

What China staked in wager for Olympics

by Cho Wen-pin

The day before the final decision on game sites for the year 2000 was made by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), tens of thousands of Beijing youths went to the Great Wall, chanting a fresh new theme: "Five-Star Awaits Five-Ring," referring to symbols on the Chinese national flag and the Olympic flag, and romanticizing the supposed economic achievement that made it possible for China to bid for the Olympics 2000.

But this time, the Beijing government was humiliated. One of the reasons it lost the bid to Sydney, Australia can be found in the monumental Tiananmen Square—just 20 miles from the Great Wall, and the place where, four years ago, hundreds of students and other protesters died for their bravery in launching a freedom movement, a heroic event that the Beijing government would like to expunge from the world's memory, using the Olympics to do so.

The bid to host this millennial game started two and a half years ago, when Deng Xiaoping expressed his wish to see the Olympic gods in Beijing. Members of the IOC were treated like gods when they toured the freshly cleaned and decorated city. City Mayor Chen Xitong, who presided over imposition of the 1989 martial law and the crackdown, and now heads Beijing's Olympic bid committee, said earlier this year, "We regard the International Olympic Committee as a god, and what it says is a command to us."

In fact, the full weight of the government and Communist Party, from Deng down to district party chief, was thrown into the effort. Streets were cleaned, highways built, factories with smokestacks moved out, prisoners released. Then, in the days before the IOC decision, the government organized thousands in flag-waving rallies at the Temple of Heaven and the Great Wall.

Had Beijing won the prize, the next seven years would certainly have seen intensive propaganda campaigns, deploying the muscle of the Olympic gods to hold the country together, while the old red gods are dropping the communist torch. So the Communist Party put the prestige of country and party into the hazard, like a desperate gambler with the most to win—or to lose.

But Beijing miscalculated. Had the city won, it would have pulled in billions in investment over the next seven years, but investors would have only put out their money for short-term gains, widening the gap between the capital and the poor interior, where people eat supper by oil lamp.

This would have worsened the bubble economy in the capital. "The government can barely control the economy now. With further stimulus, it would become even more difficult," a Japanese economist told Mark O'Neill of Reuters in Beijing. "Foreign firms wanted Beijing to win so they could benefit from a construction boom to bring the city to Olympic standards, but that would be good for them, not China as a whole."

So the daring bid made little sense economically. It was very *political*, which explains why China was fuming at British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd's public criticism of its try for the Olympics. Minutes after Sydney was announced as the winner, Beijing re-issued a statement first released 11 years ago by Deng Xiaoping, in which he warned that China would take back Hong Kong before the negotiated 1997 date, if serious disturbances arose there.

Downturn of China's relations to the West?

Attacking London over the issue of Hong Kong's return only reflects Chinese wrath toward some western governments and the Anglo-American human/earth/animal rights groups who slapped the communists in the face. Yet the timing of a series of attacks, including China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen's lashing out at the United States as "self-styled 'world cop'" and the underground nuclear test in Xijian, suggests that Beijing is ready to strike back.

The Beijing regime has wasted no time to take this chance to try to gain popularity. Blended with sympathy toward their comrades lost in Moscow over the Oct. 3 weekend, some Chinese communists have revived anti-western hatred. For the rabidly pro-free-trade Chinese, who only saw the trade opportunities brought by the shock therapy in Russia, Yeltsin's "victory" supported by some of the military is an unrealizable dream. The Chinese Army may have even fewer illusions about the West than its Russian counterpart. Indeed, Beijing's hardliners are reportedly pumping out a wave of new propaganda that would shift the role of the People's Liberation Army from "escorting the reform" to "preparing for wars against the West."

When Hong Kong's Olympic committee chief Sales accused Olympics-West of "plotting against China," he mentioned he was not alone in this idea. Yet he had no suspicion that the plot is based on the "Clash of Civilizations" thesis put forward in the Council on Foreign Relations quarterly *Foreign Affairs* by Samuel Huntington of Harvard University, which foresees inevitable battles between the West and the "Confucian" (even though one cannot call today's China Confucian) and "Islamic" civilizations—a thinly disguised declaration of war from the Anglo-American interests which have caused most of the crises in this century.

Without fully understanding how its adversaries had used the Olympic Games to play Beijing from the above vantage point, China's government will not draw any lessons from this 1993 humiliation.