

**FROM TIBET RIOTS TO SICHUAN QUAKE:
TURNAROUND IN CHINA'S
PUBLIC RELATIONS FORTUNES**

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Executive Summary

1. Within a short span of a few weeks, China's public relations image has swung from one extreme to the other. When the unrest occurred in the Tibetan areas in March 2008, China was vociferously criticized by foreign governments and others for its alleged "brutal" crackdown on "peaceful" demonstrators.
2. The Olympic torch relay became a platform for various parties with their respective political agendas to bash China. Protestors along the torch relay route attempted to seize or extinguish the flame. This sparked off Chinese nationalistic sentiments. Chinese supporters who spontaneously expressed support for their motherland unwittingly added to the schism between China and the rest of the world.
3. China was ill-prepared for the seemingly world-wide negative reception it received. To a large extent, the criticism of China can be attributed to its flawed media strategy on the Tibet issue. China denied foreign media access to the unrest, insisting on its own version of events. It was also slow to release information, reinforcing the impression that it had something to hide.
4. China's image was tarnished further when it resorted to an ideological diatribe against the Dalai Lama, a tactic harking back to the Cultural Revolution. Such language failed to engage the West on its terms. Also, the Chinese leaders' apparent inconsistent remarks on Tibet indicated that they had somewhat underestimated the degree of international outcry over the Tibet issue.
5. It was the 8.0 magnitude Sichuan earthquake in May 2008 that temporarily halted the avalanche of criticisms against China. The scale of the disaster provided a common cause for China, other countries and parties to come together to help the survivors.
6. China impressed the world with its swift and decisive response. Its leadership was on top of the situation immediately after the disaster struck, mobilizing all

available resources. China overcame concerns about its sovereignty when it allowed medical or recovery teams from other countries on its soil. It also welcomed other assistance in kind or in monetary terms.

7. China broke new ground when it gave foreign and local media a relatively free rein to report on developments in the disaster areas. The State Council Information Office also held regular news conferences involving officials and experts from the relevant ministries and agencies as well as local Sichuan politicians to offer the latest on disaster relief efforts.
8. The unprecedented media openness may show that China is learning from its past mistakes and is becoming more confident in handling the media. It may also indicate that the Chinese society is on the whole becoming more open. However, it would be prudent not to overestimate the implications of this single episode on media freedom in China.
9. The trajectory of media freedom in China is seldom linear. As a natural disaster, it would also be in the interest of the Chinese leadership to provide wide coverage of the herculean effort made by the Party and government to help the survivors. The publicity generated would create a positive atmosphere for the Olympic Games both within and outside China.
10. Although China's international image has improved, this is a mere respite. The different values that underpin the political systems and outlook between China and the West will continue to give rise to clashes over issues like China's human rights record and the conduct of its foreign policy. China will also be expected to uphold the same level of transparency to deal with future disasters.
11. For the moment, China's priority is to prevent any incident from disrupting the smooth hosting of the Olympic Games. It has not only tightened security in Beijing but also stepped up efforts to ensure that all related Games preparations such as poor air quality and traffic congestion are being addressed.

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LYE Liang Fook*

From Brickbat to Praise

- 1.1 China wants to host the best ever Olympic Games in August 2008. Toward this end, Beijing has spared no effort in looking into virtually every preparatory detail to ensure that athletes, spectators and viewers alike have a good impression of the country. It has been meticulous and comprehensive in its Games related preparations. Beijing, however, found itself faced with unexpected non-Games related challenges that have a huge impact on its image in the run-up to the Games.
- 1.2 The first major challenge that tarnished China's image was its apparent inept handling of the unrest in Tibet and neighboring provinces in China in March 2008. China failed to present the unrest as a violation of law and order which every responsible government cannot condone. Instead, China's propaganda machinery churned out ideological pieces vilifying the Dalai Lama, a revered figure in Tibet and well respected personality in major foreign capitals. This was a big turn-off. China also prevented foreign media coverage and dithered in releasing critical information about the unrest.
- 1.3 The perceived crackdown by the Chinese authorities in the Tibetan areas invited harsh criticisms from abroad.¹ China was accused of trampling on the

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¹ See news headlines such as "Tibet: an Olympian test" (*Guardian*, 14 March 2008); "It's time for Beijing to rethink Tibet policy" (*South China Morning Post*, 21 March 2008); "Tibet monks pushed to the streets by years of harshly restrictive religious policies" (*Associated Press*, 15 March 2008); "Heavy presence of Chinese police quells rioting in Tibet's capital" (*Washington Post*, 16 March 2008); and, "Chinese crackdown in Tibet 'not tolerable': French FM" (*Agence France Presse*, 25 March 2008).

basic human rights of ordinary Tibetans. It was also variously chastised for cultural genocide, religious oppression and political suppression in Tibet. Worst still, the political mileage that Beijing had painstakingly built up over the years through measured media liberalization appeared to have been undermined almost overnight.

- 1.4 The groundswell of international anger and disgust against China renewed calls for a boycott of the Olympic Games. Some foreign dignitaries and athletes have indicated that they will not participate either in the opening ceremony or have anything to do with the Games.² The Olympic torch relay quickly became a lightning rod for various parties armed with their respective political agendas to bash China. In London, Paris and San Francisco in particular, there were numerous attempts to seize or extinguish the flame. The Chinese officials assigned to protect the flame were accused of being high-handed and ill-mannered.
- 1.5 The subsequent counter-reaction in the form of displays of nationalistic sentiments by Chinese overseas citizens and Internet users to the perceived western humiliation and bullying of China left a bitter aftertaste. While the actions of these individuals and groups were largely spontaneous and did not appear to be orchestrated by China, they had the unintended effect of reinforcing the apparent face-off between China and the rest of the world. Suddenly, Beijing's Olympic theme of "One World, One Dream" sounded very remote.
- 1.6 Yet, China's swift and decisive response to another challenge posed by the massive earthquake in Sichuan on 12 May 2008 helped to salvage its image which had reached its nadir. Immediately after the quake struck, General Secretary Hu Jintao issued instructions to save lives and ensure the safety of

² Even renowned Western individuals from the entertainment industry like film director Steven Spielberg and actress Mia Farrow have pressed China to do more to stop the violence in Darfur. Spielberg had earlier resigned as artistic adviser for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Games.

those in the disaster areas.³ Within hours, Premier Wen Jiabao was on the ground directing relief efforts. Troops from the nearest Chengdu Military Command were mobilized at first instance to deal with the disaster. The local and foreign media was virtually allowed unimpeded access to the disaster areas.

1.7 China's prompt and effective response to the earthquake is markedly different from the largely indifferent attitude of the Myanmar regime to victims of the cyclone that struck the Irrawaddy Delta in early May 2008. Also, the scale of the humanitarian crisis and physical devastation prompted a flood of international sympathy. So far, the death toll has reportedly left more than 87,000 either dead or missing and over 374,000 injured.⁴ More than 45 million people were affected and about 15 million people have been evacuated.⁵ Most notably, the disaster halted the momentum of foreign censure of China that had been building up since the unrest in the Tibetan areas.

1.8 China's response to the disaster has been praised by foreign governments, human rights groups and the media. Headlines such as "China's response to quake is unusually open" (*International Herald Tribune*);⁶ "Rapid response to quake enhances Beijing's image" (*Wall Street Journal*);⁷ "China's quake response unmatched, but challenges ahead" (*Reuters*)⁸; "Ban praises China quake response" (*BBC*);⁹ and, "China earthquake: how China mobilized its

³ "Wenchuan dizhenhou Hu Jintao zuochu zhong yao zhishi" (After the Wenchuan earthquake, Hu Jintao issues important instructions), *Xinhua*, 12 May 2008 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-05/12/content_8151980.htm).

⁴ "Sichuan quake death toll rises to 69,197", *People's Daily Online*, 8 July 2008 (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/6444350.html>).

⁵ Reconstruction planning group to be launched for China's post-quake work, *Xinhua*, 28 May 2008 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/28/content_8271431.htm).

⁶ "China's response to quake is unusually open", *International Herald Tribune*, 13 May 2008.

⁷ "Rapid response to quake enhances Beijing's image", *Wall Street Journal*, 22 May 2008.

⁸ "China's quake response unmatched, but challenges ahead", *Reuters*, 22 May 2008.

⁹ "Ban praises China quake response", *BBC*, 24 May 2008.

might” (*Telegraph*)¹⁰ paint a largely positive picture. World leaders have also unstintingly pledged aid and personnel to help China and China has welcomed such assistance.

- 1.9 The turnaround in China’s public relations fortunes has been nothing short of extraordinary. Beijing appears to have regained the public relations initiative which it had lost following the Tibetan unrest. The difficult part now is for China to carefully build on this reservoir of goodwill and perception to set the right atmosphere for the Games and beyond. This is no easy task as the agenda is not entirely dictated by China. Also, there remain many challenges that could snowball into a crisis if not properly managed.
- 1.10 Already, parents of the estimated 10,000 children who lost their lives in the quake are angry that some schools for poor students in the quake zone collapsed while government offices and more elite schools not far away stood intact.¹¹ Insufficient accounting for those responsible for such shoddy construction may harm China’s image and the legitimacy of its leaders both within and abroad. Its leaders will also be judged for their ability to uphold the same level of transparency in dealing with future disasters.
- 1.11 Apart from quake-related matters, China will continue to come under close scrutiny especially in the West on issues such as its human rights record and the conduct of its foreign policy. There remain many elements eager to paint China in a negative light to fulfill their political agendas.¹² On its part, China has stood firm against such pressures. One of its priorities is to prevent disruption to the smooth hosting of the Olympic Games.

¹⁰ “China earthquake: how China mobilized its might, *Telegraph*, 28 May 2008.

¹¹ “Parents’ grief turns to rage at Chinese officials”, *New York Times*, 28 May 2008.

¹² For instance, in one of its latest publications, Amnesty International has asserted that in China “repression against activists and journalists, as well as the ‘clean up’ of Beijing, is occurring not despite the Games but because of them. See “China’s human rights record overshadows Olympic spectacle”, *The Wire (Amnesty International)*, Vol. 38, No. 6 (July 2008) at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/NWS21/006/2008/en/2f6b5753-444c-11dd-a853-cb8a3d8264d3/nws210062008eng.pdf>.

- 1.12 Besides stepping up security in Beijing, it has redoubled efforts to ensure that related Games preparations such as air quality and traffic situation are being brought down to acceptable levels. In a mark of its growing confidence, China's Central Television has announced that it will broadcast the Olympic events live "without time delay", a first for the national broadcaster since its founding¹³ 50 years ago.

Flaws in China's Media Strategy on Tibet

- 2.1 China's initial attempts to prevent the foreign media from covering the unrest in Tibetan areas created the negative impression that it was reverting to the old ways of monopolizing coverage of sensitive events. This antagonized the foreign media and harmed China's image. When Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, was ravaged by riots on 14 March 2008, the authorities immediately banned tourists and journalists from entering the area. It was only on 26 March, twelve days after the unrest, that a select group of reporters were allowed in. It seemed that the Chinese authorities were suppressing reports by independent foreign sources and only allowing its official version of events to prevail.
- 2.2 The Chinese authorities were also slow to release information, reinforcing the impression that they had something to hide. It took five days before government officials admitted for the first time on 19 March 2008 that the unrest had spread to Tibetan communities in other provinces.¹⁴ Also, even though the Chinese police had opened fire and wounded four rioters in Sichuan apparently out of self defense on 16 March 2008, the state-run *Xinhua News Agency* only confirmed this four days later.¹⁵ This time-lag, coupled with numerous foreign reports that the death toll was much higher, discounted

¹³ "CCTV to broadcast Olympic events live without delay", *People's Daily Online*, 8 July 2008 (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90779/6444420.html>).

¹⁴ "Police, officials hurt in Sichuan riots", *Xinhua News Agency*, 20 March 2008. See also "Officials keep silent on reports of dead protesters in Gansu", *South China Morning Post*, 20 March 2008.

¹⁵ "Police: Four rioters wounded Sunday in Aba of SW China", *Xinhua News Agency*, 20 March 2008.

to a large extent the credibility of the Chinese version of events even though they might be more accurate.

- 2.3 China's image was further tarnished when its leaders and official media resorted to ideological diatribe that failed to connect with the foreign audience. The Dalai Lama, an almost god-like figure revered by Tibetans and politicians in foreign capitals, was described by Tibet's Party Secretary Zhang Qingli as a "wolf in monk's robes" and a "devil with a human face but the heart of a beast".¹⁶ Elsewhere, an official commentary asserted that "the Dalai Lama's hypocrisy has put the power of his religion at stake, but he cannot cheat all the people all the time. Buddhism is no harbor for separatism. All in all, it is China's Tibet, now and forever".¹⁷ Rather than portray the unrest upfront as a threat to law and order, such ideological references, harking back to the days of the Cultural Revolution, did more harm than good to China's image.
- 2.4 Apparently, even carefully choreographed media tours for selected foreign journalists to affected Tibetan areas in China went awry, further embarrassing the Chinese authorities. The select groups of foreign journalists that visited Lhasa (Tibet) in March 2008 and Xiahe (Gansu) in April 2008 fortuitously ran into Tibetan monks who astutely broke into tears and lamented the lack of human rights.¹⁸ These tours were originally intended to showcase the damage caused by the rioters and the return to normalcy after the authorities intervened to restore order.
- 2.5 Rendering more damage to China's image was the somewhat inconsistent remarks made by the Chinese leadership on the Tibet issue. At the local level, Tibet's Party Secretary Zhang Qingli was the most hard-line when he described the struggle with the Dalai Lama as "a life-and-death battle". At the

¹⁶ "Quotes on Tibet, Dalai Lama from the region's Beijing-appointed Communist Party boss", *Associated Press*, 23 March 2008.

¹⁷ "Commentary: violence under the cloak of religion", *Xinhuanet*, 19 March 2008 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/19/content_7822113.htm).

¹⁸ "Buddhist monks interrupt government press tour in Western China", *International Herald Tribune*, 9 April 2008.

central level, Premier Wen Jiabao initially put the blame squarely on the Dalai Lama when he asserted that the riots in Lhasa were “organized, premeditated, masterminded and incited by the Dalai Lama clique”.¹⁹ However, Wen later reportedly urged the Dalai Lama to use his influence to stop the ongoing violence in Tibet, a tacit recognition that the latter could play a positive role.²⁰ Hu Jintao made the most incisive remarks when he reportedly said that no responsible government could sit idle in the face of activities that disrupted social order and jeopardized the lives of ordinary citizens.²¹

- 2.6 The different official stance could be attributed to a number of factors. First, it is not unusual for local government leaders to be more hard-line compared to the leadership higher up as the former is directly responsible for maintaining order. Second, the different stance could be due to tactics adopted by different levels to show that China’s position on Tibet is not an inflexible one provided the Dalai Lama meets certain conditions. Third, the different stance does suggest some degree of divided opinion among the Chinese leadership on how best to handle the Tibetan issue. Whatever the reasons, the apparent inconsistent remarks by the Chinese leaders indicated that China had to some extent underestimated the degree of international attention the Tibetan issue would draw and, by extension, the media glare that China would come under.

China’s Image and the Sichuan Earthquake

- 3.1 China’s astute handling of the 8.0 magnitude Sichuan earthquake that struck on 12 May 2008 boosted its sagging image. Compared to previous disasters, such as the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, the response of the Chinese leadership to the Sichuan earthquake was quick and decisive. The government also adopted a relatively open-minded approach by allowing foreign aid teams onto

¹⁹ “Wen: ample facts prove Dalai’s role in Lhasa riot”, *China Daily*, 18 March 2008.

²⁰ “Wen calls on Dalai Lama to preach calm”, *South China Morning Post*, 31 March 2008.

²¹ “Chinese, US Presidents hold talks on Taiwan, Tibet”, *Xinhuanet*, 27 March 2008 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/27/content_7865209.htm) and “President Hu: Tibet problem entirely internal issue of China”, *Xinhuanet*, 12 April 2008 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/12/content_7964771.htm).

Chinese soil. Equally important was the leadership's decision to grant foreign and local journalists considerable leeway in the coverage of the disaster.

- 3.2 The top leadership took immediate actions to deal with the crisis. After the earthquake struck, General Secretary Hu Jintao issued an immediate order to save the victims and protect those alive. On the same day, Hu chaired a Political Bureau Standing Committee Meeting that mobilized the People's Liberation Army, armed police and paramilitary forces to the disaster zones.²² Premier Wen Jiabao was on the ground within the first few hours to direct relief efforts.²³ He stayed for four days to oversee disaster relief and returned a second time.²⁴ With the Party and government machinery mobilized, all available resources were brought to bear to save those trapped and help the homeless. Chinese citizens donated generously and there were no shortage of volunteers.
- 3.3 Breaking from past practices, the Chinese government allowed foreign aid teams (either medical or recovery) from other countries to enter the affected areas after some initial hesitation. This gesture is significant because it showed that China was prepared to overlook sensitivities over its sovereignty by having foreigners on its soil. Since 16 May 2008, countries that have sent teams included Japan, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Cuba.²⁵ Many other countries, UN agencies and international organizations, interest groups, companies, overseas Chinese and individuals have provided assistance either in kind or in monetary terms.

²² "China's Hu says quake relief government's top priority", *Xinhuanet*, 13 May 2008 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/13/content_8155551.htm).

²³ Wen Jiabao oversaw the disaster relief efforts assisted by Li Keqiang and Hui Liangyu, both vice premiers.

²⁴ Wen Jiabao's second trip lasted from 22 – 25 May 2008.

²⁵ "Foreigners showered in gratitude", *China Daily*, 29 May 2008.

- 3.4 China broke new ground when it allowed foreign and local media a relatively free hand to report on developments in the disaster zones.²⁶ Often hesitant to report on negative news, the state media organs such as *Xinhua News Agency*, *CCTV* and the *People's Daily* have led the way by reporting round the clock on the latest developments in the disaster areas since the earthquake struck. Their reports have been timely and accurate, prominently playing up the government's rapid and committed response to the earthquake and the efforts undertaken to help survivors. They have since been commended by the national media regulators for the role they played.²⁷
- 3.5 The State Council Information Office has pro-actively provided information on the Sichuan earthquake. Since 12 May 2008, regular press conferences involving officials and experts from the relevant ministries and agencies as well as Sichuan politicians have been held to provide up-to-date information on disaster relief efforts. Even the normally secretive Ministry of Defence took the occasion of one of the press conferences to introduce its newly appointed press spokesman Hu Changming (胡昌明) who, together with other top military generals, gave an account of the role of the People's Liberation Army and People's Armed Police Force in earthquake relief.
- 3.6 Likewise, the foreign media has also been granted relatively unfettered access in the disaster areas. Chinese officials on the ground have facilitated the work of foreign journalists such as allowing them through checkpoints, transporting them from one disaster location to the other, and arranging and granting interviews. Premier Wen Jiabao revealed this fresh approach when he reportedly told a group of local and foreign journalists in Yingxiu Township on 24 May: "We welcome reporters from all countries. We believe that you will use your own judgment and humanitarian spirit to report on the disaster and the work we are doing in a fair, objective and realistic manner" (我们欢迎

²⁶ "China media unusually aggressive in covering quake", *Associated Press*, 14 May 2008.

²⁷ The national media regulators included the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, the General Administration of Press and Publication, and the All China Journalists Association. See "Media commended for timely, transparent quake coverage", *China Daily*, 2 July 2008.

世界各国记者前来采访，我们相信你们会用记者的良知和人道主义精神，公正、客观、实事求是报道灾情和我们所做的工作).²⁸

3.7 Foreign media coverage of the earthquake has generally been positive, focusing on the government's responsiveness and hands-on approach, including the freer rein given to the media to report on the disaster. In particular, *CNN* has been singled out for praise when earlier it was lambasted by millions of Chinese at home and abroad for its "unprofessional" coverage of events in Tibet. *China Daily* cited a *CNN* report that described a local party official at the rescue scene: "Tears flowed down his cheeks, and he made no effort to wipe them away. He says that as many as 500 are dead, including his parents, his wife and their two children. In the midst of this anguish, there is a call over his radio. He's needed again, and he runs off, with apologies, to go back to work".²⁹

3.8 Overall, the relatively open-minded attitude of China in handling the Sichuan earthquake and its speedy response generated much positive publicity and goodwill within and outside China. The earthquake fortuitously created a common cause for governments, organizations and individuals of various stripes to come together to fight a natural disaster. While the Tibet issue had been divisive due to the different political standpoints and agendas of the parties involved, the Sichuan earthquake was unifying due to the overwhelming weight of the loss of lives and physical devastation.

What Happens After the Olympics?

4.1 The unprecedented media openness accorded to the local and foreign journalists in the Sichuan earthquake has led observers to suggest that this marks a trend towards greater media freedom in China. The new standards set will be hard to withdraw in the future without incurring a certain political cost.

²⁸ "Zhongguo zongli Wen Jiabao zai Yingxiuzhen feixuqian huijian zhongwai jizhe" (Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao meets Chinese and foreign journalists in front of the ruins in Yingxiu township), *Zhongxinwang*, 24 May 2008 (<http://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/news/2008/05-24/1261007.shtml>).

²⁹ "Even CNN can see the truth", *China Daily*, 28 May 2008.

Observers have also pointed out that the Chinese leadership seemed to have learnt from its past mistakes such as the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) where information flow was inhibited and where the government was slow to react. In the most recent example, foreign journalists were denied access to Tibetan areas.

- 4.2 While there may be some truth to these observations, it would be prudent not to over-estimate the implications of this single episode on media freedom in China. The trajectory of media freedom is seldom linear and Chinese history is replete with examples of how a single step forward can be negated by two steps backwards. Hence, while the trend of media freedom may generally be moving forward over a longer time frame, the actual process may be painfully slow.
- 4.3 It is also worthwhile to bear in mind that the Sichuan earthquake is a natural disaster, not a man-made one. Given the nature of this disaster, it would be to the interest of the Chinese leadership to showcase its crisis management ability to its citizens and the world. Besides the exemplary role displayed by its leaders, China's state capacity to deal with the magnitude and complexity of the disaster was impressive. It also showed how much the leaders were in control. Hence, a media strategy that allowed for wider rather than restricted coverage would serve the leadership's purpose. Not long after, however, the local authorities in Sichuan began to restrict media reporting of disgruntled parents angered by the loss of their children due to poorly constructed schools that collapsed during the quake.³⁰
- 4.4 Furthermore, this is an Olympic year and it is important for China to set a positive atmosphere in the lead-up to and during the Games. This objective became more urgent and important after the brickbats China received following its mishandling of the Tibet issue. There appeared no let up in international criticism of China till the Sichuan earthquake struck. Moreover, it would not have gone unnoticed to the Chinese leadership of the international

³⁰ Also, Chinese critics such as Huang Qi and Zeng Hongling who posted articles on the Internet critical of the government's response and the shoddily constructed schools were detained in June 2008.

frustration, and to some extent anger, over the Myanmar regime's refusal (until after three weeks) to allow aid agencies access to the Irrawaddy Delta to help survivors of the cyclone that struck in early May 2008. While Myanmar's image suffered with its intransigence and unfriendly attitude, China won kudos for its openness and cooperation with the international community.

- 4.5 Although China's international image has improved, it is a mere respite. The same challenges that confronted China before the earthquake struck have remained. Foremost among them is the different values that underpin the political systems and outlook between China and the West. This will continue to give rise to disagreements over human rights especially with China's ascendancy and all that its rise stands for. In terms of its foreign policy, China will have to carefully manage international sensitivities over its relations with regimes such as Sudan and Myanmar including its arm sales to the former. It will further have to be seen to engage the Dalai Lama to assuage international criticism.
- 4.6 On the domestic front, China will need to ensure proper follow-up to the investigations on the schools that collapsed during the earthquake. Those found guilty have to be seen to be held accountable and punished. China will also come under increasing scrutiny to uphold the same level of transparency in dealing with future disasters.
- 4.7 For the moment, China appears to have regained its public relations initiative and is relishing in the international limelight. A successful Olympics will further burnish its image. Already, its improving relations with Japan and Taiwan have generated a positive atmosphere in the region. At a later stage, depending on the circumstances and need, Beijing may consider additional measures such as releasing political prisoners or making changes or announcements in other areas to bolster its image.³¹ This task will be an on-going and challenging one.

³¹ Most recently, China made known that the number of Chinese people under extreme poverty has dropped from 250 million in 1978 to 14.79 million in 2007, a more than 16-fold improvement. This underscores China's official stand that it is committed to improving the lives of its people, thereby contributing to a positive human rights situation in the country. See "China's extremely poor population declines to 15 million", *China Daily*, 8 July 2008.