

## The Mascots of the Beijing Olympics

Each of the Olympic Games always comes complete with (sometimes) adorable mascots. Although the mascots from one Olympics to another vary in quality and how they are received by the fans of the Games, the tradition of having mascots to represent the spirit of the Olympics lives on.

For this year's Summer Olympics in Beijing, there are five mascots, each colored to represent one of the Olympic rings. Collectively, they are known as Fuwa. Fuwa not only are supposed to represent the Olympic rings, but also the five elements recognized by many Chinese people- the earth, sky, sea, fire and forest.

Individually, the mascots are named Beibei, Jingjing, Huanhuan, Yingying and Nini. The syllables of their names are repeated to have a rhyming effect, which symbolizes a traditional way of referring affectionately to a child in China. When you put their names together, they become a sentence that translates to "Welcome to Beijing", which adds another level of meaning to the mascot name game.

If you've wondered just what the mascots are supposed to be, wonder no further. They are each one of the more popular animals for Chinese children, along with Huanhuan, who is the Olympic flame itself. The four animals represented are a swallow (Nini), a panda (Jingjing), a fish (Beibei), and a Tibetan antelope (Yingying).

As you can see, symbolism carries a great deal of weight in Chinese tradition, and as such, the symbolism of each of the mascots is very important. Let's discuss the symbolism of each of the five mascots of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, shall we?

Beibei the fish represents the blue Olympic ring, and also serves as a symbol of harvest and prosperity. Fish also signify prosperity in Chinese culture, or what many would refer to as "the good life". The mascots have associated personalities, and Beibei's is gentle and innocent.

Jingjing the panda symbolizes the black Olympic ring as well as the panda itself, which is a protected species in China and is revered by Chinese people. His ties with the forest are shown by the headdress he wears, which recall the forest and harmony between humans and nature. As an athlete, he is strong and his personality is an optimistic one.

Huanhuan the Olympic flame is known as the oldest of the Fuwa. His fire

symbolizes the passion of athletes around the world, and he is known as courteous and welcoming despite his passion to excel. He represents ball-oriented sports, and the red Olympic ring.

Yingying the Tibetan antelope is the quickest member of the Fuwa. He, like Jingjing, represents a protected species and as such, is a symbol of Beijing's desire to put on an environmentally friendly Olympic Games. Yingying is a clever personality who symbolizes the yellow Olympic ring, and also the vast lands of China.

Finally, Nini the swallow is modeled somewhat after the most popular kite design among Chinese children. In China, kite flying is very popular among children. She symbolizes the green Olympic ring, as well as the freedom of the sky. Among the sports, she represents gymnastics, and her personality is a happy one.

As you can see, there's more to these mascots than a collection of cute characters designed to make a buck from Olympic-crazy children. Full of symbolism, the Chinese ambassadors of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games hope that the Fuwa welcome all those who love the spirit of the Olympic Games.

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