

LETTERS | TO THE EDITOR

China's nationalism

Philip Bowring ("Beware an angry China," Views, April 9) makes a poignant argument regarding Chinese nationalism, yet his correlation to 1930s Japan is alarmist at best.

Based on my conversations with Chinese working professionals in Shanghai, popular opinion regarding Tibet is mostly about maintaining social order and the territorial integrity of China. They see a threat looming on the Tibetan plateau that could jeopardize the economic stability and growth they have enjoyed over the past 10 years.

Moreover, the Chinese support a strong government response to social unrest. They do not view strong central government actions to riots as a human rights issue. They will support social stability measures to the point of international scorn to avoid threatening the freedoms that their new prosperity has brought to them.

Calls for nationalistic fervor inside China will only stir the pot of discontent among those left behind in the recent economic expansion. Beijing unwisely does so at its own peril. The newly prosperous in China are not eager to fan the flames of nationalism and can easily placate the discontented masses left behind through increased internal economic growth instead of an export-led growth strategy.

Ken Haumschilt, Shanghai

Your editorial "The Olympic torch, China and freedom" (April 10) overlooked one important element in the debate over China's treatment of Tibetan people: Taiwan.

On March 22, the free people of Taiwan went to the polls in an open election and voted for Ma Ying-jeou for president. The election shows that the people of Taiwan, despite their many passionate and often lively political differences, can indeed join together to elect a leader that they deem fit to lead their nation to secure freedom, democracy, peace and prosperity.

China need not look to a public relations firm in an attempt to boost its disastrous international image during the Olympic torch relay. It need only look East to Taiwan. You know, sometimes the grass really is greener on the other side.

Stephen Rabasco, Boston

Aside from China's unacceptable record concerning Tibet, there is another reason to interrupt or stop the international relay of the Olympic flame. Has anyone thought of the carbon footprint created by sending this flame and its keepers all over the world by jet just for a publicity stunt? With global warming increasing almost by the hour, whose idea was it to forego any thought for ecology?

Ken Cowan, Paris

The hurdles facing the Olympic torch on its international relay symbolize China's struggle to come to terms with its image.

It is understandable that China wants to benefit fully from the Olympics to promote the country's norms and values, to explain its traditions to a broad international audience and to stem international criticism over the country's lack of commitment to values like democracy and human rights.

However, the relatively small pro-Tibet protest movement is adroitly exploiting the upcoming Olympics by focusing international attention on the country's inherent weaknesses. While the Communist party has indeed proven remarkably adept at adjusting to and benefiting from the economic growth, the government has failed to translate economic prosperity into soft power on the international stage.

It is not too late for China to change course and show a willingness to put Tibet and other pending issues of international concern high on the political agenda. That might be the only chance Beijing has to steer away from a disaster that Olympic gold medals can't makeup for.

Jorrit Kamminga, Paris