

## 2008 Beijing Olympics, Air Pollution, & Adoption By Joshua Zhong

On August 8, 2008, at 8:08:08 am Beijing time, the 2008 Olympic Torch and the largest fireworks demonstration ever witnessed in human history will illuminate the opening of the Games of the XXIX Olympiad. Between August 8 and 24, more than 10,500 athletes from around the world will compete in 302 events in 28 summer sports, watched by 4 billion viewers around the world, made possible by more than 20,000 journalists and media organizations.

Can you imagine how chaotic and exciting this huge city of more than 15 million people will be during the 16 days of the Olympic Games?

China is capable of impressing the world with daring and beautiful sports stadium architecture, which will all be finished way ahead of schedule; with the most fantastic opening and closing ceremony fireworks the world has ever seen, reminding everyone that China is where fireworks were first invented; and with first-class Asian hospitality reflected on the smiling faces of its Chinese people, its exquisite cuisines, and its historical treasures such as the Great Wall of China and the Forbidden City. However, the ultimate challenge for China will be the air pollution hanging over the Games and this ancient city. Beijing wants desperately to show a blue sky to the world on the opening day of the Olympic Games, and they want to make sure that no athlete's health is compromised by breathing the polluted air.

Image is everything for this five-thousand-year-old civilization that puts ultimate value on protecting "face." Therefore, Beijing has determined to "create" a blue sky on 8/8/08, an extremely lucky number in China, by all measures possible. Drastic steps already taken include:

- Shutting down or relocating steel, coal, and chemical companies that are categorized as heavy polluters. This costly effort has been credited with the recent air quality improvement in Beijing.
- Prohibiting coal burning in the city. A northern city that deals with unbearable cold in the winter, Beijing has relied on coal for centuries for its heat. The Beijing government has invested billions of dollars in the past twenty years and has successfully installed gas lines to all residential communities.
- Outlawing the use of leaded gasoline for automobiles and banning the operation of any commercial vehicles older than 10 years, as well as any personal vehicles older than six years that fail the annual emissions test.
- Introducing advanced Western environmental technology to tackle immediate and long-term pollution issues. In fact, environmental investment in China is becoming one of the most profitable businesses today.
- Building a "Protect Beijing's Air" alliance with neighboring cities and provinces such as Tianjin, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, and Hebei, which contribute to Beijing's air pollution. In the name of "Blue Sky Olympics," these cities and provinces must be willing to sacrifice

their economy by adhering to Beijing's strict air quality standards, especially during the Games.

- Rotating the mobility of commercial vehicles a few times a year by implementing an “even and odd number system.” That is, on any odd number day, such as 1, 3, 5, only those vehicles with odd license plate numbers are allowed to come into the city, with even-numbered days for even-numbered license plate vehicles, respectively.
- Expanding the public transportation system. As of today, Beijing's public buses, although still lacking in quantity, are accessible to all communities and are capable of taking its citizens to almost any part of the city. In the meantime, Beijing is further expanding its underground rail system, which carries 2 million passengers a day and about 600 million a year.

More or less, these measures are working. According to the latest report from Beijing's government, “blue sky” days have increased from about 170 days to almost 240 days between June 2006 and June 2007. Beijing is obviously not comfortable yet with this encouraging number. Therefore, they have some secret measures in hand to be implemented before and during the 2008 Olympic Games. Here are a few speculated last-minute measures:

- Shutting down the operation of most air-polluting companies in and around Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Inner Mongolia, and Shanxi a few weeks before and during the Games. This will equal the economic loss of billions of dollars. But compared with the goal of a Blue Sky Beijing Olympics 2008, it is a price Beijing is willing to pay.
- Immobilizing more than one million vehicles during the Games. Public transportation will be the main method to move people around.
- Possibly giving all “non-essential” residents two to three weeks off to reduce the burden of traffic and crowds and to allow people to watch the Games.

This is where China adoption operations could be affected. As I have mentioned in the past, Chinese officials have repeatedly made their position known that the 2008 Beijing Olympics will not cause the closing of China adoption, like some had predicted or feared. The government wants its international adoption program to continue for a long time to come. However, I do predict that the China adoption program might experience a brief period of about two weeks' “holiday leave” during the Games, simply because the CCAA staff may not be able or allowed to come to work during the Games. I believe that adoptive families will still be able to travel to China during the Games if they receive their match before the Games start.

Just like the week-long Chinese New Year and National Day holidays, the yet-unknown “Olympic Holiday” would be much appreciated by Beijingers and yet bothersome to adoptive families waiting for their match. The good news for all will be better air quality as a result of the Games, so we can all breathe easier and have more fun living in or visiting Beijing. So, what is my prediction for clear blue skies in Beijing during the Games? 50/50.