

SACRED FLAME: 100 YEARS LATER
STILL BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

BY

XU XIAO

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Recreation, Sport, and Tourism
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011

Urbana, Illinois

Master's Committee:

Professor Carla A. Costa
Professor Carla A. Santos

ABSTRACT

The Olympic torch relay, as the essential bond between the ancient and the modern Olympic Games and the symbol of Olympism, serves as the prelude to the Olympic Games and conveys a message of peace, goodwill and friendship along its route. Even though the torch relay is one of the most essential rituals of the Olympic Games and the Torch Relay Department is one of the most important departments for each Olympic organizing committee, barely any scholarship on the torchbearers and their experiences has been conducted. The purpose of the study was to explore and further our understanding of the meanings and impacts of the torch bearing experience.

Narratives of fifteen ordinary people who were publicly selected as 2008 Olympic torchbearers were collected and three themes, with several subthemes under each, were identified from the data: (1) Paradigm Shift: Who Are the Torchbearers? (2) Experience of a Lifetime – Relay Day; (3) Impacts and Significance of Torch Relay. Findings suggest that due to the symbolic potency of the Olympic torch relay, high level of liminality and *communitas* occurred, which is consistent with previous literature. The results indicate that the torchbearer experience not only brought about palpable life changes for the torchbearers themselves but also greatly impacted the people around them and inspired their communities positively. Findings imply that the type of process (i.e., focus on selecting ordinary people, process publicly and visibly held, starting more than 1 year before the Games) chosen by the torch relay sponsors may in fact have contributed significantly to spread the Olympic Spirit and increase social engagement.

To All My Torchbearer Friends

Thank You for Sharing the Precious Memories with Me

To My Mother

Thank You for Your Constant Support and Love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, this thesis would not have been possible without the support of my committee members Professor Carla A. Costa and Professor Carla A. Santos. I would like to show my deep gratitude to my adviser Carla, who patiently read my revisions for numerous times and generously helped me to improve. Thank you very much for being so understanding and supportive throughout the process. Also, I would like to give many thanks to Carla, a member of my thesis committee, who offered insightful comments, guidance and support.

Furthermore, I appreciate all the peers of RST 590 Seminar A and the instructor Professor Zvi Schwartz for giving me the opportunity to talk about the study during the seminar on April 15th, 2011. Thank you all for providing so many useful suggestions to me when I presented this study on that day. I gained a decent amount of helpful information from our discussion, from which this study has benefitted a lot.

Finally, I would like to thank my dearest friends Julian Tong, Rae Song, Debra B. Crabtree, Jill Chen, Sabrina Wang, and Xin Wang for standing by me through the process. I really appreciate your support and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST of FIGURES.....	vii
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background and Need.....	1
Research Objectives and Framework.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	7
CHAPTER II	
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
History and Facts of Olympic Torch Relay.....	8
Facts and the Uniqueness of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Torch Relay.....	13
Symbolism and the Olympic Torch Relay.....	19
Liminality and Communitas.....	26
Summary.....	31
CHAPTER III	
METHODOLOGY.....	33
Sample Selection.....	34
Data Collection.....	36
Data Analysis.....	40

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS.....	42
Paradigm Shift: Who Are the Torchbearers?	42
Experience of a Lifetime – Relay Day.....	53
Impacts and Significance of Torch Relay	66

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION.....	77
Summary and Interpretation of the Findings.....	77
Contribution of This Research Study.....	84
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies.....	85
REFERENCES.....	87

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Recruitment Script.....	93
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form For Behavioral Research Study.....	94

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: 2008 Beijing Olympic Torch Relay Schedule.....	17
Figure 2: Representation of Paradigm Shift Regarding Who Are the Torchbearers.....	43
Figure 3: Representation of Relay Day Experience.....	54
Figure 4: Representation of Impacts and Significance of 2008 Olympic Torch Relay.....	67

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Need

Generally being referred to one of the world's largest peacetime events, the most globalized sporting events and the most influential mega-events par excellence, the Olympic Games draw attention from billions of people all over the world. The multifaceted Games cover many aspects such as event management, marketing and so on. Therefore the Olympic Games are able to provide insights on sport management as an object of academia inquiry (Cashman & Hughes, 1999; Toohey & Veal, 2000).

The Olympic torch relay is the essential bond between the ancient and the modern Olympic Games (The Olympic Museum, 2007) and the symbol of Olympism (Liponski, 2008). It serves as the prelude to the Olympic Games and conveys a message of peace, goodwill and friendship when it travels around the world (Stephany, 2010). In comparison to the Games which last 15 to 16 days, the Olympic torch relay preceding each Olympic Games has a much longer duration in time. In addition, it covers more physical terrain as it travels along the route. When the flame travels through different cities as the overture to the Games, it never fails to draw hundreds of thousands of people along its route (Durantez, 1985) and it allows a large number of people to directly witness an essential part of the Olympics. This becomes important especially since not many people have the opportunity to physically attend the events during the Games. During the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games, Durantez (1985) witnessed thousands of people standing along the streets and waiting to see the flame pass by and he depicted that people were eager to see the flame with their own eyes with "a

mixture of amazement, admiration and awe" on their faces (P. 625). As huge crowds await the opportunity to welcome the Olympic flame as it passes through their hometowns and witness the Olympic flame with their own eyes, the Olympic Games turn from a media event that last 15 or 16 days on television into a community festival that can be directly celebrated and widely shared by all (Haynes, 2001).

Besides giving a chance for audience along the itinerary to see the torch by themselves and to celebrate the arrival of Olympic flame, the Olympic torch relay also offers opportunities for ordinary people to become Olympic torchbearers. In several past Olympic Games over the last two decades, thousands of ordinary people have been nominated to become Olympic torchbearers by organizers and sponsors in the name of searching for "grassroots heroes" or "community heroes". Giving the opportunity of becoming torchbearers to ordinary people has promoted the level of mass participation and community engagement in the Olympic Games.

Previously, several organizing committees have considered the Olympic torch to be very important. They believed through the torch relay the Olympic spirit and values such as purity, courage and the pursuit of excellence would be communicated to the rest of the world and the host community can also be impacted positively. Carl Diem, the sport historian and Secretary General of the Organizing Committee of the Berlin 1936 Olympic Games put it eloquently: "it is the symbolic content which makes both believers and unbelievers tremble, even in a time of materialism and technology-worship such as the present. The call comes to us across the centuries and unites us with that hour so decisive for the human spirit, in which the Games were created and in which the idea of the Games as an agent of peace among men

took on a grandiose form" (P. 10). Olympic organizers have realized the symbolic potency of the Olympic torch relay and they believed that people who get a chance to witness this essential part of the Olympics would feel "the magic of ancient history and of divinity" (Durantez, 1985).

A few scholars have also envisioned the torch relay as a powerful tool which could potentially be used to create opportunities to increase community involvement and engagement. They observed that the Olympic torch relay serves a prelude to the Olympic Games and warms up the communities several months before the Games start. Because of its symbolic power it can enable the audience to transcend themselves and to feel something different and higher as compared to their everyday life (Chalip, 2006; MacAloon, 1992; MacAloon & Richard, 1994). Haynes (2001) stated that before the torch relay, the 2000 Sydney organizing committee suffered from scandals and problems like many other organizing committees also have experienced. However, the nation-wide Olympic torch relay has successfully turned the public to embrace and support the Games. It even helped promote the reconciliation between Aboriginal Australians and White Australians and thus has united the nation on an unprecedented scale. After years of observation, Chalip (2006) found that touching stories often took place during the Games and participants usually felt something higher than themselves which they could by no means clearly describe or explain. Chalip considered these to be related to the liminality and *communitas* that occurred during the Olympics and he believed that if properly leveraged, the liminality and *communitas* that people experienced during mega-events would place lasting effects on social relations and community life.

Even though 1) several scholars have observed and proposed that the Olympic torch relay can have a great potential to impact communities positively; 2) the torch relay is one of the most essential rituals of the Olympic Games and; 3) the Torch Relay Department is one of the most important departments in the Olympic organizing committee; barely any scholarship that specifically focused on the torchbearers has been conducted. Not surprisingly, we possess very little knowledge about the torchbearer experience. More specifically what the torchbearer experience means to these people, how the torchbearer experience has impacted their lives, the lives of those around them as well as starting to understand the leveragability of the torch relay and its further impacts on the whole community.

As the Olympic torch relay occurs every two years as the lead-up to each Summer and Winter Olympic Games, it is always timely and significant to see what previous organizing committees have done in order to shed light on future relays. With the calling of paying more attention to leverage sporting events for social benefits and to create social legacy for the host community (Chalip, 2006), it is very necessary to see if the experience from past Games can be used to contribute to the relays in the future. During the 2008 Beijing Olympiad, the organizing committee and sponsors did something different and interesting concerning the Olympic torch relay. They chose a selection process which interrupted the previous pattern and got the community excited about the Games a year before the 2008 Olympic Games by holding the selection publicly on a national TV show. This selection show on prime time TV, which had a high viewership rating, along with other selection channels such as newspaper and online vote, turned many grassroots people into 2008 Olympic torchbearers (BOCOG, 2008). The process for selecting grassroots torchbearers started as early as 17 months before

the Games (BOCOG 2007). As a result, the public selection of the torchbearers as well as the torch relay route created an enormous opportunity for community involvement and engagement. In this sense, it would be interesting and important to examine what happened during Beijing Olympic torch relay, such as how the participants of the public torchbearer selection felt about the selection and the relay, how they and the people around them were impacted, thus to advance our understanding on the Olympic torch relay as a powerful tool in terms of leveraging for positive social impacts and social legacy. By doing so, we can better understand and locate the social centrality of the torch bearing experience. Because the torch relay happens on a cyclical basis there are many opportunities for learning and improving.

Research Objectives and Framework

As mentioned before, the torchbearer experience has not been studied much before and the leveragability of it has not been explored and examined. In order to advance our understanding on the torchbearer experience, its meanings and its impacts, which have been largely ignored by the sports academia, I aimed to utilize qualitative inquiry to collect narratives on the torch relay experience and thus to examine the meanings and further impacts of the torch relay on community members.

Since one of the purposes of the study is to examine the impacts the torch relay might have on communities, the sample of this qualitative study are be grassroots people who were publicly selected 2008 Olympic torchbearers. As one of the grassroots torchbearers selected from this process, I had access to many torchbearer friends, which served as a convenience sample for this research study. Then I used stratified sampling method and finally came up with a sample of fifteen participants. Fifteen semi-structure in-depth interviews were

conducted one-on-one with each participant in Chinese, and the transcripts were translated into English verbatim. The open-ended interview questions focused on their experiences and feelings, as well as the meanings of the torch bearing experience to them, which is something that has not been done before in the sports literature. During data analysis, three themes emerged: (1) Paradigm Shift: Who Are the Torchbearers? (2) Experience of a Lifetime – Relay Day; (3) Impacts and Significance of Torch Relay. The three themes are consisting of several subthemes and they are analyzed under the social and cultural context of China. The three themes, with rich quotes under each, also relate well to tie symbolism, liminality and *communitas*, which are the theoretical frameworks of this research.

This study is able to contribute to the literature as it collected the lived torch bearing experience, examined what the experience of being an Olympic torchbearer really means to ordinary individuals and furthered our understanding on the impact the torch relay had on their lives, those directly around them and their communities. Scholars have argued that mega-events have strong potentials to create liminality and *communitas* and to generate social legacy (Chalip, 2006), however, this point has never been supported by qualitative data previously. The rich data from this study clearly illustrated that the Olympic torchbearing experience made a tremendous difference for ordinary people both individually and at the community level. Therefore, from a strategic perspective, this study helps us start to understand how the torch relay process can be leveraged to involve and engage nationals both individually and collectively in the celebration and therefore be an intentional agent of social development. It advanced our understanding of the torch relay as a potential win-win-win tool for the IOC and Olympic spirit, the sponsors and the communities.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter Two attempts to offer a literature review on four relevant perspectives, which aim to incorporate some background information and the theoretical framework of this research study. Chapter Three introduces the methodological approaches employed during sample selection, data collection and data analysis. Following that, Chapter Four aims to present the three themes emerged from the data, with rich narratives under each theme. In the end, Chapter Five focuses on summarizing and contextualizing the findings, attempting to advance our understanding on the torch bearing experience, what relaying the torch really means to ordinary people and the impacts it has place and potentially could have generated on the communities.

Definition of Terms

Grassroots torchbearer: in this thesis grassroots torchbearer is defined to be ordinary people that would by no means be selected as Olympic torchbearers if there were not the public selection processes that focused on nominating “grassroots heroes” (which was one of the selection campaigns during 2008 Olympic torch relay selection) or “community heroes” (which was the campaign for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic torchbearer selection). Grassroots torchbearer here contrasts with celebrities and people in power (i.e. staff of Olympic organizing committees, governmental officials)

Community: in this research study community is defined to be a group of local people who gather around a common value. In Olympic torch relay’s case, community hereby means people along the relay route that gather together around the Olympic torch relay and the Olympic spirit.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of previous literature concerning the Olympic torch relay and is divided in five sections:

First of all, information about the history and facts of Olympic torch relay will be clearly presented, since the knowledge of the historical development of the Olympic torch relay is very essential background information. Without a panoramic view of the past Olympic torch relays, a deep understanding of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games would not have been well established. The second section focuses on the facts and the uniqueness of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay. Facts and figures of the 2008 Olympic torch relay will be illustrated and the unique characteristics of the Beijing torch relay will be identified. This section aims to lead the readers to step into the cultural and social context of China. In the third section, the symbolic potency of Olympic Games and especially the Olympic torch relay will be examined. The section will be based on the synthesis of previous academic endeavor and tries to offer an overview of the symbolism of Olympics. The fourth section will introduce the development of the concept of liminality. This section focuses on previous literature on liminality and *communitas* that talked about the events and especially the ones on the Olympic Games.

History and Facts of Olympic Torch Relay

The Olympic torch relay is one of the most essential and greatest Olympic symbols (Liponski, 2008) and it exists as a significant bond between the ancient and the modern Olympic Games (The Olympic Museum, 2007). During the ancient Olympic Games, torch

relay was conducted as an important ritual before which the ancient Greeks would hold a running race and the champion of the race won the right to light the torch in the worship of Zeus (Liponski, 2008). Also, about two months before the ancient Olympic Games, the “espondophori”, or the heralds of peace, would travel through Greece in order to announce the arrival of the Games and to declare the sacred Olympic truce (Durantez, 1985; Liponski, 2008; Stephany, 2010). For the modern Games to link with the traditions of the ancient Games, the flame was first used in Amsterdam Olympics of 1928 (Cahill, 1999). The idea of bringing the flame from ancient Olympia to the main stadium through hand-to-hand relay was initiated and organized by the German sports historian Carl Diem in 1936 Berlin Olympic Games (Durantez, 1985; Liponski, 2008; Mallon, 1984). After the Olympic Games were resumed in 1948 London Summer Olympic Games, the torch relay was conducted by every summer and winter Olympic organizing committee in order to convey a message of peace, goodwill and friendship along the way (Stephany, 2010).

In the Olympic Charter (IOC, 1994), the torch is defined as “An Olympic torch is a torch, or a replica thereof, on which the Olympic flame burns. The IOC holds all rights of any kind relating to the use of the Olympic torch” (p.27).The flame has been relayed through different means of transportations over the years (Durantez, 1985; The Olympic Museum, 2007). The flame was first conveyed by air in 1952 to Helsinki. The fire was carried by boat through the English Channel in 1948, was relayed on horseback in 2000, traveled by a dragon boat in Hong Kong in 2008 and was even carried under water in 2000. In 1976, remarkably, the flame was transformed into a radio signal from Athens and was transmitted to Canada by satellite. When received, the signal triggered a laser beam via which the flame was ignited

again. The flame was also relayed in a Native American canoe, on the back of a camel, by Concorde and even reached the top of Mountain Everest in May 2008 (IOC, 2008).

The first global torch relay was organized in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games as Africa and South America welcomed the arrival of the flame for the first time. The flame traveled to all the cities that have held the Olympic Games previously and the journey lasted 78 days in total through a distance of over 78,000 kilometers (IOC, 2008).

Multiple stakeholders such as the organizing committees and the sponsors have tried to make use of the Olympic torch relay with the purpose of achieving various goals by using strategies as varied as theming and marketing (Durantez, 1985; The Olympic Museum, 2007). Previous highlighted strategies conducted by different stakeholders are listed chronologically as follows. In 1936, Carl Diem, Secretary General of the Organizing Committee of the Games of the XI Olympiad in Berlin, proposed the inclusion of a torch relay in the program of the Olympics to showcase the national power of German (Cahill, 1999). The 1948 London Olympic Games were the first Games after the World War II and therefore the relay embrace the theme of “the Relay of Peace” and carried a welcome message of peace. The first runner took off his military uniform before carrying the torch, demonstrating the ritual of Olympic truce borrowed from the ancient Games. The flame was intentionally designed to travel across several European countries in order to celebrate the peace that was eventually regained to the world (The Olympic Museum, 2007). The 1960 Rome Games was themed “the Ancient Relay” and greatly emphasized on Greece and Italy, which are both known for their classical civilizations. Many ancient sites in the two countries were brought under the spotlight and the public’s attention was thus drawn onto the sites

which people were not familiar with before the relay (The Olympic Museum, 2007). The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee deliberately chose a person who was born on the day of atomic bombing in World War II to be the final torchbearer that lit the cauldron, thus to illustrate Japan as a victim from the atomic bombs (Price & Dayan, 2008). The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics Organizing Committee and the legendary Peter Ueberroth sold the opportunity of carrying the torch at the price of \$3,000 per leg, which was criticized mainly because of the idea of commercializing the torch relay, although the money raised through this process didn't go to the organizing committee but to local social service organizations (LaRocco, 2004; Tomlinson, 2005). As the second Asian country to hold the Games, Seoul organized an "Oriental Relay" in 1988, bringing the Korean traditions under the spotlights by making the torchbearers wearing Korean traditional costumes. The route was intentionally designed to be a zigzag from east to west in South Korea, which spoke for an ancient Asian philosophy of finding harmony and balance between two opposite poles. Oriental cultural elements were fully exhibited to the rest of the world through the relay as traditional local festivals held to celebrate the relay were heavily reported at each city the flame traveled by (MacAloon, 1992; The Olympic Museum, 2007). Coca-Cola selected 150 citizens from more than 50 nations to participate in the Barcelona 1992 Olympic torch relay, which was the first time foreigners took part in a host country's relay and this helped Coca-Cola to build up its brand image internationally (Coca-Cola, 2008). During the Lillehammer 1994 Winter Olympic Games, a national talent contest was held on TV every Saturday evening to exhibit the talent and culture of the town or village where the relay team was staying at. Furthermore, by launching the "Shape Up for the Olympics" campaign and selecting torchbearers

accordingly, the Lillehammer Olympic Organization Committee successfully fulfilled its goal of igniting the enthusiasm towards the Winter Olympic Games at the community level (Klausen, 1999). Coca-Cola selected 2,500 of the 10,000 torchbearers being the exclusive torch relay sponsor for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, gaining a good marketing effect (Coca-Cola, 2008). By organizing daily ceremonies to celebrate the arrival and the departure of the flame in each relay city, Georgia Coffee successfully marketed its brand during the 1998 Winter Olympic Torch Relay in Japan (Cahill, 1999).

During the 2000 Sydney Games, several stakeholders attempted to leverage their participation as sponsors or organizers of the relay. The Ansett Airlines designed consumer competitions to select torchbearers while AMP selected some of its own employees to carry the torch to enhance morale within the organization (Brown, 2002). With the purpose of gaining the most value from its sponsorship AMP also carefully provided guidance to each town the torch was going to visit thus to help the towns to prepare for the arrival of the flame (Chalip, 2006). Furthermore, AMP implemented an Ignite the Dream tour across Australia, featured Olympic mascots and an exhibition of Olympic torches from previous Games to “touch the grassroots base”, to deliver an Olympic experience in the community (Brown, 2002). Similarly, the Australian Tourist Commission invited a group of journalists to become torchbearers in order to facilitate broader news coverage (Brown, 2007). In the lead-up to the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, the Salt Lake City Organizing Committee, Coke and Chevrolet selected 7,200 torchbearers to help carry the Olympic flame. The participants were nominated by family members and co-workers via a 50-100 word essay that explained why the nominee "embodied the Olympic spirit." There were 210,000 nominees overall while Coca-Cola

selected more than 3,500 of the total 11,500 torchbearers for Salt Lake in 2002 which included 2500 “local citizens” who “had demonstrated courage, dedication, passion or a deep concern for others” (Tomlinson, 2005) Coca-Cola developed community torchbearer selection programs in Torino 2006 (Coca-Cola, 2008) and implemented online virtual Olympic torch relay program at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Choi, 2008). Lenovo, one of sponsors of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay, organized a free educational program in partnership with the United States Olympic Committee, which aimed to publicize Olympic ideals and to create excitement for the upcoming relay (Rezende, 2008).

Prior to the development of mass media and especially the Internet, the long-distance torch relay could not be easily broadcast live across the world. However, during those days and even until now, the torch relay would probably be the only possible opportunity for a large portion of the general public along the route to witness the Olympics. As a result, watching the relay turned to be very significant for the public (Cahill, 1999). Even though the Olympic torch relay is of great importance and never fails to attract the audience and stakeholders as the abovementioned review shows, to date, barely any literature has investigated the lived experience of the torchbearers and therefore, the meanings and influences of the torch relay experience to these people remain unknown.

Facts and the Uniqueness of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Torch Relay

For China, sports and Olympics have their unique meanings since this country historically barely emphasized on sports in ancient time. In ancient China, there were several influences that heavily held back the physical development. First and fundamentally, the Chinese culture has been based on philosophy and literature for several thousands of years.

There was a philosophic force which interfered with the natural tendency of physical education. Consequently, China did not have an opportunity to realize the importance of physical culture. The great ideal of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, the three essential parts of Chinese traditional culture, was a man who quietly reached complete harmony both externally and internally. For instance, Laozi, the founder of Taoism, articulated the philosophy of life as "to accomplish everything by non-action". His philosophic ideas lead people to behave quietly rather than becoming physically active. This philosophy and the Confucian and Buddhist ideas which are similar to this kind were embodied in the Chinese literature and art and influenced almost all the feudal dynasties in ancient China, causing many dynasties to weigh mind over body (Brownell, 2008; Hoh, 1928; Wu, 1975; Xu, 2008).

Second, the old education system in ancient China educated people that "a gentleman should not engage in any form of play" for over five hundred years from 1369 to 1905 (Hoh, 1928). During those years, the ill-formed system of imperial examinations, which selected governmental officials based on literary contests, eroded the athletic part of the nation. This system resulted in the most unfavorable age for the development of physical education (Wu, 1975). The ideology that real gentlemen should stay away any form of play was rooted deeper and deeper into the minds of the Chinese people. People widely believed that "those who use their minds and brains rule and those who use their physical strength are ruled" and looked down upon physical exercises (Brownell, 2008; Xu, 2008). The more the Chinese were mentally prepared and focused, the less athletic they became physically. The rulers and the people only emphasized on culture and study, and therefore less and less people got involved in sport games that used to be popular in former dynasties. As great attention were

paid to literature and fine arts, these games became lost to the world since historians could not find any records of them any more (Hoh, 1928; Wu, 1975).

Third, the influences that retarded the development of sports in the country became even stronger in the Qing Dynasty whose reign lasted from 1644 to 1912. When the Manchus people, the ruler of Qing Dynasty, came to china, they forced the Chinese people to wear a long queue woven on the back side of head as they did, which is not convenient for participating in sporting activities. Since Manchus ruled China as invaders, they prohibited the practice of martial arts to stabilize its reign. Also, the Qing Dynasty forced Chinese women to bind their feet tightly into very small ones, which actually caused the Chinese Women to become half-handicapped, as they could not run or walk fast properly (Xu, 2008). What's worse, opium smoking was pervasive in the latter part of the Qing Dynasty, which even became a necessity to entertain guests at its heyday (Hoh, 1928; Wu, 1975). When its women half-handicapped and its men addicted to opium, China retrogressed more and more in terms of sports, physical education and national health.

Combining all these factors, it is not surprising that there were no words in Chinese language that meant sport or physical education (tiyu) until the nineteenth century (Brownell, 2008; Jarvie, Hwang and Brennan, 2008; Xu, 2008). Being invaded and half under the control of imperial foreign powers for almost 100 years, China was sorely war-conflicted and suffered from a century of humiliation in modern history due to the invasion of West and Japan (Chen, 2009; Mangan & Dong, 2009) and even used to be called the “sick man of East Asia” (Brownell, 1995; Brownell,2008; Xu, 2008). To boost morale, the new China which was founded in 1949 stresses that sports should help build social material and cultural

civilization and more importantly should win over world's recognition and esteem (Mangan & Dong, 2009). Therefore, Chinese people are imbued with a spirit of sportsmanship with a particular emphasis on patriotism and are eager to gain national victory through sports. Nationwide media covered the athletes who were training for the 2008 Olympic Games in words such like "preparing for the war of Olympics" (Beizhan Aoyun). Consciously or not, this showed an eager intention to excel in the 2008 Olympics and to capture the attention from all over the planet (Mangan & Dong, 2009). The public generally believe that holding the Games would be a great opportunity to erase the shameful memory, rebuild national self-esteem and showcase the development and nation power of new China internationally (Lovell, 2008; Mangan & Dong, 2009). During the bid for 2000 Olympics, China lost to Sydney by merely two votes and had to bid again for the 2008 Olympics, stretching the yearning for the holding the Games for eight more years (Close, Askew & Xin, 2006). This eager was intensified by mass propaganda, which repeatedly reported that since 1908 Chinese scholars had already questioned on public magazines on when China could hold the Olympics, resulting in billions of Chinese believe firmly that China had been holding this "Olympic dream" for over 100 years (Close, Askew & Xin, 2006; Brownell, 2008; Lovell, 2008), which has endowed the Olympic Games with unique meanings.

In line with this mentality, the Olympic torch relay, through which China would have the chance to showcase its development along the route with the travel of the flame, was paid great attention to by BOCOG and the government. The 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay, named as the "Journey of Harmony" and with the slogan of "Light the Passion Share the Dream", had duration of 129 days in total. The holy flame traveled 85,000 miles through five

continents, which was the longest distance in the history of modern Olympic torch relay. The flame altogether toured 105 cities and regions in China in the enduring three-month relay in Chinese mainland. (BOCOG, 2008). One of the highlights of the relay took place on May 8, 2008 when the Chinese mountaineers climbed to the peak of Mt. Everest. These torchbearers unprecedentedly brought the Olympic flame to the roof of the world, which is 8,844.43 meters above the sea level (BOCOG, 2008). The schedule of the torch relay is presented in Figure 1, as shown on the BOCOG website:

Torch Relay Schedule	
March 24	Olympic flame lighting ceremony at Olympia
March 24-29	Torch relay in Greece
March 30	Greece hand-over ceremony
March 31	Arrival in Beijing
April 1	Heading for Almaty
May 4	Torch relay on Chinese mainland
May 8	Olympic flame atop Mt. Qomolangma
August 6	Beijing leg of the torch relay
August 8	Lighting of the cauldron in the National Stadium

Figure 1: 2008 Beijing Olympic Torch Relay Schedule

“Xiangyun”, which means lucky clouds in Chinese, is the official torch for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. The design of the torch heavily employed Chinese artistic heritage by using typical cultural symbols as the torch uses the color of traditional Chinese red, is in the shape of a paper scroll and is decorated by the historical lucky clouds patterns (Price & Dayan, 2008).

The 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearer selection campaign was launched on an unprecedented scale and 21,880 torchbearers were nominated. Two selection methods, one being internal nomination process and the other being public process, were employed. The torchbearer selection claimed to be an open process available to all community members who can be nominated to become torchbearers either on the website or at the specially designated offices. A judging process was set up to determine the final Torchbearers. To ensure the integrity of the selection process, the selection entities publicized the nomination method, torchbearer selection criteria, rules and regulations and torchbearer application forms provided by BOCOG. The application forms were submitted to the selection entities for review and approval, including the performance of necessary legal procedures. The torchbearer list was finally submitted to BOCOG for approval and record at the time scheduled (BOCOG, 2008).

In line with the public selection process regulated by BOCOG, the three worldwide torch relay partners which are the top sponsors of the torch relay, Coca-cola (China) Beverage Ltd., Lenovo Group and Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. conducted public selections which aimed at nominating grassroots people. It was not the first time ordinary citizens were selected as torchbearers, for instance, Seoul nominated citizen torchbearers during the 1988 Olympics, the Salt Lake Olympic Committee selected citizens whose relatives were killed during the 911 catastrophe and many similar examples can be found (MacAloon, 1992; Salt Lake Olympic Committee, 2002). However, the selection of 2008 torch relay was launched on an unprecedented scale as the TV and online media were largely employed to generate a widest public involvement for the first time (BOCOG, 2008). Coca-cola and Samsung both

organized online selections followed with interviews by panels, while Lenovo implemented a mass-based national selection campaign named “You are the Torchbearer” cooperating with the sports channel of China Central Television. The process started 17 months before the Games and included online registration, several preliminary rounds of selection and a national competition broadcast on prime time TV. According to the official report provided by Lenovo, the campaign drew over one million registrants online and the selection TV show enjoyed a high rate of viewership. The selection process culminated with 70 individuals from local communities nominated as 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers (Lenovo, 2008).

Symbolism and the Olympic Torch Relay

Compared with verbal narrations, representative symbols are not as accurate and of clarity. As human beings we listen and decode verbal expressions whereas we perceive representative symbols without arousing verbal consciousness since we instantly understand and assimilate the image, the scene, the sound, the atmosphere and the space perceptively (Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993). Since the life experience which is perceived symbolically never addresses the conscious, it normally stays in the unconscious part of our brain for an indefinite period of time and sometimes even forever. Researchers and scientists have discovered that representative symbols are able to go beyond the limits of verbal consciousness, directly make an impression on the unconscious mind and, therefore penetrate into the recesses of an individual’s personality (Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993; Langer, 1957).

Rituals have the ability to touch participants both physically (i.e., active participation) and mentally (i.e., meaningfulness of the experience) and many times participants are touched compulsively. Participants usually sense this sheer need inwardly that the ritual acts

must be performed in the religious sphere (Langer, 1957). With the capacities to strongly influence participants both physically and mentally, rites and symbols serve as catalysts which are able to trigger complicated changes in participants, especially within the unconscious mind. As symbols surpass the conscious mind, they bring about changes that within the unconscious include the fulfillment of suppressed impulses and the expression of unexpressed needs. Therefore, rituals and symbols have the potential to affect identity shaping. Moreover, when a ritual is conducted on a large scale, it is even able to impact a group of participants collectively (Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993; Langer, 1957). Some rites are routinely conducted such as daily prayers or yearly celebration of a traditional cultural festival; while other ceremonies do not occur often, such as commencement, wedding, funeral and so on (Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993).

Part of the reason why the Olympic Games fascinate so many people throughout the world and from so many different cultures as confirmed by the fact that it gathers the world's largest number of TV viewership is without a doubt because of the high-level of its sporting competitions; however that may not be the only reason. Consider FIFA's World Cup and many other world championships which are also world-class mega sporting events, compared to them the Games draw greater attention worldwide, one could say that it does so to a degree that looks to be unapproachable by all the other competitions (Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993; Brownell, 2008). As John MacAloon (1981) suggested, the Olympic Games are "an immense playground, marketplace, theatre, battlefield, church, arena, festival and Broadway of cultural images, symbols and meanings" (p.5). Therefore, what has distinguished the Olympics from other world-class sporting events and raised the Games to this unmatched scale is the

symbolic power that the Games have possessed and expressed. The public is captivated by this remarkably high degree of ritualism that has become inherent to the Games and that has transformed the Olympics from being a staging of sporting events into a (cultural and) sports festival with a high degree of ritualization (Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993; Cashman & Hughes, 1999; Chalip, 2006; MacAloon, 1981).

Since its invention, the modern Olympic Games have always been associated with symbols and meanings and the use of traditions and symbolism in sporting events has contributed to more-than-sport Olympics (Chalip, 2006; MacAloon, 1982). As the IOC itself claims (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976), “It is through the opening and closing ceremonies and the torch relay that the Olympiad must distinguish itself from another series of world championships” (p.280). A large portion of the majesty and magnificence of the modern Games derives from the use of the rich ancient Olympic assets (Cashman & Hughes, 1999). The sets of historical evocative symbols, the imposing and consistent rituals, and the veridical emotions triggered by the former two, altogether enable the Games to go beyond sport events and to combine religious rites and public festivals into one big event— the Olympics (Cashman & Hughes, 1999; MacAloon, 1982; MacAloon, 1992).

However, it is worthy to note that the symbolism of the Olympics has evolved along the way. Pierre de Coubertin, considered to be the father of the Olympics, at first envisioned Olympia to be a cult center and that “the ancients would be astonished to find no expression or suggestion of the religious idea of purification and sanctification” (MacAloon, 1982; MacAloon, 1992). By borrowing significant rituals from the ancient Olympics, Coubertin intended to create this “muscle religion” and added somberness and majesty to the Games

(Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993). Nonetheless, the development of Olympic symbolism was not that successful and smooth as originally conceived by Coubertin. In retrospect, Coubertin once severely criticized the Antwerp 1920 Games as only “sports competitions,” and he pointed to the need of instilling the grandeur and splendor of “powerful symbolism” into the Games (Coubertin, 1924). Since then, Coubertin intentionally defined the symbols and rites of the modern Olympics and specified what would be included in the opening and closing ceremonies to add clarification. For instance, after the lighting of the cauldron, doves should be released to symbolize the peace-loving nature of the Olympic Games (IOC, 1994). More incidents took place along the evolution of the Olympic symbolism and one of the milestone events happened during the Berlin 1936 Olympics. Entities responsible for the symbolic elements displayed were believed to deliberately showcase the rebirth of fascist Germany. At the end of the ceremony, for example, the German team entered the stadium dressing in sparkling white, which represents the symbolism of death and rebirth in Christian rites (Alkemeyer & Richartz, 1993). Despite the intense perceived fascist message expressed through the organization of the Games, at that time, however, the IOC was actually satisfied with the event itself. The satisfaction at that time came from the promotion of the Olympic symbols to a great height of development; for example, during that Olympiad the first torch relay was conducted and the opening ceremony was highlighted. However, as the 1936 Berlin Games blended the Nazi ideology into the Olympic symbolism, the ritual of the torch relay was criticized and did not take place during the St. Moritz 1948 Winter Games, which were the first Games after the World War II (Cahill, 1999). Later, the IOC made the decision to retrieve the Olympic torch relay, which got reinstated during the 1948 London Summer

Olympic Games, during which Germany was internationally left out in the route. Since then, the torch relay gradually turned into a central element and a symbolic rite of the Olympic Games and the community involvement has increased with every Games (Cahill, 1999).

The Olympic flame is a symbol that is a constant reminder of the Olympic values which include the pursuit of excellence and perfection, worldwide friendship and mutual respect, and the endeavor for victory (Greenberg, 1983). For that reason, the Olympic flame is undoubtedly one of the symbols that mostly differentiate the Games from other mega sporting events (BOCOG, 2008; Cashman & Hughes, 1999; Liponski, 2008). In ritual and symbolic terms, the Olympic torch relay is not merely about the transferring of the Olympic flame from Greece to the host country, but more importantly it is about escorting the sacred flame from one torch to another, from one torchbearer to the next in a ritual transfer, and ultimately it is about the ambitious relay of passing on the Olympic spirit to future generations (Cahill, 1999). In the torch relay that during each Olympiad tours across continents, the flame and the torch create a unique and consistent symbolic visual image that helps engrave the “sacred” image of the Olympics into the heart and minds of the public (BOCOG, 2008; Cashman & Hughes, 1999).

The rites during which the flame appears are usually conducted in a relatively strict manner since all of the activities related to the flame and the torch must be approved by the IOC. The responsibility of the organizing committee starts when lighting the flame in front of the Temple of Hera by using a parabolic mirror to light a fire from the sunlight. That is the flame transferred from hand to hand in various ways of transportation from Olympia to the host city. Every time, the flame is lit in a cauldron on the main stadium where the opening

ceremony take place, and it keeps burning in the cauldron from which people can clearly see the fire till the closing of the Games. After the fire was extinguished on the closing ceremony, the Olympic anthem was usually played with the lowering of the Olympic flag. This process and the ceremonies are repeated every two years for each Winter and Summer Olympic Games (Cahill, 1999). Still, the torch relay allows greater possibilities to the organizers as creativity can be fully employed along the relay route and the ignition of the cauldron.

Concerning the symbolism of the Olympic flame, the Vice President of Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee put it in a beautiful way at the opening ceremony of the Seoul 1988 Olympics (Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, 1989), “The Korean people ... will respect all that this sacred flame stands for....For Koreans, this flame is especially meaningful for we have a long tradition of reverence for fire and what it represents. Fire symbolizes purity and prosperity - and the Olympic Games are pure in their ideals and clear in their aims of building a better world for all people”(P.344-345). The Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau recognized and appreciated the symbolic value the torch brought to Montreal (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976): “In this Flame we can see a reflection of the courage and ardour employed by the champion athletes in reaching their goals. Runners will soon relay this Flame to Montreal so that, for two weeks, that city may become the universally acknowledged centre of excellence” (p.286). These two quotes go along with comments made by Pierre De Coubertin which pointed out the symbolic value of the Olympic torch (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976): “And you, athletes, remember the sun-kindled Fire which has come to you from Olympia to light and warm our lifetime. Keep the sacred flame alive...” and “Athletes who will carry the symbolic torch in

your eager hands... let your race be a happy one” (p.282-283). As the previous quotes illustrate, the torch attains reverence from people and in the masses’ opinion, the flame represent the ideals of Olympism (Cahill, 1999).

Previous scholarship indicates that due to the symbolic potency, the Olympic torch and flame are able to bring social and cultural benefits to the community, for instance creating collective celebratory memories for the community, boosting national pride and building solidarity and increasing the level of support of the Olympic Games; and promoting sports at the community level. (Cahill, 1999) Local community excitement raised by witnessing the torch was reported during the 1976 (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976) and the 1984 Olympics as Canadian people expressed “their joy and pride at seeing the Olympic Flame in their own town or village” (p.287) and the Americans enjoyed a patriotic celebration (Cahill, 1999). These collective experience and memories have helped link the general public with the Olympic Games and have increased the enthusiasm people hold for the Olympic Games (Cahill, 1999). MacAloon traveled with the flame for the entire route of the torch relay in 1986 Korean Asian Games and 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. After coming back to North America, he showed the video tapes to different groups Americans and Canadians, and the main purpose was to notice and explore the differences between the ways North American and Asian deemed, organized and treated the relay (MacAloon, 1992). One of the greatest differences became really clear and had to do with the Asian’s community support throughout the relay. The phenomena seemed to be directly associated the natural reverence Koreans hold for fire associated with the great symbolic potency of the Olympic flame (Cahill, 1999; MacAloon, 1992). “Through this flame, we can all look forward to a

better future” (p.344) and by claiming so, the Seoul organizing committee (Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, 1989) attempted to gather people around the great Olympic symbol in hopes it would lift their spirit and boost national pride; their intention was to facilitate a powerful new identity for their nation whose economy has recently taken off. The Flame—as the strong Olympic symbol that it is—has the power to influence and shape the identity of the citizens who have an opportunity to be involved in the torch relay. Take the 1996 Atlanta Olympic torchbearer selection as an example: the search for “Community Heroes” enhanced the community pride. The focus on the positive aspects of community life and the identification and acknowledgement of local individuals who were considered to be heroes was a powerful way to highlight positive values and to connect the community with the Games (Cahill, 1999). Furthermore, the Olympic symbols help bring communities together. For example, the 2000 Sydney Olympic torch relay served as a national discourse initiator to the reconciliation of White Australians and the Aboriginal Australians. The starting point of the torch relay was chosen to be Uluru, which is a spiritual centre for Indigenous Australians, and the first torchbearer was Nova Peris-Kneebone, Australia’s first Indigenous Olympic gold medalist. The relay turned to be a powerful statement of unity and the flame was called “an awe-inspiring flame for reconciliation” (Haynes, 2001). In all, the literature has revealed the significant symbolic potency of the Olympic torch.

Liminality and Communitas

Liminality was originally introduced by Arnold van Gennep to study the transitional period of rite of passages as he observed people would enter a different phase from ordinary life when participating in religious rituals (Arnold van Gennep, 1909). Victor Turner (Turner,

1974) then defined liminality as “a gap between the ordered worlds where almost anything could happen” (p.13). After Victor Turner’s endeavor on developing and exploring liminality in several articles and books (1967; 1969; 1974; 1974; 1978; 1986), this concept gradually got known by scholars from other fields and it now enjoys a wider application in social sciences and humanities. Nowadays, liminality is generally defined as a temporary midpoint and potentially productive condition, state and process which is situated betwixt and between two locations that are the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states. The state itself is able to provide transcendental experiences, dissolve the initial structure and brings about changes to participants (Thomassen, 2009; Turner, 1967; Turner, 1977; Zavala, 1997). The duration and level of liminality varies from case to case. The state of liminality can last from a moment to a life span while the level of liminality can vary from individual to the whole community (Thomassen, 2009)

A liminal zone, where the liminal event takes place, allows people to escape from the everyday life environment and have the freedom to suspend from ordinary judgment or even strict social conventions and to embrace a fresh, safe and meaningful limbo. People get rid of their ordinary social roles and embrace alternative social values. Under some circumstances these locations are considered to be “near-sacred”. Thus, the spatialization of liminality has changed those locations into “near-sacred” after providing people with precious time-out from everyday life (Shields, 1992; Uriley & Belhassen, 2006).

Victor Turner also noticed the interactions between human and the liminal experience and the potential influences of the interactions on shaping personality, reconfiguring self-identity and bringing about dramatic changes into daily life (Thomassen, 2009; Turner, 1967).

According to Turner, a major liminal event provides opportunities for improvement of self-cognizance on a societal level. The event touches people's emotional, spiritual and social worlds and reinterprets the overarching social relations, social patterns and social structure (Thomassen, 2009; Turner, 1967). Liminality of this kind usually causes temporary disorientation of identity where the original social status is suspended under the exigencies of sharing the same identity (MacAloon, 1982). During this process, new relationships are formed or existing relationship are reinforced due to interaction between and the discourse across different demographic groups, which originally was hardly going to happen but is achieved under liminality (Handelman, 1990).

Furthermore, Turner raised the notion of *communitas* which represents the antithesis of structured community and stands for a group of equal beings experiencing liminality, heightened emotional or spiritual experience, at the same time. He argued that the liminoid phase, if not dramatic, has the potential to bring about reintegration to the original community and could turn it into *communitas*. As an undifferentiated authentic whole, *communitas* shows unity and togetherness, during which a sense of solidarity and equality is spontaneously formed and joy and sense of belonging is heightened (Turner, 1969). According to Turner (1974), the removal of daily masks, the genuineness in interpersonal relations is deep desire of human beings who wish to live in a permanent state of *communitas*.

Turner drew a distinction between ritual-liminal phenomena and industrial-liminoid genres, as he believed the former create collective liminal ritual experience while the latter are not context-sensitive and only independently reflect personal visions. Based on this

theoretical frame, he clearly distinguished sports from other genuine liminal ritual activities by categorizing major sporting events as industrial leisure. However, other scholars (Bain-Selbo, 2008; St. John, 2008) questioned this distinction and explored what was going on within sports. Bain-Selbo argued that survey data indicates that in many circumstances sports look religious and are able to bring about religious experience. St. John pushed the issue further by pointing out that many sports and especially the Olympics are rooted in ancient heritage and are able to carry forward and pass on collective spirit, which breaks down the assumption contended by Turner that sports are merely about something personal. Therefore, these scholars conclude that notions such as liminality and *communitas* are not only for ritual but for culture in general and can be applied to sports as well.

Scholars have referred to liminality in sporting events as something sacred that emerges from the sport experience (Chalip, 2006; O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). Being an eventful situation that disrupts the ordinary order of daily life and possessing the festival-like atmosphere which is able to create heightened emotions, the Olympics fall into the category of liminal experience since during the Games people usually feel something that transcends sport is going on and become too emotional to exactly depict what they feel (Cashman & Hughes, 1999; Cashman, 2006; Chalip, 2006; O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). People usually feel something higher and different than how they feel in ordinary life, and they experience a separation and release from daily life, and many times even experience a feeling of reverence -- like they would feel in church (MacAloon, 1981). As observed by scholars, the Olympic torch relay, which serves as the lead-up to each Olympic Games, is able to create pre-Games euphoria, trigger phenomenal outpouring of public enthusiasm, initiate public liminality and

inject a sense of community to the spectators along its route (Cashman, 2006; Chalip, 2006; MacAloon, 1984). For torchbearers, the Olympic torch relay is able to provide them with suspension from daily life and render them with transcendental liminal experience. Take 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympic torchbearer Mike Casey for instance, whose wife Nelie was one of the passengers on the first plane that crashed into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001; he told staff from the organizing committee (Salt Lake Olympic Committee, 2002) that bearing the Olympic Flame "was an incredible connection with Nelie, because running was our thing... And it was a nice metaphor, because she was such a bright light. I don't even remember running, I felt like I was floating" (P.9). This floating feeling and the reconnection with his wife constitute a liminal experience, which ordinary life could not easily bring about. The locations of the relay have become liminoid space (Chalip, 2006) and certain meanings have been attached to those places which originally have no special significance, turning them into places different from quotidian sites.

Previous studies and official reports have reflected the level and the length of the liminal torch experience and results indicate that the experience not only belong to a certain group of individuals (i.e. limited to the torchbearers) but is widely shared by the community (Chalip, 2006; MacAloon, 1992; Salt Lake Olympic Committee, 2002). New energy is brought into the community and is shared by all the members in the community. Moreover, the sense of community is reinforced and people forget about social distinctions (Chalip, 2006). Also, after the period of public liminality is initiated, the liminality does not merely last for a moment but continues during the whole torch relay period. For example, the lead-up to the 2002 Winter Olympics turned into "a winter of wonder" as the torch traveled across the

United States (Salt Lake Olympic Committee, 2002). A heightened sense of community and an increased feeling of patriotism were the signs of *communitas* (Chalip, 2006; O'Brien & Chalip, 2007).

As mentioned by O'Brien and Chalip in 2007, scholars are generally unaware of the social leverage possibilities of the sporting events and there is almost no scholarship conducted on leveraging liminality in sports. One of the very few studies was conducted by Chalip in 2006, in which he argued that the leveragability of the sporting events derive from their fun nature. In the same study, he came up with five strategies for cultivating liminality and *communitas* in sporting events, which include enabling sociability, creating event-related social events, facilitating informal social opportunities, producing ancillary events, and theming.

Summary

The above four sections review the existing literature on the facts and figures of the past Olympic torch relays, including the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay. Also, a theoretical overview of relevant concepts such as symbolism, liminality and *communitas* has been conducted.

On one hand, quite a few previous studies focused on the symbolic potency of the Olympic Games, while on the other hand it is quite obvious that previously there were not any research studies that I could find, that specifically focused on liminality and *communitas* during torch relay. Nor was there much literature concerning the experience of the Olympic torchbearers and very few narratives on the Olympic torch relay experience were recorded throughout so many Olympiads. Therefore, people's torch bearing experience and the impacts

of the experience still remain undiscovered. Furthermore, although several organizing committees considered the torch relay to be important and some even envisioned the torch relay to be a powerful tool, barely any studies were conducted to investigate whether the torch relay had brought about changes to the communities as expected by the organizers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to collect the lived experience and examine the impacts of the Olympic torch relay, the purpose of the study is multifold and the methodology of the study was designed accordingly. The first and foremost aim is to collect the rich descriptive and interpretative account of participating in the torch relay. As previous literature suggests, narrative inquiry has been a popular way to collect lived experience in social sciences for the reason that narratives are the oral versions of personal past experience. By recounting and recapitulating the original events, the experiences become interpretable by others (Labov, 1997). Victor Turner (1986) believed that: “True, narratives abound after the event, they explain that event, extol it, ethicize it, excuse it, deprecate it, repudiate it, name it as a significant marker of collective life experience, as a model for future behavior. Indeed, such narratives become scripts or arguments to be used by the instigators of new sequences, and equally by those who aim to rebut them” (p.33). To understand the influences of the Olympic torch relay on individuals, communities and the spaces, first-hand narratives and lived experience need to be collected from people who participated in the Olympic torch relay. Therefore, I decided to employ a qualitative approach and conduct in-depth interviews to collect rich narratives from the participants to reach the research objectives. Secondly, I also intended to examine the meanings of the Olympic torch relay and its further impacts on community, which in this study is defined to be a group of local people gathered around a common value -- the Olympic spirit. For this reason, the participants of the study will be ordinary local people in the community or in other words grassroots people that otherwise would not have a chance to

be nominated to bear the Olympic flame.

Sample selection

This research study first utilized a convenience sample and then employed stratified sampling method to come up with the final sample which consisted of fifteen participants. The two step sample selection and the characteristics of the sample will be explained in details in this section.

I was a grassroots torchbearer nominated by one of the sponsors of 2008 Beijing Olympic Torch Relay and kept in touch with around forty grassroots torchbearers selected from different nomination process. This study firstly adopted a convenience sample (Bernard, 2000) from the forty available personal connections of mine and then combined a stratified sampling method (Bernard, 2000) to maintain a gender ratio in the hope of reflecting the actual pool of the Beijing Olympic torchbearers. With no access to the official demographic data of all the 21,880 Beijing Olympic torchbearers, I made use of the only open database of Lenovo's to get a glimpse of the overall situation of the grassroots torchbearer selection. Among all the two hundred and ten Lenovo national finalists, sixty-two were female and one hundred and forty-eight were male, making the female-to-all ratio approximately .3. On the other hand, twenty-seven out of the seventy people who were nominated in final round of the selection were female, making the final gender ratio around .39. According to the above information, I employed a stratified sampling method (Bernard, 2000) and decided to recruit five female participants and ten male participants, suggesting a female proportion of .33, which is a proper percentage based on the accessible database.

After receiving the Institutional Review Board approval from the University of

Illinois, I started to recruit interviewees based on the abovementioned sampling methods. The torchbearers were selected from all over China and therefore are very scattered throughout the country, making it impossible for me to conduct face-to-face interviews. Therefore, interviews over the telephone were conducted.

The pre-interview contact strictly followed the requirement of IRB. An email with interview request was sent to each potential interviewee introducing the purpose of the study and asking for their participation in an in-depth interview which would last 60 to 90 minutes to talk about their experiences as an Olympic torchbearer (See Appendix A: Interview Recruitment Script). After the participants responded with approval, a consent form which informed them about the confidentiality of the study was sent to each individual (See Appendix B: Informed Consent Form). The participants signed, scanned and sent back the form, which stated their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study, declared their awareness regarding the fact that they are free to withdraw their participation at any time for any reason and noted that their agreement for the interview to be recorded for research use. After gaining the consent from the participants, a mutually convenient 60-to-90-minute block of time was scheduled usually at night of central time because of the time difference between China and United States.

All ten male torchbearers that were approached agreed to be interviewed immediately and participated in the research study. On the other hand, initially I contacted eleven female torchbearers but I failed to interview six of them. Three of these six females became national celebrities because of their torchbearer identities and I could only reach their assistants; two of them agreed to be interviewed but were too occupied to schedule a time; one of them

rejected the interview request without any explanation. In the end, five out of eleven women agreed to participate in the research study.

To fulfill the purpose of collecting narratives from grassroots torchbearers, all final fifteen participants met the following criteria: First, they were nominated as torchbearers through public process by the one of the three sponsors of 2008 Beijing Olympic Torch Relay. Second, before the torchbearer selection, none of them had enjoyed national media coverage. Third, these fifteen participants agreed to participate in the research project when I contacted the participants by telephone and explained the study to them.

The fifteen participants in this study had a wide age range - from 24 to 62 years old, which was also intentionally designed to have a representative sample of the real grassroots torchbearer population. Five of the participants were in their twenties, seven in their thirties, and the remaining three were respectively in their forties, fifties and sixties. The average age was 34.7 years old ($SD = 11.2$ years). One of the fifteen participants was a minority while the others were all Han Chinese, which is the ethnic group which constitutes about 92% of the population in Mainland China. Therefore, the ethnic make-up of the sample was reflective of the actual population in China. Seven of the fifteen participants were nominated by Lenovo via “You are the Torchbearer” selection show on China Central TV Sports Channel, six were selected by Samsung, and two were picked by Coca Cola.

Data collection

Prior to the commencement of data collection, I discussed with my academic adviser, about my role and subjectivity in the data collection. As a grassroots torchbearer that was nominated through national TV selection show, I have gained first-hand experience of the

torchbearer selection and relay day scene and therefore have already formed certain opinions regarding the torch relay experience. Due to the complex nature of self-reflectivity, we eventually decided to use the existing understanding of mine as a source of background knowledge which provides insights into the big picture rather than relying on it as a main part of the study. My first-hand experience helped create a quick rapport and relatedness during the interviews and as well as facilitated the flow of conversation. Overall, I successfully located myself as an investigator.

From December 2009 to August 2010, the data were collected through one-on-one in-depth interviews by telephone. In order to guarantee the richness, the depth and the quality of the interviews, the times of the interviews were scheduled in advance and a minimum of 60 minutes were requested (Johnson, 2000). Potential participants were fully informed regarding the confidentiality. From the beginning, as soon as they accepted participation, each of them was assigned an Arabic number which has been used as their code names during data analysis and presentations of the results.

In order to encourage the Participant to “share rich descriptions of phenomena” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and to obtain organic narratives (Sandelowski, 2000; Miller & Crabtree, 1999), a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of five broad questions was implemented (Chilban, 1996). As the study aimed to collect the feelings and lived experiences of 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers and to explore the meanings and impacts of the Olympic torchbearers experience to grassroots people, the questions were intentionally designed to be general and the interviewees were encouraged to expand to the fullest and to recount in specific details based on the following open-ended questions

(Spradley, 1979) which respectively focus on the selection experience, relay-day feelings, the meanings and impacts of the torchbearer experience:

1. How did you become a torchbearer?
2. How did you feel in the moment when you realized you had been selected?
3. Please describe your relay-day experience.
4. In which ways have your torchbearer experience affected your life?
5. What does being a torchbearer really mean to you?

All interviews were conducted by me in mandarin Chinese, the native language of all participants and I. Probes were used when needed to continue with the train of thought or to clarify and add details that could aid in articulating the experience. However, interruptions of the interviewees were avoided to guarantee a smooth flow of the narratives. Questions and probes were often written down and raised in an engaging and fluid way such as “previously you’ve mentioned that... can you please tell me more about that” after the interviewee stopped talking.

At the beginning of the formal interview, to facilitate building rapport and ease with the interviewees, I briefly shared with each interviewee where and when she relayed the Olympic torch and as appropriate resorted to a few anecdotes that happened during the 2008 Olympic torch relay (Douglas, 1985). Before the interviews, I emphasized there were no “right-or-wrong” answers and any responses would be encouraged and highly appreciated. The researcher would again inform the participants that the participation in the study was completely voluntary and he/she may choose not to answer any questions that he/she feels to be sensitive or inappropriate. The participants were also fully aware that Arabic numbers would be assigned to them instead of their real names and all the information that could

directly relate to their identity would be concealed to maintain their privacy.

It is worth noting that overall the interviews were smooth and the respondents responded well to the probes. In fact, probes were not used very frequently since the participants had all been interviewed by local and national media, especially intensively during the Olympic year in China. The average length of the interviews was around 60 minutes, during which probes were used to facilitate the participants to elaborate and articulate their feelings and lived experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Briggs, 1986; Johnson, 2002; Spradley, 1979). After being granted permission by each participant, the interviews were recorded by an audio recorder. After the interviews, the collected narratives were first transcribed in Chinese and then translated into English from Chinese narratives by me via verbatim translation (Miller & Crabtree, 1999).

At the beginning of data collection, the researchers encountered challenges as I was not fully trained in conducting in-depth interviews. Additionally, my adviser did not speak Chinese and therefore could not provide training and guidance during the interviews process. We decided to resort to a senior PhD student in the same program who is a native Chinese speaker, had been well-trained in qualitative research and was working on a similar project. The student kindly agreed to supervise several interviews with me. As a result, four interviews were conducted under the supervision of this PhD student. Before the four interviews, I would meet with this senior student to go through the background of the interviewee and discuss the interview strategy. During the interviews, I took the role of the interviewer. The interviewees were aware and agreed to the presence of the second interview observer. The role the senior student played was more like an observer, and she occasionally

suggested probes to facilitate the conversation, which brought more clarity to the interview. After each interview, I and the senior student spent around half an hour debriefing the interview, during which the phone conversation were recapped, notes were compared and potential improvements were summarized such as “had you raised the probe in this way, the interviewee would probably go on and provide more information”, “the participant talked about this and this which is off-topic and you could have brought the topic back to the torch relay experience earlier” and so on. Based on the notes, reflections and summaries, I made corrections and improvements in the following interviews.

Data Analysis

The translations of the fifteen interviews generated fifteen transcripts of 4,569 lines in total. The transcripts were read numerous times independently by me and my adviser. When analyzing the data, my adviser and I took on different roles. As a native Chinese, I served an insider's role since I was born and raised in the mainland China and was familiar with the culture and language. Also, being a torchbearer myself, I was familiar with the processes and procedures related to the torch relay. Coming from an outsider's angle, my adviser examined the data with a European-American mentality. The insider provided background information in response to the inquiries from the outsider, while the outsider brought into fresh perspectives and pointed out the unique characteristics which the insiders would usually take for granted. The collaboration between us enabled us to become sensitive to both the Chinese culture and the normative implications from the data. The researchers highlighted the concurring themes among the fifteen interviews and made notes on the transcripts respectively. After the notes were compared during several in-depth discussions between my

adviser and I, the highlighted quotes were categorized and several themes emerged, each with several sub-themes under. This schematic outline was then compared with original transcripts for double check and modification.

MacAloon and Edith Turner both talked about the problematic nature of reflexivity and articulating lived experience and they also touched upon the unavoidable distance between reality, experience, and expressions (MacAloon 1984; Turner & Turner, 1986). As According to Edith Turner: “Expressions are not only naturally occurring units of meaning but are also periods of heightened activity when a society’s presuppositions are most exposed, when core values are expressed, and when the symbolism is most apparent” (p.9-10) . In this sense, the lived experience was analyzed taking into consideration the Chinese social and cultural context.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Three broad themes emerged from data analysis. The first theme clearly shows an observed paradigm shift of public perception on who are the torchbearers. The second theme delineates the relay-day experience which is considered to be once-in-a-lifetime precious memory. The third theme concerns the impacts of the torch relay on the torchbearers' lives and how they perceive influences people around them. Each theme will be respectively expanded and explored in the following sections. The three themes are interrelated and interwoven with each other as the first theme is actually about an ongoing and ever-changing life journey that encompasses the second theme, which is a relatively short-term experience, and also is intertwined with the third theme, which is mainly about the impacts that took place further into post-Games period.

During the presentation of the findings, Arabic numbers from 1 to 15 will be employed based on the chronological sequence of the interviews. This will be done to keep confidentiality. In addition, their identifiable backgrounds will also be omitted.

Paradigm shift: who are the torchbearers?

This section will focus on the influence the torch relay experience has on the self-identification of the participants and on the public perceptions of who would become torchbearers. A shift in paradigm regarding who are torchbearers was observed from the data and it evolved in several steps. Prior to the selection, existing assumptions that the rights of coming torchbearers exclusively belonged to celebrities were quite prevalent in China. With the publicity of nationwide grassroots torchbearer selection, new possibilities of common

people becoming Olympic torchbearers were discovered by the mass. A brand new conversation was started all over China 17 months prior to the relay because of the nature of the selection process. After a group of grassroots individuals were selected as 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers, they realized that being a torchbearer is bigger than the individual and it would be an opportunity to become part of the history. That realization brought about a sense of responsibility and triggered continued commitment to give back to the community. This paradigm shift has become a life journey for the grassroots people, as represented in Figure 2. In the following section, each sub-theme is further explored.

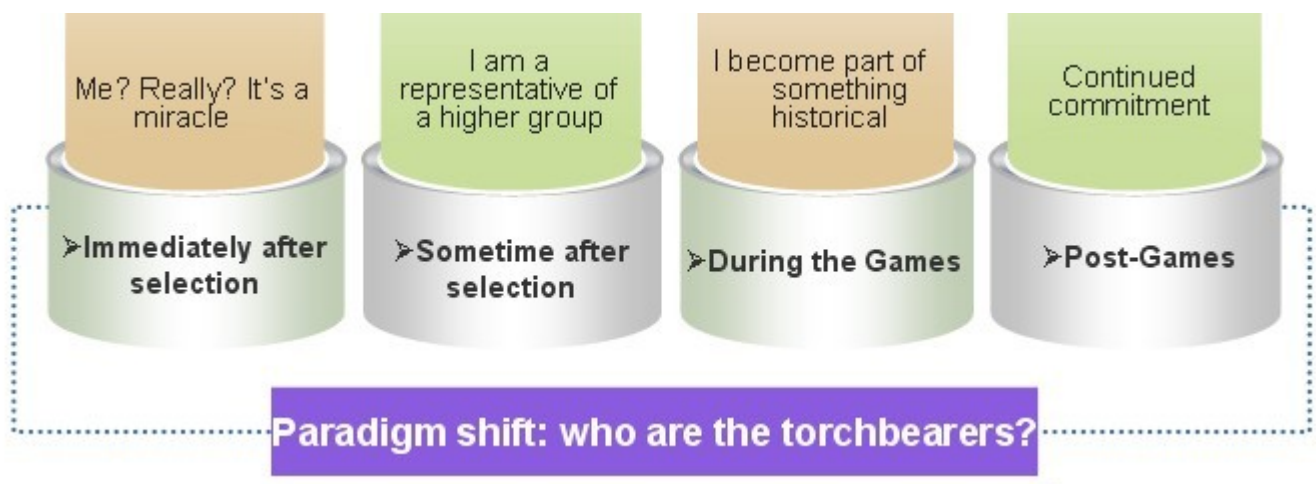


Figure 2: Representation of Paradigm Shift Regarding Who Are the Torchbearers

Me? Really?

All the individuals in this investigation originally identified themselves as grassroots people and no one from the sample had been covered by national media prior to the selection. As a result of the prevailing perception that torchbearers were for the most part celebrities, when the selection campaign started more than a year before the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, many of the participants thought they were not qualified to be torchbearers. Because of their belief they even found themselves pondering whether to apply to the selection

process. When asked about why he hesitated to register, Participant 2 answered: “I felt the torchbearer positions were there for the celebrities... Compared with them, I am only a nobody.”

When participant 10 heard about the ongoing torchbearer selection, the first reaction was: “I responded: ‘I can’t do it. I am too old to relay a torch. Aren’t the torchbearers supposed to be young celebrities?’”

The selection of torchbearers at a national level launched by Lenovo was big news in the summer of 2007. Because of the exposure, many people started to realize that ordinary people would be able to enjoy equal chance of getting nominated. Even though they reported that at first they did not believe they had a chance, after hearing more and more details about selection opportunities as they were promoted and explained in the public media, the participants gradually started to believe that they indeed had an opportunity to become Olympic torchbearers themselves and join others as well as celebrities. This shift in perception allowed them to take the next step and submitted their applications. All participants reported feeling very excited when they learned that grassroots people were eligible to register for a nationwide selection, as the illustrated by the following quotes. A participant expressed her decision process by sharing:

After I registered [online for the torchbearer selection], I told every single one of my friends what I just did and encouraged them to take part as well. I told them: “They are selecting grassroots torchbearers. Everyone has the chance. We should give a try.” My colleagues heard that and became very thrilled too... The media reports helped us to

understand that not only the celebrities but every grassroots person had the chance this time. (Participant 11)

Participant 12 touched upon something widely shared by quite a few other participants that many people assumed that one would have to be good at sports to bear the Olympic torch.

Since I was a little girl, I have never been very athletic. Speaking of the Olympic Games, people would define it as a major sporting event that challenges the limits of human beings. That's why I used to think the torchbearers should be related with sports. I like the Olympic Games very much, but due to that reason [that I am not athletic], I always felt the Games were quite out of my reach. However, the selection of grassroots torchbearer on such a large scale, as a means [for the mass] to participate in the Games, instantly made me believe that the Games are very close to me. (Participant 12)

Even though many people decided to apply after the encouragement from media reports, (i.e. more than a million individuals registered on the Lenevo torchbearer selection website), many of the winners of the selection process still could not believe they won and many considered their victory to be a miracle. The people selected were originally from all different places in China. In common, they had the belief that because they were grassroots people, their chances of becoming a part of the Games barely existed. Therefore, the participants naturally considered it to be a real marvel for them to be publicly nominated as torchbearers. As a result, disbelief and even shock was commonly observed as their very first

response to the news that they had been selected.

[When hearing I was selected,] I couldn't believe it was real! I thought I was in a dream! Then I gave myself a pinch and it hurt! So it's not surreal! It's reality! Afterwards I watched the video tape [of the selection show] for several times, and I could clearly tell that at that moment they announced I was the winner I was too astonished to react. It's so thrilling even to recall that! How precious and how rare it was for a grassroots person to be selected as an Olympic torchbearer! ... I am only a common person, and I am not great at all. The Olympic spirit is great. As a common person, I was able to relay the great Olympic spirit, that's the amazing part... The nominated torchbearers needed to take an oath in front of the Olympic flag. I can still remember the oath now! My voice was the loudest and it felt like I was an Olympic champion. [I felt] I had just won a gold medal in the Olympic Games and was singing the national anthem! How exhilarating that was! ...There are 6 billion people in the world and 1.3 billion in China, and I became one of the 21,880 Beijing Olympic torchbearers. This is even luckier than winning the lottery! (Participant 3)

In many occasions, when interviewed by local media, several torchbearers were speechless and therefore were not able to speak since they were too excited. Participant 15 remembers being in that situation and finally after a long pause being able to voice: "It's like a dream! I can't believe it's true! I can't believe they let me, a grassroots person, relay the

holy flame!”

This “miracle” perception was widely shared by other people around the winners and their reactions intensified the temporary disbelief and doubt about the possibility of an ordinary Chinese being selected as one of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers. Participant 13’s quote illustrates this point:

My boss commented: “Impossible! Impossible! Insanely impossible! How could you be selected to relay the torch?” Then he gave me a call to confirm. Well, nobody around me believed a rural man as ordinary and taciturn as me could be nominated to relay the Olympic torch. People all thought only superstars could do that, but I was the lucky one.

I am a representative of a higher group

No matter how doubtful and unbelievable people felt regarding the possibility of grassroots people to be nominated as torchbearers, the nomination actually took place in a way that left people in wonder and invited them to believe, understand and accept that it was really happening, even though that had not been their experience of how things were done in China.

From the data, the participants generally normalized the miracle of being selected by telling themselves that they were nominated as the representative of a certain group. Maybe due to the strong Chinese ideology of collectivism, the grassroots people who were selected from the masses persistently kept in mind that they were not supposed to only run for themselves but for a bigger and higher group of people. These feelings were expressed by many participants, using the words of Participant 5: “[My family] said it’s an

acknowledgement, a reward from the government to this industry [that I worked in].”

Participant 8 put it in the following way:

The first sentence my father said [when he heard that I was selected] was “You are a liar! You are not a sport superstar!” So I had to explain:” Dad, this is different. They selected people from every walk of life. I am a representative of college students!”... I think torchbearers represent every walk of life. I must be selected as a representative of college students and Olympic volunteers.

Also, some of them seemed to believe they were relaying for the crowd (i.e. as a representative of the crowd) that showed up along the relay route. In other cases, moreover, some others seemed to believe that they were supposed to relay and run for the Chinese society at large. As participants rationalized their participation, there was a seeming need to extend and take on the responsibility of representing a bigger group as if to justify the reason why they got chosen. Participant 11 and 6 shared their understanding by saying: “Our glory [of being torchbearers] came from the cohesion of everyone. I was not only me at that moment and I was representing everyone on the relay site. I was expected to accomplish a very sacred mission.” and “We [the grassroots torchbearers] were the representatives of all the Chinese, so we were obliged to share our joy with everyone else we could reach.”

Believing that they were selected as representative of a bigger group allowed them to make sense of why they were nominated, which indeed make sense given the underlying values in Chinese society. Data collected indicates that most participants believed that they indeed were representatives of bigger groups, and that belief seemed to bring about a sense of

responsibility and opportunity to make a difference and have the possibility to positively influence their community.

I become part of something historical

As the life journey continued, the identity of these torchbearers was shaped by feeling proud to have been such an integral part of the Games and thus evolved into a feeling of becoming part history. This was especially prominent when the participants recalled the moment they saw the cauldron was ignited on the opening ceremony night of August 8th, 2008. This was vividly expressed by several participants, for example Participant 1 noted:

I was so moved to witness Li Ning imitating running along the top of the Bird's Nest and lit the cauldron of Beijing Olympic Games. Watching the holy flame being ignited, I felt that I finally accomplished my mission. It was because of us that the flame got to be relayed to the Bird's Nest. Without the relay of any torchbearer, the cauldron would not be ignited. At that moment a strong feeling of national pride burst in my heart... China is on the road to rejuvenation! I participated in this great, once in a century, historical event! I became part of the history!

Further, Participant 14 and 12 shared:

I told myself: "Ah! That flame used to be in my torch. I am part of the Games" When the cauldron was ignited, I felt a part of my heart was lightened up. [That feeling was] hard to describe. I felt it very familiar... inspiring and glorious.

When the flame [in the cauldron was ignited], I felt the hearts of everyone was lit up. I felt it very bright in my heart. I felt I was part of the flame which lightened everyone at the moment. I felt so honorable to be part of it.

A common feeling expressed throughout the interviews related to the intense experience of witnessing the cauldron being lit up. In that moment they realized that there was only one flame traveling all the way from Athens to Beijing and they got to carry it for a portion of the journey. In its long trip, each leg became essential and without even one of the torchbearers, the flame would not have been possibly relayed to the Bird's Nest and the cauldron of the 2008 summer Olympic Games would by no means have been ignited. In that moment, the common feeling and experience expressed was one of being an essential part in history making and having had the opportunity to be part of a magnificent event such as the Olympic Games. Several participants reported that in that moment they largely ignored their previous grassroots status and truly believed that they were indeed part of history making. These participants felt they contributed to the event and therefore felt very related to the Games.

Continued commitment

After considering themselves to be representatives of a certain group and feeling connected to the history and the Games which were under the spotlight of people all over the world, many participants shared that an inner sense of mission and obligation arose in their hearts. When asked about what being a torchbearer really meant to them, they expressed in the following ways: "It means a motivation, an obligation for me."(Participant 4)

Another participant noted:

Being a torchbearer is not only a glory, but also means a mission, responsibility and obligation. This mission, responsibility and obligation will last until I can't do anything physically... Even though the Olympic relay ended almost two years ago, I am still committed to my responsibility and my obligation. I will take full advantage of my social influence and try to help more people to pursue their dreams. I will definitely dedicate to giving back to my community, my city, my society and my nation! (Participant 6)

Realizing their social capabilities, many of the participants reported becoming ambassadors for the Olympic spirit. Being acutely aware of the deep love people hold for the torch, many torchbearers naturally chose to leverage their social influence and became ambassador of the Games. Even without any support or suggestion from the official organizing committee, many of them were committed to public goods due to the sense of mission and obligation brought about by the identity and they successfully contributed to community development. As participant 11 noted: "I feel obliged to share the torch with more people in this society and pass along my joys. By sharing the positive energy of the torch, I feel the value of my torch is increasing."

After the Games, they founded non-profit organizations voluntarily to contribute to public good and they gave lectures at schools to inspire more people, as expressed by Participant 5:

The torchbearer of my home city founded a non-profit organization

afterwards... The greater our abilities, the higher our responsibilities, so we always contribute to public welfare such as visiting nursing home and orphanages, serving for environmental events and also giving lectures to help college students to excel in depressed job market.

The participants reported that people found their words inspiring and convincing as they used their true stories as examples:

I gave several lectures to the students in different departments and used my own experience to encourage them to persevere with their dreams. They did listen to me and trust me, since the torch is the most convincing proof of my true experience... (Participant 2)

A lot of schools and colleges asked me to give speeches, in order to motivate the students by the Olympic spirit. I also became ambassador of a local volunteer association. Using my social influence, I managed to gather a lot of people for voluntary activities. (Participant 4)

These torchbearers were not only “relaying a healthy, positive, persevering spirit and passing along hope and love” (Participant 12) and did not merely inspire other people by sharing their own personal stories. Many of them voluntarily gathered together, or even founded organizations so that they could give back to the community mainly by being involved in social activities. As one participant put it: “Being able to become a torchbearer was already such a positive thing; when several torchbearers gather together, it’s like an addition of positive energy.” (Participant 14) This positive energy has been intentionally

passed around, producing a tangible and lasting social legacy.

To my knowledge, a national organization was founded voluntarily by the torchbearers and these social activities for the public good are going to be held continuously into the future. It is worth noting that even though “continued commitment” is an observed outcome of the paradigm shift, this life journey is still evolving and developing.

Experience of a Lifetime – Relay Day

During the 2008 Olympic torch relay, 21,880 out of 6 billion people got the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to relay the Olympic torch. Being passed from hand to hand, torch to torch, the flame traveled from the Temple of Hera in Athens to the Bird’s Nest in Beijing in the lead-up to the 2008 Olympic Games. In the process, each participant (i.e. torchbearer) gained precious experiences and memories that, as most noted, they shall never forget for the rest of their lives. During the interviews, when asked about the feeling around relaying the torch, the participants usually got very emotional and even speechless and inarticulate because of the power of their experience. A similar expression was captured by Chalip: “a sense that is felt more than understood” (Chalip, 2006), and therefore really difficult to explain and put into words. Many expressed that probably one had to be there to really get what it was like, to really understand the full depth of the feeling and the experience.

In order to better capture the experience of participants during relay day, this section is organized in three parts represented in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Representation of Relay Day Experience

Dream-like state

In order to organize the torchbearers, BOCOG staff went through a standard process and gathered the torchbearers the day before the relay in a hotel where they all spent the night. This gathering only included torchbearers, no family and friends were allowed. Late that night, the flame reached the city and the crew that escorted the torch stayed in the same hotel as the torchbearers. Early the following morning, both the crew and the torchbearers started the relay journey by hopping on shuttles that took them to the specific site. The process was very strict to maximize effectiveness and the torchbearers were organized to follow directions regarding when and where to exit the bus. After their leg was complete, torchbearers waited at the finishing point for the pick-up shuttle and traveled back to the

hotel. These procedures were strictly implemented and this process was collectively experienced by the torchbearers in each city.

All participants expressed that during the relay (starting the night before), they experienced a high level of excitement and somehow felt they entered a half-conscious dream-like state during which they found it hard to fully control themselves during both the relay day and the night before at the hotel. Many have reported that they could barely sleep the night prior to their relay because of the thrill of thinking about what was going to happen the next morning. The quote below is very representative of many that were repeatedly conveyed during the interviews regarding how hard it was to have a good and sound night of sleep prior to the relay day.

...one day before the relay a BOCOG staff brought a torch to the training site. We were sitting there but couldn't touch it. Therefore we became extremely excited and looked forward to holding our own torches. I felt so excited and went to bed very early that night, however I got up really early. My roommate and I woke up at 4 am and couldn't fall asleep again (Participant 8).

The quote illustrates that many torchbearers became excited because of the training session previous to the real relay as they got a glimpse of the torch that time. They shared that consequently, they started to envision, imagine and yearn to carry their own torch and felt too thrilled to sleep well. As the flame was traveling from one city to the next, some of them even stayed up waiting so that they could see the flame when it arrived:

I could hardly get to sleep the night before the relay day. I stayed up

until 3 am to see the holy flame arriving at the hotel. [When I heard it arrived,] I rushed to the hotel lobby to see the flame which was going to be relayed by me. I took a lot of photos, I stared at the flame for a long time, and I shook hands with all the staff. I barely slept that night! The next morning, I could feel the sweat coming out of my palms even before leaving the hotel.

The above quote not only mentions about what the participant experienced the night before the relay but also shows the even stronger excitement the torchbearer felt on the relay day, which was mostly shared by all other participants. The dream-like state overwhelmed the torchbearers as the relay day started and reached its climax when the flame finally was relayed to the torchbearers' hands and lit up in their own torches. No matter how long the torchbearers have been anticipating the relay day, the real relay experience usually lasted less than one minute. During that minute, their heart ruled their head the moment they started to run and their mind usually went blank. The torchbearers usually ran faster than they previously assumed due to excitement, as Participant 1 shared:

That moment and that feeling were just incredible, unparalleled, beyond words. Seriously I seldom cry in my life but [at that time] I could feel my eyes brimming with tears... I told myself [before the relay]: "Slow down! Run as slowly as you can!" But when the torch was ignited in my hand, I was literally too thrilled to run slowly...I shouted the slogans together with the cheering leaders and the relay passed like one second.

Participant 4 also noted that the relaying process was too short: "I felt my heart

pumping! The flame was burning in my torch! I felt the heat! ... [I] tried to run as slowly as I could...Still, it was too short! Super fast! I remembered nothing! It ended like a second!”

And Participant 14 experienced this half-consciousness well:

I was very sober at first, but my mind instantly went blank the moment I saw the torchbearer before me running towards my direction. All I knew at that time was to make sure my torch was ignited... and run... and run...and then pass the flame to the next torchbearer. I felt like I was half-conscious and my excitement overweighed my senses during the whole process.

These same feelings of nervousness, excitement and half-consciousness were generally shared by all the participants and therefore the repeated narratives from others are not listed here. Taken together, the participants all mentioned that the relaying process went by too fast. Due to the high level of excitement, the relay went by too fast for them to savor the moment and live it to the fullest. They could feel their hearts pumping crazily but could hardly control their steps. They were clearly aware of how precious the relaying moment was but many of them even failed to fully remember what exactly happened during that moment when they held the flame in their torch and therefore could not precisely express their feelings into words during the interviews. Pauses spoke loudly, as did their emotions as they attempted, as best as they could, to express how amazing the experience was for them.

Power of the crowd

Another reason that the participants found it hard to articulate exactly how they felt

when they bore the torch is because of the utmost enthusiasm they perceived from the spectators. No matter if they relayed the torch in China or in other countries, all the participants talked quite a lot about the cheering crowd along the relay route and constantly mentioned the amazing interactions between themselves and the crowd. Their narratives and especially the detailed stories are indeed fascinating and moving, and vividly conveyed the desire of the audience to watch the flame and their awe towards the Olympic symbolism.

The torchbearers not only felt the power of the crowd at the relay site but actually sensed the energy from the crowd starting at the hotel, when they were traveling in the drop-off shuttle, at the relay spot and even from the pick-up shuttle back to the hotel. Participant 1 relayed the torch and worked at the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay team for one of the three main sponsors of the relay; because of that, he traveled with the holy flame all over China and was able to give a full picture of what happened along the route. Speaking of the nights before the relay days, he naturally has a lot to say about how people from different cities welcomed the flame. In the following quote, he shared a story of the relay team arriving in a city late at night and how unexpected crowd showed up:

We [the relay team] were all exhausted when our shuttle arrived in J City at 11 pm. Then we saw all those cheering people along the road to welcome us. It was like a carnival! We never expected so many people to welcome our shuttle so late at night. We knew we are not the superstars; it was because we represented the holy flame! All of a sudden, the fatigue was carried away, and we opened the shuttle windows to cheer back to them. I felt that everything that I devoted was

so worthy at that moment...

Participant 1 also talked about how citizens in another city persistently showed their enthusiasm to the upcoming relay in a heavy rain on the night before the relay day:

In the city of ST, thousands of citizens, mainly college students, gathered outside our hotel and cried out unified slogans to cheer for the Olympic torch relay the whole night before the relay day. It began to rain heavily during midnight, but nobody felt like to leave...

As populous as China is, the size of the crowds that gathered to see the torch is beyond the imagination of the people who are not originally from this country. Participant 1 recalled the great passion from the huge crowd in G city as follows:

In G City, the estimated number of people gathered to watch the relay was over 4 million. The hosts of local radio channels added fuel to the flames by roaring [in their shows]: "Now the torch is on XXX Road, hurry up to see the torch! Hurry up!" I have experienced so many major events in my life, but I still could not believe what I saw when we drove on relay route. It was a sea of people and I couldn't see its end. People were on the top of the buses, on the top of the bus shelters, on the trees, on the roofs, on the billboards, and people were just everywhere, waving national flags and Olympic flags...

The zeal the crowd held for the torch was not only reflected in terms of incredible numbers of people but was also expressed by the fact that they showed up to see the torch as well as their willingness to attend regardless of work or extreme weather. Participant 11

recalled how the crowd skipped work to watch the flame and how they waited to see the torch relay in the pouring rain:

Most people didn't go to work on that [relay] day and waited for a whole day just to see the torch for very few seconds...It was pouring rain on that day and everyone got all wet. However, no matter how heavy the rain was, nobody wanted to leave and still stood there waiting for the torch. We wiped away the water fog on the shuttle windows and tried to greet the ebullient crowd... The moment my torch was ignited, unexpectedly the crowd along the street began to run together with me, in such a heavy rain! I planned to run very slowly, but they were all running very fast! ... I couldn't slow down because of my excitement and ran very fast as well... At that moment, I felt they were my brothers and sisters. Their positive energy impacted me significantly.

As they repeatedly stated, it was hard for the torchbearers to not be touched by this contagious celebrating spirit that could be felt in the air. Therefore, many shared that the positive energy of the crowd significantly influenced them specifically. All the participants claimed to be greatly moved by the atmosphere on site and many of them have compelling stories to tell. Participant 1 shared: "Seeing the torch, some senior citizens even knelt down on the ground crying their hearts out: 'The torch...the sacred Olympic flame...the holy flame...'" And Participant 11 remembered: "I saw an old man who tied his crutch with a rope to his body and leaned against a fence, so that he could use both of his hands to swing the national flag and the Olympic flag."

Some participants seemed surprised by what most inspired them during the relay. For example, Participant 7 shared:

The thing impressed me the most took place on our way back to the hotel. It was three hours after the relay and the cheering crowd had already left. Then I saw an old lady, probably in her 80s, sitting alone by the street and waving the national flag in her hands to us. She must have been waiting for a long time for us to go back. But we were on the shuttle driving fast back to the hotel, so she could neither take a picture with us nor touch the torch. All she got was a glimpse! Just that glimpse! Even though we drove by really fast, I could feel how satisfied she was the moment she finally saw us... She was definitely the one that moved me the most on that day and I was so regretful that I couldn't take a picture of her.

Still referring to the power, energy and the enthusiasm of the crowd, Participant 15 noted:

So many people took group pictures using us as background even though they were actually very far from us. They couldn't stand really close, but they still showed their passions for the torch. It was the first time for China to hold the Games, so people were very passionate... They were cheering constantly, no matter if before, during or after the relay. I felt very moved by them.

The participants have provided several stories and depicted many scenes like the ones

presented above. Their recounts reflect how much they were impressed by the crowd and the acts and behaviors of the crowd actually became an essential part of their relay-day memory. The interactions between the torchbearers and the crowd increased as the torchbearers felt encouraged and moved by the cheering atmosphere, and therefore the power of the crowd and the energy of the flame enhanced each other's experience.

Event organizers put emphasis on security and crowd management and property strategies lead to satisfying results. However, the implementation of strict crowd control measures created tension and often stifled the socialization between crowd members and torchbearers that potentially would take place. During the 2008 Olympic torch relay, intensive security measures were employed. Sadly, extremely severe controlling actions suffocated the celebratory atmosphere in several cities. Consider this quote from Participant 8 who ran his leg in Lhasa.

The security measures were very intense. On the first day of our arrival, I saw a lot of security, armed police and even the bomb squad. I could tell that local government emphasized security measures strongly... Well, I expected more people [to show up along my route] as had been the case in other cities. However, there were very few people and the whole atmosphere felt a little bit nervous... a lot of the shops along the street were shut with their rolling doors closed. Maybe because the first 10 legs were the most important so the shops were asked to close for better protection... [It was] the least exciting part of my very memorable experience.

Tibet might be a very sensitive and special example and probably some people would argue that such actions were necessary in Tibet as riots had taken place a few weeks before the relay. Unfortunately, however, similar incidents happened in other cities, and Participant 1, the one who traveled with the torch all over China had a lot to say about this:

The municipal government [of S City] used 5000 buses to carry the people who have passed the background check and sent them to the Shenyang Horticulture Exposition and Botanical Garden, which is many kilometers away from the urban area of Shenyang. This kind of artificial crowd disappointed a lot of local people. In many cities, the routes were changed from those reported several hours before the relay without informing the public for safety reasons. Many ordinary people stuck to the previous route and waited for a whole day and even became resentful since they did not get to see the torch...The shortest relay happened in Wenzhou, where the security guards failed to control the crowd and the relay was forced to stop. The last 25 torchbearers had to relay the torch standing in a line on the stage during the city ceremony. That's way too short! Honestly, if I compare the stricter cities with the normal ones, say even though people were so crazily enthusiastic about the torch in G city, I felt they were crazy in a nice and celebratory way. I was not scared at all even when I was crowded by all those people... So few things can unite the whole nation in this way, why didn't they [the organizers in those cities] let it naturally become a carnival?

From the data, it is obvious that the torchbearers anticipated interacting with cheering crowds as they knew local people held a great passion to see the torch and would want to see it. Strict crowd control hindered the interactions between the two groups and the exchange between the power of the crowd and the energy of the flame did not always happen in those cases.

Heightened Patriotism

For China, a country with such strong nation-state mentality which uses sports to promote patriotism, people have an inclination to mix up their feelings regarding the Olympic Games and the emotions towards the motherland. Even though Participant 3 relayed the torch in another country, he still felt the craziness of crowd several thousand miles away from mainland China. The students who studied in that city, in that country even in that continent traveled a long way to support him on relay site and those overseas Chinese showed solidarity for their culture and country around the flame:

Nobody was leading the crowd but they were of one mind... Their cheers were coming from the bottom of their hearts. Even though their voice became raucous, they were still cheering... [After my relay,] a girl clasped my arm and cried, "We took train for several hours to come to L City and waited for you in the snow since 4 am. We want to support the Torch Relay of our motherland. We are so proud!" ... The nearby Chinese restaurants gave everybody a bottle of water and several steamed stuffed buns for free, so that those people could sustain the extremely severe weather... I felt so proud that I am a Chinese! Can you

imagine that everybody was crying instead of speaking at that time? I can never never never forget that our patriotism was heightened.

(Participant 3)

Patriotism was raised even higher after Sichuan earthquake that took place on May 12th 2008, which was less than three months before the Olympic Games. The torch relay was suspended for three days due to the nation-wide mourning and the relay scale was scaled back by at least 50 percent after the earthquake. However, the solidarity and patriotism escalated even higher as people hoped that the country would go through the catastrophe at such a key time. Participant 8 expressed support towards Sichuan in the following manner: “The next leg and I formed a heart shape pose with our hands, which meant billions of Chinese people have united as one man and cheered together for Sichuan and Beijing Olympic Games.”

Participant 14 depicted people showed stronger hope for a successful relay after experiencing the traumatic earthquake:

The roads were packed by people and there were colorful flags flying everywhere. It was a clear day and everyone was in such a good mood for the upcoming relay. After I got off the shuttle, I was touched, moved and encouraged by the atmosphere and became very very excited. The crowd was very supportive and was all of one heart and one mind, since at that time China was living through a catastrophe, and everyone was shouting “Go China Go! Go Sichuan Go!” which conveyed the wishes of the people for both a successful relay, wonderful Olympic Games as

well as a good recovery from the catastrophe.

Participant 6 also clearly remembered the patriotic crowd when being interviewed:

I really wanted to cry when I witnessed the visible feeling of pride that the crowd held for our country... I even want to cry now when I am trying to tell you this! ...That was so so so excited! ...All the college students in town were gathered at the end of the relay route and were singing the national anthem over and over again. The scene was so stunning and so many people couldn't help but bursting into tears because it was so emotional. I was so moved.

The above three quotes illustrate that after the earthquake, the torchbearers and the crowds showed deeper love for the country through higher support for the relay and greater enthusiasm for the Games. Many of the participants reflected that because of the upcoming Olympic Games and the Sichuan earthquake, the nation was unified on an unprecedented scale.

Impacts and Significance of Torch Relay

The nationwide torchbearer selection process that started 17 months before the Olympic Games and went on for several months challenged previous existing beliefs that celebrities were the ones who would bear the Olympic torch. The process seemed to have been designed to get the community excited about the upcoming Games. Based on participants' reflections, the 2008 Olympic torchbearer selection also positively impacted people's lives and created some legacy for communities. Data indicates that the impacts took place on three different levels: the individual level, the community level and the national

level, as Figure 4 illustrates:



Figure 4: Representation of Impacts and Significance of 2008 Olympic Torch Relay

Individual: it changed my life tremendously

During the interview, nearly all the participants said that the torch relay experience had changed their lives enormously. The two following torchbearer clearly felt the positive changes in their lives and they both gave credits to their torch bearing experience. Consider the following two quotes from them which were expressed in a very emotional way:

The whole torchbearer thing completely changed my life. The August of 2007 was the summer right after my graduation [from college] and I was at a major crossroad in my life. Thanks to the torchbearer experience, I excelled in the job interviews and got offers from all the jobs I applied to... The people around me all considered the fact that I was a torchbearer awesome. My parents finally began to encourage me to chase my dream career while in fact they had never supported me to play basketball before [I was selected]. Since I was nominated because of my devotion to basketball, I have the gut and confidence to convince them to let me continue following my dream. (Participant 2)

A lot of people call me “the torchbearer” when they see me on the street.

Some would say: “her son is also a torchbearer”. Some people even call me “the heroic mother”. That’s very important to me. Several years ago, my husband cheated on me and we divorced. I have been depressed for a long time...Now my neighbors say: “You are the heroic mother of our city! Your son went to college and you both became torchbearers! A couple wouldn’t even make it happen, but you succeeded, with only yourself.”... Tens years ago, I was a single mother struggling in a broken family. Now my son and I are two torchbearers living what I consider a blissful life. (Participant 10)

From the quotes we can see, the torchbearer experience brought noticeable life changes to the grassroots torchbearers. These changes manifested in many ways, some gained a boost in self-confidence while other went as far as rediscovering hope for their lives. Stories may vary from individual to individual, however all participants recognized and acknowledged palpable and tangible positive impacts.

The impacts that came along with the torch bearing experience were not merely felt by the torchbearers themselves, and in fact those impacts had a trickle down effect. Participants generally reported that others’ perceptions of them had changed due to their torch bearing experience. Superstar effect even took place as these people were publicly selected, which was particularly the case for those who were intensively interviewed and appeared on local media after they won the national TV selection show. During the several-month selection period, high media coverage quickly publicized the life stories of these grassroots people to the masses. All of a sudden, these torchbearers who were previously unknown were

recognized in the street by strangers, even when they were traveling outside China. Consider the following quote from Participant 11:

Now I am back into my normal life. However, a lot of strangers still can recognize me on the street since there were many news reports about me. Once I was travelling to Norway and a Chinese lady ran to me and asked: “Are you from G City? Are you Ms. 11?” I said in surprise: “How did you know me?” She said: “From the newspaper!” Once I was crossing the street, then I saw a guy smiling at me. When he walked past me, he said in a low but happy voice: “Torchbearer!” That was very interesting. I felt very happy and almost wanted to shake his hands and interview him about his feelings of the Olympic Games.

Not only were they frequently recognized in the streets, they were also deemed to be superstars in many circumstances. When coming back to his hometown after he relayed the torch, Participant 4 was totally shocked by how local media treated him: “I was astonished by the media when I walked out of the airport [after I relayed the torch abroad]. How could there be so many media! All those cameras and journalists made me feel I was a super sports star.”

Others feel inspired and encouraged

The positive impacts did not merely stop as shared by most participants with them, but in fact got reflected and felt by other people around these torchbearers. Participants spoke of cases where they observed inspiration of other people in the community.

All participants felt that by becoming torchbearers they directly made their families feel honored and indirectly made the whole community proud. In the same light that the torch

relay served as the herald of the upcoming Olympic Games, the grassroots torchbearers served as ambassadors of the Olympics as the topic of Olympics would be brought to mind every time people in the community met them. Being in the physical presence of an Olympic torchbearer is different than watching Olympics-related news on TV as the former would naturally bring a direct feeling of connectedness to the Games. Therefore, several participants spoke of the family and community pride that was generated as the following quote from Participant 11 illustrates:

My families and my friends were all very supportive and happy for me. Since they knew someone who relayed the torch in person, they naturally felt closer to the Games. Even before I relayed the torch, my colleagues called me “the torchbearer” when they saw me. I became shy and said: “I haven’t relayed the flame yet. Please don’t call me torchbearer yet.” They responded: “No, no, and no! Every time we see you, we can feel the Olympic Games approaching. So we have to call you like that.” ...People always introduced me as a torchbearer now. “This is my friend! She is a TORCHBEARER!” ...Everyone in my community got to know me and they usually sat in front of the TV [during that period] with the hope of seeing me. Many of them would say: “There is a torchbearer in our community!” as if they were my relatives while actually I didn’t really know them.

Participants seemed to agree that for the people other than family members of the grassroots torchbearers, their most immediate reason to want to know a torchbearer was their

wanting to see the torch right after the relay. Some participants explained that for many of their friends and families and community members, at large it was as if touching the torch made them become part of the Olympic spirit. Touching the torch made it real for them to feel the tangible part of the Olympics. These people's desire to create a possibility to touch the torch and their love for the torch was fully expressed through the descriptions of the participants. Participant 5 shared: "A lot of tourists and strangers came over to my apartment [after my relay]. Even though those strangers only touched the torch for one second, they felt they were experiencing the Olympics."

Participant 2 worked at a university and his students were very eager to see the torch and he shared:

So many people visited my family just for the torch that we even needed to arrange appointments at that time. At least one fourth of the students in the university [where I worked] have touched and took pictures with the torch one by one. I could see how much value the torch was since half of my students used the photo with the torch as their profile pictures on the Chinese version of Facebook. I gave several lectures to students in different departments and used my own experience to encourage them to persevere with their dreams. They did listen to me and trusted me, since the torch is the most convincing proof of my true experience.

Participant 11 explained why people in the community wanted to see the torch so much in her own words:

Everyone held the love for Olympics and felt proud that our nation could

hold the Games. In this sense, the torch served like a visible honor, a touchable spirit. So the people who got to see or touch the torch naturally felt more connected to the Games.

China is a country with vast land. Even though the torch traveled across the nation, still many cities were not covered in that route. However, with the selection of grassroots people all over the county, even residents in remote areas could have known someone right next door that became a torchbearer. After the grassroots people returned home and let others see and touch the torch, those people who originally had nothing to do with the Games gained an amazing tangible contact with the Olympic. As a result, they naturally felt closer or even connected to the Games. Participant 6 gave an explanation of this connectedness in his own words:

I shared my torch with my students for photo taking and thousands of students touched my torch. The moment I took the torch out of the box, they already burst into very loud cheers, even before they touched it and even if it was almost two years after the relay. I also organized students to relay the torch inside the classroom and allowed them to take pictures with it... Whenever they talk about it, they feel very excited and proud, and they always tell their families and friends “My teacher is an Olympic torchbearer!” Then their families, their friends and the friends of their friends feel excited and proud as well... First of all, I can tell that they are very patriotic. Second, they hold deep feelings for sports and for the Olympic Games. Third, they are so glad that there is a

torchbearer in their daily life and they got to see and touch the torch.

Comparing with other people that don't have this chance, they naturally feel more proud.

People around Participant 13 also sincerely felt that they would have not the opportunity to see the torch if someone besides them had not become a publicly selected torchbearer.

There were people visiting me every evening, from schools, factories, different post offices, even from other provinces. People kept coming to my house from March till two days before the Olympic Games...People who got to see the torch could hardly put it down, and they said: "I've never imagined I could touch a real torch". They also said: "We were born and raised in such a remote village. If were not Mr. 13, someone we know beside us, how could we even have this chance?"

As people realized that these publicly selected torchbearers originally came from the same city they live in, shared a similar experience with them and belonged to the same community, they felt inspired of what was realistically going on right beside them. Therefore, the impacts further developed into a sense of encouragement and inspiration to the mass that indeed it is possible for everyone to get involved in the Olympic Games. Participant 3 shared how people beside him reacted to him winning the selection: "They said: 'Oh, this guy is just like us. He is one of us!' Yes, I am just one of them."

Participant 4 also experienced how other people felt inspired because they shared the same past experience:

Some people even clasped my arms: “The same as you! I used to practice XXX [a traditional Chinese sport that is concealed here for privacy] as well!” See, sharing the same experience with me was enough to make him proud, since he knew I am a torchbearer!

In this sense, these grassroots torchbearers were like seeds spreading out all over China, exhibiting the changes of China, sprouting the possibility that common people could have potentially the possibility of bringing about new conversations within the community. Therefore, local people not only got constantly excited for the upcoming Games several months early but also felt a possibility to take ownership of the Olympics.

We now think of China differently

Participants mentioned the start of new conversations and ways of making a difference in their communities. As new conversation started and evolved within the communities regarding new possibilities, the torchbearer selection and the relay actually resulted in people perceiving China differently. First of all, the mass could feel that the torch has brought cohesion to China. When asked about what the Olympic torch relay really meant to China and Chinese, Participant 6 answered: “We Chinese used to be called as ‘the sick men of Asia’. I won’t need to say more about how precious this opportunity was for China to hold the Olympic Games.”

Participant 9 also noticed the difference the torch relay and the Olympics brought about:

I think the Olympic Games have played a very positive role for Chinese people, [specifically in] developing national power, inspiring Chinese

people and strengthening the cohesion... There aren't many things that can consolidate this nation, and the Olympic Games accomplished that.

Several participants explained that given the cohesion among Chinese people, the level of the conversation that the selection of grassroots people showed a different China was intensified even more. Further comments were provided by the participants on the nation-wide torchbearer selection, which they believe is able to reflect that China is transforming into a different, more open, more confident nation.

It [the nation-wide selection] was a sign of a more open, more confident China... This change showed an attitude of the government. It was not only an open attitude, but also implied an idea of change that gave more rights to the grassroots people. (Participant 12)

When asked how she thinks the selection of Olympic torchbearers would be different if it took place in China 20 years ago, Participant 14 gave a very convincing answer:

First of all, we wouldn't have the capabilities to select [Olympic torchbearers] on such a large scale because we couldn't take full advantage of Internet to disseminate information at that time. We wouldn't be able to draw so many people's attention at one time through mass media. Second and more importantly, at that time Chinese people's mentalities hadn't been changed since that would have been very few years after the Reform and Opening-up Policy. There wouldn't be so many grassroots torchbearers since people would assume that the torchbearer experience belongs to a specific class. But in 2007, people

were educated that the experience did not only belong to politicians or elites; as long as you did meaningful things to this society, you were eligible to register. I think the selection on such a large scale and the nominations of such a big group of grassroots torchbearers indicated a major change in Chinese society.

In all, the participants reported relevant and positive impacts of the torch relay on three different level from individuals to the community and to the public perception of China. Therefore, they considered the torchbearing experience to be very significant.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

First, findings pointed to a noticeable paradigm shift on the perception of who are the torchbearers and this might have been brought about by the liminal experience produced by the selection and torchbearing experience. This paradigm shift is consistent with the literature which suggested that liminal experience is able to bring about changes to participants such as reshaping and reconfiguring of personality and self-position (Thomassen, 2009; Turner, 1967; Turner, 1977; Zavala, 1997). Due to the power inherent in liminal spaces and experiences of liminality, the observed paradigm shift took place accompanying a trend of reconfiguring and reintegrating the self-identity. In the participants' case, the previous self-perceived identity was dissolved and a temporary disorientation of identity occurred. Afterwards, a new self-identity of being a representative appeared in order to normalize the "miracle" of being selected, which was something they could not accept and make sense of right away. As the feeling of being part of history making was aroused, a sense of obligation formed accordingly. This shift in identity parallels previous scholarship which has touched upon the influence of liminality (Thomassen, 2009; Turner, 1967).

Also, other literature concerning the cultural and social context of China can provide more insights into this paradigm shift. Due to the strong collectivism mentality, the vast majority of Chinese believe that conducting physical exercises is actually training the body for the nation (Brownell, 1995). So it is not hard to understand the fact that for those grassroots torchbearers the positions of torchbearers were awarded to them because they were

representing certain groups rather than because they were deserving, as individuals, of relaying the Olympic torch. One can therefore say that participants in fact internalized their participation as part of a collective act, not so much an individual one (i.e. I am representing something instead of I am here as me). This is a clear contrast between Chinese collectivism and Western individualism. Many times in China, people have a hard time justifying and rationalizing individual achievements and taking credit as individuals.

Furthermore, due to belief that Chinese have been yearning for the Olympic Games for over one hundred years, the participants of the torch relay naturally would highly evaluate their participation since they deemed the Olympic torch relay experience to be a very precious part in history. Therefore, it is easy to understand why the participants were so excited to see the cauldron being ignited and felt they themselves became part of the flame that kept burning throughout the Games. Feeling that they were chosen to be part of history as the representatives of certain groups, the participants naturally had an inclination to transform self-importance, excitement and even gratitude into an obligation to give back to the community, which they firmly believed they were representing.

Second, from the data concerning relay day experience, we are able to see the magic of liminality and *communitas* and also the symbolic potency of the Olympics. Previous literature suggest that during the Olympic torch relay, high level of liminality and *communitas* are very likely going to occur due to the symbolic potency and celebratory nature of the Olympic movement (Chalip, 2006). From the data, the level of liminality and the formation of *communitas* are very evident and clearly illustrated. The torchbearers entered the liminal phase as they did not sense the change of time and experienced self-

transcendence; they experienced a half-conscious dream-like state during which they found it hard to fully control themselves, which was something that would not take place during their ordinary lives. They also felt extremely connected to people around them and felt they were like brothers and sisters who acted with one heart and one mind, even though they previously did not know each other in most cases. As the results suggest, the torchbearers were amazed by the power of the crowd as the crowd felt inspired in the presence of the torch. As shared by the participants, many moving scenes and stories took place which would most likely not happen during everyday life. From the descriptions and stories told by the torchbearers, one can clearly see that the crowd considered the torch to be of divinity. China is a country that does not have religions at the national level due to the communist belief, but the participants constantly used the term "the sacred flame" "the holy flame" in their narratives, which is similar to what MacAloon (1992) had observed in Korea, where people generally called the Olympic flame to be "sacred fire reverently and respectfully dedicated and delivered" (p.123), if directly translated from Korean. In the eyes of the participants, the Olympics stand for something ideal and high from above which deserve their most genuine reverence. This is largely because of the great symbolic potency of the Olympic torch relay. Thus, the streets where the audience was standing turned into liminal zones which allowed them and even invited them to freely express their feelings and emotions. Similar phenomena have been reported by other researchers studying liminality in other events (Shields, 1992; Uriley & Belhassen, 2006). The torch bearing event actually provided liminoid zones where people had the space and freedom to have and express extraordinary experiences and emotions. Independently whether before or after the Sichuan earthquake, independently whether the

atmosphere was celebratory or of mourning, the unity and togetherness of the crowd, as an important characteristic of *communitas* (Turner, 1969), was noticeably expressed clearly in the participants' narratives. The quotes illustrate how people felt the power of the torch relay and reveal the existence of liminality and *communitas*, which is similar to what Chalip wrote in 2006: "It feels as if new energy has been injected into the communal atmosphere – an energy that can be shared by all. Social rules and social distinctions seem less important, and are sometimes suspended altogether. There is a heightened sense of community among those who are present" (p.110). To sum up, the experience was not only able to reintegrate the identity of torchbearers but also had the power to impact existing relationships and to foster sociality.

In the result section, several participants mentioned a few examples in which they felt that they were far away from the crowd due to the extremely strict crowd control in those specific legs. Trying to avoid controversial political issues, the researchers only looked at the example from an event management perspective. Chalip (2006) argued that strict crowd control will suffocate the formation of liminality; however, even though counter intuitively, fostering of liminality and *communitas* can actually reduce risks, which means, on the contrary, because by allowing the crowd to fully experience the event can actually decrease the pressure to the event safety control. After all, the relay involves an enormous physical terrain and it is almost impossible to fully control every single street the flame is going to travel on. This point should be considered in future relays and we would suggest that event managers create more opportunity for the community involvement in future torch relays.

After analyzing the data of the relay day experience, we are confident to conclude that

firstly, due to the symbolic potency of the Olympic torch relay liminality and *communitas* are very likely going to occur during such a major event like this, turning the relay sites into near-sacred liminal zones, providing people with free escape from quotidian life and leaving people with precious experience; secondly, the liminal experience is not only limited to the torchbearers but is widely shared by a bigger group or even the whole local community, forming *communitas*; thirdly, the level of this group liminality and *communitas* is usually high.

Third, the findings indicate that the impacts that the Olympic torch relay experience provides actually transcend sports and the Games themselves and have long lasting effects on the grassroots torchbearers, people around them and even their overall community. The quotes illustrate that the torch can bring ordinary people closer to the Games and they are in line with the findings of previous scholarship, such as this following one. When Chalip asked why a participant bought tickets to Sydney Olympic Games in one of his studies (2006), the participant answered: “I knew the Olympics were going to be important for Australia, but it wasn’t until the torch came [to my town] that I really understood. It was so moving. I had tears in my eyes. I just realised how much it really means” (p.110).

From the data we have learned that having an opportunity to participate in the process and become an Olympic torchbearer made a tremendous difference for ordinary people both individually and at the collective level. Participants revealed that through the very publicly held and lengthy process they became ‘local heroes’ and that newly earned position propelled them to willingly (and with much honor) become ambassadors of the Olympic spirit—which is something that none of them ever imagined possible. As a torchbearer, their boundaries of

influences got expanded. They became role models and that's why, in their understanding, responsibilities got heightened. They felt that the public would scrutinize their actions and therefore felt honored and pressured at the same time. In addition, most referred to this newly felt increased individual capacity to make a difference in their communities and regions, as if they were experiencing themselves as change agents for the first time.

One of the major impacts is that the selection process allowed a positive conversation to be started at the local level by locals who came to believe that China is indeed changing and moving towards a different future and a different way of thinking, one that they were not used to. This change of perception was formed from the hearts of the locals, rather than directly memorizing propaganda. A clear shift in mind took place - like something that was not possible now suddenly becomes very possible. This brings about further engagement of the community to the community. With the initiation of a new discourse started by the grassroots torchbearer voluntarily, the existing relationships were influenced and new relationships formed, from which people were educated and social legacy was fostered. There were 21,880 torchbearers for the 2008 Olympic torch relay, which is a large number; imagine if the majority of this group had been selected from grassroots people all over the country, there could have been 21,880 local conversations started at the local level, in and with community.

Even though many activities have been held and positive social legacy has been created and maintained by individuals and groups of torchbearers, not much of the post-Games credit would go to the organizing committee since the organizers of the torch relay did not intend to extend the liminality and *communitas* after the Games or use it as a strategic

leveraging tool by design. Chalip (2006) touched on this when he explained how the Sydney Olympic Games organizing committee missed the opportunity to use the ongoing discourse about Cathy Freeman to foster the reconciliation between Aboriginal Australia and White Australia. From the narratives, it is evident that the duration of the communal conversation created by 2008 Olympic torch is unprecedentedly long. Thanks to the sponsors, the discourse was kicked off 17 months prior to the Games and with the voluntary efforts, the liminality and *communitas* has been amplified to some extent. Thanks to the endeavor of the torchbearers voluntarily serving as ambassadors of the Olympic Games, the conversations within the communities were carried on for a longer time frame after the closing of the Games. It is not hard to imagine how much deeper the discourse could have been developed and how greater social capital could have been leveraged if guidance would have been provided by the organizers intentionally. Unfortunately, similar to the Sydney's case, the leverageable discourse was not intentionally encouraged and therefore the social capital was not strategically increased to the level it could have been.

All in all, the stories from Beijing and the nation-wide selection of grassroots torchbearers reveal that commercial elements (i.e., the fact that sponsors like Coca-Cola, Lenovo, and Samsung sponsored the event and conducted public selection) can support social leverage if properly designed and used. Beijing did a good job pre-relay with a tangible effect, but the discourse could have been continued after the relay and, therefore, leverage further impact. Due to the calling of the mission and obligation, many of the torchbearers got deeply involved in social activities after the relay. But this was not fully exploited by the organizers, probably due to the temporary nature of the organizing committee.

Contribution of This Research Study

First and foremost, this study contributes to the literature by adding more understanding to the torchbearer experience and the impacts it has on people's lives. For the first time in sport academia, this study captured the rich narratives and lived experience of torchbearers and the quotes directly collected from the torchbearers depicted very touching scenes, helping the readers to understand what bearing the Olympic torch feels like and means. Additionally, the results indicate that the torchbearer experience not only brought about palpable life changes for the grassroots torchbearers but also greatly impacted the people around them and inspired their communities positively. The impacts to the communities that the Olympic torch relay potentially has were not widely found in the previous literature.

Second, this study holds value to the field both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the rich data from this study illustrates and supports previous arguments regarding the presence and power of liminality and *communitas* during the Olympics. Data indicates and supported the potential for leveragability of the Olympics specifically the torch relay for social legacy as previous scholars such as O'Brien and Chalip (2007) have suggested. Many host countries' priorities and concerns regarding hosting a mega event such as the Olympic Games or FIFA's World Cup relate directly to social legacy. Understandably, given the level of investment, the host country wants the mega event to have a positive enduring impact on the nation's social development. Yet in many instances, challenges commonly associated with these mega events and reported by the media include a low level of support and engagement with the event from local communities. This low level of support

and in some instances resistance to the event and associated activities logically makes sense given human beings tendency to resist change. Community involvement is necessary for host communities to fulfill their social objectives and this study shows the possibility to leverage a sporting event to awaken collective energy and to leverage for deep community involvement.

Practically, findings imply that the type of process (i.e., focus on selecting ordinary people, process publicly and visibly held and the fact that it started more than 1 year before the Games) chosen by the event organizers in fact has contributed significantly not only to increase their brand awareness, spread the Olympic Spirit but also to increase social benefits as it made a difference and started the excitement and involvement at the community level. The public selection provided an opportunity to break the existing ceiling between social classes and turned the grassroots people into conversation initiators that bring on new discourse to their community.

Last but not least, this study has furthered our understanding of the torch relay as a potential win-win-win tool (for sponsors, the IOC and the Olympic Spirit, and the host community) as well as our understanding regarding what it means to become an Olympic torchbearer. The results of this preliminary study present an opportunity for further inquiry into how events like the torch relay can be leveraged in ways that create business and marketing opportunities for sponsors, organizing committees and the IOC as well as social development opportunities for host countries and local communities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Although the study has fulfilled its original purposes, there still might have been limitations such as the study is focused on one single Olympiad and the one that took place in

the least westernized country in the world (Brownell, 2008). Each Olympic Games take place in a different social and cultural context and each organizing committee usually has its own torch relay theme, and therefore each Olympic torch relay has its own unique characteristics. In addition, as the IOC has called an end to all future international relays, the discrepancy between the 2008 Olympic torch relay and future relays might become more obvious since in the future the Olympic torch will only be relayed in the host country. Future qualitative studies can be conducted in other Olympic torch relays to compare and contrast the similarities and differences of the torchbearer experience, meanings and impacts.

Even though from the data and previous literature we learn that liminality and *communitas* usually occur in events like Olympic torch relay, further questions remain for researchers and event managers such as how we can make use of the leveragability of the Olympic torch relay and maximize the social legacy it can potentially create. Strategies can be borrowed from the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay such as publicly selecting ordinary people, starting the selection process early and fostering liminality and *communitas* by allowing the crowd to celebrate.

REFERENCES

- Alkemeyer, T. T. & Richartz, A. A. (1993). The Olympic Games: from ceremony to show. *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, 279-89.
- Bain-Selbo, E. (2008). Ecstasy, joy, and sorrow: the religious experience of Southern college football. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 20.
- Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games. (2007). *Torchbearer*. Retrieved from the Official Website of 2008 Beijing Torch Relay from <http://torchrelay.beijing2008.cn/en/torchbearers/>
- Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games. (2008). *Official report of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. Beijing; China.
- Bernard, H. R. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Briggs, L. *Learning How to Ask*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986; 56–59.
- Brown, G. (2002). Taking the pulse of Olympic Sponsorship. *Event Management*, 7 (3), 187-196.
- Brown, G. (2007). Sponsor hospitality at the Olympic Games: an analysis of the implications for tourism. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 9(5), 315-327.
- Brownell, S. (1995). *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brownell, S. (2008) *Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China*, Rowman and Littlefield.
- Burnard, P. (1991). A method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research. *Nurse Education Today*. 11 (6), 461–466.
- Cahill, J. J. (1998). The Olympic flame and torch: running towards Sydney 2000. In *Global and cultural critique: problematizing the Olympic Games*. 181-190.
- Cashman, R. R., & Hughes, A. A. (1999). *Staging the Olympics: the event and its impact*. Kensington, NSW; Australia: University of New South Wales Press.
- Cashman, R. (2006). *The bitter-sweet awakening: The legacy of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games*. Petersham, NSW; Australia: Walla Walla Press in conjunction with the Australian Centre for Olympic Studies, University of Technology, Sydney.

- Caton, K., & Santos, C. (2007). Heritage Tourism on Route 66: Deconstructing Nostalgia. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(4), 371-386.
- Chalip, L. (1992). The Construction and Use of Polysemic Structures: Olympic Lessons for Sport Marketing. *Journal of Sport Management*, 6(2), 87-98.
- Chalip, L. (2006). Towards Social Leverage of Sport Events. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 11(2), 109-127.
- Chen, J. (2009). Nation, Ethnicity, and Cultural Strategies: Three Waves of Ethnic Representation in Post-1949 China. *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 70(3), 865.
- Chilban J. (1996). *Interviewing in Depth: the Interactive Relational Approach*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Choi, J. (2008). Coca-Cola China's Virtual Olympic Torch Relay program at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games: adding interactivity to a traditional offline Olympic activation. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, 9(4), 246-255.
- Close, P., Askew, D., & Xin, X. (2006). *The Beijing Olympiad: The political economy of a sporting mega-event*. London: Routledge.
- Coca-Cola Company. (2008). *Coca-Cola® and the Olympic Games: Our Partnership History*. Retrieved from the Official website of Coca-Cola www.thecoca-colacompany.com
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. (2006). *The qualitative research interview*. Medical Education, 40(4), 314-321.
- Diem, C. (1971). *Ewiges Olympia*. Wuppertal.
- Douglas J. (1985). *Creative Interviewing*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage.
- Durantez, C. (1985). The torch: the great Olympic symbol. *Olympic Review*, (216), 620-627.
- Greenberg, S. (1983). *The Guinness Book of Olympics Facts and Feats*. Guinness Superlatives Ltd, Middlesex.
- Haynes, J. (2001). *Socio-Economic Impact of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games*, Paper presented at the 2001 Seminar of the International Chair in Olympism, Barcelona: Olympic Studies Centre.
- International Olympic Committee. (1994). *Olympic Charter: In force as from 5th September*,

1994. Lausanne, Switzerland.
- Jarvie, G., Hwang, D. & Brennan, M. (2008). *Sport, revolution and the Beijing Olympics*. New York: Berg.
- Johnson J. In-depth interviewing. In: Gubrium J & Holstein J (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage 2002.
- Klausen, A. (1999). *Olympic Games as Performance and Public Event: The Case of the XVII Winter Games in Norway*. New York, NY: Berghahn.
- Labov, W. (1997). Some further steps in narrative analysis. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7(1-4), 395-415.
- Langer, S.K. (1957). *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Act* (3rd edition). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- LaRocco, C. (2004). Ring of power: Peter Ueberroth and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. *Financial History*, (81), 10.
- Liponski, W. (2008). *The humanistic symbolism of Olympia: a message from antiquity from modern times*. The 48th session of the International Olympic Academy, 1-20.
- Lovell, J. (2008). Prologue: Beijing 2008 - The Mixed Messages of Contemporary Chinese Nationalism. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 25(7), 758-778.
- MacAloon, J. (1981). *This great symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the origins of the modern Olympic Games*. Chicago; United States: University of Chicago Press.
- MacAloon, J. (1982). Double visions: Olympic Games and American culture. *Kenyon Review*, (4), 98-112.
- MacAloon, J. (1984). *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*. Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- MacAloon, J. (1992a). Sport, science, and intercultural relations: reflections on recent trends in Olympic Scientific meetings. *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, 11-28.
- MacAloon, J. (1992b). The ethnographic imperative in comparative Olympic research. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 9(2), 104-130.
- MacAloon, J. (1994). Richard W. Five rings over Korea: the secret negotiations behind the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul. *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic*

- Studies*, 3, 117-123.
- Mallon, B. (1984). Independent views: the history of the opening ceremonies. *Olympic Review*, 200, 449-450.
- Mangan J. & Dong J. (Ed.), (2009): *Beijing 2008: preparing for glory. Chinese challenge in the "Chinese Century"*. Routledge: Abingdon.
- Miller W, Crabtree B. Depth interviewing. *Doing Qualitative Research. 2nd ed.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage 1999.
- O'Brien, D. and Chalip L (2007). Executive training exercise in sport event leverage. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*. 1. 296-304.
- Olympic Games Organising Committee. (1976). *Montreal, 1976: Games of the XXI Olympiad*, Volumes I and II. Organising Committee of the 1976 Olympic Games. Montreal.
- Price, M. E., and Dayan, D. (Eds). (2008). *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the new China*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Redmon, D. (2003). Playful Deviance as an Urban Leisure Activity: Secret Selves, Self-Validation and Entertaining Performance. *Deviant Behavior*. 24(1):27–51.
- Rezende, A. L. (2008). *Olympic education experiences: the sponsorship role in the promotion of Olympic values*. Barcelona: Centre d'Estudis Olímpics UAB.
- Rubin, H. & Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing: the Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis Techniques in Mixed-Method Studies. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23: 246–255.
- Schell, O. (2008). China: Humiliation & the Olympics. *New York Review of Books*, 55(13), 30.
- Seoul Olympic Organising Committee. (1989). *Official Report*. Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, Seoul.
- Shields, R. (1992). *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies on Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Spradley J. (1979). Asking Descriptive Questions. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York:

- Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- St John, G. (2008). *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance*. London: Berghahn.
- Stephany, M. (2010). The Olympic torch relay by the numbers. *Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids*, (31), 14.
- The Olympic Museum. (2007). The Olympic flame and torch relay. Retrieved from multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_655.pdf
- Thomassen, B. (2009). The Uses and Meanings of Liminality. *International Political Anthropology*. 2 (1): 5-27.
- Tomlinson, A. (2005). The commercialization of the Olympics: Cities, corporations and the Olympic commodity. In K. Young & K.B. Wamsley (Eds.), *Global Olympics: Historical and sociological studies of the modern Games* (pp. 179–200). London: Elsevier.
- Tomlinson, A. & Young, C. (Eds). (2005) *National Identity and Global Sports Events* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Toohy, K., & Veal, A.J. (2000). *The Olympic Games: A social science perspective*. New York: CABI.
- Turner, V. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Pub.
- Turner, V. (1974). *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Turner, V. (1974). Liminal to liminoid in play, flow, and ritual: An essay in comparative symbology. *Rice University Studies*, 60(3), 53-92.
- Turner, V. & Turner, E. (1978). *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Turner, V. & Turner, E. (1986). *The Anthropology of Experience*. University of Illinois Press.
- Uriley, N. & Belhassen, Y. (2006). Drugs and Risk-taking in Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33, 339–359.
- Van Gennep, A. (1909). *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Xu, G. (2008). *Olympic dreams: China and sports, 1895-2008*. Harvard University Press.

Young, K. & Wamsley, K. (2005). *Global Olympics: Historical and sociological studies of the modern games*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Zavala, L. (1997). Towards a Dialogical Theory of Cultural Liminality: Contemporary Writing and Cultural Identity in Mexico. *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, 19-22.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello! My name is Xu Xiao. I am also a 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearer. I am currently a graduate student from the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Together with my adviser Dr. Carla Costa, who is an Assistant Professor from the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism at the University of Illinois, I am inviting you to participate as one of the interviewees in a research project regarding the experiences, meanings and impacts of 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers.

If you take part in this project, you may help us to better understand the feelings and experiences of 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers and to explore the meanings of the selection and torch relay experiences for the torchbearers. As a participant in the research you will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview which will last 60 to 90 minutes to talk about your experiences as an Olympic torchbearer. Also, with your permission, we would like to audio-tape the in-depth interview. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and we anticipate that there are no risks to this study greater than what you experience in normal life.

Would you like to participate? Can I send the consent form via email to you? Please feel free to raise any questions towards this project and I am more than willing to answer them.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH STUDY

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Dear Participant,

Our names are Carla Costa and Xu Xiao. Carla Costa is an Assistant Professor from the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism at the University of Illinois, and Xu Xiao is a graduate student in the same department. We would like to include you, along with other participants, in a research project regarding the experiences, meanings and impacts of 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers. If you take part in this project, you may help us to better understand the feelings and experiences of 2008 Beijing Olympic torchbearers and to explore the meanings of the selection and torch relay experiences for the torchbearers. As a participant in the research you will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview which will last 60 to 90 minutes to talk about your experiences as an Olympic torchbearer. Also, with your permission, we would like to audio-tape the in-depth interview.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and we anticipate that there are no risks to this study greater than what you experience in normal life. By giving your consent to participate in this research, you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to be audio-taped during the in-depth interview. You are free to stop participating at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You are also free to withdraw your permission for participation at any time and for any reason by contacting us. The audiotapes that are obtained during this research project will be kept strictly secure and all identifying information, such as your name or the names of anyone you may mention will be replaced with a code to protect your identity. The audiotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be accessible only to project personnel. The audiotapes will be transcribed into a WORD file and be deleted immediately. The WORD files will be kept in secure, password protected computers of the University of Illinois which will be accessible only to project personnel.

The results of this study may be used for reports to future Olympic Games organizing committees, journal articles, and conference presentations. In any publication or public presentation codes will be substituted for any identifying information.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want to participate in this project. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact us either by mail, e-mail, or telephone. The second copy of the form is yours to keep.

Sincerely,

(signature)
Xu Xiao, Investigator

(signature)
Carla Costa, RPI

(217) 243-3920
xuxiao1@uiuc.edu

(217) 244-3882
ccarla@uiuc.edu

I do/do not (circle one) agree _____ (your name) to participate in the research project described above.

_____ **Date** _____ **Signature**

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (you may call collect) or via e-mail at irb@illinois.edu.