by Larry Tung
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Bing Yuan is a strong supporter of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. It is not hard to know that because he is wearing his support on his head - a hat decorated with the five mascots of the Beijing Olympics known as Fu Was, or fortune dolls.

Draped in a big star-spangled banner, Yuan, a native of China's Jiangsu Province, is among the thousands of people who gathered in a May 4 rally on Foley Square to support the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Many of his fellow demonstrators had painted the Chinese flag on their faces while other waved big flags and signs that read "One World, One Dream," the theme song for the Beijing Olympics.

With the media having focused on the anti-China protests surrounding the Olympics torch relay, the rally is among the most recent efforts by overseas Chinese in New York to counter negative publicity on the Chinese government's crackdown on Tibet's independence movement and the country's poor human rights record and involvement in Sudan. Now, with the Beijing Olympics less three months away, people on all sides of the issue are working to advance their cause.

The Separation of Sport and Politics

"Politics and sports are two separate issues," said Yuan, who has lived in New York for 14 years and works for a computer company. "I have no problem if they use a peaceful channel. ...Hijacking Olympics is absolutely wrong -- particularly the use of violence to hijack the Olympic torch."

Yuan is referring to clashes by pro-Tibet and human right activists with Olympics torch runners in Europe, Australia and Asia. Officials in San Francisco changed the torch's route there at the last minute to avoid the protestors.

"It took Western countries at least 100 years to develop their human rights," added Feng Ming Wang, a friend of Yuan's and a graduate student at Rutgers University. "China is a developing country. It needs economic resources and people's understanding to develop human rights. ... If the Western countries invest more efforts into helping us develop human rights and not just the media distortion, that will help us a lot."

The Foley Square rally, titled "Love China in New York," was spearheaded by One China NY . A group of Chinese Olympics supporters organized the group over the Internet and received donations from several Chinese business associations. It then publicized the demonstration on the Internet and with flyers in some Chinese-owned stores.

John Liu, the Taiwan-born City Council member from Flushing, Queens, helped the group secure a permit to hold the rally.

"For thousands of years, people all over the world, no matter what their governments say or do, they come together for the Olympics," said Liu as he addressed the rally. "One opportunity every four years, no matter what the politics, no matter what the principles, just come together to engage in sports."

During the rally, two small airplanes with streamers reading "Go to 2008 Beijing Olympics" and "CNN Jack Cafferty is a liar" flew overhead. They were sponsored by the Beijing Association of New York. The event also featured exhibitions on Tibetan culture and history that emphasized its growth under Chinese rule as well as Beijing's urban development.

Questioning the Coverage

Those supporting the Olympic direct some of their ire at the media. The well-attended Manhattan rally did not receive much attention from English-language press but got extensive coverage from the local Chinese-language paper, as well as Xinhua News Agency , the official news agency for China.

"You don't see any Western media here," said Joachim Stroh, who was wearing a Beijing Olympics T-shirt and resides in Brooklyn with his Chinese wife. "It is so one-sided. Now we

have the Chinese people here voicing their opinions. But nobody cares."

"China's human rights issue is misunderstood," added Stroh. "Look at China. What a gigantic country this is. You come up with measures of tiny spots where you have this human rights issue. That's not to compare to what happened here in the past and compared to the sheer size of the country.

Earlier in April, 200 overseas Chinese staged a protest against CNN's Jack Cafferty who, during an April 9 broadcast of "The Situation Room," called the Chinese "goons and thugs" and referred to Chinese products as "junk." CNN said that the comment was directed at the Chinese government in the context of the Olympics.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an official request for apology from Cafferty and CNN. The network responded, "CNN would like to clarify that it was not Mr. Cafferty's, nor CNN's, intent to cause offense to the Chinese people, and would apologize to anyone who has interpreted the comments in this way."

Student Protests

One of the most noticeable sights in the Foley Square rally was the presence of young Chinese graduate students. Many served as volunteers and passionately sang patriotic songs while waving the Chinese national flags.

Ling Hui Wu, a first-year graduate student from Stony Brook University on Long Island, found out about the rally online and came with her roommates.

"I want to support the Olympics and spread love and peace," said Wu, holding a placard with a peace symbol. "I have been thinking about doing this for a long time. Politics and the Olympics should be separate. Everyone should just love each other."

Yi Yang, a graduate student at Penn State University who was in New York for the weekend, came to the event with his family. He learned about the rally from a www.mitbbs.com popular

Chinese-language Website for overseas Chinese.

"We had a similar event at our school but it was smaller," said Yang. "I am here to support the Olympics and protest against CNN's distorted report. Our voice needs to be heard." However, when asked about his opinion on China's human rights record and Tibet, Yang did not wish to comment.

Outside New York City, similar rallies were held on many university campuses, including Yale, Cornell, Louisiana State, Colorado State and the University of Washington.

Turmoil Over Tibet

For their part, Tibetans and their supporters in New York argue that it is the Chinese government that is using the Olympics for political advantage. Tenzin Dorjee, deputy director of the New York-based Students for a Free Tibet , has participated protests of the torch relay in Greece, Paris and San Francisco. He was at the rally in Foley Square and was greeted by insults when he tried to distribute flyers there.

"The Chinese government is using the Olympics as an opportunity to legitimize its occupation of Tibet, said Dorjee, who is of Tibetan descent and was born in India. "Right now with the global spotlight on China, Tibetans and their supporters around the world are speaking out to show Chinese leaders that until Tibet is free, the Chinese government will never get the acceptance that it so desperately seeks."

"For us Tibetans, our basic rights have been denied. It has been extremely painful," he added. "But now when the Chinese government is seeking international acceptance and glory, suddenly we have an influence to deny that. When we do that, the Chinese government is realizing that it is also painful to not get what they want."

Tsomo Tsomo, a Tibetan college student in New York, was among the hundreds of protesters outside the United Nations headquarters in early April. She said Tibetans must protest now while the world has its gaze on China because of the Olympics.

"China absolutely does not deserve to host the Olympics," Tsomo told the News Hour. "Its now or never for us."

Some overseas Chinese are sympathetic to such arguments. "I feel like the Olympics shouldn't be in China because of Tibet," Kim Chen, a native of Fujian Province and a sales clerk in Flushing, told the New York Times. "I feel the protesters should be protesting."

"The Olympics is just a game. And you cannot separate politics from the Olympics, despite your wishes," wrote Chinese-American blogger Jen-hao Liu in a New York Times online forum. "Let's just boycott the whole thing. It is no longer a simple, noble sports event. It has already been corrupted by politics and the decisions of the Chinese government."

Growing Tensions

Occasionally, the demonstrations in support of Beijing have gotten out of hand , with the students' displaying a zealous nationalism.

At Duke University, a Chinese freshman named Grace Wang was harassed by fellow Chinese students and received a death threat after she attended a pro-Tibet vigil in a dining hall on campus. Her picture was posted on the Internet with the word "traitor" on her forehead, and her parents' house in Qingdao, Shandong Province, was painted with graffiti saying, "kill everyone in the house."

At the University of Southern California, a student was asked to leave a lecture after he threw a bottle at the visiting Tibetan monk. At the University of Washington in Seattle, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association staged a protest during the Dalai Lama's speech, and pressured the university administration not to allow him to speak on any political issues.

The Olympics are set to begin with an elaborate opening ceremony on Aug. 8. As organizers plan the extravaganza , some Western political leaders are reportedly considering whether to boycott the event to protest Chinese policies. As the officials mull their plans for August, Chinese actions and the connection between sports and politics seem certain to remain hot topics

among Beijing's supporters and opponents on New York's streets and campuses.

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