

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

Sports Culture and the Paradox of Westernisation in China

A case study in Ultimate Frisbee

11457254 Sarina Zhou

978136 In-Country Study: China



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
Ultimate Frisbee: A Case Study.....	6
METHODOLOGY	7
Observational Studies	7
Interviews and Correspondence.....	9
RESULTS & DISCUSSION.....	11
The Foreign Divide: Physiology and Psychology.....	11
Clash of the Cultures.....	14
Accommodation & Hybridisation.....	16
Success and Longevity of China Ultimate.....	18
CONCLUSION.....	19
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	21
REFERENCES	22
APPENDICES	24
Appendix 1. Consent Form.....	24
Appendix 2. Interview Outline.....	25
Appendix 3. Shanghai Open Flyer.....	26
Appendix 4. China Open 2013 Flyer	27

INTRODUCTION

In Mandarin Chinese, the word for China 中国 (*zhongguo*) translates into the ‘Middle Kingdom’ and this is exactly how China wants to be perceived by the rest of the world - the centre of the world. China is desperately competing for a spot on the world stage and while it currently boasts one of the fastest growing economies in the world it seems to struggle with coming to terms with their own traditional culture and the intercultural (namely, Western) influences that have flooded the country.

Former President Hu Jintao published an essay in *Qiushi*¹ declaring war against the “foreign hostile powers that plot to Westernize and divide our country” (Hu 2012, p. 5). The essay talks of strengthening Chinese culture domestically and internationally in order to eradicate the idea of “a strong West and weak [China]” (Hu 2012, p. 6). This type of psychological response to environmental change would be described by Yang (1998) as a resistance mode of adaptation where the person or group in question (in the case, the Communist Party of China) attempts to affirm their traditional value system and actively resists those groups (in this case, the West) who could cause those changes. Despite affirmations by the leaders of China to defend their traditional culture, these same leaders have “asserted their intention to further open China to the influence of globalisation” (Knight 2006, p. 6). Since the introduction of the ‘Open Door Policy’² there has been a major influx of foreign trade and economic reform which has been widely supported by Chinese leaders and scholars but it has also raised some alarm bells due to its association with apparent negative cultural consequences (Knight 2006, p. 6). We must question whether the leaders of China’s adamant rejection of the West is practical or whether the future of China would be bettered if there was some accommodation and adaptation of Western ideals.

The paradox that China seems to struggle with is its want to modernise China and prove itself on the world stage by accommodating to Western standards yet the government also rejects any notion of Westernisation into its traditional culture. The importation of Western brands such as McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Walmart and KFC exemplify a superficial adoption of Westernisation that has been accepted as normal by the Chinese population, but this superficial level of Westernisation has bled into the cultural fabric of the country especially

¹ *Qiushi* Journal, which translates directly into ‘Seeking Truth’ is a quarterly periodical released by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

² The Open Door Policy is a foreign policy that called for equal foreign commercial access to China. It was rejected until 1978 when Deng Xiopeng, the Vice Premier of the People’s Republic of China at the time allowed it so as to increase foreign trade and economic investment.

with the youth of China who have “absorbed and manifested the lifestyle characteristic(s) of Western capitalist nations” more so than other age groups (Knight 2006, p. 10).

Western capitalist ideas of individualism, consumerism and affluence oppose traditional Chinese ideas of conservatism, idealism, dependence and social order (Knight 2006; Smith 1989) and these cultural values are prevalent in the culture of sport in both the East and West. Lu (2011) illustrates the dichotomy between Chinese and Western cultures in Table 1. While grey areas are acknowledged to exist, it is useful to note these conceptual notes as we delve into the differences in how sport culture is approached in China and the West.

Table 1. *Conceptual and perceptual perspectives in Chinese & Western traditional cultures*

<i>Concept/Perception</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Western</i>
Humans and nature	Human is part of nature (oneness)	Human is separate from nature
Humans and society	Harmony (collectivism)	Individualism
Humans and universe	Human is universe in miniature	Human is a minute occupant in universe
Body/mind	Inseparable unity	Separate entities
Method of understanding	Intuition	Reasoning
Aim of life	Health and longevity	Happiness and wealth
Worldview	Holism	Dualism (eg. Body-mind)
Health/fitness focus	Internal organ strength	External muscular strength and body shape
Nature of sports	Individual and non-standardized (for self)	Societal standardized (rules for all)
Purpose of sports	Self-enlightenment	Setting records, challenging self & others
Action	Everything has limits and “golden mean” is the best	The more, the better
Process/product	Emphasis on process	Focus on product (fitness goal, competition records)
Relationship with others	Harmony (interdependence)	Distinction (independence)
Living	“Be”ing	“Do”ing (productivity)

Sports Culture has long been acknowledged as a metaphor for global dominance and power and in China's case – its challenge towards the United States of America (USA) (Xu 2006; Dyreson 2008, 2012; Brownell 2005; Lu 2011). After China's successful bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games many scholars began to draw parallels between a successful Olympics and a successful China. The 2008 Beijing Olympics thus served as a platform to prove “how well China [would] conduct a balancing act (...) in [a] socio-political background” (Xu 2006, p. 91). Ultimately, China's success at hosting the Olympic Games provoked several different viewpoints – many Western academics claimed the Beijing Olympics were successful but only because they had adopted Western standards (Dyreson 2008; Brownell 2005; Xu 2006). Dyreson (2008) and Xu (2006) believed that if “China becomes a long term global sporting power ... it will be because China has not only adopted Western sporting culture but Western political culture”.

Ancient Olympic ideals of beauty and winning for honour (Clarysse et al. 2012) have naturally evolved into the more modern Western ideas of elite competition and are “primarily influenced by the ideology of the *higher, faster, stronger* motto” (Lu 2011 p. 6). However, this natural evolution of sports culture in the West is not the case for China – the idea of sports and competition was introduced into Chinese culture in the 1800s when Western sports were first introduced into the country (Lu 2011, p. 5). Even the terms for sport and physical education (体育活动 *tiyuhuodong*) were imported words - the original idea of sport referred to more leisurely activity and the purposes of these activities were for worship, education, medicine or recreation as opposed to competition and individual glory.

As the country continues to grow, the Western influence within Chinese sports culture has become more and more obvious. Yao Ming, one of China's most successful athletes, was extremely successful in the NBA³ but was still criticised for his lack of aggression and ‘spectacular’ dunk shots which he claimed was “not the Chinese way” (Wang 2004, p. 272) . The NBA's growing popularity within China exemplifies the embrace of Western influence rather than the opposition of US hegemony. Local professional leagues of soccer and basketball seem to fall short of Chinese fans' desires and some teams have had to “invite foreign coaches to help train their players “in order to meet Chinese fans' ever higher yet often frustrated expectations” (Xu 2006, p. 94). Fans of the China Basketball Association (CBA) league often voice their want for more entertaining play and dunk shots ala the NBA.

³ The NBA is a professional men's basketball league in the USA and considered to be the most elite basketball league in the world.

It represents a change of preference being embraced by the youth of China from local culture to Western.

There have been several case studies regarding the Westernisation of sports culture in China – Bicycle Motocross (BMX) (Dyreson 2012), Baseball (Yang 2011) and *wushu* (Yang 2011) are a few of the case studies that have all demonstrated the effect of westernisation in China of Chinese sports as well as looking at the success of American sports in China. They have demonstrated how more specific, context-driven examples can illustrate the issues of Westernisation in China yet they are fairly sparse in comparison the amount of literature available on the paradox of traditional and modern cultural identity as a whole.

Ultimate Frisbee: A Case Study

Originating in the USA, Ultimate has become one of the fastest growing sports in the world. It is a non-contact sport played with seven players per team on the field at a time and has similarities with American Football and Netball. One of the most unique features of the sport is that it is self-refereed – all fouls and violations are called and resolved by the players themselves. Even at the international level - for instance, the World Ultimate and Guts⁴ Championships (WUGC) organised by the World Flying Disc Federation's (WFDF⁵) - no referees or observers⁶ are present. Instead of relying on third party decisions, players are encouraged to call their own fouls and enact good and fair sportsmanship when a call is made. When a call is made against a player - a foul call, for example - the opposing player is allowed to 'contest' or 'no contest' the call – depending on whether the opposing player believes the call was correct. This requires a communication between two opposing players not usually seen in other competitive sports such as basketball or soccer – the reliance on a referee or umpire in those sports means no communication is required between teams and relies solely on a third party.

The most important thing to come out of its self-refereeing nature is the most integral part of Ultimate Frisbee – the Spirit of the Game. WFDF summarises the Spirit of the Game as the following:

⁴ 'Guts' is another flying disc sport that focuses on catching a variation of the standard disc used in the sport of Ultimate. It was included as secondary competition to 'Ultimate' at the WUGC

⁵ WFDF is the international governing body for flying disc sports. It sanctions world championship events, establishes rules and sets the standards for and records world records.

⁶ In some cases, 'observers' have been adopted as third party referees who only make a decision when asked by the involved players. Observers have been utilised in many levels of competition in the USA however, WFDF-sanctioned events have remained observer-free.

All players are responsible for administering and adhering to the rules. Ultimate relies upon a Spirit of the Game that places the responsibility for fair play on every player. It is trusted that no player will intentionally break the rules; thus there are no harsh penalties for breaches, but rather a method for resuming play in a manner which simulates what would most likely have occurred had there been no breach. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but should never sacrifice the mutual respect between players, adherence to the agreed-upon rules of the game, or the basic joy of play. (Bernardi 2013)

This idea of Spirit of the Game and mutual respect between players translates into a universal language between players that transcends cultures and languages; on the field it requires communication and respect between players no matter their background. As an imported sport from the USA we can think of Ultimate as a ‘product’ brought in from the West into China and assess the effect of Westernisation in China. Since the sport is an imported ‘product’ its success is theoretically contingent upon the correct ‘marketing’ from its creators (teaching and promotion of the sport) and a willingness to accept this product by the ‘consumer’. Through observation and correspondence with the community we can assess and analyse the success of the sport and therefore draw some theories as to how the paradox of Westernisation in China can be resolved.

METHODOLOGY

Two main methods of research were used; observational studies and interviewing. Observation consisted of two main Ultimate Frisbee competitions (Shanghai Open and China Nationals) as well as participation in regular training sessions and events within the local Hangzhou Ultimate Frisbee club. Interviews were conducted with two interviewees in addition to more casual correspondence with other members of the China Ultimate Frisbee community.

Observational Studies

During observational studies two main Ultimate Frisbee competitions were used – China Nationals and the Shanghai Open. The 7th China Nationals was held this year (2013) in Shenzhen and had 18 competing teams from China and Hong Kong. What is notable about this competition is the stringent conditions concerning what they count as ‘foreign’ players on a team and their subsequent inclusion on a competing team. For this tournament, a foreigner was regarded as one who did not own a Mainland Chinese ID, a Three Star⁷ and

⁷ The stars on a Hong Kong Identity card represent the re-entry permit into Hong Kong.

AZ⁸ Hong Kong Identity Card or a Taiwan Passport. A competing team would not be allowed to play more than two foreigners on the field at any given point and the ratio of foreigners and locals on the team roster could not exceed thirty percent (2013 Shenzhen Flying Disc Association). Teams with more than the allowed number of foreign players were relegated to a 'Foreigner' division – they were allowed to compete against local teams however they would not be able to win the tournament.

The 15th Shanghai Open was held shortly after China Nationals and unlike the China Nationals tournament there was no limit on 'foreigners'. This freedom to pick and choose players meant that many teams had players from various countries like the USA, Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Singapore, Korea and Japan. These two tournaments were chosen for main observational studies due to their stark differences regarding the inclusion of foreign players – these differences would translate into two entirely different environments in which to observe interactions between local and foreign cultures.

For both the Shanghai Open and China Nationals I was present as a player on a competing team in the tournament which allowed an in-depth observation into the game play and psychology of the team. My presence as a player and 'complete participant' (Baker 2006) allowed more fluid movement within the group without upsetting the natural interactions of the community. While some players noticed my presence and were curious about my research I generally went unnoticed – audience members and observers of the game were very common at such a public sporting event and my familiarity with the community meant I was not taken as an intruder. My role as a player in both tournaments however, meant that I was subject to time constraints and I could not necessarily observe all the games and match-ups that may have yielded the best research as I had to compete myself.

Baker (2006, p. 178) states that intimate familiarity with a community could harm a study but also that "the depth of data that can be collected in this role more than compensates for the loss of scientific detachment". For my role as a researcher I found my familiarity with the community to be much more of an advantage than a disadvantage – I was able to pick games that I thought better suited my research project, I already had a brief knowledge of the background of players and I could utilise connections within the community to fill in any gaps of knowledge I may have had.

⁸ 'AZ' on a Hong Kong Identity card identifies the card holder as having been born in Hong Kong

The sociable nature of the sport and my familiarity with the community however, meant that the lines between my role as a researcher, competitor and friend within the community were blurred. While I attempted to keep an awareness of objectivity within my role as a researcher it was difficult to completely cut off all subjectivity. It is possible that there may be bias present in my analysis whether it be from my standpoint as a foreign player (despite my Chinese background), as a competing player from another team or as a person with a personal relationship with a particular player or team.

While I already had connections within the Ultimate Frisbee community what was most useful was my experience as an Ultimate Frisbee player. Having played Ultimate for five years I was already 'fluent' in the Ultimate Frisbee jargon - I could easily observe game tactics and identify types of offence and defence whether it be a 'vertical stack', '3-man cup' or 'iso[lation]' play in the end zone; I was able to observe the roles of players whether they were a 'handler', 'short deep' or 'cup axis'; and I was already aware of the rules and what it meant when a 'strip', 'fast count' or 'pick' was called.

Interviews and Correspondence

My personal correspondence with members of the Ultimate Frisbee community consisted of interviews with two members of the Hangzhou Ultimate Frisbee club as well as email correspondence with an elite member of the Ultimate Frisbee club hailing from the USA currently living in Shanghai. Interviewees were given a consent form (Appendix 1) to sign before continuing with the interview, made aware that their names would be used within my project (as well as the option to remain anonymous) and made aware that a recording device would be used when possible.

The two interviewees I corresponded with were part of the leadership group of Hangzhou Ultimate Frisbee (HZU). I was able to garner interviews with the President and Founder of HZU; self-taught Frisbee player Miki Xie and Kevin Reitz, the head coach and previous player for teams in Colorado, USA; Beijing Big Brother and Beijing Bang. Both interviews were conducted in English due to my own language limitations as well as time constraints. As Reitz was an American, it was an easy and logical decision to conduct that particular interview in English however the interview conducted with Xie was a more difficult decision. While Xie is highly proficient in English, having led the club for many years and built relationships with locals and foreigners alike, it was obvious that English was not his first language and it is possible that there are some aspects of the interview that were lost in

translation. An attempt to conduct the interview in Chinese was considered but was ultimately rejected - while speaking in Xie's native language may have been easier for him and allowed him to express himself more easily it was decided that my limited language skills would have had an even greater negative impact especially within the smaller time frame in which I had to speak with him. During the interview conducted with Xie, there were several instances where clarification of a question or response was required where some rephrasing and possible simplification of responses was required – it is possible that this may have hampered our responses.

The last of my main correspondents was Miranda Knowles, a female Ultimate Frisbee player from the USA currently living in Shanghai. Since coming to Shanghai she has become a core member of the local club team 'Huwa', contributed to development of Youth Ultimate Frisbee and conducted several clinics with her husband Matthew Knowles (an elite Ultimate Frisbee player as well) in order to develop Chinese Ultimate teams. As a 2004 Callahan award⁹ winner, previous captain of the 7-time USA Club Championships finalists' women's team Seattle Riot, Ultimate Peace¹⁰ Director of Coaching, coach, writer and generally well-known member of the Ultimate Frisbee community I was extremely lucky to have been in contact with her and her wealth of knowledge. Due to location and time constraints our main form of correspondence in regards to my research project was through e-mail. While face-to-face interviews similar to Xie and Reitz would have been more advantageous and effective to “[investigate] truths, facts, experience, beliefs, attitude and/or feelings of [Knowles]” (Talmy 2011, p. 26) it was decided that any correspondence was better than none due to her extensive coaching and playing experience in both China and the USA at different levels of play.

During my correspondence, my knowledge and familiarity within the Ultimate Frisbee community became my most useful tool. The open form of the two interviews conducted meant that I was able to probe further into responses and I was not hindered by any of the Frisbee jargon whether it be terms used or teams and players that were named. This open form of the interview meant that interviews fell into the risk of falling into the form of simply a casual conversation between two friends rather than an interviewer-interviewee relationship – while the intimate relationship had its advantages of putting the interviewee at ease it is

⁹ The Callahan award recognises the most valuable players in men's and women's college Ultimate. Nominations are submitted by any college team and voted upon by members of USAU each year.

¹⁰ Ultimate Peace is an organisation dedicated to building bridges for youth from different social and cultural backgrounds around the world using Ultimate Frisbee. Their work has taken them areas such as the Middle East and Colombia.

possible that this personal connection could have caused bias and skewed interpretation of the interviewee's responses. My lack of experience as an interviewer also meant I was constantly having to check notes, ensure that discussion did not veer off topic and I was not aware whether my style of interviewing would be the most effective at gathering the most pertinent data. Prior to each interview I had prepared a line of questioning (Appendix 2) to be followed however the open-ended nature of the questions meant there were several times where the interviews veered off topic both relevant and irrelevant tangents. There were also several times where points brought up in a previous interview or correspondence was integrated into other interviews in order to gauge whether they had a similar or different point of view.

I was also able to take advantage of my relationships within the community by asking Tournament directors for behind-the-scenes information such as team rosters and score sheets in order to better understand the ratio of foreign and local players and results of games I may not have been able to observe due to time constraints or their simple unavailability to the regular Ultimate Frisbee community.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The Foreign Divide: Physiology and Psychology

During my observation one of the most easily observed differences were the physiological differences between the local and foreign players. The foreign males were taller, had broader shoulders and generally had more muscle mass, while the local girls had generally smaller physiques compared to the foreign players. These physiological differences translated into different levels of athleticism and speed which are qualities required in a successful Ultimate Frisbee team. Previous winners of the China Nationals tournament include teams such as the 'Graduates' made up of Tianjin Sports University students and alumni; and Air Kazakh, where the Kazakhstan players were simply more muscular, bigger and taller. This year's Shanghai Open finalists were made up of two foreigner-dominated teams which positively correlated with a final that showcased a lot of athleticism and big throws to big players. If we compare this physiology to teams such as Ningbo or Hong Kong – they are generally smaller and rely on quick movement and speed in their style of play.

Not only were there physical differences, but psychological differences were prevalent between Chinese and Western players. Knowles (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) stated that the youth of China simply did not participate in sports that we, as Westerners were used to. The

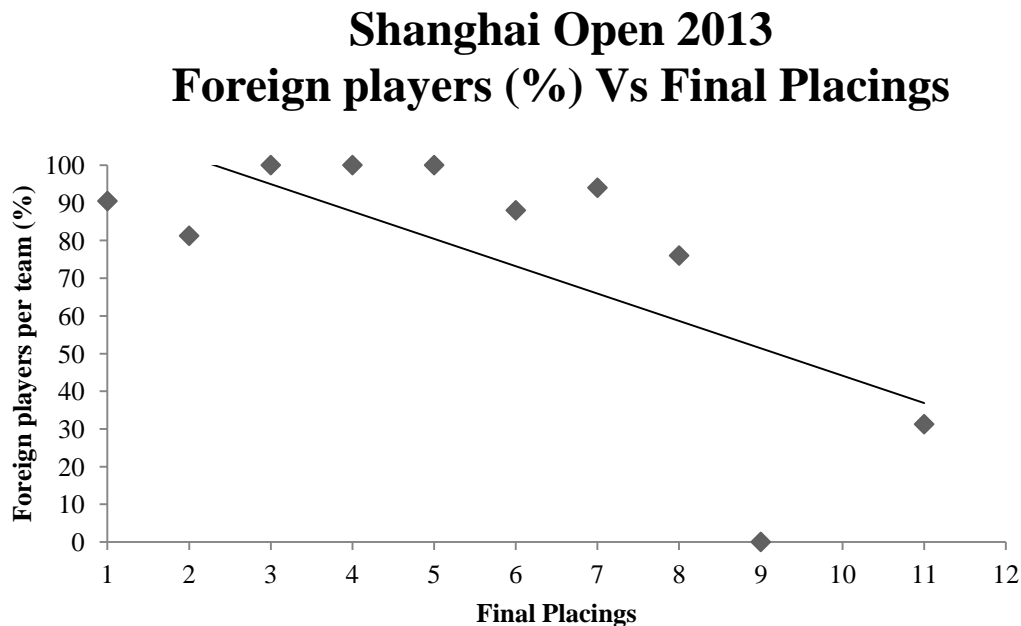
lack of focus on sport was noticed by all three correspondents, Knowles and Reitz in particular, brought up the lack of participation in team sports which Reitz (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) believed led to a handicap when it comes to Ultimate Frisbee, while those who have played soccer or basketball transition much easier. My observations saw those foreign players simply have more drive to play more competitively and enthusiastically compared to the locals (though there were always exceptions) and that the most successful local players had the common trend of having participated in previous sports such as basketball or soccer.

Reitz, Xie and Knowles all participated in sports from a younger age and grew up with that mental competitive edge – Reitz, who participated in wrestling before joining Ultimate Frisbee believed in a philosophy of “pain is weakness leaving the body” (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) and used his experiences to foster his competitive spirit and learn how to push himself. During my observations during simple training sessions as well as tournaments, there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm from some local players and an unwillingness to play during certain games – players claimed to be too tired, too hot, or just could not be bothered to play while many of the foreign players were always keen to push themselves and keep working. If we hark back to the traditional notion of sport for leisure this lack of ‘fire’ makes more sense - the locals have simply not been brought up to value elite competition. An organising principle of state sports policy is ‘friendship first, contest second’ as opposed to the notion of elitist, competitive sport (Xu 2006, p. 94) so even on a state-wide level the sort of competitive drive that is born from a young age in many Western countries is being suppressed.

In comparing the style of on-field play for both tournaments there were some obvious differences especially in the finals for both tournaments. The Shanghai Open finals were a bigger, more outlandish display of athleticism and entertaining play. The teams Shanghai ‘Huwa’ and ‘Chairman Xiongmao’ were teams almost completely dominated by Westerners – mostly Americans who lived in Asia which meant they were physiologically more athletic players allowing them to play in such a style. If we look at Figure 1, it shows the percentage of foreign players (according to China National rules) compared to their final rankings in the Shanghai Open. While this is a very superficial view of looking at the correlation between success and foreign players it does give an idea of the physiological and psychological advantages foreigner presence can have. Figure 1, however, does not take into account different amounts of playing time, injuries and general chemistry and history of the team. The China Nationals final between Hong Kong and the ‘Graduates’, while entertaining to watch,

was not on par with the amount of big displays of athleticism exhibited in the Shanghai Open. The two local teams played in much more conservative styles though it should be noted that the ‘Graduates’ did rely several times on their Sports University alumni to make those big athletic plays using their psychological and physiological advances.

Figure 1. Percentage of foreign players per team versus final placing at Shanghai Open 2013



Tianjin ‘Speed’ and its players on the ‘Graduates’ are notorious being athletic and fast – this is no surprise as most of these players are students at the Tianjin Sports University and so this athletic nature and psychological drive for competition is inherent in the players when they join Ultimate Frisbee. Reitz (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) stated that Tianjin easily absorbed and developed the skills and technique required for the sport which then complemented their previous athleticism and credited much of their success to both their physiological and psychological advances.

This value of elite competition and athletic physique harks back to the dichotomy between Chinese and Western cultures in Table. 1. The idea of elite competition is an imported concept from the West so it cannot be of any surprise that much of the Chinese youth are unfamiliar with this same drive that is present in players such as Reitz, Xie and Knowles who have all been brought up a diet of sport and competition. Xu (2006) believes that a strong sports nation encompasses “citizens’ moral and physical qualities, sport and recreation

facilities, people's consciousness of physical culture and participation in it, individual investments in sports activities; as well as sports industry and the level of competitive sport", qualities which China has not quite achieved yet. Tianjin is an example of how this imported sports culture has been adopted by the Chinese population and subsequently utilised to their own success. In addressing the paradox of Westernisation in China we could look at the success of Tianjin and look at adopting those Western qualities that are advantageous and making them their own rather than evolving into another Western nation or conversely, vehemently rejecting all Westernisation.

Clash of the Cultures

The nature of Ultimate Frisbee allows for a plethora of interaction between local and foreign players on and off the field. The self-officiating nature of the sport forces interaction between two players on the field when there is a problem or disagreement. The amount of local and foreign players present at both the Shanghai Open and China Nationals tournaments meant there was plenty of interaction between the two cultures on and off the field which sparked both positive and negative incidents.

One of the obvious obstacles to be overcome was the language barrier – the locals spoke Chinese and most of the foreigners spoke English as their first or second language. While much of the local population had some grasp of English this was not always the case – I observed several cases where language was a huge barrier and either a translator was required to resolve the situation or the situation was not really resolved at all. An incident between a local and foreign player who disagreed over a foul call during the Shanghai Open resulted in some clear anger issues and disbelief. In this case, the foreign player continued to argue in English, and yet, despite some calls from the sideline that the local player did not understand him, he continued to argue in English until a teammate stepped in to act as a mediator and translator. In an alternate incident during China Nationals, one of the foreign players called a 'fast count' call to which the local player had no reaction – play continued and it became apparent that the local player did not understand the 'fast count' call. Instead of arguing like the Shanghai Open incident, both players talked briefly off-field on the sidelines and the foreign player explained in Chinese (with the help of a teammate) what should have happened – the incident was resolved without any drama.

When we compare these two incidences we can notice that in one situation, the foreign player accommodated the needs of the local player in a local dominated tournament while in the

other, there was no compromise and there seemed to be some anger that the player did not speak English despite the tournament being held in China. There seemed to be an inherent assumption in both tournaments then that one culture takes precedence over the other – at China Nationals the local culture takes precedence while at the Shanghai Open, Western culture dominated. It appeared that having Western culture completely dominate was not successful and we can draw this metaphor to a macro-level. Western culture cannot simply be allowed to run rampant within the local culture and dominate - there must be some compromise on both sides in order for it to be accepted into the local culture.

An interesting note brought up by Knowles (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) was the different evolution of Spirit of the Game in Asia. Knowles' experience with self-officiating in China has been more negative with some players abusing the self-officiation and getting away with some violations. Knowles (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) claims that "Spirit has evolved differently in the vacuum of Asia" as whoever brought Ultimate Frisbee to China in the first place failed to clearly state what Spirit of the Game really means and hoped that the next generation of Ultimate Frisbee players understand Spirit "in a more western way and that they will uphold Spirit of the Game as it was envisioned by the founders of Ultimate".

While it is possible that Spirit of the Game has evolved differently and that self-officiating is being abused it is also possible that there is a misunderstanding of the rules in China. USA Ultimate (USAU¹¹) and WFDF have each published their rules¹² about Ultimate Frisbee on the internet yet most of the local players learn the rules by learning from other players. WFDF publishes the rules in several languages (eg. French, German, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese) but not Chinese while USAU only publishes their rules in English and so, the only way any local players get a full understanding of the rules is through the players they learn from. My personal experience in playing in China has been largely very spirited and the only incident of bad spirit arose from both a language barrier between myself and the opposing player as well as a misunderstanding of the rules – off-field, a teammate of the opposing player explained in their native language and clearly stated the rules to the point where I later got an apology for this incidence of 'bad spirit'. In saying this, I have never played Ultimate Frisbee in the USA so my own perception of Spirit of the Game may not necessarily match with Knowles.

¹¹ USA Ultimate is the national governing body for the sport of Ultimate in the United States.

¹² WFDF and USAU have different sets of rules for Ultimate. The major differences are published on the WFDF website.

Reitz (2013, pers. comm., 9 June) described similar incidents of a misunderstanding of the rules by local teams. Initially, local teams did not understand the calls being made against them and realised that they had to learn calls better in order to improve as a team. While they started to learn the rules Reitz believed they never really truly understood the purpose of the calls which would lead to some incorrect use of the calls which led to arguments and 'cheating' in some more extreme cases.

What is interesting about this difference is that local teams have learnt what is essentially a Western sport and the ideals and values that come with it yet - according to Western standards - it has been misinterpreted and misused by the local culture. Due to its US origins and success compared to other countries it is probably logical that the standards set by USAU are the ones that we should be measuring the success of Ultimate Frisbee against. Even the WFDF released in updated version of their rules in January 2013 that were in "closer alignment with the USAU rules" (Berg 2013) Due to the importance of Spirit of the Game to Ultimate – the success of Ultimate could be measured by the ability of this concept to be accepted and executed in another culture.

Accommodation & Hybridisation

While we have outlined several incidences whereby the two cultures have been unable see eye to eye there have many other instances during training sessions, smaller tournaments, scrimmages, and other games during the same two tournaments these sort of obstacles are easily overcome with some compromise on each side and accommodation of cultures whether it be a language compromise or some understanding the different way sport is approached and embraced.

At the very beginning of his coaching stint in Hangzhou, Reitz's approach to coaching focused on ways to build the team and increase the success of the club as a whole. Reitz (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) stated that he felt that the more experienced foreigners and non-experienced local players required different approaches – more patience was required in bringing the local players up to speed in the fundamentals of Ultimate Frisbee and he needed to resist those experience players who simply wanted to play as competitively as possible in order to build solid foundations. Similar to the language accommodation at tournaments, we have an example of compromising personal Western values of elite competition in order to build up the local club. While we have seen Western ideas being successfully imported into the local culture there is a need to understand the local context in which it is being executed.

China is traditionally dominant in sports such as table tennis, badminton, gymnastics and diving (2008 Chinese Olympic Committee) – all of which have a strong individual component and techniques that can be ‘studied’ – these are the sorts of sports that the Chinese population have grown up with rather than team sports that require a psychological edge as well when it comes to ideas such as competitive spirit, strategy and field sensibility. When it came to coaching those local players who had not quite developed those aspects of the game Reitz (2013, pers. comm., 9 June) offered time as the most effective way to mould them into a successful player imbued with those characteristics. Reitz offered that rather than be taught, the individual must take that first step themselves into wanting to play – those players who preferred to sit on the sideline and content to watch could not be helped. Once a player decides to form their own willingness to play they begin to transition into this Western sport more successfully. The more successful local players in HZU are those who have embraced a more Western sensibility of sport and elite competition that they had not grown up with. In this case, we have had local culture have to make some accommodations to foreign concepts in order for the local culture to be successful.

The language barrier was a communication obstacle that required some navigation as a player and a coach. While Reitz has some proficiency in Chinese - and there are several players who could undertake the role of a translator - most training sessions are conducted in English with very few moments where a Chinese translation has been required. It would seem to be a trend that those players with some English proficiency are those players who are more present and willing to regularly participate in trainings and tournaments. While English seems to be the preferred language in many teams this is not always the case – teams such as Hong Kong, Tianjin communicate with each other largely in Cantonese and Mandarin respectively so perhaps it is not a case of having to learn English, or English being the common factor for a successful player but rather finding a synonymous way to communicate.

The team I competed with as part of China Nationals consisted of some foreign players (within the restrictions) and local players with varying levels of English proficiency. These varying languages translated into miscommunications and some misunderstanding of strategy on the field especially when those who were experienced (usually the foreign players) tried to teach those players who did not speak the same language. Teams like Tianjin or Shanghai Huwa have not had to really deal with issues as the players essentially all speak the same language.

In a club such as HZU, there are varying levels of English proficiency but this has been dealt with fairly well through local members having knowledge of English, more experienced players teaching some concepts in Chinese. Reitz (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) recounted his experiences training with mixed team Beijing ‘Bang’ where both languages were utilised well and Reitz was able to lead by example even if he could not communicate it with speech. Accommodation and compromise on both sides of each culture is essential to those clubs who rely on a mix of local and foreign players as opposed to largely local clubs such as Ningbo ‘UFO’ and Tianjin ‘Speed’, or largely foreign clubs such as Shanghai ‘Huwa’ and Beijing ‘Big Brother.

Tianjin ‘Speed’ is an interesting case for local teams in China – while they are undoubtedly a wildly successful local team having made up a large portion of the two-time winning China Nationals team ‘Graduates’, winning the Tianjin Open and the men’s division of the Shanghai Open 2013 – they are also a case of being ‘the exception to the rule’. Coming from a Sports university they tend - both physiologically and psychologically - towards a more Western sensibility. On the other hand, they are still a local team who have had to learn the skills and techniques required of Ultimate Frisbee and there has been a case made that they have not successfully adopted the *western* idea of Spirit of the Game. In saying that, they are still a largely successful team and the notion that they should measure their success as a team against Western standards is something to be questioned – perhaps Tianjin’s success at China’s Nationals should be worth more than their final placing at the largely foreign Shanghai Open. Tianjin has managed to adopt some Western traits yet still develop their own hybrid style of very fast, athletic, entertaining and high-risk play exemplifying their use of taking Western traits and using them for their own success in their own Chinese environment.

Success and Longevity of China Ultimate

The general consensus between players was that the Shanghai Open was one of, if not, the most competitive tournament in China, far outweighing the competitive nature of China Nationals. From a superficial point of view, the core of the team that won China Nationals this year ‘Graduates’ competed as the team Tianjin ‘Speed’ eventually placed 9th at the Shanghai Open. Second-placed team of China Nationals, Hong Kong formed the team ‘Blaze’ which placed 11th at the Shanghai Open. While both these teams were able to compete at a Nationals level they do not seem to be able to keep up this same level of success when those who are deemed as ‘foreign players’ are introduced into the competition.

Both Reitz (2013, pers. comm., 6 June) and Xie (2013, pers. comm., 7 June) believed that China Nationals was a better environment to foster development of local Chinese players allowing them more game time, less stress and a more even level of competition across the board. While hypothesising that a higher level of competition in the Shanghai Open could force players to step up and play better both agreed that this would not work as the difference in skill and experience level was too great. Xie (2013, pers. comm., 7 June) stated that the current level of Chinese Ultimate was not up to par but believed that eventually local teams would no longer need to rely on an influx of foreign players to keep a competitive nature citing the example of teams such as Tianjin 'Speed' and Ningbo 'UFO' who have established themselves as successful self-sufficient local teams. From this, we could theorise that while China Ultimate has adopted this Western sport, in order for the sport to have any longevity and success in China, the game must be propagated by the local population rather than being reliant on those foreigners who have brought the game to China. Similarly, any adoption of Western values must be adapted and perpetuated by the local population for there to be any success rather than having these Western ideas forced upon them.

The two most successful local teams in China would very likely be Tianjin 'Speed' and Ningbo 'UFO' who do not rely on any influx of foreign players and have instead implemented their own programs and become self-sufficient however Tianjin and Ningbo may not be counted as the 'norm' for local teams as 'Speed' is largely made up from Tianjin Sports University students and alumni; while Ningbo has a large influx of players from the University of Nottingham and its sports exchange program. While they may not currently be the 'norm' it could be that eventually, as China Ultimate continues to grow teams such as Tianjin and Ningbo set the standard to which other local teams aspire. Considering the amount of Western influence already in China the idea that Western powers must be eradicated seems irrational, using the example of Ultimate Frisbee there may be a need to re-establish what is the cultural norm in order for things to move forward.

CONCLUSION

As Ultimate continues to grow and flourish in China we have identified what aspects of this imported Western product have had to be accommodated, adapted or hybridised. The leaders of China cannot continue their persistence attacking the "foreign hostile powers that plot to Westernize and divide [China]" (Hu 2012, p. 5) and find alternative ways to harmonise the two cultures that have already, and continue to collide. Using the concept of sports culture

and Ultimate Frisbee we can see how there can be success in adopting Western culture as long as it is used correctly utilised by the local culture in their own way. Western culture cannot be simply put into an entirely foreign context without compromise on both sides if there is to be mutual success. In the case of Ultimate Frisbee, successful promotion of the sport requires a different approach to the way it is taught and promoted; and requires the locals to adopt some different values in order to successfully integrate it into their mainstream lines of sport.

Word Count: 7400

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is a culmination of the efforts of all of my participants and supporters, all of whom, I am greatly indebted to. I would first like to thank Kevin Reitz - my coach, captain and friend for his support of my project and always helpful insights. I would like to thank Miki Xie whose continued effort into promoting China Ultimate is to be commended and who gave great insight into the local Ultimate Frisbee community. Many thanks to Miranda and Matthew Knowles for being incredible teachers and to Miranda especially, who dedicates so much time and effort to the development of Ultimate Frisbee around the world but was still able to take the time to talk to me. I would also like to thank Tournament Directors Colin Erikson-Sheehy and Geoff Ng who provided me with behind-the-scenes information and statistics from China Nationals and the Shanghai Open, respectively. I would like to thank my supervisor Susette Cooke who guided me through this project and whose constructive feedback was priceless.

Finally, I would like to express my everlasting gratitude and thanks to the Hangzhou Ultimate Frisbee Club and to 'Jiangnan' – some of the best teammates I have had the pleasure of playing with on-field and some of the most amazing friends off-field.

REFERENCES

- '29th Olympic Summer Games: Beijing 2008' 2008, *29th Olympic Summer Games: Beijing 2008*, Official Website of the Chinese Olympic Committee, viewed 9 June 2013, <http://en.olympic.cn/china_oly/china_olympic/2008-09-17/1636414.html>.
- Baker, L.M. 2006, 'Observation: A Complex Research Method', *Library Trends*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 171-89.
- Berg, R. 2013, *WFDF Releases Revised Version of Official Ultimate Rules*, viewed 9 June 2013, <<http://www.wfdf.org/news-media/news/press/2-official-communication/492-wfdf-releases-revised-version-of-official-ultimate-rules>>.
- Bernardi, V. 2013, *WFDF: World Flying Disc Federation*, viewed 30 April 2013 <<http://wfdf.org/>>.
- Brownell, S. 2005, 'Challenged America: China and America - Women and Sport, Past, Present and Future', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 22, no. 6, pp. 1173-93.
- Clarysse, W., Remijnsen, S., Yan, H., Wen, J. & Wan, X. 2012, *Ancient Olympics*, KU Leuven, viewed May 1 2013 <<http://ancientolympics.arts.kuleuven.be/eng/TD007EN.html>>.
- Dyreson, M. 2008, 'Preparing to Take Credit for China's Glory: American Perspectives on the Beijing Olympic Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 25, no. 7, pp. 915-34.
- Dyreson, M. 2012, 'World Harmony or an Athletic 'Clash of Civilizations'? The Beijing Olympic Spectacle, BMX Bicycles and the American Contours of Globalisation', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 29, no. 9, pp. 1231-42.
- Hu, J. 2012, 'Adhering to the Socialist Cultural development Path with Chinese Characteristics and Striving to build a country with strong socialist culture. ', *Qiushi*, Jan 1 2012, pp. 5-15.
- Knight, N. 2006, 'Reflecting on the PARadox of Globalisation: China's Search for Cultural Identity and Coherence', *China: An International Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1-31.
- Lu, C. 2011, 'How China Plays the Game: A Cultural Perspective on Sports in China', *Scandinavian Sports Studies Forum*, vol. 2, pp. 1-17.
- Talmy, S. 2011, 'The Interview as Collaborative Achievement: Interaction, Identity, and Ideology in a Speech Event', *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 25-42.

- Wang, C.-M. 2004, 'Capitalizing the big man: Yao Ming, Asian America, and the China Global', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 263-74.
- Xu, X. 2006, 'Modernizing China in the Olympic spotlight: China's national identity and the 2008 Beijing Olympiad', *The Sociological Review*, vol. 54, pp. 90-107.
- Yang, K.-S. 1998, 'Chinese responses to modernization: A psychological analysis', *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 1, pp. 75-97.
- 第七届全国极限飞盘赛2013 *China Open: 秩序册 Official Program* 2013, 深圳市飞盘运动协会 Shenzhen Flying Disc Association, pp. 1-13.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Consent Form

University of Technology, Sydney

RESEARCH PROJECT CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (interviewee/participant's name) agree to participate in the project *Sports Culture and the Paradox in Westernisation- A case study in Ultimate Frisbee* being conducted by Sarina Zhou, a postgraduate student at the University of Technology, Sydney undertaking a Masters of Arts of International Studies (Chinese Languages and Culture)

I understand that the purposes of this study is the research

- Cultural differences between Chinese and Western sports culture, in particular Ultimate Frisbee
- Personal experiences within the Chinese Ultimate Frisbee community
- Relevant learning cross-cultural learning experiences for example, breaking down language barriers between local and foreign players.
- Opinions on the success of local teams as well as the future success of Ultimate Frisbee in China

I understand the participation in this project will involve an observation of my interactions within a one-on-one interview and that an audio recording of the interview will take place.

If I have any concerns about the research I am aware I can contact Susette Cooke, the Subject Co-ordinator on +61 (2) 9514 1427 or susette.cooke@uts.edu.au. I also understand that I may withdraw my participation from this project at any time without giving any reason.

I agree that Sarina Zhou has answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

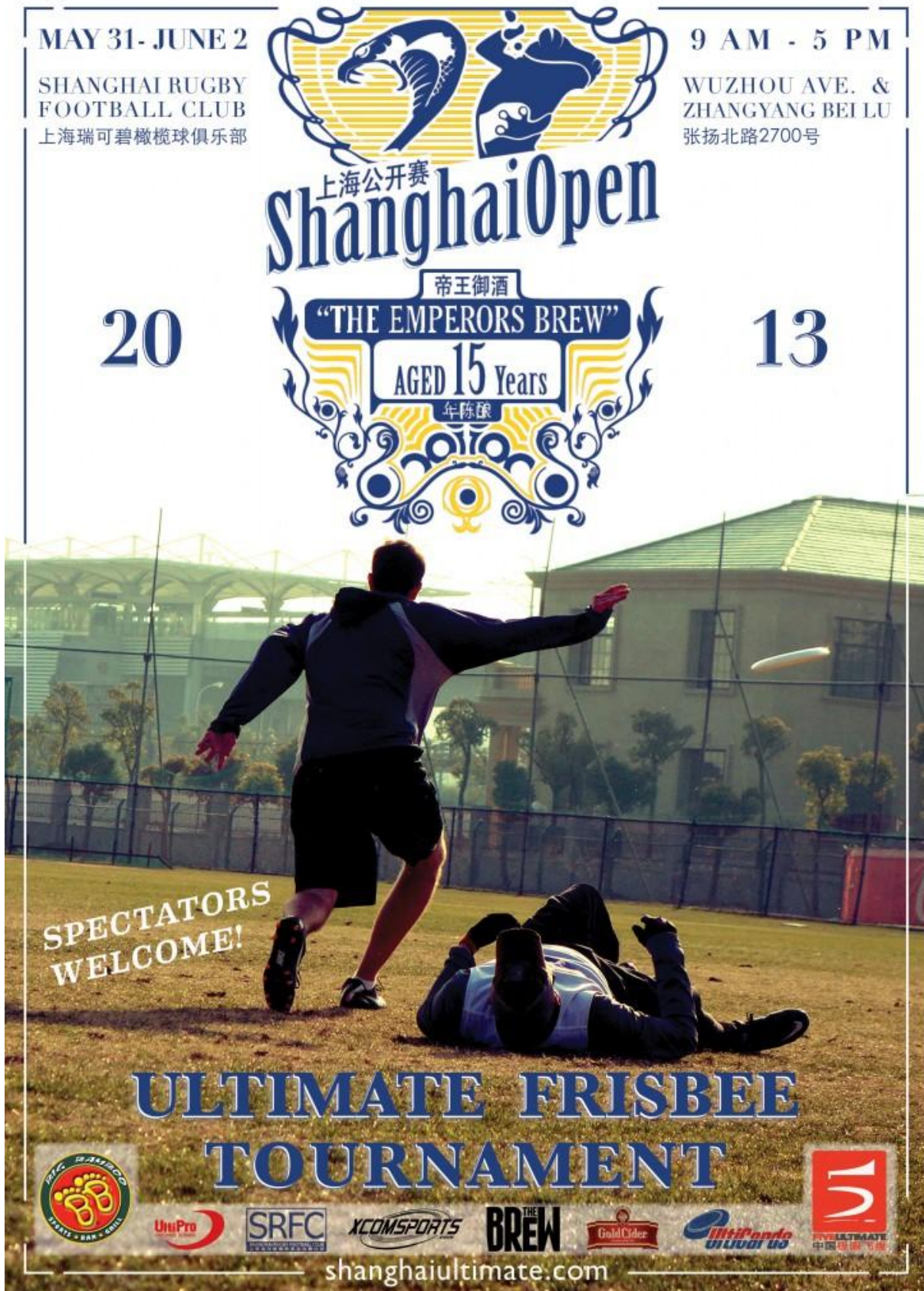
Signed by _____ Date __/__/__

Witnessed by _____ Date __/__/__

Appendix 2. Interview Outline

1. Could you briefly outline your background in Ultimate Frisbee
 - a. How and why did you choose to play Ultimate Frisbee?
 - b. What teams have you played with?
2. What do you think about fostering local development of Ultimate in regards to China Nationals and Shanghai Open?
 - a. Is one more effective than the other?
 - b. What are your opinions on the foreign restrictions?
3. What are the current more successful local teams?
 - a. Why do you think that is ie. What makes them more successful than other teams?
4. What do you think will be required to making China Ultimate more successful in the future?
 - a. What interventions will be required?
 - b. Is it possible for Ultimate to be self-sustaining by locals without the intervention by foreigners?
5. What are your opinions on the Spirit of the Game in China?
 - a. Is it being followed the way you wish it to be?

Appendix 3. Shanghai Open Flyer.



The flyer is a vertical rectangular poster for an Ultimate Frisbee tournament. At the top, it features a decorative header with a yellow and blue color scheme. On the left, it lists the dates 'MAY 31- JUNE 2' and the host 'SHANGHAI RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB' with its Chinese name. On the right, it specifies the time '9 AM - 5 PM' and the location 'WUZHOU AVE. & ZHANGYANG BEILU' with its Chinese address. The central focus is the 'Shanghai Open' logo, which includes a stylized bird and a figure, and the text '上海公开赛 Shanghai Open'. Below this is a decorative banner for 'THE EMPERORS BREW' aged 15 years, with Chinese characters '帝王御酒' and '15年陈酿'. The numbers '20' and '13' are placed on either side of this banner. The main image shows a person in a dark jacket and shorts in the foreground, seen from behind, with arms outstretched as if catching or releasing a frisbee. Another person is lying on the grass in the foreground. The background shows a large, modern building with a green roof and a chain-link fence. At the bottom, the text 'SPECTATORS WELCOME!' is written in a white, slanted font. Below that, the words 'ULTIMATE FRISBEE TOURNAMENT' are written in large, bold, blue letters. At the very bottom, there is a row of logos for sponsors: SRFC, UluPro, XCOMSPORTS, THE BREW, Gold Cider, UluPro, and FIVE ULTIMATE. The website 'shanghaiultimate.com' is printed at the bottom center.

MAY 31- JUNE 2
SHANGHAI RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB
上海瑞可碧橄榄球俱乐部

9 AM - 5 PM
WUZHOU AVE. & ZHANGYANG BEILU
张扬北路2700号

上海公开赛
Shanghai Open

帝王御酒
“THE EMPERORS BREW”
AGED 15 Years
15年陈酿

20 13

SPECTATORS WELCOME!

ULTIMATE FRISBEE TOURNAMENT

SRFC UluPro XCOMSPORTS THE BREW Gold Cider UluPro FIVE ULTIMATE

shanghaiultimate.com

Appendix 4. China Open 2013 Flyer

