



Let's Get Emotional: the Strategic Use of Emotions in China's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

In this article, I assess how states can use emotions as a strategic tool to advance their preferences in international politics. To test the argument in the literature on the significant role that emotions can play in international politics, I examine why China reacted the way it did to the 2008 torch relay fallout in France as a case study. Instead of material power playing a central role in this case, it was what the event (i.e., the torch relay, pro-Tibet protests, and the attempt to seize the torch out of the hands of a Chinese) represented in the minds of Chinese. This case study highlights the significant role that identity and emotions play in international politics.

Keywords Emotions · Spring rage · China · France · Redemption

Introduction

This article demonstrates that states can use emotions or get emotional to advance their preferences in international politics. In doing so, this article questions the emphasis on material factors, whether strategic in terms of security factors or economic advancement, as a primary motivator for state behavior. With this case here, the focus is on non-material issues, that is, the power of emotions and identity.¹ Given that China was willing to have tense relations with France over what some would consider a trivial issue (i.e., the torch relay), this cannot be adequately explained by international relations theories that posit states aim to maximize their power materially. The torch relay was not about economic or military issues and there was no loss of Chinese life,

¹In the international relations literature, material factors are regarded as either economic factors, such as trade or military capabilities. Emotions and identity are not considered in the literature as material factors because there is no tangible value such as money or weapons. Unlike realists and liberals, constructivists devote ample attention to non-material issues such as identity.

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unlike with the 1999 US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade and the 2001 EP3 spy plane collision. For the Chinese government, the Olympics represented its quest for status. Then, in spring of 2008, due to events in Tibet, the Chinese government then decided that it had to appear strong to its domestic audience regarding events in Tibet and the international ramifications of Tibet.

In its quest to secure the 2008 Beijing Olympics in 2001 and then in the years preceding the Games, the Chinese government framed the mega event as its coming out party, an event that would demonstrate to the world the good intentions of China. Taking the Chinese statement at face value, one would then expect the Chinese government to react in a calm manner to the torch fallout. If we were to accept the argument that liberals posited in the 1990s, and at the time of Beijing securing the Olympics in 2001, that engaging China will produce a more politically open China, then we should have expected a very different kind of reaction that the Chinese government manifested towards France after the torch relay fallout. As such, the Chinese government's reaction to the torch fallout is instructive regarding China's actions in international politics. It reflects how the Chinese government, even though China is a non-democracy and thus politicians cannot be voted out of office by the electorate, places significantly more concern regarding domestic ramifications of its actions than international ramifications. In other words, the case here, despite it being ten years ago, demonstrates how the Chinese government will act in international politics. Considering the international importance that China attached to the Beijing Olympics, this case should have been a least-likely case in which the Chinese government would allow nationalist emotion to impact its international relations only several months prior to the mega event.² This case here demonstrates how, as China's economic power has ascended, we have witnessed a more assertive China, one that seeks to advance its preferences more on the international stage. Such a pattern has indeed continued in the Xi Jinping era. The implications of this study from 2008, in other words, reveal how the Chinese government is willing to engage in conflict with other major powers, and this pattern has continued to the present.

In this article, I examine the Chinese government's managing of the 2008 torch relay fallout by using a case study approach that draws from PRC statements, Chinese newspapers, and scholarly writings. In doing so, I explain why both Chinese state and non-state actors reacted the way they did regarding relations with France in the aftermath of the torch relay in Paris. I argue that identity and emotions, which are both linked with nationalism in China, and in particular the Century of Humiliation narrative, explain Chinese state and non-state actions for this case. Since the Chinese government allowed massive street protests directed at France, it acquiesced to Chinese public opinion instead of putting an end to it. Given that the protestors then followed the government's call in late April to stop the protests, this demonstrates that the protestors were willing to adhere to the government's call for an end to street protests directed at France. If the protestors were genuinely enraged, they would have continued with such protests, as previous Chinese protests such as the Tiananmen protests in 1989

² It is important to note that a state's use of nationalist emotion is not limited to a non-democracy like China; instead, both democratic and non-democrats state actors can use such nationalist emotion in aiming to acquire leverage in international bargaining.

and in Urumqi after the July 2009 riots demonstrate. In short, even though the protestors expressed much rage, they were strategic. This case also reveals the interaction between Chinese state and societal actors. Societal actors wanted the government to get tough with France, which the government heeded, and then such societal actors followed the government's call to end such protests.

This article adds to the recent international relations literature on the role of emotions by focusing on both elites and masses in China. This topic (the impact of the Olympic torch relay) may appear as a trivial topic to some international relations scholars who devote their attention to state actors. However, this topic involving non-state actors turned into a major diplomatic row between China and France. The combination of events that spring—starting with the Tibetan riots, followed by French President Sarkozy stating that he was considering boycotting the ceremony of the 2008 Games, and then the pro-Tibet protests at the torch relays, in London and then most significantly in Paris—brought back the legacy of the Century of Humiliation and the idea that Westerners were out to hinder China shortly before its much-anticipated mega event. This was the view of both masses and elites in China, as demonstrated by the language used among netizens and the Chinese government with its statements. Given that the Chinese government appeared weak to its domestic audience (i.e., netizens who criticized the Chinese government for a slow response to Tibetans destroying Han shops and homes in Lhasa) with its initial response to the Tibetan riots, it could not appear weak just several weeks later with an issue that had Tibet wrapped up with it.³ Put differently, the Chinese government calculated that it would be on stronger ground to embrace the emotional anger that vocal Chinese masses demonstrated during spring rage than appearing weak in its relations with France.⁴

The rest of this article proceeds in five sections. First, I provide background information on China's desire to host the Olympic Games in 2000 and 2008, China's core interests, and Chinese nationalism to situate the topic in the necessary context. Then, in the "[International Relations Theories: Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism](#)" section, I examine IR theories and the applicability to the topic here. The "[Spring Rage—the Tibetan Riots, Torch Relay, and Protests](#)" section focuses on the main issue examined here, that is, the role of Tibet and the torch relay⁵ on China-France relations in April of 2008. The "[Damage Control: Carrefour and the French Government's Shuttle Diplomacy to Quell Spring Rage](#)" section focuses on how the quest of both the French government and Carrefour in trying to improve relations with China provided China with an opportunity to move beyond the tense period in China-France relations. I then end with a conclusion summing up the main finding of this article: non-material factors played a more significant role than economic interests for the Chinese government in its handling of bilateral ties with France.

³ For more on the importance of the Chinese government not appearing weak to its domestic audience regarding international affairs, see [1, 2].

⁴ Spring rage is a term that I use to refer to the time period in China that PRC netizens played a central role in during the aftermath of the Tibetan riots. It reached its apex during the torch relay fallout, and ended with the French government and Carrefour going to great lengths to demonstrate their sorrow for the torch relay incident in Paris.

⁵ The torch relay was called the "Journey of Harmony."

Background: Desire for the Games and Chinese Nationalism

The Chinese government's goal of hosting the Olympics started in the late 1980s, with the objectives being to raise China's profile at the international level and to bolster support for the Chinese government at the domestic level (3), p. 517). At the 1984 Games in Los Angeles in which China placed fourth, the Chinese government realized it could use the Games to tap into nationalism. When the US Congress approved a resolution that called upon the International Olympic Committee to reject China's bid in 1993 for the 2000 Olympics, many Chinese perceived this as yet another US attempt to deny China face (4), p. viii; [5], p. 159). Many in China accepted the Chinese government's position that denying China the 2000 Games was all about trying to shame China [5].⁶

Successfully winning the bid to host the 2008 Games, many Chinese viewed the 2008 Beijing Games as about national pride. Given that Chinese citizens looked to their government to put on a spectacular event, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) competency was on the line [7]. Both the Chinese government and the Chinese people did not view this as simply a city in China hosting the Olympics, but rather it was something the whole country was involved in. The world was coming to China, in their view. As Wang Hui, the moderator of the "Press Conference on the Overall Operations," stated at the time of the Olympics: "the world is focused" on the Beijing Olympics ([8], p. 52).⁷ Seeking status, in other words, was a central objective for the Chinese government.

Beijing wanted to dazzle the world—and especially its own people—with having a spectacular 2008 Olympic Games,⁸ and nothing was to get in the way of that [4]. A few months prior to the Beijing Games, China was in a state of disarray with spring rage. By the time of the Olympics, however, the anger in China had calmed down. Since many in China were very proud to host the Olympics,⁹ anyone, especially foreigners, who

⁶ For an assessment that it was not simply human rights that denied Beijing the 2000 Games, see [6]. Polumbaum argues there were a number of issues the IOC took into account, such as financing and the environment to name two [6].

⁷ Reflecting this enthusiasm about the Olympics, a massive number of Chinese wanted to serve as volunteers. Exactly one year prior to the Olympics, there were already five times more Chinese people willing to volunteer at the Olympics than needed. The estimated number of volunteers needed was 100,000, and China had 560,000 willing to do so in August 2007 [9]. In conducting polls both in Beijing and throughout China, independent organizations found that 90% of respondents or higher consistently supported Beijing's desire for the Games [3]. In brief, it was not just about Beijing hosting the Games; rather, the country was hosting the Games [3].

⁸ The slogan of the Beijing Olympic Games was one of inclusion: "One World, One Dream."

⁹ Many Chinese viewed the Olympics as giving their nation face [6, 7]. The concept of face runs deep in Chinese culture as well as other Confucian-influenced countries [see 10], p. 135]. A loss of face in China has profound implications. As such, Chinese culture stresses the importance of obtaining face and preventing the loss of face [10], pp. 135, 209]. With the Century of Humiliation, it has been presented in China as the ultimate loss of face that China has experienced and China needs to redeem itself for such a loss of face. On the topic of face, the massive \$40-billion-dollar infrastructure investments in Beijing, including the world's biggest airport terminal, were a sign to both its people and to the world that Beijing is a very modern city with all the things that an advanced city in the world has. In this quest to obtain face, the Chinese government commissioned top architects throughout the world to design Olympic venues, with the goal being to make Beijing a very modern city [11]. In preparation for the Olympics, Beijing carried out a massive campaign to educate its public in Beijing about how to act during the Olympics. Bus drivers, for example, were trained on how to act. Crossing guards were given instructions to prevent people from jaywalking. Ordinary citizens were told how to get on and off the subway—not to shove people aside and wait until others get off before getting on. Locals were notified not to spit on the ground. The government was concerned about a loss of face among its international guests with all of these issues [12].

criticized the government or protested over the Tibetan riots prior to the Beijing Games was viewed as one who wanted to deny China from having a successful Olympics.

The Tibetan riots and then the violence against Tibetans that followed in March 2008 had a significant impact on the torch relay, as pro-Tibet supporters outside of the PRC took to the streets in various countries to protest the Chinese government during the torch relay. Subsequently, the protests that met the torch relay were the catalyst for anger among both masses and elites in China, as Chinese Internet users expressed their outrage and the Chinese government also expressed its strong disapproval during its press conferences. Prior to the torch relay, pro-Tibet activists stated that they planned on being in every city where the torch would be. The issue of Tibet has particular salience for China and its domestic populous. If the Chinese government is confronted with an issue regarding one of the most pressing core interests (e.g., Tibet),¹⁰ then it has less room to maneuver, for domestic opinion, especially on the Internet, will criticize the Chinese government for not being tough enough, which then places it in a precarious position.

For the Olympics, the Chinese government had primarily a domestic audience in mind—to show its people what the government was capable of doing.¹¹ This in turn reaffirmed the CCP's legitimacy with its people. Liu Qi, a Politburo member at the time and the person who was in charge of the organizing committee for the Beijing Olympics, encouraged members of the government to use the Olympics as an example of nationalism: "Particularly, we should propagate the achievements made in building socialism with Chinese characteristics ... and the patriotic spirit and the Olympic spirit" [quoted in 15]. In Liu's view, the Olympics would strengthen the CCP if it used the event as an example of nationalism. Thus, anyone critical of the Chinese central government over the Games in China was deemed anti-China [15]. The Chinese government wanted its people to view the government as bringing China back to the level of world prestige that it had before the Century of Humiliation [16].

In the post-Tiananmen context, the Chinese government had used the Century of Humiliation, (1839–1949), which started with the First Opium War between China and Britain in 1839 and resulted in China being forced to sign a treaty allowing Britain to control Hong Kong and five port cities, to tap into nationalism as a way to gain support. The Chinese government uses the Century of Humiliation legacy to remind Chinese what Western powers did to China. As such, foreigners are presented in the Century of Humiliation literature in a very negative way, who have aimed to push China around (17), pp. 41, 84). Regarding the Century of Humiliation, the CCP presents itself as being unwilling to ever let something similar ever happen again. Ample scholars argue that redemption for the Century of Humiliation was central to China's desire to host the Olympics [e.g., 18].

Also regarding the Century of Humiliation, numerous China scholars focus on how it—or any act of humiliation—is central to Chinese nationalism [e.g., 19, 20]. In advancing the view that it is not just about material capabilities, Callahan argues that Chinese

¹⁰ The Chinese government has stated that various areas and issues are considered as core interests of the Chinese government—e.g., Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang [13]. The Chinese government first used the term to describe Taiwan as a core interest and has expanded the number since. The Chinese government uses the term to signal to other states that these are issues of paramount importance for the Chinese government, and thus other states should not press China on stated core interests.

¹¹ Related to this argument, Edney argues that the Chinese government has its domestic audience in mind regarding its interest in advancing soft power [14]. According to Edney, the CCP aims to advance soft power in China to achieve a domestic political objective with its domestic audience.

nationalism is about both the greatness of China and how China was abused during the Century of Humiliation [17, 19]. According to the predominant Chinese view, which is based on the Century of Humiliation narrative, China is the victim of the West [see 20]. The destruction of Yuanmingyuan¹² in 1860 by British and French soldiers and China's desire to get back those stolen relics has a prominent role in the narrative of the Century of Humiliation. Due to France's role in the destruction of Yuanmingyuan, this is essential to take into account regarding the reaction of Chinese masses to the torch relay in Paris. Furthering the view that Chinese foreign policy contains an emotional component, China did not request material compensation from the USA when a Chinese pilot was killed in 2001 during the EP3 spy plane incident; rather, China demanded an official apology, as an apology was the most important issue for China [19].

Ample China scholars [e.g., 21] argue that in recent years, the Chinese government has not shown that it is willing to limit nationalism among its people. Instead, the government tends to give in to the intense nationalism and challenge both Western states and East Asian states, as the intense nationalism calls for that. As a result of this popular nationalism in China, many in China do not want the Chinese government to cooperate with states or international actors. Due to the West descending with the financial crisis in 2008 and China ascending, especially with China being the largest holder of US debt, Zhao [21] argues that Chinese leaders had more of a desire to stand up to the USA on issues of importance to the Chinese government. Previously, the Chinese government sought to limit this popular nationalism in China, as the government wanted to develop its economy by cooperation with other states and international actors and was not in a position of strength to exert itself internationally.

The relationship between Chinese nationalism and core interests in China is particularly salient for how Tibet is viewed. The Chinese government has not given in to international calls for providing more freedom to Tibetans, as Tibet is a core issue of utmost importance. In addition to the significance of its land mass and natural resources, if it were to break away, other provinces also of tremendous significance in terms of such land mass and resources (e.g., Xinjiang) could well do the same. Thus, the Chinese government does not want this happening and will not give in to international calls for genuine autonomy of such areas.

International Relations Theories: Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism

Regarding international relations theories and emotions, numerous theories say very little, if anything, about the power or emotions. Neorealism's emphasis on the black box approach, which neglects the role of society, culture, nationalism, and other domestic variables, is also unhelpful in explaining this case. Neorealism and neoliberalism both employ a neo utilitarian perspective regarding state behavior in that states aim to maximize what they can in international politics, with neorealists arguing that it is about power issues (i.e., military capabilities) and neoliberals positing that states aim to maximize gains with economic interests. Both the neorealist and the neoliberal

¹² Translated as the Garden of Perfect Brightness, and known as the Old Summer Palace, it was the main living quarters in Beijing for five Qing emperors from the early eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century.

emphases on states aiming to maximizing capabilities do a poor job in explaining the case that I examine here. Constructivism's emphasis on social aspects shaping international politics is relevant for this case, as many constructivists emphasize history, culture, and language. In addition, the constructivist emphasis that state actors are more concerned about identity than maximizing gains is particularly relevant here. Identity, for constructivism, comes from history and culture, which is demonstrated in the case that I examine here. Numerous China scholars [e.g., 17] argue that Chinese foreign policy is not simply about advancing material gains; instead, respect and status play a central role in Chinese international politics.

Emotions in International Relations

Numerous scholars have recently devoted adequate attention to the role of emotions in world politics [22–29, e.g.]. As Ross points out, “emotions are a neglected dimension of global politics” ([23], p. 274). The issue of respect in international affairs should not be ignored, for if others in the field of international affairs are respected, this helps with the chances of cooperation—the opposite is also the case [27]. Larson and Shevchenko argue that the chances of China participating in global governance will most likely increase if the USA is willing to accept China on its own terms and not by Western standards [30]. The issue of respect is central in accounting for why masses and elites in China reacted the way they did in April of 2008 with France.

Steinberg [22] argues that if foreign policy leaders are shamed or humiliated, this has the chance for such leaders seeking redemption (e.g., the possibility of military conflict). Lowenheim and Heimann's emphasis on the issue of revenge is particularly relevant to the case of Chinese international politics involving certain countries, that is, those countries involved in the Century of Humiliation. If state actors, according to Lowenheim and Heimann, feel that they have been treated with such harm, then they will seek to redeem their state with the other state [24]. The goal of revenge, according to Lowenheim and Heimann, is “to reinstate self-worth, dignity, and identity” ([24], p. 695). Hall's focus on the role that emotions played for the Chinese government during the 1995–1996 Taiwan Straits crisis is relevant for my focus here. Hall argues that such a “diplomacy of anger” is not omnipresent; instead, it comes and goes, which allows for improved relations to get back on track, so long as there is no perceived threat ([25], p. 522). Hall argues that state actors are willing to use the diplomacy of anger when state actors view an issue as of great importance and as willing to incur damage to its relations with another government on that issue, then state actors will use the diplomacy of anger [25]. In other words, Hall argues that there is cost-benefit analysis by state actors regarding using the diplomacy of anger in terms of being willing to damage relations with another government.¹³ Hall elsewhere argues that sometimes state actors may fake emotions due to how they perceive the benefits of doing so [26]. According to Saurette [28], it is important to take into account the particular culture and how that culture views issues related to humiliation. Due to that, the actors may feel even more humiliated. This is relevant in China regarding both the issue of obtaining face, as mentioned earlier, and the legacy of the Century of Humiliation are very significant.

¹³ Eznack [29] also argues that strategic calculations do have an impact on leaders' decision to get emotional in IR.

Protestors and Strategic Calculation

Based on their survey with PRC college students, Zhou and Wang [31] found that such students are strategic regarding anti-foreign street protests. Regarding the case that I examine here, it also seems that the protestors were strategic regarding China-France relations, as the protestors stopped once the Chinese government signaled its desire to move on and improve relations with France. Similarly, Cairns and Carlson's findings are also relevant [2]. In examining public opinion posts on *weibo* during August and September 2012 when China-Japan relations were tense, Cairns and Carlson's main finding is that the Chinese government allowed online criticism of Japan to signal to its domestic and international audiences that it will not accept Japan taking action to control the *Diaoyu* islands. In short, the Chinese government aimed to get on the side of its netizens who had criticized the Chinese government for not being tough enough with Japan. Cairns and Carlson argue that it is likely that the central government viewed it as necessary in terms of allowing its populous to vent its anger at Japan (pp. 39–40).

Spring Rage—the Tibetan Riots, Torch Relay, and Protests

Tibetan Riots

On March 14, 2008, which was several months prior to China's long-awaited 2008 Olympics, certain sections of Lhasa, Tibet, exploded in violence due to the resentment that has existed for decades in that region. The aggressive Chinese policies implemented in Tibet were the structural cause of events on that day, for the aggressive restrictions by Chinese security forces on Tibetan monks and at the Buddhist monasteries were long-held issues of disconnect by Tibetans. Since the images captured of some Tibetans pillaging Lhasa were shown time and again in China by the media and government, Chinese nationals wanted the government to punish those responsible [17]. Given that the government and the media depict Tibet as a place that has advanced as a result of Han aid and enjoys preferential treatment because it is an autonomous region, the vast majority of Han think that Tibetans should be satisfied with the benefits that they have enjoyed as a result of Chinese assistance. According to Fu Ying, then the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, Tibetans have all their basic needs met, as Tibetans, in her words, "are well-fed, well-clothed and well-housed." In her view, for hundreds of years the Chinese government has placed top priority on taking care of Tibetans [32]. Tibetans, however, view the situation differently.

After that riot, Chinese Internet users criticized the government's slow and poor response to Tibetans causing havoc on both Han shops and Han Chinese [4]. Because Chinese state actors did not want its Internet users targeting the government, government officials thus changed the focus of the events in Tibet. The government then focused on both inaccurate reporting by the West and the violent Tibetans [see 33]. This played out well with its public, as Chinese citizens became angry at what they viewed as biased and inaccurate Western coverage of Tibet and the torch relay [34]. Since the Chinese government and media constantly aired

footage of Tibetans destroying certain sections of Lhasa after the March 2008 riot,¹⁴ that played a large role in both overseas Chinese and Chinese at home supporting China's ensuing crackdown in Tibet [27, 35].¹⁵

Many nations were concerned about events in Tibet after the riots. On March 25, 2008, the leaders of the USA, the UK, France, and Germany called on Beijing to have talks with the Dalai Lama, which was only resented by the Chinese government. Various Western governments emphasized the lack of freedom for the Tibetan people in explaining why the riots happened. Also on March 25, Sarkozy announced that he was thinking about boycotting the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony due to Beijing's aggressive approach in Tibet [37]. Sarkozy stated that he would not attend the opening ceremony if PRC leaders do not meet with the Dalai Lama. Given that China's foreign ministry spokesperson depicted the Dalai Lama as a very violent and evil person [38], it would have been very difficult for PRC officials to back down and reverse course with its domestic audience. Instead, the PRC decided that remaining firm with France would be a safer choice for its angry and vocal citizens. PRC leaders, in other words, calculated that demonstrating the emotional side of the public during its government press conference would play out well domestically.

Although the Chinese government, and in particular the foreign ministry spokesperson, claimed the Dalai Lama was responsible for the riots, Beijing never showed any evidence to support this. Both the Chinese government and the Chinese media stated that the Dalai Lama's goal was to ruin the Olympics for China [38]. In demonstrating the negative way that the Chinese government views the Dalai Lama, foreign ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu stated that he is "the ruler of the theocratic serfdom, which is the darkest slavery in human history." Jiang also stated that Dalai Lama "prefers violence to dialogue" [38].

Torch Relay and Protests

In April 2008, just several months prior to the much-anticipated Beijing Olympics, China witnessed the angriest anti-foreign demonstrations since the 2005 anti-Japan protests, when Japan glossed over the Rape of Nanjing in schoolbooks. Adding to the anger of many Chinese, there were pro-Tibet supporters at the torch relays in London (on April 6), Paris (on April 7), and San Francisco (on April 9). From the time of the riots in Tibet until mid-April, most of this anger was limited to the Internet. Then, on April 19, Chinese demonstrated in the streets of various cities in China, supporting their government's position on Tibet and denouncing those in the West who pushed for freedom in Tibet [39]. In addition, many Chinese were upset with the host countries for, in their view, not doing enough to protect the torch carriers in the given cities that hosted the torch relay [see 20]. During the torch relay in Paris, many of the protestors had Tibetan flags and voiced their disapproval of China's policies regarding Tibet [40].

¹⁴ As pointed out earlier, in fact, the entire city of Lhasa was not destroyed. Instead, it was only certain shops of certain areas. However, this was not the way that the Chinese media nor the way that the Chinese government presented it.

¹⁵ For a detailed account of the riot, see [36].

The Chinese media claimed those who disrupted the Olympic torch relay around the world were violent people and did not adequately represent many in the world who wanted a successful Olympics. For the torch relay in Paris on April 7, there were massive banners on the Notre Dame and Eiffel Tower with the Olympic rings serving as handcuffs. The City Council in Paris put up a banner that stated: “Paris defends human rights all over the world,” with the obvious aim being at China. At the torch relay in Paris, protesters were chanting “free Tibet” [41]. Jiang Yu, the Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman, commended those who escorted the torch, saying they “put their lives on the line to protect the sacred flame.” Jiang also stated that the protestors in Paris “should be universally condemned” [quoted in 42]. The Chinese media stated that what happened in Paris was due to “Tibetan separatist forces” [43]. Given that many Chinese viewed it as not simply a city in China hosting the Games, but rather as their country hosting the Olympics, they felt connected to it and thus what happened in Paris and elsewhere was felt by them. The most damaging event on that day in Paris involved a Chinese Paralympics fencer, Jin Jing.

Throughout April 2008, many of China’s then approximately two hundred and twenty-one million Internet users viewed images of one of their own, Jin Jing, being the victim of foreigners in Paris during the torch relay. As a pro-Tibet supporter tried to take the torch from Jin in her wheelchair, she did not let go. The fact that a Chinese female athlete in a wheel chair was being harassed by someone, and in particular a Tibetan activist, was too much for Chinese nationalists. That combination was overwhelmingly insulting for Chinese nationalists. Jin, quickly dubbed after the Paris torch relay as the “smiling angel in the wheelchair” by the Chinese media, later stated: “I would die to protect the torch” [quoted in 44]. These photos of Jin Jing trying to secure the torch from a pro-Tibetan protestor were a key source of humiliation for Chinese masses.

Largely due to Jin’s mistreatment, France became the key target of spring rage. If there were more security, according to Chinese public opinion, the torch protests and what happened to Jin Jing could have been prevented. Many Chinese thought it was France’s goal to make China look bad and to deny China a successful Olympics. Anything French in China was an object of disdain. The Beijing French School, the French Embassy, Carrefour, and Louis Vuitton, to name a few, all were targeted by angry Chinese with protests or boycotts. In their quest to spread the word of boycotting French stores in China, such as Carrefour, due to the multinational company’s supposed support for both Tibetan independence and the protests that targeted the torch relay, Chinese masses used the Internet and texting. A 23-year-old Chinese, Rao Jin, started a website (anti-cnn.com) with the idea of raising awareness of CNN’s supposed anti-China position on Tibet.¹⁶ This website was essential in bringing about Chinese taking to the streets during spring rage [47].

¹⁶ Also regarding CNN, thousands protested outside of CNN’s studio in LA, specifically targeting Jack Cafferty, for he referred to the Chinese government as “goons and thugs.” After that comment received much criticism from both Chinese masses and state actors, Cafferty stated that he was talking about the government—not the people. That did not satisfy mainland or overseas Chinese, as they did not want any foreigners being critical of their own. The following comments by Jiang Yu during the Chinese foreign ministry’s press conference on April 15, 2008 reflect how the Chinese government embraced an emotional view of CNN: “We are shocked to hear the malicious attacks of CNN commentator Jack Cafferty against the Chinese people.” She went on to add that he demonstrated “hatred to the Chinese people” and stated that he should “apologize to all the Chinese people.” [45] During the Chinese foreign ministry’s press conference on April 24, 2008, Jiang Yu stated that Cafferty’s comments, “deeply hurt the feelings of the Chinese people.” [46]

Given that this initiative to boycott Carrefour was driven by non-state actors in China, this reflects their influence in Chinese international politics. While it was not only Paris that witnessed a pro-Tibet and pro-human rights torch protest directed towards the Chinese government, the distinction between Paris and the other cities was that Paris was the place where Jin Jing, a female Chinese Paralympian, was harassed by a pro-Tibetan activist. It was her treatment that accounts for France being targeted and not the other countries.

During the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson's press conference on April 15, 2008, Jiang Yu was asked if the Chinese government supports the boycott of French products that some Chinese have called for online. Jiang Yu stated Chinese Internet users have "a reason for [doing] this." Essentially, she approved the protest by Chinese Internet users, as she did not condemn it. Considering that the Chinese government rarely allows street protests, such approval should be viewed as the Chinese government aiming to capitalize on such protests in its relations with France. Regarding the situation with France, Jiang Yu stated "we have seen something happen in France [i.e., the torch relay] which the Chinese people cannot understand and accept." She explicitly stated at that press conference that it is up to France to decide how to improve the bilateral ties. In other words, according to the Chinese government, it was France's fault. Jiang Yu went on to add: "I believe the Chinese citizens will express their reasonable appeal in accordance with the law" [45]. Given that Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu did not denounce the Carrefour boycott when she addressed it at a press conference on 15 April, many Chinese viewed that as the Chinese government approving further action against the MNC in China and took to the streets in the thousands throughout various cities throughout the country [10]. Of those in China who protested against French goods, many felt that the French government both allowed for lax security and was not concerned about keeping order for the torch relay. Also, given that Sarkozy had stated in March that he was thinking about boycotting the ceremony due to China's actions with the Tibetan riot, this only added to the rage and humiliation among Chinese.

On April 19, there were Chinese protesting and holding signs outside of the French Embassy in Beijing that read: "Frenchmen shut up"; "Tibet is part of China" [48]. In addition to protests in Beijing, there were protests in various Chinese cities, such as Wuhan, Hefei, Kunming, Chongqing, and Qingdao, calling for boycotting anything French. The protests were often near a Carrefour, as it had 112 stores in China in 2008. Some of those protesting had large pictures of Jin Jing and signs saying: "Say no to French goods." Of those who gathered to protest outside of Carrefour stores in China that April, which usually consisted of over 1000 Chinese at each protest, many chanted slogans like "Oppose Tibet independence" or "Oppose CNN's anti-China statements." Outside of various Carrefour stores in China, demonstrators sang patriotic songs and displayed the Chinese flag. Since many Internet users in China spread the word that Carrefour supported the Dalai Lama, the animosity towards Carrefour grew [49]. In reflecting the consequential role that the Century of Humiliation still plays in China, some protestors had signs in Qingdao at the Carrefour cite saying: "Strongly Protest Britain and France Invading China in 1860!" [quoted in 50]. Thus, it was about past French actions during the Century of Humiliation in China, and these protestors related that to the present.

After the torch relay in Paris on April 21, the Paris City Council proclaimed the Dalai Lama an honorary citizen, which only produced more rage in Chinese. When

asked about the Paris city government's decision to make the Dalai Lama an "honorary citizen of Paris," Jiang Yu, at the foreign ministry press conference, denounced Paris' city government decision and said that such actions violate Chinese sovereignty and damage bilateral ties [33]. Jiang Yu stated that the torch relay in Paris "seriously injured the feelings of the Chinese people and undermined China-France relations." She went on to call on France to take action to remedy the conflict between the two countries due to the way the Dalai Lama issue was handled in France [33].

The Chinese government's tourism agency suggested that tour groups avoid France after the torch relay, and that was exactly what happened. In the aftermath of the Paris torch relay, the number of Chinese visiting France dropped sharply. Given that approximately 700,000 mainland Chinese went to France for travel in 2007, news of such a vast boycott of French products was not something French businesses or the French government wanted to hear [51, 52].

In reflecting the strongly held emotions at that time, there was little—if any—room for dissent in China regarding how France and the West in general must be punished for this. In the spring of 2008, Grace Wang, a Chinese undergraduate studying abroad at Duke University, wanted to mediate the situation at Duke University between those who were pro-Tibetan independence and those who backed Beijing. Staunch nationalists in China, who viewed her as anathema, targeted her online. According to Wang, her mother's home in China was broken into and ransacked by those who read about her on a human flesh search engine, *ren rou sou suo yin qing*.¹⁷ Even the "golden girl" Jin Jing was targeted during spring rage when she did not support Internet calls to boycott French stores, such as Carrefour. Some even called her "unpatriotic" and "a traitor" for disapproving of the boycott.

Overseas Chinese Take to the Streets

As a result of Tibetans and other critics of China protesting China from abroad during the torch relay, overseas Chinese also took to the streets abroad to show their support for the 2008 BOG, leading to spring rage. The CCP tapped into and benefited from intense Chinese nationalism during the Olympic torch relay around the world [36]. Chinese Internet users from around the world commended Chinese in San Francisco for their show of support for the Beijing Olympics and thus China during the torch relay. Internet users cheered on other Chinese in cities that would also host the torch to do the same. Showing their solidarity with those in the mainland in late April, thousands of overseas Chinese and Chinese students studying abroad also took to the streets in various cities (Paris, London, Berlin, and Los Angeles) to show their support for Beijing and the Olympics. A central theme of the overseas protestors, just like protestors in China, was that Tibet belongs to China and that Western media coverage of the Tibetan riots was unfair [53, 54]. In Paris, thousands of ethnic Chinese congregated at the *Place de la Republique* to demonstrate support for Beijing and denounce the West. Over 1000 protested at BBC stations in London and Manchester, arguing that the Western media was very biased in its coverage of Tibet, China, and the relay [49].

¹⁷ Human flesh search engines in China are devoted to drawing attention to specific people, often people viewed as anti-China, with the goal of destroying them.

Damage Control: Carrefour and the French Government's Shuttle Diplomacy to Quell Spring Rage

In the aftermath of the torch relay, Carrefour, in trying to diffuse the tense situation, was quick to show its support for China and the Olympics, as it issued a statement in mid-April 2008 that it was against independence for Tibet and that it supported the Olympics. This position by the French multinational was well received by the Chinese government. After that initial statement, Carrefour, which first set up stores in China in 1995, constantly stressed that it supported China and apologized for the torch relay, even though Carrefour played no role in the torch relay debacle in Paris [55]. Because Chinese Internet users accused the French MNC of being pro Dalai Lama, Carrefour viewed it as necessary to address the issue.¹⁸

Given that Carrefour's sales in China were approximately \$4.28 billion in 2008, it did not want to lose out on that market, which was why the CEO and president of Carrefour, Eric Legros, gave an interview to *China Daily* during the Carrefour fallout [36, 55]. In trying to appease both the Chinese government and Chinese citizens, Carrefour stores in Beijing had its Chinese staff wear patriotic Chinese clothing and Olympic apparel to show Carrefour's support for the Olympics and China [56].

Sarkozy was also involved in trying to resolve the tense standoff and help the success of the French MNC in China [35]. In late April, Sarkozy had top government officials—the French Ambassador to China (Herve Ladsous), France's President of the Senate (Christian Poncelet), and a top advisor of Sarkozy's (Jean-David Levitte)—meet with PRC officials, members of the Chinese media, and Jin Jing, the Chinese Paralympics fencer who secured the torch in Paris while protestors tried to take it from her, to diffuse the situation. The Chinese government did not send any officials to France at that specific time for comparable meetings; instead, France was coming to China, which reflects the French desire more than the Chinese desire to improve relations. When Poncelet visited Beijing for talks to calm the situation, he expressed Sarkozy's sorrow for the incident that happened to Jin Jing in Paris. In wanting to present a good image of France to the Chinese public, Poncelet met with Jin in Shanghai in late April and presented her with Sarkozy's apology letter. In that letter, Sarkozy stated that what happened to her did not have the support of the French people [10]. Poncelet read the letter that Sarkozy provided for China: "I understand that the Chinese people's feelings were hurt by what went on that day, and especially by the intolerable attack you suffered and which I condemn with the utmost force" [quoted in 57]; see also 55]. In the letter, Sarkozy also invited Jin to visit France as his guest and stated that she demonstrated "remarkable courage" [58]. In short, this letter served as redemption for China, a way of overcoming what had happened to a Chinese national in Paris during the torch relay. In reacting to the letter, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Jiang Yu, stated that Carrefour's actions to remedy and improve relations were "touching." Jiang Yu also stated that the letter and the invitation for Jin Jing as Sarkozy's personal guest are very helpful for France-China relations. Jiang Yu's statement again reflects the emotional sentiment, as she stated that such action by Sarkozy "is appreciated by the Chinese people" [see 58].

¹⁸ What was not recognized by many in China, including the media, was that 99% of Carrefour's employees (over 40,000) in China that year were local workers for its 122 stores [41]. During spring rage, a French MNC that provided 40,000 jobs for locals was a non-issue. The real issue was national pride on the part of Chinese.

Sarkozy's apology letter received ample attention from the Chinese media as a way of showing PRC citizens how a leading Western country was showing remorse to China and admitting wrong was done in Paris to China during the torch relay. Put differently, the Chinese government benefited immensely from the formal apology from France, as it provided an excellent opportunity to move on from the anti-French mood. With the apology letter, PRC officials and the public achieved what it wanted from France—face. In late April, Sarkozy no longer made Tibet an issue, he abandoned his potential boycott of the opening ceremony, he stated that he understood how the Chinese people had their feelings hurt due to the torch relay in Paris, and in his letter to Jin Jing, he denounced what happened in Paris at the relay [35]. In short, all of the actions that Sarkozy took in late April of 2008—sending government officials, including the former French Prime Minister, and especially the apology letter to Jin Jing—allowed the Chinese to redeem themselves.

In late April and early May, having received what it wanted from France, the Chinese government decided that it was time to move beyond the anti-French anger. On April 22, the Chinese foreign ministry stated that China and France are striving for cooperation in bilateral ties [59]. In demonstrating this willingness by the Chinese government to improve relations, China's previous ambassador to France, Zhao Jinjun, went to France on a special mission from April 18 to April 22 to meet with Sarkozy and other French state actors [59]. The Chinese government did not send any officials to France during the height of spring rage, as that would put the government in a weak position with its angry domestic populous. Instead, the Chinese government sent an official when relations started to improve as a result of France's concessions. At that time, the Chinese government prevented Internet users from spreading calls for more boycotts and removed anti-Carrefour information from the Internet [60].¹⁹ Due to the concrete actions that French government officials took in demonstrating their regret for what happened to Jin Jing in Paris and for not questioning the Chinese position on Tibet, bilateral ties between the two countries were back to normal. Then, as a result of the May 12 earthquake in Sichuan, the attention of the Chinese media fundamentally shifted away from spring rage and towards the earthquake [36]. Due to the magnitude of the Sichuan earthquake, many western states also diverted their attention from the torch and Tibet to helping out in the recovery [62].

Conclusion

In an examination of this case, I have demonstrated the power of emotions that masses or non-state actors in China were able to manifest, which impacted Chinese foreign policy after the 2008 torch relay in Paris. By embracing an emotional stance in its relations with France, this increased the Chinese government's bargaining position. China signaled to France that it was unwilling to back down in this confrontation. Due to strategic calculations regarding emotions and identity, the Chinese government was willing to stand firm against France. Had Tibet not been at the center of the issue with France for the torch relay issue, then the Chinese government could have moved beyond the torch

¹⁹ The Chinese government is very concerned about preventing collective action and removes any material online that may possibly result in people taking to the streets due to government grievances [see 61].

fallout sooner. However, because it was related to Tibet, with riots occurring there the previous month, protestors at the torch relay being pro-Tibet, and with Carrefour being depicted by masses as pro-Tibet, the Chinese government had less flexibility with its domestic audience to back down from confrontation with France. Because the Chinese government was on weak footing for its lack of a quick response to the events in Tibet, it was not in a position to then, just several weeks afterwards, stifle domestic public opinion discontent with what happened to Jin Jing in Paris. In the event that the Chinese government did not embrace its vocal netizens who were denouncing France regarding Tibet, the Chinese government would have been subjected to being accused by its domestic population of being weak in protecting a leading core interest (i.e., the notion that Tibet belongs to China), which is a risk the government does not want to take. In other words, it had to embrace the public's emotional anger at France. Significantly for this case, since the event examined here was not about a military issue, the Chinese government had more room to apply pressure on France, as opposed to having to consider the consequences of military conflict, such as the 2001 EP3 spy plane incident or more recently with the border tensions with India in which the Chinese government decided to cooperate with such states to end the tensions.

This study has demonstrated the strategic calculations on the part of PRC participants in that they stopped the protests when called upon to do so, which is similar to Zhou and Wang's findings regarding how PRC college students stated that if participating in protests will help China's bargaining position with Japan, then they will take to the streets to protest against Japan [31]. If those who took to the streets during spring rage were truly angry, they would have continued the protests. Instead, because the protestors viewed the government as standing up to France, and as a result of the Chinese government's show of force, France then demonstrated its regret to China and gave China the face that the protestors wanted, the protestors heeded the government's call to stop it.

As observed here, material interest, defined in terms of military capabilities or economic benefits, did not play a role here. The Chinese government was not interested in obtaining any material gain from France. In fact, the anti-foreign actions by Chinese citizens could have been perceived as unwelcoming to international business. Also, the Chinese government was willing to stand up to an MNC—Carrefour—and forgo the economic interdependence of that MNC. Thus, the liberal emphasis on trade and neorealism and neoliberal's emphasis that states maximizing capabilities do not explain this case.²⁰ In other words, China was willing to risk ties with France and economic trade due to a non-material issue—the issue of how Tibet was, according to Chinese netizens and the Chinese government, being presented by the French government and people in France. The main objective was to have the French government and the MNC apologize to China, and thus by having a leading Western state apologize to the Chinese people, Chinese state and non-state actors could regain lost face. Among realism, liberalism, and constructivism, it is the latter that best explains this case, for it was about how China views itself. We should expect China to continue to place paramount emphasis on issues related to identity in international relations and that in some instances, such as the case examined here, China places more emphasis on status than material gain.

²⁰ Gries also argues that realism's emphasis on material power does not help when examining events such as the 2008 torch relay and ties between China and the West during that time period of 2008 [20].

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