

Beijing's Non-Accredited Olympic Media

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Realizing the role the Non-Accredited Media Center (NAMC) will play in promoting the historical, cultural and social elements of Beijing to the world, Beijing's 'Service Guide for Foreign Media Coverage of the Beijing Olympic Games and the Preparatory Period' (Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games, 2007) takes into account provision for the non-accredited media.

In this document, as well as in personal interviews throughout July 2006, the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) expressed its intention to host a Non-Accredited Media Center that would accommodate more than 10,000 journalists, including representatives from the more than 2,000 newspapers that exist in China, along with other

international media. While this is an interesting development, its implications are not clearly positive. Increased visibility and integration with official



structures could lead the NAMC to implement tighter restrictions on access and narrowing the range of participants it hosts.

In short, one might suppose that this integration within BOCOG is indicative of the attempt to control and restrain the non-accredited media. However, it might also enable greater and wider journalistic coverage. In support of the positive interpretation of this development, one might cite an interview with Wang Hui, vice-director of BOCOG's media and communications department. Wang emphasized the diversity of media coverage during the Olympics, 'as media are concerned not only about who won a gold medal and set a world record during the Olympics, but also about the Olympics hosting country's landscape, the hosting city's characteristics, local people's lives, how they participate in the Olympics.'

The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games suggested that there was some expectation that the NAMC would host professional journalists, who did not happen to have access to the Main Press Centre and the International Broadcasting Centre. In an interview at the Beijing Olympic Media Center, which currently operates as the main point of contact with the press, one journalist from the China Post newspaper indicated that the non-accredited journalists should be professional journalists and have qualifications that would authenticate an application to the NAMC.

it is unlikely that many of these non-accredited journalists will be either “professional” in the widely-accepted sense or in possession of a national press card.

Yet, as we have suggested in reference to Torino, and given the rise of online usage in China (see China Internet Network Information Center 2007), it is unlikely that many of these non-accredited journalists will be either “professional” in the widely-accepted sense or in possession of a national press card.



Consequently, while the expectation of the NAMC in Beijing might seem to contradict our expectation, experience at previous Games suggests that these intentions are common when discussed in advance of the Games. In each of the cities we have investigated, there was considerably less rigor applied to applications from journalists during Games time itself, as local authorities were pressing to attract publicity about non-Olympic-related causes.

The Beijing Games illustrates a number of other challenges posed by the development of new media in China. For example, one might have concerns about China's capacity to deliver international, online facilities to accommodate the Olympics' new media needs, such as streaming on accredited broadcasters' websites. In March 2007, the IOC launched a tender for the sale of the Internet and mobile platform exhibition rights (new media rights) to the Beijing Games, for

China's mainland territory. This is the first time that the IOC has separated the sale of television transmission rights from Internet and mobile broadcasting. However, while China endeavors to honor its commitment to the IOC by abiding by the rules of Olympic media coverage, some of its own domestic media management laws and regulations have not been upgraded to meet these commitments.



Effective February 2003, China's State Administration of Radio Film and Television ("SARFT") instituted the Administrative Measures regarding the Broadcasting of Audiovisual Programs through the Internet and other Information Networks in China, which stipulate that a broadcaster must first apply for a "License to Broadcast Audiovisual programs By Network" before they can broadcast audiovisual programs through information networks such as the Internet.

However, many Internet content providers, such as Sina.com, Sohu.com - the appointed

Internet content provider for BOCOG, China Unicom and QQ do not have such a 'license,' which means they may not be able to broadcast under this regulation. At the time of going to print, the IOC had not announced the results of the open tender for the rights to broadcast competitions over the Internet. However, in a transcript from Sohu.com in the first quarter of 2007 it indicates that it has no role in the delivery of such content:

Sohu is the exclusive Internet content provider sponsor for the Beijing 2008 official website, so we are the operator of Beijing2008.com or .cn, for that matter, and all content on that website is provided by Sohu....The new media rights is a separate matter and that is closely tied into with the TV broadcasting rights, so yes, there was a tender but that is separate and distinct from the official website that we operate. So it is almost like TV broadcasting rights in the eyes of the IOC. The outcome of the tender will be known probably -- it not during Q2, it will be early Q3. So it is separate and distinct. (Carol Yu, Sohu Co-President, Chief Financial Officer, cited in Seeking Alpha 2007)

For the non-accredited journalist, the implications of this are unclear. While it indicates the IOC's attempt to respond to the potential challenge of online publishing and a recognition that the national television broadcaster is not always best placed to deliver the largest online audience, domestic laws can inhibit this objective.



For China, the SARFT regulations indicate that there will be considerable barriers to a non-China-based company delivering such content. Indeed, it is likely that a number of China-based companies will struggle with the regulations. In any case, China-based bloggers—including those who are approved to work from the NAMC—could face unknown penalties for broadcasting material via the Internet, though this is likely to be of concern only in the context of moving sports images. In sum, while it is still unclear what the Chinese Olympic 'citizen journalist' might achieve, with instant messaging and Web 2.0 technology, the active Chinese blogs, podcasts, vlogs and so forth are a clear indication of the relevance of

such voices in the construction of alternative narratives about China. Moreover, in response to such participation, many mainstream Chinese media companies, such as China Central Television (CCTV), are already engaging in new media practices by adding blogs and podcasting elements to their websites.

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