It fears they might have spill-over effects on the mainland, cause contamination by democracy. Under the territory's Basic Law, agreed to by China and the United Kingdom, the central government, i.e. Beijing, is supposed to be responsible only for defence and foreign affairs. Everything else should be under the jurisdiction of Hong Kong and its people. It is not clearly when the Basic Law lost its original meaning; perhaps direct elections and universal suffrage are now part of defence and foreign affairs.)

In other words, party secretaries and their acolytes at the provincial, district and municipal levels get their Mandate from Heaven and govern for all. Their power is boundless—it includes natural resource management, migration controls, housing demolition and the trigger-happy use of police. This is their daily bread.

I deeply believe there are good and honest people inside the Communist Party, and that there are more than a few. But there also are wicked ones, stupid and careless people who persecute and exploit the Lao Bai Xing's of this world, and they too are more than a few. Similarly, inside the Politburo some members are good, some are bad.

But one can surmise that with the Communist system governing everything democracy and the rule of law have no place. Such a system turns those in power in God-like figures. It turns cowards into demons. But above all it is a system that will always deny ordinary people full citizenship. For me this is the most important aspect to come out of this third truth.

How can we get out of this? Quoting the Provincial Party secretary, Xinhua said that one solution lies in strengthening the powers of the Disciplinary Commission. I do not think this is a way out. If Mao were still alive today, he too would not

believe it.

In 1945, Huang Yanpei [6] asked him: "How can we avoid corruption when the party takes over?" Did Mao respond by saying "we have the Disciplinary Commission?" I think not. Instead he Mao said: "We have democracy." Indeed democracy is the way out, but the real question is "Do we have democracy? When did we have it? Can you sirs, who wave Mao's portrait, really tell me when we had democracy?"

When keeping up appearances is more important than the truth and the slogan "serving the people" [7] is more important than the people itself, officials will be aware that only the Party's Disciplinary Commission is above them. Under such circumstances there will be no place for concepts like the "people" or the "law".

This is why Zhao Ziyang, who said that problems must be solved along the "path of democracy and the Law," was condemned by some for provoking a schism within the party and favouring unrest. This is what one might "Chinese-style truth". Wu Hu![8]

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[1] This association includes the families of those killed in the Tiananmen Square massacre of 3-4 June 1989. Ever since the group was founded it sought justice for the victims of the crackdown. For the Communist Party however, they were but "counterrevolutionaries". Ms Ding Zilin, a former professor at Renmin (People's) University in Beijing, is among its most prominent members. She lost her 17-year-old son on that fateful night.

[2] These are the big powers that invaded and humiliated China during the Boxer Rebellion, namely Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

[3] This is a sarcastic reference to one of President Hu Jintao's pet slogans, namely "building a harmonious society" which in his view is intended to reduce the gap between rich and poor in favour of a more balanced development. For many people it is just meaningless slogan.

[4] The population took to the streets in protest when the police claimed the young woman had simply drowned in the river. Instead, her parents say she was raped and then thrown into the river by the scions of some party leaders. See "Police arrest 200 protesters in Guizhou revolt" in AsiaNews.it (30 June 2008 and subsequent days).

[5] These are legendary figures from around 2300-2200 BC who are said to have handed the mantle of power from one another.

[6] Huang Yanpei (1 October 1878 – 21 December 1965), was a great democratic revolutionary and educator. He was education minister for the Republic of China, (before Mao's People's Republic) as well as light industry minister, vice-chairman of the National People's Congress and vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of the People's (Communist) Republic of China.

[7] This phrase is associated with the duties of Communist officials.

[8] This expression indicates sadness and can be rendered in English as 'alas'.