On August 8, 2008, U.S. President George W. Bush chose to attend the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games in Beijing, an action that nullified any possibility for a U.S. Olympic boycott associated with the Chinese obstruction of antigovernment Tibetan protesters in March of that year. It was wise decision for him to come to Beijing at this pivotal juncture because the Olympic Games were extremely important to the Chinese government and its citizens. China viewed the games as a perfect opportunity to showcase the nation’s emergence as a new world power and promote a positive national image to the international community. Thus, in working to achieve this “international recognition of China’s social stability, economic progress and the healthy life of the Chinese people,” the Chinese made a tremendous effort to orchestrate this prominent international athletic event, and they did not want to lose face in front of the world.

So save the Chinese face! President Bush is the first U.S. president to travel abroad and attend the Olympic Games in American history. Unlike British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Bush never declined the opportunity to attend the Beijing Olympic Games, despite facing domestic and international pressure to punish China’s government for the “crackdown” on Tibetan protesters. President Bush took a low-key position and did not respond to the criticism and thus the Chinese had an improved image of the U.S. government (when compared with countries like France and Germany). The Bush administration understood the importance of the
political relationship between the United States and China. The White House’s position was that any Olympic protest by the United States would run the risk of hindering a host of international efforts that the Bush administration needs China’s help to solve. Those include confronting Myanmar’s military junta and Iran’s nuclear efforts as well as the continuing activities of North Korea.² In addition, when President Bush attended the dedication of the 600,000-square-foot U.S. embassy with his father, he also showed an effort to foster “trust” between China and the United States because the two countries have “built a strong relationship built on common interests.”³ By simply showing up at the first four days of the Beijing Olympic Games, President Bush, along with the other foreign leaders who attended, garnered substantial attention from the Chinese media and, consequently, earned enormous good will from the Chinese people.

**New Face, Old Story**

The Olympic Games are not only full of athletic stories of winning and losing, but they are also seen as a diplomatic stage for the winning or losing foreign people’s minds and hearts. Edward R. Murrow, former director of U.S. Information Agency, cited the importance of “telling America’s story.” In the past few years, the Bush administration accelerated the pace on telling America’s story to the Chinese people. On November 9, 2006, Michelle Kwan was appointed as a public diplomacy ambassador to represent American values especially to young people and sports enthusiasts over the world. Her parents were originally from China, and her first overseas trip was to China in 2007. When interviewed by the Chinese media, she expressed her desire to initiate dialogue with young Chinese people.⁴ As a child of immigrants, Kwan grew up in a humble social situation. Dependent on her passion for figure skating and hard work, she has won nine U.S. championships, five World Championships, and two Olympic medals and has become the most decorated and successful figure skater in U.S. history.

As the first American Public Diplomacy Envoy, Kwan was a new face, but an old story to Chinese. It is the first time for the American government to appoint a sports star to play an active and valuable role in communicating with people abroad to present a good American image. Michelle Kwan, with Cal Ripken Jr., who was also named by the State Department as a special sports envoy to travel in China, represent an