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August 30, 2008 in The Five-List Plan by The China Beat | 2 comments

Last week, we handed out five medals for media handling of the Games, and now we’re following with a different sort of list, which flags both shortcomings as well as accomplishments.

1) Yellow Card for over-generalization and reinforcing stereotypes: to Thomas Friedman for “Melting Pot Meets Great Wall.” Though the Olympics could be seen as a “teachable moment,” with both the U.S. and China having things to learn from the other, Friedman essentializes both countries here, arguing that the US is diverse while China is focused and goal-driven. Moreover, the jumping off point for Friedman’s piece is his observation that “the Russian team all looks Russian...the Chinese team all looks Chinese; and the American team looks like all of them.” Not only is this a neat bit of selective viewing (what does the New Zealand team look like? The British?), but it overlooks the fact that China is actually enormously diverse (particularly historically), even if Friedman can’t “see” it by watching the opening ceremony. Friedman’s essentializing impulse is further illustrated by a gaffe in this paragraph, preserved in the original but edited in syndication—at the Times, part of Friedman’s intro reads “the African team all looks African”; in syndication, it became “the African teams all look African.” Not only do all Chinese people not look alike, but Africa is actually not a nation.

2) Medal for humor: Xujun Eberlein at Inside-Out China translates several Olympic jokes from Chinese. Though she was concerned that jokes-in-translation are rarely as funny as the original, these manage to make the leap.

3) A medal for quick-off-the-start post-Olympics analysis to YaleGlobal for their on-going series. Part II of the series, “China’s Olympic Run” (“With the Games over, the Communist Party loses a convenient excuse for every hardship”), was written by Pallavi Aiyar, who we previously interviewed about her new book.

4) Yellow Card to China Beat, for having neglected to ever mention Jocelyn Ford as one of “our women in China.” Ford, a freelance journalist working in China, was previously Beijing bureau chief (2002-2006) and Tokyo bureau chief (1994-2000) for Marketplace and blogs regularly for Science Friday. Check out this fabulous short video at the Boston Globe documenting her visit to a farming village to chat about the Olympics with regular Chinese.

5) Own Goal: To China for blocking iTunes, as though it would be more damage to the regime for athletes to hear Tibet-related songs than for it to get criticized for such a ham-handed bit of censorship.

Tags: The 2008 Beijing Olympics