1-20-2008

Taelspin for Sunday, January 20, 2008

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive

Part of the Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Chinese Studies Commons, and the International Relations Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/101

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the China Beat Archive at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
This has been rumored for awhile here in Beijing, but the Angry Chinese Blogger gives the lowdown on the decision by some of the top Olympic teams to avoid staying in Beijing during the games. Reportedly, teams from Europe and America are making arrangements to stay and train in (and this is sure to be particularly galling to the Chinese) Japan out of concerns for pollution, food safety, and other issues. No idea how many teams are considering such an arrangement and, needless to say, Beijing authorities and BOCOG have kept mum on these developments. If it turns out to be a trend, it could be a real blow to Beijing’s self-esteem and, as ACB reports, official reaction could offer an indication of how authorities will handle other ‘embarrassing’ stories in the domestic press during the Olympics.

Moreover, it will not only be the games that will come under scrutiny in 2008, and the same officials may find the foreign press corps more difficult to control than the homegrown variety. The Foreign Ministry has said, doth too much a wag might suggest, that foreign journalists will have unprecedented freedom to report on China this summer. Anecdotal evidence (Mrs. Jenne works for the Beijing bureau of an American newspaper) suggests that many officials, especially those in local areas, haven’t gotten the memo. But as the Olympics approach, Chinese officials struggle with how to handle foreign criticism of long standing problems (pollution, human rights, etc.) as well as the inevitable PR snafus that arise whenever an event of the magnitude of the Olympics is held. The most common response so far to negative reports in the foreign media has been to whine about how foreigners don’t/can’t understand China. Cam at the Zhongnanhai blog says that learning how to take criticism is essential if China is serious about improving its image around the world. As Cam astutely notes, a Falun Gong protester on camera is embarrassing for the Chinese government, but video of the Chinese police, not known for their restraint, beating the guy before hauling him away would be catastrophic for China’s PR campaign. That scenario would probably mean the ballgame in terms of China’s new image, thank you for playing, and all the Fuwa you could muster likely wouldn’t be enough to fix it.

Citizen journalism also presents a challenge to the CCP spinmasters. Via Global Voices Online, Chinese blogger Lao Humiao has published a series of reports on Beijing’s homeless population, who are living in desperate poverty amidst the glitz and redevelopment of the Olympic City.

Why does China care so much about its image? Well, its part of a long history to try and achieve equivalency, as Yan Fu once wrote (via the late Benjamin Schwartz) it’s about the search for ‘wealth and power.’ In the dark days of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the struggle for national survival consumed Chinese intellectuals, many of whom were convinced that China’s weakness would result in her passing into oblivion. Those fears still linger today. China is not in danger of disappearing, but presenting an image of a unified, strong, and confident nation is still seen by many in power as a priority of the highest order. One of the foremost intellectuals of the 20th century, and somebody whose ideas continue to resonate in contemporary China, was Liang Qichao. Dave of The Mutant Palm, has a beautiful post on Liang looking at the influence of Social Darwinism on Liang’s thought and on the subsequent development of Chinese attitudes regarding race and the competition among nations.