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The Narrative Arc of Nation Branding:

Staging Shanghai World Expo 2010 in Historical Events

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Abstract

Research on Chinese nation branding (e.g. Barr 2012; Bodet and Lacassagne 2012; Loo and Davies 2006) has noted its Janus-faced nature: outward towards the world, and inward towards a domestic audience of heterogenous ethnic and cultural backgrounds. To examine how this dualistic outlook is discursively achieved in historical narratives, this study analyses a collection of stories of China's participation in the World Expos from 1851 to 2008 (Yu et al., 2009), published in anticipation of the Shanghai World Expo 2010. By examining the overall narrative arc as well as metonymic usage of country names, this chapter shows how these narratives smooth over significant gaps in history when the country was closed off to the world and reinvent a progressive trajectory, in which China's contact with the outside world has steadily increased under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This progressive historical trajectory, in turn, provides a narrative profluence (Scollon 2010) to launch the upcoming global event. Combined with strategic use of metonyms, this selective retelling of China's relationship with the world then serves to reconstruct a unified national consciousness to the domestic audience and the party's legitimacy as agent of progress on the world stage.

Keywords: narrative profluence, plot, metonymy, history, nation branding, China, World Expo

Introduction

A vast country of 56 ethnicities, a developing nation with global power, a rapidly growing economy within an authoritarian regime, these inherent contradictions have created a number of challenges for the People's Republic of China (PRC) in its nation branding campaign (Loo and Davies 2006), which, by definition, requires the creation of a single, distinctive, and coherent image (Anholt 1998). They also lead to a noticeable dualism in its branding discourse. As Barr (2012) observes, Chinese nation branding encompasses both an outward orientation, targeting international audience, and an inward orientation, addressing domestic population. Other scholars, such as Brownell (2008), have even argued that it is the latter that is the more important objective. Given their global reach and boost for domestic economy, international mega events such as the Beijing Olympics 2008 and Shanghai World Expo 2010 were important means to achieve this twofold objective. While the impact of both events has been extensively researched in anthropology, marketing, and political science (e.g. Brownell 2008; Barr 2012; Bodet & Lacassagne 2012; Hong 2010; Jankowiak 2010), few have examined how they are represented in public discourses. This study thus turns to look at how they make use one discursive resource that has been frequently employed by the Chinese government in its branding projects – national history.

As the historian Hayden White (1973) has famously claimed, writing history is not simply presenting facts but **emplotting** events (cited in Czarniswska, 2004; emphasis mine). To understand how national histories are reinvented for the purposes of nation building and branding (Del Percio 2016), narrative analysis provides a useful tool, in particular, in its attention to the temporal sequencing of events (Labov & Waletzky 1967). Yet as Scollon (2010) points out, the plot of a story not only shapes how we remember the past, it also provides a link to the future. The narrative arc creates an invisible force, which he terms

‘narrative profluence’, which not only moves the story along but also shapes events in the real world beyond its ending.

Narrative profluence is then key to understanding how national histories are linked to international mega events in Chinese nation branding. The text under examination is an official publication published in anticipation of the Shanghai Expo 2010, recounting the history of China’s participation in World Expos since 1852 (Yu et al., 2009). By looking at the overall narrative arc and metonymic use of country names, it seeks to illuminate the link between stories from the past and events in the future and to understand how a unified national consciousness is reinvented through historical fragments. Following a review of relevant literature on mega events, nation branding, and narrative profluence, this chapter first looks how a linear narrative arc, enhanced by multiple periodicity, creates an upward profluence to launch 2010 World Expo. It then turns to look at how a unified national consciousness emerges and acts as the agent of progress through metonyms. I conclude by discussing how these two discursive devices work together to construct a double-dualistic outlook in Chinese nation branding – both inward- and outward-looking, and both retrospective yet anticipatory.

Mega Events and Nation Branding

Mega events such as the Olympic Games and World Expos are often sought after by countries around the world as golden opportunities for nation branding or rebranding. China is no exception. Since Deng Xiao Ping’s ‘Open Door’ Policy in 1978, the country has invested a staggering amount of resources in promoting its ‘soft power’ to the world, culminating in the Beijing Olympics in 2008, soon followed by the Shanghai World Expo in 2010. The assumption is that the positive associations of these events will be transferred to the host countries or cities (Bodet & Lacassagne 2012). While the Olympic Games are

associated with athleticism, friendship and solidarity, the World Expos are associated with human progress and technological advancement.

Since the first Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All nations was held in London's Crystal Palace in 1851, its mission has always been "to educate the public and promote innovation in the service of human progress"(Bureau International des Expositions Website <http://www.bie-paris.org/site/en.html>). The 1851 Expo in London was hailed as the harbinger of the Industrial Revolution; the 1876 Expo in Philadelphia presented to the public for the first time the typewriter and Bell's telephone. Of course, World Expos are not only "blue prints for building a better tomorrow for humankind" but also "theatres of power" (Rydell, 1993, p. 11). This is especially clear when during the Cold War, the United States of America boasted the high quality of the American life with the GE kitchen at the 1959 Moscow Expo, and the Soviet Union retaliated with a gigantic restaurant housed in a formidable architecture at the 1967 Expo in Montreal (Heller, 1999).

After the Cold War, however, the focus of World Expos has gradually shifted towards sustainable development and environmental concerns, particularly the concern with the impact of the Expo for the host city. The 1992 World Expo in Seville was an opportunity to expand its urban area; the 2000 Expo in Hanover was a strategy to renew its urban space and outdated exhibition facilities, and to brand the city as an eco-friendly and eco-sensitized destination. Similarly, the theme for the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai is 'Better City, Better Life', continuing the theme on city and urban life. Ironically but also unsurprisingly, the urban focus was downplayed in the official government discourse which brands it as a national event, with significance comparable to that of the Beijing Olympics. As Jean-Pierre Lafon, the President of the Bureau of International Exposition, acclaims in his speech during the opening ceremony of the 2010 Expo, "This grand Exhibition will allow you to show the emergence of China at the beginning of the twenty first century" (Lafon, 2010). It is

thus the main objective of this article to examine how such national significance is discursively constructed in a government-sponsored publication and how it in turn contributes to the branding of a new China. Before turning to the analysis, I first outline the theoretical framework informing the current study.

Linking Past and Future Through Narrative Profluence

In his attempt to bridge Heidegger's theory of time with the analysis of narrative, Paul Ricoeur (1980) argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between them: "I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent" (p. 196). Further, he critiques that, while Heidegger's "deep temporality" lies in "the unity of future, present, and past" (p. 180), there is a tendency in literary criticism and structuralism to focus on the past. Similarly, in discourse analysis, although both retrospective and anticipatory dimensions of discourse have been extensively researched, they are often studied separately, with the former perspective predominating in the analysis of narratives, and the latter in the analysis of policy documents, predictions, and other non-narrative genres. However, as Reisigl and Wodak point out, "past events in a society ... are interpreted and perspectivised in narratives re-told and re-constructed in the present" (as cited in Chilton, Tian, & Wodak 2010, p. 496). Another notable exception is Ochs's (1994) article titled "Stories that step into the future," in which she traces how conversation participants move effortlessly between stories about the past and references to present conditions and past events. Furthering the argument, this chapter suggests that the key to understanding the link between retrospection and anticipation lies in an analytical tool familiar to narrative analysts, that is, the plot, or more precisely, narrative profluence (Scollon 2010).

According to Ricoeur (1980), the plot is “the crossing point of temporality and narrativity” (p. 171). It is the narrative correlate of historicity, the second layer of Heidegger’s temporality, our sense of time that recognizes the pattern of past events, the shape of history. And plot is the textual manifestation of this historical pattern. “A story is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events into a story,” says Ricoeur (1980, p. 171). This definition is further taken up by narrative social researchers to distinguish narrative and story (Czarniwska 2004). While a narrative is only a linear sequence of unrelated events, the plot of a story shapes them into a meaningful whole. The plot of a story also shapes how we remember the past. The details of the events as narrated by different individuals might vary, but the order in which these events are told and retold often remains consistent, with similar beginnings and endings. Hence, memories are shared to the extent of which plots are shared (see also Zerubavel, 2003 for the discussion of social memory). In Linde’s (2008) ethnographic study of an insurance company, shared stories are an important resource in building institutional memory, and one’s participation in narrative activity is a key to becoming a member of a “textual community” (see also Ricoeur 1980, p. 179). Although Linde’s own study focuses on the story stock of an institution and the social occasions for telling these stories, she also points out the importance of stories for the present and future of the company: “narration is one very important way that institutions construct their presentation of who they are and what they have done in the past, and **they use these pasts in the present as attempt to shape their future**” (Linde, 2008; emphasis mine).

Despite the common consensus that narrative plays an important role in shaping the future, it is not a genre frequently associated with anticipatory discourse. As summarized by de Saint-Georges (2010), “researchers interested in anticipatory discourse are, generally speaking, concerned with discourses in or about the future.” Political and media discourse are probably the most studied types of anticipatory discourse, as many important decisions are

justified based on the likelihood of a future event. For example, Dunmire (1998, 2005) examines how future events (e.g. terrorist attacks) are often construed as inevitable facts in political discourses. Jaworski and Fitzgerald (2008) examines how politicians manipulate textual features, such as topics, lexical choices, hedging, and context models in their predictions of the results in order to steer the course of election. And conversational storytelling, Ochs (1994) studies future time when it is explicitly referenced. That is, future time tends to be studied only in discourse about the future, but the “deep unity between future, past, and present” à la Heidegger (Ricoeur, 1980) is still scarcely understood.

As the analysis in this chapter attempts illustrate, the key to understand narrative as anticipatory discourse lies in plot, or more precisely, to use Scollon’s (2010 term – narrative profluence. For Ricoeur, plot gives us a tool to understand the anticipatory dimension in the recollection of past events, because a good story captures its audience by keeping them intrigued about the end of the story. It is the knowledge that the end exists yet the end is still unknown that keeps readers turning the page. The attraction of the story is lost once the conclusion is spoiled. However, when applied to analysing events as narrative, plot is not the best candidate, because “the plot’s configuration also superimposes ‘the sense of an ending’ – to use Kermode’s expression – on the open-endedness of mere succession’ (Ricoeur, 1980, p. 179). It is perhaps for this reason that plot has rarely been studied in anticipatory discourse, as this “superimposed sense of ending” sets up an artificial barrier between past and future. Therefore, in the following analysis, I use the term profluence as advanced in Scollon’s (2010) thesis on narrative social analysis, which, like plot, refers to the invisible force (“the unresolved tension that creates curiosity in the reader or listener”) that moves a story along, but which, unlike plot, does not assume a certain pre-existing structure or text-internal ending. Narrative profluence, then, provides the link between texts about the past and events

in the future and addresses the central concern of narrative social analysis (Czarniawska, 2004) – how stories shape social processes.

Opening Up: Reinventing A Progressive Trajectory

About a year before the World Expo officially opened in May 2010, major bookstores in Shanghai as well as other Chinese cities added special display shelves for Expo-related publications in highly visible locations. Among them is 《历史的回眸》 (*Lishi de Huimou*, “Looking Back at History”), a collection of stories of China’s participation in the World Expos from 1851 to 2008 (Yu et al., 2009). Texts in the book were originally produced for a touring exhibition organized by the Shanghai Bureau of World Expo Affairs and Coordination to publicize this mega event around China. Intriguingly, the 2010 event is referred to only once in the book, in a photo of the touring exhibition included in the final section. The five chapters in the book are outlined below, with their original titles and English translations.

第一篇：睁开眼 (1851 ~ 1867)

Chapter 1: Opening eyes (1851 ~ 1867)

第二篇：打开窗 (1873 ~ 1900)

Chapter 2: Opening the window

第三篇：推开门 (1904 ~ 1949)

Chapter 3: Opening the door

第四篇：伸出手 (1982 ~ 2008)

Chapter 4: Extending hands

第五篇：展品的故事

Chapter 5: Stories of Exhibits

Since the fifth chapter consists of stories of individual Chinese products on display at the World Expos, the following analysis will only focus on the first four chapters of the book.

Following a summary of each chapter, I employ Zerubavel's (2003) method of visual typography to illustrate how the book smooths over significant gaps in history and reinvents a unilinear narrative profluence.

The first chapter "Opening Eyes" covers the period of history from 1851 to 1867, in which the imperial government of the Qing Dynasty turned down the invitations to participate in any of the first five World Expos. In this chapter, the insular Qing Government was set in stark contrast against the background of a rapidly industrializing Europe. According to the authors, the lack of participation from China in the early World Expos was a reflection of the imperial government's neglect of technology and commerce. A display room in the Crystal Palace with a sign that says "China" is visible in the panorama picture of the 1851 London Expo. Another painting depicting the reception of foreign officials by the Queen shows a Chinese man dressed in official clothing of Imperial China, an ordinary Chinese person, probably by the name of Xi Sheng (希生), who happened to be aboard a ship that docked on the Thames during the World Fair. As for the China display room and a variety of Chinese exhibits, these were selected by British diplomats and businessmen.

The second chapter covers the historical period from 1873 to 1900, which marks the beginning of China's official participation in World Expos. In 1873, the Qing Government finally accepted the invitation and delegated the task to Robert Hart, a British national from Northern Ireland, who served as the Head of the Chinese Customs of the Qing Dynasty, hence the nickname "Foreign housekeeper of the Chinese Customs" (Yu et al., 2009, p. 18). Given the unmitigated success of the Chinese exhibition at the 1873 Vienna Expo, Hart was asked again by the Qing Government to lead the Chinese Delegation to the 1876 World Expo in Philadelphia, the 1878 World Expo in Paris, and the 1893 Expo in Chicago. Chapter 2 first gives a biographic sketch of Hart and his contributions to introducing China to the World

Expos. Meanwhile, it does not forget to remind the reader that Hart, after all, was British, and thus a colonialist representing imperial interests, especially the British interest in China.

This generalized portrayal of a large number of expatriates in the first section is a preparation for highlighting the impact of World Expos on the few Chinese participants in the subsequent sections. Although these Expos took place at different points in history, the few Chinese representatives shared similar experiences. They first witnessed the success of the Expos, then became inspired with awe by the achievements of Western nations, awoke to the reality that there was gap between China and developed nations, and were determined to work for the prosperity of their motherland. This storyline is repeated in each subsection and thus illustrates what Plaks (1977) calls “multiple historicity,” the cyclic pattern of temporally overlapping events and non-events, commonly found in traditional Chinese novels.

Chapter 3 covers the historical period from 1904 to 1949, the most turbulent time in modern Chinese history. While at previous Expos, China either refused to participate or it sent a delegation comprised mainly of expatriates, at the 1904 Expo in St. Louis, China sent its first official delegation led by Fu Lun Bei Zi (溥伦贝子), a member of the imperial family. In addition to regular items such as silk and tea, they brought with them furniture and pavilions with elaborate carvings and replicas of the imperial palace. A painting of the Mother Queen Ci Xi by an American artist is also said to have hung in the National Gallery of Art for everyone to admire. The scale of China’s participation at the Expo was unprecedented. According to the authors, however, a more important significance of this Expo was that it produced a tremble throughout the late Qing society. The gap between the insular and feudal imperial China and the industrial West had never been so clear. While western countries showcased an array of industrial products, all of the Chinese exhibits were hand-made, which at that time, was a revelation to the Chinese participants that China had no industry at all.

This Expo also motivated the late Qing Government to make policies that promote commerce, trade, and transportation. When China participated again in the 1915 San Francisco-Panama World Expo, the country had undergone major upheavals. The last emperor of Qing was overthrown by revolutionaries. The Republican President, Sun Yat-Sen, however, did not stay in power for long before a military recoup turned the presidency to the warlord Yuan Shikai (袁世凯). Despite the political instability of the Chinese society at the time of the 1915 Expo, the Chinese Pavilion at the Expo had more exhibits than other countries and was hailed as spectacular. Similar to Chapter 2, each World Expo during this historical period, for the authors, showed Chinese the gap between their country and the world and hence presented the opportunity for change. China, however, did not grab this opportunity to connect with the world, due to the muddy domestic political scene and dramatic upheavals.

In comparison with the first three chapters, Chapter 4 “Extending Hands” is more descriptive than narrative. It begins by a detailed description of China’s participation in the 1982 World Expo in Knoxville, followed by a brief introduction of each of the 11 World Expos that China participated in since then, from the 1984 Expo in New Orleans to the 2008 Expo in Zaragoza, Spain. In all of these expos, China showcased its achievements in various areas, such as energy and natural resources, technology and communication. At the Expos during this period, China pavilions also adopted more modern and high-tech presentation technologies. What is more intriguing is how the gap between the end of the third chapter (1949) and the beginning of Chapter 4 (1982) is accounted for in the following excerpt.

Excerpt (1)

中国曾参加不少早期的世博会，但从 1939 年美国纽约世博会以后，由于种种原因，中国和世博会渐行渐远，有过一段分离时期。1949 年 10 月，中华人民共和国成立，1971 年，中国回复在联合国的合法席位，特别是 1978 年以后，中国实行对外开放政策，逐渐融入世界大家庭。从 1982 年美国诺克斯威尔世博会起，中国便以崭新的姿态重新回到世博会这个国际盛会中。

China participated in quite a number of earlier World Expos. But since the 1939 Expo in New York, due to various reasons, China and World Expo walked farther away from each other, leaving a period of separation. In October 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded; in 1971, China gained its seat in the United Nations; especially since 1978, China implemented the "open door" policy and has been gradually assimilated into the big family of the world. Since the 1982 World Expo in Knoxville, China returned to this international party of World Expo with a brand-new poise.

Here the gap between 1939 and 1949 was attributed to merely "various reasons," which would include the Japanese invasion from 1937 to 1945 and the Civil War from the 1945 to 1949. In the second sentence, the gap between 1949 and 1971 was smoothed over as successive historical events, leaving out movements such as the Great Leap Forward and the Great Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. These events brought the country's economic and political development to a halt and repeated the history of closing the country off again to the outside world, which would explain the absence of China from World Expos for nearly half a century, for which the CCP was largely responsible. In fact, during this period, China did participate in World Expos, albeit represented by the Republic of China in Taiwan.

Mentioning these facts would undoubtedly hurt the positive image of CCP as the leader of modern China. However, a more severe but perhaps less noticeable consequence is that doing so would interrupt the upward narrative trajectory that gradually emerged from the first three chapters. Along with the discursive strategy of deletion (van Dijk, 1997), the beginning of the story then contributes to the overall shape of the narrative (Labov, 2006) and its ideological message (Lou, 2010). What we find here is a familiar practice of beginning the narration at the time of decline. Similar to Flowerdew’s (2003) analysis of an exhibition on modern Chinese history in post-colonial Hong Kong, choosing the Opium Wars as the starting point made it possible to highlight the backwardness of the country in the second half of the 20th century and downplay the controversial events in the past fifty years, and consequently positions CCP as the savior of modern China.

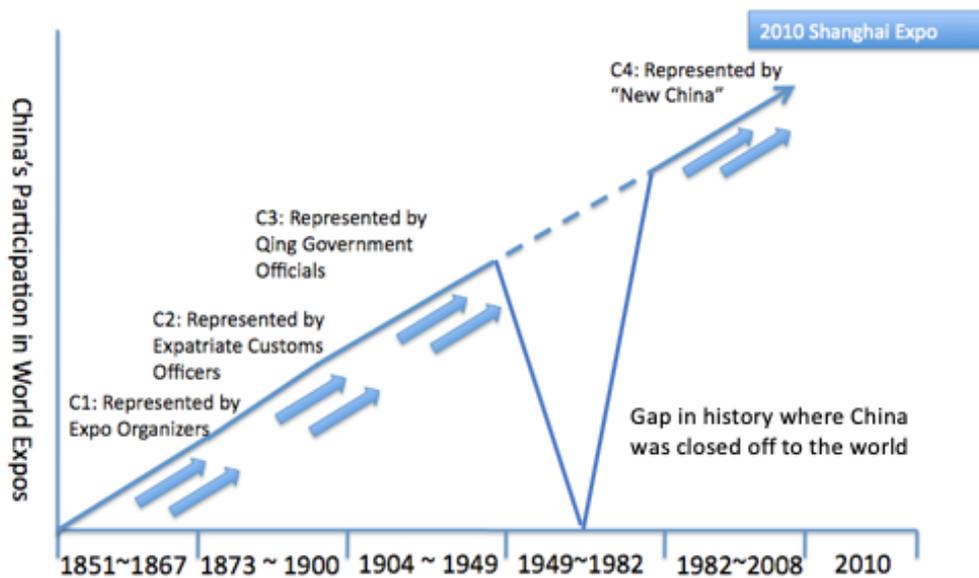


Figure 1: Reinventing narrative profluence in *Looking Back at History*

To summarize, what emerged from the foregoing discussion is a plotline of progress (Zerubavel, 2003), “a ‘later is better’ scenario” that is “commonly manifested in highly

schematic ‘rags-to-riches’ bibliographical narratives” as well as “backward-to-advanced evolutionist narrative” (p. 14-15). As visually represented in Figure 1, these four chapters depict China’s participation at World Expos in a unilinear trajectory, with increased participation and awareness of the importance of opening the country up to the outside. This upward profluence is further enhanced by the multiple periodicities observed in each chapter, where the same plot is repeated in individual encounters with World Expos during the same historical period. By erasing the major social upheavals from 1939 to 1949 which closed the country off to the world, it reinvents an imaginary smooth line connecting the historical period in Chapter 3 with that in Chapter 4 (represented as dotted line in Figure 1). This progressive trajectory stages the World Expo 2010 at the most open time in modern Chinese history and brands the CCP as a progressive leader.

Becoming One: The Emergence of a Unified National Consciousness

In addition to the progressive profluence found in this historical narrative, another trend that has emerged is the increasing use of metonymic country names throughout the chapters, a common discourse tactic observed in the discourse of nationalism (Billig, 1995). Whereas in the first two chapters, the country name “China” is distinguished from an array of characters including the Chinese government at that time, in the third and fourth chapters, “China” often stands for the Chinese nation, government, and people.

In the first chapter, the authors make a clear distinction between the Qing government, China, and Chinese people, as illustrated in Excerpt 2. Contrasting “Qing Government” and “China” in this statement excludes the potential use of the former as a metonym standing for the latter, and vice versa. In other words, the Qing Government’s reluctance to participate in World Expos did not necessarily represent the will of the Chinese people.

Excerpt (2)

“虽然当时的清政府对早期世界博览会不以为意，但这并不妨碍这些博览会里出现中国展室，中国展品以及中国人”(Yu et al 2009: 5)

Although the Qing Government at that time did not care much about the early World Expos, it did not prevent the presence of the China display room, Chinese exhibits, and Chinese people (at the Expos). (Yu et al 2009: 5)

While the word 中国 (*zhongguo*; “China”) occurred for a total of 65 times in this chapter, most are used as adjectival modifiers as in 中国人 (*zhongguo ren*; Chinese people), 中国产品 (*zhongguo chanping*; Chinese products), or 中国展室 (*zhongguo zhanshi*; Chinese exhibition hall), as in the above excerpt, and only two occurrences are metonyms for the Chinese government. On the other hand, out of the seven references to the Qing Government or Qing Dynasty, there is only one metonymic usage, representing the ignorance of “Chinese people then” of the importance of World Expos, as shown in Excerpt 3. As a result, participation in World Expos is discursively represented as an act performed by “China,” while lack of participation is explained in terms of the ignorance of the “Qing Dynasty.”

Excerpt (3)

当时的中国人把世界展览会称为“炫奇会”或“赛奇会”，这是大清帝国对世界博览会的一种理解。

Chinese people then called World expos “Novelty Fair,” which is how the Qing Empire understood World Expos.

The second chapter continues the trend in the first chapter of using “China” as metonym for a government that is open to interaction with the West and more willing to participate in World Expos. Out of the 183 occurrences of the word “China” in this chapter, 25 of them stand for

the Chinese delegation that mainly consists of expatriates such as Robert Hart as mentioned in the previous section. That is, China was represented by British colonials. As we can see in Excerpt 4 below, the authors display an ambivalent stance toward the contribution of British colonials to the success of the Chinese delegation and question their ability to represent China.

Excerpt (4)

从中国参加博览会筹备到最后的結果看，这次展览会是比较成功的，但这是谁的成功呢？不是晚清政府的，也不是清代商人的，它是赫德和以他为首的海关洋员的，是洋人控制的旧中国海关的。对中华民族来说它是不是一种成功呢？对中国的影响又有哪
些呢？(Yu et al., 2009: 31)

From the results of China's participation in the World Expo, this exhibition (1984 Vienna Expo) was relatively successful. But whose success is this? It does not belong to the late Qing Government or Qing merchants; rather, it belongs to Hart and the other foreign expatriates like him, to old China's Customs. Then, is it a success of the Chinese nation? What are its implications for China?

The historical period covered in Chapter 3 (1904 ~ 1949) sees more frequent use of "China" as metonym for the Chinese Government (18.8%), especially after the Qing Dynasty was succeeded by the Republic of China in 1911. Similar to the previous chapters, the only instance in which the imperial Qing Government stood for China was in the description of Chinese crafts in contrast to the industrial achievements of the West. It was not given credit for the unprecedented success achieved by the Chinese delegation, which was instead attributed to "China," the nation.

After the unexplained gap of nearly forty years, chapter 4 starts with the 1982 World Expo in Knoxville, where the People's Republic of China sent its first delegation to World

Expos. In this chapter, the term 新中国 (*xin zhongguo*; new China) appears for the first time, and there are more occurrences of 我国(*woguo*; our country) as well. The percentage of using “China” as metonym standing for the Chinese government is lower compared with that in Chapter 3, mainly due to the frequent mention of “China pavilion” in the 12 World Expos covered in this single chapter. On the other hand, the word zhengfu (政府; government) only occurred three times in this chapter, none of which conflates with China as a country. In other words, it seems that the national label “China” has gradually absorbed the referent of the Chinese government into its semantic scope, which is essential in creating a unified national brand.

	Number and percentage of “China” as metonym for government	Number and percentage of “Government” as metonym for China
Chapter 1	2/65 (3.1%)	2/6 (33%)
Chapter 2	25/183 (13.7%)	1/20 (5%)
Chapter 3	31/160 (19.4%)	1/12 (8.3%)
Chapter 4	17/124 (13.7%)	0/3 (0%)

Table 1: Frequences of "China" and "Government" as metonyms for the Chinese nation

As summarized in Table 1, we see how the increased participation in international events as discussed in the previous section is attributed to the current government in power, who is made synonymous with the Chinese nation, whereas the lack of participation as described in Chapter 1 was attributed to the “weak and corrupt” imperial Chinese government, who did not represent China. The grand historical narrative analyzed here not only builds a trajectory of progress by leaving out long, turbulent historical periods but it also contributes to Chinese nation branding by *differentiating* the CCP from its predecessors as progressive and open to the world.

Conclusions: Writing National History in the Future

After Billig (1995), linguists have contributed to our understanding of the discursive construction of nationalism (e.g. De Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak 1999; Condor, 2000; Bishop & Jaworski, 2003; Wodak et al., 2009) by paying attention to the “little words.” This chapter examined the use of country name – *zhongguo* (China) as metonym standing for various governments that ruled China and the Chinese people. In addition, the analysis of a historic text has the advantage of showing how such usage varies across historical periods. In stark contrast to such “metonymic stereotype” (Billig, 1995), the lack of Chinese participation in the first historical period is depicted as the shameful deed of the Qing Government, which is linguistically singled out as the insular Other.

This article also contributes to the existing body of work on discourse and nationalism by examining the plotline or profluence in narrative discourse, an understudied discursive and branding strategy. By analysing its overall plotline, we have found that the publication builds a progressive narrative trajectory, exemplifying the way in which modern Chinese history has often been written. As Duara (1997) observes, this pattern of linear historical progression indicates the profound influence of Enlightenment philosophers, such as Hegel, on Chinese intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it coincided with the emergence of a discrete and modern national identity.

National history secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time. This reified history derives from the linear, teleological model of Enlightenment History ... It allows the nation-state to see itself as a unique form of community which finds its place in the opposition between tradition and modernity, hierarchy and equality, empire and nation. ... In contrast to them (dynasties, aristocracies, and ruling priests and mandarins), the nation is a collective historical subject poised to realize its destiny in a modern future. (Duara, 1997, p. 2)

The analysis in this chapter then shows how the nation as “a collective historical subject” is constructed discursively. Presented simultaneously with the progressive trajectory, it is then also represented as the agent of progress, responsible for not only the achievements of the past but also those of the future, including hosting, rather than simply participating in, the World Expo.

While heeding Scollon (2010)’s advice of considering alternative narrative influences in the analysis of social issues in different cultural contexts, I would also like to suggest that we beware of the notion of a monolithic “Chinese narrative”. Characteristics of classic Chinese novels are not often found in contemporary Chinese discourse. In fact, as this analysis has shown, the writing of modern Chinese history is rather heavily influenced by the Enlightenment mode of thinking, particularly the idea of progress. In this more complicated picture, we see how “multiple historicities,” a structural feature of traditional Chinese narratives, is combined with the modern, linear, teleological history to enhance the upward influence of the latter, thereby illustrating the continuous dialectical influence between Chinese and Western scholars. Thus, by considering various narrative possibilities, we are able to reach a better understanding of how textual accounts of past events can serve as a stage for a future event and, conversely, how the future event is represented as a chapter in an unfolding history of the rising nation.

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