



# CHINESE SUBJECTIVITIES AND THE BEIJING OLYMPICS

Gladys Pak Lei Chong

'Gladys Pak Lei Chong offers an informed discussion of the modern Chinese state's techniques of governmentality, particularly in the production of patriotic subjects. The ramifications of her thoughtful analysis go far beyond the Beijing Olympics'.

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'An eminently readable book full of insights into the intricate ways in which people in China are subject to, and sometimes resist, the governmental calls on them to be ideal national subjects'.

—IEN ANG, Distinguished Professor of Cultural Studies, University of Western Sydney

*Chinese Subjectivities and the Beijing Olympics* develops the Foucauldian concept of productive power through examining the ways in which the Chinese government tried to mobilize the population to embrace its Olympic project through deploying various sets of strategies and tactics. It argues that the multifaceted strategies, tactics and discourses deployed by the Chinese authorities sustain an order of things and values in such a way as to drive individuals to commit themselves actively to the goals of the party-state.

This book examines how these processes of subjectification are achieved by zooming in on five specific population groups: athletes, young Olympic volunteers, taxi drivers, Chinese citizens targeted by place-making projects and the Hong Kong population. In doing so, it probes critically into the role of individuals and how they take on the governmental ideas to become responsible autonomous subjects.

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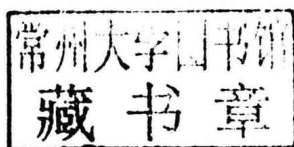
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# **Chinese Subjectivities and the Beijing Olympics**

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tears and sweat. At difficult moments when I desperately need to retreat and rest, I find trust, comfort, and peace with my partner, Marcel. For the last fifteen years, he has always stood by me, providing me with love, patience, kindness, support, positive thoughts and energies. When I need a companion with whom to share such happy moments, Marcel is always around. I also thank my mother and my sister for supporting me in pursuing my dream. When I was growing up, the many family chats in the living room about our family's past and the turmoil in "China" fascinated me; these have sowed the seeds for my interests in "China," the complexity of human relationships, as well as politics and the world at large. I dedicate this book, to Lucius and Leonard. It is so important to stay curious and hopeful, never stop reading, learning, and asking questions.

Gladys Pak Lei Chong  
January 2016



## A Note on Translation and Romanization

Though all research has its challenges, writing about China in English is uniquely challenging in linguistic terms. As I discuss later in this book, “China” is not a simple geopolitical term. Whenever one discusses and writes about this topic, one needs to engage with a set of cultural politics involving “China” and “Chineseness.” There is no such thing as a simple and standardized linguistic practice. This has complicated writing about China. This has also in many ways complicated the process of writing this monograph so that it is no longer a simple matter of following “the house rule” of an academic style. Here, I am obliged to draw your attention to certain aspects, some related more directly to questions of “Chineseness,” others to (more) general issues.

Most of the quotations from my corpus and interviews are originally in Chinese unless otherwise stated, and I translate all of them into English unless otherwise specified. Moreover, the transcriptions of interviews with Chinese interviewees are not always grammatically correct. This is done with an aim to give some idea about the ways these interviewees expressed themselves, especially in the case study of the taxi drivers. I am well aware of the constraints, the debates, and the impossibilities of presenting the “original” and the “authentic” voices. My purpose is not to present something “authentic”; the rationale behind this lies in a “simple” wish to communicate—to bring together the original-native to the foreign-local setting so that they can infect each other with a certain degree of linguistic flux (de Kloet 2005, 121).

Given the linguistic practices in different Chinese-speaking localities, *Hanyu Pinyin* (汉语拼音) is the official system of transliterating Mandarin in the romanized format in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In academic practice, this is also the system commonly used nowadays to write about China. In this book, pinyin is generally used when referring to Chinese names and terms but when some proper nouns are long familiar in other forms such

as the Wade-Giles, their established spellings will be used. Some examples are cheongsam and Kuomintang.

Chinese communities such as Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan<sup>1</sup> have used different romanization systems. When Chinese names from these places are quoted, both pinyin and other romanization systems are used. In some instances, an English name is included when the person referred to is commonly known or officially addressed by that name. For example, when Rey Chow (周蕾) English name is used, I do not change her name into pinyin—Zhou Lei.

Chinese and English names are used as found, citing what the authors themselves generally use, especially for the reference list. Confusion is often created because of the diverging practices in name order. Some Chinese people choose to present their names according to Chinese custom—family name first; others have adopted the Western custom of placing the family name after the first name. And, in other cases, some choose to put their English name before their Chinese first name. For example, 陳巧文's name: Christina (English name) + Hau Man (Chinese first name) + Chan (family name); others put their Chinese first name first, then followed by an English name and the family name, for example, Jinhua (Chinese first name) + Emma (English name) + Teng (family name).

These diverse Romanization practices would mean that pinyin transliteration cannot be used or read as the “standard” language for everyone. As such, I choose to use Chinese characters next to the English translations when Chinese phrases and special terms are involved. For example, when referring to “The Road to Rejuvenation,” I put down (复兴之路) instead of “*fixingzhilu*. Yet, when the pinyin transliteration of a Chinese phrase is widely used and quoted in writing, such as *suzhi* (素质), I provide its English translation, pinyin, and Chinese characters in its first appearance and then the pinyin transliteration is used throughout.

Simplified Chinese characters (简体字) are officially used in the PRC, whereas traditional Chinese characters (繁體字) are used in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and some Chinese overseas communities. In this monograph, I use simplified Chinese to refer to concepts, ideas, and people related to mainland China. However, out of respect for the diverse practices in different Chinese communities, I retain the use of traditional Chinese characters (繁體字) when referring to programmes, names, and titles used in Hong Kong.

## NOTES

1. For a long time, Taiwan had used various Romanization systems such as Wade-Giles; it was only in 2008 that *Hanyu Pinyin* was officially adopted as the Romanization system in Taiwan. It is quite common to come across romanized words derived from other systems such as Wade-Giles or *Tongyong pinyin* (通用拼音).

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## Chapter 1

# The Productive Aspect of Power

## *The Art of Making an Active Chinese Subject*

### THE BEIJING OLYMPICS AND SUBJECTIVITIES STUDIES

A single-party state, China receives negative news for its use of “negative” power, such as media censorship and the prosecution of dissent and dissidents, which could lead one to assume that the Chinese Communist Party’s (hereafter CCP)<sup>1</sup> source of domination is primarily derived from its deployment of force and ideology, and that its people are the oppressed victims of the state, living in shameful conditions with little room for resistance. The 2008 Beijing Games is a case in point.<sup>2</sup> Whenever there were Western media reports about Beijing, citizens’ discontent or government censorship was featured to reiterate an oppositional relationship between an authoritarian Chinese government and the people. Not that criticism was absent within mainland China, but there was a relative lack of domestic protests (Teets, Rosen, and Gries 2010)—at least, based on my observations during the field-work, not as visible or audible as the criticism outside China. The majority of the population seemed to be keen supporters of the Games.<sup>3</sup> Many believed that the Games—despite the amount of resources they cost—would advance China’s status in the global arena, and that the CCP and its current leaders were *doing their jobs* in making China a strong and respectable nation state in the world.<sup>4</sup>

If all the CCP does is to repress and force its will on its people, then how could one explain the consistency of pro-PRC nationalism? And if all the governing body does is to make the people feel deprived, wouldn’t the people feel discontented and rise up to overthrow the regime or, at least, not participate in its agenda? As Foucault writes:



The notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power; one identifies power with a law that says no, so that power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one that has been curiously widespread. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourses. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (1980a, 119)

Based on what I experienced and observed during the fieldwork, I discovered that the strategies and tactics deployed by the ruling authorities were more productive than merely the imposition of negative forms of power could be, for they are means and practices that help achieve the technologies of the government, which are practical and calculated rationalities governed by conscious governing goals.

The sharp contrast between the seemingly overwhelming support of the Games within China and the various global criticisms of China motivated this research: How might we understand the Chinese population's support for the Beijing Olympics and its government? What motivates an individual to become an active subject of the state? This book examines how the productive processes of subjectification are achieved. In other words, I examine the processes under which individuals become self-directed subjects of their own, having internalized state-defined norms/ideals in embracing the nation's dream.

The uneasy tension between the narrowly constructed idea of coercive or oppressive power and a consistency of pro-PRC nationalism forced me to look for theoretical tools to explain the broader ruling strategies and tactics that shape the behaviours of individuals. Foucault's works offer useful analytical tools. In his words: "I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area. . . . I don't write for an audience. I write for users, not readers" (Foucault 1994 [1974], quoted in Nealon, 2008: 112). His works helped me negotiate a labyrinth of questions regarding the state and governance, the processes of subjectification and subjectivity, and above all, questions related to power, unavailable in Chinese literature. So the use of Foucauldian ideas lies in intervention, practicality, and availability.<sup>5</sup>

Foucault writes about the two meanings of a subject, both suggesting power relations: an individual is (1) "subject to someone else by