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China's National Representation and the Two-China Question in the Olympic Movement

The Significance of the 1952 Helsinki Games*

XU GUOQI

This paper, through a case study of Beijing's involvement in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, provides a crucial historical analysis of China's current obsession with the Olympic movement and the ongoing Beijing/Taipei dispute over the national representation issue. It demonstrates that both Beijing's all-out campaign for the 2008 Games and the argument across the Strait about who should or should not represent China are nothing new, and are rooted in past experience.

Beijing has many ambitious plans for the 29th Olympiad, including its Olympic torch relay, will have traversed the longest distance, covered the greatest area (even reaching the peak of Mount Everest), and involved the largest number of people in Olympic history. Beijing modelled its torch on the so-called "lucky cloud," and designated "the journey of harmony" as the theme of the torch relay, with "light the passion, share the dream" as its slogan. However, the Taiwan authorities firmly rejected Beijing's plans to route the "lucky cloud" through Taipei, and declared that Taiwan did not to share Beijing's "dream" or its idea of "harmony." Why did Taipei make an issue of Beijing's Olympic torch relay? The answer lies in the debate over national representation and Taiwan's refusal to be seen as part of China.

Many people may be puzzled by the politicization of sports reflected in the torch relay dispute. But disagreements between Beijing and Taipei over who represents China are nothing new and have plagued the Olympic movement since the early 1950s. At the same time, there is a major difference between the current dispute and the earlier version, which lasted from the 1950s until 1980s.

In the previous dispute, both Beijing and Taipei agreed there was only one China, and their disagreement focused

on the question of who represented that China. During the 1960 Rome Olympic Games, when the International Olympic Committee asked Taipei to march under the name of Taiwan in the opening ceremony, Taipei protested by marching behind the card "Under Protest" to remind the world that it wanted to represent China, not Taiwan. In the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, when the Canadian government demanded that the Taiwanese team take part in the Games under the name of Taiwan, Taipei chose to walk out. Since the 1990s, however, Taipei has tried to create a Taiwan identity separate from China by purging any link to the name of China. The torch relay fiasco clearly demonstrates Taiwan's new obsession, especially under the Democratic Progressive Party, with not sharing an identity with Beijing.

This paper will examine the case of the PRC's first involvement in the Olympic Games in 1952 and explain the historical background of the dispute between Beijing and Taipei over the national representation issue in the Olympic movement. In the process of exploring why the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) decided to take part in

* This article is adapted from Xu Guoqi's book *Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895-2008*, Harvard University Press, May 2008.

the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, how the International Olympic Committee and Taipei responded to Beijing's plan, and what was the significance and implications of Beijing's participation in the 1952 Olympic Games, this paper makes use of materials that only very recently became available to shed light on this complicated and long-neglected issue. Apart from providing the historical background of the dispute, this paper also shows that Beijing's recent obsession with the Olympics is not new, and that the newly established PRC regime exhibited a strong interest in the Olympic movement from the outset.

Beijing's decision to take part in the 1952 Olympic Games

Pierre de Coubertin founded the modern Olympiad in a spirit of "all games, all nations."⁽¹⁾ In a dispute over the participation of Bohemia and Finland in the 1912 Games, Coubertin reminded the parties that there existed a "sports geography" that was quite "distinct from the political geography."⁽²⁾ But Coubertin was perhaps too optimistic; individual governments seldom bought into his high idealism when political interests and issues of legitimacy were involved. Some states, though not all, did as they pleased when it came to dealing with the Olympic Games, as when Great Britain refused to allow Ireland to participate independently in the seventh Olympiad in 1920. The Irish athletes responded by refusing to compete under the British flag.⁽³⁾ Until sometime around the early 1990s, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) made a point of stating that it recognized National Olympic Committees (NOCs), not nation-states, and as a result, the IOC could in principle certify an NOC for any territory. For instance, under U.S. territories there are three NOCs: the USOC, the Puerto Rico NOC, and the Guam NOC. Under the British Empire there were also multiple NOCs, including Hong Kong's NOC, certified by the IOC. The best examples on this point are the IOC's certification of two Korean (North and South) and two German (East and West) NOCs.⁽⁴⁾

In dealing with participation of Beijing and Taipei in the Olympic movement, however, the tried and tested IOC principle ran into big trouble. For 30 years after the founding of the PRC in 1949, when the Nationalist government fled to Taiwan, Beijing and Taipei used sports as an important vehicle for pressing their political legitimacy in the world. Each government claimed to represent China and did everything possible to block the other from membership in the Olympic movement. Heated disputes surrounding their

respective membership claims plagued the international Olympic movement for years. The problem was so serious that IOC chancellor Otto Mayer complained, "The quarrel of the 'two Chinas' has been, from 1954 on, the main burden of Olympism."⁽⁵⁾

The question is why the Chinese case has been so difficult and problematic for the IOC to handle. It is impossible to explore the full range of reasons in this essay, but I would like to highlight some key differences between the Chinese case and the others mentioned above.

First of all, over the period from 1949 to the late 1970s, both Beijing and Taipei believed there was only one China, and the key dispute between them was over who truly represented the Chinese nation. Each side declared that it was the legitimate government of China, while the other was a mere pretender, and both swore that the legitimate government would never allow the "rebel" government to play a role in international organizations (*han zei bu liang li*).

Secondly, both governments linked membership in the Olympic movement with political legitimacy, and seemed to ignore or not to understand Olympic principles and IOC rules. This explains why both Beijing and Taiwan were so persistent and intensely engaged in the membership fight. The IOC's inconsistency and incompetence in handling Chinese membership in the Olympic movement only made the issue of China's representation more difficult to manage. The year 1949 was supposed to be a turning point in Chinese history; the Chinese Communists had come to power and sent the Nationalists packing. From the perspective of the PRC, the Republic of China ceased to exist when the Communist government took over the mainland, and Taiwan was merely a renegade province that had no place in the international sport federations and Olympic movement. However, the Olympics were not a priority for the Communists when they first came to power. They may not have even been aware that China had been a member of the Olympic movement for many years, and that one of

1. Coubertin, *Olympic Memoirs*, Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 1997, 126.
2. Coubertin, *ibid*, 138.
3. *The New York Times*, 21 July 1920, 23.
4. For an excellent study on the case of Puerto Rico, see John MacAloon, "La Pitada Olympica: Puerto Rico, International sport, and the constitution of politics," in Edward M. Bruner, ed., *Text, Play, and Story; the construction and reconstruction of self and society*, Prospect Heights, IL, Waveland Press, 1988, 315-355. For the most recent examination of the Korean case, see Brian Bridges, "Reluctant Mediator: Hong Kong, the Two Koreas and the Tokyo Olympics," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24, No. 3, March 2007.
5. Allen Guttman, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, 145.

the three Chinese IOC members, Dong Shouyi, had chosen to remain on the mainland after 1949.⁽⁶⁾ The top Communist leaders were so busy consolidating power, nation-building, and fighting the United States in the Korean Conflict that the upcoming 1952 Helsinki Olympics were not even on their radar screen. Had the Soviet Union not intervened, the PRC might not have considered itself to have a stake in the Olympic Games until much later. By raising the issue when they did, the Soviets facilitated the Communist government's participation in the games, although it was too late for China to actually compete.

Since Beijing had not yet set up a sports commission, the government used the Communist Youth League as a facilitator for sports. Only after taking part in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games did Beijing consider that it might be desirable to establish a separate sports federation. The Chinese Communist Youth League representatives, on their return from Finland, prepared a report on China's participation in the Helsinki Games for Liu Shaoqi, the number-two person in the Communist system, suggesting that Beijing establish a ministry-level sports commission headed by a high official such as a vice-premier. This suggestion was accepted, and He Long, a top military man, assumed leadership.⁽⁷⁾

Why was the USSR interested in Beijing's involvement? The answer is simple: international politics. After World War II, the USSR reversed its former refusal to join corrupt capitalist sports events and decided to compete in every area, to demonstrate the superiority of Russia's political system and society. In 1950 the IOC accepted the Soviet Union's official sports organization as a national Olympic committee, and the 1952 Helsinki Games were Communist Russia's first Olympic appearance. The participation of the Soviet Union in the Olympic movement was important both for sports and for international politics. Avery Brundage, IOC President from 1952 to 1972, wrote in his unpublished memoir that "for the first time in forty years the Russians participated—and the large and well-organized team from the Soviet Union which came to Helsinki astonished the world by its outstanding performance."⁽⁸⁾ The Soviets realized the importance of this as well. A 1953 editorial in a Russian newspaper expressed how pleased Russians were over the 1952 Helsinki Games. It proclaimed, "The Russian people are ready to open their doors ... the Iron Curtain will be lifted for all sportsmen from all over the world."⁽⁹⁾ Brundage did not realize that the USSR's entry into the Olympic movement and the subsequent Soviet push for Beijing's membership in the Olympic movement would force the IOC to deal with the two-China issue even before Beijing's own sports organiza-

tion was properly ready. The Soviet Union had every reason to demonstrate its solidarity with the new communist regime in China and to groom it as a close ally in the Cold War.

The Russians seem to have brought the Olympics issue to Beijing's attention in 1951. Beijing's foreign ministry was informed by Helsinki, which was under strong Russian sway politically and diplomatically, that Finland would like to have Beijing to take part in its 1952 Olympic Games. Finnish enthusiasm for the PRC's participation made then-IOC President J. Sigrid Edström uneasy, since he had no desire to get embroiled in the tricky China issue.⁽¹⁰⁾ Beijing, being unfamiliar with world sports, did not initially take Finland's invitation seriously,⁽¹¹⁾ but a sharp prod from the Russians the next year quickly sent Beijing into action. On 2 February 1952, the Soviet ambassador to Beijing made an urgent inquiry as to whether Beijing would send a delegation to the 1952 Games and whether the new China would join the Olympic movement and attend the IOC meeting on 15 February 1952. Following his meeting with the Soviet ambassador that day, Feng Wenbin, Secretary of the Chinese Communist Youth League, wrote a report to Premier Zhou Enlai concerning China's potential participation in the 1952 Games. This report, which has become available to scholars only recently, explains that the Russian had asked Feng to tell the Russian embassy immediately what China's attitude was toward Olympic participation. According to the report, the Soviets were under the impression that Beijing was not a member of the Olympic family while Taiwan was. The ambassador reminded Beijing that participation in the Olympics was an important political issue, and he even suggested that his government was willing to train Chinese athletes so the Russians and Chinese could attend the Games together.

6. The other two, Wang Zhengting and Kong Xiangxi, decided to leave. Kong lived in the United States after 1949, while Wang resided in Hong Kong.
7. Beijing's National Olympic Committee was not established until November 1952. For details on the impact of the Helsinki Games on Beijing's thinking, see the report to the Party's central committee from China's delegation to the 1952 Olympic Games, 21 August 1952, which can be found in Rong Gaotang, *Rong Taotang tiyu wen lun xuan* (Selected articles and speeches of Rong Gaotang on sports), Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992, 5-8. See also Li Lie, ed. *He Long nianpu* (Chronological biography of He Long), Beijing: Ren min chubanshe, 1996, 519-520.
8. Brundage draft memoir, chapter xi, in Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois Archives, Urbana (hereafter quote as ABC), box 250, reel 244.
9. Brundage draft memoir, chapter xi, 7-8. ABC, box 250, reel 244.
10. Edström to Otto Mayer, 24 March 1952, in International Olympic Committee Historical Archives, Lausanne, Switzerland (hereafter IOC Archives): République populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.
11. For details on this internal discussion, see Fan Hong and Xiong Xiaozheng, "Communist China: sport, politics and diplomacy," in J. Mangan and Fan Hong, eds., *Sport in Asian Society*, London, Frank Cass, 2003, 320-327.



Top leaders attending the PRC's first national games, Beijing, 1959.

Given Beijing's official policy to learn from the USSR through most of the 1950s, this inquiry and suggestion from Beijing's "elder brother" carried much weight. The report from Feng spurred Zhou Enlai to meet with him on 4 February about the Olympics issue, and Zhou forwarded Feng's report to Liu Shaoqi with his own recommendations that same day. Zhou told Liu that, based on his discussion with Feng Wenbin, he felt Beijing should send a telegram to the IOC in the name of the All-China Sports Federation, which then existed only in name, to declare that Taiwan could not represent China in the Olympic movement. He suggested demanding that the IOC allow Beijing to attend its February meeting and the upcoming Olympic Games. Zhou also told Liu that the telegram had already been sent, due to the pressing deadline.

With no understanding of China's past involvement with the Olympic movement, the telegram dashed off to the IOC claimed that Beijing had just organized a national Olympic committee and requested IOC certification for Beijing to participate in the 1952 Games. Zhou further reported to Liu:

I estimate that if the IOC does not allow us to attend its February meeting, then we will not attend the July Olympic Games to avoid running into the delegation from Chiang Kai-shek's bandit organization. [But] if the IOC invites us [not Chiang]. . . to attend the February meeting, the situation is favourable to us

politically. Moreover, since the Games will take place in Helsinki, we may attend. Even if we don't do well in the competition, it is not important.

Zhou asked Liu to make a decision about Beijing's participation in both the meeting and the games, and Liu quickly approved Zhou's suggestion.⁽¹²⁾ This new insight into the background of Beijing's early interest in the Olympic movement and the 1952 Games is notable for demonstrating the importance Party leaders placed on sports from the beginning. More interestingly, it shows how Beijing chose to fight its first major battle for international legitimacy through its membership in the Olympic family and Olympic Games.

Once a decision had been made, Beijing acted quickly and with determination. As IOC president Edström wrote in June 1952, "The Communist Chinese organizations are making all kinds of efforts to take part in the Olympic Games in Helsinki."⁽¹³⁾ To make sure the IOC and the

12. "Dui zhongguo shifou canjia di shiwujie guoji aolinpike yundong hui wenti de piyu" (Comments on the report regarding whether China should take part in the XVth Olympic Games), February, 1952, in Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiu Shi, Zhongyang Danganguan, eds., *Jianguo yilai Liu Shaoqi wengao* (Collections of Liu Shaoqi's comments, writings, and speeches after the founding of the PRC), Beijing, Zhongyang Wenxian chubanshe, 2005, 4:4-5. See also Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiu Shi, Zhongyang Danganguan, eds., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu, 1949-1976* (Chronological biography of Zhou Enlai), Beijing, Zhong yang wen xian chubanshe, 1997, 1:214.

13. Edström to R. M. Ritter [honorary secretary FINA], 6 June 1952, IOC Archives: Republique Populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

Games' organizers received Beijing's message, the Chinese ambassador to Finland, Geng Biao, personally involved himself in getting the telegram delivered on February 5. China even sent its diplomat from Stockholm to personally visit IOC president Edström about Beijing's membership and the invitation to the 1952 Games. In a presentation to Edström on February 13 during the IOC's Oslo session, Sheng Zhibai argued that the PRC's All China Athletic Federation represented 600 million people and should be considered the only proper participant in the Olympic movement from China. He further demanded that the IOC immediately expel Wang Zhengting and Kong Xiangxi, Nationalist officials still serving as IOC members for China in exile, and decertify Taiwan's NOC. But Edström had had enough from the Beijing diplomat and cut him off: "My dear sir, you are neither qualified nor entitled to give the IOC orders or instructions!"⁽¹⁴⁾

Here Beijing made two mistakes. First, the PRC's forceful intervention conveyed a strident politicization of sports that was off-putting to the IOC. Second, by not using Dong Shouyi, the IOC member who remained in China, to communicate with the IOC, Beijing not only forfeited any legitimate claim to membership in the Olympic movement, but also gave the impression that Dong was either dead or imprisoned, even though the Communist government was at that time either unaware of or uninterested in Dong Shouyi and his IOC involvement.⁽¹⁵⁾ It was Dong who learned of Beijing's intentions and eventually made contact with the government.⁽¹⁶⁾ Had Beijing known the IOC rules and Olympic principles and simply asked Dong Shouyi to contact the IOC, Dong might well have attended the IOC first sessions in February that year as China's sole representative, given that Wang Zhengting and Kong Xiangxi were too demoralized to go to Helsinki after the Nationalist defeat in the civil war.

Erik von Frenckell, an IOC member in Finland, informed the other IOC members that the Chinese ambassador in Helsinki had been in contact with him and demanded to know why Beijing had not yet been invited to the 1952 Olympic Games. Frenckell recommended to the IOC session that it should make a decision about the China issue before the 1 June deadline. Avery Brundage, who was to become IOC president in 1952, declared that the IOC must establish contact with all three Chinese members before it could reach a decision. With the civil war raging in China, all three members had lost contact with the IOC back in 1948, and the Taiwan side spread a rumour that Dong Shouyi was dead.⁽¹⁷⁾ In his meeting with Sheng

Zhibai, Edström asked about Dong Shouyi and was told that he was alive and well. "His place is here in Helsinki," the IOC president told Sheng, who was shadowing the IOC session in Oslo.⁽¹⁸⁾ Since the IOC rules indicated that no athletes could participate in the Olympics unless they belonged to an international federation, Beijing managed in April 1952 to convince the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur to accept the All-China Athletic Federation as a member by claiming that it succeeded the previous Chinese organization and had paid up the affiliation dues in arrears since 1949.⁽¹⁹⁾ Beijing did the same with pre-existing Chinese memberships in other world sports federations, including the pentathlon, gymnastics, ice hockey, skating, volleyball, and football.

The so-called two-China issue would have been much easier for Beijing to manage had it done its homework and sent Dong Shouyi in the first place. But because of ignorance and its tendency to resort to high-handed methods, the Beijing government turned what should have been a simple sports issue into a messy political standoff. These critical mistakes strained relations between Beijing and the IOC from the outset. In his telegram to Beijing's All-China Athletic Federation, Edström wrote on 17 June 1952 that their Olympic committee had not yet been recognized and their travel to Helsinki would be "useless."⁽²⁰⁾ He sent another telegram on 8 July 1952 to Rong Gaotang, a Chinese sports official, telling him that China was in political chaos and the IOC had decided that no Chinese athletes "may compete until difficulties are resolved." He also asked Rong to inform Dong Shouyi that his presence in Helsinki was "desired."⁽²¹⁾ Despite Edström's position, Beijing was determined to attend the Games and soon dispatched Dong to take part in the IOC's Helsinki session later that month. When Dong showed up at the meetings with a translator, Edström sent the man out of the room, since according to IOC rules translators were not allowed to attend IOC meet-

14. For details, see the IOC minutes of 46th session, Oslo, 12-13 February 1952.

15. For details on this point, see Hua Zhi, *Su yuan—Dong Shouyi zhuan* (Biography of Dong Shouyi), Beijing, Renmin tiyu chubanshe, 1993, 114.

16. Hua Zhi, *Su yuan – Dong Shouyi zhuan*, 111-113.

17. The IOC minutes of 46th session, Oslo, 12-13 February 1952.

18. IOC: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique, 1947-1975, folder, Peking: 1952-1958.

19. R. M. Ritter [honorary secretary FINA] to Edström, 9 June 1952, and Ritter to the All-China Athletic Federation, 25 April 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

20. IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique, 1947-1975, folder, Peking: 1952-1958.

21. IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique, 1947-1975, folder, Peking: 1952-1958.

ings. Dong's translator refused, saying that Dong only spoke Chinese. According to an eye-witness report, Edström rapped his cane on the table and said icily, "You are lying. I spoke with him in English without any difficulties as recently as 1948! Leave the room immediately!" The interpreter left, taking Dong with him. It was obvious that Beijing did not trust Dong at that time. But it was also true that in 1951 the newly elected Russian member Konstantin Andrianov attended the IOC session in Vienna with an interpreter without a fuss from the IOC. Only at its 1954 session in Athens did the IOC decide that newly elected IOC members must have an adequate knowledge of French or English or both.⁽²²⁾

Dong's appearance at the Helsinki session accomplished little for the IOC, since he was in no position to resolve the problems surrounding Beijing's demands. J. Sigrid Edström reminded members that Beijing's athletes were waiting in Leningrad for an invitation.⁽²³⁾ Forced into a quick decision, the IOC executive board proposed not to accept either Taiwan or Beijing for the 1952 Olympic Games. This obvious dodge was not very effective, given that, as Erik von Frenckell pointed out, Taiwan's NOC had already been recognized and could not be excluded from the Games. Frenckell then suggested that the athletes of both Chinas be allowed to take part. When the IOC session voted 29-22 to allow both teams to participate at Helsinki, the IOC put aside a decision on Beijing's membership until later. On 18 July, one day before the opening ceremony of the Helsinki Games, the IOC finally extended invitations to both Beijing and Taipei.

Taiwan's and the IOC's tactical errors

Taiwan's successful efforts to remain in the Olympic movement after 1949 had more to do with Cold War international politics than the effectiveness of its policy. The fact that most Western countries diplomatically recognized Taipei rather than Beijing up to the 1970s gave Taiwan powerful leverage in the IOC. Taiwan, after all, continued to represent China even in the United Nations until 1971. Taipei did make several astute moves, one of which was to claim political legitimacy directly from the Republic of China, founded in 1912 and a member of the Olympic movement since 1922; Taipei also immediately notified the IOC of the Chinese National Olympic Committee's change of address to Taiwan after the Nationalist government fled the mainland. These moves in the long run helped Taipei to remain

part of the Olympic family, no matter how hard Beijing tried to dislodge it.⁽²⁴⁾ Even with all these advantages, however, the Nationalist government, like its mainland counterpart, made several mistakes in its negotiations over the membership issue.

One mistake was its handling of the 1952 Olympic Games. Initially, the Nationalist government intended to take part in the Games and started to prepare for them in 1951. On 3 March 1951, the government allocated NT\$80,000 for selecting and training athletes. But on 10 May 1951, Hao Gengsheng, an important sports leader who had moved to Taiwan with the Nationalists, suggested that Taiwan not participate in the Helsinki Games because the USSR, attending the Games for the first time, might use the forum to confront Taiwan. This bad advice swayed the cabinet. When Taipei learned that Beijing had been invited to participate, its decision not to attend was strengthened on the principle of *han zei bu liang li*. In other words, the rationale of "no two Chinas" actually lay behind Taipei's thinking at this point, long before Beijing embraced it as grounds for withdrawing from the Olympic movement.⁽²⁵⁾ In an official letter to IOC president Edström dated 19 July 1952, the Nationalist Olympic committee wrote, "as a protest against the resolution adopted at the plenary session of the International Olympic Committee on July 17, 1952, which compromises the right and position of the Chinese National Olympic committee of China, I beg to inform you that we have decided to withdraw our participation in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games." This letter was signed by Hao Gengsheng, president of the Taiwan NOC.⁽²⁶⁾ In its official statement, Taiwan's NOC protested that by "allowing Chinese Communists to participate in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki," the IOC's decision was "unlawful as it approves

22. But the new rule said that existing members who were not familiar with these languages could be assisted by an interpreter. In other words, the IOC used a pretext to reprimand Beijing during their first official contact. This was not good for its own credibility, either.

23. The minutes of the IOC session, Helsinki, July 1952.

24. For details on Taiwan's relations with the IOC in the early 1950s, see Hao Gengsheng, *Hao Gengsheng hui yi lu* (Memoirs of Hao Gengsheng), Taipei, Zhuan ji wen xue chubanshe, 1969, 40-54, 72-95.

25. Tang Mingxin, an important sport scholar and official in Taiwan, later claimed that Taiwan's withdrawal from the 1952 Olympic Games and late march "under protest" in the 1960 Rome Olympics were not good choices, since neither helped Taiwan's effort to stay in the Olympic movement under the name of Republic of China. See Tang Mingxin, *Tang Mingxin xiansheng fangwen jilu* (The reminiscences of Mr. Tang Mingxin, interviewed by Zhang Qixiong and Pan Guangzhe), Taipei, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 2005, 176-177.

26. Announcement of withdrawal from participation in the XVth Olympiad Helsinki 1952 by Chinese National Olympic Committee, 17 July 1952, Hao Gengsheng to Edström, 19 July 1952, IOC Archives: Republique Populaire de Chine, histoire, 1952-1986.

entry of competitors from China not entered by the Chinese National Olympic Committee, which is the only legal national Olympic committee of China and has been recognized as such for many years.”⁽²⁷⁾ Taiwan’s decision not to participate in the Helsinki Games, however, left the door open for Beijing to step in uncontested and make its debut in the international sports arena.⁽²⁸⁾ Of course, as explained later, the IOC’s mixed signals to Taiwan about its participation in the 1952 Olympic Games also played a role in Taiwan’s eventual decision not to participate.⁽²⁹⁾

The Nationalists made another mistake in failing to act regarding the two IOC members Kong Xiangxi and Wang Zhengting, whose involvement in IOC matters had long lapsed, leaving them confronted with forced resignation. Kong, who served as Secretary of the Treasury in the Nationalist government and had been an IOC member since 1939, had never even attended an IOC meeting. While in theory IOC members were chosen by the IOC itself and functioned as Olympic ambassadors to the countries from which they were chosen, individual states retained a degree of influence through their national Olympic committees. It should have been especially important to Taipei communicate with these two members more effectively and have more voices at the table as it engaged in a membership war with Beijing. Brundage, who was obviously pro-Taiwan, advised Hao Gengsheng even before the Helsinki Games that “the important thing now is for Nationalist China to have its representative at Helsinki prepared to fight vigorously for its recognition by the different international federations and the International Olympic Committee. This is a very serious situation.”⁽³⁰⁾

As it turned out, during the crucial diplomatic battle between Taipei and Beijing over membership in the Olympic movement, the only contribution Kong Xiangxi made was to write to Otto Mayer on 29 February 1952 to oppose the IOC’s recognition of the All-China Athletic Federation “because it is against the rules of the International Olympic Committee which states that the national Olympic committee of any country must be affiliated with the IOC.” Kong commented, “I believe the Olympic committee of China is still in existence and functioning on Taiwan.”⁽³¹⁾ In a cablegram on 22 April 1954, Brundage told Hao Gengsheng bluntly that it was “most important you have someone at Athens. Wang [Zhengting] and Kung [Xiangxi] are both delinquent according to rules and liable to forfeit [their] memberships because of repeated non-attendance.”⁽³²⁾ After prompting by the IOC, Kong finally tendered his resignation in a letter to Brundage on 24 June 1955.⁽³³⁾ Wang Zhengting, although more involved in

the IOC than Kong, rarely took part in IOC meetings and other activities after the 1948 London Olympic Games. He sent his resignation to Brundage in 1954, but changed his mind and eventually resigned for good in 1957.⁽³⁴⁾ It thus transpired that over the course of these crucial developments, Taipei had no active IOC members, while Beijing’s Dong Shouyi aggressively asserted Beijing’s interests.

If both Beijing and Taipei made mistakes negotiating their membership conflicts regarding the 1952 Olympic Games, the IOC itself may also be called on to shoulder an important share of the blame. In hindsight, the IOC seems to have been incompetent and ignorant in dealing with the two-China issue.

The IOC’s first misstep was its readiness to change the China NOC’s address from mainland China to Taiwan in 1951. When Hao Gengsheng, on behalf of the Taiwan’s sports authority, informed the IOC that the office of the Chinese Olympic committee had been relocated from Nanjing to Taipei, the IOC bureaucrats did not understand the enormous political significance of the shift and simply recorded the change of address in issue 28 of the *Olympic Review*. Only later on did Avery Brundage realize the misstep: “After the revolution in China, we received notice from its national Olympic committee for a change in address to Taipei, Taiwan. The change had been made on the records in the IOC office in Lausanne as a purely routine matter, without any thought of the political significance.”⁽³⁵⁾

It is fair to point out that Edström had tried to determine the significance of the address change. He wrote, “It is essential that we learn to know which is the proper Olympic Committee of China. We have had a letter from China National Amateur Athletic Federation, 147 West Gate Street, Hsin Chu, Taiwan. This federation claims to be the National Olympic

27. ABC, box 201, reel 116.

28. Hao officially informed Edström on 19 July 1952 about Taiwan’s withdrawal from the games. IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique, 1947-1975, folder, Taiwan, 1951-1964. Hao Gengsheng in his memoir did not mention this tactical error. For details, see *Hao Gengsheng hui yi lu*, 40-54.

29. Hao Gengsheng wrote an angry letter to J. Sigfrid Edström, on 31 July 1952, after Taiwan’s withdrawal to protest Beijing’s participation, stating that he had no power and authority to cable Taiwan on 16 June 1952 “the following abrupt and insolent message: ‘you may not participate.’” IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique, 1947-1975/folder/Taiwan, 1951-1964. See also “Hao to Brundage, personal and confidential,” ABC, box 120, reel 66.

30. Brundage to Hao Gengsheng, 17 June 1952, ABC, box 120, reel 66.

31. ABC, box 120, reel 66.

32. ABC, box 120, reel 66.

33. ABC, box 120, reel 66.

34. The IOC to Brundage, 3 May 1954. ABC, box 120, reel 66.

35. ABC, Brundage draft memoir.

Committee of China.”⁽³⁶⁾ Unfortunately he did not pursue the matter further after Wang Zhengting and Kong Xiangxi simply claimed that the NOC in Taiwan was the right one.⁽³⁷⁾ As Edström told Otto Mayer, the IOC chancellor, “I do not want to spend more time on this Chinese question.”⁽³⁸⁾

Regardless of who was to blame, the damage was done, and it was not until June 1952 that Erik von Frenckell, IOC member and chairman of the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games organizing committee, wrote to Edström to protest the handling of the address change. He pointed out, “The change of the address of the Chinese Olympic committee from Peking to Taiwan has been a mistake, not confirmed by the Executive Committee nor by the Congresses.” He suggested to Edström that “this question should be finally settled by the Congress [IOC session] in Helsinki.”⁽³⁹⁾ But matters were not to improve soon: Edström’s successor, Avery Brundage, chose to follow Edström’s policy. As Brundage wrote to Edström in 1952, “The Chinese situation is indeed a most complicated and difficult one. As you say, it is hard to tell what to do.”⁽⁴⁰⁾

The IOC’s passivity led to another misstep, namely, its hasty decision to allow both Beijing and Taipei to take part in the 1952 Games. When Beijing broached its intention to join the Games, the IOC was not at all prepared to respond and was forced to make an ad hoc decision, since the new sports authority in Beijing was not an official Olympic committee and Taipei claimed to represent China. As Brundage told Edström at this crucial moment, “The most that we can do would be to recognize both [Beijing and Taipei] and this, of course, we have refused to do in the case of Germany. The whole situation is most difficult and it is too bad that we can’t get through the next two months without taking a stand.”⁽⁴¹⁾ Edström initially decided to allow neither Beijing nor Taipei to participate in the Helsinki Games and so notified them by telegram in mid-June.⁽⁴²⁾ The IOC president-elect Brundage wrote to Edström, “Your action on the Chinese question in notifying both organizations that they are not eligible to participate at Helsinki, as I wrote to your before, is the correct one.”⁽⁴³⁾ But Edström was not naïve enough to believe that the problem was solved with this decision. As he told Otto Mayer the very day he decided to bar both parties, “We will probably have a great fight about this matter in Helsinki with the Russian delegates and other friends from behind the iron Curtain.”⁽⁴⁴⁾

Attacks soon came from many directions. The Helsinki Games organizing committee chair Frenckell protested Edström’s decision, telling him that “we have been informed that FIFA, FIBA and FINA [the corresponding

International Federations] have accepted the Peking Chinese as representatives of China.”⁽⁴⁵⁾ As a matter of fact, the Helsinki organizing committee had already sent invitations to both parties to join the Games before Edström informed Beijing and Taiwan not to come.

Given the fast-approaching deadline for the beginning of the Games and the strong criticisms he was facing, Edström asked IOC members to vote on two proposals in a general session: 1) No Chinese team should be allowed to participate, or 2) Both teams should be allowed to compete. The second proposal won by 29 votes to 22. The IOC executive board, however, requested an additional vote on a proposal by French member Francois Pietri, who wanted the IOC to approve participants only in those sports for which their national federations were affiliated with the relevant international federation. Pietri’s proposal won by 33 votes to 20. To be on the safe side, Avery Brundage, newly elected to succeed Edström, suggested that the IOC should not recognize either of the Chinese national Olympic committees until later. But even this compromise, as Brundage himself admitted, “breaks our own rules... because it is inspired by the sympathy we feel for the sportsmen who are on the way to Helsinki.”⁽⁴⁶⁾ This represented a complete reversal of the original decision. The IOC seemed to be at its wit’s end and could come up with no other solution. Thus it committed the fiasco of inviting Beijing to attend the Games just one day before the Games kicked off.

36. J. Sigfrid Edström letter (no recipient’s name, presumed to be addressed to the IOC members in China), 30 May 1951, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

37. Kong Xiangxi to Otto Mayer, 16 May 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, histoire, 1952-1986. Both Wang and Kong were high officials of the Nationalist government and had political reasons to support Taiwan’s claims. Moreover, although both were IOC members, they had not been actively involved in the IOC for quite a long time.

38. Edström to Otto Mayer, 24 March 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

39. Frenckell to Edström, 19 June 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique 1947-1975/Helsinki 1952, Rome 1960.

40. Brundage to Edström, 2 June 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

41. Brundage to Edström, 2 June 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

42. Account of exchange of telegrams between the President of the International Olympic Committee, J. Edström, and the All China Athletic Federation, Peking” IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, histoire, 1952-1986

43. Brundage to Edström, 3 July 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

44. Edström to Mayer, 16 June 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique 1947-1975/Helsinki 1952, Rome 1960.

45. Frenckell to Edström, 19 June 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, Juridique 1947-1975/Helsinki 1952, Rome 1960.

46. The IOC minutes of 47th session, Helsinki, 16-27 July 1952.

Beijing marches into the Olympic movement

The new PRC government was certainly quick to understand the significance of the Olympic Games to their political legitimacy and took action with amazing speed. Having finally gotten the green light from the IOC, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and Zhou Enlai, the PRC's three top leaders, immediately approved the decision for Beijing to attend the Olympic Games, although the decision was not made public until 23 July, after Beijing learned that Taiwan would not attend the Olympics. Late in the evening of 24 July, Zhou met with delegation leaders and told them that although Beijing was late for the Games, "It is a victory for the PRC when its flag is flying at the [Helsinki] Olympic Games. Being late was not our fault."⁽⁴⁷⁾ The delegation left for Finland on 25 July and arrived in Helsinki on 29 July, one day before the closing ceremony. It failed to take part in any competition; one of its swimmers participated in a preliminary competition but he failed to qualify for the next round.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Even so, Beijing did participate in some of the Games' cultural programs, and Zhou Enlai had personally examined the program that would be performed by the Chinese entertainment acrobatic troupe in its visit of Helsinki. Zhou told the acrobatic entertainers that they were China's national treasures and expressed the hope that they would win glory for the motherland.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Beijing's principal interest in the Olympic Games and Olympic movement was to seek legitimacy in the world arena in the face of the recognition by Western countries widely commanded by the Nationalist government in Taiwan. As the Russians had made abundantly clear, the Helsinki Games provided an important platform for such efforts. Simply being there and seeing its flag fly with those of other countries counted as a victory for the new government in Beijing.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Moreover, by setting one foot in the Olympics in 1952, Beijing again forced the IOC's hand. The very day the Chinese delegation departed Helsinki on 3 August 1952, the Beijing government fired off a telegram to Otto Mayer, the IOC's chancellor, and demanded that the IOC approve Beijing's membership in the Olympic movement.⁽⁵¹⁾ The IOC did just that in 1954 by formally recognizing the Chinese Olympic Committee.

Thus between 1954 and 1958, both Taiwan and Beijing claimed to represent "China" in the Olympic family. But Beijing was not happy to have Taipei remain in the Olympic movement and strongly protested the representation of China by two rival regimes. In 1958, concluding that the

IOC was hostile to Beijing and followed a pro-Taiwan and pro-Two-China policy, Beijing officially broke off its relationship with the Olympic movement. This decision was made by China's top leaders, and under direct instruction from Deng Xiaoping, China's sport commission summarily withdrew from 11 international sport organizations that accepted Taiwan's membership.⁽⁵²⁾ Beijing did not return to the Olympic movement until 1979, when the IOC made concessions to Beijing by changing Taiwan's NOC name to Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee and forbidding Taipei from using its flag, anthem, or emblem in the Olympic movement.

It is also worth pointing out that Taiwan did not play a completely passive role in these developments. Taiwan realized that the IOC-mandated English name, the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee, could not be changed, but Taiwan could manipulate the Chinese translation of that name. Beijing insisted that it should read *Zhongguo Taibei*, but Taipei made it *Zhonghua Taibei*, throwing the two sides into another serious dispute. The one character difference was important, according to Wu Jingguo, an IOC member from Taipei involved directly in the negotiations, because it implied whether or not Taiwan was subordinate to Beijing's Chinese Olympic Committee. Several secret meetings were held in Hong Kong to work out a solution, and in the end it was Deng Xiaoping who finally decided to accept Taiwan's translation. In 1989, Beijing and Taiwan signed an official agreement regarding the Taipei's NOC's Chinese name.⁽⁵³⁾ It is important to point out that the final solution of the two-China issue in the IOC and in other international sports federations reflected Deng Xiaoping's concept of one-country-

47. Hua Zhi, *Su yuan – Dong Shouyi zhuan*, 118-119.

48. "Dui zhongguo shifou canjia di shi wu jie guo ji ao lin pi ke yundong hui wenti de piyu," February 1952, in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiu Shi*, *Zhongyang Danganguan*, eds., *Jianguo yilai liu shaoqi wengao*, 4: 4-5. See also *Zhou enlai nianpu*, 1:214.

49. *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 1:250.

50. Liang Lijuan, *He Zhenliang: Wu huan zhi lu* (He Zhenliang and the Olympics), Beijing, Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2005, 19, 27.

51. Rong Gaotang to Otto Mayer, 3 August 1952, IOC Archives: Republique populaire de Chine, correspondence, 1924-1958.

52. Liang Lijuan, *ibid*, 34.

53. Wu Jingguo, *Ao lin pi ke zhonghua qing* (My Olympics and China bond), Suzhou, Suzhou daxue chubanshe, 2005, 65, 205-206; Wu Jingguo, *Ao yun chang wai de jing ji* (Competitions beyond the Olympic Games), Taipei, Tianxia yuanjian chubanshe, 2001, 97-105. Although it allowed Taiwan to use "Zhonghua Taibei," Beijing itself uses "Zhongguo Taibei" in its own media. Song Shixiong, who was China Central Television's top sport announcer, recalls that he always marked *Zhongguo Taibei* clearly to make sure he got it right, since the one-character difference involved a "major principal question" and "cannot be confused." See Song Shixiong, *Song Shixiong zishu: Wo de tiyu shi jie yu ying ping chun qiu* (The story of Song Shixiong: My times with the sports world and television), Beijing, Zuo jia chubanshe, 1997, 208.

two-systems. Many people are aware that Deng developed this concept to deal with Hong Kong's return from British colonial control, but few realize that the idea was first applied in resolving the Olympic dispute with Taiwan. More importantly, pragmatic attitudes on both sides of the straits and avoiding the mistakes of the past allowed Chinese in both the PRC and Taiwan to take part in the Olympics and other international events together. Taiwan, of course, was not happy with the conditions imposed on it, but being present under whatever name conferred a sense of legitimacy that was increasingly eroding in other world forums. Since then, although Taiwan and Beijing continue to be political rivals, their athletes have competed in the Games together, and Taiwan's status as a National Olympic Committee has in all respects been fully maintained and respected. Unlike the old zero-sum game perspective, the hard-won solution has proved a win-win situation, and suggests a model that could serve as a basis for future political relations between Beijing and Taiwan.

The Taiwan formula also served as a model for dealing with Hong Kong following its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Hong Kong was first accepted as a member of Olympic movement in 1950, while it was still a British colony, and retained its membership in the Olympic movement with Beijing's blessing; two days after the handover, Hong Kong and the IOC signed an agreement on 3 July 1997 that declared, "It is the common aim to enable the

people of Hong Kong to continue taking part in the Olympic Games and generally in sports competitions everywhere as a separate and independent entity." In the new arrangement, Hong Kong's Olympic committee would add "China" to "Hong Kong" in its committee designation in accordance with the Basic Law; Hong Kong teams would fly the flag of the Special Administrative Region at all times, while the Chinese National Anthem would be played on official occasions such as flag-raising and victory ceremonies. According to the agreement, the initials "HKG" would be maintained, and the emblem would feature the bauhinia blossom with the Five Rings and the Chinese characters *Zhongguo Xianggang* all within a circle, followed by "Hong Kong" with "CHINA" underneath.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Juan Samaranch, who served as the IOC president from 1983 to 2001, once boasted that "we are the only international organization in the world—sports organization or other—that recognizes as full members the national Olympic committees of the People's Republic of China and Chinese Taipei." However, looking back at the history of the China issue in the IOC, the organization has little to be proud of. Still, given the rocky early phase of their relations between 1958 and 1979, it is amazing to see how the IOC and Beijing have become close allies, always willing to boost each other's interests in preparation for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. It now remains to be seen how the Beijing Olympics will affect China's national representation. •

54. The IOC executive board meeting minutes, Lausanne, 3-6 September 1997.