

# Human Rights & Human Welfare

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Volume 8

Issue 5 *May Roundtable: An Annotation of "China's Olympic Delusion" by Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom*

Article 1

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5-2008

## May Roundtable: Introduction

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### Recommended Citation

(2008) "May Roundtable: Introduction," *Human Rights & Human Welfare*: Vol. 8: Iss. 5, Article 1.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol8/iss5/1>



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## May Roundtable: Introduction

### Abstract

An annotation of:

"China's Olympic Delusion" by Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom. Nation. March 19, 2008.

### Keywords

Human rights, China, Olympics

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**"China's Olympic Delusion" by Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom. *Nation*. March 19, 2008.**

An Annotation

With the Beijing 2008 Summer Games peeking over the horizon, the People's Republic of China is at center stage—an unfamiliar place for the long-time isolationist and consistently secretive country. With this new attention, however, comes new responsibility. China postures to be the superpower of the future and a trustworthy business partner, but its continued repression of democratic freedoms and suppression of Tibetan self-determination severely impede China's ability to legitimize itself and garner the necessary credibility emblematic of a global leader. Wasserstrom's article takes a particular angle on this widespread debate by discussing whether or not China will be able to control its public image under the bright lights of the Olympics, given mass communication as accessible as it is and the critics as vociferous as they are.

**“...it remains doubtful that the regime will be able to keep tourists or spectators in Beijing from voicing support for the Dalai Lama or making eye-catching pro-Tibet gestures while the games are actually taking place in August.”**

While in the lead up to the Games, China attempts to [utilize visual imagery](#) to malign Tibetan protestors as violent, or [deploy nationalistic bloggers](#) to tote the Party-line online, when international media descends on Beijing, much will be out of the hands of the central administration. Outraged human rights advocates will seize on this opportunity to leverage China's exposed vulnerability in the eyes of the world. However, to what lengths is the Chinese government willing to go to protect its public persona in preparation for its “coming-out” party? We have already witnessed [crackdowns](#) against pro-democratic activism within China and will likely see more. The short-term costs could well be high for what some see as a long-term project of integration into international society.

**“...the tragic and farcical developments in recent weeks underscore the inherent conflict between China's desire to place itself in the global spotlight and its hope that no one will focus on the nation's flaws.”**

Within human rights circles, there is an ongoing debate surrounding China and nations like it: is steady constructive engagement likely to provoke change within a traditional stalwart or is a tougher, abrasive stance more productive in prompting human rights progress? Providing China with the ultimate stage on which either to shine or embarrass itself in the process may be the perfect control group for this experiment to play out. Or, as critics suggest, has the international community honored and appeased China the abuser by allowing it to host an Olympic games? Looking forward, for China to truly emerge as a global leader it must confront international norms, including universal human rights protection. And this summer we will all be witness to this major face-off.

All this and more in this month's installment of *HRHW's* Roundtable...