

21st Century China

21st Century China:
Views from Australia

Edited by

Mary Farquhar

CAMBRIDGE
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21st Century China: Views from Australia, Edited by Mary Farquhar

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INTRODUCTION

MARY FARQUHAR

As the first decade of the twenty-first century closes, China is centre stage. Who can forget the stunning images of Beijing city during the Olympic opening ceremony, when the People's Republic of China proclaimed its superpower status to the world? In thrilling heartbeats, 2008 high-tech versions of ancient *fou* drums, pounded by the People's Liberation Army, opened the Games just before 8pm on 8 August 2008. This was a spectacular ceremony bridging past, present and future. Marrying ancient art and space-age technologies, each drum was a manually controlled pixel that, together, turned the floor of the stadium into a shimmering stage and then into giant digital numbers to count down the final seconds to 8 o'clock. The drummers chanted a Confucian saying, welcoming the world to Beijing as beams of lights pulsed across stage, drums, drummers and drumsticks. Computer-generated firework footprints then marched across the sky along the capital's north-south axis to the national stadium. A media-savvy China unfolded its ancient heritage and hyper-modernity before the world. Subsequent stunning visual tableaux on scroll, screen and three-dimensional stage used visual effects on an unprecedented scale to display Chinese civilization through its technological achievements over millennia: fireworks, paper, printing, compass and beyond to aerospace, digital art, Beijing's city skyline and architecture.

China's leap to centre stage as Olympic host nation pulsed with drama, spectacle and gold medals. The Olympics was often called China's "coming out party", a mass media extravaganza that heralded China's economic power three decades after Deng Xiaoping opened China to the world. With the world financial crisis towards the end of the same year, China's superpower status—economically, politically and militarily—is evident to all. China's time has come and interest in China is surging.

Twenty-first Century China: Views from Australia expresses this surge of interest, presenting a collection of papers by leading and emerging Australian Sinologists. Several key factors have shaped this book. First of all, it arose primarily from the 2007 conference of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia (CSAA) celebrating Australia's China scholarship.

Keynote presenters were twenty-first century Australian winners of such prestigious prizes as the annual Joseph Levenson awards (Geremie Barmé in 2004, John Makeham in 2006 and Michael Dutton in 2007) and leading Australian-Chinese artists and writers (such as the writer Sang Ye). Geremie Barmé's chapter, which opens this book, is a direct rewriting of the conference opening address to the public.

Second, and as a result of the book's origins, the chapters in this volume were not prepared around a central theme. The single organizing principle is that all are by Australians on twenty-first century China. Third, papers presented at the CSAA conference concentrated more on society and culture than on economics and politics. Other national conferences increasingly specialize in these latter areas. Hence, the majority of chapters in this volume discuss Chinese arts, society, law and culture.

This focus masks the breadth and depth of China's importance to Australia this century: culturally, demographically, economically and politically. These facets are encapsulated by our Mandarin-speaking Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. China is now our major trading partner. On a day in 2007 when Australia signed up a \$45 billion gas deal with China—Australia's biggest-ever export deal—Rudd as then leader of the Australian Opposition addressed China's President Hu Jintao in Sydney. Speaking in Chinese of his time in China as a diplomat, Rudd said:

My wife and I have a particular love for Beijing. We love the feeling of Beijing. We love the people of Beijing, and of course, its culture. Twenty years later, [our daughter] the little girl that we took to Beijing...married a young man from the Australian Chinese community.¹

Indeed Prime Minister Rudd, who graduated in China studies from the Australian National University, is a product of our deep academic engagement with China in the postwar period.

The chapters in this volume are organized around five key fields and disciplines:

1. urban architecture;
2. law and justice;
3. business and politics;
4. society and culture; and
5. the arts.

¹ John Ferguson, Gerard McManus and Ben Packham, "Kevin Rudd's Mandarin words impress China APEC delegates," *Herald Sun*, 7 September 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22376210-662,00.html> (accessed 20 June 2008).

Geremie Barmé's opening chapter explores urban transformation in the national capital as "an Olympic undertaking". It takes as its starting point the 1898 Hundred Days Reform period of the late-Qing dynasty, and culminates 110 years later with the August 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. In the context of Chinese history and spectacle, Barmé sees the latest reorientation of Beijing as a centuries-old process of destruction-construction that showcases social change and state symbols—including the dragon supposedly hibernating beneath the city. Indeed, he sees Beijing's Olympic Park as part of a new imagined dragon whose tail curls around the po-mo *pièce de resistance* of the Games: the fabulous Bird's Nest stadium, a "symbol of the new order, one in which global capital and a heavily policed, harmonious society prevail".

In Chapter 2, Michael Dutton offers another, broader, political reading of Beijing's urban architecture. For Dutton, Beijing's monumental rebuilding—and indeed all architecture—is "a gift of politics", moving beyond utility to symbolic forms of labour, power and domination. He argues from Martin Heidegger that buildings give "to things their look and to men their outlook". In a tour of building sites that takes us from the Tower of Babel to the *qi* of ancient Beijing, and on to the Ten Great Projects of the Maoist era, his essay explores the ways in which the built environment reflects the means by which communities are "worlded". Moving from site to site, he reaches beyond the question of "form and function" and enters the realm that Georges Bataille labels "the sacred": the building site is more than bricks and mortar. It is a means through which one can begin to explore the different cosmologies of politics and move toward a fuller understanding of the "gift-like" quality of certain forms of politics.

Chapters 3 and 4 take us to issues of Chinese law, regulation and justice. This was a major theme of the 2007 CSAA conference, which launched an Australia-wide China Law Network currently directed by Sarah Biddulph. Her chapter, "Justice and Order in Shanghai: The Case of Forced Housing Demolition and Relocation", continues the discussion of urban landscapes but in a different Chinese city and from different perspectives. She examines responses of Shanghai residents to changing policies and practices of forced housing relocation for the purposes of urban renewal. Relocation practices and outcomes considered to be unfair have led to considerable popular dissatisfaction and public protest. These problems have been exacerbated by a number of factors, including the ambiguity of residents' legal rights, a problem that has not been resolved with passage of the *PRC Property Rights Law* in 2007; the way demolition rights have been granted and implemented; and the lack of effective legal

redress for unconscionable or unlawful conduct. Biddulph then compares the reactions of two groups of residents, one relocated under pre-2001 policies and practices and the other under the Shanghai Municipal government's "Sunshine" policy, which was designed to improve transparency and fairness in housing relocation. The differences between responses provided by the two groups not only indicate the importance individual respondents placed on being treated fairly and equally. They also suggest a link between the respondents' levels of confidence in the legal system and their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the processes and outcomes of their relocation.

Chapter 4 by Susan Trevaskes, "Restorative Justice or McJustice with Chinese Characteristics?", starts from the Chinese state's commitment to a harmonious society, which Chapter 1 notes as a significant slogan of the Beijing Olympics. Trevaskes shows how this commitment is legally expressed in a new policy of "balancing leniency and severity". The policy is touted as a mechanism for correcting a longstanding imbalance in the criminal justice system that favoured harsh punishment. In 2007, authorities produced new standards for criminal indictment, lowering the benchmark by which certain offences are now deemed prosecutable. Authorities have also encouraged a new policy where the accused pays the victim financially and consequentially receives a reduced or non-custodial sentence that in many cases replaces a custodial sentence. While some see these moves as a kind of "restorative justice", others see no justice in the concept or the practice of effectively "buying" escape from a prison sentence. The chapter analyzes these events and public, media and institutional reactions to them, while offering some alternative justifications for these changes.

Chapters 5 and 6 open windows into business and politics, exploring Chinese business cultures at the national and local levels respectively. Chapter 5, "The Politics of Power in China" by Xu Yi-chong, discusses the development of the national electricity industry. Her work demystifies two general perceptions: that China has been dominated by a ubiquitous Communist Party that insists on authoritarian control; and that the state-owned corporations are mere instruments of the government, and thus the party, to achieve whatever objectives the party decides. The electricity industry is facing three major challenges: rising energy demands, worsening environmental pollution, and perennial conflicts between the two-interlocked sectors, coal and electricity. The most important issues for understanding the players in the electricity industry are their creation, expansion and competition. Reform of this industry concerns three related issues: horizontal bureaucratic power struggles, vertical central-local

government competition, and asymmetry of information between fragmented government agencies and oligopolistic power companies.

In Chapter 6, “Explaining Business: The Role of Culture in Enterprise Development”, David Goodman shifts our gaze to the local level. He claims that business development in China is often explained in terms of that country’s unique culture. A prime difficulty in such an approach lies in operationalizing the concept of Chinese culture. He claims that culture is more readily and usefully analyzed at the local than at the national level. The importance of local culture to both politics and the emergence of modern Chinese nationalism has been demonstrated often. However the relationship between local culture and enterprise development is more complex. Local culture provides ideology and often organization that supports entrepreneurship and the development of specifically local economic activity. Through local studies in three Chinese provinces—Shanxi, Qinghai and Hainan—Goodman argues that local culture is not only a significant factor of production but also helps explain the trajectory and organization of local business.

The following three chapters turn from business to Chinese society and culture, focusing on rural land redistribution, urban taste and China’s Confucian revival. Chapter 7, “Families and Farmland in Chinese Villages: Unexpected Findings” by Jonathan Unger, analyzes changes in attitudes to property and property distribution in much of the Chinese countryside today. He discusses why the division of the paternal household takes place at the point of each son’s marriage; why elderly parents tend to live with their youngest married son; and why popular rural attitudes toward private property today are dramatically different from both traditional times and the revolutionary period. To resolve the financial difficulties posed by the family life cycle, most farmers currently oppose a system of private property in agriculture and secretly participate in periodic free redistributions of farmland among households within rural communities.

In Chapter 8, “Taste and Hierarchy in China’s Cities”, Stephanie Hemelryk Donald addresses the matter of taste in the middle market(s) or middle-classes (*zhongchanjieji*) in contemporary urban China. She considers how people determine their behaviour at work and in private life, as marketization continues to develop a sophisticated consumer economy. She suggests that we must be open to diverse sources and eclectic transfers of interpretation in describing the complexity of such new social phenomena. These sources and methods may include quantitative snapshots of social and economic trends, media and film analyses, brand and consumption data, and of course interviews with

people themselves. This work requires the researcher to respect the challenges people face as they confront everyday life in an aspirational and uncompromisingly money-oriented society. Moral and political judgements around class issues can be too easily transposed from the researcher's experience and opinions of class difference. This analysis aims to avoid that trap, reading vulnerability as well as power in the responses of the study's sample group.

John Makeham's Chapter 9, "The Past as Present: China's 'Confucian' Revival", began as a keynote address at the 2007 CSAA Conference. He argues that since the 1980s, Taiwan and China have witnessed the most sustained resurgence of academic and intellectual interest in *ruxue* or Confucian studies for the past century. In the discourse that has emerged, *ruxue* is variously conceived as a form of culture, an ideology, and a tradition of morally normative and even religious values. By the mid-1990s, on the mainland this revival was sometimes referred to as a period of "*ruxue* fever", just as "culture fever" had burned a decade before. Makeham's chapter examines particular aspects, such as cultural nationalism and party policy, in the contemporary revival of "Confucianism" in China. This revival has a global dimension in the growing number of China-sponsored Confucius Institutes in universities in Australia and around the world.

The final three chapters explore aspects of the arts. In each chapter the arts—whether exhibition, film or cuisine—are a matter of Sino-Australian collaboration. Chapter 10, "Climbing the Great Wall of China for Australia: Three Views" is by Claire Roberts, Jean-Francois Lanzarone and Sang Ye. The authors document their role in *The Great Wall of China* exhibition, held in Sydney and Melbourne in 2006-2007. It was the first major international exhibition to chart the 2500-year history of The Great Wall of China, from the Warring States period 475-221 BCE to the present. A joint project of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney and the National Museum of China in Beijing, the exhibition attracted 200 000 visitors. The authors were creative contributors to the project: Claire Roberts was lead curator of the exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum; Jean-François Lanzarone was a Museum photographer who produced a large-screen audio-visual programme about the Great Wall; and Sang Ye is the Beijing-born, Australian-based writer and oral historian whose interviews with people living and working in close proximity to the Walls frame the exhibition publication. In this three-part essay, the authors reflect on the significance of the Great Wall and their involvement in this landmark exhibition in Australia.

In Chapter 11, “Digital Imaginaries: Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* and Sydney’s Animal Logic”, Mary Farquhar explores Zhang’s controversial martial arts film from an unusual perspective: the contribution of Australian visual effects art and technology to the film’s lush imagery. Farquhar argues that *Hero* (*Yingxiong*, 2002) is a visual effects film with significant Australian input, despite protestations from the two main filmmakers, Chinese director Zhang Yimou (who went on to direct the 2008 Olympic ceremonies) and Australian cinematographer Chris Doyle. An analysis of the digital effects in before-and-after visuals, supplied by Animal Logic in Sydney, demonstrates that *Hero* exemplifies ways in which new technologies have revolutionized the worldwide film industry. She concludes that *Hero*’s before-and-after visuals not only produce stunning “digital imaginaries” of China’s mythic martial arts world but also bring the “mainland” blockbuster into a new global production paradigm that is well recognized in the West.

The final essay in this book—Chapter 12, “Being Chinese Australian: The Best of Both Worlds”—offers an inextricable blend of Australian and Chinese through self-ethnography. Kylie Kwong, a household name in Australia, presents glimpses of her life as restaurateur, chef, television presenter, sustainability advocate and China tour guide. As a fourth-generation Chinese Australian entrepreneur she shares her life, favourite recipes, and the memories they evoke. Recipes intertwine with affectionate portraits of memorable meals—from the succulent Cantonese-style white-cooked chicken that graces the family’s half Chinese–half Australian family feasts, to childhood neighbour Mrs Adams’s bangers and mash. The richness and diversity of Kylie’s cooking, and the cultural mix that injects life into it, are reflected in her philosophy of cooking and her travels back to China, as well as in the dishes that mean so much to her. For Kylie, food is a way of life in the present, and a link with the past that steeps her in a Chinese-Australian family heritage that she believes is “the best of both worlds”.

Kylie’s chapter highlights the positive interaction between Chinese and Australians in everyday life. But the relationship is also controversial. Newspapers abound with various views on the Australian-Chinese relationship in this new century. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s closeness to China—his self-confessed “love” of Beijing—unsettles some commentators, given our long reliance on British and then American ties and our close trading relationship with Japan in the postwar period. Xu Yi-chong’s chapter on China’s electricity sector talks directly to current concerns about Chinese investment in Australian resource companies, such as Rio Tinto. Other areas of debate, not included here, relate to Australia’s

proposed naval build-up partly as a response to China's military rise in the Asia Pacific region to our north and, to a much lesser extent, China's presence in three Antarctic bases to our south.

Whatever the texture of these debates over time, China is indisputably a major trading partner that builds Australian prosperity. Australian resources helped feed the Chinese resurgence from the later twentieth century just as they fed the Japanese resurgence postwar. Our exports to China supported ongoing Australian budget surpluses early this century that now suddenly seem long gone. Without question, any Australian recovery from the global financial crisis that brought economic upheaval worldwide in the closing years of this century's first decade will depend on China's economic recovery. As Kevin Rudd, while Opposition leader, observed at the Brookings Institute in April 2007, China-related issues have become part of Australia's "very lifeblood" in the twenty-first century.²

Acknowledgements

As editor, I wish to acknowledge the superb editing work of Maureen Todhunter and the desk-top publishing of Robyn White who prepared this volume for publication, and the financial support of the Griffith Asia Institute. We also thank artist Guan Wei for copyright permission and Julie Ewington of the Queensland Art Gallery for the cover image of Guan's painting *Echo* (2005) on the dustjacket.

² Kevin Michael Rudd, "The Rise of China and the Strategic Implications for U.S.—Australia Relations," address at The Brookings Institution, Washington, 20 April 2007, <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2007/0420china.aspx> (accessed 15 June 2008).

CHAPTER ONE

BEIJING REORIENTED, AN OLYMPIC UNDERTAKING

GEREMIE R. BARMÉ

The Body of Nezha

It is the mid-1890s. The young Hunan reformist Tan Sitong and a group of his heroic followers arrive on horseback in a cloud of dust at Taoran Ting, the Joyful Pavilion, in the southwest of the Chinese imperial capital. Another reformer, the firebrand Liang Qichao, is already there and the place is crowded with people who have come from all over the city. Tan reports to his bewildered colleague:

These last few days, people have been saying that something peculiar is happening here. There are reports of roaring from beneath the ground; it is said to sound like the bellowing of bulls.

The unsettling sound was not made by a submerged bull. It was the stirring of a restive dragon, one that had long been hibernating under the city. The beast was not the Napoleonic dragon of China that, once woken, would shake the world. Rather it was a curmudgeonly and grumpy old beast agitated by the feverish goings on above ground. The dragon under Beijing was, literally, being unsettled by untoward events over its head: the increasing corruption of the dynastic Qing court, the incursions of foreign invaders and the harrowing destitution of the common people.

Tan Sitong is surprised to find so many of his friends gathered at Taoran Ting. But they are not there to investigate subterranean rumblings; they are planning their own commotion. They are in the midst of setting up the Society for the Strengthening of Study (*Qiangxue hui*). The group will agitate for the political and economic reform of the moribund Qing

empire.¹ In 1898, their efforts will contribute to the famous Hundred Days Reform, or *Wuxu Bianfa*, an attempt by the Guangxu Emperor to remake the political, educational and social landscape of imperial China. Today it is just 110 years since that movement failed, resulting in the beheading of reformers like Tan Sitong and the slide of the Chinese empire towards its collapse a little over a decade later.



Illustration 1-1: Carving on a Balustrade at North Lake (Bei Hai)
 Source: Photograph by the author.

In the early 1500s, the Yongle Emperor, Zhu Di, had the dynastic capital of the Ming dynasty moved to Beijing. To do so he had the old city of the Mongol–Yuan rulers redesigned and expanded. Legend has it that during the creation of the imperial cities of the Ming, the soothsayer Liu Bowen reported to the emperor that he feared dragons lurking in the waters of the city would bring calamity if they were not pacified. The water-hungry creatures that lived throughout the lakes and marshes of the area threatened to steal the precious resource.² It is said that one day, while

¹ Yan Gu Laoren, *Xu Niehaihua (Flowers on a Sinful Sea Continued)* (Shanghai: Zhenmeishan, 1947), Chs 33, 36, 37.

² For a comprehensive study of the stories related to Nezha and Beijing, see Hok-lam Chan, *Legends of the Building of Old Peking* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008), 87-169. Chan points out that legends related to the “Nezha City” (*Nazha Cheng* or *Nezha Cheng*) can be traced to the Yuan dynasty. Drought was a constant problem for the rulers of both the Ming and the Qing. See Chan, *Legends*, 115, 118-20. My thanks to John Minford for bringing this book to my attention.

absorbed in his thoughts, Liu was visited by the boy-god Nezha. A playful wraith with eight arms, Nezha flew on wind-fire wheels, like roller-blades, and wielded monster-defeating hoops.

Nezha was famed for having killed the son of the Dragon King, thereby curtailing the power of the dragon whose aqueous lust constantly threatened the stability of Beijing and the access of its people to precious water. On this occasion, Nezha said to Liu Bowen that if the new walled city of Beijing was designed using his body for its layout, the dragon in the depths would remain quelled and imperial prosperity would be assured.

According to this legend, Liu Bowen oriented the city so that the gates of Beijing would correspond to Nezha's arms and legs. The front gate, or Qian Men and its enceinte, is Nezha's head, the side gates his ears and the wells just inside it his eyes. The two northern gates of Anding Men and Desheng Men are his feet, while the two temples outside the gates represent the wheels of fire and water on which the playful spirit traversed the heavens.



Illustration 1-2: Nezha and the Design of Beijing

Source: Illustration by Ding Cong, in Jin Shoushen, *Beijing Legends*, Beijing: Panda Books, 1982.

The red colour of the imperial city itself represented Nezha's costume, and the halls and pavilions inside the Forbidden City represent his inner organs. The three lakes of Zhongnan and Bei Hai (literally, "central, south and north seas") were his stomach, and the Dragon King who lorded

it over the area is said to have dwelled here.³ Keeping the dragon under control was not only about containing reptilian malevolence, however, for each year the subterranean creature was said to lift its head—*long taitou*, “the dragon raises its head”—bringing spring and summer rains, and so replenishing the underground waters that fed the wells of the city.

With the new walled city of Beijing in the form of Nezha’s body, the dragon beneath it remained quiescent and in hibernation through to the late nineteenth century. But then it would stir, aware that the spell cast over it by the body of Nezha would soon be broken. It is said that the threat of the unruly dragon would eventually arrive from the north to steal the precious water on which the city survived. Perhaps, then, it is no accident that directly to the north of old Beijing a new dragon has taken shape, with the site of the 2008 Beijing Olympics in its scaly embrace. The tail of this new and imperious serpent—the Dragon Lake of the Olympic Park—curls around the main Olympic stadium (Herzog and de Meuron’s National Stadium), known as The Bird’s Nest (*Niao chao*).



Illustration 1-3: The National Stadium, or “Bird’s Nest”

Source: Photograph by Lois Conner.

³ See Jin Shoushen, *Beijing Legends*, trans. Gladys Yang (Beijing: Panda Books, 1982), 10-17, 24-31; L. C. Arlington and William Lewisohn, *In Search of Old Peking*, reprint edn (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987), 338-39. Chan Hok-lam notes the rise of Nezha legends during the early decades of the Republic of China and argues that the god’s popularity was linked to a rising nostalgia for the grand Beijing of the imperial era.

Reorienting Beijing

Regardless of the resurgent dragon in the northern suburbs of Beijing, Nezha has been struggling for a long time. The twentieth century saw the legendary body of Nezha put on the rack time and again by urban planners whose efforts have reflected attempts to remodel, ideologically and physically, the inhabitants of the city and, by extension, China itself. Even during the last years of the Qing dynasty that collapsed in 1911, the celestial geometry of Beijing was being reordered. Warfare during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 saw the first despoliation of walls within the city, and subsequently their grand crenulations were breached for the convenience of modern transportation.⁴



Illustration 1-4: Ming City Wall Ruins Park

Source: Photograph by the author.

After the fall of the Qing, the world of the abdicated Xuantong Emperor Puyi would literally be turned on its head, as was the north–south axis of the imperial capital itself. No longer would the Son of Heaven leave the Forbidden City through its imposing southern gates at Wu Men, Duan Men and Tiananmen. These southern precincts of the palace were now entirely off-limits to the court, occupied by the new republican government and a preparatory Palace Museum (initially called the Gallery

⁴ See my essay “Zhu Qiqian’s Silver Shovel,” in Features, *China Heritage Quarterly*, 14 (June 2008), at: <http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/>.

of Antiquities). Henceforth, the emperor had to use Shenwu Men, the northern entrance of the palace, to make his exit.



Illustration 1-5: Shenwu Men, or the Gate of Divine Prowess, Seen from Prospect Hill (Jing Shan)

Source: Photograph by the author.

Meanwhile, the seat of political power was relocated to the Lake Palaces of Zhongnan Hai. They had been a favourite residence of the Empress Dowager Cixi, the effective ruler of China, in her later years. Both she and the Guangxu emperor died in the Palaces' pavilions 100 years ago. In the early Republican era of the 1910s, these palaces would be used as the seat of government for Yuan Shikai,⁵ a president who would be emperor. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the State Council still rule the nation from the Lake Palaces today.

Under Yuan the physical reorientation of Beijing began in earnest, with the walls of the imperial city (*Huang cheng*) dismantled. Today only a small, broken remnant of these can be seen at the Imperial City Wall Park that extends along the eastern flank of the Forbidden City from Chang'an Boulevard to Heping Boulevard in the north. Meanwhile, a Chinoiserie main entrance was created for the government. It was named *Xinhua Men*, or New China Gate. As Yuan made his imperial gambit, he

⁵ A significant Chinese political figure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Yuan was a highly ranked military official of the Qing Dynasty who turned against it, succeeded Sun Yat-sen as the first president of the Chinese Republic, and attempted to found a new dynasty.

even declared that the Lake Palaces be renamed the Palace of New China (*Xinhua Gong*).



Illustration 1-6: Aerial View of Zhongnan Hai, with New China Gate (Xinhua Men) Visible at the Bottom of the Image
Source: *Zhong Nan Hai, Beijing—Political Centre of a Country of One Billion*, Beijing: China Pictorial, 1981.



Illustration 1-7: New China Gate (Xinhua Men)
Source: *Zhong Nan Hai*.

The lavish gate was to serve as a podium from which the military ruler could review his troops, their serried ranks marching along an east–west

axis in front of it. This new axis broke significantly with the imperial north–south geometry of Beijing, marking a basic realignment of the design of the city that would continue unabated for the next 70 years. This axial route would eventually become Chang’an Boulevard, the multi-laned highway that cuts a swath through the centre of the modern city.



*Illustration 1-8: Tiananmen Square and Chang’an Boulevard, 1999
Reconstruction*

Source: Photograph by Lois Conner.

The People’s Liberation Army led by the Communist Party occupied the ancient city in 1948 and, in 1949, the new Communist Party government declared Beijing the capital of the People’s Republic of China. The architects and urban planners Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhanxiang presented to the new party leaders what they called the “49 Scheme”, a city plan that proposed a new municipal centre to the west of the old, walled city of Beijing. This plan would locate the socialist government of the Communist Party in the area where the Japanese military had established headquarters during its occupation of the city (1937-1945). Under this plan, the old city could be preserved in its entirety, and an ambulatory garden would be built on the 500-year-old city walls.

In 1952, the central government vetoed the plan, but arguments over the design of the new city continued. In July 1953, Peng Zhen, the mayor of Beijing, declared that majority opinion now favoured demolishing the city walls. It was felt that retaining the Forbidden City would preserve more than enough of old Beijing. Party Central and the people’s government would expand into new buildings to be constructed around an enlarged Tiananmen Square. Eventually, it was hoped, the Forbidden City would be surrounded by six to eight storey high-rise offices. An avenue of

equally impressive buildings would line both sides of Chang'an Boulevard; the heroic structures of the new socialist China would overshadow, both literally and figuratively, the squat and disfiguring remnants of the feudal past. For, despite the dutiful discussions with experts, consultations with the labouring masses and the consideration of the city's cultural heritage, Peng Zhen had learnt that "Chairman Mao doesn't like old Beijing; he wants to see it torn down and rebuilt". The only thing that held the government back from enacting the drastic proposals drawn up in the 1950s was a lack of money.⁶

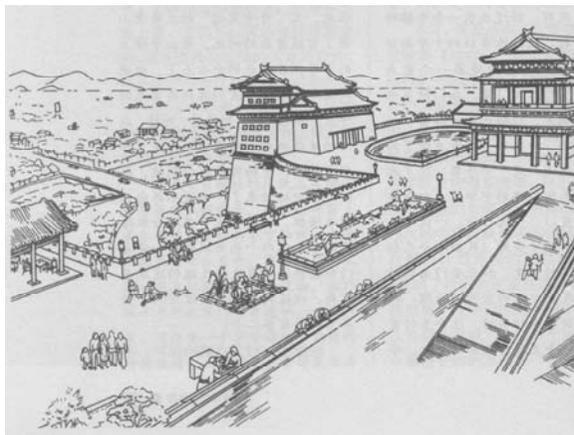


Illustration 1-9: A View of the Beijing City Wall Park as Envisaged in the Early 1950s

Source: "Liang Sichengde Beijing chengqiang gongyuan shexiang tu" (Plan for the Beijing City Wall Park by Liang Sicheng), from *Liang Sicheng wenji* (*The Collected Writings of Liang Sicheng*) 1986, reproduced in Wang Jun, *Cheng ji* (*Recording the City*), Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2003.

Nonetheless, the new rulers of the conquered city still achieved a radical re-engineering of the place: the feminized, supine, inward looking site of Manchu–Qing betrayal and decadence, a city of *gonzige'r*, *kuotai*,

⁶ For details of plans for Beijing and the former imperial palace during the early decades of the People's Republic of China, see Chs 1 and 7 of my *The Forbidden City* (London: Profile Books & Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1-24; 143-69, and the online notes to these chapters at: www.chinaheritageproject.org/theforbiddency.

mingshi and *xiangong*, a place of unique culture and refinement, was transformed into an heroic city of party stalwarts, workers, micro-factories, industrial plants and, above all, robust, progressive, polluting production. Paradoxically, the survival of the old city of Beijing, and the remnants of its imperial north–south orientation, was the result of the two most radical revolutionary movements, or rather calamities, of recent Chinese history.



Illustration 1-10: 'Plan for Tiananmen Square 8' (1954).

Source: Dong Guangqi, Gudu Beijing: Wushi nian yanbian lu (A Record of Fifty Years of Change), Nanjing: Dongnan chubanshe, 2006.

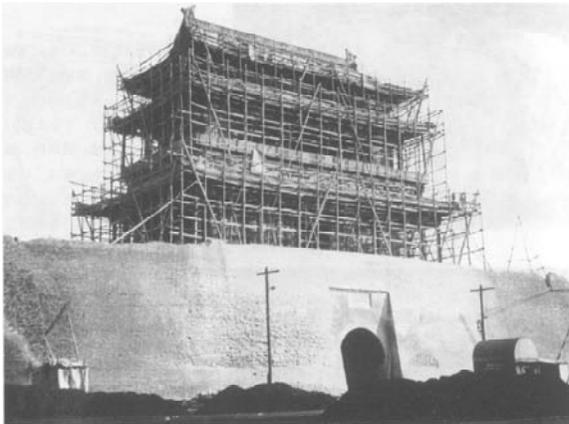


Illustration 1-11: The Late-1960s Demolition of Anding Men

Source: Photograph by Luo Zhewen, in Wang Jun, Cheng ji.

The economic dislocation and political in-fighting resulting first from the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s, and then from the Cultural