



## PROTOCOLS FOR FLAG RAISING AT MEDAL CEREMONIES OF THE BEIJING OLYMPIC GAMES 2008

**ZHAO Xingfeng**

China Flag Network

### INTRODUCTION



Both Sydney and Beijing have hosted Olympic Games, so I would like to talk at the 26th Flag Congress about flag raising at the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008.

China has a long history of flag culture. Flag raising ceremonies, still popular in China, date back to 1976, when the national flag was raised in Tian'anmen Square.

The Honour Guard, originally comprising two soldiers, has evolved into a team of 36 for the flag-raising ceremony. I used to be one of them, and from that experience, I chose a career closely associated with flags. Today I would like to share one particularly significant experience: my part in designing the flag-raising protocols for the Beijing Olympic Games and the training of flag raisers.

### SIX YEARS' PREPARATION

On 13 July 2001, on the night of Beijing's bid to host the 29th Olympic Games, I was training young flag raisers at a youth education base in Shaoguan City, Guangdong Province.

Along with over one hundred flag raisers from primary schools, I was watching the live broadcast. At the moment when Juan Antonio Samaranch, then International Olympic Committee President, announced that the host city was "Beijing", we all jumped for joy and sang the national anthem, sending our congratulations to Beijing and to China. At that moment, I also realized that an opportunity was opening.



As soon as I returned to Beijing, I quickly set up the Beijing Xinfeng Flag Cultural Communication Center and finally obtained license for my company from the relevant industrial and commercial bureau on 13 September 2001, two months exactly after Beijing won the Olympic bid. I got in touch for the first time with the Beijing Organizing Committee of Olympic Games (BOCOG).



In May 2006, my company successfully undertook the construction of the electric flagpole project for the office building of the Beijing Olympic Committee.

At the end of 2006, a productive discussion on flag raising at the Award ceremony resulted in my further cooperation with the Award Department of BOCOG.

## DESIGNING FLAG-RAISING PROCEDURE AT THE MEDAL AWARD CEREMONIES OF THE BEIJING OLYMPIC GAMES

In early 2007, in response to requirements from the Awards Department of BOCOG, I started to design proposals for flag raising training at the Beijing Olympic Games, submitting relevant documentation such as a Reference Standard for Flag Raiser Selection, and a Training Manual of Flag Raisers at the Games. In accordance with selection criteria for flag-raisers, I proposed inclusion of female flag raisers. However, BOCOG concluded that there should be no female flag raisers, with provision only for an Etiquette Hostess.

In 2007, I worked with officials from the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee to select the flag raisers for the test competition.



In line with new selection standards, flag raisers had to be male, not older than 23 and 180-185cm in height. The candidates should be of average appearance, with no eye defects or facial scars, their weight between 65 to 70kg, and when raising their arms not higher than their heads. Reserves should account for 10% of formal flag raisers. All raisers are volunteers and needed to submit applications on their own for their Work Units' examination and verification before advancing further.

In May 2007 BOCOG approved my training plan for flag raisers. This plan clearly outlined regulations on the movements of flag-raisers and flag-guardians, a significant contribution maintained since the Beijing Games. Compared to the movements of flag guardians, those of flag raisers are more complicated, with great importance placed on the essential technique of carrying and holding the flag, whether moving or standing still.

Holding the flag is the prescribed action of the flag bearer when marching or standing. The body is required to be upright, the head upright, and the shoulders flat. Grasp the flagpole with the right hand between the index and middle fingers, straighten the right arm naturally, and carry the national flag on the right shoulder. The flagpole is at 45 degrees to the body, the left hand swings when traveling, and the flagpole must not swing left and right.





The formation of the flag raising ceremony is generally composed of 6 people, that is, three flag bearers and three flag guards lined up in front of each other, and two people in each team. Form a 2 by 3 formation. The flag bearers carry the national flags of the countries where the runner-up, champion and third runner-up athletes are located from front to back in that order.

Another important technique concern folding the flag. After the flag is lowered and the hanging clip at the lower end is detached, the raiser needs to fold the flag evenly with right hand into left hand. As he finishes folding the flag, he should hold the flag with right hand and turn 180 degree in a clockwise direction. Then he will hold the folded flag close with his left hand and tie up the corner of the flag on the post in a clockwise direction. Finally, he needs to untie the upper clip ring and carry the flag on his right shoulder. After completing these movements, he will exit according to regulations with the flag guardian.

The movements of a flag guardian are relatively simple. He only needs to swing his arms naturally and act in time with the raiser when they walk forward. At the moment the flag is about to be hoisted, he should unfold it with vigour.

Another stipulation for the flag raising at the medal ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games required a set style for the entrance and exit ritual of the flag-raising teams.



As the award ceremony begins, the team should be lined up in the designated area. When the announcement for flag raising is broadcast and music played, and at the order of the team leader, the team will advance to the flagpole by the designated route. Flag-raisers and guardians stand together and turn as one towards the pole to hang the flag.

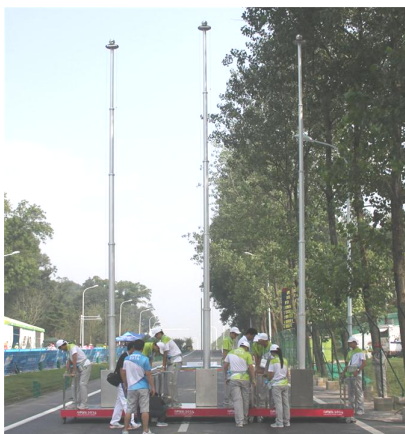
After the medals are awarded, the national flag raising ceremony will begin with the champion's national anthem. As flags are hoisted, guardians need to unfold them as required and salute and look at the flags, as do the flag-raisers.

After the award ceremony, on announcement for exiting is broadcast and music played, the winning athletes depart. The national flags are lowered and guardians holding and folding the flags in the proper manner. The team leader then gives the order and all six members march out in single file by the designated route to prepare the next flag raising ceremony.



In the event of two equal third-place winners, there will be a fourth flag raiser and guardian, making a team of eight, and four national anthems played.

## TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR FLAGPOLE AT THE BEIJING OLYMPIC MEDALS CEREMONY



As the Award Department required, I also specified the Technical Standards for Flagpoles at the Medal ceremonies. There are two kinds of ceremony flagpoles: indoor and outdoor. In general, indoor flagpoles are horizontal, and vertical outdoors. The process of flag raising and lowering on vertical flagpoles outdoors is similar to the process of flag raising and lowering on horizontal flagpoles indoors.

BOCOG stipulated the heights of flagpoles used at the medal ceremonies - 9 metres for the champion's national flag, and 8.57 for second and third place-getters. National flags are to hang facing the winners, second place, champion, and third place, left-to-right as seen by them.

The medal ceremony flagpoles are electric, with manual emergency equipment – another innovation in the history of Olympic Games. At the flag raising ceremony, even though the flagpoles are of different heights, hoisting must be synchronized with the national anthem. No matter which country the champion comes from, as soon as the operator presses the national anthem button of the country, the three flags should be hoisted at the same time to the beat of the champion’s anthem, so that when the anthem finishes, the respective national flags are raised so as to arrive at the top of their masts at the same time.

Worth mentioning are the mobile flagpoles used at the Tennis Center - a new page in the history of the Olympic Games. Due to the tradition that no flags are raised at award ceremonies in world tennis competitions, there is no place for flagpoles. However, there were quite a few flag raisings at medal ceremonies at the Beijing Olympic Games and Beijing Paralympic Games. In addition, flagpoles should be movable to meet the requirements of medal ceremonies, which means there are 10 minutes at most for flag teams to enter with flagpoles and completing flag raising. When the flag raising ceremony is over, they must exit immediately so that tennis competition can continue.



It was a tough problem. My technicians and I checked the arena, as the height of the entry gate was only 1.7 metres while our flagpole was 9 meters. Even when our mobile poles were telescoped, they were still 2.4 metres long, the total 2.6 metres if including their transport carts. Facing this quandary, after a couple of days’ exploration and tests with engineering technicians, I solved the problem by first tilting the flagpoles before raising them to vertical.

With the preparation of flagpole equipment and a guarantee from highly capable technicians, we practiced flag raising again and again. Finally, in the competition, it only took us three minutes - one third of planned time - to move from off the field, enter the arena and get equipment ready. This was three times faster than the original plan.



The performance of flag-raisers is critical to the Medal Award ceremony of the Olympic Games. The basic requirement for flag raising is “zero mistakes”. There was not one mistake in flag raising at all 302 award ceremonies in all 37 arenas.

In November, 2006, I wrote to BOCOG suggesting that flag raisers for the Olympic Games be selected from excellent exemplars in the Beijing universities. In 2007, before Olympic test events began, BOCOG approved my suggestion. Since the summer vacation in July 2007, I had led flag raisers from universities assembled at Tsinghua University for flag raising training for two weeks. Those students seized the opportunity by choosing the intense training in the heat of summer rather than going home or seeking internships.

The night of 13 August 2007 is etched forever for those students, as well as for me. The first flag raising at the medal award ceremony of the first “Good Luck Beijing” Olympic test event was held at the hockey field. As the competition ended, it started to pour so heavily that the competition had to stop. However, the team decided to hold both award ceremony and flag raising ceremony in the rain. On that night, Liu Peng himself, General-Director of Sports Administration, presented medals to athletes. The moment Australia’s national anthem came to an end, three flags reached the top of flagpoles together. As the whole audience cheered, I took a deep breath: we had made it!



In November 2008, after the Games, Tsinghua University and I co-organized a ceremony to thank and honour the Olympic college student flag raisers from the several Universities.

BOCOG and 54 flag raisers from Tsinghua University gathered to review our moment of glory and deep feeling on the Olympic fields. After the ceremony, all flag-raisers enthusiastically signed the Olympic flag.

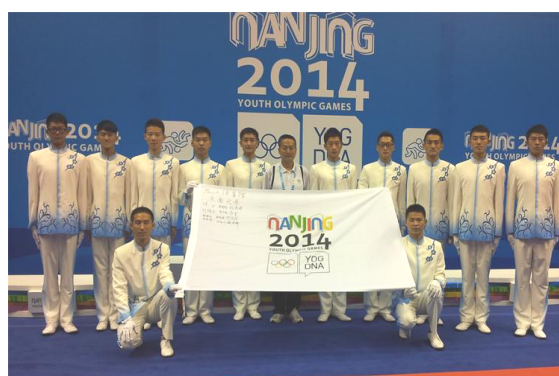


The main recruitment source for the flag-raisers in the Beijing Olympic Games is the Army soldiers. From the end of 2007, I gave systematic training to the flag raisers of the brigade of the guard of honour of the three services of PLA (People's Liberation Army), separately in etiquette, common sense of foreign affairs, physique and so on to equip the soldiers with civil and military knowledge and adapt to the requirements of the flag-raisers of the Olympic Games as soon as possible. 140 officers and soldiers of the Honour Guard carried forward the military ethos of continual readiness and the highest standard and met perfectly the flag-raising tasks of the award ceremony of Beijing Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

## CONCLUSION

When the Olympic flame flickered out at the closing of the Games in Beijing, the vibrant images of the flag raisers have left a deep impression on viewers. The “zero-error” Olympic requirement was achieved and their solemn promises to China were realized by their wisdom and effort, youth and enthusiasm. Moreover, it lifted the Olympic flag-raising ceremony to a new standard and height, providing the Olympic Games the valuable heritage of the Chinese-style flag-raising ceremony, and illustrating the strength, warmth and confident images of youth to the world.

For the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games of 2014, I was also invited to design the flag raising ceremony and the training of the flag raisers, leading 180 college students to successfully complete the flag-raising tasks of various venues.



For the future, I hope the wide cooperation and communication on flag raising with various countries in the world will continue and that our experience and achievements will be used to diffuse and promote interaction of the flag raising ceremonies in various countries, so as to add new content and colours to the World Flag Conferences.

今后，我希望能与世界各国开展广泛的升旗合作交流，用我们的经验成果，推动各国升旗仪式的交流互动，为世界旗帜大会增添新的内容和色彩。

## BIOGRAPHICAL



**Zhao Xinfeng**, founder of the **China Flag Network**, was the designer and training specialist for of the flag raising ceremony for presentation of medals at the Beijing Olympic Games. He is also the Director of the Communication Center of **Beijing New Wind Flag Culture**.

In March 2019 the Vexillological Research Center of China ([vrcc.org.cn](http://vrcc.org.cn). 中国旗帜学研究中心 ) was established, with Xinfeng as chairman. VRCC will co-host the 30<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Vexillology in Beijing in 2024.

Email: [xfqz98@163.com](mailto:xfqz98@163.com)

Flag of the VRCC

