Beijing:
City of Spectacle, City of Dust

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I declare that this dissertation is my own original work.

Kelly Layton

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For Mum and Dad
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Abstract

As the capital of the People's Republic of China, Beijing has become an increasingly important emblem in the new story of China's rise, both domestically and internationally. This is not, however, the first time that the city has had such symbolic importance. Rarely in the history of China has a city been made to manifest world-making and world-transforming power as Beijing. With only rare exceptions, it has been the central motif of political power and authority since it was first built in the thirteenth century. This political and symbolic life has had profound consequences for the unfolding history both of the place and for those who have lived there. Each new era in the unfolding history of Beijing required, in one way or another, the city and its peoples to engage with the complex heritage of its past, and this palimpsest itself now forms part of that very heritage. It is a heritage with which the reconstruction of contemporary Beijing has had to engage and negotiate.

This study examines the relationship between Beijing, a symbol of one or other totalising vision over the course of its modern history, and the physical and figurative 'dusts' both of its past and present. It offers a series of historical and contemporary 'images' of place, weaving together different views and representations of Beijing from on high, and impressions of the city at street level, as a way to explore how these two worlds have engaged with each other over time. Utilising a diverse range of sources, from accounts by historians, historical memoirs and archival materials to sketches and models, official plans, and first-hand accounts of contemporary Beijing, it engages with some of the dialectics and tensions that have
emerged from the city’s problematic doubling both as a space for the spectacular inscription of power, and a lived-in, constantly remade and contested urban environment. In particular, it examines the design, development and reconstruction of Beijing in dynastic China; western travel writings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the physical and moral cleaning up of the city following its ‘Peaceful Liberation’ in 1949; Mao Zedong’s war against the Old City, the building of the socialist capital and its subsequent transformation under Deng Xiaoping; the problematic re-emergence of and re-emphasis on the city’s heritage in the reform era; and narratives of the future existent during the city’s Olympic reconstruction.

Undertaken in large part as a negation of its dynastic and imperial past, the transformation of modern Beijing has nonetheless been carried out in its shadow. Furthermore, the city’s life as a symbol of power has made it subject more than most Chinese cities to statist concerns regarding physical and figurative hygiene, to efforts to mould and fashion its street life, and to police the historical, social and physical dust that constantly threatens to becloud and disrupt the state-sponsored image of the city.
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1

Introduction: The Cities of Beijing

In the ancient world, platforms that afforded an elevated view of the landscape were often demarcated as sacred places, realms reserved for gods and their worship, or the dead and their ghosts.¹ They were commonly the highest points of the natural environment – mountains and rocky outcrops wrought and moulded by the cataclysms of nature and the gentle sculpting of time. Apart from rare instances where these natural formations were found near human settlements, bird’s-eye views of towns and cities, overarching panoramas of a place, were largely limited to the imperfect workings of human abstraction. In Europe, medieval and renaissance painters conceived visions from on high based upon their own partial experiences of the world from the ground. They made use of what Michel de Certeau once termed the godly ‘celestial eye’, which was yet a fictional viewpoint.² With the invention of modern flight and technologies that enabled the erection of skyscrapers, there is now a proliferation of these once sacred, once only imagined views in modern cityscapes. Indeed, these very views and the ways of seeing that they imbricate are now intimately linked to the conception and design of modern cities.

For de Certeau, ruminating on Manhattan from the viewing platform of the World Trade Center in 1980, to see a city from above as a whole evokes in the

¹ One can think of the sacred mountains of Tao and Buddhist China, or the Acropolis in Athens.  
spectator an 'erotics of knowledge'. While now divorced from any sacral filiations, such a view transforms the real city into a text – a readable, rationalisable object, excised of its complicated, lived-in reality – and the viewer into a kind of 'seeing God'. Through the agency of such distance, cities appear both perceptually and also conceptually (or 'theoretically'): they become at once the mapped and the map, the represented and the representation, reality and its abstraction, with, for de Certeau, the problematic triumph of the latter over the former. In this way, representations of the city from above are anything but passive and neutral. They delineate and obfuscate political will, fantasies of possession and understanding, encouraging certain ways of seeing the world represented, and intervening in it. According to de Certeau, 'the space planner, the city planner or map-maker' all make use of this 'scopic drive' – a way of seeing the world which both constructs a perception of reality and, in doing so, effaces other perspectives, creating a more useful, utilisable picture.

Martin Jay has similarly traced the origins of the modern notion of space to late-Medieval European attempts to discern the workings of a divine will. Opticians at the time believed the grand design of God was geometrical, which they could uncover and delineate through studying the mathematical regularities of the behaviour of light. Thus emerged a nascent scientific worldview from an existing theological one. Eventually decoupled from its religious associations, this notion of an 'allegedly objective optic' persisted, developing into a concept of space that was

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 102.
5 Ibid.
'geometrically isotropic, rectilinear, abstract, and uniform'.  

The world was seen as a manifestation of 'a mathematically regular spatiotemporal order' to be disclosed and comprehended by the rational observer — the scientist and, eventually, the social scientist. It was therefore an initial concern with uncovering a divine will, and the persistence of this theological relic, that led to the eventual de-sacralisation of space and the development of sciences that sought both to uncover it rationally, and to produce the transparent, rationalist spaces of modernity. This movement was central to what Anthony Vidler calls the 'myth of transparency': that space and indeed society is a thing that can be systematically understood and constructed. This myth, he says, haunts the work of everyone from Jeremy Bentham to Le Corbusier, and, I would suggest, the view of the city that de Certeau found so intoxicating and problematic. It is a myth that is entangled within the very project of western urbanism, and the modernist project itself.

Pre-modern city planning in China — a place, in its recent history, of unprecedented urban expansion — itself enjoyed its own version of divine origins, one intimately linked to the dominion of the ruler. Pierre Ryckmans has noted the overlap between 'map' and 'image' in the Chinese language, in the word tu (图), which seems to engage with a concept similar to that which de Certeau found so disconcerting in his ruminations on modern cityscapes. The ambiguity of this word was made use of in the realpolitik of pre-imperial China, when the possession of a map of a territory signified the possession of that very territory: when conquered, a

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7 Ibid., 6.
8 Ibid., 9.
state would surrender the territorial map-image to the conqueror, thus transferring possession and control of the place represented therein.\textsuperscript{10}

In imperial China, the ambiguity of the map-image of a place and its relationship to the reproduction of power continued, in the form of the capital city. A capital was a conditionally sacred city, manifesting the ‘architecture of conditional power’ of the emperor as the Son of Heaven.\textsuperscript{11} It was integral to legitimising the dynasty and its occupation of the empire. When a dynasty fell, it was taken as a sign that the Mandate of the Heaven of its builder had been lost. Therefore, a new dynasty would often undertake a complete re-build of the capital, on top of the old or at an entirely new site, to re-establish this numinous approval. It demonstrated the might of the new dynasty, which was capable of ‘moving whole cities if necessary, and recreating familiar cityscapes in new locations’.\textsuperscript{12} It also indicated symbolically the irreversibility of the resultant social and political order.\textsuperscript{13} The new sovereign was expected to participate in various duties from site inspection for suitability, as well as divination and planning, turning the process of capital building itself into ‘a ritual act of imperial legitimization’.\textsuperscript{14} The capital also helped create and reproduce power and imperial authority through its very shape. As such, Chinese city planners made a

\textsuperscript{10} In a footnote of his essay, ‘The Chinese Attitude Towards the Past’, Ryckmans outlines this overlap: ‘Note the ambiguity of the word tu which means both map and image. Originally, to possess the map-image of a territory was to have control over that territory. In international relations in pre-imperial China, when a state yielded territory to another state, the transaction was effected by surrendering the map-image of that territory’ (China Heritage Quarterly, no. 14 (June 2008), http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=014_chineseAttitude.inc&issue=014 (accessed 31 July 2013).


great effort and gave much thought to ensure it accorded with the surrounding geomantic and physical landscape, as well as to make it embody in its structure significant astral bodies, so as 'to ensure its harmonious location and arrangement in relation to the celestial and terrestrial powers which would impinge upon it'. For the capital did not just serve as an imperial residence and a centre of government. It was also a kind of cosmological diagram, a planned whole that embodied a totalised vision, which could only be grasped in its totality when viewed from above, or as a bird's eye abstraction or map.

City of Spectacle, City of Dust

China's current capital Beijing itself fits comfortably within the longer span of imperial capital planning and building. The modern city can be tentatively traced to Khanbalik, which Kublai Khan, the would-be emperor of the Yuan dynasty, ordered built in the late-thirteenth century. This city, which would serve as the capital of his new Sino-Mongolian dynasty soon after it was completed, was conceived as an abstract whole before any work began on its realisation in wood, earth and stone. Its final design and the process of its construction were deeply influenced by an ancient canon of city planning, with great consideration and effort made to ensure its cosmological correctness and harmony with the surrounding environment.

I have drawn the reader's attention to these initially disparate notions of space (and their sacred filiations) for it was with this indigenous legacy of city planning that Beijing's modern transformations (the main point of departure of this work) would have to contend and engage. Indeed, I suggest that since the middle of

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16 See the following chapter for more. Kublai had the capital built before he was announced emperor.
the nineteenth century there has been an extraordinary, profound commerce of
meaning between the two in the space of Beijing. It began in 1861, when the first
western tourists began to arrive in the city following the devastation of the Garden of
Perfect Brightness (also known in English as the ‘Old Summer Palace’) in 1860.
These visitors comprehended this Chinese city and their experience of it through the
prism of newly developing western notions of hygiene and space, thus marking the
first point of an extended period of ‘contact’ between these radically different notions
of space which has continued to the present day. Rather than arguing that a
rationalist notion of space supplanted China’s own traditions of city and empire
building, I suggest that when the European idea of space, tied to what Vidler has
called ‘the tradition of utopian and materialist attempts to refashion the social
world’,17 came into contact with that of city planning in China, embodied in the
figure of Beijing, the city’s twentieth and twenty-first century geopolitical urban
transformations became all the more easy to undertake. The confluence of these
logics of space in Beijing was, in a sense, fuel to the fire of these transformations,
which have been ‘sensible’, as both ancient and modern practices.

Rarely in history has one Chinese city been so persistently made to manifest
the world-making and world-transforming cosmologies of political power as Beijing.
Indeed, due to its overlapping origins as symbol, sacred space and political centre, I
suggest that Beijing is a city that has lent itself to views from on high, and thus to
modern struggles to possess and transform its map-image. This has manifested in
Beijing’s history as what I call the ‘city of spectacle’, a space that appears and is
produced in monolithic, monopolising state visions and projections of Beijing as a

17 Vidler, The Architectural Uncanny, 189.
seat and symbol of political power and authority, and in those visions of the city as a planned and immutable whole. The city as a spectacle has meant, over time, not only the frequent reordering of the physical structure of the city to better reflect and embody the dominion of the new occupying power, but also the constant impingement on the everyday reality of the city, on the lives of the people who have lived there, on the ways in which it has been imagined, and its stories and histories told.

This is made all the more important in Beijing due to its fundamentally dusty nature. Beijing, a city of spectacle, is also a 'city of dust', both metaphorical and physical, and it is this other 'city' that frequently creates ambivalence in the orchestration of official reality and its reception. Over the course of its history, the capital has been a space of monumental symbolic inscriptions, made to embody the vision and power of its imperial, republican, Japanese, socialist and post-socialist occupiers. Although abraded, obscured and covered over by the work of time and the elements, the flows of capital and the economy, paroxysms of urban elimination and renewal, its history of successive totalised occupations, its negated monumental formations, have yet complicated the monolithic constitution of the city-symbol over time. China's capital is also a lived-in place, entangled within the complex lifeworlds of its inhabitants. It is a place of human imagination and praxis, stories and tales, artistic contemplation and oniric play, private fantasy and discordant symbolic struggles over its very meaning. All of these histories still persevere in the city, as elements both seen and unseen, as monolithic markings and lingering spectral traces. They constitute an archive of textual remnants and images, of past social codes and constellations of meanings and habits of thought and body, ways of seeing, being,
living in and imagining the world. A central interest of this work, they define the complex historical habitus of the city.

Beijing's physical dusts have also indelibly shaped its metaphorical life. From the beginning, rulers and planners have questioned the wisdom of building a grand capital in this drought-prone region on the north China plain. In the thirteenth century, the supply of water determined the city's very layout, as designers placed the imperial palaces of the Yuan capital further south than ideal in order to bring them closer to the main lakes of the area. In the following century, a story of the origins of the city appeared, versions of which continue to be related to this day, telling that the capital's chief planner had designed it in the likeness of the legendary dragon slaying deity Nezha, so as to tame the thirsty dragons said to inhabit the landscape, threatening drought and doom. Over the course of Beijing's existence, violent springtime sandstorms have seen wave upon wave of Gobi desert sand blow in to cover all exposed surfaces and penetrate the smallest of cracks, and a fear persists that Beijing is in danger of being swallowed up by the desiccated soils of the north. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the capital of the besieged Qing dynasty had become a place of extraordinary squalor as residents, not wanting to waste precious water, used their own excreta to wet the streets, to prevent the city's putrid dusts from rising. It was this very squalor that would further inflame a nascent reform movement of national significance, for the members of which the filth of the capital's streets signified more generally the backwardness of the nation, a place stuck in a cultural and political quagmire.18

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18 See Chapter 3.
The squalor would reappear intermittently for almost a century, until the city's January 31 1949 'Peaceful Liberation' by the Chinese Communist Party-led People's Liberation Army (PLA). For the new regime, the physical degradation of the city could be productively linked to the iniquity of the regimes of the past, and the massive clean-up of the would-be capital that the authorities carried out after taking control signified the purity of the new order that replaced them. However, this clean-up also presaged the political storms of the coming decades, as Beijing became a synecdoche in the story of New China. All of those now iniquitous activities and elements that offended and threatened the probity and cleanliness of the new socialist order, and sullied the social body — the unwanted, the iniquitous, and the counter-revolutionary elements of the city and country — were like so much dust to be swept away (hengsao 横扫).

In contemporary Beijing, the cityscape is constantly shrouded by a grey haze (yinmai 阴霾) of smog and dust. It rises like a final breath from ancient buildings as they are demolished, and from the pits of the construction sites that take their place, combining to hover over the city in an amorphous cloud of physical histories and social memories unsettled and lost. It is produced also in the factories that occupy the city's outskirts, and neighbouring provinces, arriving as a darkening soot which, together with the exhaust fumes of some five million cars, silently defaces the burnished veneers of its new buildings, those grandly conceived structures that attest to the emergence of 'new Beijing' and thus 'new China', with its ashy accretions.

The 'dusty world' (chenshi 尘世), more than just a figurative description of the mundane world of humans, is something that the residents of Beijing, China's most important urban monument, and its rulers constantly encounter in everyday
practice. It has engaged them in daily efforts to keep the lustrous surfaces of the new city free of blemish. Beijing's role as emblem of China's modernity has made the city, its streets and populace, the stage par excellence of the modern war against dust and opacity, filth and uncleanliness. It is the very battle which Georges Bataille read also as a metaphorical struggle against the amorphous 'nocturnal terrors', those hidden pathogens of mind and body that dwell in darkness and invisibility, and undermine the very logics upon which the meaning of the world hinges.19 At its most provocative, Beijing's 'city of dust' forms something of a necropolis of stories and visions long dead and half buried, or uncanny compositions that arise in tension with the orchestrated reality of the city at a given time. They disturb yet augment, aggravate the state vision of reality, confound the strictures of being in and seeing the world, and threaten the understanding of the present and the unfolding timescale of the prescribed future with the whispers of other possibilities.

An Order of Concern

This work is about Beijing's life as an object of urban spectacle and its dusty augmentation over time. Its central, ordering concern is the dialectics between the city of spectacle, as a symbol of one or other totalising vision, and the physical and figurative dust of Beijing's past and present. Throughout, I use the terms 'city of spectacle' and 'city of dust' as conceptual metaphors to underpin and inform my reading of Beijing's modern and contemporary history and society. I offer a series of 'images' of Beijing from selected times in its history, as a way to explore how these two 'cities' have engaged with each other, shifting focus between the real and

19 Quoted in ibid., 218.
abstract views of the city from on high (whether in the form of maps, sketches, the overarching visions those surveying the city from its walls and gates, or urban planning models) and the 'dusty' world of Beijing on the streets, the currents of history and meaning of the city, and the afterlives of its past formations. As an observer, one must constantly juggle the rhetorical singularity of this city-monument with a dialogical aspect that arises from those things that it mutes and forgets, its absent present, that constantly undercut it, flowing thick and fast from human memory and inhabitation.

Most chapters engage with a particular era in Beijing’s history. While chapters seem to follow a roughly chronological order, this chronology is for purposes of organisation only. What is presented is anything but a continuous history, just as each chapter presents anything but an exhaustive survey of the ‘moment’ or ‘moments’ it engages. Similarly, as bricolages of place and time that stem from the creative choices of the author, a variety of source materials are used, disrupting any notion of continuity (for example, the foreign and Chinese perspectives from Chapter 3 contrast with the almost universal use of Chinese sources in Chapter 4). Additionally, while reference is sometimes made to times when the city was not a political capital, my main focus is on those times in which it was. Only brief mention is made, for example, of the city between 1928 and 1949, during which time Nanjing, and during the Second Sino-Japanese war Chongqing (from 1937–45), served as the capitals of the Republic of China.

In the following chapter, 'Capital Cosmology', I give a brief historical account of the planning and building of Dadu, the capital of the Yuan dynasty, and its reconstruction and expansion during the Ming and Qing dynasties, as Beijing.
The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader what I believe is an important context for the discussions of both real and fantastic occupations and possession of the Beijing map-image in the chapters that follow. I focus on the city's design and construction as embodying an overarching logic that legitimated imperial rule. Unlike other chapters, this chapter is predominantly based on the scholarship of others.

Apart from Chapter 2, all other chapters engage with what I tentatively suggest is the city's (though not country's) modern and contemporary period, from 1860, up to the present. In that year, British and French troops destroyed large parts of the imperial detached palace, the Garden of Perfect Brightness, on the western outskirts of Beijing, in response to the capture and murderous torture of members of a convey sent to the capital to exchange treaties following China's defeat in the Second Opium War (1856–60). This event led directly to the opening up of the city to a steady stream of western visitors. In Chapter 3, 'Impenetrable Peking', after detailing these events, I examine the Beijing that some visitors to the capital experienced during their time there. I do so against the background of the transformations that were occurring in the city, from 1861 until the early years of the Republic of China. Initially mostly the officials and representatives of foreign powers, in the writings of these visitors, on the street the crumbling Qing capital was a city of an impenetrable place of physical and cultural dust, that frustrated as much as it allured, often offending their newly modern notions of hygiene and cleanliness. However, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, they were joined by an increasing number of moneyed tourists in China to explore the 'peripheries' of empire and, in some cases, the limits of their own worldviews. Many of these
nineteenth and early-twentieth century occidental visitors to the city, who found the reality of the streets of the city all too disturbing, took refuge in its high places, both enabled by and of its monumental architecture. In viewing Beijing from above one could be seduced by the city's textured topography – an overarching visual order of reds, yellows and greys; and, in spring and summer, greens, delineated by the city's majestic walls. From these places, the neglected capital seemed to manifest another existence, one of a comprehensible whole, a phantasm of order and harmony, with the Forbidden City at its centre. These moments, in which visitors could grasp the city as an abstract whole, and in particular its grand imperial fabrication, delineate a private, imagined possession of the city from on high, allowing fantasies of possession, understanding and control that in reality were as elusive and illusory as ever.

In 1949, following decades of depression, civil war and misrule, the city had become, once again, a place of tremendous squalor. Its streets were choked with garbage and refuse, and its lakes clogged with silt and detritus. The population itself had been infiltrated by the remnants of the Nationalist armies, while begging, considered a scourge on the image of the would-be capital, and prostitution, considered an iniquitous commerce that enslaved women and spread disease, were rife. Chapter 4, 'Socialism and Cleanliness', sets the tone for the rest of the work, which is about the Communist Party of China's occupation of Beijing. It is about the physical and figurative clean-up that followed the PLA's occupation of the city that year, based upon materials collected from fieldwork at the Beijing Municipal Archives. It is a little examined period in the history of socialist Beijing, yet an important one. The removal of actual as well as cultural dirt or pollution was a
central element of the new regime's establishment of its power and legitimacy, both in Beijing and throughout the new people's republic. It was a crucial step for a city under a socialist regime to regain its role as the symbolic centre of China. It also affirmed a link between the socialist order and cleanliness that Mao had formulated in the years before taking power, a link that would be amplified further in the violent purges of the coming decades.

Chapters 5 and 6 straddle Beijing's socialist and post-socialist eras, and they are related. Unlike the previous two chapters, which are predominantly concerned with the physical filth of the city, these chapters engage with the policing and cleaning up of the city's historical dusts, their selective re-emergence within today's cityscape, and the disturbing traces of other histories that complicate this re-emergence. In the first of these chapters, 'A Negated City', I outline the destruction and symbolic negation of the Old City under Mao, and the continued imperilment of the city's physical history in the reform era, especially since Deng Xiaoping's southern tour of 1992. I pay particular attention to some of the historical reversals of the Deng era, as the ruling Communist Party sought to maintain power, and re-establish its legitimacy, after nearly three decades of political ruction.

In Chapter 6, 'Returns of the Past', I examine the increasing concern with the city's heritage that has emerged in the reform era, concomitant with the ongoing destruction of much of what remains of Beijing's physical past, and the somewhat paradoxical re-historicisation of parts of its urban fabric, as the authorities have sought to re-imagine the city as a modern city with a (selectively drawn upon) ancient past. In particular I focus on the reconstruction of Qianmen, a neighbourhood to the south of Tiananmen Square that was made famous during the
Qing dynasty, in the lead up to the 2008 Olympic Games. After describing some aspects of its historical emergence as a centre of entertainment and various kinds of commerce in imperial times, I examine the recent history of the area, during which time a complex urban space was demolished to make way for a faux-Qing-style shopping street. While Qianmen now presents a face of history, I am interested in the amnestic quality of its historicisation: its reimagining has been carried out in a way that has removed many of the more enlivening, disquieting elements of the era that is supposedly recalled, and has involved the obliteration of much of its physical history. I suggest that, at the interstices of this imagined recollection is a heritage of loss, of evictions, discord, concern and outrage, which can make the hygienic vision speak more of life in modern Beijing than it does of the cultural heritage of the ancient capital.

Chapter 7, 'The Promise of Beijing', and Chapter 8, 'Dust and Catastrophe', also examine the contemporary era. However, whereas Chapters 5 and 6 are in many ways about the fraught nature of the past in the present, these chapters are about the myth of the future, a discourse of hope that pervades the narration of the present and state-sponsored reality. After describing the hygienic version of Beijing presented to the International Olympic Committee Evaluation Commission (IOCEC) in their inspection of the city in 2001, a visual promise of the future, I look at the Olympic reconstruction of the city and the urban planning model that China's successful Olympic bid produced. I examine the ways in which Beijing Olympic reconstruction was emblematic of China's rise. Particularly through a rumination of a model of the future city in the Beijing Planning Exhibition Hall, I then examine some of the structures of promise that seem to construct the new civic reality. In Chapter 8, I
then look at the ‘illusion of Beijing’, the spectres of environmental catastrophe, and questions to do with the long-term sustainability of Beijing as China’s capital, questions and problems that complicate the monolithic image of the city’s present and future.
2

Capital Cosmology

In this chapter, I trace the origins of the city of Beijing as the capital of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, and its reconstruction under the Ming and Qing, framing the present work within the context of the relationship between the ancient map-image of Beijing and instances over time of its literal and figurative possession (imperial, colonial, revolutionary and capitalist) since. The concern will be with the overriding structure of the city as an inscription of imperial dominion and cosmological power. The original capital was conceived as a 'star map', a terrestrial embodiment of the cosmos created to accord with the surrounding geomantic landscape, and its design and construction was undertaken in a way that ensured the Mandate of Heaven of its Mongol builders.

While much of this work focuses upon Beijing's modern and contemporary history, starting from 1860, I suggest that the story of the city's dynastic development is yet an important one in coming to understand this history. When first built, Beijing was both a city and a symbol, and it is this fundamental inscription that has endured over subsequent epochs, surviving in important, sometimes subtle ways the physical transformation of the capital over the last one hundred years. It is an inscription that still haunts the capital's development today, and the articulations of human life in the contemporary city. Whether through the eyes of western travellers, or those of its republican, socialist and post-socialist rebuilders, those who
have come to ‘possess’ Beijing, to make it an object of fantasy or political passion, have had to come to terms with the complex physical and symbolic heritage of the city in a myriad of ways, and their own efforts now form part of this very heritage.

Prelude to Dadu

The landscape that present day Beijing occupies has long been the site of human inhabitation. The records suggest that Ji, a major northern town of the Tang dynasty, developed in the area in the first century BCE, and it has been the site of settlements of greater and lesser prominence since. In the tenth century, the Khitan Liao dynasty (907–1125) established one of its five capitals at the site, in recognition of its strategic importance as a link between the north and south. After conquering the Liao in the twelfth century, the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115–1234) similarly built its joint capital Zhongdu in the area.1 While it remained one of their cities, the Jin abandoned Zhongdu as a seat of government under a fragile treaty with Ghengis Khan-led Mongolian armies in May 1214, fleeing south to Bianliang (modern day Kaifeng).

A year later, the returning Mongol armies laid siege to Zhongdu, quickly capturing it, and massacring those who had resisted. After razing much of it to the ground, the Mongols renamed what was left Yanjing. This name stayed until 1264, over which time even those parts that had survived the Mongol invasion fell into ruin. In that year Ghenghis’ grandson Kublai wrested control of the Mongol empire, following a protracted struggle with his brother, and once again named the city Zhongdu. He also made it his new southern capital. Three years later in 1267 work

began on the construction of a new city to the northeast of the former Jin capital, which would become the centre of a new Chinese empire and dynasty. In 1271, Kublai moved principal capitals from his fortress of Shangdu (in the today’s Inner Mongolia), to the newly built city, to claim the Mandate of Heaven and declare himself emperor of China. The city of Dadu (Great Capital) thus became the capital of the new cosmopolitan Sino-Mongol Yuan dynasty of China. Ming and Qing Beijing were built upon its remains, and its design was a primary influence in its conception and development.

An Imperial Shape

Here, where Heaven and Earth are in perfect accord, where the four seasons come together, where the winds and the rains gather, where the forces of yin and yang are harmonized, one builds a royal capital.

The jiangren [the official in charge of royal building projects] builds the state, leveling the ground with the water using a plumb-line. He lays out posts, taking the plumb-line (to ensure the posts’ verticality), and using their shadows as determinators of a mid-point. He examines the shadows of the rising and setting sun and makes a circle which includes the mid-points of the two shadows.

The jiangren constructs the state capitals. He makes a square nine li on each side; each side has three gates. Within the capital are nine north–south and nine east–west streets. The north–south streets are nine carriage tracks in width. On the left (as one faces south, or, to the east) is the

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2 Xiao Mo, Weiwei didu: Beijing lidai jianzhu (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chuban she, 2006), 33, 326.
1 Khanbalig (The City of the Khan), in Mongolian.
Ancestral Temple, and to the right (west) are the Altars of Soil and Grain. In the front is the Hall of Audience and behind the markets.5

—'The Record of Trades'

The building of Dadu involved the 'extraordinary intercultural collaboration' of Persian, Muslim, Khitan and Jurchen artisans.6 However, despite this collaboration, and being presided over by a Mongol ruler, the city was planned and constructed meticulously in accordance with principles enunciated in an ancient Chinese work on capital building, as well as ancient Chinese cosmology texts.7 As the architectural historian Nancy Steinhardt has shown, the principal influence on the design of the Yuan capital was that of the 'Wangcheng' (王城, which can be literally translated as 'King's city'). This is a city planning model that was first described in a section of the Rites of Zhou (Zhou li 周礼) called the 'Record of Trades' (Kaogongji 考工記). The entire Rites of Zhou is ancient text of ambiguous origins that was initially believed to date to the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BCE) and presents an idealised description of the structure and governance of the mythological Confucian state of Zhou.8 However, it was the Confucian scholar Zheng Xuan, writing in the second century, who first attributed the text to the Duke of Zhou, and this attribution has been in question since the court historian Xie Xiu first raised doubts about it during the Han dynasty (206–20). The 'Record of Trades' section of the work, which describes the correct design of and way to construct the capital, was, due to

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5 From Steinhardt, Chinese Imperial City Planning, 33.
6 Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 17.
7 Wu Liangyong, Rehabilitating the Old City of Beijing: A Project in the Ju'er Hutong Neighbourhood (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 4.
8 Steinhardt, Chinese Imperial City Planning, 33.
differences in style and terminology, almost certainly not part of the original work. Nancy Steinhardt has argued that it was added to the *Rites of Zhou* in the late-first century BCE. This suggests that it is a pre-Han text that possibly describes Shang practices of city building. 

In Steinhardt’s estimation, although there were several designs for the ideal Chinese city in circulation, ‘before the end of the first millennium B.C. the Chinese conceived of their space as a predetermined design that corresponds to a perfect geometrical form’. The Wangcheng model forms part of this general conception. It describes the ideal capital as a city of four walls, each a length of nine *li* (approximately 4.5 kilometres). There are three gates in each wall (giving twelve gates in total), from which extend nine north to south and nine east to west avenues. In the eastern part of the city there is an ancestral temple, and in the western part an

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 50.
altar of soil and grain. At the centre of the city is the imperial palace. The text places great emphasis on ensuring that the site is prepared, and the capital built, 'in reconciliation with natural forces'.

According to Steinhardt, the square shape of the city, for example, reflects an ancient belief that the universe itself is such a shape. Moreover, the text stipulates that vertical poles, plum lines and the shadows cast by the sun should be used to determine the four cardinal points that align the terrestrial square-shaped city. The shadows that the rising and setting sun casts are similarly used also to determine the fifth cardinal point, the centre of the site, which the all-important palace occupies.

While the Wangcheng model represented a specific embodiment of a general idealised form, since the work first emerged in the second century BCE the standing of the 'Record of Trades' in China's imperial courts was anything but assured. Han scholars at the time gave it little regard, and apparently viewed it with scorn, deriding it for its heterodox content. After a period of short-lived prominence during Wang Meng's fugitive Xin dynasty (9–23), the model's standing once more waned, although it was still highly regarded by some scholars of the period. It was not until the Western Wei (535–57) that the general Yu Wentai attempted to create a state that closely followed the principles of the Rites of Zhou. This was an exception, however, and the status of the Wangcheng model for capital planning was anything but stable in the centuries leading up to its utilisation in the design of the Yuan capital.

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11 Ibid., 33.
12 Ibid., 50.
14 See ibid., 27.
15 Ibid., 29–30.
Although a singular plan for capital building was anything but a settled idea at the time the Mongols decided to utilise the Wangcheng model in the thirteenth century, the Yuan court narrated their utilisation of it in designing the new centre of empire as 'recovering the past' (fù gǔ 复古).\(^{16}\) They suggested that the Wangcheng model was indeed the ideal Chinese capital, and that their immediate dynastic predecessors had ignored this tradition. It was an attempt to construct Kublai as a traditional Chinese emperor, and thus reinforce the legitimacy of his Chinese-styled empire.\(^{17}\) This is evident also in the use of the character Yuan (Original) to name the new dynasty. Derived from the classic text, the *Book of Changes* (Yijing 易经), it positioned the Mongol rule as a continuation of China's previous dynasties.\(^{18}\) In keeping with the tradition in China before and since in which the 'recovery' of the past is often an act of invention – indeed, this was perhaps the Mongol's most Chinese of customs – the court sponsored a series of works on the previous capitals of Bianjiang (Kaifeng), Lin'an (at present-day Hangzhou), Jiankang (Nanjing) and Luoyang, recreating them to appear as embodiments of the capital building ideals of the 'Record of Trades'. This was only possible, however, because these former

\(^{16}\) Liu, 'The Yuan Dynasty Capital', 268.  
\(^{17}\) This somewhat paradoxical development (given that the dynasty was established by a foreign force) is understandable, however, when one considers that the historically nomadic Mongols had no history of city planning of their own. Apart from its Chinese shape, and attempts to adopt some of the rituals of Chinese imperial courts that had preceded it, the city's Mongol lords nonetheless continued to adhere to many of their old customs established during life in the steppes. Although, from the beginning, many rulers and members of the royal family chose to take up life in the more permanent tenements of the city, it was not until the fourteenth century that Mongol tents set up in the city's imperial park would finally be vacated, while the imperial park itself was planted with transplanted grasses taken from the Mongolian grasslands. See Elizabeth Endicott-West, 'The Yuan Government and Society', in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 609.  
\(^{18}\) Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, 14.
capitals, none of which were based upon this text, themselves lay in one form or other of ruination.19

The Wangcheng model was not, however, the only influence on the design and construction of Dadu. The city’s chief designer, the Han scholar and official Liu Bingzhong, chose the area itself on the advice of an imperial inquiry into its suitability for the construction of the Yuan capital.20 There were several considerations to take on board. Repositioning of the city away from the erstwhile Jin capital was first and foremost a practical decision. It meant that the construction of Dadu could proceed without the need to first dismantle the ruined city’s structures, and clear away the rubble. The area’s physical geography also constrained how closely the builders of Dadu could realise this Wangcheng ideal. For example, to ensure an adequate supply of water in the years to come the imperial palace was built further south than stipulated. This was a necessary compromise as it brought the palace closer to the Taiye pond, the main body of water in the area, which was fed by the Gaoliang River that flowed from the west.21

Besides the Wangcheng model, however, one of the other main considerations that influenced the building of Dadu was the geomancy of the site. Indeed, according to Meyer, paramount in choosing the site and shape of the city was its ritual and cosmic correctness, which was assured not ‘so much by the particularities of Peking’s geography as by divination, orientation, and design of the

19 Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, 160. This notion of the removal of physical history allowing its re-grasping in creative ways that serve the contemporary reconstruction of Beijing is explored in Chapters 5 and 6.
city according to ancient norms'. The area was long thought to bear the signs of propitious *fengshui*, a property determined through a system of calculations elaborated in the influential Zhou dynasty text, *The Book of Changes*. The Southern Song scholar Zhu Xi (1130-1200) had previously written of the confluence of geomantic elements in the area, describing it as 'the centre of heaven and earth'. Liu himself liked the site for its favourable geomancy. Its physiognomy was said to resemble the auspicious image of a coiled Dragon, 'a cloud-emanating, rainmaking protean spiritual being', while its rivers and springs were said to flow with 'good and sweet water', another sign of good *fengshui*.

The city of Dadu itself was an embodiment of ancient cosmography and astrology. Much of the layout and structure of the city was built to literally mirror apposite stars and constellations. According to Jeffery Myer, the central axis of the city that aligned the position of its buildings was 'astral in origin, an earthly imitation of the palace of the Heavenly Ruler T'ai I who dwells in the Polar Regions'. Similarly, as the Son of Heaven, the new emperor's courts and residences were the terrestrial equivalents of the courts and residences of this heavenly ruler, which were visible as celestial objects in the night sky. This 'speculative celestial-terrestrial correspondence system' was, along with the heed paid to the Wangcheng model and the geomancy of the area, central to establishing the new dynasty's Mandate of Heaven.

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22 Meyer, 'Traditional Peking', 263.
23 Ibid., 22.
24 Ibid., 47.
25 Ibid., 9.
26 Meyer, 'Feng-shui of the Chinese City', 140.
The design and construction of Dadu, by mirroring in earth and stone principles and properties of the Chinese cosmos, aided the establishment of the Mongol Yuan dynasty and the authority of the emperor. While the city would take on a practical role as an administrative centre for the governance of the region, its construction was also intended to provide spiritual protection against potential disasters and threats to the empire. The finished city represented something of a star map, realised in accordance with the invented tradition of the Wangcheng model and the geomancy of site. It was to be emblematic of a unified China with the city of Dadu, a cosmological diagram, at its terrestrial centre: a rectangle 6.7 kilometres from east to west, and 7.6 kilometres from north to south.29

**Building Beijing**

Upon capturing Dadu in 1368, Ming forces razed its imperial palaces and renamed the city Beiping (Pacified North). The capital of the new Ming Dynasty was relocated south, to Nanjing. In 1403 Yongle (r.1402–22), the third emperor of the Ming dynasty, named the city Beijing (meaning Northern Capital) for the first time, and made it the joint capital of China. In that year, he ordered a major reconstruction of the city in preparation for its return to principal capital by 1421. Apart from some additions to the city's defensive capabilities made under the reign of Zhengtong (r.1435–49), the addition of a smaller walled area in 1553 (now known as the Outer City), and several minor changes to the capital during the Qing era, the city that would be dismantled from the late-Qing dynasty onwards was built largely during this period.

29 Xiao, *Weiwei didu*, 34.
By 1421, work was completed on the city’s new walls. Under Yongle, the city’s northern and southern walls were rebuilt to the south of their originals, while its eastern and western walls were built almost entirely on top of the foundations of the Yuan city. With thick brick veneers encasing rammed earth, they were wider and taller than the walls of Dadu, which had been made of rammed earth only.

Richard Belsky, ‘The Urban Ecology of Late Imperial Beijing Reconsidered: The Transformation of Social Space in China’s Late Imperial Capital City’, *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 1 (2000), 55.
Beijing's new significant buildings, including the new imperial palace, the Forbidden City (built from 1406 to 1420 also slightly south of its destroyed Yuan counterpart), were also constructed along the central axis intimated by the Yuan city plan. In Ming Beijing, the drum and bell towers, which in the Yuan capital had been erected to the west, were also rebuilt upon this central axis, which is a position they occupy to this day.

It was also during the Yongle reign that another significant feature was added to the city: the Hill of Ten Thousand Years (Wansui shan 万岁山). Now known as Prospect Hill in the centre of Jingshan Park, it is situated immediately to the north of the Forbidden City. Fabricated from the rocks and soil that had been excavated in creating the Forbidden City's moat, this artificial hill became the highest point in the city. Apart from the more diminutive walls and drum and bell towers, there had been no specially made viewing areas for the emperor to view this terrestrial centre in Dadu. The presence of such a large, man-made hill itself was also not called for in the original design of the city, or in the 'Record of Trades'. The totality of the Yuan capital, designed as an abstract object from above, was made for no human gaze at all.

The builders of Dadu had marked the central meridian by building the unassuming Center Pavilion slightly to the west of the city's geometrical central point (a point equidistant from the city's four walls). However, in Ming Beijing it was the sequestered Hill of Ten Thousand Years that occupied the key point of the cosmological compass. It was this restricted area, reserved for the use of the emperor and his retinue, that lay at the true centre of the Ming capital, a place that afforded views of the entire city, spread out below. It was also the final view of any Ming emperor, as it was here that the Chongzhen emperor hanged himself from the
Pavilion of Imperial Longevity (*Huangshou ting 皇寿亭*) with the sight of smoke rising in the south, a sign of the invasion that foreshadowed the end of the dynasty.\(^{31}\)

Due to the resurgent threat of Mongol raids, the 1550s saw a final wall added to Beijing. This new wall was originally planned to extend around the entire perimeter of the extant city. However, with funds and workers drawn elsewhere, this plan was eventually abandoned in favour of one that would enclose only an area to the south of the original city. The revised construction of the wall to cut in and join the south-eastern and south-western corners of the old city meant the new and old walls, in their entirety, resembled the character *tu* (凸).\(^{32}\) Although not as high than the original, the new southern wall provided protection to both residents of the area, and also to the Temple of Heaven and Altar of Mountain and River (later renamed Altar of the First Farmer), which were important ritual spaces of worship and offering. The city enclosed in the original walls became known as the Inner City (*neicheng 内城*), while the newly fortified area to its south became known as the Outer City (*waicheng 外城*).

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The layout of the Ming/Qing city mimicked the cosmic processes of *yin* and *yang*, light and dark, life and death. The enthroned emperor faced south, towards 'the sunlit world of human beings'.\(^{33}\) In audience, civil officials, charged with the practical duty of the everyday governance of the living – road building, taxes, manufacturing, and medicine – would enter the courtyard from the east, where their various


\(^{33}\) Ibid.
ministries were also situated. In keeping with the necessities of cosmological structure and flow, officials charged with the affairs of government associated with death, darkness, and yin would enter the courtyard from the west, where their various headquarters (Army, Imperial Guard, Police and Justice) were also situated. Similarly, the results of the examinations, held every three years for official positions, were posted on eastern Chang’an Gate. In contrast, twice a year at the western Chang’an Gate the High Court would review the death sentences of prisoners, many tortured until they could no longer speak, with little chance of a stay of execution.

The central axis of Beijing, like Dadu, traces the celestial meridian from the northern pole star (heaven’s capital) to the centre of the capital of earth, through the throne room, and then further south, to the world of humans. The Purple Forbidden City reflects the Purple Hidden Enclosure, a constellation near the polestar, made up of stars that each had their equivalent in the ‘Imperial Entourage’ of ministers, counsellors and guards, while many gates of the city had their own astral equivalents. According to the cultural geographer Yi-fu Tuan, like the Yuan capital upon which it had been built, Yongle’s Beijing represented ‘an imposing cosmic diagram’, inscribed with an aesthetic that gave the emperor the moral right to govern. It was this aesthetic that many visitors to the city from the middle of the nineteenth century would come to marvel at in their attempts to escape the world it delineated, on the ground.

34 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 19.
40 Yi-fu Tuan, Cosmos and Hearth: A Cosmopolite’s Viewpoint (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 18.
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Impenetrable Peking,
‘Everything which rises into the air’

From 1861, after overcoming resistance from the Qing court, foreign powers began to establish embassies inside Beijing’s walls. This opened up the once impenetrable capital to western visitors, who came in increasing numbers to experience the ruinous splendor of China’s once forbidden symbolic centre. Their arrival marked the beginning of an extraordinary, still ongoing commerce of meaning in Beijing between what was at the time a still nascent western modernity, and related notions of order, hygiene and visibility, and China’s own legacy of capital building. In the nineteenth century, the capital was a place of fading grandeur and tremendous squalor. The writings of these visitors frequently manifest the tension between the chaotic, unhygienic filth of its streets, which were for many places beyond comprehension, and incommensurable views afforded of the monumental layout of the city from its walls and other high places, from where Beijing appeared a place of majesty, order and harmony.

This chapter traces some aspects of this dynamic from 1860 until the early years of the Republic of China (1912–49), before the capital was moved to Nanjing in 1928. I begin with an examination of the events that led to Beijing’s opening up, before turning to some of the descriptions of western visitors in the city during the period, and, by the end of the century, those of Chinese reformers, inspired by the
nation’s new fraught cosmopolitanism, who worried about the state of the capital and what it said about the state of the Chinese empire. I then look at attempts from the early 1900s to modernise the capital’s streets, removing them of the dust of the past as part of a final bid to save the failing dynasty, and related efforts in the early republican period that were similarly aimed at reinvigorating China as a modern nation-state.

I pay particular attention to Victor Segalen's *René Leys*, a novel set in the final years of the Qing dynasty, in which the protagonist attempts to penetrate the mystery of the city from its streets. A deracinated outsider constantly frustrated in his attempts to penetrate into this world, he would have to content himself with pondering its depths, and the layout of the city at large, from the purview of the Bell Tower in the city’s north, and by pawing over an old map of European conquest. For Segalen his occupation of Beijing would remain fantastical, a fantasy made possible only by the view of Beijing from on high.

**The Capital Opened**

While China’s eighteenth century would be described as a time of extraordinary national flourishing, comparable to the so-called ‘Prosperous Ages’ (*shengshi* 勝世) of the Han (206 BCE–220) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, the nineteenth century proved a period of unprecedented imperial decline. Throughout its course natural disasters, uprisings, war and famine – historically familiar portents that heralded the loss of the Mandate of Heaven, and foreshadowed the end of a dynastic cycle – constantly tested the mettle of the Qing court.
While these challenges from within China’s borders were not particularly new, in the nineteenth century they were compounded and complicated by the unprecedented external threat of industrialised foreign trading powers keen to exploit the country’s considerable riches and potential markets. A series of humiliating treaties, beginning with the Treaty of Nanjing, signed with the British on 29 August 1842 in the wake of the First Opium War (1840), gradually undercut the territorial gains of the Kangxi era (r.1661–1722). By the end of the century, British, French and German troops had established settlements in strategic locations along China’s eastern seaboard, while Russia and Japan had occupied large parts of Manchuria in the north. Under pressure from these new ‘spheres of influence’, the Qing court’s grip on power grew increasingly tenuous as the century wore on. Indeed, as the 1911 Xinhai Revolution and the abdication of the last emperor in 1912 bore out, the decline was terminal.

In 1860, the tumult that had gripped the empire at large reached the capital itself. In October, the Qing court detained members of a convoy sent to exchange treaties following China’s defeat in the Second Opium War (1856–60). While hoping to use the hostages to bargain for more lenient terms – a point of particular irritation was that foreign governments were to be allowed to establish permanent diplomatic compounds within the capital – the result was disastrous. Over the course of their imprisonment, their Qing captors murdered eighteen of the convoy’s number. When finally returned to the allied forces, their remains revealed that they had suffered horrifically before death. The allied command, led by Lord Elgin, felt that the Chinese people themselves had suffered enough under what they saw as the despotic rule of the Qing. Retribution was thus aimed directly at the court, and on
18 October Anglo-French forces sacked and looted the Gardens of Perfect Brightness (Yuanmingyuan 圆明园), a spectacular complex of lakes, gardens and palaces to the west of the city, leaving many of its buildings damaged or in ruin. These imperial grounds had served as the seat of government for much of the Qing dynasty, and the violence perpetrated there was a grievous blow to its already flailing rule.

As Allied troops marched on the capital to force the release of those captured, the Xianfeng emperor (r.1850–61) had fled to the imperial hunting grounds and summer retreat to the north of the Great Wall at Jehol (Rehe, what is today called Chengde). He would die there in 1862, having never returned to Beijing. In the emperor's absence, his brother Yixin, known to history as Prince Gong, was given the task of representing the Qing government in negotiations. He continued attempts to persuade the allies to establish their diplomatic compounds outside the city walls, suggesting a site within the grounds of the ruined Gardens. This proposal was rejected outright and from March 1861, with the arrival of Fredrick Bruce to take up residence in the new British Legation inside the Inner City, Beijing began to reflect the reality of the country at large: it was a territory breached by rapacious colonial powers, and a place that was host to unwelcome guests.

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41 References in this paragraph were taken from Geremie R. Barmé, 'The Garden of Perfect Brightness, a Life in Ruins', *East Asian History*, no. 11 (June 1996): 131.
42 Ibid., 112.
43 Ibid., 135.
The City, Below and Above

The Qing dynasty would survive just over fifty more years. Soon after the events of 1860 forced the city open, the first Westerners began to arrive again after an absence, with few exceptions, of more than three decades.\(^4\) Previously, foreigners had been permitted to stay in Beijing at the whim of the court. This time, however, it was the outsiders that dictated the terms. At first, most of these arrivals were in some way attached to the newly established diplomatic missions of what would be known as the Legation Quarter, an area in the southeast of the Inner City. Although Nicolas Dennys gave significant space to a description of the Beijing in a guidebook of northern China in 1866, independent tourists to the capital at the time were still rare.\(^5\) However, from around 1880 a significant number of what the Qing historian Susan Naquin has called 'leisured Western elites' journeyed to see for themselves what was for them the decaying centre of a once great empire.\(^6\)

These visitors would leave behind a plethora of letters, guidebooks and memoirs that recorded impressions of the capital in the twilight of dynastic China. Frequently displaying the tension between the city as a place and as a symbol, they provide significant insights into the conditions of Beijing at the time, and the outsider's experience of it. The capital did have its advocates, prominent among them being sympathetic Christian missionaries such as Joseph Edkins and Alphonse Favier who had some knowledge of the local language and involvement in the

\(^4\) A few Russians were permitted to stay in Beijing in highly circumscribed fashion during the period of the Opium Wars (1830s–1850s). See Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 470, 487.

\(^5\) Nicolas Dennys, *Notes for Tourists in the North of China* (Hong Kong: A. Shortrede & Co, 1866).

\(^6\) Naquin, *Peking*, 489.
community. In 1899, the travel writer Eliza Scidmore wrote of Beijing’s considerable allure, describing it as ‘the most incredible, impossible, anomalous, and surprising place in the world’, a sentiment that echoes with that of many visitors to the city before and since her time.

However, even as Beijing impressed, it appalled. Of the physical conditions on the ground, visitors were almost universally damning. In their writings, Beijing’s streets are frustrating, opaque places that challenge their newly modern sensibilities and often confirm their prejudices. Indeed, although Beijing was as yet untouched by the tarry grime of industrial modernity, it shared some similarities to the ‘murky canyons’ of Corbusier’s Paris – places antithetical to modern notions of hygiene and cleanliness, flow and transparency. It was a state of affairs that no doubt inspired in its European visitors that modern ‘fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths’. Corbusier would take advantage of modern aviation to view Paris from above, composing bird’s-eye sketches of it to reveal a lack of topographical order and argue for its redesign. In nineteenth century Beijing, however, there already existed the promise of an overarching visual order – the very structure of the imperial capital itself – and a place from which to view it.

Beijing, even after the events of 1860, was a city of physical and social borders. Its walls, which enclosed the ever-more restricted spaces of the Outer, Inner,
Imperial and Forbidden cities, were perhaps the best example of this. Impressive in scale, they added to the experience of the city from street level as ultimately impenetrable. Prior to the events of 1860–61, the capital’s walls were inaccessible to all but those charged with its protection. This was both for reasons of defence and also to prevent the unsanctioned from overlooking the forbidden palaces of China’s Qing rulers. For similar reasons, building height was strictly controlled. However, from that time, the presence of foreigners on the top of the city’s walls, while never officially approved, was more or less tolerated. The concourse was reached from a point that abutted the Legation Quarter, and from here it was possible to walk its entire length. Especially in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the imposing ramparts that had once ensured the city’s protection became a platform where the city’s foreign population came to stroll, enjoy outings, rest and contemplate. It was also from such a height that the city seemed to manifest a different existence entirely, a patterned picture of beauty and order, difficult to commensurate with the pullulating world of the city below.

Decaying Capital

Edward de Fonblanque, a British consular official stationed in Japan, was one of the first to travel to Beijing during this period. He arrived in March 1861, just months after the destruction of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness. At the time, although a building had been set aside for the British Legation, the first British minister, Fredrick Bruce, was yet to take up residence. Like many who would come later, Beijing’s ‘fine solid wall’ impressed de Fonblanque. However, inside it the city was a

51 Juliet Bredon, _Peking: a historical and intimate description of its chief places of interest_, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1922), 18.
'straggling mass of ruin, dirt, and decay'. Apart from the wall, and 'one lovely view, called Pay-hay [Bei hai]', de Fonblanque found little to recommend to the visitor:

'Dirt, ruin, and bad smells reign supreme in the capital of the “Lord of Ten Thousand Years.”'

The heat of summer did little to ameliorate such perceptions. The Scottish merchant and writer Alexander Michie’s 1864 description typifies an impression that appears in numerous accounts until well into the next century:

Once inside the walls you instinctively exclaim, What a hot, dusty place this is! and you call to mind that that is exactly what everybody told you long before its threshold was polluted by barbarian footsteps. Peking is celebrated for its carts, its heat, and its dust. If it rained much the streets would be a sea of mud.

We pursue our way along the sandy tracks between the city wall and the buildings of the town for a mile or two, then plunge into the labyrinth of streets, crowded, dirty, and odoriferous.

Foreign visitors almost universally remarked on Beijing’s lack of sanitation. In his 1866 guidebook, Denny described in some detail the prevalence of certain diseases among its population. The climate, he suggested, made those living there susceptible to consumption. While small pox and cholera were the chief dangers, ‘scrofulous diseases are common and insanity is said to affect the natives extensively’, along with infections of the eye and skin. However, in spite of

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53 Ibid., 218.
54 Alexander Michie, *The Siberian Overland Route from Peking to Petersburg, Through the Deserts and Steppes of Mongolia, Tartary, &c* (London: John Murray, 1864), 32.
the prevalence every summer of the epidemics above mentioned, Peking cannot be considered by any means an unhealthy residence for Europeans. During the past three years, no one has died of any disease of this nature, and it may safely be asserted that, were the city properly drained and sanitary regulations strictly enforced, it would probably be the healthiest spot in Eastern Asia.\textsuperscript{56}

Beijing, however, was not properly drained, nor were sanitary regulations strictly enforced. Although the situation would improve somewhat with the new century, at the time water was a precious resource, generally drawn from shallow wells and distributed by water carriers at a cost. The ‘sweet’ waters drawn from sources to the west of the city were unaffordable to all but a few. Rather than use what water they had on the task, in the evenings those living in the city had long resorted to using their own excreta to water the streets and bring an end to the daily rising cloud of Beijing’s suffocating dust. In his account of his time there during the first year of British presence, physician David Bennie attributed the city’s peculiar odour to this practice: ‘The more odorous properties of the Peking dust were readily conceded by Mr. Wade. This smell results from the sewer water, that accumulates in the choked drains, being used to water the streets—a municipal measure coming under the head certainly of what now-a-days it is the fashion to call “defective sanitation.”’\textsuperscript{57}

This was still a common practice at the time the writer and painter Constance Cumming arrived overland from Tianjin in 1879. For Cumming, the

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} David F. Bennie, \textit{Peking and the Pekingese: During the First Year of the British Embassy at Peking}, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1965), 3–4. During his time in the city Thomas Wade, the British diplomat in the city to oversee the establishment of British presence there, and also of Wade-Giles fame, served as Bennie’s host.
evening watering of the capital’s streets was the beginning of a cycle that revealed the true composition of the very dusts that the foul liquids were meant to abate.

According to Cumming, by night Beijing was pervaded by a horrid stench that was diminished somewhat by the next day. This was, however, only because the ‘slops’ used to water the streets had dried out, to form part of the city’s growing body of dust, to be watered down once again when evening broke. It was this process that marked the horrid in- and out-breath of the entire city.⁵⁸ It meant that the great capital was in her eyes of unparalleled squalor: ‘Talk of eating a peck of dirt! those luckless Europeans whose lot is cast in Peking must get a good deal more than their share, for, happily, never have I seen any other city whose filth and foul smells equalled those of this great capital.’⁵⁹

‘The Peking dust’ almost inevitably found its way into descriptions of travellers’ experiences of the city from 1860 to the twentieth century. It covered all exposed surfaces, and penetrated the smallest cracks. In all but a few places, the very roads were composed of it, making it all but impossible to travel in any comfort. This was true no matter the weather, until the first macadam roads were laid from the turn of the century, and roads paved during the Republican era. In dry conditions, the city’s dust rose in blinding, choking clouds. With rain, it was transformed into a sickening, malodorous mud. Those who chose to travel by the springless, horse-drawn ‘Peking cart’ (sedan chairs were reserved for high-ranking mandarins, and

⁵⁹ Ibid.
rickshaws would not appear in the city until the late-nineteenth century) found little relief, and the potholed, uneven roads made for the most uncomfortable of rides.\(^60\)

For Cumming, the dust that coated and indeed comprised the streets of the capital, that covered one’s hair and person no matter the conveyance used, and that one could not help but inhale, represented ‘the pulverised filth of the whole city’ which ‘becomes more and more unclean’ with the passing of time, ‘and is never purified’.\(^61\) She intimated its presence everywhere. Even the more permanent aspects of the city’s material manifestation seemed to owe their existence to it. According to Cumming, Beijing’s imposing, protective crenellated walls and gate towers, ‘when seen through the dust-clouds… are not built of stone, but of large grey bricks (about 20 inches in length by 9 in width [as elsewhere])—so that, after all, these enormous bastions are just the universal dust in a baked form!’\(^62\)

However, these structures of suspicious origin, which impeded vision and movement on the ground, also offered a way to transcend the dusty world of the street. The bird’s-eye view of Beijing from the southern wall, which marked the barrier between the Han Chinese Outer City and the Manchu-occupied Inner City to its north, revealed a landscape that appealed to Cumming’s artistic sensibility. It was a sight made all the more intriguing for the contrast it provided with her experience of Beijing’s streets.

There is just one way by which to obtain quite an illusive impression of Peking—namely, by looking down on the city from its majestic walls. Then all the squalor, and dirt, and dust which are so painfully prominent at all


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 457.
other times seem to disappear, and, as if by magic, you find yourself overlooking rich bowers of greenery, tree-tops innumerable, from which here and there rise quaint ornamental roofs of temples, or mandarins' houses, with roofs of harmonious grey tiles, or of bright glazed porcelain, which gleams in the sunlight.

Such a glimpse I first obtained one morning at early dawn, ere the dust-clouds had begun to rise with the day's busy traffic, and the peaceful beauty of the scene struck me the more forcibly from the contrast betwixt the bird's-eye view and the reality when seen on the level.63

The British journalist Henry Norman recorded his impressions of Beijing in his 1895 book, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*. It was the year that China had suffered overwhelming defeat to Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). In its aftermath, the country found itself further indebted to foreign powers in another 'unequal treaty' of the period. Although Norman praised some of its architectural features, which were for him the symbols of a past more admirable than the present, on the whole he found the city disappointing. Rather than its ancient heritage, it was the city's rundown state that dominated his experience. Like Cumming, he devoted considerable space to describing the appalling state of the streets: '[It] is the streets of Peking that strike the observer first, and fade last from his recollection. Whether wide or narrow, dark alley or main artery, they are entirely unpaved — the native alluvial soil and the native sewage form every Pekingese pathway. From this state of things spring several curious consequences. The roads are so uneven, the holes in them so numerous and deep, the ridges so high and steep, that no vehicle with springs can navigate half a mile.'64

63 Ibid., 455.
The state of these streets were part of the most undeniably prominent aspect of Beijing – greater and more overwhelming than its monumental structures:

I mean its filth. It is the most horribly and indescribably filthy place that can be imagined. Indeed imagination must fall far short of the fact. Some of the daily sights of the pedestrian in Peking could hardly be more than hinted at by one man to another in the disinfecting atmosphere of a smoking-room. There is no sewer or cesspool, public or private, but the street; the dog, the pig, and the fowl in a sickening succession are the scavengers; every now and then you pass a man who goes along tossing the most loathsome of the refuse into an open-work basket on his back; the smells are simply awful; the city is one colossal and uncleansed cloaca. As I have said above, the first of the two moments of delight vouchsafed to every visitor to the Celestial capital is at his first sight of it. The second is when he turns his back, hoping it may be for ever, upon “the body and soul-stinking town” (the words are Coleridge’s) of Peking.65

Especially at around the turn of the century, visitors linked Beijing’s physical decay and lack of sanitation to the character of its Chinese inhabitants. Western visitors often sealed themselves in the Legation Quarter, away from unnecessary contact with the poverty and squalor of the ‘Chinese crowd’ of the city at large. In many writings, ‘it’ is present almost everywhere, often as a culturally impenetrable, malicious mass of humanity that brims with foul smells and disease, and clamours with incomprehensible sounds. The British diplomat Maurice de Bunsen, visiting Beijing in 1892, found it ‘impossible to conceive of a country more hideous or inns more loathsome. They are all the same—a dirty courtyard, full of ponies and mules, surrounded by a one-storied structure of mud or brick. No food to be had that a

65 Ibid., 209–10.
civilised person can eat. Add to all this the disgusting aspect of the people, their state of filth and their unconcealed hatred of a European, to whom they would be aggressively rude if they dared'.\textsuperscript{66} Norman, too, wrote with inelegant scorn of those living in the city. The Chinese he described as a malevolent, vermin-covered ‘mass of solid humanity, which is eating horrible stuff... smells worse than words can tell, and which is quite likely to have small-pox about it’.\textsuperscript{67}

As had others, Norman found some relief from the top of the city’s walls, which, he suggested, impressed first-time visitors almost universally. Whereas for Cumming, from here Beijing revealed previously hidden beauty, for Norman the sight of the city stretching out was notable for the absence that such a distance from the street enabled: ‘Peking, seen from the wall, is a stretch of flat roofs, more than half hidden in foliage, from which here and there a tower or a pagoda or high-roofed temple projects. Not a trace of the actual dirt and discomfort and squalor is visible; the air is fresh, the smells are absent, and the Celestial capital is at its best.’\textsuperscript{68}

\textbf{The Turn of the Century}

It was not just foreigners that ruminated on Beijing’s trying physical conditions. Its Manchu-Qing rulers themselves considered it ‘a place of miasma and plague’ due to ‘its low elevation and climatic extremes’.\textsuperscript{69} By the final decade of the century, the city was the centre of a nascent reform movement. For many in this movement, Beijing symbolised much of what was wrong with the flailing empire, and provoked

\textsuperscript{66} Quoted in T.G. Otte, “A Very Great Gulf”: Late Victorian British Diplomacy and Race in East Asia, in Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Western and Eastern Constructions, ed. Rotem Kowner and Walter Demel (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 143.

\textsuperscript{67} Norman, The Peoples and Politics of the Far East, 199.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 202–3.

\textsuperscript{69} Barne, The Forbidden City, 49.
dissatisfaction as both a city and a symbol. As a city, it offended modern notions of hygiene, and endangered the health of its residents with its telluric miasmas. It was also, as the centre of empire, a place that had once served to consecrate the majesty of empire but now, in its decaying, dusty beauty, served as a reminder of a broader national decline, of a cumbersome past that held the nation back, and delayed (even as it inspired) the modern, reformist project.

Indeed, as much as they fortified nationalist gloom, it was not the state of Beijing's streets that motivated the first calls to move capitals from Beijing, but its equally stifling historical dust. In 1895, China was reeling from massive military defeat to Japan in the first Sino-Japanese War. Loss to Japan, previously considered a barbaric and backward country, marked a shift in power away from China in the region, which did not fit well with China's image of itself as the region's primary power. To make matters worse, Japan had put forward a humiliating treaty, which would see China cede the provinces of Taiwan and Liaodong to the Japanese. When Kang Youwei, a reform-minded scholar who was in Beijing to sit the imperial examinations, heard news of the terms of this treaty, he organised a 'memorial' with his fellow examinees requesting the emperor refuse to sign. Opposition to the treaty swelled, and Kang saw an opportunity to make a broader appeal for national reform on the back growing indignation. He soon penned a lengthier petition to the emperor, with the support of a growing number of intellectuals, which once again detailed the reasons that the treaty was unacceptable and argued for a broader reform

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of China’s institutions. The Gongche Shangshu (公車上書, literally Public Vehicle Petition) reform movement was born, with Kang as its leader.71

For Kang, China was laboring under the burden of an antiquated system, which hindered social and economic development. According to the historian Hao Ping, Kang argued that the institutions of the Qing dynasty ‘had been in use for hundreds of years; if a utensil was in use for a long time, it would break, and if laws were practiced for too long they too would become useless and out of date, just as the utensil would’.72 One of the key proposals in Kang’s petition was that the Qing government ‘move the capital in order to strengthen the foundation of the nation’.73 Even at the end of the nineteenth century, Beijing was already a city of great antiquity, and regarded by some also as a place of considerable historical baggage. Kang suggested that moving capitals south, along with other economic, political and education reforms, were necessary to transform the ageing institutions of the Qing government and reinvigorate its rule.74

However, it was not until the Hundred Days’ Reform Movement in 1898 that the Guangxu emperor would give serious consideration to national reform. By this time Kang, although calling for even deeper and more radical reforms of Chinese society and government than he previously had, would have removed his petition for a change of capitals. It is nonetheless instructive to note the kind of ‘cultural baggage’ that Beijing was seen to have even in the late Qing Dynasty. This is not to say that Beijing did not invoke Kang’s ire. In his 1898 petitioning of the Qing government, he decried the squalid state of the capital’s streets, which had long

71 Hao Ping, Peking University, 104.
72 Ibid., 104.
73 Quoted in ibid.
74 Ibid., 105.
been an object of embarrassment and frustration for its more cosmopolitan Chinese residents. For Kang, the befouled streets were a sign of national backwardness and a country mired in the physical, cultural and historical dirt of its past. They imparted the city with a sickening air that threatened those who lived there with ill health and disease.\textsuperscript{75} The streets, he said, ‘are higher than people’s houses; dust fills up streets; and filthy air steams. All of this causes diseases. It indeed poses a big problem for people’s health.’\textsuperscript{76} Scholar Li Ruohong, in the city in 1886, had similarly written of the disagreeable dusts of the city, which impeded vision, making navigation difficult: ‘one cannot recognize whether it is the South or the North City. Streets and avenues all smell filthy; one thinks about leaving the city as soon as one arrives.’\textsuperscript{77}

With the new century, things would only get worse for the beleaguered capital, when it was lay siege to the Legations. The Boxer Uprising was an anti-foreign movement that originated in drought and poverty-stricken Shandong of the late-nineteenth century. For members of this movement, foreigners and foreign ideas and things were a disturbing presence all of their own, that had brought nothing but ill fortune to the country. Marching under the slogan of ‘Support the Qing and exterminate the foreign (\textit{fu qing mie yang} 扶清灭洋)’ the Boxers were bent on ridding China of this menace.\textsuperscript{78}

In June 1900 the Boxers, who had finally gained the explicit support of the Qing court, laid siege to Beijing’s Legation Quarter. An international alliance of troops that had assembled in Tianjin and from there marched to Beijing finally

\textsuperscript{75} Madeleine Yue Dong, \textit{Republican Beijing: The City and its Histories} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 38.
\textsuperscript{76} Quoted in ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Quoted in ibid., 37.
broke the siege after 55 days. With these troops approaching the capital, the Qing court (including with the Empress Dowager Cixi and the Guangxu emperor) fled Beijing for Xi’an, the provincial capital of Shaanxi to the west. It was not until 1902 that the court was permitted to re-enter the capital and the Forbidden City. Upon the court’s return from internal exile, foreign troops, which had occupied the capital in its absence, were now permanently stationed in Beijing.

The siege on the Legation Quarter captured the imagination of the west, and made international headlines. It would also form the subject of a 1963 film, starring Charlton Heston and Ava Gardener, *55 Days at Peking*. Many who were present in Beijing during the siege would publish first-hand accounts of their experiences. The Englishman B. L. Putnam Weale (whose real name was Bertrand Lenox Simpson) was one such writer. His 'eye-witness', 'indiscreet' (though pseudonymous) account of his time there begins with a description of the peculiar character of the city's by now notorious dust.79

The Peking dust, distinguished among all the dusts of the earth for its blackness, its disagreeable insistence in sticking to one's clothes, one's hair, one's very eyebrows, until a grey-brown coating is visible to every eye, is rising in heavier clouds than ever. In the market-places, and near the great gates of the city, where Peking carts and camels from beyond the passes—*k’ou wai*, to use the correct vernacular—jostle one another, the dust has become damnable beyond words, and there can be no health possibly in us.80

79 Although presented as a series of 'letters' written as the siege unfolded, it is difficult to disagree with Robert Bickers' description of Weale's work as 'no straightforward memoir but a stylised account'. See Robert A. Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900–1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 34.
Weale regularly evoked the ‘terrible Peking dust’ in his letters of life in the city before and during the siege. Its presence in Beijing at the time was no doubt an important intimation of one of the causes of the uprising. Several years of drought in northern China, which the Boxers blamed on foreigners, had no doubt compounded the presence of dust in the capital. In Weale’s account, it rises in clouds with the coming and going of people and provides cover for soldiers lying in wait. It blinds and chokes those caught in battle and covers those resting in its aftermath. It coats the interiors of long deserted buildings, rising with the coming of human trespassers. At times, Weale’s ‘Peking dust’ seems to anticipate the coming violence, or somehow bear witness to it: ‘Even our Peking dust is awed by the approaching storm and nestles close to Mother Earth, so that it may come to no harm.’ When the siege is finally relieved, with Weale’s final ‘letter’, the dust seems affected by the general exhaustion that pervades the scene: ‘It was becoming cold, and even the dust no longer rose in clouds. Everything was pinned to the soil—tired—finished....’

During the siege, it was Beijing’s decaying, increasingly war-ravaged walls that separated Weale from his would-be murderers. It was a situation that provoked exhaustion and misery in the besieged. Despite this, moments of peaceful respite yet punctuate his account, inspired by a contemplation of the history of its imperial buildings, or by the view of the city from its highest points. In one such passage, Weale writes of the view from Prospect Hill to the north of the Forbidden

81 Ibid., 243.
82 One of their placards read, ‘When the foreigners are wiped out, rain will fall and the visitations will disappear’. See Victor Purcell, The Boxer Uprising: A Background Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 122.
83 Weale, Indiscreet Letters from Peking, 97.
84 Ibid., 447.
85 Specifically, the south-east wall of the Inner City.
City, previously reserved for members of the ruling Manchu household: 86 'From here the view was magnificent. Right below you you could see far into the Palace and inspect the marble bridges, the lotus-covered sheets of water and all the other things of the Imperial plaisaunce. Farther on, the city of Peking spread out in huge expanses hemmed in only miles away by the grey tracing of the city walls and the high-standing towers. [...] The view was indeed immense and wonderful.' 87

The French novelist and officer Pierre Loti was a member of the international force sent to relieve the siege. In his The Last Days of Pekin, he writes of his first impression of Beijing, that of its crenelated outer wall. It dominates the landscape with its sheer scale: 'The wall of Pekin overwhelms us, a giant thing of Babylonian aspect, intensely black under the dead light of a snowy autumn morning. It rises toward the sky like a cathedral, but it goes on; it is prolonged, always the same, for miles.' 88 Inside this wall, like Weale, Loti described a place of murky chaos, a place that oscillated between visions of grandeur and squalor. Due to his status as a foreign officer, Loti passed the capital's previously insurmountable barriers and borders, and into its layered walled enclosures, with unprecedented ease. Yet the Beijing he encountered on his journeys was still a symbolically impenetrable place of incomprehensible sights and sounds. In particular, the ruinous antiquity of the capital, the evidence everywhere of a historically rich yet inaccessible world, at times seduced and at times terrified him.

86 Whether this in a real account or a confection of his own imagination nonetheless composed from the view afforded by other, perhaps more accessible parts of the city's walls and towers in unclear. Weale, elsewhere in his account, also claims to have bustled and tricked his way into the Forbidden City itself, into the inner sanctum of the dowager's vacated bedroom, and into the quarters of the still-present royal concubines. See the chapter 'Forbidden Fruit' in Weale, Indiscreet letters from Peking, 377–96.
87 Ibid., 414.
While the signs of the city’s past provided some ambivalent interest for Loti, its present, and the Chinese that occupied it, provoked his disdain. He described the Chinese occupants of the city as ‘the uniformly dirty populace, dressed in blue cotton, with squinting, evil eyes, [which] swarm and crawl about, eagerly searching and raising a perfect cloud of microbes and dust’. For Loti, this dirty populace had ‘done a hundred times more than the invaders in the way of pillage, burning, and destruction in Pekin’. 89 Loti’s Beijing was also a city of dust. In his account, it sometimes rises in ‘infectious clouds’, 90 signalling the death and decay that pervades the scene. At other times it is a kind of aesthetic device, a ‘veil which then masks the shabbiness of its streets and the squalor of its crowds’, which allows him to imagine the city’s former splendour. 91 For Loti, the city’s dustiness was not just due to the perhaps forgivable situation of war. For him Beijing as a whole, its ancient buildings and crenelated walls, was literally ‘falling into dust’. 92

Despite the mental and physical challenges that the city posed, Loti was fortunate to be able to return daily to his peaceful enclosure. His residence during his time in Beijing was in the Rotunda Palace or Tuancheng, inside the parks to the west of the Forbidden City, within the walls of the Imperial City. From these walls, he regularly took in a bird’s-eye view of the surrounding landscape, and revelled in the once forbidden, yet still exclusive, nature of his experience: ‘Each time that I return to this palace I am charmed with the sonorous silence of my high esplanade and with the top of the crenelated wall surrounding it, — an artificial spot whence one commands an extended view of artificial landscape, the sight of which has always

91 Hsieh, *From Occupation to Revolution*, 75.
been forbidden, and which, until lately, no European has ever seen.\textsuperscript{93} Loti compared this view, especially as the reddening sun, in the final hours of daylight, lit up the enamelled roofs of the Forbidden City below, to the ‘barbaric ugliness’ afforded by the bird’s-eye view of European cities: ‘In China, where they are all too scornful of pavements and sewers, everything which rises into the air, into the domain of the ever-watchful and protecting spirits, is always impeccable.’\textsuperscript{94}

\textbf{The Final Years}

In March 1901, the British envoy Ernest Satow described his disgust at Beijing: ‘Driving back in the tonga we had a great deal of dust, and the street in one place was being watered with stale urine, producing a horrid stench. Truly Peking is a filthy hole.’\textsuperscript{95} In 1903, Gertrude Bell wrote of the city’s ‘horrible fascinating streets’. Echoing accounts of travellers in the previous century, she described them as places ‘full of people, a high mud causeway down the middle, crowded booths on either side and a straight and uneven way between them and the shops. Your rickshaw dashes in and out, bumps over boulders, subsides into ditches, runs over dogs and toes and the outlying parts of booths and shops, upsets and occasional wheelbarrow, locks itself with rickshaws coming in the opposite direction and at a hand gallop conveys you, breathless, through dust and noise and smells unspeakable to where you would be’\textsuperscript{96}.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 170.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{95} The Diaries of Sir Ernest Satow, British Envoy in Peking (1900–06), vol. 1, ed. Ian Ruxton (Raleigh: Lulu Press, 2006), 96.
\textsuperscript{96} Gertrude Bell to F. B., The Letters of Gertrude Bell, vol. 1, 1874–1917, ed. Ian Ruxton (Fairford: Echo Library, 2006), 103.
Travel to and around the city would soon become much easier. Indeed, an intimation of things to come had already touched the capital at the time Satow and Bell wrote. In 1900, foreign expeditionary troops had extended the Tianjin to Marco Polo Bridge railway line to the southern gate of Yongdingmen in the Outer City, and then up its spine to Zhenyangmen, the southern gate of the Inner City. It was the first time since its Ming reconstruction that the walls had been physically breached. It would not be the last, and over the course of the next decade numerous lines and stations would be constructed across the city, to the detriment of parts of its walls and, especially, the city's gates, which were turned into railway stations, transforming transportation in the city. With new drilling methods, deep wells of 'sweet' water had already largely replaced the shallow wells, and brackish water, of the mid-nineteenth century, and by 1910 a German-controlled, citywide, pressurised water system was complete, although only few of the city's households could afford it. Moreover, a special Fertiliser Guild had been established in 1900 to manage and organise the collection of night soil and its transportation to yards outside of the city (between 1900 and 1906 these yards were housed inside the walls) where it was dried for use as fertiliser.

Under the Boxer protocol that followed the siege of the legations, Beijing became beholden to an international military force. The now terminally weakened Qing government had little choice but to replace enmity towards foreigners with openness. Upon her return from Xi'an in 1902, the Empress Dowager, who had beheaded some of those who had called for sweeping reforms in 1898 as part of the
Hundred Days' Reform Movement, and supported the Boxers' 1900 siege of the legations, would become remarkably affable to the city's foreign occupiers. She would also enact a series of reforms that went further than those called in 1898 and move to modernise the capital's antiquated infrastructure. Indeed, while the Australian journalist George Morrison had in 1899 described Beijing as 'the filthiest city in the world', in August 1911 he would paint a significantly different picture. For Morrison, by that time a profound transformation had gripped the city, even as dynastic rule would barely see in the new year:

Macadamised roads are being made everywhere: every important house is lit with electric light: the streets are lighted by electricity: there is an excellent telephone system: there is a postal service with delivery eight times a day. [...] There is a good water supply, and I have no doubt that before long we shall have electric tramways. [...] Carriages in Peking now you can count by the thousands, and there are a few motorcars. [...] There can be no question as to the material prosperity of the people. Of nothing am I more convinced. 101

Segalen's Beijing

In the end, I came here looking for neither Europe nor China, but for a vision of China.

—Victor Segalen102

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101 Ibid., 614.
*René Leys* is a work of autobiographical fiction by the French writer Victor Segalen. The novel, published posthumously in 1922, was written between 1913 and 1916 in the early years of the Republic of China, and is set in Beijing during the momentous year of 1911. It was the year before the abdication of the last Manchu emperor, Xuantong (Puyi, r. 1908–12), an event that marked the end of Segalen’s beloved Qing dynasty, and eight years before his bloodied corpse would be found in a forest in Brittany. A story within a story, the book chronicles its narrator’s fascination with the Great Within (*da nei* 大内), the world of the Inner Court of the Forbidden City, which he yearns to penetrate, and his relationship with the book’s eponymous character, the young Belgian René Leys, who claims to possess intimate knowledge of that world.

In the book, Segalen, obsessed with the mystery at the city’s centre, traverses Beijing from horseback, maintaining a distance slightly above the street and its occupants. According to James Clifford, this characterised the cultural distance that Segalen always maintained in his contact with China. It allowed him to walk, ‘in physical contact with the uneven ground, but from a certain height’, remaining, to a degree, outside of and above the city. Despite the distance this implies, however, Segalen chose to reside outside of the foreign enclaves of the Legation Quarter, indicating in some sense his desire to experience a China inaccessible to many of his cloistered European contemporaries.

Segalen’s Beijing is a place both of visible and invisible worlds. Despite his efforts to make it serve as a portal onto a deeper reality, the everyday world of the city he encounters, in contrast to the writers mentioned earlier, is ‘both familiar and

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103 Hsieh, *From Occupation to Revolution*, 95.
mundane, in which everything meets the eye'. The people that inhabit the city constantly disappoint. His first Chinese language tutor Master Wong, for example, is a man of 'plain and direct speech, hiding neither secret nor mystery'. However, the possibility that he might yet penetrate into the Forbidden City atones for his unsatisfactory experience of quotidian Beijing.

During this time, Segalen becomes increasingly enamoured with René Leys, who is, after Master Wong, the second language tutor that he engages the services of. When Segalen confesses his desire to gain entry into the secret world of the court, René, who has reached a state of mastery of the Chinese language, discloses a deep knowledge thereof. As their relationship seems to grow – at one point in the novel René moves in to the author's home – the young Belgian discloses more details of his secret life within the aristocracy, claiming to have a place on the roster of the secret police of the palace, a concubine granted by the Regent, and intimate knowledge of the heart and thoughts of the Empress Dowager (Longyu, the widow of the Guangxu emperor) as her lover.

In this ambiguous narrative, it is unclear which elements of Segalen's story are a recasting of his lived experiences in Beijing, and which are figments of his imagination. Similarly, Segalen himself cannot be sure which elements of René's tales of his secret life in the city are true, and which are fabrications. However, as Segalen is constantly frustrated in his attempts to gain first-hand knowledge of the

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107 Interestingly, the aristocracy that so fascinated Segalen in his search for China was largely comprised of the descendants of Manchu invaders who had, for example, ejected all ethnic Han Chinese from the inner city in 1648.
Inner Court, the young Belgian's tales become the only way Segalen has to (vicariously) fulfil his wishes. René becomes, in a sense, the figure of a kind of cross-cultural being that Segalen wants to become himself, holding the possibility that he may yet become a part of that hidden world at the city's heart. Finally, with the mysterious death of René at the end of the novel, his claims become forever unverifiable, and Segalen's attempt to penetrate the world of the Inner Court appear similarly distinguished. René, who initially signified the possibility of final attainment for Segalen, comes, ultimately, to represent its impossibility.

The dynamic of frustration and doubt is punctuated by several moments in which the narrator seeks to escape the frustration of daily life by taking in Beijing's imperial layout. Like other outsiders that had, in one way or other, come to grasp Beijing as a cultural and social object, one of the intriguing themes of Segalen's work is the contrasting experience of life on the street and from above. In one such passage, he considers the springtime prospect of Beijing from the top of its Bell Tower in the north of the Inner City, once the exclusive preserve of the Manchu Qing rulers and their immediate coalition allies. Perhaps frustrated by his failure to uncover the secrets of imperial Beijing by penetrating its Forbidden City from ground level, it was from this vantage near the northern-most tip of the city's cardinal north-south axis that he could come to dominate the city in another way, by considering its grand fabrication with a 'founder's eye', from on high:

I can think of no better way of passing the time between lunch and the evening before me than by indulging in a lengthy contemplation of the city itself from its highest point.[...] Looking due south over the white

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crenellations of the terrace I shall see the bulky ‘Ku Leu’ or Drum Tower, the Hill of Contemplation, the distant, sealed-off Palace, the walls of the Tartar City forming a categorical, angular barrier...and beyond, farther to the south, the misshapen rectangle of the Chinese city. [...] With a founder's eye I shall trace the vast quadrilateral of which the Chinese city is but the southern suburb, the entire monumental concept dreamed by the Great Emperor. [...] Within its fictive or actual confines I know that, from the top of the Bell Tower, I shall see the Northern Capital spread out before me over its plain like a mosaic in willow-green, yellow (the palace roofs), and gray (the private houses). 109

For Segalen, then, the Beijing that spread out before him as he looked down from the Bell Tower was a mosaic of colours and shapes that bespoke spatial delineations and social demarcations. It was a patterned picture that lent itself to his contemplative gaze. It was also from here that the 'monumental concept' of the city, belied by everyday life on its streets, appeared before his eyes. By removing himself from the prosaic concerns of the mundane world below, Segalen could access constellations of meaning unavailable at ground level, ones that would have suited his particular quiet, and imaginary, conquest of the capital. From the Bell Tower he could also indulge in a certain forgetfulness that Certeau noted in his contemplation of cities. 110 However, whereas for Certeau the view represented a fraught optical artifice, for Segalen to view the city from above provided a leisurely way of passing the time during his days in Beijing. Thinking and seeing from this lofty position proved the perfect place to contemplate his object of obsession with no hindrance

110 See the discussion in Chapter 1, 1–3.
from what for him remained an obstreperous city that would never yield its secrets to him.

As the story lengthens, and his frustration deepens, Segalen’s possession of the city becomes increasingly imaginary. What began with his contemplation of the city from the Bell Tower reaches its apogee in his contemplation of a map of Beijing, one drawn up by the Allied occupation force in 1900 as they moved to relieve the siege of the diplomatic quarter during the Siege of the Boxers. It was a document that itself forms part of a lineage of conquest, and brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s oft-quoted statement that there ‘is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism’. 111

Maps bring disparate elements together. They create continuities usually through the rendering of three dimensions into two, by shrinking huge geographies into something that may fit into one’s pocket, and through providing an unchanging image of a place removed from the relentless vicissitudes of time. Maps also displace continuity with artificial differences through the use of lines, demarcations and borders. They augment and diminish perspective in many ways, through the displacement of time, the loss of dimension, erasure and effacement. They render the whole while perpetuating difference. In this way, maps can be seen as both concrete representations of space as well as abstract images that borrow from, and share their origins with, fields such as art, aesthetics, rhetoric and politics. Segalen’s fantastical, libidinous possession of the city found completion in the overarching, simplified vision the map of Beijing enabled. All simple lines and shapes, it proved to be the perfect, simplified plane above which Segalen’s imagination could float and fantasise:

'And here, before my eyes, between my two hands spread out at less than a man’s full
span, I see, unfurl, spread out, hold, and possess, at small financial cost, the plane
representation of the city as a whole, this capital and all it contains—Péi-king.'112

Here, Segalen described the two segments that make up any map of what is
now called the old city of Beijing, the Inner and Outer cities, as ‘a Square set on top
of a Rectangle’.113 He situated his own property as a ‘discreet conqueror’ in the
‘bottom right-hand corner’ of the Inner City, where he himself possessed ‘a tiny
square’.114 The Inner City enclosed the Imperial City, around which is a further,
misshapen wall. And lastly, the form of the Forbidden City itself – the object of
Segalen’s fascination and desire – scaled down and diminished: a final, third purple
rectangle.115

Viewing the city from above, revealing the structure of its ancient heritage,
allowed Segalen to fantastical ly possess it as an unchanging image. It also provided a
measure of relief from his increasingly frustrating and ultimately futile attempts to
unveil its secrets through engaging with life on the streets below. Even when the
narrator finally succeeds in gaining entrance to the Forbidden City for an audience
with the Regent as part of the French Minister’s entourage, he quickly becomes lost
in a maze of courtyards and enclosures. Unable to locate his position within his
mental representation of the palace’s layout, he becomes frustrated and confused. To
come to terms with his experience, he would later study a detailed map of the palace
to attempt to once again pinpoint the place of his encounter, but to no avail.

112 Segalen, René Leys, 87.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid., 88.
115 Ibid.
Republic Relief

Despite the belated efforts of the late-Qing, the city the new Republican administration inherited in 1912 was still largely mired in dust or mud, depending on the season. It was also moored to the daily cycle of wetting the streets with liquid waste that Cumming had had earlier decried, the result of residents both ‘emptying their chamber pots and dumping their garbage there’, or simply relieving themselves directly onto the street, to avoid the fee for toilet use.\(^\text{116}\) In addition to being caked with excrement, the streets were also apparently thick with garbage. This accumulation, when added to the ashes from coal burning, led to the strange phenomenon of a mountain-valley structure in which the streets were ‘higher than the foundations of houses’.\(^\text{117}\)

Upon coming to power the new municipal administration focused much of its effort upon improving Beijing’s streets. At the time, according to Madeleine Yue Dong, ‘there were no asphalt or concrete roads in Beijing, and only about 33.87 miles were covered with macadam. Between 1914, when the Municipal Council was established, and the end of 1918, 121 roads were repaired, expanded, or constructed’.\(^\text{118}\) Despite this, development was not equal among Beijing’s different areas. While the streets in many of the city’s wealthier areas were greatly improved (including the Legation Quarter, which was the first to have asphalt streets laid in 1915), the conditions in most of the city’s poorer areas were still reminiscent of those of the nineteenth century.\(^\text{119}\)

\(^{116}\) Dong, Republican Beijing, 37.  
\(^{117}\) Ibid.  
\(^{118}\) Ibid., 38.  
\(^{119}\) Ibid., 40.
Reversing years of neglect was a slow process. Writing in 1916, the year which had earlier seen Yuan Shikai's abortive attempt to re-establish dynastic rule, dust so characterised journalist and author Ellen LaMotte's time in the capital that she named her memoirs of her time in the city after it. Her *Peking Dust*, similar to accounts of the late Qing dynasty, constantly evokes the presence of dust in its descriptions of life in what she described as 'the beautiful, barbaric capital of China'.

For her, the newly asphalted streets of the Legation Quarter were 'European, and stupid' while the streets of the Chinese city were 'marvellous' for the bustling life they were stage to. Peking dust was, for LaMotte, both an actual physical presence, and also a description of the chatter and gossip that pervaded her daily life there, both of which smothered and colonised: 'By this time you must have discovered that Peking dust and Peking gossip are pretty much the same thing, whirling and blowing along together, sifting over you and into you, physically and mentally, till you are saturated through and through.' It was both of these dusts that, in the end, proved too much for LaMotte. As much as she loved the capital, she would eventually leave it to find solace in a more-modern Japan, a place more famous for its flowers than its dust: 'So we are going to leave Peking, gorgeous, barbaric Peking, with its whirling clouds of gossip and its whirling clouds of dust. We are stifled by them both. We are going to Japan to see cherry-blossoms.'

By the time the writer Juliet Bredon published her *Peking* in 1919 it seems that Beijing had cast off its early-century moniker as the 'Filthy Capital', Bredon wrote in the past tense of the filth that had once enveloped the capital, suggesting

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121 Ibid., 17.
122 Ibid., 198.
123 Ibid., 230.
124 I am quoting from the second edition, published in 1922.
that, in imperial times, the 'squalor reached the Palace gates. Even the open space around Ch’ien Mén was neglected, untidy and littered with refuse'.

Indeed, Bredon suggested that the post-1860 Qing tolerance of foreigners walking on the walls was primarily a practical relief to the city’s foreign population, who no longer had to travel always by way of the city’s streets. As Bredon noted, this was ‘a privilege more precious then than now as the streets of those days were unpaved and generally impassable, either ankle-deep in mud or dust according to the season’.

Improvement in the Republican era was not just due to the introduction of sealed roads. The implementation of new sanitation management system also played a large part. Under the Republic, public health work, which was previously left to individual households or district committees to organise, was placed ‘entirely in the hands of the police’. Its Board of Health, and its various departments, was charged variously with street and sewer cleaning and repair, the organisation of night soil collection, the construction and maintenance of public toilets, food and brothel inspection for disease prevention, as well as supervising the running of the growing number of hospitals.

Although beset by difficulties in enforcement and compliance (officers and residents were largely ignorant in principles of hygiene and sanitation), it appears that Beijing’s increasing number of sealed streets, at least, were well maintained. By 1921, the Board of Health had employed a force of some 1500 to clean them. These workers were also tasked with their watering in the dry season, by horse-

125 Bredon, Peking, 64.
126 Ibid., 18.
127 Gamble, Peking, 114
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., 124.
drawn cart, or by hand, and with water rather than sewage. According to Sidney Gamble, writing in the period, 'great progress has been made in the sanitation of the city and one has only to walk down the well-paved and well-cleaned streets and hear how some of them used to be ankle deep in filth to realize what an improvement there has been'.

The Republic would also see changes to the structure of the city itself. As with the covering of the streets, most of these occurred to improve transport access to and through the city. The year 1913 saw the first work to open up the area to the south of Tiananmen Gate. On the first anniversary of the Republic of China, the walls connecting the gate towers on either side of what was at the time an enclosed area were demolished, and the doors of the gate towers were removed. This was the first step in a process that would be completed in socialist Beijing after 1949, when the gate towers themselves would be completely dismantled in the expansion of a multi-lane east-west thoroughfare, Chang'an Avenue, which cut across the city's ancient north-south axis. Along with this, during this period major public works were undertaken to increase the city's penetrability from the outside, as well as projects to expand the north-south and east-west thoroughfares, often by cutting a path through the ancient walls. Continuing a process that had begun in 1900, more sections of the walls were dismantled to make way for train tracks. Similarly,

130 Ibid.
131 Ibid., 115.
132 Dong, Republican Beijing, 34.
133 Wang Yushi, Tian'anmen (Beijing: Zhongguo chubanshe, 2001), 36.
134 Chang'an already existed in the Republic in much more diminutive form and was a long east-west street that ran outside the city walls by means of the new gates, Fuxing in the west and Jianguo in the east.
135 Dong, Republican Beijing, 40.
most of the city's gates, often the site of train stations, were partly demolished (with walls or doors removed) to accommodate the flow of passengers.\(^{136}\)

As for the Forbidden City, from 1912, under China's new republican government, the country's former ruling Manchu household was permitted to continue to stay there. However, even at the time Segalen wrote his novel, members of the vanquished, now powerless 'little court', with the child emperor Puyi at its head, had had access to the more stately areas of the imperial palaces severed, and were restricted to its labyrinthine Inner Court.\(^{137}\) While the emperor would remain there until his eviction following the warlord Feng Yuxiang's coup in 1924,\(^{138}\) from 1912 the Forbidden City, for centuries the hidden centre of imperial power, was consigned to the periphery of national affairs, even as discussion about what to do with it would long remain unresolved.

Over the course of the twentieth century this Great Within that Segalen had so longed to penetrate would be slowly yet inexorably eviscerated. As the palace decayed around him, and the promise of imperial restoration similarly lost its lustre, it was Puyi and members of his household themselves that began this process. In preparation for the former emperor's own future removal from the palace, they purloined 'between 1,000 and 2,000 highly valuable scroll paintings, albums and works of calligraphy' from the imperial collections until their eviction.\(^{139}\) The thievery also occurred at the hands of eunuchs, without the consent or, initially, the knowledge of Puyi. Suspicious that items were disappearing at the hands of those other than his own, he ordered an inventory of the treasures of the Palace of

\(^{136}\) Ibid., 34-5.
\(^{137}\) Barme, *The Forbidden City*, 118.
\(^{138}\) Ibid., 129.
\(^{139}\) Ibid., 126-7.
Established Happiness. However, on 27 June 1923 this building and surrounding structures were burned to the ground, with the conflagration presumably started by eunuchs eager to hide evidence of their crimes. 140 This would lead, finally, to Puyi expelling most of the remaining eunuchs from the Forbidden City, many of whom would open shops in the commercial centre south of Qianmen, a gate in the city’s south, to make a living from their silently lifted plunder. 141

The initial theft of the palace collections during the republican era was just the initial step in a grim tale of banditry, neglect and sabotage that the entire imperial heritage of Beijing has faced under successive administrations to the present day. The city’s perfidious officialdom would oversee the dismantling of the walls of the Imperial City and the selling off if its materials in the 1920s. 142 Multilane roads eventually supplanted Beijing’s majestic crenelated walls, ‘a categorical, angular barrier’ as Segalen called them, which were demolished in the 1950s, continuing a job that began in the late Qing dynasty. Traffic junctions would, with few exceptions, also replace the city’s already partly demolished gates. Many of these new junctions are named after the gates they replaced, serving as spectral reminders of the irrevocable destruction of what is today called the ‘old city’ of Beijing. Paradoxically, given its ambivalent history as the secret centre of imperial rule for several hundred years, the buildings of the Forbidden City would remain largely untouched, with the contents that survived the tumult of the following decades eventually museumified as a part of a desacralised tourist Mecca. 143

140 Ibid., 160.
141 Ibid., 127. See Chapter 6 for more on this area.
142 Whereas the walls of the Inner and Outer Cities were made of rammed earth inners and brickouters, the walls of the Imperial City were solid brick.
143 See Barmé, The Forbidden City, for an extended exploration of the histories of the palaces.
Despite its diminished position in national affairs after the fall of the Qing dynasty, the Forbidden City continued to be a place of considerable allure for European visitors, as did the picture of the city at large. Bredon noted the view of both from the walls in her guidebook, presumably researched largely in the turmoil of Republican Beijing in the decade after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, remarking on the harmonious aesthetic sensibility that seemed to inform their design:

Delightful views of Peking may be had from the top of these fortifications. On a clear day the plan of the four cities is easily traced. In the centre lies the Forbidden City—the innermost heart of them, soaked in history and mystery...

Walking eastward, we look down on our left upon the Legation Quarter where many men of many minds have constructed an inharmonious whole, contrasting most unfavourably with the dignified unity of the Palaces beyond. Truly the Chinese understand better than we how to adapt their buildings to the surrounding landscape, the frame to the picture, and the picture to the frame. 144

Although there were some intermittent efforts to maintain hygiene and public health, limited funding for public works meant that the state of the city on the ground deteriorated once again after 1928, when the Nationalist government moved the capital south to Nanjing. 145 Yet despite the tumultuous changes that would take place in the city over the years of the Republic of China (1912–49), the undulating fortunes of successive governments, and the spatial reorganisation of the city from

144 Bredon, *Peking*, 18, 29.
imperial to republican city, the picture of the city from on high evoked by Segalen in his work, and earlier visitors to the city, would remain substantially unchanged. Even the revolutionary and reform era reconstruction of Beijing from 1949 until the present day remains haunted in powerful and complex ways by the perdurance of its ancient design.

146 Described in great detail in ibid.
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Socialism and Cleanliness

By the time of the socialist takeover in 1949, following some two decades of tumult, war with Japan and the civil war that followed, China’s former capital had once again become a place mired in filth. While occidental visitors had fallen significantly from their heights from before the civil war, the now almost century of contact and commerce with China that their presence had signified was nonetheless still felt. The city’s new Communist rulers were now armed with ideas of hygiene and cleanliness resulting from their myriad contact with the outside world (which now included Soviet Russia) and the longstanding engagement with modernity that gained prominence in the late nineteenth century. The construction of socialist Beijing in the 1950s, and attendant destruction of the Old City that it entailed, is a story often told. However, the creation of the city as the sacred centre of New China began not through reordering its architectonics and thus transforming its layout from above. Rather, it occurred firstly through a massive clean-up of the entire city and its streets, a process of physical and social purification that signaled also the purity of the new socialist order, which began in early 1949.

This chapter presents an examination of the clean-up of the city from the beginning of its Peaceful Liberation in 1949 until the early 1950s. I examine the extraordinary effort that began soon after the arrival of the People’s Liberation Army in February to prepare the city, which had been renamed Beiping, for its return to
capital status in October, before considering other elements of the city's clean-up that occurred after the founding of the nation on 1 October. Ostensibly carried out in the name of public health and law and order, the authorities also saw the clean-up as an opportunity to differentiate the new order from the (presumably corrupt) old order, and establish its legitimacy among the population. It focused not just on removing the physical dirt and garbage that inundated the streets, but also upon dealing with the still present enemy and social ills that did not sit well in the new image of the capital that the authorities wanted to present to the nation. While the initial occupation of the city marked a period of remarkable leniency towards the remnants of the Nationalist enemy, from 1950 continued national instability saw the Party's treatment of those it deemed as undermining the revolution changed markedly. It ended in a murderous purge, a clean-up, of the revolutionary masses that was in full swing by the end of the year.

Peaceful Liberation

On 31 January 1949, with little fanfare, a vanguard unit of PLA soldiers entered the city of Beiping through its northwestern Xizhimen Gate, marking the first moments of its Communist occupation. Three days later, a much larger procession of troops and vehicles entered Yongdingmen Gate in the south. Bearing big character posters and Mao portraits, they paraded up the southern part of the city's imperial axis, along which an enthusiastic crowd of thousands had gathered, before assembling south of Zhengyangmen Gate. From the gate, Lin Biao and Luo Ronghuang, commanders in charge of the operation of the city's Peaceful Liberation, reviewed

1 The city had returned to its early Ming name of Beiping in 1928 when the capital of the Republic of China was moved to Nanjing in the south.
the troops below. The procession then continued east, through the Legation Quarter, before its members finally dispersed to posts throughout the city.²

Although the occupation of the city had begun three days earlier, the spectacular 3 February 'entry ceremony' (ru cheng shi 入城式) of the PLA would come to dominate the official story of Beiping's 'Peaceful Liberation'. Unlike 31 January, it was an event carefully orchestrated to resonate with, while overwriting, the imperial and Republican histories of the city. It was hoped it would indicate the beginning of a new era, one enthusiastically supported by the masses. The crowd that lined the route though the city had been organised in the days before.³ That


³ Ibid.
PLA troops had entered through Zhengyang Gate and travelled up the city's imperial axis itself was no coincidence, nor was their progression through the Legation Quarter. Rather the route through these areas, deeply associated with foreign domination and feudalism, was planned for its powerful symbolism.4

A little less than eight months later, on 27 September, the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference passed a resolution to rename the city Beijing, formalising the city's long-planned-for restoration as the capital. The reasons for this were manifold. The other imperial and Republican capital Nanjing had been tainted due to its association with the rule of the Nationalist Party and its backers. Geographically, although Beijing was prone to drought and sandstorms in the spring, its inland status made it easier to defend. Situated on the main traffic artery that linked the northeast of China (dongbei 东北) to its central plains (zhongyuan 中原), Beijing was also relatively close to the economically and strategically important Bohai Gulf, and to the nation's closest allies Mongolia and, in particular, Soviet Russia. The city had also played an important role in China's history of political and social reform and fomentation. In 1898, it was from Beijing that the young Guangxu emperor had initiated the ultimately doomed Hundred Days' Reform Movement, calling for broad-ranging constitutional and political change.5 The last ruling emperor had also abdicated in the city in 1912, bringing two millennia of dynastic rule to an end. Student demonstrations in Beijing in 1919 had also sparked the nationwide anti-imperialist protests, the May Fourth

4 Ibid., 92–3.
5 The movement was eventually crushed by conservative forces in the government, led by the Empress Dowager Ci Xi.
Movement, which would inspire radical intellectuals, including the young Mao Zedong himself.

Moreover, although the new government in 1949 would represent itself as radically different from the country’s imperial and Nationalist rulers, the choice of Beijing as capital drew upon the city’s history as the axis mundi of imperial China and nominal capital of the early Republic. Beijing had been, with several exceptions, the centre of a unified state since beginning of the Yuan Dynasty in the thirteenth century. While the reversion of the city could draw on this imperial legacy, the occupation of the city could also be used to support the new social and political goals of the party, through a language of the radical negation of the city’s and, by extension, the country’s past.

Figure 4. Dong Xiwen’s *The Founding Ceremony*, 1953. The painting has undergone several periods of repainting, removing or adding different people to the rostrum to reflect the political mood. Source: National Museum of China.
The 27 September resolution was symbolically consecrated on 1 October. On that day Mao Zedong, possessed of a perspective and understanding that 'allowed him to stand above the fray and perceive distant vistas (zhande gao kande yuan [站得高看得远])', and with the newly constituted masses gathered below, announced the founding of the People's Republic of China from the rostrum of the historic Tiananmen Gate, the front entrance of the Imperial City, with his back to the Forbidden City. In imperial times, the emperor could stand on the exclusive Prospect Hill, the centre of the city, to view the cosmos in miniature. In socialist Beijing, Tiananmen Gate replaced it as the new symbolic summit of China. For from this still relatively privileged position the country's new leaders could view and figuratively possess the nation, represented by the square and the people amassed below, while remaining visible to it – given powerful symbolism in the position of Mao's portrait on the gate, over the people. It was from this apex, both real and ideological, 'from which one could see far and wide (gao zhan yuan zhu 高瞻远瞩)', that Mao would declare his desire to look south and in the future see a forest of

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7 The following year, China's national emblem, designed by Liang Sicheng and his Tsinghua University colleagues, would prominently feature Tiananmen Gate, further reinforcing its importance in the symbolism of New China.

8 Although Mao did not enter Beijing until March, a rough portrait of the Great Helmsman had replaced that of Chiang Kai-Shek on Tiananmen Gate soon after the city's Peaceful Liberation. It was visible on the occasion of the first major rally in the city on 12 February, a celebration of the city's Peaceful Liberation. Marshall Ye Jianying addressed a crowd of mobilised residents, social leaders, and officers and soldiers of the PLA, that had amassed below. Even at this early stage, it indicated the importance of the area the south of Tiananmen Gate, which would have profound ramifications for the city at large. By the time of the country's official founding, a portrait of the chairman wearing a hat and course jacket had replaced his February portrait. Over the coming years, this image would change as Mao himself aged, until it would become the eternal, unchanging (though frequently replaced) image that hangs there today, dissected by and dissecting the ancient imperial axis that guided the building of the city almost seven hundred years before.

chimneys. This was part of his more general wish to transform the ‘decadent’ old
capital that only consumed into a city of industrial production. It was also from
here, on the day of the nation’s founding, that the new leadership enunciated its
preliminary vision for the future transformation of the city. This was to begin at the
nation’s new symbolic centre – the centre of the centre: Tiananmen Square. It was
Zhou Enlai, Chairman of the Central Government Administrative Council, who
outlined plans for the reconstruction of the area immediately to the south of the gate.
According to Zhou’s chief bodyguard, Cheng Yuangong:

Joyously, he called together architect Liang Sicheng and officials of the
Beijing Municipal Government and relevant central government departments
and told them his idea about the rebuilding of Tiananmen Square.

“The square is the largest of all squares in capital cities across the
world, and we must change it into the most beautiful square as well,” he said,
with pride. He led the group to the southeast corner of the Tiananmen
Rostrum. Pointing to the east side of the square, he said: “There should be a
history museum – a huge structure – there.” He then led the group to the
southwestern corner of the Tiananmen Rostrum. Pointing to the west side of
the square, he said: “The National Grand Theater should be built there.”
Finally, he led the group back to the middle, saying: “Tiananmen Square lies
in the heart of Beijing. In front of us are the Sun-Facing Gate
(Zhengyangmen or Qianmen) and the Arrow Tower (Jianlou), and in front
of them we should build a monument (to honor the people’s heroes)... There
should be a history museum on the east side of the square and the National
Grand Theater on the west side. Behind us are the Forbidden City, the
Cultural Palace of the Laboring People and Zhongshan Park. Upon
completion of its transformation, Tiananmen Square will be center of mass

10 Wang Jun, Beijing Record: A Physical and Political History of Planning Modern Beijing (Singapore:
11 Ibid.
activities and entertainment for the people of Beijing, nay, for the people of the entire country."¹²

As Wu Hung has demonstrated, the creation of this new sacred revolutionary space in Beijing's centre had profound consequences for the capital's development.¹³ It foreshadowed a long-running war to rid China of the injurious legacies of its national past. Much of Beijing's imperial heritage, a most conspicuous symbol of this past, would bear its brunt. Indeed, Beijing's map-image would be completely transformed in the coming decades to embody tectonically the new national order and signify its permanence and irreversibility.

Before this transformation, however, the city was subject to another kind of reordering. By 1949, after years of war and economic stagnation, dust, dirt, garbage and excrement, physical deposits that were also the metaphorical vestigial residues of the corrupt old order, covered the city's streets and choked its waters. Beggary, a practice that upset the would-be capital's image of itself, was endemic, and prostitution, considered a barbaric commerce that enslaved women and spread disease, was rife. The populace still harbored enemy soldiers and operatives – remnants of the old order that threatened the establishment of the new regime's power and the revolution itself. Initially, therefore, it was not the lines of the Beijing map that were reordered, but the spaces that these lines delineated: the city 'on the ground', which was in 1949 a place inundated with the invasive physical and figurative dust of the past.

¹² Cheng Yuangong, quoted in ibid., 43.
¹³ See Wu, Remaking Beijing, for a detailed examination.
Making a Capital

Imagine all this junk, which till now has lain spread out over the soil like a dry crust, cleaned off and carted away.

—Le Corbusier\(^\text{14}\)

The clean, ordered space that the leadership looked down upon during the founding ceremony, to plan and contemplate the future, was not just a chimera brought about by the image of the serried ranks below. The area to the front of Tiananmen Gate, where the masses gathered to celebrate the beginning of New China, had been the object of months of preparation, cleaning and construction.

This was part of a project that began soon after Peaceful Liberation, when, with the coming reversion in mind, the army and residents had undertaken a clean-up of the entire city, launching thereby its remaking as the nation’s new capital and symbolic centre. It was a clean-up, like the transformation of the city in the decades to come, which was narrated in relation and opposition to China’s past, enabling the city and nation’s revolutionary leaders to construct an image of a new regime that was there to ‘serve the people’, and establish its legitimacy in the populace.

The initial project to clean up the capital was still underway on 1 October, and would continue into the early 1950s. The view from the gate was both the result of the initial part of this project and a prescription for the future. It intimated, in the years and decades to come, the application of what Maria Kaika has called the ‘programmatic vision’ of modernity to the populace of city and the nation as a whole,

with devastating consequences. Along with rooting out counterrevolutionary elements there were also movements to cleanse the social lives of the city’s residents, especially the presumably iniquitous activities associated with China’s feudal past. By the end of the year, and indeed into the future, all of those now iniquitous activities and elements which offended and threatened the probity and purity of the new socialist order – the unwanted, the iniquitous and the counter-revolutionary elements of the capital (and, by extension, country) – were to be ‘swept away’ (hengsao 拂扫).

In China, the work of revolution in the ‘home’ of the nation has often been linked to the everyday practices of sweeping and cleaning. In the early period of Communist Party rule, China's foreign policy was guided by the notion that China should ‘sweep clean our house before inviting guests inside’ (dasao ganjing fangzi, zai qingke 打扫干净房子, 再请客). This related to both eradicating the final traces of ‘imperialism’, the remnants of the Nationalist armies, and also proofing the people from the temptations of the bourgeois mindset that may follow from contact with the outside world in the future. Even before Peaceful Liberation, in an August 1945 speech in Yan'an following the end of war with Japan, Mao had used the domestic metaphor of sweeping one’s own room to describe the work that lay ahead of awakening the people and ridding their minds of incorrect thought: ‘We should sweep backward ideas from the minds of the Chinese people, just as we sweep our rooms. Dust never vanishes of itself without sweeping.’ Mao similarly described the

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work of taking control of the country and overthrowing the country’s reactionaries using the metaphor of sweeping the floor:

Everything reactionary is the same; if you don’t hit it, it won’t fall. It is like sweeping the floor; where the broom does not reach, the dust never vanishes of itself.... Only where the broom reaches can political influence produce its full effect. Our broom is the Communist Party, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army. Broom in hand, you must learn to sweep; don’t lie in bed, fancying that a gust of wind will somehow rise and blow all the dust away. We Marxists are revolutionary realists and never indulge in idle dreams. There is an old saying in China, “Rise at dawn and sweep the courtyard.” Dawn is the breaking of a new day. Our forefathers told us to rise and start sweeping at the very break of day. They were setting us a task. Only by thinking and acting in this way will we benefit and find work to do. China has a vast territory, and it is up to us to sweep it clean inch by inch.17

At the time of the PLA’s arrival in late January, Beiping was in a dire state of disrepair. With the seat of government’s move south to Nanjing in 1928, public services fell into a long decline, and stalled almost completely during the civil war years. Swathes of garbage had accumulated in uninterrupted lengths inside the former Imperial City, from Tiananmen Gate to its northwest corner, and along the wall of the Inner City, from Zhengyangmen Gate to Xizhimen Gate. With a lack of adequate sewage or waste collection systems, the streets were filthy, covered in refuse and, in places, ‘sun-dried’ (shai liang 熏彼ら) excrement.18 The city’s numerous foul-smelling lakes, rivers and canals, blocked with silt and detritus, were given to seasonal flooding, at which time they would cover their surrounds in a mephitic,

17 Ibid.
pestilential sludge. As the future capital, Beiping was at the centre of the symbolic construction of New China. The state of the city was in many ways an allegory for the state of the nation. Making sure it was in a tolerable state was of primary importance. In early 1949, therefore, one of the first, and most visible, projects that its new rulers would undertake was a massive clean-up of the entire city.

The Clean-up Beijing Campaign Committee (*Beijing qingjie yundong weiyuanhui* 北平清洁运动委员会) formed soon after Peaceful Liberation. The committee held its first meeting on 8 March 1949. Among its members were representatives from the municipal government, the Public Security Bureau (PSB), the Bureau of Civil Affairs, the Bureau of Sanitation, and the military, among other organisations, indicating the broad coalition of constituencies involved in this task. According to the minutes of the meeting, the Bureau of Sanitation and the Bureau of Public Works were responsible for formulating the plan for the clean-up, which was to be implemented under the supervision of the PSB. ‘Mobilising the masses’ (*fādòng qunzhòng* 发动群众) to get them onside was left to each of the city’s district leaders.

The clean-up itself (*qingjie yundong* 清洁运动) officially began on March 24 and lasted for 91 days. In total 73,537 people, organized into working groups according to their factory, school, army unit or organization, joined the initial

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19 An earlier Japanese plan to build a new centre in the western suburbs during its occupation of the city (1939–1945), which Liang Sicheng would draw upon in formulating his own planning vision, did not emerge, as Liang’s had, from a mind for preservation. Rather the Japanese administration felt that the old city, with its dilapidated buildings, poor sanitation and sewerage systems and neglected streets, was not fit for modern living.

20 ‘Beijing shi qingjie yundong weiyuanhui di yi ci huìyì jílù’, 8 March 1949, Beijing Municipal Archives.

21 Ibid.
effort. The China Students Confederation (zhonghua quanguo xuesheng lianhe hui 中华全国学生联合会) engaged in street-level activism and implemented a large-scale poster campaign to advertise the significance of the clean-up, and encourage residents themselves to join in the effort in their local communities. Work initially focused on Beijing’s households and alley and laneways. Major roads and public spaces followed. In the first three months from late-March, workers collected and removed some 250,000 cubic metres of waste to sites outside the city. In July, following the initial effort, the government introduced temporary measures to ensure the regular removal of waste, and new laws that banned relieving oneself on the street and regulated the correct method for the disposal of garbage.

According to a June 1949 Municipal Government work summary, the clean-up was a great success. A significant amount of waste was removed, making life in the city more tolerable. Equally important (with officials mindful of the need to create a good impression of the new regime with the situation in the city still unstable) the clean-up, part of a broader effort to consolidate the new regime (referred to as zheng quan gongzuo 政权工作), was well received by the populace. Many residents had apparently also taken it upon themselves to get involved, thus adding to the success. Moreover, the work resulted in the grooming of many new activists (peiyang jiji fenzi 培养积极分子) willing to help promote the cause of regime change at street level and in their local communities.

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22 'Qing yun gongzuo zongjie', June 1949, Beijing Municipal Archives, 1.
23 'Beipi ng shi qingjie yundong'.
26 'Qing yun gongzuo zongjie', 5.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 2.
According to the report, after the campaign the masses could see ‘the stark contrast between the people’s government and the anti-people’s government [of the Nationalists]’. The report quoted a tenant who lived by the eastern wall of the Imperial City and had apparently spoken in praise of the clean-up, saying, ‘our old house had been buried under rubbish for more than a decade. With Peaceful Liberation, the top of it has finally seen the light of day again. Only a true government of the people could get this done.’ Another resident made a direct comparison between the new regime and those of the Japanese and Nationalists before: ‘More than ten years of garbage piling up, under the Japanese and Nationalists, and there weren’t even a few times that it was taken away. They just embezzled the people’s money. But now, it has all been carted off.’

One of the most politically important focuses of the clean-up of Beiping was the area to the south of Tiananmen Gate, where crowds were to gather in celebration of the founding of the nation on 1 October. In July, the Central Committee had convened a special meeting to discuss the coming ceremony, which led to the establishment of the Municipal Bureau of Construction (市建设局), an organization that was tasked with planning and managing the clean-up of and repair work on the area. On 13 August, at the First Meeting of Representatives from All Social Circles of Beijing City (北京市第一届各界代表会议), the work was given a boost when Mao appealed for all to unite together and struggle to construct the people’s capital city. As a result,
representatives then adopted a motion to aid in the work at what was to become Tiananmen Square, in preparation for the coming founding ceremony.

Like much of the rest of the city, the area was in a state of considerable disrepair. After an initial clean-up, workers leveled out the uneven ground and surfaced the roads connecting the surrounding gates with asphalt. This was to create a space that would be expansive enough to fit the vast numbers expected to be present. Parts of the area were planted with trees, and decorated with flowering plants and grass, in a beautification project that would be echoed many decades later with the coming of the Beijing Olympics (and, indeed, many of the officially celebrated anniversaries in between). Work was undertaken to restore the gate itself, upon which government leaders would stand during the ceremony. It was overgrown with grass and weeds, and its plaster had faded and cracked from years of neglect.
Additional viewing stands were also constructed on either side of Jinshui River. This work also included the first imposition along the imperial axis in the post-Liberation period, when workers erected a 22.5 metre-high flagpole in front of the gate (see Figure 5), to bear the rising five star flag during the ceremony.32

According to Wang Kangjiu, from the time of Peaceful Liberation until the founding ceremony on 1 October, two million people were involved in all aspects of the clean-up.33 According to one apocryphal account, which still influences the way the 1949 clean-up of the city is imagined in the present day, when Peng Zhen entered the city he had commented to those present: “The Communist Party has entered the city. We can’t do what the capitalist “lords and ladies” of the past did: walk past some foul-smelling ditch and just cover our noses. That’s a thing of the past. We are the Communist Party. We serve the people.”34

Both in the way it was advertised among the populace, and in the way cadres spoke internally, the clean-up of the city and the new rule of the communists was cast in opposition to the dark and gloomy past. For the new government in 1949, the physical degeneration of the city could be linked productively to the moral failings of the country’s previous ruling classes. Filth, it seemed, was something they could put up with: it was the product of the bourgeoisie mindset, which cared nothing for the toiling masses and was fundamentally corrupt. Even though, as we have seen in Chapter 3, there had been recent efforts, as late as the Republican era, to clean up the city’s streets, which had been a regular object of nationalist woe and foreign derision since at least the nineteenth century, later accounts of the clean-up often

32 From Chen Rongguang, ‘Kaiguo dadian qian’, 45.
blame its rundown state in early 1949 on a history of neglect that began in the Ming dynasty. In fact, it was Liang Sicheng who popularised this idea in a speech delivered at the First National People’s Congress in July 1957, ‘Why I Love Our Party So’, which was widely reproduced, including in the People’s Daily. The party leadership had rejected Liang’s preservationist plan to build a new city centre to the south of the old capital. Perhaps increasingly aware of the vagaries of life in the still young republic, he felt that his creation of the plan and lobbying for its implementation, as well as his western ‘bourgeois’ education, was an increasingly cumbersome liability. His wariness at how his own personal history might be cast was evident earlier, just a few years after Peaceful Liberation, when on 18 April 1952 he had had an article of extensive self-criticism published in the Guangming Daily, with the self-explanatory title of ‘I Recognise the Harm My Bourgeois Thought has Caused the Motherland’. It is perhaps not surprising then that, in his 1957 speech, Liang praised the great transformation of the city that had taken place under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party, claiming that ‘Within one year of its Peaceful Liberation, 349,000 tons of garbage, left over from the Ming and Qing dynasties, were cleared out of the city’. 35

Beggars

Beggary and prostitution were the two main kinds of ‘social ills’ or ‘human impurity’ that the urban authorities had focused their attention on in the lead up to the 1 October founding ceremony. While much internal discussion took place on how best to ‘deal with the prostitutes’ before 1 October, it was not until November that the

authorities would take action. Beggars, in contrast, were a more pressing concern. According to one government report, they had misread the language of 'liberation' and begun ‘rampaging’ around in the name of the proletariat.\textsuperscript{36} Taking things into their own hands, they had harassed business owners, who were scared to defend themselves (they themselves were unsure of the nature of the revolution) with threats of violence and vandalism. As a result, many beggars were ‘earning more than labourers’.\textsuperscript{37} This only increased pressure on the city's already volatile social and commercial environment.

Despite this, in the first few months after occupation authorities, by their own admission busy with the work of regime change, did not rush to resolve the problem.\textsuperscript{38} Officials thought that the situation would improve as the economy recovered, and focused on establishing and maintaining law and order rather than implementing specific programs of education and reform.\textsuperscript{39} However, as the city's reversion to become the capital once more grew closer, the question of what to do with beggars, one of the most visible signs of social decline and poverty, became increasingly urgent. The presence of beggars came to be viewed as a problem that affected the appearance of the city (shirong 市容). Such unwanted elements could not be tolerated in the future people's capital. It was a message that local governments, charged with eradicating begging in their areas, were aware of.

According to one local official writing in August, ‘The united government [lianghe zhengfu 联合政府] is about to form, and Beiping will become China's capital. Many

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 381–2.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 381.
outsiders will visit. The problem of the city’s appearance must be quickly rectified.

Principal among things affecting this appearance were the city’s beggars. Accordingly, eradicating begging from the city’s streets was not just about solving beggars’ life problems, but it was ‘also a question of our international reputation [*guoji shengyu 国际声誉*].’

Like the clean-up of the streets and lakes, the work to eradicate begging was cast in opposition to the past. Authorities described the practice itself as ‘the result of thousands of years of the bloody rule of feudal bureaucrats’ and contrasted their work to stamp it out with Nationalist and Japanese efforts. It was claimed that, for example, the Japanese, to remove the signs of poverty from the streets, had seized the city’s ‘coolies’ and expelled them. The Communists, on the other hand, planned to took in and housed the city’s beggars (*shourong 收容*), and offered them care and an opportunity for redemption.

Eventually, the authorities formulated a detailed plan for dealing with Beiping’s beggars. They were first taken to a government ‘poorhouse’ (*jiuji yuan 救济院*) where, after examination and consideration of such factors as age, skill level and sex, they were housed at other various organisations. Those beggars who could not work, for example, such as the old and infirm, were sent to nursing homes (*anlao suo 安老所*). Beggars aged between eight and fifteen were housed at a special education centre for the young (*yuyou suo 有幼所*). Able-bodied men were taken to a special trade centre (*pingmin xiyi suo 平民习艺所*) from where, after a period of re-education, they would form work brigades (*laodong dadui 劳动大队*) to engage in...
productive labour. Women, on the other hand, were housed at a special women’s penitentiary (funü jiaoyang suo 妇女教养所) where they would undergo re-education before learning handicrafts.44 During the initial campaign from 27 May to 3 June some 854 beggars were taken from the street for processing.45 By the end of the year, 1,248 had been taken in and allocated places of domicile.46

The main goal of education was ‘ideological reform’ (sixiang gaizao 思想改造). Classes focused upon, among other things, the horrible suffering of people under feudal and Nationalist bureaucrats, the future prospects of those living a parasitic life, the harm it causes society and how it was no longer possible, and the glory of productive labour.47 They were also held under armed guard to prevent some ‘troublemakers’ from inciting chaos (authorities believed some were Nationalist colluders, some deserters, some runaway landlords).48 Ex-beggar ‘graduates’ were placed in class with new arrivals, both to spy on them and also to serve as models for the new students to aspire to.49 To correct slack habits (ziyou sanman 自由散漫), life in these education centres, including waking, meals, study and recreation times, was strictly controlled.50 Male beggars housed at the trade centre were required to obey an extensive list of ‘Life Rules’:

1. Don’t be naughty, don’t cause trouble and don’t try to escape. Obey the leadership of the organisation; 2. Remain quiet during class, don’t speak out of turn, and study hard; 3. Pay attention to public and personal health; 4.

44 Information on these different organisations is from ibid., 383.
45 See ibid., 398–9, for more figures.
48 Ibid., 384–5.
49 Ibid., 385.
50 Ibid., 386.
Treasure public property; 5. No smoking; 6. No spreading rumours or inciting the masses; 7. Act and speak honestly; 8. No fighting or yelling; 9. Help each other and be accommodating; 10. Transform your stealing and begging mind. From today forward, study and be productive with all your effort; 11. All the above regulations will begin from the day of this posting. Violators will be dealt with according to the will of all beggars.51

Prostitution

It was not until after the ceremony to mark the birth of the new People’s Republic on 1 October that the government moved to end prostitution. Its concern was made public on 21 November, when Nie Rongzhen reported the findings of a citywide investigation into the trade to the Second Beijing People’s Representative Conference. According to Nie, at the time there were 1421 prostitutes working ‘out in the open’, another 400 working in unregistered establishments, and 1462 other people working in other roles in the industry (such as owners, managers and others).52 On the same day, members of the conference passed a motion to shut down all of the capital’s brothels. Within 12 hours of the passing of the motion, under the command of China’s first head of the PSB, Luo Ruiqing, 2400 soldiers and police had closed down 224 brothels, relocated 1288 prostitutes to the Women’s Labour Re-education Camp, and arrested 424 pimps and bosses, who were held at the PSB General Office.53 According to a 1950 summation of the work, while some were merely imprisoned, others were executed.54

51 Ibid., 385–6.
52 ‘Nie Rongzhen shizhang xiang gejie daibiao huiyi baogao quanwen’, Guangming ribao, 23 November 1949.

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Later officially sanctioned 'histories' of this event depict Mao himself as the chief instigator of the campaign. The story goes: Luo Ruiqing (China's first security chief) was one day called to Mao's residence to discuss an important matter. Peng Zhen, having completed an investigation into the prostitutes of Beijing, had just informed Mao of his findings. Mao, moved by tales of their terrible suffering, had decided that such a thing could not be tolerated in New China. It was up to the party to act decisively. Mao, so the story goes, moved by passion, told Luo: 'We must sweep our houses clean', and called for the closure of the city's brothels. The
compliant Luo had immediately agreed with the Chairman’s wishes, and set out to turn his vision into a reality.\textsuperscript{55}

However, government documents from the era make it difficult to corroborate such involvement by Mao. Rather, it seems that the decision to close the city’s brothels stemmed from a long process that involved multiple interest groups, which had begun almost half a year before. A 18 May Beiping Municipal Government Office work report, which also discussed the problem of beggars in the city, suggests that a taskforce made up of members from the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs, the Women’s Commission, and the PSB had been organised to investigate the problem, and work was to begin on the 25\textsuperscript{th} of the month.\textsuperscript{56} A lengthy draft paper on the issue entitled ‘Method for Dealing with Prostitutes in Beiping’ was already in circulation by late September.\textsuperscript{57} Interestingly, the municipal government also sought the advice of the Soviets, in particular a physician by the name of Artemyev. His report on the sanitary and health situation in Beijing, including its prostitution industry, was the subject of a forum held on 25 October which Peng Zhen, professors, local doctors, municipal bureaucrats, and the Soviet advisors themselves attended.\textsuperscript{58} A final, detailed report of the Beijing Municipal Committee was presented to the Central Government and the North China Bureau on 7 November, recommending the closure of all the brothels in the city.

\textsuperscript{55} Other versions have Mao himself make an incognito trip to the city’s red light district from his residence in Fragrant Hills to see for himself.
\textsuperscript{56} ‘Beijing shi minzheng ju guanyu chuli qigai wenti yu jinü wenti de gongzuo buzhi’, 378.
\textsuperscript{57} ‘Beijing shi chuli jinü banfa (cao’an)’ in Beijing heping jiefang qianhou, ed. Beijing Municipal Archives (Beijing: Beijing chuban she, 1988), 400.
Through its broad coverage at the time, and later through a 1951 film, *Sisters, Stand Up (Jie jie mei mei zhan qilai) the work to close down the city’s brothels, the liberation and re-education of Beijing’s prostitutes, and the public denunciation of their former masters, became an enduring symbol of early socialist rule. This work to end prostitution in the city enabled the party to position itself unequivocally as protecting and advancing women’s rights against the remnants of China’s feudal past and advancing public health more generally. The nationally publicised wording of the motion to close down Beijing’s brothels described prostitution as a ‘barbaric and savage system’ of the ‘old rulers and exploiters’ that ‘destroys women’s bodies and spirit, and insults female dignity... spreads disease and syphilis and harms the people’s health’. In similar fashion, brothel owners and others involved in this exploitation of women were described as the ‘extremely savage and brutal dregs of feudalism’.59 A 28 November *People’s Daily* article entitled ‘‘Good Deeds” of the Highest Order: Carrying Out the Decision of the Beijing Municipal’s People’s Congress to Close Down the Brothels’, advanced the deep significance of the project, placing the party, and the figure of Mao, at the centre of the effort:

This malignant tumour of feudal society, this malignant tumour of capitalism: not even the development of science and medicine can stop it from spreading, and the feudal rulers and bureaucratic capitalists want to protect it, and even speed up its growth! But today, under the leadership of the communist party and the people’s government, in the people’s Beijing, this evil tumour has been cut out once and for all... The miserable lives of the prostitutes are over. Their existence of insult and torture has reached its end. Today, they have jumped out of the frying pan, and become human again... The Communist

Party and Chairman Mao are the rays of the sun, the judges of the dark and the evil, the cleaners of everything foul and hideous, the guardian spirits of human beings. [...] Today is just the start. Tomorrow, we will smash all the living hells of the whole world. Tomorrow, we will lead everyone to honourable and happy lives.60

Zhongnanhai

The clean-up of the former imperial grounds of Zhongnanhai, a gardened enclosure of pavilions and houses set along a series of connected artificial lakes in the southwestern corner of what was once the Imperial City, began soon after Peaceful Liberation, as part of the more general work described above. At this time, reviving a practice that had begun with Yuan Zikai in 1911 and ended with Marshall Zhang Zuolin in 1928, the area was chosen to house the nation’s new central leadership.61 While the initial clean-up of the grounds, along with the construction of new residential compounds, was complete before 1 October, work on the lakes themselves would take considerably longer. Indeed, cleaning up the city’s numerous waterways generally was a project that would proceed well into the next decade.

The party leadership had officially moved into their new residences at Zhongnanhai by the time of the founding of the new republic. Mao himself officially moved in on 9 September. However, it is unclear how much time he actually spent there over the following months. From the time the new leadership had entered the city in March, Mao had preferred his Shuangqing Villa in the Fragrant Hills to the

60 "Toudeng de "shanshi" —wei Beijing shi renmin daibiao huiyi fengbi jiuyuan jueyi er zuo", Renmin ribao, 28 November 1949.
west of the city to the imperial airs and malarial waters of the would-be capital.

According to one account, Mao commuted into the city centre for work purposes only, and always returned at night to this residence. Several months after the Peaceful Liberation, the initial clean-up of the grounds Zhongnanhai had been completed, and new residences built. Mao, however, still refused General Ye Jianying’s invitation to move to Zhongnanhai, replying, ‘I’m not moving. I’m not an emperor’. He was apparently mindful of the folly of the ill-fated Ming rebel, Li Zicheng, and, before entering the city, had asked his comrades to read an account of Li’s overthrowing of the Ming dynasty in the mid seventeenth century, and his subsequent attempt at imperial rule that had ended in disaster for Li. 62

However, perhaps another reason for Mao’s delay was that, although the site had undergone initial renovations, the clean-up had not yet extended to the foul waters of the lakes themselves. Indeed it seems that, despite their horrific state, it was not until early 1950 that preparations began on the dredging of the lakes, which were to be cleaned up as part of a larger Three Seas Project. 63 Zhongnanhai is named after the southern and central lakes of the Three Seas, which are three connected lakes, of the Inner City. The other lake, Beihai, which was cleaned up at the same time, is the site of a public park. While the dredging of the Three Seas was given most attention in the coverage of the project at the time, according to official documents of the municipal government, a large amount of effort was also exerted on dredging at the source of the Three Seas’ water, the spring water pools of Jade

Spring Mountain to the city's northeast, and the Jinhe and Changhe rivers that fed this water into Beijing.\textsuperscript{64}

The municipal government began planning for the clean-up in early 1950. In January, Mayor Nie Rongzhen and Vice Mayors Zhang Youyu and Wu Han sent a memo to the Administration Council of the Central Government regarding the state of the Three Seas and connecting waterways and the proposed budget for the clean-up. The memo gives insight into the reasons authorities considered the clean-up necessary: the state of the Three Seas impeded the supply of water the rest of the city and its stagnant waters (si shui 水) were considered a breeding ground for mosquitos, which were blamed for the spread of malaria and viral encephalitis. They were not just a concern for those in close proximity to the water but, according to the memo, 'the drainage of the Three Seas relates to the health of the people of the entire city'.\textsuperscript{65}

Despite these concerns, it was not until 8 April that the dredging of what was referred to as the 'dead water pit' (si shui keng 水坑) of Zhongnanhai officially began.\textsuperscript{66} For security reasons only members of the armed forces were permitted to work on the project.\textsuperscript{67} However, authorities hoped that its success would inspire the clean-up of other of the city’s lakes and rivers, which the masses would eventually participate in willingly.\textsuperscript{68} According to Liu Luming, an official involved in the clean-up, some 7,500 workers participated in the removal of some 160,000 cubic metres of

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Nie Rongzhen, Zhang Youyu and Wu Han, ‘Zhengli Beijing shi San Hai hedao gongcheng gaisuan yi fen’, January 1950, Beijing Municipal Archives.
\textsuperscript{66} Bo Sheng, ‘Wa hai ji: ji zhongyang gong’an zongdui Zhongnanhai gongcheng’, Renmin ribao, 10 May 1950.
\textsuperscript{67} Beijing shi renmin zhengfu, ‘Zhengli Beijing shi san hai hedao gongcheng jihua’.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
material from the lakes. Apparently inspired, and despite the difficulty of the task and the unusually inclement weather, workers completed the different phases of the project ahead of schedule, with the entire project at Zhongnanhai complete in twenty days. The project was also productive in ways not predicted. During their labour, workers caught hundreds of kilograms of (presumably edible) fish and turtles, and also uncovered silver coins, valuable metal, bullets and hand grenades.

Figure 7. The dredging of the lakes in Beijing. Source: Guangming ribao, 27 August 1950.

A 10 May 1950 People's Daily article described the clean-up of the lakes as a 'historic' project. Reflecting the beliefs of authorities at the time, the article pronounced the water as 'greatly undermining the people's health environment in the

70 Ibid., 30.
71 Bo Sheng, 'Wa hai ji'.
capital', and 'a cause of epidemic' in the city at large. Like other projects in the city's clean-up, authorities contrasted the dredging of Zhongnanhai with the efforts of the past:

There is a history of dredging the Three Seas (Zhong, Nan and Bei) in the past, but then it was undertaken entirely for the feudal, imperial ruling classes' lives of extravagance and pleasure. It is said that the Qing Emperor Shunzhi once dredged the lakes so he could disport himself there. After that, the Empress Dowager Cixi once had a watercourse dug in it to paddle a dragon boat. One of the Northern Warlords, Feng Guozhang, undertook a search for rare fish in the Three Seas under the guise of fixing the lakes, and falsely claimed costs under a 'fixing the seas' account.

These past reasons for dredging the lakes are fundamentally incomparable to the reasons for dredging the lakes today, which is for the purpose of disease prevention and the health of the capital's people.

The work a Zhongnanhai, and the operation of Peaceful Liberation and the establishment of the regime more generally, was carried out under the slogan 'Serve the People' (as opposed to the presumably self-serving rulers of the past). Indeed, the spirit wall behind the formal entrance to the compound, New China Gate (constructed under orders of the leader of another New China and subsequent short-lived Hongxian Emperor of the Chinese Empire, Yuan Shikai (r.1915–16)), still bears this slogan today. When Nanjing became capital in 1928, Zhongnanhai served for a time as a public park. Paradoxically, however, with the liberation of the city, the lakes and gardens that surround them became the exclusive preserve of China's new
rulers – a new forbidden centre of power and one of the nation’s most inaccessible of places, impenetrable by all but the political elite and their invited guests.74

Dragon Beard Ditch

While the work on Zhongnanhai was given some coverage at the time, the project soon fell into relative obscurity. The clean-up of the canal in Tianqiao district in the city’s south, on the other hand, would become one of the greatest, most enduring stories of early socialist rule. This project, focused on one of the city’s poorest areas, sought to cover a notoriously polluted, malodorous canal and replace it with a modern drainage system. One of the principal waterways in this area which was part of this project, Dragon Beard Ditch (Longxu gou 龙须沟), was named thus due to its position in relation to the cardinal axis, or Dragon Vein (long mai 龙脉), of the city. According to this geography, the southern part of the axis, which extends from the throne room of the emperor and out to the southern sections of the city, represented the snout of the dragon and the streams of water running either side of this snout were the dragon’s whiskers (or beard), one of which was Dragon Beard Ditch.75 Bringing more easily advertised benefits to the people of the city at large than the dredging of the sequestered lakes of Zhongnanhai, the metamorphosis of this waterway from stinking ditch to modern drainage system was praised broadly for its transformative influence on the lives of the long-suffering people who lived in its vicinity.

74 With the exception of the Cultural Revolution.
This occurred most famously through the Beijing author and playwright Lao She's *Dragon Beard Ditch*. Originally performed at the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1951 (the first original work staged by this organisation), the play was performed widely at theatres in China during the period. Through these productions, and later especially through its Beijing Film Studio film adaptation, Lao She's work received widespread dissemination, forming a significant part of the socialist agitprop of the era. His essays on the play and project, as well as glowing reviews that praised the work as a model of socialist theatre, were also broadly published in the Chinese news media at the time.\(^\text{76}\)

*Dragon Beard Ditch* is set in a courtyard compound on the shore of a stinking ditch. The play focuses on the lives of several families who live there. Its three acts represent three different periods: the first is set in the pre-Liberation city, and depicts the horrible struggles of the courtyard's inhabitants as they deal with the degenerate city around them and their own loss of purpose under Nationalist rule. The second act is set in the period immediately after Peaceful Liberation, as the Communist Party seeks to consolidate its rule in the city and establish a people's government. The final act is set after the establishment of the new nation, when the public works project is well on its way towards completion.

The whole play is framed by the figure of the ditch itself. Its physical transformation is linked to the moral transformation of its inhabitants under the new regime. As one character in the play, Old Man Zhao (Zhao Laotou), comments, 'only when the officials are clean will the water run clear' (*you le qing guan, cai neng*...
At the beginning of the play, the ditch is a monstrous presence that covers the characters' world in stench, floods their homes with its pestilential waters, and steals the lives of their loved ones. Yet by the end, with the ditch tamed, the goodwill and hard work of the new regime has left the characters transformed and living lives of new purpose. This transformation is indicated also in the set changes of the three acts. The state of the courtyard, which is dilapidated and ill-repaired in act one, improves over the course of acts two and three, which are set in the post-Liberation city, until it is completely cleaned and repaired by the end.

The narrative and imagery of the play represents the rule of the Communist Party as radically different to the city's pre-Socialist period. However, in reality the state of Dragon Beard Ditch had long been cause for concern for the city's authorities. Indeed, a substantial part of the waterway at Tianqiao underwent repairs during the city's republican era. The section at Dragon Beard Ditch was left unrepaired not because of lack of will, but rather because of a lack of funding. However, such historical complexity did not fit with the image promulgated by the new government through Lao She's work and the discourse associated with it.

The project became a visual metaphor for the cleaning up of the nation. It turned the city 'into a parable' of the moral transformation of a people under the good-willed guidance of the new government. According to Yomi Braester, 'The Communist Party's hold over China relied on the claim not only that it was

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77 Lao She, 'Long xu gou', in Lao She zuopin jingdian, ed. Jiang Shujuan (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chuban she, 1995), 110.
78 Braester, Painting the City Red, 42.
79 Ibid., 27.
reinvigorating the nation-state but also that it was making over the capital.\textsuperscript{80} To this day, the film version can be found in DVD shops throughout China, and is considered an essential document of the reconstruction of the city in its early-Socialist years. In a not unusual case of fiction passed off as history, according to Braester, the film has been ‘quoted in histories of urban planning and integrated into documentary films, as if it were historical footage’.\textsuperscript{81} This reflects the way the play was disseminated at the time and since as based upon real events.

This is even more perplexing when one considers that Lao She wrote his play years before the project itself was actually completed. His first and only visit to the area was in July 1950, when the project was still in its infancy. He had finished writing the play a month later, when little had changed. Despite his claims that the play inspired by the work of the party in the capital, Lao She’s play was in fact a triumphant ode to a project that was still years from completion. Indeed, although Lao She suggested that his work was a personal tribute, Braester has uncovered the subterranean involvement of the central authorities in influencing its production. Like other propaganda, \textit{Dragon Beard Ditch} constructed, rather than reflected, the reality of the city and nation. It was, in other words, a state-sponsored prolepsis of things to come which, through its dissemination, was given the timbre of inevitability. It also prescribed how the people should react to the work of the party, which served the people, when the ditch was finally completed: gratefully and with enthusiasm. At the same time the ambiguous time-scale of the play suggested that the future had, at the time Lao She wrote his play, already arrived. Through its \textsuperscript{80} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
dissemination, it delivered, to paraphrase Norman Klein, a lasting memory of an event that had yet to occur.82

**Enemy Elements**

In newly liberated Beiping and in the early years of its new role as the socialist capital Beijing, the establishment and maintenance of a new order did not just involve the removal of the physical remnants of the city's past or the stamping out of supposedly iniquitous social behaviour. It also involved purging the populace of the enemy and other inimical influences. Peng Zhen, at the time the secretary of the Beiping Municipal Committee, foreshadowed this work on 6 January 1949 when speaking to a group of cadres charged with overseeing the city's coming occupation. According to Peng, the three things of primary importance in 'overthrowing the old regime and establishing a new regime'83 were seizing political power, transforming industry and commerce, and establishing democracy. In a sign that the development of democracy in China, a promise that the party had made when taking power, would be paradoxical at best, Peng warned that elections should not be carried out immediately because 'we have suffered on that front already', citing the failure of a cotton mill in Shijiazhuang to elect Communist Party members. He suggested that, before a democratic system could be put in place, the friends and enemies of the party first needed to be identified and dealt with. Democracy could not be achieved, in other words, until a more fundamental work was undertaken: 'We must

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completely root out and destroy the remnants of the reactionary forces. First we must kill the wolf. In order to establish democracy, we must first eliminate the enemy. 84

At the time of its Peaceful Liberation, Beiping was home to the highest concentration of ‘scattered’ Nationalist soldiers (liusan junren 流散军人) of any city in North China. Understandably, the authorities reasoned that dealing with these vast numbers of remnant enemy forces was of the utmost importance in establishing their power. 85 They considered it not just a political battle (zhengzhi douzhan 政治斗争), but also a more immediate question of law and order. Not only did many of these soldiers openly oppose the occupation, or work to undermine the establishment of the population’s trust in the new Communist occupiers, but authorities also attributed a large proportion of urban crime – for example, as much as eighty per cent of robberies – to these now unemployed soldiers. 86 Indeed, at the time the Public Security Bureau considered them the biggest threat to public order. 87

Despite Peng’s pre-Liberation designs, the treatment of Nationalist remnants in the city immediately following the communist takeover was remarkably lenient. Authorities were mindful that the take-over of the city had occurred in the name of its Peaceful Liberation and this, at least initially, precluded the use of any ‘ultra-leftist [radical] methods’. 88 Ridding the city of the remnants of the old order was not just necessary in establishing their own power. Authorities also saw it as an opportunity to created trust with the city’s residents and, through a policy of leniency,

84 Ibid., 186.
86 Ibid.
87 ‘Beijing shi gong’an ju yi nian lai gong’an gongzuo baogao’, 308–9.
construct the image of the new government as radically different from those of the past.

This was achieved, firstly, through a policy of willing registration. From early February, authorities encouraged the ‘remnants of the old order’ to come forward and register with the government. A 2 February 1949 notice called upon ‘counterrevolutionary parties, such as the illegal organisations of the Nationalist Party, the China Youth Corps, the Chinese Youth Party, and the China Democratic Socialist Party’ to cease activity and disband immediately. Authorities offered clemency to those who registered, handed over all documents, radio transceivers and arms, and gave information regarding other members of their organization. However, failure to comply, it warned, would be met with serious consequences. 89

More than two weeks after the PLA entered the city, Peng issued a top-secret emergency notification warning that enemy agents had infiltrated his units and carried out assassinations, sabotaged property and spread false rumours. 90 The following day, in a report to Mao and comrades of the General Front Committee and North China Bureau Peng warned that, despite good progress, the power of the hidden enemy was still strong. 91 Nonetheless, the policy remained, first and foremost, registration, and several more notices were released over the following months urging enemy forces to hand themselves in.

Despite this system of registration being in place from early on, in the first weeks of occupation the main thrust of the work of clearing out these remnants forces was achieved through arrest. Within the first 10 days from 2 February the majority of scattered soldiers, some 1700, were taken in in just such a manner. This was not, however, because arrest was the preferred method, but rather because the benefits of registration had not been sufficiently promoted and many remained fearful of the intentions of the Communist authorities. Realising a change of strategy was needed, on 19 February authorities launched a grassroots campaign to promote the benefits of registration and assuage the fears of those wary of the repercussions of handing oneself in, which including gaining legal status, free passage home (to those whose hometowns were in liberated China), or a position in the ranks of the PLA (especially the highly educated and technical staff), as well as financial assistance to the injured. Authorities largely achieved this through mass rallies (qunzhong dabui 群众大会) and other forums arranged through pre-Liberation social organisations (such as the baojia system of social governance). Authorities also often made use of soldiers who had already been taken in and processed to talk of the benefits. Interestingly, the government also called on brothel owners and pimps to encourage soldiers, many of who frequented the city's brothels, to register. Through a combination of arrests and registration, from 3 February to 21 March, 30,912 scattered soldiers in total were brought in and processed.

Besides these remnants of the Nationalist armies, the city was also thought to house vast networks of enemy operatives (tewu 特务). The majority were thought to be Nationalists. However, the United States and other counterrevolutionary parties

92 'Beiping shi chuli guomindang liusan guanbing de gongzuo zongjie', 280–1.
93 Ibid., 281–2.
were also suspected of running their own networks. Like the remnants of the Nationalist army, these personnel were dealt with under a policy of 'leniency and repression' (kuanda yu zhenya atada ni kan). On 5 March, for example, a notice of the Bureau Chief of the PBS in Beijing municipality Tan Zhengwen called for undercover agents to come forth and register with the new government, and hand over arms and information. Like previous calls for surrender, to those that complied with the notice Tan promised mercy. Similarly, he warned those who refused to register that, once caught, they would face severe punishment. Leaders were to be executed. However, agents who handed themselves in and gave up their superiors were spared and even rewarded. Over the course of the year to December, some 9571 enemy agents and counterrevolutionary party personnel were processed, of which more than two thirds had come forward and registered willingly. While some were placed in prison or released (and a small number executed), many underwent 'labour reform' (laodong gaizao). A principal symbol in this was the Qinghe Team (Qinghe dadui), a labour team established in early February whose 2070 members were all former enemy agents and counterrevolutionary party members. Guided by their Communist leaders, over the course of the year this team built 20 houses and a sock factory for 120 workers. By the end of the year, they were planning to have completed work on a 300,000-acre farm, 90,000 acres of which were already ready for use.

94 'Beijing shi gong'an ju yi nian lai gong'an gongzuo baogao', 306.
95 Ibid.
97 'Beijing shi gong'an ju yi nian lai gong'an gongzuo baogao', 306-7.
98 Ibid., 307.
99 Ibid.
A Municipal Military Control Commission summary of work regarding old regime administrators circulating in July suggested that the large number of those who represented the old order, such as former government administrators, scattered soldiers, and even enemy special agents, were capable of being absorbed into the new system. Once again, in regards to administrators, leniency was the principal catch cry. Guided by the ‘fundamental spirit’ (jibenjingshen 基本精神) of ‘clear out the minority of bad elements, and reform the majority of useful personnel’ (qingchu shaoshude shouyao huaifenzi, gaizao duoshude youyong renyuan 清除少数的首要坏分子，改造多数的有用人员), 78.9 per cent of those who had served in the Nationalist administration were kept within the new administration in some capacity.100 Most of these had been lower level officials considered as having no particular political persuasion.101 According to the report, ‘Most wish to receive our education. Under the correct leadership of my party, they have improved quickly.’102 A December 1949 work report by the PSB, discussing its work in the city in the previous year, which including the above said management of spies, scattered soldiers, Nationalist administrators and illegal party members, as well as prostitutes and beggars, summarised its achievements: ‘Within a year, on top of smashing the old system, we have washed away the bad, reformed the old and nourished the new.’103

100 ‘Beiping shi junguan hui ge da danwei chuli yuan guomin dang jiguan renyuan de gongzuo zongjie’ in Beiping beiping jiefang qianhou, ed. Beijing Municipal Archives (Beijing: Beijing chuban she, 1988), 213.
101 Ibid., 211–2.
102 Ibid., 213.
103 ‘Beijing shi gong’an ju yi nian lai gong’an gongzuo baogao’, 318.
While clemency characterised the initial treatment of the remnants of the Nationalist regime and other parties, in the early 1950s a major shift occurred. The new regime had met with fierce opposition in many parts of the country, and underground Nationalist resistance continued to destabilise Communist rule. In the capital itself, enemy agents were held responsible for sabotaging infrastructure, destroying factories and fomenting social unrest. Leniency, it seemed, had failed to produce the desired results and rebellion was commonplace. Many began pushing for the use of more violent means to rid the revolution of its opponents. Not surprisingly, Peng Zhen was chief among them. In May 1950, he blamed 'leniency without bounds' for demoralising cadres and emboldening the enemy. Not only had it 'swollen the enemy's arrogance' but it had also, according to Peng, alienated the people.

According to Yang Kuisong, it was Peng's criticism, and previous Liu Shaoqi-guided Central Committee directives on the Elimination of Bandits and Establishment of the Revolutionary New Order and Suppression of Counterrevolutionary Activities issued in March, that led to the government Council and Supreme Court issuing a joint directive that called on the suppression of counterrevolutionary activities on 23 July. However, it was not until two days after the decision to send troops to Korea to aid the north in their conflict with the United States and the south, on 10 October, that Mao would issue his 'double-ten directive'. In it, he declared, China was to go to war on two fronts, in Korea and at

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104 See the PSB report of cases in 1949 in ibid., 308.
106 Ibid.
home. Like the war in Korea, the cleaning of the revolutionary masses on a national scale in China, the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries (zhénya fāngémíng yundòng 镇压反革命运动), would be framed as necessitated by the spectre of American imperialism. According to Mao, writing at the time:

Right now, the Americans have brought war to the door of our home. We must sweep our houses clean, so to be able to better counter their imperialism. No matter if we choose execution, imprisonment, or surveillance [of counterrevolutionaries], we have to mobilise the people on a grand scale, and rely on the people. We cannot take the route of isolationism, and cloud the process in mysterious airs.

Paradoxically, earlier leniency and its associated policy of registration would help identify many of those subject to this campaign. While initially aimed at 'active' counterrevolutionary forces such as secret agents and spies of the Nationalist enemy, the campaign eventually extended to more abstract enemies of the revolution, such as those falling under the vague categories of 'local tyrants' and 'historical counterrevolutionaries'. Reticence characterised its early stages. Liu Shaoqi in particular was afraid that overly excessive measures would create a 'negative image' of the party as 'extremist and homicidal'. Apparently, however, it was an opportunity to 'establish the new government's authority among the populace through promoting patriotism and cracking down on the opposition' that was too valuable to

107 Ibid., 105. It was at this time, too, that Mao would first use the phrase 'We must sweep our houses clean', although this phrase has since been used in the re-writing of the history of the clampdown on the prostitution industry in November 1949 to suggest Mao's greater involvement.
108 Huang Yao and Zhang Mingzhe, Luo Ruiqing zhuan (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chuban she, 1996), 262.
109 Yang Kuisong, 'Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries', 106.
squander. By mid-January 1951, mass-executions were in full swing. Authorities in each province worked under a quota system of recommended executions (0.1 per cent of the population of each region, half of which were to be executed first, with the other half executed pending future developments) that Mao himself had formulated in exact detail. Over the some three years of the campaign’s various phases, it is estimated that some 712,000 people were executed nationwide.

Inimical Selves

The process of toppling the old order became an ongoing enterprise, the completion of which would be constantly deferred as the parameters for its success and definition of its object were redrawn and rewritten to accord with the political imperatives of the day. Over the course of the years, a more nebulous, ambiguous enemy, present in the body of the revolutionary masses and the practice of the party itself, would come to replace the actual Nationalist and external American enemy that had survived from the war years. It was a tireless struggle against the ever-arising forces of revisionism that would inspire the frequent purges in the coming decades.

Once again, Mao had foreshadowed such a state of affairs years before. In a 1945 speech, ‘On Coalition Government’, he argued that self-criticism and the criticism of others, what he referred to idiomatically as the need to ‘wash your face and sweep the floor’ (洗脸扫地), were ‘the only effective ways to prevent all kind of political dust and germs from contaminating the minds of our comrades and the body of our Party…. Can we be willing to allow political dust and germs to

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\text{Ibid., 105.}\ \\
\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Ibid., 108.}\ \\
\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\text{Ibid., 120.}\]
dirty our clean faces or consume our healthy bodies?\footnote{Mao Zedong, 'On Coalition Government', in \textit{Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung} (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 317.} While the initial work of the revolution in post-Liberation China focused on ridding the country of the remnants of the old order, people would also be urged to take the battle to the most private of realms – the intimate spaces that made up the texture of one’s life and self. There was no permanent inoculation against reactionary thought, those diseases of mind and bourgeois influences that threatened the revolutionary subject and the revolution itself. The only way to ensure one’s purity was through vigilance – a constant examination of one’s own internal life and of the actions of others.

A \textit{Guangming Daily} article published on 6 December 1949 quoted Mao’s speech extensively to finally urge everyone towards constant criticism of self and others, and to be constantly on the lookout for the signs of (social) disease. Washing one’s face and sweeping the floor were ‘weapons in the battle’ (\textit{zhandou de wuqi} 斗的武器) upon which rested the success of the revolution:

‘Houses should be swept regularly. If you do not sweep them, then they will soon fill with dust. One should also wash one’s face regularly. If you do not, your face will get covered in dirt. Our comrades’ thoughts, and the work of our party, are also constantly sullied, and should also be subject to sweeping and cleansing. I would add that “running water is never stale, and a door-hinge, ever moving, never gets worm eaten”, which is to say that constant movement prevents the accumulation of germs and other organisms.’

Comrades! We should not take this passage lightly, for herein lies the difference between individual improvement and regression! If one is always on the lookout for illness in one’s body (self-criticism), and then seeks out a doctor for an examination (criticism from others), and gets rid of the defect, only then can one’s body be healthy. It seems simple enough. However, are
there not still some comrades with the wrong ideological style who are scared of criticism, who hide their sickness for fear of treatment, who are unwilling to wash from their faces the dirt that has collected there\textsuperscript{114}

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In socialist Beijing, people were asked to see everywhere, within the home, and their own bodies, the harmful phantoms of the past. History was not just a thing that scholars and intellectuals contemplated. Rather it inhabited the very present as a menace that lurked in the individual’s thoughts and insinuated, often subtly, into one’s words and deeds. That which was most taken for granted, that which was most evidently familiar, was to be held at arm’s length and criticised. This constantly, intensifying paranoiac state defined the very habitus of the revolutionary subject in Mao’s China, and, in different ways, the schizoid habitus of the social body and nation that would become apparent in the decades to come.

This form of governance, and the social paranoia it induced, would reach its apogee during the Cultural Revolution. Under the slogans of ‘sweep away everything’ and ‘sweep away all ghosts and monsters’, the Red Guards would attempt to destroy the Four Olds (\textit{si jiu 四旧}) of customs, habits, culture and ideas, while paying lip service to the creation of the Four News (\textit{si xin 四新}). People themselves, as containers of the vestiges of the old world, became a kind of cultural dirt that threatened the cleanliness of the revolutionary order. They were things to be swept into the ‘dustbin of history’ – the very objects of the revolutionary impulse to reform or obliterate. It was another instance of the long ago formulated and frequently reiterated connection between China’s socialist modernity and cleanliness.

\textsuperscript{114}Chen Mo, ‘Xilian he saodi’, \textit{Guangming ribao}, 6 December 1949.
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A Negated City

In this chapter I offer an account of the destruction of the Old City from 1949 and, within the context of the Party reassessing aspects of its own fraught past while staking its political survival on both an acceleration of economic growth and a recalibration of its image from chief iconoclast to chief custodian of China's national culture, the further acceleration of this destruction in the post-1978 reform period. Given this process of unparalleled destruction, in the following chapter I then turn to examine some of the paradoxical cases of the re-emergence of this obliterated history in the reform era.

During this period of radical economic reform and the subsequent transformation of Chinese society, especially from 1992, the city's republican and imperial history, all the more malleable and thus useful a legacy due to its physical disappearance, became a reservoir of images and signs, a resource of ambiguous images (what Gamboni in a different context called 'potential images'), which lend themselves as much to ambivalent social fantasy as to historical analysis. It is an archive that state imagineers and private entrepreneurs alike have drawn upon to re-configure and reconstruct the city as a historic yet modern, global metropolis, often to political and commercial ends.

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The contemporary re-imagining of Beijing has not been an enterprise without risk, and has been undertaken with an eye to keeping in darkness and muted those undesirable aspects of society and history, fragmenting moments of collective and individual loss, which might unsettle the nation's image of itself and the state-sponsored reality. Even as there has been a blossoming of acts of memory, encouraged (or at least not hindered) by the state, there has also been a concomitant negative labour aimed at keeping the friable dust that has accumulated around these histories in place.

A Model of Absences

The Beijing Museum of Ancient Architecture is set within the grounds of the Altar of Agriculture, in Beijing's southern districts. The museum opened in 1991, after some three years of renovations to restore the site's original courtyard structure, which a local school had appropriated in the years following the Communist takeover in 1949. The museum now houses a range of displays made up of some of the bits and pieces of the structures that once formed the quotidian texture and grand architectural designs of the pre-revolutionary city. These remnants, collected during the reconstructions and associated excavations of the city following the founding of the People's Republic, in the museum now serve as the displaced reminders of Beijing's fragmented physical history. Despite the antiquity of many of these remnants, the artefact that perhaps best relates this story fragmentation is paradoxically the only 'complete' structure on exhibit (apart from the building of the museum itself (a Qing-dynasty courtyard complex of considerable heritage)), and is
of more recent provenance: it is a three-dimensional scale model of the city as it appeared in 1949.

The opening of the museum, featuring the model of the city as its principal attraction, formed part of a renewed interest in and government emphasis on the city's heritage that first began to emerge in the late 1970s. The model itself, however, is a relic of the early years of the post-liberation regime – a time of crucial discussion and debate over what role the Old City of Beijing would play in the building of socialist China’s capital. The model is based upon a series of photographs taken as part of a detailed PLA aerial survey of Beiping (soon to have its former name Beijing restored) ordered by Party rulers following their takeover of the city. Work on creating the model began that same year and, upon its completion in 1950, it offered an accurate reflection of a bird's-eye view of the whole cityscape. It displayed an urban form that, despite the tumult of Republican Beijing/Beiping, embodied the
principles of a planning model conceived centuries before: an imperial-style capital, contained along its clearly demarcated territory by the embrace of its ancient outer walls. Only the monumental structures of dynastic China, built along its still dominant north–south axis – Yongding Gate, Qianmen Gate, Zhonghuamen Gate, the Thousand-step Corridor, Tiananmen, Duanmen, Wumen, Shenwumen, Prospect Hill and the Drum and Bell towers – upset its generally modest vertical horizon.

However, as a consequence of Beijing's socialist and capitalist remaking since that time, the model has come to represent a city that no longer exists. It is an object that, although itself unchanged, has been recast by the transformation of the city outside; both have now become places marked by absences. The model lacks any hint of the upheavals that await in its future, just as the city itself has become progressively stripped of the physical traces of its pre-revolutionary (and, increasingly, revolutionary) past, yet filled everywhere with reminders of a newly emphasised, officially calibrated antiquity. This is the afterlife of the model: in viewing it, just as when we consider Beijing's obliterated heritage, we engage in a dialectic of presence and absence, caught between cities seen and unseen, time still present and times lost.

The Future of the Past

While work to clean up the city occurred at breakneck speed soon after Peaceful Liberation, its long-term reconstruction from imperial to socialist capital would be a far more gradual process. The initial story of the subsequent transformation of the city under Mao is often referred to as a kind of colloquial battle for its future shape that began in early 1949. On one side was the University of Pennsylvania-educated
architect and founder of Tsinghua University’s School of Architecture Liang Sicheng and his preservationist colleagues, who favoured building a new administrative centre in the western outskirts of the original city. On the other were those who favoured a Soviet-inspired plan that would integrate the new government and administration into Beijing’s existing structures, resulting in the radical transformation of the Old City.

Some initial signs from the new leadership had perhaps given Liang hope that protecting the city’s built heritage was on their agenda. Peaceful Liberation had occurred without any noteworthuy damage to the city’s overall plan or imperial structures. Indeed, it had been carried out in a manner that had ensured their protection.² In March 1949, the Communist Party leadership suggested that Liang compile a nationwide list of buildings of historical significance. Liang’s list nominated large swathes of the city of Beiping. In an updated list, published for wider reading and circulation in June that year, Liang argued that the entire city of Beiping was worth preserving. Keen to adjust his language to accord with the times, Liang argued that the city was a monument to the workers who had built it, and suggested that Beiping ‘should be seen not as a relic of an autocratic monarch, but rather as the crystallisation of the blood and sweat of the people’.³

On the invitation of Ye Jianying, the PLA general given oversight for the reconstruction of the city, on 22 May 1949 Liang and his wife and collaborator Lin Huiyin attended the Beiping Municipal Planning Committee’s inaugural meeting at Beihai Park to discuss where best to locate the new centre of government.⁴ It was a

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² See Dai Qing, ‘1948’.
⁴ Hung, Mao’s New World, 26.
chance for Liang to push for the development of the city in a way that would ensure the protection of its historical structures. Following this meeting, and guided by his preservationist principles, the committee commissioned Liang and his Tsinghua colleagues to draft a plan to build a new administrative centre in the western suburbs, outside the extant city's walls.5

The issue, however, would prove far from settled. Soviet technical advisers and experts were a regular presence in the city in the early years of the new People's Republic, and in no area was their influence greater than in the redesign of the capital. A visit by soviet urban planners to Beijing on 13 September 1949 to advise on the planning of the soon-to-be capital resulted in the creation of five alternate plans.6 These plans were all in accord in regard to certain basic principles: that the city should be a major industrial centre that also housed the administration of the national government; that growth of the city should be limited to 4 million residents; that concentric ring roads, connected by radial roads, should be constructed around a single centre; and that major industrial areas should be located to the south and east of the city, and higher education institutions in the west.7 However, the basic difference between the various plans revolved around this issue of where to locate the centre. While there were some compelling arguments for building an entire new area in the city's west, the Soviets advocated strongly that the new administrative centre should be built within the boundaries of the Old City. The development of the already vacant area to the south of the imperial city (Tiananmen Gate), they argued,

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5 Ibid., 27.
7 Ibid., 466.
was more economical (in the short-term) and time effective than starting completely anew in the west.\footnote{Ibid.}

The debate, which had earlier seemed over, was renewed, as was Liang’s concern. This was highlighted in a 19 September letter in which he urged Nie to take a cautious approach in the planning of the new capital.\footnote{Liang Sicheng, ‘Liang Sicheng zhi Nie Rongzhen xin’, in Liang Chen fang’an yu Beijing, ed. Wang Ruizhi (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005).} The Soviet vision, however, would only gain greater purchase in the months ahead. Most significantly, at a December 1949 meeting of the new municipal government the Soviet architect M.G. Barannikov presented his influential urban development plan for Beijing.\footnote{Hung, Mao’s New World, 30.}

Expanding upon the proposals of Soviet advisors in September, it contained two new features that would become central to the city’s reconstruction – a people’s square in the heart of the existing city and a major east-west thoroughfare along which the new government offices would be constructed.\footnote{Shuishan Yu, ‘Redefining the Axis of Beijing: Revolution and Nostalgia in the Planning of the PRC Capital’, \textit{Journal of Urban History} 34, no. 4 (2008): 578.}

Liang was losing ground. To develop a more detailed proposal in the face of increasing opposition to his preservationist vision he sought out his associate and friend, the urban designer Chen Zhanxiang.\footnote{Daniel Benjamin Abramson, ‘The aesthetics of city-scale preservation policy in Beijing’, \textit{Planning Perspectives} 22, no. 2 (2007): 132.} Chen, who had just returned to China after completing studies in England, at first in architecture at the University of Liverpool and then in urban design at University College of the University of London, possessed an expertise in city planning that the architectural historian Liang lacked.\footnote{Hung, Mao’s New World, 31.}

In February 1950, Liang and Chen co-authored ‘A Proposal on the Location of the Administrative Centre of the Central Government of the People’. In
this proposal, which would become known as the Liang-Chen Plan, they argued in
detail that the ‘most rational location for the new governmental administrative centre
is the area to the west of the Temple of Heaven in the western districts, and to the
east of Gongzhufen’, outside the walls of the imperial and republican city, and
provided the initial designs for this new centre.14 On 10 April 1950, Liang wrote a
letter directly to Premier Zhou Enlai calling his attention to the proposal, and
explaining its central tenets.15

The Liang-Chen plan, however, did not fit well with the tide of the times. It
eulogised the Old City, and paid little heed to the language of radical historical
negation that Mao and his comrades were using to construct the new nation. It also
shared too many similarities with the urban planning model the Japanese had drawn
up during their occupation (1937–45).

At around the same time Liang’s wrote to Zhou, the architects Zhu Zhaoxue
and Zhao Dongri proposed their own model for the capital city of the Chinese
revolution. Their April 1950 proposal was the first to formulate comprehensively
how, on the advice of the Soviets, a new administrative centre could be located in the
heart of the existing city, in direct opposition to the Liang-Chen Plan.16 Zhu and
Zhao proposed that new government departments be constructed along the southern
side of Chang’an Avenue to the east and west of what would be a new administrative
centre to the south of, and in a sense facing, the imperial city itself. Interestingly, the
proposal placed the new centre slightly to the left of Tiananmen Gate, however
partly cutting across the old axis, thus displacing some of the traditional balance of

14 Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhanxiang, ‘Guanyu zhongyang renmin zhengfu xinzheng zhongxin qu
weizhi dejianyi, in Liang Cheng jiang’an yu Beijing (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 43.
15 Liang Sicheng, ‘Liang Sicheng zhi Nie Rongzhen xin’.
16 Hung, Mao’s New World, 29.
the old city, and in a sense mirroring the shift of power that had already occurred westwards, towards Zhongnanhai. Atop this new axis the imperial Altar of Soil and Grain would serve new functions, and the Imperial Ancestral Temple would be renamed the Cultural Palace for the Labouring People.\(^{17}\)

Figure 9. Zhu Zhaoxue and Zhao Dongri's 1950 proposal. Source: Yu, 'Redefining the Axis', 580.

Under this plan, Chang'an Avenue would have been extended and widened significantly, although its east and west sections were to remain separated. Traffic arriving at the centre would have, according to this plan, been diverted south to the wall of the Inner and Outer cities, and also north to the southern perimeter of the Forbidden City. It is perhaps surprising that Tiananmen Square, which was already a place of considerable significance in the early years of the new people's republic, and indeed since the initial occupation of the city by the PLA in February 1949, was reduced to a small space between Tiananmen Gate and the new administrative centre. Although not adopted, this proposal, better suited to the revolutionary climate of the times, was also a sign of things to come.

\(^{17}\) Yu, 'Redefining the Axis', 591.
Although the times were against him, his 1951 essay, co-authored with Lin, ‘Beijing, an Incomparable Masterpiece of Urban Planning’, shows that Liang continued to push for his agenda. A sketch accompanying this essay provides perhaps the best illustration of his overarching vision of Beijing, evoking a view of the city as a planned whole (yige juyou jihuaxing de zhengte一个具有计划性的整体) and an artistic masterpiece (yishu jiezuo 艺术杰作). Emphasising the city as a picturesque totality, it was a visual statement that argued for the Old City’s total preservation. However, through the Maoist occupation of Beijing, Liang’s sketch, like the 1949 model, became a document, a trace, of a fragile urban masterwork that would soon be utterly transformed.

Figure 10. Liang’s 1951 sketch of Beijing. Source: Liang Sicheng, ‘Beijing—chengshi jihua de wubi jiezuo’, 33.

18 This essay was first published in 1951 as Liang Sicheng, ‘Beijing—dushi jihua de wubi jiezuo’, Xin Guancha 2, no. 7/8 (1951), in which Liang appears as the sole author. However, Lin’s contribution is noted. See the republished essay in the collection Liang Sicheng, Jianzhu wen cui (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shu dian, 2006).

Despite these efforts, the Liang-Chen Plan soon disappeared completely from the discussion. By early 1953, the Beijing Municipal Planning Commission had under consideration two separate plans, both of which placed the new administrative centre within the Old City. In June, the Municipal Committee transferred the planning of the capital to a team comprised only of members of the party, guided by Soviet advisors (who had once again visited in March). Liang and other ‘outsiders’ were sidelined. By November, the new team would develop a final draft plan entitled *Key Points in the Draft Plan for the Renovation and Expansion of Beijing.*\(^{20}\) Once presented, this plan that would guide the reconstruction in the city over the coming decades, even though the National Planning Committee never formally adopted it.\(^ {21}\)

While the authors of the final plan extolled Beijing’s magnificent shape and pattern, in a sign of things to come they dedicated more space to a description of its inherent failures. The city, according to this plan, ‘developed amid class antagonism’, and was ‘constructed in accordance to the will of the feudal rulers and designed to serve their needs’.\(^ {22}\) The city’s palaces and temples received the most criticism, along with its layered walled structure, which was a testament to ‘the egoism of those feudal emperors’.\(^ {23}\) While not calling for any specific demolitions, the authors of the plan suggested that the party must ‘do away with the restrictions and barriers that stem from the old pattern of the city. Things that hold back the city’s development and do not suit the needs of the people must be changed and even demolished....’\(^ {24}\)

This plan stipulated that not only should the national government offices be located

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\(^{21}\) Sit, ‘Soviet Influence on Urban Planning’, 467, 470.
\(^{22}\) Wang Jun, *Beijing Record*, 158.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 159–60.
in the centre of the Old City, but also that, among other thing, the capital should be
the political, cultural and economic (including industrial) hub of the entire nation.
More importantly for this discussion, it also held that ‘an extreme respect for old
architecture’ should not constrict the city’s development.25

Destructive Creation

The Communist Party occupation of Beijing from 1949 marked a new phase in the
life of a city that had long been made to manifest political cosmologies. Under Mao
and with the help of architects and advisors schooled in European modernist and
Soviet city planning ideas, the planners would oversee the transformation of the city
from being a largely imperial-style capital (despite some of the ‘opening up’ and
modernising influence of late-Qing and Republican interventions) to the new
symbolic centre of the revolution – a revolution that had occurred and continued
under the rubric of a radical break with and negation of the past. Although subject to
some debate in the early period that marked New China, the reconstruction of the
city in line with this new order would be much to the detriment of the city’s ancient
structures.

Much of the large-scale restructuring of Beijing over this period occurred in
the 1950s. Major projects that characterise this period were the creation of a public
square at the city’s centre and a new east–west thoroughfare that cut across the
imperial north–south axis. From the early 1950s, Tiananmen Square in particular
rose in significance as the new sacred centre of the revolution. In the following
decades, it would become the country’s most important and ambivalent political

symbol and stage to the largest revolutionary parades and officially calibrated exhibitions and performances (except, perhaps, the Olympic opening ceremony of 8 August 2008), as well as mass and individual displays of discontent, of the Mao and post-Mao eras.\footnote{26 Although the establishment of the central government in Beijing and the symbolic construction of new China from 1949 was narrated in opposition to what had occurred before it, the destruction of what is today known as Old Beijing began long before the communist Peaceful Liberation of the city in 1949. Much of the reconstruction of the city done during this period, rather than being born of the time, indeed find their origin in a much longer modernist movement in China. See Geremie R. Barmé, ‘Zhu Qiqian’s Silver Shovel’, China Heritage Quarterly, no. 14 (June 2008), http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=014_zhuQiQian.inc&issue=014 (accessed 25 June 2013).}

The importance of this area on the future development of the capital was evident as early as 12 February 1949. In that month, the first major rally was orchestrated from the aging Tiananmen Gate’s rostrum to celebrate Beiping’s Peaceful Liberation. However, at the time the area to the south of the gate that was to become the new people’s square, modelled in cities over China, was little more than a thoroughfare connecting Tiananmen Gate (the southern gate of the Imperial City) to Zhengyangmen Gate (which connected the Inner and Outer cities), with the ceremonial Gate of China standing between them. As the square was expanded over the 1950s, the authorities demolished the surrounding walls and residential areas nearby, along with the Gate of China, which was dismantled in 1954.

Ornamental arches immediately in front of Tiananmen Gate, the left and right Chang’an Gates, also fell. Over the same decade, workers constructed the gigantic Liang Sicheng-designed Monument to the People’s Heroes, which was completed in 1958, joining the flagpole, erected just before the founding ceremony of the nation in 1949, as the first new impositions along the city’s ancient north–south axis. With
Mao's death, a mausoleum containing his embalmed corpse would join them on the southern side of the square, where the Gate of China once stood.

Figure 11. A critical moment in determining Beijing's future: the 12 February 1949 Celebration of Peaceful Liberation, as seen from the rostrum of Tiananmen Gate. Source: Beijing Municipal Archives.

Large sections of the Old City also fell to the wrecker's ball with the expansion of Chang'an Avenue, which reoriented the capital along a new east–west axis. Work began with the widening of the extant roadway to south of the gate and the demolition of the east and west Chang'an commemorative arches (*pailou* 牌樓) in 1950, noted above, although the main thrust of its expansion occurred over the course of a year from 1958. Over that year the Great Ten Buildings of socialist Beijing rose along this new orientation, built in time to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the nation's founding. Mixing Soviet designs and Chinese ornamentation (*zhong er xin* 中而新), these monumental buildings were designed to
stand above and dominate the surrounding cityscape. They included the Great Hall of the People and the National Museum of China on the western and eastern flanks of Tiananmen Square, along with seven other buildings along Chang’an Avenue. Together they displayed a level of ambition and monumental order that was in marked contrast to a nation suffering during the Great Leap Forward. By the time of Mao’s death in 1976, Chang’an Avenue, in 1949 a diminutive area south of the Gate, had grown to more than five times its original width, and would eventually extend to well outside the original walled region.\textsuperscript{27}

The realisation of these projects saw many of the city’s older structures destroyed. However, not all of the damage to the small-scale structures of the city was done to accommodate these new exclamations of socialist power. Some acts of demolition seemed purely iconoclastic in nature. For example, during the 1950s authorities labeled the *pailou* of the city, structures which ‘broke the monotony of the streets and gave them a kind of rhythm that was at the same time noble and elegant’ as ‘feudal and reactionary remnants’ and all were destroyed, regardless of whether they were in the way or not.\textsuperscript{28} In 1966 history repeated itself, but this time the thousands of hands of the Red Guards replaced government-sponsored demolition crews. Taking to the streets to eliminate the ambiguously formulated Four Olds, these Mao-inspired revolutionaries looted and ransacked the houses of those thought

\textsuperscript{27} Although the expansion and extension of Chang’an Avenue did, in a sense, undermine the ancient central axis (zhongzhouxian 中轴线), it is interesting to note that a pronounced east-west thoroughfare was far from a radical concept in imperial city planning in China. The Wangcheng of the ‘Record of Trades’ is a multi-axial city, and an emphasis upon its north to south aspect has been rather inferred from the layout of its buildings. In some ways, the realignment of the city’s layout that resulted from the elaboration of Chang’an Avenue during this period made the city of Beijing more like the ideal capital as described in the ‘Record of Trades’ than ever before. Even the term ‘central axis’ is a modern term, which Liang himself had coined in 1932 to describe the layout and orientation of the traditional courtyard complex. Before that, during the Qing dynasty, people spoke of Beijing’s *Long Mai* 龙脉 (dragon vein). For a detailed discussion see Yu, ‘Redefining the Axis’, 595–8.

guilty of class crimes and 'confiscated' owners' 'ill-gotten' goods. By the end, more than two thirds of 6843 officially designated 'places of cultural and historical interest' in the city – tombs, temples, pieces of classical architecture, and ancient artifacts – were lost to their iconoclastic fervor.29

The most cited example of destruction under Mao has been that of Beijing's ancient walls. The dismantling of these most visible, and symbolically powerful, structures seems to illustrate well the radical disdain for the past that characterised Mao's rule, repeated in all aspects of socialist society. However, this was not an historical exception. According to David Strand, a desperate Qing government, as part of a belated effort to modernise China, itself considered a plan for the demolition of the entirety of Beijing's outer walls in the early twentieth century.30 While the plan was never implemented, most of the smaller wall of the Imperial City was demolished during the city's Republican period, from 1917 to 1927. To accommodate an encirclement of train tracks and their stations, sections of other walls and barbicans also fell during this period (a project that had begun in the late Qing).31

However, despite these earlier efforts, the job was still far from done, and the walls and gates that marked the Inner and Outer cities in imperial Beijing remained, in 1949, largely intact. By the late 50s, however, the wall of the Outer City had been completely demolished. With the situation with China's erstwhile Soviet allies escalating, in 1965, the on-again off-again construction of the country's first (and at first secret) subway began in earnest, and the walls of the Inner City slowly made

30 Strand, Rickshaw Beijing, 3–4.
31 Wu, Remaking Beijing, 250n.
way for the modernisation of the city's transport system (at first the subway line, then eventually also the city's first ring road, inappropriately named the Second Ring Road). Material from these dismantled walls would make up part of the material for the new line, which runs under a part of the southern part of the Inner City, where its wall once stood. Material from both walls fed the reconstruction of the city at large, with its bricks finding their way into the domestic renovations of Beijing's increasingly cramped courtyard tenements, as well as projects that ranged from the building of new factories and the construction of pigsties. Some also fed the construction of an extraordinary network of air raid shelters and tunnels, built over the course of a decade from 1969, which Mao hoped would protect soldiers and civilians in case of a Soviet attack.

In 1979, work halted on the demolition of Beijing's Inner and Outer City walls and gates. The damage, however, had been done. Of the walls, only two small sections survived, which became designated cultural heritage sites. There were only three gate complexes left: the watchtower of Dongbianmen in the southeast corner of what was once the Inner City; Deshengmen Gate, in the northwest, now incarcerated between the roadways of a major intersection along the Second Ring Road; and the two gates that once made up the enceinte of Zhengyangmen (Qianmen), just south of Mao's mausoleum.

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33 Ibid.
Just as the Olympic-inspired dismantling of the city would later be described as a dismemberment of the city’s protector deity Nezha, in 1957 Liang similarly described the destruction of imperial structures of the city, the initial demolition of its walls and towers, as a torturous rending on his own body: ‘Demolishing a city gate tower, you are cutting a piece of flesh off my body; taking off a brick from the city walls, you are peeling off an inch of my skin.’ By the time of Mao’s death, large parts of what is now known as the Old City had fallen. In their place had risen a new skyline, shaped by the new, yet rapidly ageing, buildings and vistas of the socialist imagination. Urban historian Thomas Campanella has described the dismantling of the ancient walls under Mao in particular as one of the greatest acts of urban vandalism in history. For the sinologist and critic Pierre Ryckmans, writing in 1978, the destruction of the entire ancient capital was an ‘outrage inflicted on a cultural legacy of all mankind’. It was an outrage he may have found more tolerable had it formed part of a truly revolutionary enterprise. However, in many cases, the demolition of the Old City seems to have occurred without reason: it was, for Ryckmans, prosthesis for real change. He made particular reference to the destruction of the city’s gates:

What makes the Maoist vandalism so odious and so pathetic is not that it is irreparably mutilating an ancient civilization but rather that by doing so it gives itself an alibi for not grappling with the true revolutionary tasks. The extent of their depredations gives Maoists the cheap illusion that they have done a great deal; they persuade themselves that they can rid themselves of the past by attacking its material manifestations; but in fact they remain its

35 See Chapter 7.
36 Quoted in Wang Jun, Cheng ji (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shu dian, 2004), xx.
37 Ryckmans, Chinese Shadows, 58–9.
slaves, bound the more tightly because they refuse to realize the effect of the old traditions within their revolution. The destruction of the gates of Peking is, properly speaking, a sacrilege; and what makes it dramatic is not that the authorities had them pulled down but that they remain unable to understand why they pulled them down [...]. Seen in this light, the Maoist enterprise appears hopeless; the regime may well change China into a cultural desert without succeeding in exorcising the ghosts of the past: these ghosts will continue their paralyzing tyranny so long as the regime is unable to identify them within itself.

While the dismantling of the imperial capital under Mao was in many was a radical negation of the past, it was nonetheless carried out in its shadow. That the Qing emperors made few changes to its form was an aberration that gave rise to architectural historian Wu Huanjia, in his defence of the city's modern transformation up to 1988, criticism of them as 'useless ancestors', who contributed nothing of worth to the city, thus placing Mao (and, subsequently, Deng) within the longer span of China's imperial history. This brings to mind what Ryckmans has elsewhere described as 'the parallel phenomena of spiritual preservation and material destruction that can be observed in the history of Chinese culture'. In the tradition of imperial capitals in China, preservation of the legacy of the past occurred not in the preservation of the building, so to speak, but through the work of building.

Much of the protectionist bent of those such as the western-educated Liang Sicheng, and more recent members of the heritage movement of Beijing, represent a mentality that finds few examples in China's short republican and long imperial

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39 Pierre Ryckmans, 'The Chinese Attitude Towards the Past'.
40 As Ryckmans poetically observed, 'eternity should not inhabit the building, it should inhabit the builder' (ibid.).
history. As Abramson has noted, 'While it is important to reaffirm that the current regime is part of an orderly sequence of regimes, i.e., is following certain purportedly timeless principles, it is just as important to start anew. Only by rebuilding the capital, and demonstrating its economic and political might by doing so, can the current regime live up to the glory of its ancestors.'

**Untethering History, 1978 to 1989**

The December 1978 Third Plenary Session of 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party marked a critical moment in the coming transformation of China and its capital. It ended with the ascension of the recently politically rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping as the nation’s paramount leader, and the adoption of his pragmatic yet radical reform philosophy. In contrast to previous policy, Deng emphasised industrial efficiency and decentralisation, the development of a competition-driven market economy, and the opening of parts of China to foreign investment. The changes this brought about would not be limited to the economy. From that time, narratives developed around the creation of wealth and the construction of market capitalism would slowly begin to displace those of class struggle and mass campaigns in defining life in China’s cities, narratives that had dominated the urban sphere for some three decades. Both in the way the state attempted to forge again its legitimacy and Chinese nationals came to comprehend

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their own life-worlds and histories, everyone would be forced to adapt in one way or another to this major political and discursive shift.

The Party's transition from revolutionary agent to economic manager raised issues and paradoxes regarding one-party rule that to this day remain unresolved, and require constant management and policing. In the early reform period this involved a careful, fragile public repositioning of the Party in relation to its own recent history. The same session in which Deng had gained political ascendancy also saw the abolition of the central line of Hua Guofeng's Mao-centric policy apparatus, (now mockingly) referred to as the 'Two Whatevers'. Formulated by Hua upon coming to power after the fall of the Gang of Four, this policy had called for the party to 'firmly uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made and unswervingly adhere to whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave'. Through it, Hua had sought to reaffirm the primacy of Mao Zedong Thought and the Mao personality cult that had reached its height during the Cultural Revolution, and draw from it to construct his own authority. Its abolition marked the beginning of a challenge to the legacy of the deceased yet still corporeally present (in the Mausoleum at the southern end of Tiananmen Square) Mao; it intimated a negation of the past that, while governed by the strictures of the state, nonetheless loosened its reliance of Mao-era policy and language.

This loosening continued with the adoption of the lengthy 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's

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44 Interestingly, Deng would appeal to a Mao dictum in justifying the new change in course from Mao worship to economic development, insisting that the practice of the state be guided by the principle that the party must 'seek truth from facts' (*shi shi jiushi* 事实求是), suggesting a results-driven, rather than specifically ideologically driven, national policy.
Republic of China' in 1981, a carefully worded abrogation of many of the social and economic policies of the Mao era. Through it the Party admitted to some of the mistakes of the past, such as those made during the disastrous Great Leap Forward and earlier revolutionary pogroms, with most attention given to a careful critique of the Cultural Revolution and associated cult of Mao.\footnote{See Goodman, 'The Sixth Plenum', for a detailed discussion of its content.} It was a key document in the development of the reform agenda in China that, through a cautious criticism of the past, provided political impetus and historical legitimacy to the radical reformulation of Chinese society to come.\footnote{It was also this document that contained the oft-referred to assessment of Mao's rule, dividing it into a good early phase and a bad late phase, and suggesting that he was 70 per cent right and 30 per cent wrong. See Tong Zhang and Barry Schwartz, 'Confucius and the Cultural Revolution: A Study in Collective Memory', in States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 116.} The figure of Mao could not be completely repudiated, however, without denying the very legitimacy of the Party itself. In the document, therefore, a critical corpus of Mao Zedong Thought was separated from Mao's actual political praxis and suggesting that, at its core, Mao Zedong Thought was fundamentally correct, while the man himself had made mistakes. This would continue to be refined into the future, as 'a sanitised corpus of "Mao Zedong Thought," now interpreted as the crystallization of the party's collective wisdom, would be used both by the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] itself and various of its opponents as a source of self-justification and for the purposes of self-preservation'.\footnote{Geremie R. Barmé, 'For Truly Great Men, Look to This Age Alone: Was Mao Zedong a New Emperor?', in A Critical Introduction to Mao, ed. Timothy Cheek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 244.}

Despite the transformation of Beijing under Mao, at the time Deng set China on this new course, many of Beijing's vernacular courtyard tenements and laneways had, in one form or another, survived. The new government had
appropriated some for use in the 1950s, to house cadres and to serve as offices of government organs. Others had been converted into factories and schools. The city’s population rose sharply in the early 1950s, a result of officials moving from other provinces to take up posts within the new central government, and workers migrating to the capital to take up positions in new factories built during the first five-year plan. More pressure was brought to bear on housing in the Old City as government policy encouraged large families, and population density rose sharply. However, in the 1960s, this trend leveled off, as many left China’s cities for the countryside. 1976 saw another rise in population, as many of the refugees displaced by the earthquake in Tangshan relocated to Beijing. This placed further strain on the housing situation of the Old City as the government encouraged infilling and extensions of extant tenements to accommodate new residents. This decentralised form of housing development, evident in the late 1970s, meant that, by the 1980s, many areas of Beijing had been transformed into a cramped, shanti-like web of renovations and haphazard expansions, the so-called dazayuan (大杂院) of the socialist city, with several families and generations of families living in a compound previously occupied by only one.

Under Deng’s new direction, further change would come. The 1980s saw another surge in population, as people returned from the countryside, and others ventured to the capital following new promises of wealth. This placed further stress on the Old City’s already dilapidated and antiquated housing. While Mao had sought to turn Beijing from a city of consumption to a city of production and

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49 Ibid.
50 Campanella, The Concrete Dragon, 149.
51 Visser, Cities Surround the Countryside, 142.
industry, the 1982 Master Plan of Urban Construction in Beijing de-emphasised the
capital’s industrial role. Instead, it focused upon on developing the city as a national
cultural and political centre. It also called for measures to address the housing
shortage and develop basic services in residential areas. In another reversal,
important for the present discussion, the plan also mentioned the importance of
protecting the historic city.

By the beginning of the reform era, the great walls of the Inner and Outer
Cities, once an angular boundary around the perimeter of the city, had been
supplanted by the course of a multilane ring road, the Second Ring Road, completed
in 1980 (which had first been proposed in the 1950s). It was the first of five built to
accommodate an ever-increasing number of cars and trucks. Further north to south
and east to west arterial roadways began crisscrossing the city, carving it up into a
new form, and gearing it up for automobiles. Laws changed to allow some private
ownership of property, precipitating the rise of real-estate development and
speculation, and transforming urban space and living. As the slogans of canny
marketers and real estate developers usurped those of revolution, so too did the more
efficient bulldozers of the reform-era come to replace the hammers of the Red
Guards. Driven by a new commercial environment, high-rise developments,
previously a rarity, began to emerge across parts of the Old City, towering above its
ancient alleyways and courtyards, and changing forever the urban fabric of Beijing.

While Deng had set China on a path of characterised by economic
pragmatism, life in this period was nonetheless not without its ideological

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54 Hui Xiaoyi, *Housing, Urban Renewal and Socio-Spatial Integration*, 148.
55 Ibid., 153.
underpinnings and overtones. At the 12th Chinese Communist Party National Congress in September 1982, Hu Yaobang emphasised that that strengthening of Socialist Material Civilisation, the ostensive goal of Reform, should be undertaken with a concomitant construction of a Socialist Spiritual Civilisation. In this formulation of 'Two Civilisations' (jiang ge wenming 两个文明) the nebulous notion of Socialist Spiritual Civilisation was the utopian (yet ambiguous) goal of reform that served to justify the adoption of capitalist economic policy, for it was argued that a strong material base was essential for its eventual attainment. Perhaps more importantly, it also served as a malleable principle around which a civilising social discourse could develop, that initially called for the cultivation of socialist citizens possessed of the Four Haves (siyou 四有) – ideals, morality, culture and discipline.\(^5^6\)

The very idea itself, even in its explanation, was abstruse, and it was this malleable notion of Socialist Spiritual Civilisation that would be constantly re-imagined and re-formulated according to social conditions and political necessity in the state-sponsored narration of the economic and social transformations that characterised the decades to come.

This discourse of Socialist Spiritual Civilisation was used to narrate change and appease those uneasy with the new policy direction, providing a grander socialist narrative to the minutiae of change. It would, however, also provide a platform for those same people to express their misgivings at the state of the emerging society. Deng Xiaoping once warned that, with the necessity of opening one's windows (to the West), there was always the chance of the flies and dirt of other worlds blowing in (unwanted habits of mind and body, as well as ways of thought). Launched by

Deng himself in October 1983 under the pressure of his leftist comrades uneasy about what they saw as the erosion of socialist values in the face of reform, the brief Campaign to Eliminate Spiritual Pollution (qingchu jingshen wuran yundong 清除精神污染运动) focussed initially on writers, artists and intellectuals whose works were deemed to have ‘strengthened the mass distrust of socialism, communism, and the leadership of the party’, as well as, supposedly, led to a rise in ‘social crimes’. This quickly spread to an attack more generally on what were considered the symbols of an emerging western, bourgeois culture, and the efflorescence of new cultural forms in art, fashion and music. Women ‘who wore lipstick, had permed hair, and wore colourful blouses and men who wore their hair long, smoked filter-tipped cigarettes, and wore flared trousers’ all became targets of the campaign. It was, however, short-lived, as Deng perceived in its expanding scope and deepening vitriol a revival of Cultural Revolution politics that threatened reform itself (which he would call, in 1984, Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics).

Those Leftist apparatchiks who had partially unmasked their disdain for Deng-era policy in this Campaign to Eliminate Spiritual Pollution would have to wait four years for another chance to strike. In the aftermath of the bloody crackdown on protests in Beijing on 4 June 1989, Deng’s opponents within the party now had more than enough fodder to move against him. They blamed his reforms for the social ‘chaos’ of the protests, which had threatened the position of the party itself. Moreover, the decision to use force against the protesters in Beijing, the responsibility for which ultimately rested with Deng, was taken as proof that the

58 Ibid., 51.
Little Helmsman had lost the right and ability to lead the nation. Deng officially resigned as Chairman of the Central Military Commission soon after the massacre in Beijing (incredibly, given his power, and pointing to the personality-driven politics that still drives the country, it was his only official position from which to retire). The following three years would see the rise of a Mao-inspired socialist revivalism attempt to curb and reverse the economic liberalisation of the economy that had been pursued since 1978, presenting a challenge the very core principles of Deng’s reform agenda.

Accelerating Change

The 1989 protests and their bloody suppression provided Party revisionists with enough material to sideline Deng in the short term. Apart from some brief periods of seemingly more liberal rule, and constant references to its necessity, political reform suffered a blow in 1989 from which it has not recovered to this day. However, the crackdown in Beijing, despite inducing a period of malaise and inspiring an increasingly vocal opposition to economic reform, proved, in hindsight, a critical point in its acceleration. The Party’s image had been harmed irreparably from its use of the military upon its own people. However, the previous decade had similarly seen the aspersion of the old revolutionary political culture. To a large extent, the continued viability of the one-party state, while supplemented by new legitimising discourses of party imagineers, would be further hedged on its ability to accelerate growth at all costs. For Deng there was no going back.

Although many of the initial experiments with Deng’s new market-driven ideology had occurred in Beijing in the early 80s, up to that stage much of the
success and influence of Reform had occurred far from Beijing, in China’s increasingly prosperous south. Here many cities, in particular Shenzhen, had seen change occur at a break-neck pace. It was not a coincidence, then, that an eighty-year-old, nominally retired Deng would use the occasion of an ostensive private visit to the south on the eve of the 1992 Lunar New Year on 15 January to once again wrest control of the political agenda, and revive his ailing legacy.\(^5^9\)

Almost three years since the disaster of 1989, Deng’s power in Beijing was eroded to such a degree that his southern tour was subject to a news blackout of several weeks. However, after drumming up support away from the capital, during which time he delivered speeches urging deeper market reforms and opening up, connecting such reform to continued social stability, and suggesting that previous reform had prevented the country falling into chaos and civil war, his trip could not, in the end, be ignored. Deng’s tour was compared to the Southern Tours (nanxun 南巡) of the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors, made during the so-called Prosperous Age (shengshi 盛世) of the Qing Dynasty.\(^6^0\) These tours, which themselves revived an even more ancient practice of an ‘imperial inspection tour’, were undertaken largely in the name of water conservancy issues along the Yellow River and the Grand Canal (an artery that connected the north to the south and the main channel for the


\(^6^0\) The Southern Expeditions of these Qing emperors were themselves crafted around an already ancient practice. At the time of its reappearance under Kangxi, the last time this practice had been in institution had been the Tang dynasty. From the end of the Tang it had fallen out of favour. However, Kangxi and Qianlong would make conscious reference to the inspection tours of the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang dynasties. See Bruce Doar, ‘The Southern Expeditions of Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong’, *China Heritage Quarterly*, no. 9 (2007), http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=009_expeditions.inc&issue=009 (accessed 31 March 2013).
delivery of the annual tribute grain). Underpinning these ostensive motives, however, was the political motive of bringing and maintaining imperial dominion over the distant south of the country.

While this comparison is useful, Deng’s southern tour perhaps shared more in common with a more contemporary potentate’s southern excursions. Indeed, this was not the first time that a party leader had revived the Qing dynasty practice. Mao

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had used visits south to launch many of his most significant movements, often to bring change back to a recalcitrant north. Perhaps most significantly Mao, whose supremacy had been weakened following the failure of the Great Leap Forward, would use a 1966 visit to Wuhan and a highly publicised swim across the Yangtze River to signal the beginning of a counterattack against opponents in Beijing – what would later be called the Cultural Revolution – after a period of plotting in Hangzhou from late 1965. Deng similarly used his visit south to generate political momentum and retake control in the north. His 1992 southern tour did not just revive the economic reform agenda. His victory spurred an urban revolution that, in its transformative power, would easily match any of the previous revolutionary campaigns of Mao, and continues to unfold to this day.

Change soon came to the north, as Beijing was once again made to manifest the attendant political realities of the time. It became, more than ever, a magnet for people and capital. Those who had willingly or forcibly left the modest means and relative security of the socialist ‘iron rice bowl’ (tie fanwan 铁饭碗) behind to ‘dive in the ocean’ (xia hai 下海) of the market flocked to the city. The skyline, when visible, became a composite of cranes and scaffolding, as the city expanded upwards and outwards. Cars replaced bicycles, and great snarls of traffic soon formed on the city’s multiplying roads. Much of the post-92 construction occurred within the areas between the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and, eventually, Sixth Ring Roads – a multi-layered girdle marking the city’s expanding girth, belittling the ambitions of imperial Beijing in a still-developing adumbration of its now demolished walls. They became like age rings within which newer and then still newer urban spaces emerged.
Change, however, also radiated inwards, as what was once modern soon became antiquated.

The run-down centre, still symbolically important, quickly became a principal focus of a government bent on modernisation. The principal mechanism for achieving this was the Old and Dilapidated Housing Renewal Program, which was developed as a way to oversee the upgrading of housing and services for residents of the Old City. However, at the same time land values soared, pressure from developers rose, and the government saw instead an opportunity to make extraordinary financial gain under the auspices of the Old City's development. According to Campanella, the originally 'well-intentioned' Old and Dilapidated Housing Renewal Program was soon undermined, as the municipal government 'abrogated its responsibility to provide affordable housing for residents in the Old City, and chose instead to fatten its coffers with lucrative land-lease fees and taxes on parcels released to developers. In the process, Beijing ridded itself of both “old and dilapidated housing” and the poor people inconveniently living there.'

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The implementation of this now compromised program led to an exodus from the Old City that matched the original influx of people in the '50s and late '70s. By the late 1990s, swathes of the houses and structures that had survived the city’s revolutionary transformation, the physical remnants of 'Old Beijing', had fallen, as had much of the ‘newer’ housing of the more recent city under Mao, signalling also the associated erasure of urban memory and the rending of communities. By 2002

some 40 per cent of the Old City that had existed in 1992 had been destroyed. Developers had eliminated 'in a decade an urban landscape that had endured 600 years of war, peace, and revolution'. While a political discourse that called for the radical negation of the past drove Mao's destruction of the old, in the reform era, it was a new language of hygiene and modernity that drove the devastation.

Paradoxically, an effort to strengthen the city's ancient identity, which had first emerged in the 1970s, accompanied this accelerated destruction. While one may think that a renewed emphasis on Beijing's imperial heritage would finally result in significant protection of its surviving structures, many of the greatest acts of destruction since have occurred in the name of their restoration.

6

Returns of the Past

Over the last two decades of the twentieth century, the representation of the past in China was slowly untethered from the Maoist narratives to which it had been long bound. Society was no longer seen as just the stage of class struggle, and the history of pre-revolutionary China, once read as a story of feudal repression punctured occasionally by one or other commendable act of (pre-revolutionary) resistance, was finally released from a strictly Marxist-Leninist interpretation. Founding stories such as that related to the Long March, the route of which aspiring young revolutionaries retraced during the Cultural Revolution as a kind of pilgrimage, were slowly displaced by personal journeys to rediscover lost roots and dig up old family stories that it may have once been imprudent to acknowledge. During this era of reform, the ambiguous effect of the market economy and the individuating operation of capital weakened the dichotomy of friend/enemy that had ordered social and political life since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. Against a backdrop of unprecedented market expansion, which once again saw the residents forced to adjust to new, radically different economic and social realities, and a state-sponsored re-evaluation of the national past, emerged a flourishing of official and unofficial practices of memory, along with the re-appearance of images of Beijing’s destroyed heritage in the cityscape.

China's publishing industry in particular oversaw the production of numerous books that took 'Old Beijing' as their subject. The art historian Wu Hung has noted a part of this emergence in his discussion of the popularity of historical photography publications in the 1990s. He traces the trend of printing 'old photos' to late 1996 with the publication of the first issue of the serial *Old Photos* (*Lao Zhaopian* 老照片) by the Shandong Pictorial Press, which met with considerable commercial success. This led many other largely unknown publishers to enter this rapidly expanding market, at first with similar publications, but quickly with offerings of more specialised titles, based around specific themes or eras, with photos generally set within an explanatory text. Although Wu suggests that the 'craze' (热) for old photos was 'clearly over' by 2003, the nostalgia for the past was not. Collections of pictures and sketches of the fast-disappearing *butong* (the grey lanes and alleyways that any description of Old Beijing must include) are still to be found in the city's bookstores. Some are complimented by the edited recollections, prose and poetry of Beijing's famous literary inhabitants, and indeed there are also more literary collections of writings by famous residents that in one or another way work to recall a Beijing of memory. This interest in the Old City has similarly seen a burgeoning of cultural guidebooks, footnoting the experience of the city with some of the tales of a disappearing (yet at the same time uncannily re-emerging) way of life. History tours and walks organised for domestic and foreign tourists became a lucrative business, and local, municipal and state governments also made it their business to advertise

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2 Ibid., 121.
Beijing's newly rediscovered historical character for less tangible, more complex reasons.

With the coming of the new century, access to some archives slowly eased, although never completely, and with the new millennium an effort was made to transcribe and digitise large parts of these holdings of historical documents for a broader public and academic interest.\(^4\) The one-party state itself began to reformulate its own nomenclature, modulating its rituals and language with the Confucian-inflected discourse of Harmonious Society. At around the same time, the PLA undertook the first stages of the expensive repatriation of Chinese heritage on the international art market, pilfered under the gunboat diplomacy of western powers in the nineteenth century, under the guise of the China Poly Group Corporation.\(^5\) Accounts by local, amateur historians of the city under Japanese occupation, or during Republican and Qing times, soon found their way onto the shelves of the city's bookshops next to volumes that catalogued the stories and folktales of a Beijing beyond living memory. Traffic maps of the contemporary city were now found sold side-by-side with reprinted maps of older provenance – offering bird's eye views of the various aspects of the city in previous periods. With the growth of digital technology, some committed residents created websites for the gathering and discussion of materials, photographs, newspaper articles and essays

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\(^4\) See, for example, the work of the Beijing Municipal Archives, a large part of which has been transcribed into digital format and made available through various databases, with an emphasis on pre-1949 sources.

related to ‘Old Beijing’ and other elements of China’s threatened physical and intangible cultural heritage.\(^6\)

This reflected a broader rise not just in reflections on the past but also of concern with the current state of the city’s remaining heritage sites that began in the 1990s. He Shuzhong, one of the first vocal opponents of government heritage policy, founded the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center in 2003, with a mission to protect the city’s remaining heritage from further destruction.\(^7\) Wang Jun’s 2003 book, *Chengji* (City Record), which tells the tale of the despoliation of the Old City since 1949, used previously inaccessible material from the city’s archives.\(^8\) It spurred on public interest and concern in the topic, becoming an unexpected bestseller and going through a number of reprints. Wang’s book was central to the virtual secular canonisation of Liang Sicheng as the paragon of a nascent preservationist movement, one focussed on saving what had survived some 50 years of the city’s transformation.

At the same time as these developments, paradoxically a certain nostalgia for the days of high socialism also emerged, although the language and symbolism of this yearning for simpler days lacked the social authority they once had. Markets, such as the Panjiayuan in Beijing’s southeast, were inundated with both originals and copies of the big-character posters and ‘Little Red Books’ (*Quotations of Chairman Mao*) of the high years of Maoism, and a market emerged catering to people who wanted to purchase even the most trivial documents produced in that era. Collecting Mao paraphernalia was one of the more obvious signs of this nostalgia. However,

\(^6\) See for example www.oldbeijing.org.

\(^7\) Despite the difficulty of working in a difficult commercial and political environment, the center has had some success in preventing some demolitions from occurring, most notably of the imperial granaries at Dongsishitiao and more recently the proposed reconstruction of the area around the Drum Tower into a Museum of Time. The centre’s website can be accessed at www.bjchp.org.

\(^8\) Publication details of both English and Chinese versions are in the bibliography.
membership into the new 'posthumous cult' of the Great Helmsman, rather than signalling a commendable act of social worship, was now powered as much by personal obsession as political interest. The songs that had been the soundtrack of the revolution were now often sung for their nostalgic or even kitsch value rather than for the edifying and transformative exhortations they contained. Dialectical images (in Walter Benjamin's sense) that showed how the times had changed, they clashed grimly with the new capitalist realities of reform-era Beijing.

These returns were preceded by a new push to incorporate aspects of the Old City's disappearing architectural designs into the very urban fabric of the new city, beginning early in the reform period. In the 1980s, then-mayor Chen Xitong established a set of guidelines requiring new buildings to feature a neo-traditional aesthetic, which led to the appearance over the city of many skyscrapers sporting a bizarre looking 'Chinese-style' roof on top of their modern forms. This was one of the first examples of a push more generally to emphasise some of the more superficial aspects of the city's architectural history.

At around the same time, the authorities renovated, cleaned up and re-opened the Yonghe Gong Lama Temple and more parts of the Forbidden City, largely untouched during the city's revolutionary reordering, in recognition of the increasing tourist value of Beijing's remaining physical heritage. Similar renovations were carried out on many extant

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10 Indeed, the symbolic heritage of high-Maoism would be just as much the subject of the ruminations of China's new avant-garde artists, with Mao the frequent subject of their juxtapositions. It was and is both recognition of the market value of 'rebellion' and an indication that the ambivalence of his legacy in contemporary China remains unresolved.


12 Interestingly, the first real official act of complete restoration of an imperial object in post-1949 Beijing was the 1959 secret demolition and reconstruction of Tiananmen Gate, which was in a state
temples and princely mansions, which had been taken over and transformed for official purposes, from the 1980s until the Beijing Olympics.\(^\text{13}\)

Liulichang in the city's south was the first of a number of urban areas museumified during the reform era, rebuilt along the lines of an imagined version of their past. The area was originally home to the kilns that fired many of the tiles and ornamentation of the city’s imperial buildings. In the 1700s it became famous as an emporium of art and literature, and home to one of China's largest publishing industries.\(^\text{14}\) This mercantile history was profitably drawn upon in the area’s wholesale reconstruction over several years from 1979 into Liulichang Culture Street, a faux-Qing pedestrian mall with shops selling books, Chinese art and associated paraphernalia. This project exemplified the process by which much of the future renovations of the city's remaining 'historic' areas would occur: it emphasised the creation of a surface of 'pastness' using largely modern materials; most original buildings were demolished and replaced with 'authentic' copies; and the process made scant reference to the socialist history of the areas, and indeed only passing regard for the history of the era it was being made to represent.

As the city's vernacular architectural forms decreased in number during the construction frenzy from 1992 and in particular in the lead up to the 2008 Summer Olympics, there would be more and more examples of a re-emergence of the city's fast disappearing past, and a deepening nostalgia for the Old City. Campanella has discussed a visit to the Old Beijing Miniature Landscape Park in the city's

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\(^{14}\) Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, 269.
Changping district in 1999, a reconstruction of the Old City that dwarfs the model of Beiping that occupies the Museum of Ancient Architecture. Here was a 1:15 scale model of the entire city of Beijing as it was during the late-Ming and early Qing dynasties, where visitors could come to (impossibly, given its at least early Qing origins) 'Relive your long lost memories of Beijing'.

Despite this grand reconstruction, however, there was a strange dynamic at work that is present in much of the nostalgic turn that has gripped the city, which speaks more of the present than the past. As Campanella describes it, 'even as I wandered through this garden of urban memory, wrecking crews in the city itself were tearing apart the very lanes and courtyard houses so finely reproduced here. One could consume a miniaturized rendition of old Beijing’s cityscape even as the thing itself was being swept into the dustbins of history'.

The very negation of Beijing’s heritage (at least, the almost completely forgotten socialist and reform-era city) has itself been a process of revelation, with old layers of the city uncovered as more recent extensions and lean-tos have been scraped off. One example of this kind of destruction and revelation is of Nanluoguxiang, a now popular old-style street of trendy shops, bars and cafes, which was reconditioned in time for the Olympics. The process of resurfacing this street with stones and pavers (a look more in-line with its neo-Qing redesign) uncovered long-buried artefacts from the Qing dynasty. Clearing off the socialist and reform era constructions from an eastern outlet of Shichahai Lake unearthed artefacts that date to the Yuan dynasty.

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15 Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, 145.
16 Ibid.
However, for this discussion the most important re-emergence of the past in Beijing’s cityscape was that of the ‘mystical current’ of the imperial city, its ancient north–south axis, as part of Beijing’s Olympic reconstruction. It was this axis that the city’s new rulers appropriated in 1949 in constructing the new scared spaces of the revolution, only to challenge its dominance with the expansion of Chang’an Avenue in the 1950s. Beijing’s new Olympic-inspired Master Plan, released in 2003, however, resurrected it in an almost surreal, gigantesque extension northwards, to the Olympic Green.¹⁷ Now referred to as the Imperial Vein Scenic Line (huang mai fengjing xian 皇脉风景线), it was a conscious effort to recall the imperial character of the city, and connect it to the present and future of the nation. As such, this axis featured prominently in the Opening Ceremony, seemingly lit up by what turned out to be a computer-generated fireworks show that began in Beijing’s south and ended at the Olympic Green in the north. In addition to the Olympic Green, this axis also dissects Prospect Hill, the Forbidden City, and the rebuilt (and down-sized) Yongdingmen Gate, which had been destroyed in the Maoist upheavals of the 1950s and 60s and, devastatingly, the area of Qianmen, which had, in Qing and republican times, been a bustling area of commercial activity that contrasted with the refined airs of the imperial centre and, in the reform era, provided stark relief to the formalism of Tiananmen Square just to its north.

¹⁷ This was not the first time the north–south aspect of the city’s structure had reappeared in urban planning models. Yet the construction of the Millennium Monument in the city’s western suburbs for the year 2000 New Year celebrations shared as much in common with the Liang-Chen plan than with a resurrection of the old axis: it drew attention away from the imperial centre (and, importantly, away from an increasingly symbolically problematic Tiananmen Square).
Qianmen, Gateway to a Beijing Heritage

One of the finest coups d'oeil of Peking is from the Ch'ien Mên (Front Gate) which had such a sacred character that no corpse was allowed to pass through it. This view is indeed the key to the whole city, and the visitor who means to study it must begin here.

—Juliet Bredon

The symbolic and commercial value of the area to the south of Beijing's Inner City was recognised as early as 1550. For it was then that, mindful of the constant threat of raids by the northern Mongol armies, officials from the late-Ming dynasty ordered the construction of a new fortification, the Outer City, that would connect to and extend the southern limits of the original walled region. Comprised of smaller yet still imposing ramparts, and interrupted along its length by seven additional towers and gates, this newly fortified space would increase the walled area of the city by more than half again. Not just protecting the imperial ritual spaces of Ming and Qing Beijing, the Altar of Heaven and the Altar of the First Farmer, the construction of the Outer City also ensured an easier existence for residents of that previously unprotected area directly to the south of Zhengyang Gate, often referred to as Qianmen or 'Front Gate', an area that would eventually become of equal importance to daily life in the capital as the conspicuous imperial altars were to the prescriptive rituals of empire.

In 1648 China's new Manchu rulers, who had experimented un成功fully with ethnic comingling in recently conquered areas north of the Great Wall before

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18 Bredon, *Peking*, 21
19 Both Zhengyang Gate and the arrow tower to its south were part of a crenelated enceinte long since demolished.
taking control of the capital, implemented a policy of ethnic segregation in the capital. In implementing this, the already physically delineated spaces of the Inner and Outer cities provided the perfect geographical foundation. Under this policy, the court designated the Inner City for the quarters of the Manchu bannermen (which included the members of military groups organised under various banners composed of those either of Manchu descent or of those who had aided or early on pledged allegiance to the Manchu conquest and the establishment of the Qing dynasty). Han Chinese, with the exception of 'guards at government offices, Buddhist and Daoist monks, or servants within banner households', were given a year to relocate, and afterwards only permitted within the Inner City at daytime. This area itself was divided into separate areas along banner divisions. The walls of the Inner and Outer cities, originally intended to forestall attacks from the outside, thus became the physical boundaries along which the new social boundaries of the Qing capital could be better policed.

This forced the previously privileged occupants of the Inner City during the Ming dynasty to move elsewhere. In most cases they took up new residences in the Outer City, in what is today's Qianmen. During the Ming Dynasty, the area had already been home to many shops as well as the city's provincial guildhalls. However, the southward migration of erstwhile Inner City residents, who also brought with them money and entrepreneurial wherewithal, transformed this already significant commercial area into a flourishing entertainment district. By the late eighteenth century, Qianmen offered a growing mix of restaurants, teahouses, lodgings, luxury

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shops, nightclubs and opera houses, drawing in rich and poor alike.\footnote{Naquin, \textit{Peking}, 411.} Rambunctious Qianmen, a place of craftsmen and street peddlers, merchants and beggars, scholars and thieves, became a distinct counterpoint to Beijing’s more subdued and stately Inner City, a place of princely mansions, intimate vistas, sequestered pleasures and tranquil lanes.

The neighbourhood soon became notorious for its brothels, which catered to the varied sexual appetites of their male clientele. According to the Beijing historian Zhang Jinqi (and many salacious accounts in ‘apocryphal histories’, \textit{(yeshi 野史)}), it was here that a concupiscent Tongzhi Emperor (r.1862–74), during one of his late night incognito excursions to escape from the vexation of court life, contracted the syphilis from which he would eventually die.\footnote{Zhang Jinqi, \textit{Ba Da Hutong li de chenyuan jiushi} (Jiaozhou: Jiaozhou daxue chubanshe, 2005), 80.} Prostitution could not be separated from the rise of other notable social spaces and practices that characterised the area’s increasing importance. It was intimately connected, for example, to the rise in popularity of Peking opera as a form of public entertainment. Performances had previously been held in private residences, in the company of family and guests, or in the even more formal setting of the imperial court. However, the creation of new performance spaces in Qianmen, which operated outside of familial and formal ties, allowed for a new articulation of what Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson have described as a male ‘homoerotic vogue’ that had been in existence since the late Ming dynasty.\footnote{Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson, ‘Speaking of Flowers: Theatre, Public Culture, and Homoerotic Writing in Nineteenth-Century Beijing’, \textit{Asian Theatre Journal} 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 102–3.} ‘Flower guides’, written by and for the theatres’ male clientele, give perhaps the most compelling insight to the form this vogue took in Beijing’s opera houses. These guides fetishised boy actors, who would usually take the lead female
role in the all-male troupes, along with young male lead actors, describing their virtues in poetic detail and comparing them across the city. These actors were not just objects of this kind of distant objectification. For the boy actors of Beijing's opera houses, acting went hand-in-hand with prostitution. Admirers were hosted at 'private apartments' in the houses of their 'master tutors', which operated 'like an exclusive nightclub: they were luxuriously appointed and provided for their every comfort (some came to describe them as a “home away from home”)'.

Male homosexual relationships were not limited to these kind of exclusive relations between Beijing's well-to-do literati and merchant classes and the boy actors of the city's opera houses. According to Wu Cuncun, less refined 'flower groups' (huadangzi 花樣子) of boys, often dressed in female attire, earned money both from singing and from prostitution, and attracted customers on the street with 'lewd gestures and erotic songs'. The most derided of boy sex workers in Beijing worked in Qianmen's barbershops. Unable to sing or dance, they relied on their looks, and lower prices, to attract customers of more modest means. Male to female prostitution had long existed in Qianmen. However, during the late Qing, 'male-love became so popular as to cause the overshadowing of female brothels by male homosexual brothels in the capital city ... People who enjoyed homosexual relations existed in every class, from male favourites of the imperial court to cases of homoerotic vogue among the laboring classes'.

Imperial regulations technically forbade government officials engaging any form of sexual commerce. However, the procurement process in Beijing's opera

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24 Ibid., 111.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 4.
houses, which often occurred with airs of romantic love and within the environment of cultural appreciation, meant that engaging the services of Qianmen's boy actors, generally favoured by the city's elite, was tolerated in the late Qing period. This changed with the fall of the Qing government and the collapse of the official structures that it had supported, leading to a new burgeoning of street side prostitution between male customers and female sex workers that continued until the middle of the century. Throughout this period Qianmen maintained its reputation as a place of iniquity. Indeed, the presumably 'iniquitous' commerce of the area was not just limited to prostitution. The Yongzheng Emperor's (r.1722–35) edict to ban the use of opium in the area in 1729 illustrates the ubiquity of the drug in the city at the time, a state of affairs that would change little until the mid-twentieth century. By 1949, the area of Qianmen, in particular the Eight Big Hutong that angle off from its main street, were considered the city's main red-light district, a place of decadence and squalor, bordellos and opium dens.

This changed with the city's Peaceful Liberation in 1949. The area, which was at the time home to most of the city's brothels, was subject to a nationally publicised clean up, when all of its brothels were closed in a single night in late November 1949. As discussed in Chapter 4, this was given much attention in the state-media, and celebrated in a 1950 feature film. From Peaceful Liberation up until the beginning of the reform era, the area largely shared the same fate as the rest of the Old City, as Beijing was transformed, as Mao had wished, from a city of consumption to a city of production. This led to a steep downturn in commercial activity, along with an increase in population density seen across Beijing.
As the area re-geared for commerce from 1978, and returned to one of the main commercial and tourist areas over the coming decades, little was done to transform the dilapidated state of the area's buildings, both Qing and more recent. By the turn of the century, the further construction of ramshackle lean-tos and extensions upon existing neglected structures, as well as an infilling of previously open spaces with rooms to accommodate the influx of people, added further pressure to the area. For the authorities, Qianmen was an unhygienic, dangerous eyesore that was out of keeping with the vision of a modern Beijing. As the authorities sought to problematically redefine Beijing as a modern metropolis, especially from 1992 (at first with the Old and Dilapidated Housing Project), and then a re-emphasise its historical character, especially from the turn of the new century, this still relatively poor area in an important location with a high population density in close proximity to Tiananmen Square, was subject more than most to concerns of hygiene and history.

In a sign of things to come, in 2001 the municipal government rebuilt the commemorative arch of Qianmen, which had been destroyed in the 1950s. In 2004 the neighbourhood, which had been slated for redevelopment, became the focus of one of the city's most highly visible 'slum clearance interventions', resulting in the mass eviction of residents. This process continued through 2005, as did mounting public concern about what the authorities had planned in the long-term. When demolition began in 2006, this simmering apprehension soon erupted into controversy as 'scholars, preservationists, and concerned residents tried to save what

28 It was demolished and rebuilt again in 2007.
was left' of the area.\textsuperscript{30} Despite extraordinary public pressure, which included a group of scholars directly petitioning the National People's Congress, 'warning that demolishing Qianmen would be more devastating to the cultural heritage of Beijing than the destruction of the ancient wall by Mao',\textsuperscript{31} the destruction continued. By the end of the year, large parts of the area, one of twenty-five neighbourhoods designated in 2002 by the government as of particular historic and cultural significance, had been razed, with particular devastation in Dazhalan, an open-air market that runs off the main thoroughfare.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} The Da Zha Lan Project, which brings together the work of several artists, photographers and cinematographers, has documented significant parts of this demolition. See http://www.dazhalan-project.org. (Dazhalan is the Mandarin pronunciation of dashila'r, as it is called in the Beijing dialect.)
After a failed start by another company, the leading Beijing real-estate
developer SOHO China won the rights to the 360,000 square metre area in time for
the 2008 Olympiad. This Hong Kong stock exchange listed company, established in
1995 by Pan Shiyi, had already designed and constructed several contemporary,
‘avant-garde’ developments that made up a large part of Beijing’s new commercial
zones. As such, their custodianship of the project did nothing to ease public concern
as to what the future held. Pictorial hoardings advertising the Qianmen’s future went up, surrounding the site and, by late 2007, wrecking crews had torn up the main street itself and the entire area to its east, demolishing most of the buildings there. By the end of the process, a trail of rubble and debris nearly one kilometre in length was all that remained of the once bustling streetscape.

On 7 August 2008, following a year of ‘protection and improvement’, the main thoroughfare of the new-look Qianmen re-opened for business. A municipal government orchestrated opening ceremony, in front of an audience of thousands, marked the occasion, under a banner that read ‘Ancient capital appearance, glowing with youth’ (gudu fengmao, huanfa qingchun). Visitors were then able to walk the length of this ‘Emperor’s Avenue’, now a pedestrian shopping mall that SOHO had ‘restored’ to a Qing dynasty-style countenance. Of the commerce that the area had become famous for, little had survived. Apart from several shops, such as the Quanzhude Roast Duck Restaurant and Zhangyiyuan Teahouse, Qianmen, rebuilt for modern business, was almost completely absent of the commerce that had been such an important aspect of it past.33 On that day, however, it was as busy as it would ever be, as tens of thousands of tourists, in the city for the Olympics, flocked to the area to get a taste of what history is like in modern Beijing. While SOHO had finished work on the main avenue by the time of the unveiling, hoardings of digitally rendered imperial-styled pictorial façades covered most of the alleys that ran off it, restricting access to what are still

33 Indeed, to this day, shops remain vacant as agents struggle to bring business back.
construction sites to either side, suggesting the more recent, now more important, history of the area.\textsuperscript{34}

Qianmen is nowadays a place of inconsistencies. Its redevelopment was supposed to have restored the area to its late-Qing appearance. However, despite this historic pretension, according to its re-development plan only three per cent of the original buildings of the area were preserved.\textsuperscript{35} The rest had been designed in SOHO’s offices, some based on old pictures of the area taken in the 1920 and ’30s, others contemporary guesses and imaginative constructs based on a general style. The new street-car lines installed along this new so-called ‘Emperor’s Avenue’ recall rather a period long after the fall of the Qing dynasty (Qianmen’s original cable-cars were installed in 1924, and were removed in 1966).

Figure 15. New Qianmen’s Opening Day, 7 August 2008. Photograph: Kelly Layton.

\textsuperscript{34} This was a state of affairs that continued at least until my last visit there in mid-2012.
A More Useful History

We are struck by the fact that the sites that have been lived in are filled with the presence of absences.

—Michel de Certeau, ‘Walking in the City’

Following the almost complete removal of the physical remnants of all of its previous architectural and commercial features, Qianmen has become increasingly historicised. In addition to the reconstruction described above, Qianmen has also been fitted out with signs and panels outlining the historical significance of the area. This historical signage imbricates a new civic disposition that encourages the leisurely consumption of history, and tacitly suggests ‘proper’ ways of thinking about and experiencing the history in the city. These signs at Qianmen outline what are considered historically significant details, freezing its understanding to an imagined moment in late-Qing history. However, there is no mention of most of the more sordid, complex and enlivening aspects of that time, nor of the more recent social and historical vicissitudes of Beijing’s republican, Japanese, socialist and reform eras.

Qianmen’s new historical countenance elides the removal of history – erasing the past even as it seems to disclose it. It is a phenomenon that exists in the recent development of ‘national heritage’ more generally in China, as the state has sought to draw upon more ancient cultural traditions in a selective way. Indeed, while Beijing Opera has itself recently become ‘national heritage’, the role of homosexuality in the

36 Certeau, ‘Walking in the City’, 114.
development of that heritage has been largely ignored. This omission is mirrored also in the development of ‘heritage’ in the capital, as the government has paradoxically sought to emphasize Beijing’s cultural and historical heritage in general, and as private industry sees the value in presenting a cleaned up, consumable version of history to property prices and consumption. It is related to the unfettering of the story of history from its physical site, allowing people and the State to be more flexible in recollection. In other words, there seems to be a kind a visual rendering of ‘historic’ urban form that relies for its very existence upon the initial erasure of the physical remnants of the history supposedly recalled, which allows for the confabulation of a more useful picture. The re-emergence of the past in Beijing has paradoxically augured the destruction and removal of many of the remnants of that past, and in the end product the complexities of history have been largely excised. It involves a more conscious utilisation of what the philosopher Paul Ricouer has described as ‘the dialectic of presence and absence at the heart of the representation of the past’.

Despite the absence of reference to many of the significant events and eras in newly reconstructed Qianmen, perhaps the most significant occlusion is the story of the past few years. The entire process of Qianmen’s reconstruction has been completely effaced from the final reality – the stories of migration and protest, despair and resignation; the process of demolition, re-design and rebuilding; the ways in which, through the obscure application of Beijing heritage protection policy, diluted and complicated with the interests of industry, what was deemed worthy of

37 Chris Berry, foreword to *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*, by Wu Cuncun (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), xiv.
preservation, what should be reconstructed and how, and what could be flattened as unimportant, were decided behind closed doors. Qianmen is, in a sense, all about history, yet here one gets the sense that the past is 'everywhere and it is nowhere'. It involves, to borrow the words of Gamboni, the 'more or less cynical preservation of outward appearance' that 'contributes to a confusion of old and new, fake and authentic, and relates to a late modern type of destruction caused by the very development of “heritage”.' It is the generation of the recent form of the area that has, in a sense, become the least accessible (or the least manifest), as a present has emerged that is cloaked in images of the long gone.

I am borrowing from Vidler’s discussion of Proust’s ‘abyss of remembering’, in which he suggests 'the traces of erasure form a kind of negative path, a route of obliteration into a past'. In Qianmen, however, tracing this route is more complicated, in that the trail is crowded with the simulacra of history. Nonetheless, the excised, obliterated histories of the area continue to haunt the present. They are the muted spectres of place that represent ‘the ever present possibility of an uncanny proliferation’, delineating moments in which the immutability of the reality presented is disturbed and becomes disturbing. They are the uncanny doubles of the present that exist within the shadows of loss, prefiguring the return of the abyss of memory, or 'the disturbing unfamiliarity of the evidently familiar'. While contemporary Qianmen presents an image of ‘pastness’, like much of the return of

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40 Gamboni, The Destruction of Art, 224.
43 Vidler, The Architectural Uncanny, 18.
history more generally in the capital’s urban form, it is a return that is, in fact, all about the present.

The recent reformation of contemporary Beijing as a modern capital with a past (as opposed to conflicting, unsettled and unsettling pasts) has brought historic areas such as Qianmen into an uneasy relationship with the strangely historicising forces of commerce and capital, as well as with the more subtly operating complexities of Beijing heritage policy. While planners have attempted to turn this historic area into a space of consumption, of jouissance, where the nouveau riche come to consume and waste time in a leisurely manner, it has rather become an ambivalent space where others come to contemplate the paradoxes of heritage in Beijing, and the problems of privilege. In Qianmen, as in the rest of the city, as physical history was itself obliterated, what emerged in its place is an image of history. For those who have the time and means to consider the palimpsest of the city’s past, however, the Front Gate depicts a disturbing history of Beijing’s present.

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In Beijing, as history has been decimated, in place of a complex art of memory, that would have to work to undercover the often subterranean signifiers in a city of layers and might speak of a heritage of loss, has emerged a more productive commerce of imagined recollection. This encourages the consumption of a version of the past, as well as the international goods that can now benefit from a proximity to its sanitised and harmonised image. Indeed, the constant reconstruction of Beijing since 1949, and the large-scale erasure of the grander symbols of the city’s heritage, both overshadow yet whisper of a perhaps greater, more significant damage: that
damage inflicted upon the heritage of the lives of those who endured these
undulations of revolutionary and capitalist excess, the periods of social tumult that
have occurred side-by-side with the city's reordering, and more recent development
of urban 'heritage': they are kernels of experience that are difficult for the positivist,
amnesic discourse of Harmonious Society, itself the result of a government
realigning itself with aspects of its own past, to properly subsume.44

44 Geremie R. Barme, in 'Living the Heritage', discusses how, in contemporary China, voices have
emerged that can 'confound the crude strictures of the Party-state' by people drawing upon 'the
heritage of their own lives' (China Heritage Quarterly, no. 18 (June 2009),
The Promise of Beijing

The following two chapters present a discussion of the hygiene of vision at work in Beijing's Olympic and longer-term transformation. In the first place I examine the city's reconstruction and its state-sponsored narration, which has turned the capital, and the 'moment' of the Olympics, into a figuration of a broader national promise, and a symbol of China's rise. The reformation of the city-monument is structured like a promise, ¹ haunted by a possible present that is yet to arrive, yet also partially visible in a proliferation in the cityscape of images of the future, as well as the public discourse that augurs its imminent arrival. In looking at the ever-changing skyline, and putting up with the noise and dust of construction, residents are always urged to see this as a transition to that almost-present future. I give special attention to a model of the city in the Beijing Planning Exhibition Hall, and consider what insights an examination of this model can give regarding the reimagining of Beijing more generally. I then examine some narratives that have emerged in Beijing that disturb this monolithic image of the city as a symbol of China's rise and a prosperous future. The second half of the chapter is devoted to the greening-up of the city in the period before the Olympics, during which time (and during the Olympics) Beijing became almost literally, following Barmé, a garden of symbolic violence, a place in

¹ I am here borrowing from Derrida's discussion of the non-presentable idea of democracy, which, 'belonging to the time of the promise... will always remain, in each of its future times, to come' in Jacques Derrida, Politics of Friendship, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 306.
which an optimistic vision of China's present and future were presented to a
domestic and international audience, and the artifice that produced this vision.
Finally, I examine the subtle signs present even in the image of the future city
proffered that call into question Beijing's very viability and long-term sustainability
as China's capital.

The Promise

I prefer to dream that burnished surfaces are a figuration and promise of the
infinite.

— Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Library of Babel'

For several days in February 2001, when the city was still in the final throes of a still
freezing winter, public heating in large swathes of Beijing went off, factories citywide
(most notably Capital Steel or Shou gang 貞鋼) ceased production, and coal-fired
stoves, which many inhabitants in the Old City still relied on for cooking and
warmth, were banned. It was not, however, just the state of the air, and a desire for
blue skies, that concerned the authorities prior to the arrival of the International
Olympic Committee Evaluation Commission (IOCEC) on their final inspection
tour of the city before the July announcement of who would host the 2008 Summer
Olympiad. In their eagerness to create an image of Beijing as a clean and modern
metropolis (or, at least, to give an impression that it one day could be), all aspects of
the capital's appearance had been subject to a 'Great Clean-up' (da saochu 大扫除),
one that recalled similar capital clean-ups of times past.

It was a project that encompassed twenty-six million square metres of the cityscape, and included anything that might have been visible to the IOCEC inspectors during their visit. Over the course of several weeks prior to their arrival, tens of thousands of students, workers and volunteers scrubbed clean and painted traffic dividers, guardrails, bridges and phone booths, dyed green any drab looking grass, and repainted the façades of dreary looking apartment blocks (only, however, the sides facing the road) that abutted most of the IOCEC's pre-planned routes through the city. The clean-up also extended to the population of Beijing itself. In preparation for the inspection tour, taxi drivers were issued with cassette tapes that taught them basic English words and useful phrases, and they were reminded constantly of the upcoming inspection and the need to be polite to all foreigners.

More tellingly, police and work crews who had cleaned up proposed Olympic venue sites, removing from them any unwanted structures, had also dispatched their now unwanted inhabitants. Street vendors, blind musicians, itinerant labourers, beggars and the homeless were similarly swept off the streets before the commission's arrival, augmenting the city's strange orderliness (for those aware of the difference).

By the time of the arrival of the IOCEC, Beijing's notoriously hazy, red-grey sky had been flushed of its poisons and pollutants, with blue skies prevailing. At the time of the inspection, the routes taken by the delegation were unusually free of the bicycles, cars and trucks that regularly clog up the city's streets and avenues – a state of affairs that a police force, numbering in the thousands, enforced and maintained 'behind the scenes', blocking off roads and redirecting traffic away from the key thoroughfares. The stage management was perfected to such an extent that traffic
lights turned green as either of the IOC’s two convoys approached, ensuring a smooth, uninterrupted passage.\(^3\)

The visitors were not completely unaware that what they were witnessing and participating in was a masterful performance that had been managed only by placing a considerable burden on Beijing’s population. The authoritarian verve by which the state had constructed this reality perhaps appealed to the IOC’s sensibilities, and it was certainly not out of line with the ambivalent twentieth-century history of the Olympic movement. During this visit, and in the years ahead, the reality of the city came face to face with an image of what it would one day (hopefully) be. It presented the appearance of a future refacement imposed upon the lack and limitations of the present. During its time in Beijing, the IOCEC was presented with a visual promise of orderliness, cleanliness and efficiency that would precipitate the monumental transformation of the city over the next seven years in its fulfillment. It was followed not just by the physical transformation of the urban landscape, but this transformation itself would become imbricated within broader narratives related to China’s rise and national flourishing, of which Beijing remains one of the most important, and potent, symbols.

In Beijing, both during the games and during the visit of the commission in 2001, Taussig’s assertion in relation to the paranoiac censorship of the Chilean dictatorship that ‘officialdom strives to create a magical reality’ was given vivid

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\(^3\) In contemporary times, the most notable of these was perhaps the clean-up of the city in 1999, in the lead-up to the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China. (Details of the IOCEC’s visit were taken from *The Age*, 15 July 2001, Paul Wiseman, ‘Beijing Residents Pay Price for Olympics Push’, *Chicago Sun-Times*, 12 July 2001, Peter Hessler, ‘Great Sprint Forward’, *The New Yorker*, 7 May 2001, and personal correspondence with Atish Ghosh.)
In these cases, the 'magical reality' took the form of a carefully produced spectacle that the officialdom of the Chinese state crafted for an international audience. It implicated a hygiene of vision which, similar to the history of the concept of hygiene in France as analysed by Georges Vigarello, placed 'the primacy of the visual field' above all else. It is an emphasis on surface and image, above substance, that is at work more generally in the constitution of the contemporary city-monument of Beijing, which is a place, and a concept, as I suggest later, which is on borrowed time, and on time borrowed from others.

Capitalising on the China Dream

The success of the Olympic bid, announced on 13 July 2001, prompted an overhaul of Beijing's short- and long-term urban planning model. In 2004, the municipal government released a new Master Plan of Urban Beijing (2004–2020) (Beijing chengshi zongti guihua 北京城市总体规划) in specific reaction to the success of the bid. This plan divided the future of the city into three distinct periods: 2004 to 2010, the near future (jin qi 近期); 2010 to 2020, the far future (yuan qi 远期); and distant prospects (yuan jing 远景) beyond 2020. By 2020, when the plan reaches its concrete terminus, it is scheduled that the city will have become a liveable 'international megalopolis' with a grand cultural heritage 'melding historic culture and modern civilisation into its urban form'.

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It thus places the ‘moment’ of the Olympiad and related urban reconstruction upon a longer timescale and teleology that will concretely end in 2020. It is also the year 2020, not accidently, that the state has set as the year in which a ‘moderately prosperous society’ (xiaokang shehui 小康社会) is to be achieved, thus setting the city’s Olympic and post-Olympic reconstruction and reimagining within a broader narrative that encompasses the promised future of the entire nation. With official proclamations that China has apparently entered a new ‘Prosperous Age’, comparable to periods of national flourishing during in the Han, Tang and Qing dynasties,7 the transformation of Beijing, as capital of China, has become a synecdoche for the rejuvenation (fuxing 复兴) of China itself, and a central symbol in the story and performance of China’s rise.8

Paradoxically, as the government commissioned a frenzy of construction to realise the city’s still absent Olympic architecture, on the path to the so-called Green Olympics, in the intervening years the city was more polluted, dusty and congested than it had been over its entire modern history. The plan, therefore, which narrates the urban change of the Olympic era, forms part of a more general urban signage, contextualising urban violence and renewal within a teleology that moves the city and nation towards its promised future. This shares structural characteristics with what Barme has called the ‘crude theoretical creation’ of ‘building socialism with Chinese characteristics’, which legitimates neo-liberal reform (and, by implication, its excesses and the inequality it produces) as a process of ‘making up for the

[unfinished] lessons of capitalism' before full socialism can be achieved. It acts to supplement and narrate the experience of the present and diminish potential discontent, reminding one that the constant disruption to daily life that the construction of the future city entails will be worth it in the end. More importantly, it imbues the promise of one possible future with a timbre of inevitability. This social fiction demands (and indeed requires) social investment, what Pierre Bourdieu has called the *illusio*, on behalf of the city's residents – a fundamental belief that the reality as presented should be taken seriously. In Beijing, still a place ruled by an autocratic, one-party state with a history of military violence against its own people, we nonetheless have not the governance of the population through 'the cultural elaboration of fear', but through the social elaboration of hope – a pedagogy of nervous optimism about the current state of the nation and its future prospects.

**Beijing Megaspace**

The initial phase of the implementation of this new master plan (from 2004 to 2010, but a period largely with the 2008 Olympiad in mind) saw some US$160 billion in expenditure. Deyan Sudjic has described Beijing during this latest period of rebuilding as 'the city that ate the world' to relate his awe at the colossal amount of raw material, cement, steel and coal required to satisfy the city's construction

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9 Quotes are from Barme, 'After the Future'.
10 For Bourdieu, the *illusio*, 'the adherence to the game as a game, the acceptance of the fundamental premise that the game... is worth being played, being taken seriously', which resides at the *foundation of belief* is both a precondition of social investment and as such also a potentially disturbing realisation that can remove one from a belief in the fiction of the real. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 333.
12 Direct investment specifically related to Olympic projects was around US$40 billion.
frenzy. While an unprecedented construction boom in general has gripped Beijing, the most important symbols of its transformation are several ‘megaprojects’—landmark undertakings in Beijing’s modern development, which would become the defining features of its Olympic and post-Olympic physiognomy, and lead to the city’s new description as a ‘playground for architects’.

The first of these projects was the National Grand Theatre. The titanium and glass ellipsoidal exterior of this building began to take form from 2001 at a site to the west of Tiananmen Square and the Great Hall of the People, as part of a softening of the autocratic image of the city’s centre. While this building was commissioned before Beijing was awarded hosting rights to the games, it nonetheless formed part of the city’s Olympic push which itself was part of a broader reimagining. The failed bid to secure the 2000 Summer Olympiad in 1993 had prompted a period of national reflection. A general consensus emerged that the

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13 Deyan Sudjic, ‘The city that ate the world’, The Observer, 16 October 2005.
capital needed to internationalise its image in order to deflect future disappointment, and the National Grand Theatre was a central part of this undertaking.

The Paul Andreu-conceived design of the building, its astronomical price tag (CNY3.2 billion), and its positioning so close to the city’s (and nation’s) symbolic centre, however, ensured its construction would not proceed without controversy, especially from those, such as the Tsinghua University architect Wu Liangyong, who believed that urban renewal in Beijing should proceed with respect given to traditional Chinese aesthetics.\(^\text{15}\) To ensure acceptance of its contentious design, then-President Jiang Zemin intervened in the debate, and took personal stewardship of the project – even, reportedly, taking the opportunity of singing the first aria on the completed main auditorium during a pre-opening celebration.\(^\text{16}\)

The avant-garde design and the cost of the National Grand Theatre set the tone for projects to come. In the coming years a series of colossal buildings, conceived in the offices of international architectural firms, transformed Beijing’s skyline. Perhaps most important among these was the Herzog & de Meuron-designed National Stadium itself, site of the all-important Opening Ceremony on 8 August 2008. This building, which came to be known as Beijing’s ‘Bird’s Nest’ (niao chao鸟巢) due to a design which spectacularly utilised hundreds of interwoven steel rods, began to take shape from 2003 at a site on the outer side of the northern section of the Fourth Ring Road. It was complimented by the construction of the National Aquatics Centre to its south. The work of PWT Architects in Australia,


this cuboid structure clad in a layer of bubble shaped cells is colloquially referred to as the 'Water Cube' (shui lifang 水立方).

Figure 17. A smoggy view of Olympic Park, with the National Aquatics Centre in the foreground, and the National Stadium behind. Source: Xinhuanet.

These two buildings are the most conspicuous of those that occupy the Olympic Green, which itself forms the geographical apex of the newly extended north–south axis of Beijing. This axis, which aligned the imperial capital, and which the Maoist transformation undermined, is one of the most important recalibrations that the city's reconstruction has involved. In line with the new planning model that seeks to push Beijing's identity as modern yet historic, it now takes in the entire sweep of the capital's history, powerfully connecting the (reconstructed) past to the promise of the future, to which the performance of the Olympics was central. It includes the recently reconstructed Yongdingmen Gate and Qianmen in the south, Tianamen Square, the throne room of the now museumified Forbidden City, the
Drum and Bell Towers of the Old City, a new park along the northern Second Ring Road (created in recognition of the demolished walls), and the Olympic Green itself.

The plan for the re-design of this axis itself provoked considerable debate. The commission for the project was controversially awarded to the architect and urban planner Albert Speer, Jr., the son of Albert Speer, Hitler's chief architect. It was difficult to resist drawing comparisons between the reconstruction of Beijing and Berlin, especially as Speer senior had himself proposed a grandly conceived north-south axis at the heart of his (finally unfulfilled) plans for the Nazi capital.17

Figure 18. 'Model photo' of Speer's Central Axis, looking north. Source: Albert Speer (via www.albert-speer.de).

In all, nineteen completely new sporting venues were commissioned to accommodate the games. They appeared in tandem with other new mega-projects built with the city's reconstruction in mind. Of these, in terms of sheer scale, the Norman Foster-designed Terminal 3 of Beijing International Airport dwarfs even the National Stadium. Completed in 2007, and designed to appear from above as a dragon in flight, it is one of the largest buildings in the world. Perhaps the most ambitious of all of these projects in terms of design, however, was the colossal CCTV headquarters, which, along with the new Tower 3 of the World Trade Centre (the tallest building in Beijing, completed in 2009) now dominates the
skyline of the city’s new Central Business District centred around Guomao to the city’s east. This Rem Koolhaas-designed building takes the form of a gigantesque ‘trapezoidal loop’\(^\text{18}\) composed of two leaning towers connected together by a 75-metre long cantilever. Like many other construction projects at the time, great effort was made to have the façade of this building complete and cleaned up by the Opening Ceremony in 2008. However, also similar to many of the other projects, the building in its entirety itself was not finished until well after the completion of the Games – in the case of the CCTV Tower, in mid-2012.

These buildings are centerpieces of Beijing’s new internationalised image, and form part of a more general transformation. They were constructed while the urban fabric of Beijing itself saw a burgeoning of new international malls and public spaces, green zones, parks, museums and commercial centres. As discussed in the previous chapter, the modernisation of the city has also been paired with the questionable restoration of carefully selected historic areas into themed shopping streets, such as Qianmen to the south of Tiananmen Square, as the city has been re-imagined as a modern city with an ancient past. By the time of the games in 2008, an expansion of the rapid transit system of subway and light rail saw four new lines opened (a fraction of the planned total) along with some 300 kilometres of new roads and expressways, including two new ring roads. It is an expansion that continues apace.

In pursuit of its promise of a ‘Green Olympics’, the state reportedly spent over US$12 billion on environmental projects specifically related to greening up the

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city for the games. A 'three stage plan to ensure blue skies', implemented from 2007, involved the regulation of the amount of dust that escaped into the air from construction sites, testing vehicular restrictions, and decreasing or ceasing industrial production in Beijing municipality and neighbouring provinces. By the time of the Olympiad, Capital Steel, one of the city's most polluting factories that had ceased production during the IOCEC's visit in 2001, had completely shut down production. It finally completed its expensive relocation to a new facility at Bohai Gulf in January 2011. The risky decision not to have a retractable roof on the National Stadium was managed with the development of cloud seeding techniques – ways of delaying or inducing rain to make the time or place of its falling more convenient for the authorities. With often-windless August days regularly leading to a dangerous buildup of pollution in the atmosphere, cloud seeding was a standby 'emergency measure', enabling the authorities to induce heavy rainfall and flush the city's toxic air.

The large-scale reconstruction of Beijing has been paired with citywide public education campaigns espousing the virtues of queuing and not spitting, and offering one's seat to the elderly, disabled, pregnant or children on public transport. In the weeks before the games commenced, booklets were handed out advising residents against wearing overly colourful clothing, pairing white socks with black shoes, and wearing pyjamas in public. In public urinals 'one small step forward for a

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22 Kiran Randhawa, 'No Bling in Beijing: Dress Code Tells People to Wear Only Three Colours'.
man became a giant leap for civilization' (xiang qian yi xiao bu, wenming yi da bu 向前一小步，文明一大步). These are but some superficial examples of a broader civilising narrative that has operated in Beijing before and since the Olympiad, which urges citizens to play their part in bringing about the promised future that they have little choice but to accept, even as it paradoxically empowers them as agents in its realisation. It takes form not just in the usual language and sloganeering of the party in its signage of the city, but educates more subtly, and perhaps more powerfully, through the very structuring of Beijing's new urban monuments, through tacit inscriptions of urban and national time, and through the subtle prescription of what is imaginable.

Modeling the Future

Located on Qianmen East Avenue, near Qianmen Gate and Tiananmen Square, is the Beijing Planning Exhibition Hall (Beijing shi guihua zhanlan guan 北京市规划展览馆). The hall was opened in September 2004, to coincide with the official release of the new master plan. Within its exterior of black steel and glass, across four floors, are 8000 square-metres of exhibits. By means of an unusual mixture of traditional display techniques, interactive exhibits and highly sophisticated film and digital media (which range from the interesting to the near-psychedelic), the hall presents a grand yet uneasy vision of Beijing, inviting visitors to experience and participate in a story of its origins, development and future.

The centrepiece of this vision is located on the third floor: a spectacular photographic, glass, plastic and wooden rendering of the entire city of Beijing.

Thousands of glass covered satellite photographs, illuminated from below, represent the city's outer districts and extended conurbations. Viewers are able to walk upon these panels to take in the main focus of this splayed urban vision. Constructed by 150 workers in the space of a year, and at a cost of over four million yuan, it is a spectacular 302 square-metre, 1:750 scale model of Beijing's inner districts, which emerges in striking three-dimensional detail from the surrounding photographs. Balconies on the floor above, equipped with viewing binoculars, afford visitors an aerial view of this simulacrum, amplifying a schizophrenic effect which sees the viewer's experience fluctuate between the knowledge of the artifice of the model and the uncanny sense of reality that it invokes.

Figure 20. The model of Beijing in the Beijing Planning Exhibition Hall. Photograph: Kelly Layton.

This is a version of Beijing in miniature. Its artifice enables a view of Beijing that few have had of the real city outside the hall's walls. While one's gaze may move...
'peripatetically', and linger for a time on certain of its specific urban elements, the model encourages the viewer to take in the entire city in a single sweep, constructing it as a total, totalised object. However, although the model invokes a sense of truthfulness, in contrast to Michael Dutton, Hsiu-ju Stacy Lo and Dong Dong Wu's claim that it is an exact replica of contemporary Beijing that 'shows every street, every building, every monument, every park, every road, every thing, in miniaturized detail', the view on offer is in fact a simulacrum of an as-yet-unfinished project, presenting an artfully rendered vision of what the city (it is proposed) will one day look like. For although the photographs surrounding it are of a more recent Beijing, the model itself is of a 'complete', future Beijing, based primarily upon the revised master plan. In other words, the model itself can be nothing more than a spectacularly rendered guess of a project that has in fact been realised through a compromising matrix of different interests and interpretations (developers, officials, local residents and heritage groups). It is this project, and indeed its 'projection' onto the current city, which constantly disrupts the everyday reality of the city outside. Just as new Beijing has had to contend with the uncanny spectres of its past, so too has it had to contend with the invisible city of its future.

The model does not just render certain aspects of the city's planning visible, but also provokes a certain kind of seeing, powerfully combining reality and imagination. Like the narrative that pervades the reconstruction of Beijing at large, it provides visitors an uncomplicated vision of the future, unimpeded by the present reality. From the time of the model's completion in 2004, subways, overpasses and skyscrapers, many of them still taking shape in the cityscape as cement and steel slabs

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or gargantuan excavations in the earth in which countless labourers toil in the city outside, occupied the model, complete and perfect. Since the opening of the hall, visitors have been able to view a completed ‘new downtown’ or CBD around the World Trade Centre in Jianguomen Wai, in east Beijing, and Zhongguan Cun Technology Park, in the northwest, whole and unadorned by the usual cranes, scaffolding and milling workers. The Rem Koolhaas-designed China Central Television tower, the construction of which was not finished until 2012, has stood in the model complete since 2004, as have the buildings that make up Beijing’s Olympic Green.

Figure 21. A modeled view of Beijing's new CBD around Guomao, showing the CCTV Complex with Tower 3 of the World Trade Centre behind. Photograph: Kelly Layton.

By seeing the city from this overarching position the visitor can enjoy the kind of imaginary possession of the city that proved so intoxicating for Victor Segalen. However, here the vision proffered is not one of an imagined conqueror
surveying a pacified, subjugated territory. For it is also from this height that the embrace of the future city itself is possible. It is a view that tacitly educates – operating, to borrow the words of the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, as ‘a sight that operates like a saying’. The model, like the hall, in other words, is a social and cultural object that plays its own part in the dissemination of power and the construction of people’s relationships with the city around them, requiring the co-opting of the spectator in the effect of the vision. Much as James Hay has said of film that its role in the functioning of power ‘has to do both with how it becomes part of an environment and how it enables or constrains navigation of that landscape’, so too can we consider the model as constructing allowing limits for the operation of the spectator’s imagination and oneiric play. Here, in possessing, one is also possessed. By standing above, one becomes consumed by and consumes the mythos of the future. In the Hall, possession is a two-way street.

In this ‘model city’ the two-dimensional satellite photographs underneath the glass floor depict the ‘present’, in dim hues of green-grey. This allows for the designers of the three-dimensional model, which depicts a not-yet-present, or a present-to-be version of the city, to borrow from a kind of privileged access that photography has to (at least imagined) truth by engineering a physical contiguity with them. Thus, the ‘real’ gives way to the make (or want-to) believe at the same time as reinforcing it. In this process the future is also elevated, both metaphorically and literally, above the muted tones of the present. It is a present (or rather the present of the past few years) that, in some sense, has thus already been relegated to

the infamous 'dustbin of history'. The future city may be figured in terms of *weilai* (the Chinese word for 'the future' that means literally 'that which has yet to come'), yet here it is literally not far from the truth, and the photographs depict a city that, as soon as it is placed beside the model, appears antiquated. In looking at the ever-changing skyline of 'actually lived Beijing' and contending with the chaos of construction, the city's residents are always urged to see the present condition as a transition to that almost-present future. It is a teleology that sweeps all up into the structure of promise.

Figure 22. The 'present', given by the satellite photograph on the left, gives way to the 'future' of the model on the right. Photograph: Kelly Layton.

The model, and the hall, shed light on the broader civic imaginary that gives sense and direction to the lives of those in the present, recasting experience
allegorically. The notion of the city-to-come, of Beijing as a modern megalopolis with a glorified past, forms part of the larger signing of the entire city before and since the Olympiad. In this process, new malls and public spaces, recreated antiquarian heritage sites, museums, commercial centres, construction sites and public works (such as the expanding encirclement of ring roads and the thrust of rapid transit systems) are all saturated with signs and slogans that attest to and ramify a new civic imaginary, paired with the civilising discourse of the Harmonious Society (.hexie shehui 和谐社会). No longer merely ramifying the power of the ruler over the ruled in a spectacle of might and dominance, these new urban monuments are places for the education of citizens, requiring a tacit acceptance of the reality constructed and under construction. They are places where correct social and consumer habits are cultivated, and where the correct reading of history and working of memory is reinforced. They narrate identity within a new space of production and consumption, managing, not always successfully, the excesses of modernity, mediating experience and literally constructing a sensibility of place, whilst at the same time limiting interpretation. This monumental physical and social inscription, of which the model forms part, plays on one of the most fundamental aspects of settled, social beings, and that is how, through the telling of stories as real, one can feel that one is going somewhere without actually moving.

This can, however, only ever be an imperfect project. As ever, Beijing’s multivocal reality undercuts attempts at monopolising the reception of the new city-monument and the future it heralds. Despite attempts to ramify the state-sponsored understanding of China, and harmonise the representation of the city, the experience

of it, and what is imaginable, there are still present disturbing traces that complicate the heterogeneous narrative of China’s rise, and indicate other realities, experiences and possibilities. For all the posturing and confected optimism of the state, they suggest that, not only is the distribution of hope in China, to paraphrase Hage, unequal, but that the very future of Beijing itself as capital is one that is far from assured.

Other Cities

The view of Beijing from on high was once strictly reserved for the imperial gaze. However, it has long since been democratised. Prospect Hill, once the city’s highest point, sequestered from all but the emperor and his retinue, is now the centre of a public park. The walls of the city, those majestic symbols of imperial power and the social hierarchy that supported it, fell to Mao’s real and abstract plans of modernisation, just as the Forbidden City, once the hidden heart of empire, and central symbol in the geographical and social segregation of society, has long been open to the public. New Beijing, however, for its spectacular urban transformation and the promise of hope it has entailed, is still a place of boundaries and exclusions. Although less apparent, they are as perhaps equally insurmountable as the city’s now demolished walls were in imperial times.

It is the often-silent toil of literally uncounted migrant workers that have made the city’s Olympic and post-Olympic reconstruction possible. Although the project has been astronomically expensive, the exploitation of this ‘vast, pliant, and disposable labor force’ has kept costs much lower than they might have otherwise.

They built those wordless figurations of China’s promise, the mega-projects discussed above, with little chance of sharing in the prosperity that they symbolise. The excision of these ‘outsiders’ (waidi ren 外地人) from Olympic Beijing image was indicated early on. Even as Beijing was in the grip of a pre-Olympic construction boom during the IOCEC’s visit in 2001, these workers were nowhere to be seen. It was a state of affairs repeated seven years later when, having built the new landmarks that would receive so much attention during the games and afterwards, this group of millions, indispensible to the very possibility of the project, yet disturbing reminders of a country of breath-taking levels of economic and social disparity, were sent home.

The exclusion would continue after the games finished when the stadia and venues were themselves slated for privatisation and commercialisation, offering new, exclusive ways for the city’s elite to enjoy their lives in a leisurely way. Similarly, the city’s newest highest point from which to view the city, the viewing platform in the newly constructed Tower III of the World Trade Center, shares use of the building with, among other things, a five-star hotel, a ballroom, and a shopping mall that sells high-priced goods to the city’s new elite. Indeed, the relatively high price of a ticket into the Beijing Planning Exhibition Hall, available to those who have the time and means to visit, suggests that the view of the future city proffered there, like in the rest of New Beijing, while total and totalised, is not one that is accessible to all.

This is but one example of the complicating nature of the new city. Even as Beijing’s reconstruction has occurred in the name of China’s rise and, eventually,

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29 See ibid., 90-1 for details.
prosperity for all, the capital is still a place of profound inequalities that its recent transformation has only exacerbated. For Broudehoux,

the delirious grandeur of Beijing’s Olympic makeover climaxes a generation of breakneck marketization and uneven development, accompanied by increased sociospatial polarization, rampant land speculation, the proliferation of public-private partnerships, the popularity of gated communities, and the spectacularization of the urban landscape. For many, Beijing has become a paradise of opportunity, creativity, and lifestyle. But for those who are bypassed by this fast-paced modernization, the city represents a place of betrayed promises, injustice, and despair.‘30

No matter the energy of the Chinese state to promulgate a harmonized story of China’s rise, it is impossible to completely gloss over this kind of utopian/dystopian split in the experience of the capital, and the nation at large. For Ai Weiwei, the artist and provocateur and also, to his apparent regret, the main artistic consultant to the architecture firm that designed the National Stadium, Beijing is a place of violence, anonymity and indifference. Two different mental conditions define it: one of power and money, the other of desperation. ‘If we remember what Kafka writes about his Castle,’ says Ai, ‘we get a sense of it. Cities really are mental conditions. Beijing is a nightmare. A constant nightmare.’31

30 Ibid., 88.
Much of the new metropolis stands in place of the old (including socialist and early reform-era) city. Adam Yuet Chau has discussed the ubiquity of the character  DataService\chaj, the ‘awful mark’, in the Beijing cityscape, which is hastily painted upon buildings to call attention to their impending demolition.\footnote{See Adam Yuet Chau, ‘An Awful Mark: Symbolic Violence and Urban Renewal in Reform-era China’, \textit{Visual Studies} 23, no. 3 (2008).} It is in many ways as significant a symbol in the telling of the stories of life in modern Beijing as the façades of the new high-rises and reconstructed ‘heritage’ sites that it inversely heralds. New Beijing adumbrates a shadow history of mass evictions and protest, violence and intimidation, with residents of land slated for redevelopment offered payouts of a sum well below market value, and given little choice but to leave. This is,
however, the extreme end of a story that is more generally about the 'erasure of community, experience, memory, and narrative'\textsuperscript{33}, and the irrevocable, often publicly undisclosed damage to the heritage of lives swept up in this transformation. For many evicted from their properties, or put out by the insomniac building, and its associated noise, air pollution and traffic, the propagandising padding and sloganeering of the state does little to soften unsettled everyday life. If anything, the contrast between image and reality make the tension even more deeply felt.

The tumultuous course of the country's modern history itself has perhaps further exacerbated this tension. The recent reconstruction of Beijing, and the associated polarising inequalities and excesses it has entailed, represents another moment in a long fragmenting history of social and political instability and revolution. Many of the capital's residents have experienced, in the space of decades, the rise and fall of radically different social and political movements that, despite some attempts at feigned continuity, are informed by incommensurable fantasies about the nature of the world. These different programmatic movements, in one way or other, have had at their centre a recalibration of the relationships people have with their worlds and selves. They have involved inciting a state of dissociation, and a questioning of the values of the social, which the state has sought to supplement with an alternative model or fantasy to once again narrate meaningful action and meaning itself. Yet there can be little doubt that these albeit soon-supplemented states of dissociation leave their traces (and scars) – especially as the historical events that brought them about have been so regularly swept into silence – which affect the reception of state-sponsored image of the city and nation. There are similarities to

this process and what Hannah Arendt has suggested is the destabilising effect of
brainwashing on the perception of truth:

It has frequently been noticed that the surest long-term result of brain­
washing is a peculiar kind of cynicism – an absolute refusal to believe in the
truth of anything, no matter how well this truth may be established. In other
words, the result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth
is not that the lies will be accepted as truth, and the truth be defamed as lies,
but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world – and the
category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end – is
being destroyed. 34

It may be the case that, to paraphrase Dutton, 35 those who have lived in the
shadow of the revolutionary excesses of twentieth century China have a particularly
interesting feel for the nature of the social and the artificiality of culture. It is perhaps
unavoidable that this history of constant world-making, of which the latest calls of
New Beijing are just another in a long line, will always undercut and deform
government attempts at crafting an impression of the permanence and immutability
of the present, and presented, reality.

Many of the city’s new buildings have become the subject of specific
descriptions that fall outside of the official narrative. Despite the direct overseeing of
the project by Jiang Zemin, the National Grand Theatre was the first to undergo a
kind of colloquial renaming. Many locals now refer to it simply as Beijing’s ‘Giant
Egg (ju dan 巨蛋)’, or, due to its being set in a lake, the ‘Boiled Egg (shui zhu dan 煮蛋)’. The alteration of a single consonant in its Chinese designation has meant it

34 Hannah Arendt, Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought (London: Faber and
Faber, 1961), 257.
35 Dutton, Policing Chinese Politics, 4.
is sometimes more salaciously referred to as ‘China’s Great Whorehouse’ (*Zhongguo da jiyuan* 中國大妓院, a play on the Chinese for the National Grand Theatre, *Zhongguo da juyuan* 中国大剧院).

These same buildings, and others in New Beijing, have also become imbricated in urban geographies that adumbrate a dystopian urban landscape of loss, despair and alienation. One narrative that draws much of the architecture of Olympic Beijing into this landscape represents a new chapter in a centuries-old story of the dragon slaying deity Nezha and his custodianship of Beijing. According to the original legend, the city was designed based upon Nezha’s worldly form: that of a child with multiple heads and arms. When it first appeared in the fourteenth century, the story went thus: Liu Bingzhong, the Yuan capital’s chief planner, was fearful of the dragons said to live in the waters of the area, which were known for their insatiable thirst. When Liu was at his wit’s end in thinking of a way to avert the calamity of drought to the city he was designing, Nezha appeared and advised him to design the structure of the city to mirror his body. Liu, who knew of Nezha’s dragon-slaying renown, followed his advice, and the resulting Yuan city, so the story goes, was designed to ensure Nezha’s protection.36

This creation myth reappeared during the Qing dynasty, and has persisted in one form or other to the present day. Geremie Barme has described the transposition of Nezha’s form onto the Old City in the following way:

> 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

36 See Chan, *Legends of the Building of Old Peking*, for an exhaustive survey of the different manifestations of this myth in imperial Beijing.
the gates represent the wheels of fire and water on which the playful spirit traversed the heavens.

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. 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.\(^{37}\)

Many describe Beijing's recent transformation, which has involved the destruction of much of the Nezha City (*Nezha cheng* 哪吒城), as a dismemberment of the deity's body, which has led to a removal of his protection of the city. In this latest chapter, Nezha has been pulled apart, and replaced by the absurd figure of a bird—a Boschian nightmare made up some of the bits and pieces the new city.

According to one taxi driver:

This Beijing of ours was once Nezha—three-headed, six-armed Nezha with his feet on wind-fire wheels, golden halberds in his hand, and a sword and cudgel for defeating demons tucked in his belt. He was known by everyone—he they in heaven or on earth. From this you can see we've got traitors in our midst: they don't like Beijing, they think it's too backward, not friendly enough towards the foreign devils. We can't have that these days, can we? But all the good things have fallen into the hands of the devils. Which is why the bastards with all their plans have turned Beijing into a 'bird' [a word, in Beijing dialect, with a meaning similar to 'crap'].

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The bird’s legs are stabbed onto the East Third Ring Road—the off-kilter ‘big underpants building’ that serves as China Central TV’s headquarters. Its head is over on the West Ring Road, beak agape—the damn thing they call the Millennium Monument. Of course, a big bird like that needs a nest, doesn’t it? Well, the nest has been plonked down on the North Fourth Ring Road. On the radio they even boast that it’s the biggest nest in the world. Fuck me, but what the hell is so impressive about heaping scrap metal into a pile?

Of course, a bird needs more than a nest. It needs to eat. So they built it the Water Cube, a Perspex birdfeeder. Big birds lay big eggs, and this bastard’s laid its egg right on Chang’an Avenue—‘China’s Great Whorehouse’.

After a deluge of unprecedented rainfall that overwhelmed Beijing’s antiquated drainage system on 21 July 2012 resulted in at least 77 deaths and made many of its roadways unpassable, the capital’s Olympic makeover was once again brought into question. Many online critics suggested the events undermined the credibility of the entire reconstruction of Beijing, proving it was little more than the triumph of image over substance. According to one Weibo user, ‘There’s a city that poured huge sums of money into the Olympics, a nation’s capital. When it rained in this city, the streets flooded. People drowned in their cars. A policeman died of electric shock. This city is called Beijing.’ Poignant comparisons were also made

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between the drainage system of the modern city, and that of Ming-era Forbidden City, which had apparently avoided any kind of flooding altogether.  

The CCTV complex at Guomao has been the object more than most of anxieties about China’s present and future. While the authorities consider it ‘a paramount symbol of new China, [and the] crown jewel of a 30-year economic boom’, others have not felt comfortable with the excesses that the complex signifies. While architects and engineers praise the main tower’s seemingly impossible ‘trapezoidal loop’, many locals less savvy with the latest postmodern lingo refer to it somewhat less deferentially as Beijing’s ‘Big Pants’ (da kucha 大裤衩). Some wags have found other connotations in the main CCTV Tower and its nearby counterbalance, the TVCC annex, pointing out a resemblance to the coupling of male and female genitalia.

There have also been other, more foreboding interpretations. According to Campanella, when fire consumed the almost completed phallic TVCC building, the ‘yang’ to the ‘yin’ of the main CCTV doughnut, on the final day of the Lunar New Year in 2009, some commentators suggested it was punishment for the billions of yuan the state had spent on the complex’s construction. Others, more ominously, suggested that ‘the “dehydrating” flames symbolized the severe drought in north China, the worst in a generation’.

44 Ibid.
In contemporary Beijing one might be forgiven for thinking that anxiety about drought is misplaced. This impression, however, results from the ongoing, constant labour of the Chinese state, which continues to enchant the fiction of the city against the emergence of indications of an altogether different reality. In Beijing, there has been an almost irrational effort to create an image of a green city, a place of rivers, lakes and parks. However, no matter this effort, there are often barely perceptible signs that herald other futures, indicated in the presence of a gently colonising menace, which reappears as soon as it is removed from the image proffered. It is a colonisation that touches even the picture of the future city itself, and transforms the seemingly (or want-to-be) immutable symbols that constitute the city-monument of Beijing into ‘potential images’, in Gamboni’s sense: things of ambiguity and indeterminacy. The model in the hall is one such place. For, like much of the city

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See Gamboni, *Potential Images*.
outside, one discovers upon closer inspection that this potent symbol of the state-sponsored reality is covered in a thin layer of fine grey dust.
Dust and Catastrophe

The setting of the Yellow City seems vaster, more extensive than ever in the April light. One is bewildered by so much artificiality. How marvellous the genius of these people has been! To have created bodily, in the midst of an arid plain, a lifeless desert, a city twenty leagues in circumference, with aqueducts, woods, rivers, mountains, and lakes! To have created forest distances and watery horizons, to give their sovereigns illusions of freshness! And to have enclosed all this, — which in itself is so large that one cannot see its boundaries, — to have separated it from the rest of the world, to have sequestered it, if one may use the word, behind such formidable walls!

—Pierre Loti, *The Last Days of Pekin*

After a lead up marred by the international controversy surrounding the torch relay 'Journey of Harmony', the inauspicious disaster of the Sichuan earthquake in Wenchuan, and civil unrest and its violent suppression in Tibet, the Games of the 29th Olympiad, held in Beijing from 8 to 24 August 2008, were remarkably free of major incident. Visitors to the city during these self-styled ‘Green Olympics’ were presented with an historic, modern metropolis of extraordinary cleanliness and order. A new architecture of polished glass and mirrored façades dominated the city's skyline, its lustre undiminished by any of the notoriously polluted skies that had received so much attention in the weeks and years before. At ground level, Beijing

appeared a city of clean streets, manicured parks and green zones, historic and
modern shopping areas offering ‘time-honoured’ local and international brands, all
serviced and connected by an extensive and efficient transport system. Absent of the
usual rush-hour gridlock, the city was also absent of the signs of poverty and social
discord and, indeed, the general crowds and noises that often distinguish street life
in the world’s largest metropolises. Much of the celebration that usually characterises
an Olympic host city, apart from several specially designated areas, was largely
restricted to within the Olympic venues themselves.

The finishing touches on Olympic Beijing were added in the weeks before
the 8 August opening ceremony, during which time the authorities undertook a final
vast clean-up of the city. Echoing the clean-up that preceded the IOCEC’s arrival in
Beijing in 2001, it involved the removal of all of those disquieting elements, the
people and things that upset the state-sponsored image of the capital, that were in
many ways the very same people and things that were necessary for its construction.
This suggests the underlying symbolic and real violence that the creation of
‘harmonious society’ involves. Construction sites had been shut down so that their
general din, and associated dust and pollution, would be absent for the period of the
games. Perhaps more importantly, the city could thus be cleared of the migrant
labourers responsible for the on-going construction of the new city. They were sent
home for the period of the games, removing the city’s streets of their disturbing
presence. Usually places in which the national obsession with food is in full evidence,
restrictions on eating, drinking and sitting on the city’s sidewalks, which were also
cleared of the homeless, beggars and street vendors, had transformed Beijing’s streets
into places of relative silence, homogeneity and hygiene. Moreover, work crews had
scrubbed or painted the buildings of the city's more frequented places from top to bottom, and the municipal government introduced vehicular restrictions within the Fourth Ring Road. This resolved, for the period of the games, the problem of the city's usually inevitable traffic jams. Olympic Beijing thus became a place in which its modernity was indicated visually – an image enforced and maintained with intense vigilance and constant labour.

The performance of the Olympic events themselves mirrored the more general conceit of the Olympic city. Filmmaker Zhang Yimou led the team that directed the spectacular Opening Ceremony, The Beautiful Olympics, which included 'a consortium of non-Chinese "imagineers" from Los Angeles (Stephen Spielberg), Paris (Yves Pepin) and Sydney (Ric Birch).\(^2\) Other, perhaps less obvious, inclusions on the team included China's politburo and the PLA's General Logistics Department's deputy minister of propaganda, Zhang Jigang, who served as deputy director.\(^3\)

Several details of the staging of the Opening Ceremony were revealed later as less than genuine. In what the *New York Times* reported as a 'sleight of voice', organisers later admitted that nine-year-old Lin Miaoke rousing performance of Ode to the Motherland was in actual fact a chimeric amalgam of seven-year-old Yang Peiyi's voice and Lin's face. The politburo's direct intervention in the days before the Opening Ceremony had seen Yang replaced with Lin. Yang's face (and her imperfect teeth) apparently did not match the image that China's wanted to project into the world, so her role was reduced to providing the backing track that

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the presumably more aesthetically suitable Lin could mime to. The switch was, according to organisers, in the 'national interest'.

Moreover, authorities later admitted that a spectacular aerial view of a series of fireworks that ignited along the north–south axis from Tiananmen to the new National Stadium in the north, passed off as genuine during the staging of the event, was in fact a computer-generated contrivance. The structure of the narrative of the ceremony itself, which presented the domestic and international audience with a celebration of China's past, present and future hopes, shared the subterfuge of its visual presentation. It 'harmonised' China's multivocal stories into a monolithic, state-formulated China Story (*Zhongguode gushi* 中国的故事), eliminating 'China's 20th-century history of radical iconoclasm and struggle, as well as democratic aspirations'.

Geremie Barmé has discussed the disconcerting connection between what Zygmunt Bauman once termed the 'gardening impulse' and Beijing's modern history. In Olympic Beijing this connection was illustrated compellingly. The city was not only, in the weeks leading up to the Opening Ceremony, removed of signs that might point to the darker aspects of China's rise. Although the area had suffered from several years of severe drought, in its history Beijing had never been greener. In the weeks before 8 August, floral displays and sport-themed garden

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5 Barmé, 'China’s Flat Earth', 64. For a forensic examination of the Opening Ceremony and the history of its production, see the full article. Also, see the website, www.thechinastory.org, for more analysis of the social, cultural and political articulations of the China Story.

6 See Barmé, 'Beijing, a garden of violence'.

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arrangements had transformed many of the busier corners and streets of the city. Once again, migrant work crews were behind much of the more significant changes. They planted trees and bamboo around Beijing, often in a single night transforming the dirt- and debris-covered frontages of newly constructed hotels and malls into forests dense with foliage.

Figure 25. Garden-themed hoardings surrounding a construction site near Lama Temple, July 2008. Photograph: Kelly Layton.

The vacant areas along Beijing’s ring roads and canals were similarly transformed into flowering gardens and parks, or adorned with spectacular floral displays. Civic beautification panels announcing one or other of the latest ‘harmonious society’ tropes underpinned by garden and floral themes appeared around the dreary looking frontage of construction projects that were not completed in time for the Olympic cut-off. Similarly, newly excavated lakes and watercourses

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filled with water as key rivers, such as the previously dried up Chaobai, upon which the Shunyi Olympic Water Park had been built, began to run once again. Extravagant fountains, such as the Zhongguanxun Fountain in the city’s west, and the fountain that occupies ‘Harmony Square’ in the aquatic park, capable of shooting over 100 metres in the air, also began operation. In a short time, Beijing had become filled everywhere with signs that suggested an environment of green, aquatic abundance.

Figure 26. A poster next to one of Beijing’s canals, June 2008. It reads ‘Build an ecological water environment. Create a harmonious Beijing’. Photograph: Kelly Layton.

However, all is not well in Beijing. Since its return to capital status in 1949, seemingly intractable problems have emerged that throw into doubt its very viability: an explosion in population, severe air and land pollution, skyrocketing real-estate prices, and an infrastructure of roadways which reaches gridlock, except for the rarest...
of occasions, daily, have brought ever increasing, often unbearable pressure to bear upon the urban environment and those living there. As the Nezha creation myth, which dates to the Yuan Dynasty, illustrates, the problem of water and its lack has been the most chronic, and, even taking into account the other problems that have appeared since the city's modern development, the most urgent issue that Beijing faces.

All effort was made during the Olympics, and indeed before and since, to suggest abundance, rather than imperilment, of water resources. However, this is an impression, as the journalist and environmental activist Dai Qing has noted, that is far from the present reality. Even as Beijing now appears greener than it has been in its entire history, this has paradoxically occurred as the city's water resources have fallen to dire levels. Of Beijing's rivers, those that have not already dried up completely are well on their way, and its reservoirs, big-ticket construction projects carried out in the 1950s, are nearly completely depleted. The main reservoirs of Miyun and Guanting are at 10 per cent capacity, and Guanting's pollution levels are so severe that the water is undrinkable. The city's ground water, once considered 'inexhaustible', is dropping at an alarming rate, and contamination levels are increasing. Nonetheless, the political necessity of creating a green city, and of making Beijing as a city tenable at all costs, has led to the construction of several 'deep groundwater extraction projects' to pump water from the already depleted aquifer. This is water that was, before 2004, considered an emergency supply.

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9 See Probe International Beijing Group, *Beijing's Water Crisis*.  
10 Ibid., iv.  
11 Ibid.  
12 Ibid., 27.
constant pumping of the already depleted aquifer has led to the phenomenon of land
subsidence: as the water table dries out, Beijing is literally sinking.13

More immediately alarming has been the implementation of severe water
restrictions upon residents of Hebei and Shanxi provinces, in order to increase supply
to the capital. This has involved strict limitations on groundwater use in those
provinces, particularly in areas that surround the origins of several of Beijing’s rivers,
so as to increase runoff into the capital.14 More economically costly has been the
construction of large-scale water diversion projects – complex engineering schemes
consisting of pipelines, canals, dams and water pumping stations. They were used to
extract water from Hebei, pumping it directly into the capital’s stocks in time for the
Olympiad.15 Beijing’s growing thirst affects lands further still. In the long term, it
has been placed upon the central route of the ambitious South–North Water
Diversion Project, a complex system of canals, pumping stations and tunnels (one of
which extends underneath the Yellow River) that diverts water from the Yangtze
River watershed to China’s drought prone north. This project, which completes a
vision that Mao first enunciated in 1952, is being undertaken at greater expense than
that of the much-publicised (and criticised) Three Gorges Dam, and with
considerable environmental and social cost.16

The two projects are more generally part of an effect that sees both people
and resources sucked into Beijing, often at the expense of neighbouring (and,
sometimes distant) regions. It is a phenomenon behind the emergence of what is

13 ‘Report: Land under 50-plus Cities is Sinking’, Caixin Online, 24 February 2012,
14 Probe International Beijing Group, Beijing’s Water Crisis, 31.
15 Ibid.
termed a ‘poverty belt’ (*pinkun dai* 貧困帶) in surrounding areas. This is a description of Beijing’s damaging sphere of influence that the economist Hu Xingdou brought to a broad readership with a widely read 2006 post. In this piece, Hu calls attention in particular to the disparity between Hebei and Shanxi provinces and nearby Henan and Shandong, and Beijing itself. He writes,

> North China’s ecology is on the verge of collapse. [...] Beijing is like a great vacuum that has sucked the resources out of the areas that surround it. [...] Hebei and Shanxi, these are provinces that face severe water shortages, but they still have to ship what they have off to Beijing. There are hundreds of thousands of people who don’t have enough water to drink as a result of this. In order to protect Beijing’s water supply, to grow its trees and water its grass, people in Hebei cannot hope to even start a basic enterprise. They’re restricted to farming animals. [...] All of the gains on one side are direct losses on the other. Beijing’s development has led to the depression of areas around it. 17

As he points out, Hu wrote his piece when the capital was in the grip of a sandstorm. This illustrates another, related problem that faces Beijing. These storms are a regular occurrence in spring, and have pummeled the capital for centuries. They are evidence of the ongoing desertification of China’s north, in particular Inner Mongolia and nearby Hebei, a phenomenon that threatens to engulf the capital itself. The former premier Zhu Rongji was apparently personally concerned about this phenomenon. In 2001, he visited Xilingguole in Inner Mongolia to see for himself

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17 Hu Xingdou, ‘Guanyu qiandu de jianyi shu’. The original blog on which Hu Xingdou posted his piece has been shut down. However, it is still widely available on the internet. For example, [http://www.newcenturynews.com/Article/gd/200604/20060418205700.html](http://www.newcenturynews.com/Article/gd/200604/20060418205700.html) (accessed 20 February 2013).
one of the main sources of these springtime menaces. His visit ultimately led to the announcement of the ‘Sandification Control Programme for Areas in the Vicinity of Beijing and Tianjin’, which joined other massive reforestation programmes, such as the Three-North Shelterbelt Reforestation Programme (a programme which Deng had initiated early in the reform period). A project slated for completion in 2050, it has become known as China’s Great Green Wall. However, it is not just sandstorms from the northern deserts that threaten Beijing; parts of the county itself are under threat of turning to desert. During his visit to such areas Zhu commented, according to the scholar Feng Yongsheng, that ‘if we don’t solve this problem with urgency, Beijing will be swallowed by the desert. There is no sensationalism in this claim’.

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The extraordinary expense of Beijing’s reconstruction points to the paramount importance of the city in the telling of the China Story, of which the Olympic extravaganza formed a vital part. Beijing is not just a city, but is also a powerful national urban symbol. Its ongoing viability as capital is intimately connected with the ongoing enchantment of the rule of the regime itself. ‘Moving capitals’ (qiandu 迁都) has a long and complicating history in China. It was often the case in imperial China that a change of capitals followed the fall of a dynasty. Indeed, as discussed previously, a change of capital was a telling factor in signifying a loss of the previous Mandate of Heaven, just as rebuilding a new capital was important for establishing


the legitimacy of the new dynasty. Despite official unease, the discussion of whether, in the light of the ever increasing pressure on the environment and on the lives of those who live in Beijing or are affected by its influence, China should move capitals is a topic that has been breached on and off since the 1980s.

The economist Wang Ping, then a professor at the Capital University of Economics and Business, was perhaps the first person to publicly broach the topic when he petitioned the central government with the idea in 1980. Since then, many intellectuals in China have been engaged in a profound and delicate questioning of the ongoing suitability (and indeed sustainability) of Beijing as capital of China. In 1989, even though it was still largely a 'forbidden area', the scholar Qian Jiaxie discussed the question of the best place for China's capital, pointing out, specifically, the already dire situation regarding Beijing's water supply. For Qian, the ideal location was far to the south of Beijing, between Yangzhou and Xuzhou in Jiangsu province. The scholar Guo Jianwei, writing a year later, suggested Xiangyang (called, until 2010, Xiangfan), in Hebei province. This questioning of Beijing’s viability as capital and the discussion of possible alternatives reappeared on and off throughout the 1990s. From the turn of the century, as Beijing’s problems intensified and grew more numerous, this questioning has only increased.

For Hu, in his 2006 piece, and an increasing number of others, the only solution to the ongoing problems facing Beijing and its surrounds is for China to move the 'political capital' south out of Beijing, which would retain a diminished role as 'cultural capital'. Writing with Qin Fazhan in 2008 Hu (who had in 2006

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21 See ibid.,10–14.
petitioned various government organs with his suggestion) would post the piece, ‘A Motion to Move Capitals’, which presented a more detailed examination of the compelling reasons that Beijing was unsustainable to take on the future burdens as sole capital, and a carefully considered proposal on a model to replace it.\textsuperscript{23} As Hu and Qin point out, the economic and social cost of attempting to ameliorate Beijing’s growing problems, as evidenced in the problem of water scarcity and various diversion schemes, has reached extraordinary levels. Most ‘solutions’ lead simply to either the problem being transferred elsewhere (for example Hebei in the case of water scarcity) or of extending in scope (as has occurred in the case of attempting to correct traffic congestion by building more roads).\textsuperscript{24} For Hu and Qin, Beijing has run its course. The geopolitical reasons for its return to capital in 1949 are no longer relevant to today’s China:

Beijing was chosen as the capital of New China in a particular time and under a specific set of conditions. After several decades of construction, the city has undergone a series of colossal transformations, and has made great contributions to China’s economic and social development. However, everything that rises must also eventually decline. Now, Beijing is like an old ox trying to pull along a space shuttle: overwhelmed and inadequate.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} This piece, entitled ‘Zhongguo qiandu dongyi 中国迁都动议’ in Chinese, is widely available on the internet. It apparently forms a section of an unpublished book, parts of which Hu has posted on his new blog at: http://huxingdou.blog.ifeng.com. Hu and Qin’s proposal has been widely read, cross-posted and plagiarised in popular magazines such as Huangjin shidai (Golden Age), and been subject to numerous responses, while also being referred to on state-run news sites such as the People’s Daily (Renmin ribao). See: http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/13511338.html for example.
\textsuperscript{24} Hu Xingdou and Qin Fazhan, ‘Zhongguo qiandu dongyi’.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
Conclusion: Spectacles of Impermanence

Meanwhile dismal sheets of dust constantly invade earthly habitations and uniformly defile them: as if it were a matter of making ready attics and old rooms for the imminent occupation of the obsessions, phantoms, spectres that the decayed odour of old dust nourishes and intoxicates.

When plump young girls, "maids of all work," arm themselves each morning with a large feather-duster or even a vacuum cleaner, they are perhaps not completely unaware that they are contributing every bit as much as the most positivist of scientists to dispelling the injurious phantoms that cleanliness and logic abhor. One day or another, it is true, dust, supposing it persists, will probably begin to gain the upper hand over domestics, invading the immense ruins of abandoned buildings, deserted dockyards; and, at that distant epoch, nothing will remain to ward-off night terrors, for lack of which we have become such great bookkeepers...

—Georges Bataille, 'Dust'

Dust is often associated with things that have long lain forgotten and unused, and thus the past. For the French historian Jules Michelet, working in the Archives Nationales in Paris in 1833, the dust that rose up, that he disturbed and breathed in during the course of his work, was metaphorical. Breathing in the 'dust' of the archive, inky traces on parchment and paper, was the slow work of the historian. For

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Michelet it was a work of resurrection, which brought quondam worlds back to life by placing them once again within the 'light' of the present.\(^2\)

However, Michelet, in pursuit of his patient work, could not help but breathe in the residues of histories other than those that enjoyed his immediate attention. For the historian Carolyn Steedman, it was the physical layers of dust that had come to rest upon the documents Michelet disturbed that were of greater concern. These layers are like sediments of time, which insinuate in their very composition and the structure of their resting the disquieting reminders of worlds past. Michelet's breathing in of the dusty air of the archives, rather than resurrection, for Steedman signified disease and death, with the dust he inhaled a composite of the products and pollutants of those 'filthy trades' of his time and before that had come via various 'circuitous routes' and decompositions to settle finally on the documents and their crumbling bindings that he sifted through.\(^3\)

This work has analysed Beijing as a city of spectacle and of dust (both real and metaphorical). The concern throughout has been with how state visions of the city's modernity have engaged with the complex, lived-in historical and social habitus of the city, and the very physical threats augured by Beijing's dusty reality: the city as seen from 'above' and experienced 'below'. Underpinned by the conceptual metaphors of Beijing as both a 'city of spectacle' and a 'city of dust', I have examined Beijing's powerful, problematic doubling as an actual place and a figurative site, as a place for the living and a symbol of one or other occupying power, and a centre of one or other totalising worldview. The focus has been on the effect Beijing's role as a


\(^3\) Ibid., 26–7.
symbolic centre and synecdoche of the nation has had on the flows of history and meaning there – an effect amplified by the coincidental confluence of an ancient Chinese worldview and the modern obsession with hygiene and the transparency of space. At times, this has meant the attendant reordering of the city to better represent the vision of the occupying power of the day. However, at other times (although sometimes at the same time) human practice and its complicating histories and realities have themselves distorted this vision 'on the street', altering its very meaning.

Following the introductory chapter, in Chapter 2 I sought to give some important background on the development of Beijing as an imperial symbol of power in dynastic times, as a way to set up the discussion of the remainder of the work. Chapter 3 began in what I termed Beijing's modern period, one that follows on the destruction of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness in 1860, and the subsequent arrival of foreign 'barbarians' to take up their increasingly influential occupation of the city within the previously impenetrable walls, and up to the early republican period. Against a background of the changes taking place in the city (especially significant in the end of the nineteenth century) I looked at some of the contrasting visions of Beijing from below and above that these newly modern visitors left in their memoirs and travel guides, which often compare the filth, squalor and chaos of the streets with the elaborate ordered beauty of the city as viewed from its walls. Chapter 4 examined a frequently neglected era of the city, the period following the communist occupation in early 1949, when the city was still called Beiping, and the period after its regaining the status of capital of China in September of that year. As the city was once again the central focus of political power in China, and now symbolic centre of
the new socialist revolution, I examined the extensive clean-up of both the physical and social environment of the city. Chapters 5 and 6 straddled the socialist and reform eras, looking firstly at the destruction that was wrought on the city over these periods and, in the reform era, a paradoxical return in the contemporary cityscape of hygienic images of the city's obliterated, reimagined antiquity. The following chapters 7 and 8 continued this meditation of the 'hygiene of vision' at work in the constitution of the contemporary city-monument of Beijing, focussing the analysis on the city's Olympic reconstruction, the narratives of the future that have surrounded it, and the other possibilities for interpretation that they have occluded.

In his discussion of the interesting cultural milieu and associated efflorescence of historical memory and practices of Beijing in the 1920s, David Strand suggested that some cities 'are like palimpsests. The imperfectly erased past is visible even though only the imprint of the present can be clearly deciphered. By contrast, Beijing in the 1920s, as a human and physical entity, clearly preserved the past, accommodated the present, and nurtured the basic elements of several possible futures'. It is not insignificant, I believe, that this occurred as the city itself was gradually sloughing off its role as political capital (a role of which it was completely stripped in 1928, when the capital of a unified China was relocated in the south, to Nanjing). As I have attempted to show, especially in the second half of this work, there does seem to be a relationship between Beijing's status as capital, the symbolic policing of its historical and social dust, and various attempts to prescribe and proscribe its inhabitants' ways of being in and seeing the city and nation. In particular, when presided over by the authoritarian post-Liberation state, there has

4 Strand, Rickshaw Beijing, 7
been a monopolisation, in the public realm, of the ways in which the past, present and future have been, and can be, narrated.

Perhaps the most evident outcome of Beijing’s central position in socialist and post-socialist China has been the way everyone has been forced, in some way, to make sense of their world through the prism of this narrative, even if only to rally against it. It is a form of cultural violence that seems to reduce the great expanse of human possibility, annihilating difference to a series of postures that by necessity must be grounded in some way (whether in agreement or opposition) to this fundamental, state-sponsored narrative and its imaginative, reality constricting power. In China, with the multi-vocal stories of place harmonised within the monolithic story of the state, there has been little opportunity for a public reckoning of the more disquieting and unsettling, or just complex, aspects of that country’s socialist and post-socialist eras. Nor is there much chance for people to achieve a public reconciliation of the significant and conflicting heritages of their own lives, especially those that have been forced to the margins of history and society.

A similar process of ‘editing’ has occurred, as I have demonstrated, in the ways that the past is represented in the contemporary city. Whereas the history-conscious rulers of the Republican city made efforts to preserve the remnants of the capital’s past and acknowledge its complex history, in contemporary Beijing, while there have been concerted attempts to reconstitute aspects of the traditional city, interweaving thereby heritage into the urban fabric of the new, this has concomitantly involved the neglect, if not the wholesale erasure, of some uncomfortable aspects of the past, the palimpsest of history that underlies the contemporary city. Indeed, as I demonstrated in the last two chapters of the work,
even the representation of the city’s future has been subject to such pre-emptive ‘editing’. As the environmental problems facing Beijing have become increasingly grave, so too has investment increased in Beijing as the prime symbol in the story of China’s rise into a new ‘prosperous age’. This investment has implicated also an increasingly onerous and expensive negative labour aimed at maintaining the viability of the city as capital, and trying to keep it clean, green and dust free, and the state monopolisation of the ways in which the country’s present and future are imagined in the public realm. In Beijing, however, the constant invasion of dust, both those spectres of the past and untimely apparitions of the present often excised from the retelling of the city’s story, and the very real menace of physical filth, dust particles and disease that always already colonises the city the moment it is cleaned, are markers of the mutability and impermanence of what is presented as an immutable reality – signs that point to other realities, and other futures, and that future beyond the future of the nation itself.

Perhaps it is here that we can detect a more profound motivation for action and argument that both those who maintain Beijing’s viability, and those who would call for an alternative capital, share in common. To examine this motivation is to move beyond those uncomfortable questions about relocating the capital or those concerning the legitimacy and legacy of the one party-state to look at the labour of meaning itself, and that very human struggle against the forces of entropy and impermanence. The constant invasion of dust, the pulverised remnants of times passed and present, not only disrupts the state’s vision for Beijing. It perhaps also plays upon a deeper fear expressed by the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre’s Nausea, Roquentin:
I am afraid of cities. But you mustn't leave them. If you go too far you come up against the vegetation belt. Vegetation has crawled for miles towards the cities. It is waiting. Once the city is dead, the vegetation will cover it, will climb over the stones, grip them, search them, make them burst with its long black pincers; it will blind the holes and let its green paws hang over everything.\(^5\)

In Beijing, however, rather than a fear of green nature overwhelming the structures of the city, there is a concern among the authorities and inhabitants alike of the place falling prey to dust and pollution, or of being swallowed up by the expanding desert. Both fears seem to stem from an anxiety over the impermanence of things, that the world now inhabited will one day fall to ruin and oblivion, abandoned and forgotten, given over to eroding, encroaching nature. In Beijing, a city so much made to signify the permanence of order and the meaning of things past, present and future, dust figures that 'distant epoch' beyond history that Georges Bataille wrote of, beyond the prescribed future as advertised by the prognosticators and imagineers of modernity. At that time, dust may finally gain the upper hand, and settle upon the monuments of the current age.\(^6\) Here it may rest in stillness, to be disturbed one day in a future when the dust of the forgotten past, our present, rises up to be breathed in once again.

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\(^6\) See Bataille, 'Dust'.

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