The impact of the Beijing Games
a unit of work for 11 to 14-year-olds
by Dr. Andrew Lee

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Introduction
This unit covers the wide-ranging impact of the Beijing Games of 2008. China is planning the 2008 games on a grand scale and planning to use the event as an opportunity for China to reveal itself to the world. China wants this to be a surprise. Journalists visiting the already famous Bird’s Nest stadium have been warned to not take photographs so as not to detract from the surprise on 8 August 2008. Wang Wei, Secretary-General of the Beijing Organising Committee, said: ‘The world does not really know as much about China as we wish’, implying that the Games was to be a moment when China can reveal itself to the world as a new and worthy world player. Many regarded the Sydney Olympics as a similar opportunity.

Rationale for this unit
This unit aims to increase student understanding of the complex relationships at stake with the staging of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. In this unit, students will be asked to:
• assess the impact of the 2008 Beijing Games on the Chinese, local and international society and economies
• consider the extent to which the Beijing Olympics come at a good time for China, given the current situation of the country
• assess how far China is managing to ensure that the Games is a sustainable event
• conduct independent research on issues relating to China.

There is a separate resource sheet at the end of this document where questions are summarised.

How to organise the activities
Activity 1: Impact assessment of the Beijing Games (1 lesson)
For this lesson you will need copies of Activity Resource Sheet C1: How Olympic Games impact on local society and economies, Activity Resource Sheet C2: China country profile and Activity Resource Sheet C3: Beijing city profile. Introduce the lesson as an exercise in impact assessment.

1. Ask the class to volunteer categories that might need to be assessed when writing an impact assessment of the Olympics in China. Write these on cards and affix/pin to the board. Then consolidate cards that might be similar.
2. Have students try to organise the remaining categories into an order of importance.
3. Have students consider the local circumstances that make the holding of the games difficult, including the political context of the games. Students might be asked to try to find out about features of the way that China manages its society and how this might differ from conditions elsewhere in the world.
4. Ask students to work in pairs and to consider specific scenarios that might cause problems given the political situation in China.

Student handout—Activity Resource Sheet C1: How Olympic Games impact on local society and economies.

Activity 2: Identifying change
Look at the collage of photographs provided on Activity Resource Sheet C4 and try to identify evidence of recent change and areas that might see change during and beyond the Olympics. What impact will the Olympics have on the people and places featured in the photographs? Use the checklist and work through the photographs thinking about the information you have already come across with the earlier activities on China and Beijing.
You will need to think carefully about how to answer these questions because the impacts of mega-events can be significant and may impact in any number of ways.

Social planners try to anticipate the impact of such events on societies and the economy even though this can be a difficult task.

Activity 3: How green are my games? Assessing specific initiatives of the Beijing games (1 lesson)
Using the internet look through the Beijing Olympics 2008 website, local Chinese press, the BBC, CNN and Wikipedia to find out what is happening in terms of presenting a green games. Be aware that the press in China is not free, and some news agencies may not give information that is entirely accurate.

Using a range of sources find what is being said about the challenge and prospects for a green Olympics in Beijing in 2008.

At the end of your investigation give some assessment as to the degree to which you think the Chinese situation is being well reported.

Activity 4: Additional research
Read through the questions on Activity Resource Sheet C7 and answer them using the resources that your teacher has made available for you.
Beijing has a dependence on bicycles even though personal car ownership is on the rise. Rickshaws have been banned from the centre of the city.

Tourism has already started to grow in anticipation of the Olympic Games.

Reporters without borders
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

The Chinese news agency Xinhua has come in for international criticism for not being entirely truthful in its reporting. More recently it has been accused of publishing news that is critical of Chinese policy, but it has been suggested that this has been a kind of subterfuge to create a sense of authenticity especially as these stories have not been published in Chinese.

The organisation Reporters without Borders creates a measure of press freedom and has shown that China is rated 163 out of the 169 entries although it has shown modest improvements since 2002. When looking at China-sourced information, it is worthwhile keeping this in mind and trying, wherever possible, to check the validity of news with what has been reported by western reporters. Reporters without Borders is using the Olympics as an opportunity to coerce China to improve its record in terms of integrity in reporting.

See <www.rsf.org>.
Activity Resource Sheet C1: How Olympic Games impact on local society and economies

In a report written for the Government of British Columbia in Canada it was suggested that the Olympic Games are sought by countries for a range of reasons including:

- While the development of sport, athleticism and world peace are underlying themes of all Olympic Games, the decision to host an Olympic Games has as much to do with the social, psychological or economic stimulus that can be derived from such large events. Some cities have used the games as a catalyst for urban renewal. The 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney, for example, were developed on a site that had been home to an unusable swamp, a meat packing house, a brick works and a munitions dump. Some countries have used the games to legitimize their claim to first world economic status. All hosts aim to raise their international profile.

There are many other reasons why host countries might want to host the games, and every country that has considered hosting the games will have thought about what it might choose to highlight.

**Economic benefits**

There is no doubt that economic benefits are high on the list of countries deciding to seek the hosting of a mega event such as the Olympic Games. In particular there is a number of key areas in which financial gain is sought:

- **Labour**
  The demand for labour in hosting and preparing for the games is seen as an important economic benefit by providing local and national jobs and income.

- **Urban infrastructure**
  The construction of improved transport, roads, public facilities, lighting, housing etc, is a big benefit for the host city.

- **Sporting infrastructure**
  The construction of improved sporting facilities are regarded as having little long term value to local communities, with sporting events being regarded as a 'luxury' product.

- **Incremental impact (income)**
  The income expected to be raised by an Olympic Games is often exaggerated, however, in some cases, games have generated high income. As income is spread around it is often difficult for it to be accurately measured. Income is normally measured using GDP (gross domestic product). The impact on income from additional tax also needs to be considered. New investment can also attract further investment (multiplier effect).

- **Improve tourism recognition**
  The games bring wide media coverage and this helps to make a place more attractive for tourists, not only during the games, but for many years afterwards.

**Social benefits**

Not all benefits associated with the Games are best measured economically, as there are other factors that affect their worth and success. In addition to direct financial benefits, there are also social benefits that may or may not be measured by money:

- **Empowerment of low income residents**
  Providing employment to local and national workers who may be unemployed or underemployed provides a level of wealth that might not otherwise be enjoyed. In so doing local people benefit from being a part of a national event.

- **Uniting the people**
  Mega events such as the games help to create a sense of community. Volunteering, participation and engaging with foreign visitors, as a group creates a sense of national unity.

- **Feel good factor and national pride**
  The games provides a kind of national euphoria which creates a sense of national pride.

- **Inspirational experience especially for children**
  The games constitutes a national event which draws together educational experience and creates a focus for children.

- **Sporting facility legacy**
  The preparation for the games implies the construction of a sporting infrastructure that can promote a stronger national sporting life.

- **Urban/social renewal**
  Most modern games have involved the (often well overdue) renewal of run down areas of the city. Urban renewal has a positive and lasting effect on social structure and neighbourhoods.

- **Foreign policy objectives**
  The games is an opportunity for diplomatic progress and the developing of international friendship. Whilst this may be economically motivated, the games firstly plays an connecting role between nations.

**Environmental benefits**

The games are sensitive to the environment of the host country and some recent games have had a highly-profiled ‘green’ focus. A successful environmental games is one based on activities that are sustainable. This means that the games should serve to not damage the local natural, social, cultural and economic environment.

- **Sustainability**
  The games needs to have an objective of protecting the local environment and all that that might include.

- **Construction**
  In addition to sustainability programmes, construction needs to be particularly sensitive to local needs and circumstance.
Activity Resource Sheet C2: China—Country profile

China is in a state of flux because it is growing rapidly, urbanising quickly, and some individuals are growing wealthy. It is producing a vast quantity of exported goods for which it is being extremely competitive, but this is having an impact upon work practices within the country. However, because China is trading more with other countries and coming into contact with the West, the country’s practices are being watched more and more. China’s massive population and economic growth means that it is hungry for energy and is responsible for the release of large amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. China’s government is Communist and totalitarian and therefore operates in a way quite different to western democracies, and this approach also makes it often the subject of criticism. This resource sheet looks in more detail at some of these characteristics under the headings of economy, society and environment.

Economy

The Chinese economy is the second largest in the world, to the US economy. In 2006 its GDP was US$10.2 trillion. The government has changed the way the economy operates from a Soviet-style planned economy to a more market-driven economy that involves international trade. The Chinese economy is the fastest growing in the world and along with economic reform is drawing many Chinese out of poverty, although growing inequalities of wealth are also appearing.

• Labour
  Although China has massive manufacturing and agricultural industries, there is still much underemployment with areas risk of high levels of unemployment, especially as inefficient state factories close operations. While new industries are booming, sunset industries are driving increasing unemployment. In 2007 the unemployment rate in China was 9 per cent; much lower than elsewhere, but still a large number of people.

• Infrastructure
  Infrastructure, such as roads, rail, electricity and water supply, in China is highly variable. For a country that is building its economy at a rapid pace, one of the most pressing issues is transport. Roads, rail and shipping infrastructure, as well as specific infrastructure for moving people, varies widely from high-tech Maglev trains in Shanghai to unreliable roads in rural areas.

• Income
  Although income levels have been rising consistently there is still much exploitation of workers. Because companies wield the threat of unemployment, workers compete for jobs and often accept lower wages and poor conditions. Incomes can be as low as US$1 per hour and conditions can be dangerous and long. Labour laws are often poorly observed.

• International trade
  International trade fuels China’s rapid economic growth. Not only is the scale of trade significant, but every year there are large increases in the scale of operations. China’s major industries include mining and ore, iron, steel, aluminium, coal, petroleum, fertilizers, consumer products, food processing, transport, ships, telecommunications equipment, etc.

• Foreign investment
  The development of the Chinese economy has allowed the influx of foreign money. This money, which has mainly come from Asia, has been a big factor in Chinese development and the growth of employment.

Society

Chinese society is made up of a wide variety of ethnic groups. Many of these groups retain their language and ethnic identity. Still, 70 per cent of the population speak Mandarin, often with their local dialect. Although China has historically been an advanced nation, in the 17th Century it lost its lead and is only now refocusing on science and technology.

• Chinese identity
  One of the challenges facing Chinese society is how to maintain a Chinese identity as the country changes rapidly. It is still unclear what the ‘new’ China will ultimately be like. China adopted a ‘one country, two systems’ concept, a term coined by Deng Xiaoping, to manage the way Hong Kong, Macau and other areas would be administered. More recently, in the face of a
new market economy, this makes less sense and it is a concern as to how this transition might be managed.

• Taiwan
Relations between Taiwan and China are sensitive because of their involvement with the USA in international relations. China does not recognise Taiwan as a separate country and it vetos Taiwan’s application to become a member of the United Nations, at which they currently have no representation. There has been increasing pressure for Taiwan to be included in the UN, in 2007.

• Human rights issues
Human rights abuses in China include: high levels of capital punishment including for white collar crimes and a mistreatment of regional groups seeking autonomy such as Tibetans. Freedom of speech and information in China is managed with many websites being blocked and the media being controlled. The one child policy, whilst having been effective in managing China’s population growth is seen as being in violation of people’s human right to bear children.

Environment
Rapid industrialisation has fueled the demand for energy and natural resources. Such rapid growth has led to the release of much greenhouse gas into the atmosphere as well as the damaging land resources. The demand for resources has meant that energy infrastructure has been constructed without due care for the environment. Challenging this output is difficult, however, as energy availability is key to China’s continued economic growth.

• Air pollution
In 2007 the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency announced that China had surpassed the USA as the world’s largest producer of carbon dioxide exceeding America’s 5600 million tonnes. Many industrial cities are highly polluted. Of the 338 cities in which air quality measures are made, two-thirds are regarded as polluted with the majority of these being either moderately or severely polluted. This pollution contributes to climate change and is responsible for localised disease and mortality.

• Water and water pollution
Water presents a problem in China not only because of pollution, but also because of water shortages that face some areas including cities. Most urban water bodies are highly polluted and tap water in most cities is not safe. Half the country’s population lack access to clean drinking water. In the north of the country the lack of water is a real constraint to economic growth—many cities have an acute water shortage. Water has also caused controversy through the Three Gorges Dam project that is seen by many as a man-made environmental disaster for many reasons, including the silting up of the Yangtze River. Nevertheless, the dam is expected to generate a large amount of sustainable energy and to protect large areas from flooding. The cost, both financial and to the environment, not to mention the impact of relocating 1.4 million persons, has raised the overall cost of the project.

• Land pollution and degradation
Around 30 per cent of China’s land mass is desert. The Gobi desert has an area of around 1.295 million square kilometres—more than one-and-a-half times the size of New South Wales or five-and-a-half times the total land area of the United Kingdom—and has been increasing by around 3,600 square kilometres per year as the result of desertification caused by water overuse, deforestation and industrialisation. The loss of farmland to this process is valued at around US$50 billion per annum. While there are other forms of land degradation, such as the accumulation of heavy metals and pesticide residues in the soil, desertification is the most serious.

• Energy demand
China is aware of its energy shortfalls and is building large numbers of coal-fired power stations to provide itself with energy. At the same time it is trying to find ways to use energy more efficiently and is exploring alternative and sustainable sources of energy. However, the degree to which sustainable energy sources are likely to make a big impact on China’s overall carbon footprint in the foreseeable future remains to be seen.
Activity Resource Sheet C3: Beijing city profile

Beijing is China’s second largest city with a population of around 17 million people. Like many cities in China, Beijing is experiencing rapid growth, fueled largely by urbanisation. While urban prosperity is rising, there are many living dangerously close to or below the poverty line. Living conditions for many continue to be harsh and despite the onset of the Olympic Games there is still massive underemployment, which is more to do with the numbers in Beijing than the lack of available work. Such underemployment continues to keep both wages and working conditions low/poor, especially amongst ethnic immigrants not holding a Beijing working pass. There are many changes afoot in Beijing many of which local authorities would like to have complete by the beginning of the Olympic Games on 8 August 2008.

Pollution

Beijing is a highly polluted city. The air pollution comes from the fact that the city lies in a basin that is more than a hundred kilometres from the coast and this basin collects pollutants and dust which hangs over the city often unable to escape. Dust blows into Beijing from the increasingly desertified Mongolian plains. A third of China’s landmass is now desert with areas growing due to overgrazing. The Yong Ding River that flows through Beijing continues to be a destination for industrial waste, although recent developments have meant that effluent now often enters the river through more hidden channels and is often released after dark. See <www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/envronmt/2005/0704pollutionchina.htm>. In anticipation of the Games, new regulations have led to high-polluting companies relocating as they have been unable to afford the expense of creating cleaner operations. Other factories will remain closed during the Olympic period. The Chinese are keeping careful track of the pollution and are measuring blue sky days, but they are often unable to do anything about the combination of factors that draw pollution into the city. Part of Beijing’s success with their Olympic bid was to create a green games. Ironically, a lot of the dust pollution in the city is a result of the building work that has been undertaken in the city in preparation for the games. There remains a high level of small particulate matter in the air, which exceeds World Health Organisation (WHO) safe levels. See <www.nytimes.com/2007/12/29/world/asia/29china.html?_r=1&pagewanted=3&ref=asia>.

Water supply

Beijing suffers from massive undersupply of water resources. Additionally, much water in regional areas around the city, especially in the large open watercourses, is not only unsuitable for human consumption but cannot be used even for irrigation. Water in some lakes is now only suitable for industrial use. Untreated waste water, industrial effluent and agricultural pollution accounts for most of the damage that has been done to water resources.

Economy

In 2006 Beijing’s GDP was US$97 billion, an increase of 12 per cent over the previous year. Like most cities in China, Beijing is growing at a surging pace.

Demography

While the majority of local residents of Beijing are Han Chinese, there is also a large expatriate population. In addition, there is also a large number of illegal workers who are in Beijing without a permit, which is cause for concern among administrators in the city. Chinese authorities allow these people to take only the most menial and lowly-paid of employment.

Manufacturing

Beijing is showing strong local market growth in real estate and local prosperity is fueling the demand for private cars, which have not been highly taxed as has been the case in Shanghai. Zones within Beijing have emerged for the sale of pharmaceuticals and IT. The manufacture and sale of pirated goods, especially DVDs, is a growing market, principally aimed at expatriates living in the city.

Urban living

Historically urban citizens lived in hutongs, small clustered family-based residential units accommodating extended families independently, but facing onto a communal area. The increase in land values in Beijing has made this living difficult, damaging the extended family structure that has historically been part of Chinese life.

Vehicular traffic

Traffic jams continue to be a problem in Beijing, although some significant changes have been implemented including the creation of peak hour bus-only streets designed to encourage people on to public transport. Additional circuit roads have also been constructed to make vehicular traffic more efficient in a city that has long been known for its road shortcomings. Pollution caused by vehicular traffic is being addressed by increased fuel economy standards and a restriction on car use.

Metropolitan subway

The Beijing metro has been regarded as a ‘minimal’ service given the profile of the city’s geography and population. Prior to preparations for the 2008 Games there was 142 kilometres of metropolitan track and in anticipation of the Games more lines and stations will be opened. By 2015 the city is expected to have a 561-kilometre network.
China’s population is ageing and health is improving. It is very common for older Chinese to be exercising in groups in the park or taking long walks with their dogs or other animals. This man has taken his bird for a walk.

Chinese citizens learning the words of the Olympic song in a local park, along with how to say ‘Welcome to Beijing’ in English.

Above: Large new housing estates built adjacent to the Olympic village

New recycling bins installed throughout Beijing
The Bird’s Nest Stadium and Aquatic Centre at Beijing’s Olympic Green—two iconic stadiums built for the 2008 Games.

Below: Traffic in Beijing has been addressed but still enormous traffic jams occur in the city.

A soldier stands guard outside the Forbidden City in Tianamen Square in Beijing.

The population of Beijing continues to grow because of rural–urban migration. The one child policy is in force here, as it is in other parts of China.
Activity Resource Sheet C5: Potential Impact Checklist

Using the checklist below and the photographs in Activity Resource Sheet C4, consider the current issues, the impacts of changes associated with the Games and the longer-term impacts relating to the area that the photograph represents. In some instances you will need to think creatively about what the photographs might represent and just how you will need to answer the question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current issues (before)</th>
<th>Environmental impact</th>
<th>Obstacles to change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic impact</td>
<td>Social impact</td>
<td>Long-term impact (after)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Old man in park with bird
   - Low income, family moved away, little local interest

2. Recycling bins
   - Moderate impact depending on how people react to this new way of thinking, and whether it is supported by advertising, etc.

3. Bird’s Nest stadium
   - The stadium, as part of the Games construction program, is a symbol that reflects Chinese identity and helps to create a shared identity

4. Small child in bicycle tray
   - More employment available in Beijing with longer-term potential in terms of tourism and economic development.

5. Soldier in Tianamen Square
   - The Games has the potential to act as an opportunity for diplomatic relations. Greater peace makes for a stronger economy and stability.

6. Traffic in Beijing
   - Improvements in road infrastructure may help, but there is little planned to create disincentives to car ownership.

Write a paragraph that summarises some of the most significant impacts on Beijing (underline your choice) giving your reasons why these might be important to the city’s current situation.
Activity Resource Sheet C6: Internet survey—how green are my games?

Using the information below seek information about the green initiatives of the Beijing Olympics. Use the internet to search for information on the official Beijing Olympics website, Chinese news sites, national and international news sites. Try to get a feel for the tone of news entries from different sources. Write a short paragraph on each of the source areas that you have investigated. To what extent is it possible to tell whether the information coming from China is balanced and accurate?

Information from the official Beijing Olympics website:

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________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________

Information from the Chinese news sites:

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________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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Information from news sites from an international news website such as CNN, BBC etc:

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To what extent do you think that the reporting from China is accurate?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Are there any questions that are raised from international sources and/or the Reporters without Borders site, which remain undiscussed in the Chinese press?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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Do you think that the Beijing games will be a green success?

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________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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Activity Resource Sheet C7: Additional research

Activity 1: Impact assessment of the Beijing Games (Activity resource sheets C1, C2 and C3)
• What categories might need to be assessed when writing an impact assessment of the Olympics in China?
• What order of importance would these categories have?
• What local conditions and circumstances might make the Beijing Games difficult?
• Consider specific situations that might cause problems given the political situation in China.

Activity 2: Identifying change (Activity resource sheets C4 and C5)
• Look at the collage of photographs that is provided (Activity Resource Sheet C4) and try to identify evidence of recent change and areas which might see change during and beyond the Olympics.
• What impact will the Games have on the people and places featured in the photographs?
• Use the checklist (Activity Resource Sheet C5) and work through the photographs thinking about the information you have already come across with the earlier exercises on China and Beijing.

Activity 3: How green are my games? Assessing specific initiatives of the Beijing games (Activity resource sheet C6)
• Using the internet investigate the Beijing Olympics 2008 website, local Chinese press, the BBC, CNN and Wikipedia to find out what is happening in terms of creating a green games. Be aware that the press in China is not free, and some news agencies may not give information that is entirely accurate.
• Using a range of sources find out what is being said about the challenges and prospects for a green Games in Beijing in 2008.
• At the end of your investigation give some assessment as to the degree to which you think the Chinese situation is being well reported.

Activity 4: Additional research and activities
• Use the internet to find out what the term ‘development’ means. How would you begin to measure how developed China might be?
• Suggest what might be the greatest challenges to development in China in the future.
• Create a Powerpoint or keynote presentation that shows aspects of development and underdevelopment in China.
• Divide the class into three groups. Decide which group will look at economic, social and environmental factors. Each group should then do some investigation to determine what issues China is facing in this area. Each group should then come back together to decide which of these are the most important and then allocate investigation tasks to smaller groups of students who can prepare a one page summary on their field. Compiling the information should provide a fact booklet of issues facing China and Chinese development.

This could be done online as a homework task using an online document-sharing tool such as Wikispaces.