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From ‘Beiping’ to ‘Beijing’: Continuity and Change from Republican to Communist Beijing Through Tourist Guidebooks

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The year 1949 is often depicted as a radically revolutionary moment in Beijing’s history. Marking the destruction of the old Republican regime and the ascendancy of the new Communist regime – a change that heralded the return of Beijing’s status as the national capital – 1949 was in many ways a pivotal moment in the city’s history. As such, much of the historiography of modern Beijing treats 1949 as a historic rupture, focusing either on the pre-49 or the post-49 years. Examples include David Strand’s *Rickshaw Beijing*, Madeleine Yue Dong’s *Republican Beijing*, and the many books written about Beijing after China’s normalization of relations with the United States in 1972. Works that do straddle this temporal boundary, such as *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, often emphasize the discontinuities between Republican and Communist Beijing: “For the city of Beijing as for the rest of China, the year 1949 was a momentous turning point... Beijing under Mao experienced many

physical [and]... social transformations.”¹ Symbolic of this discontinuity was the vast transformation in Beijing’s architecture, which saw the “creation of new public spaces and buildings” and “the destruction of major gates and walls.”² The Communist era is often depicted as a time of great destruction, a time that saw the disappearance of “Old Beijing,” with its endless rows of *hutongs*, and the creation of a modern “Socialist Beijing,” with endless rows of smokestacks.

However, though acknowledging the monumental shift in Beijing’s trajectory that occurred with the takeover of the Communist Party, in this paper I propose an alternative

- 1 Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novoy, and Haili Kong. *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 172.
- 2 Li, et al. *Beijing*, 172.

narrative: instead of thinking of 1949 as a radical *break* in Beijing's trajectory, the transformations occurring in Beijing post-1949 were, in many ways, fundamental *continuations* of changes that were already occurring in Republican Beijing. In contrast to the standard narrative of the Communist destruction of "Old Beijing," I instead argue for a subtler story: the selective historicization, preservation, and nationalization of particular imperial "historical" sites on one hand, and the self-conscious modernization of quotidian architecture and the creation of new "modern" monumental architecture on the other.

In this narrative, these forces that shaped early Communist Beijing – this selective historicization and self-conscious modernization – were the very forces that shaped Republican Beijing, as Madeline Yue Dong demonstrates in her excellent book *Republican Beijing*. I use Dong's argument as a guiding conceptual framework upon which I base my comparison between Republican and Communist Beijing.

Guidebooks as Sources: Similarities and Differences in Rhetorical Purposes

I turn to Beijing tourist guidebooks in order to make my argument, tracing and tracking changes in the guidebooks' depictions of Beijing and Beijing's "places of interest," as one guidebook puts it.³ Naturally, before proceeding, it is important to explore the usage and consequences of viewing transformation in Beijing through the lens of guidebooks. As works written for an express function – generally, to inform readers of "what to see"⁴ on their trip to Beijing – as we examine the portrayal of place in Beijing tourist guidebooks, we must keep this basic function in mind. Naturally, the content of guidebooks will tend towards discussion of monumental sites and their histories, places and information about sites which visitors to Beijing would find most interesting. At the same time, we must also remember that despite sharing this common function, such a function can be appropriated and used by historical actors acting in different interests for various purposes – commercial, political, cultural, intellectual.

Perhaps the easiest categorization of guidebooks is a temporal one: guidebooks written in the Republican Period, and those written in the Communist Period. Guidebooks written in the Republican Period included in this paper are *Baedeker's Russia with Teheran, Port Arthur, and Peking* (1914), *Peiping and North China* (1928 – 1934, most likely 1933), *In Search of Old Peking* (1935), and *Beiping Luxing Zhinan* (北平旅行指南) (1935). Guidebooks written in the Communist Period included in this paper are *Beijing*

Youlan Shouce (北京游览手册) (1957), *Peking: A Tourist Guide* (1960), and *Places of Interest in Beijing* (1984). There is a natural temporal break in the publication of English and Chinese language guidebooks between 1937 and 1949, as during these years Beijing was first taken over by the Japanese military, then wracked by civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. Interestingly, a number of Japanese language guidebooks to Beijing were published during this time period; however, due to language limitations, these guidebooks were excluded in this project.

However, beyond this categorization are a number of other categories. The authors of these guidebooks, for example, potentially have different motivations and purposes behind writing their books – some guidebooks were written by government writers, others by economic associations, still others by foreigner expatriates living in Beijing. Another categorization is language – Chinese versus English – as different language books obviously target different audiences: Chinese domestic audiences, for example, versus Western ones. Interestingly enough, some of the English language Communist era guidebooks were in fact nearly direct translations of Chinese language guidebooks, albeit with minor changes, suggesting that the Communist government wanted to convey the same message to both its Chinese and foreign audiences.

With that, let us take a closer look at historical trends transforming the face of Republican Beijing, and see how they continued into the Communist era.

The Historicization of Imperial Places

Republican Beijing: "Neglected" Imperial Grandeur and "Ugly" Modernity

With the 1911 Revolution and the collapse of millennia of dynastic rule, a newly Republican Beijing inherited the vast, splendid, yet decaying imperial architecture of the late Qing. With the change in regime, Beijing went through some fundamental transformations. As Madeline Dong demonstrates, Beijing was for the first time unified under a single municipal government (a development that Strand also shows in *Rickshaw Beijing*), and "the new Republican state envisioned... commercial and industrial development" and a "modern" city, which required a new, open "spatial order conducive to increased mobility of people and goods."⁵ As such, from such a perspective, "the physical evidences of Beijing's imperial past were obstacles to modernization and had to be removed."⁶

In other words, for much of the Republican era, Beijing's majestic imperial architecture was quite neglected

3 Zhaohua Yan and Qixin Zhu. *Places of Interest in Beijing* (Beijing: China Travel and Tourism, 1984).

4 L. C. Arlington, and William Lewisohn. *In Search of Old Peking* (Peking: Henri Vetch, 1935), vii.

5 Madeleine Yue Dong. *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23.

6 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 24.

by the municipal government, who instead chose to focus on modernization projects such as road-building, school establishment, and the construction of the streetcar system – actions that we tend to read into the Communist government, but not so much the Republican one. We can see these dual forces at work in the guidebooks. Foreign guidebooks to Republican Beijing all talk about the poor state of the various sights of Beijing; *Peiping and North China*, for example, observes how it was once “possible to walk completely around the city on [the city] wall... but most of the inclines leading to it are now closed and weeds and brambles grow luxuriously on it.”⁷ *In Search of Old Peking* mentions repeatedly the deplorable state of historical sites, such as how “The Halls of Examinations... fell into disuse and were razed in 1913, the first intention being to erect parliament buildings... this was never carried out and it is now used as a rubbish dump,”⁸ or how the Temple of Heaven’s “numerous buildings... have been left to the wear and tear of the elements,” with “the hall for musicians and the stables for sacrificial animals [being] turned into a wireless station and a medical experimental station, since the establishment of the Republic.”⁹

In these sections we see the emergence of a curious theme threaded throughout *In Search of Old Peking* – that of a blatant modernizing impulse that destroyed (in the Western author’s view) much of the city’s old imperial charm and heritage. The appropriation of these historical buildings for modern uses such as a “wireless station” and a “medical experimental station” display the extent to which the Temple of Heaven had lost its practical utility in a modernizing Beijing. The complete destruction of the Halls of Examination in favor of building parliament building or rubbish site again demonstrates in a shocking manner the casual disregard with which the new authorities treated the old imperial sites in favor of constructing new, modern sites.

The guidebook makes it clear this neglect was intentional. The guidebook’s introduction reads:

As [this book] is about “Old Peking,” it describes not only buildings that are to be seen to-day, but also those that have disappeared completely... Readers may be led to believe that the authors have sometimes mixed up the two, when during their rambles round Peking they are unable to find monuments or buildings that are mentioned in the book as still existing. This, unfortunately, is not the fault of the authors – they would be only too glad if it was – but is due to the indifference of the Chinese themselves, more especially of their

authorities, towards the historical monuments in which Peking is so rich. The loss by vandalism and utter neglect has been proceeding at such a rate that, on repeated occasions, buildings and historical monuments have actually disappeared while the authors were still writing about them.¹⁰

Some of the acts of “vandalism” and “utter neglect” include “converting historic palaces into modern restaurants and tea-houses; famous temples into barracks and police stations,” “defacing age-old walls and tablets with political slogans,” and most damningly, the destruction of “historical buildings and monuments” by “official orders.”¹¹

However, while acknowledging the very real neglect of these ‘historical’ sites, we must also remember that these foreign authors are imposing their orientalist framework of understanding upon the city of Beijing. The authors wax romantic about the grandeur and incredible beauty of old “historical sites” while contrasting them with what they call “ugly,” “uninteresting,” and “modern” buildings, such as the Ministry of Communications or the Parliament Building.¹² These categorizations of *modern* and *historical* were to a certain extent the product of Western orientalism, the exoticization and creation of an “ancient,” “unique,” “timeless” Beijing of “creaking bamboo poles and wooden carts, the distinctive cries of various street merchants, and the beat of the night watchman’s stick... all unchanged for centuries.”¹³

This simplistic Western view of juxtaposing the beautiful “traditional” with the ugly “modern” ignores the perspective of many Chinese intellectuals. As Dong points out, intellectuals such as Hu Shi and Chen Xujing advocated “wholesale westernization” – Chen, for example, notes that “it is the Westerner’s business if they want to advocate Eastern culture; but it is the responsibility of people of the East to westernize.”¹⁴ What the authors of *In Search of Old Peking* may have sniffed at as signs of hideous modernity, many Chinese saw as symbols of national progress. At the same time these authors fawned over the beauties of the old buildings of Beijing, many Chinese cringed at signs of what they saw to be their backwardness.

In summary, in the early years of the Republic, Beijing’s imperial architecture was frequently neglected by local elites, contradicting the standard narrative of a dichotomy between a romanticized “Old Beijing” in the Republican period and a blindly modernizing, historically destructive government in the Communist period. Republican Beijing was just as susceptible to this historically destructive modernizing trend as Communist Beijing. However, Beijing elites soon discovered foreign fascination with

7 Peter Gum and Bertha Gum. *Peiping and North China, Information and Illustrations of the Important Places to See* (Peiping: (Grand Hotel Des Wagons Lits, n.d), 6.

8 Arlington and Lewisohn, *Old Peking*, 155.

9 *Ibid.*, 105.

10 *Ibid.*, 1.

11 Arlington and Lewisohn, *Old Peking*, 1.

12 *Ibid.*, 162.

13 Gum, *Peiping and North China*, 4.

14 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 98.

Beijing's imperial buildings, such as that of the authors of *In Search of Old Peking*, could be exploited for profitable and nationalist purposes, as we will explore next.

Ambitious Plans: Yuan Liang and the Beginnings of Historic Preservation in Beijing

In 1928, Beijing lost its status as the capital of Republican China, and its name was changed to "Beiping." Such a change had a profound effect on the city; without the status and government functions that came with being the capital, Beiping's economy was crippled and Beiping lost many of its wealthy residents.¹⁵ Some 32.7 percent of labor union members were unemployed in wake of the change in status.¹⁶

As a result, Beiping had to find a new way of recasting itself and making itself vibrant again. One way was tourism. Beiping appears to have been immensely popular with foreigners, with its historical sites drawing particular attention. *Peiping and North China* said in its introduction, "in all the Orient Peiping is the one city which may be said to offer everything to the tourist... in many ways the heart of the country, representative of all that is oldest and richest in it its life,"¹⁷ while *In Search of Old Peking* explained Beiping's appeal in the following manner:

The magic of Peking, the world-wide fame and charm of this city of enchantment, spring from an enduring source. For nearly three centuries it was the capital of a mighty empire, the seat of some of the ablest, most cultured, and most artistic monarchs who have ever sat on a throne. On its embellishment they lavished continual care and attention and expended vast sums of money... There is scarcely a building of any age in this great city that cannot make its contribution towards the history of the country... she remains the city of romantic legend, the Mecca of lovers of art from all over the world, and to tourists the chief attraction in China, if not in the whole of the East.¹⁸

Considering Beiping's appeal to foreign tourists, it thus seems quite logical that in 1929, the Beijing municipal council issued a "Proposal for Beiping's Development" that emphasized the development of Beiping's "national tradition," "scholarship and arts," and the "expression of Oriental culture" in order to position Beiping as China's premier center of culture and tourism.¹⁹

Continuing on this trend, in 1933, Yuan Liang was appointed mayor of Beiping. Yuan was notable for his

desire to preserve imperial places and create a new "Beiping Tourist District" as a way of revitalizing the city. Under his guidance, and noting that "people from Europe and America are all amazed by the beauty of Oriental culture" in Beiping, in 1935 the municipal government proposed a project to "renovate palaces, gardens, temples, and other famous sites," preserving them in order "to develop international tourism" and "inspire morale."²⁰ Much of the motive was profit based; city planners calculated that if China – and Beiping in particular – could capture a fraction of American travel spending, valued at over sixty million dollars, Beiping could stand to profit enormously.

For the first time Beiping's government began to consider preserving historical imperial space instead of demolishing, ignoring, or appropriating them for modern functions, as we saw in the previous section. Though preservation was mainly directed towards foreign tourists and motivated by economic gain, it was also partially driven by an elite Chinese desire for the preservation and strengthening of "Chinese culture," as reflected in *In Search of Old Peking*:

"That the Chinese people, formerly so attached to their own culture and customs, should have acquiesced in this wanton destruction of their ancient works of art, derived from a civilization going back for thousands of years, is not only surprising, but is of serious ill-omen for the artistic and cultural future of the country as a whole. This is not written in a carping spirit or the narrow view of a foreigner: *many Chinese think the same, and say so quite freely.*"²¹

Thus, the guidebook suggests certain elements of Chinese society, disturbed by the Republican neglect of Beiping's rich historical sites, began caring for the preservation of Beiping's historical heritage. This is corroborated by Dong, who cites Qinghua professor Zhang Xiruo as an example of such a preservationist. Zhang, suffering from a national inferiority complex compared to Western nations, found that such feelings of inferiority disappeared and were replaced by genuine national pride by the magnificent palace and imperial architecture of Beiping, saying "the vulgarity of London, clumsiness of Berlin, repetition of Paris and Versailles, tediousness of Rome, what can be a match for Beiping?"²²

It is thus in the mid-1930s, in the years of the Republic, amid a nascent growing Chinese nationalism, that we can

15 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 80.

16 Nankai Weekly Statistics Survey, January 19, 1931, cited in Madeline Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 80.

17 Gum, *Peiping and North China*, 4.

18 Arlington and Lewisohn, *Old Peking*, 1.

19 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 81.

20 Shizheng pinglun (Review of city administration) 3, February 16, 1935, cited in Madeline Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 91.

21 Arlington and Lewisohn, *Old Peking*, vi. Emphasis added.

22 Zhang Xiruo, "Quanpan xihua yu Zhongguo benwei" (Wholesale Westernization and China-centeredness), in Luo Rongqu, Cong "xihua" dao "xiandaihua" (from "Westernization" to "Modernization"), page 452, cited in Madeline Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 99.

locate the birth of historic site preservation in Beijing – not only as a pragmatic, profit motivated measure, but also as the creation of a new national space and history inscribed into the old imperial sites. This is what I mean by “historicization” of space; imperial sites, which previously had no meaning attached to them other than their imperial functions which were lost after the 1911 Revolution, became places where new nationalist symbolic meanings were formed and inscribed into their architecture. Chinese elites, looking for symbols of national pride, found them in the awe-inducing architecture of China’s imperial past. Though this new trend in Beijing’s development was cut short by the Japanese occupation in 1937, when we skip ahead to the Communist takeover of Beijing in 1949, we find that this process of historicization picks up right where it was left off.

Preserved Historical Sites as National Symbols in Socialist Beijing

When the Communist Party marched triumphantly into Beijing in 1949, the leadership of the Communist Party was confronted with the question of the future of Beijing. Designated once again as the capital of China, Communist leaders envisioned Beijing as the symbol of a bright new socialist future. But what did a socialist Beijing look like? In order to determine the future of the city, the Capital City Planning Commission was founded in May 1949, commencing the famous debates between total preservationists, most prominently architectural scholars Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhangxiang, who wanted to construct an entirely new administrative center outside of the city walls, and advocates of industrialization and appropriation of imperial Beijing, who wanted to place the administration in the center of the imperial city and demolish the city walls.²³ The latter won out.

In the standard narrative, the preservationists’ defeat and the demolition of the old city walls reflected the Communist disregard of history. Li, Dray-Novén, and Kong note in *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City*; “to the victorious Communist revolutionaries, [the city walls] symbolized the rotten old society and the authority of the privileged ruling class whom they just defeated.” As evidence, they cite transportation minister Zhang Bojun, who said that they did not “have yesterday, so there was no need to preserve yesterday. Therefore, many great things that remained from yesterday, such as the city wall and archways on the streets, of course were worthless.”²⁴

However, when we examine guidebooks published

in the early Communist period from 1957 to 1960, we find that to the contrary, instead of a Communist disdain for history and the old imperial sites, the Communist government boasted of Beijing’s “history of more than three thousand years” and “its magnificent edifices.”²⁵ Indeed, the guidebook repeatedly and proudly points out the Communist government’s efforts to preserve and renovate historical sites. For example, the guidebook’s section on the Yi He Yuan says, “this resort continued to suffer under either the rule of the Japanese and their puppets, or the Kuomintang reaction government... its further deterioration during these 30-odd years was tremendous, and only through the great efforts that were made after liberation was it restored to its old splendor.”²⁶ On a section on Xiang Shan, the Fragrant Hills, the guidebook says, “this fine garden was practically deserted before liberation, and ruins lay everywhere. Many exquisite buildings, such as the Chien Hsin Chai (Unbosoming Chamber) were completely dilapidated, the ancient Hsiang Shan Temple was only a pile of rubble... after liberation, Fragrance Hill was developed anew.”²⁷ Such passages surface countless numbers of times in these guidebooks, following a formulaic pattern of depicting a historical treasured site neglected and in ruins before “liberation,” then rejuvenation and restoration to former grandeur under the Communist authorities.

At first glance, it is difficult to reconcile these passages and the emphasis on historical restoration and preservation with the Communist Party’s demonizing of China’s imperial past. The Communist government obviously did not renovate these old imperial sites for the sake of the monarchy. Nor would it seem that they, as the Republican government did, renovate these sites for the sake of capitalist profit. So then, why did they go through the trouble of preserving these imperial sites? In one revealing passage, the guidebook shows both the Communist’s ideological hatred of the imperial monarchy, and the reasons why they preserved vestiges of imperial times despite this hatred:

...all these edifices of Peking were built for the enjoyment of the feudal ruling class and to make possible the display of the wealth and power of the feudal emperors. No consideration was ever given to the needs of the working people or to those of production... [with liberation,] for the first time in its history, age-old Peking, with its history of more than three thousand years and its magnificent edifices built by the working people during the centuries, belonged to the people and got a new lease of life.²⁸

23 Li, Dray-Novén, and Kong, 176.

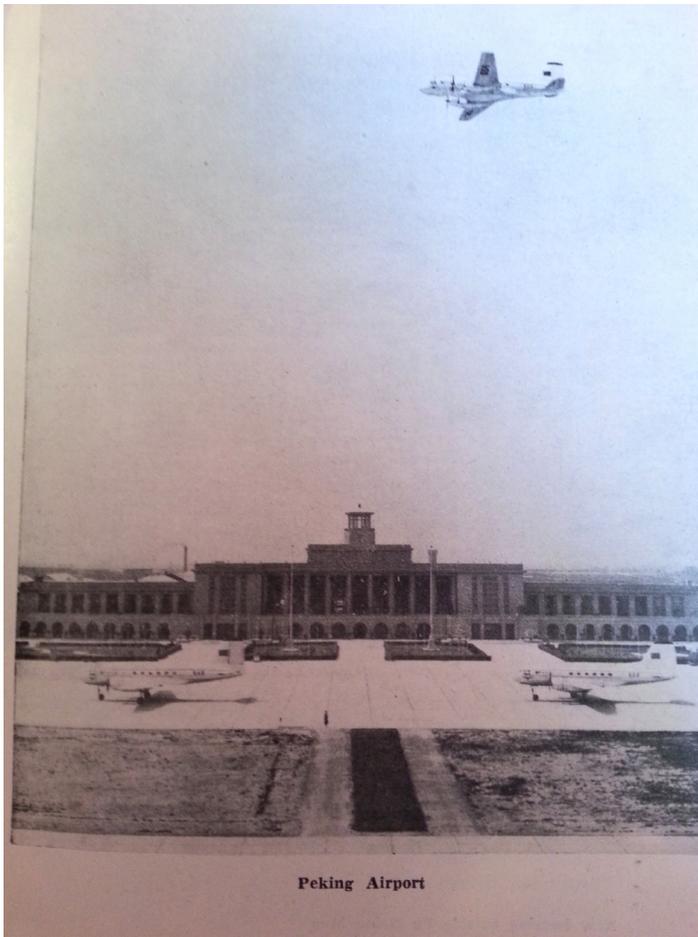
24 Zhang Yihe, Wangshi bingbu ru yan. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004, 111, cited in Li, Dray-Novén, and Kong, in *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, 177.

25 *Peking: a Tourist Guide*. Peking: Foreign Languages, 1960, 12.

26 *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 105.

27 *Ibid.*, 112.

28 *Ibid.*, 12.



On the left is a map of Beijing's streetcar system in 1957. Note how the city walls are represented as an obstacle pierced by the streetcar lines, just as in Republican Beijing. On the right is a picture of Peking Airport displayed in a 1960 guidebook, showing how transportation in Communist Beijing was as much a mark of pride as it was in the Republic.³⁶

The Communist government thus subsumed the imperial architecture left in Beijing into their own historical narrative: though the imperial architecture was built by “feudal emperors” for their own enjoyment, the “magnificent” imperial “edifices” were built by the *working people* of China, and thus, despite being the remnants of a much-hated imperial past, also represented the achievements of the Chinese people and nation.

This point is hammered home in the guidebook's section on the Forbidden City: “The symmetry and well-planned arrangement of the buildings show that the *Chinese working people* have since ancient times been most resourceful in architectural creation. The present Palaces have a history of over 500 years and are a precious object of historical interest.”²⁹ Again, the Communist government recasts these historical sites as symbols of the achievements of the Chinese working class. In this way the Communist government, just like their Republican predecessors,

inscribed their own history and nationalist meanings into Beijing's imperial spaces, continuing and deepening the process of ‘historicization’ which, as we saw earlier, had its start in 1930s Republican Beijing.

Of course, the kind of historicization that took place in Republican Beijing was of a different character than that of Socialist Beijing, as it was more oriented towards Chinese elites and foreigners, whereas the Communist's appropriation of historical sites as national symbols was clearly geared towards what the Communist Party considered ordinary or working class Chinese. But underlying these different rationales for preservation of imperial place was the same fundamental driving force: the recreation of historic places as national symbols. Imperial Chinese architecture, so beautiful yet strikingly different from modern foreign architecture, was, despite its inconvenient imperial past, a convenient symbol that allowed the Chinese to celebrate their own nation.

However, there still appears to remain a paradox in the Communist preservation of space – for of course, we cannot ignore that despite doing more preservation work

29 *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 46. Emphasis added.

than they get credit for, the Communist government did in fact destroy much of Beijing's old architecture, most notably the city walls. The destruction of the city walls appears to be a salient counterargument to the continuity between Republican Beijing and Communist Beijing. However, this destruction was in fact part of a self-conscious modernization effort that actually had its origins in *Republican* Beijing, which I will elaborate upon in the next section.

The Creation of "Modern" Place in Beijing

While this process of historicizing imperial sites was taking hold in Republican Beijing, a different, yet related process was unfolding: the impulse for self-conscious modernization; the drive to pull Beijing out of its "backwardness" and give it a modern character and identity. Though the kind of modern identity that the Communist and Republican governments wished to give Beijing may appear to be radically different on the surface – the Communist government, for one, differentiated themselves from the Republican period by categorizing the latter as "semi-feudal and semi-colonial"³⁰ – there were many more similarities than differences between the modernizing impulses inherent in both movements. To show the continuities between Republican and Communist modernization, I examine the creation of three kinds of explicitly modern places in Beijing during this time period: transportation infrastructure, stadiums and parks, and modern political monumentality.

Transportation Infrastructure and the Compromise and Destruction of the City Walls

As we saw in *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, one of the biggest differences cited between Republican and Communist Beijing's physical construction is the tearing down of the old city walls under the Communist government. However, this seemingly radical break between the two eras is actually far more understandable when we think of the complete destruction of the city walls as the culmination of decades of transportation modernization, which first surfaced under the Republic. Though Strand argues in *Rickshaw Beijing* that modern transportation projects such as streetcar track "did not replace the city walls," but rather that Beijing "preserved the past [and] accommodated the present,"³¹ in fact, transport projects set forth in motion the marginalization and eventual destruction of the city walls by recasting the walls as an obstacle to modernization.

The beginning of modernization of Beijing's

transportation infrastructure in the Republican era, such as the construction of railroads, the streetcar system, and the pavement of roads, has been well documented in the secondary literature, especially in David Strand's *Rickshaw Beijing* and Madeline Dong's *Republican Beijing*. The construction of such infrastructure was done explicitly for modernizing purposes; reformers like Kang Youwei expressed the need for new roads, commenting that "streets are higher than people's houses; dust fills up streets; and filthy air streams,"³² and Li Dazhao, another prominent intellectual, demanded in his manifesto "The New Life Beijing Residents Ought to Demand," a "municipally managed streetcar system at once."³³

The construction of these transportation systems began to significantly compromise the integrity of the walls. The new railroads pierced the city walls in many different places, causing the opening of seven doorways, the dismantling of the walls of all Inner city gates, and the destruction of Chongwen Gate.³⁴ The walls were left to rot; as one guidebook mentions, it had once been possible "to walk completely around the city on this wall," but neglect and disrepair made it unwalkable by the 1930s.³⁵ Though the walls survived, their old function of protecting the city and controlling the flow of people in and out of the city had been rendered obsolete, and now became a direct obstacle to modern transportation.

On the left is a map of Beijing's streetcar system in 1957. Note how the city walls are represented as an obstacle pierced by the streetcar lines, just as in Republican Beijing. On the right is a picture of Peking Airport displayed in a 1960 guidebook, showing how transportation in Communist Beijing was as much a mark of pride as it was in the Republic.³⁶

Both Republican and Communist governments took pride in the construction of modern transport under their authority. *Beiping Luxing Zhinan*, published in 1935, boasted how "as all the countries of the world can see, Beiping's transportation is extremely convenient,"³⁷ and advertised how Beiping was easily accessible by train, bus, plane, and streetcar from major cities across the country. *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, published 25 years later, proudly informed readers that "since liberation, there was been tremendous development in public transport in Peking," saying how under Communism, the number of buses went from 5 to 900, the number of trams from 49 to 290,

32 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 38.

33 Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, 124.

34 *Republican Beijing*, 37.

35 Gum, *Peiping and North China*, 6.

36 *Beijing Lanyou Shouce*, 156, and *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 18-19.

37 Ma, Zhixiang, *Beiping Luxing Zhinan (A Travel Guide to Beijing)*. Beijing: Jingji Xinwen She, 1935. "Transportation," 1.

30 *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 11.

31 David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 7.

and the amount of paved road from 2.19 million square meters to 10.81 million square meters. It also bragged that “Peking has become the centre of air and railway transport for the whole country... one can travel by air or train from Peking, the capital, directly to the main cities in China as well as to Moscow,” a curious echo of *Beiping Luxing Zhinan*’s boasts about Beiping’s accessibility by train and air. All this illustrates the continuity between Beiping and Beijing in their respective government’s attitudes towards transportation. Modern transport was a key priority and a point of pride in both governments, symbolizing progress and development. Though the Communist government attempted to portray their modernizing efforts as a major advancement from the past, the underlying impulse towards modern transport was clearly present in both time periods.

Understanding this continuity in transport development makes the complete destruction of the city walls under the Communists much more recognizable as a continuation of trends originating in the Republic, instead of a seismic break from the past as it is commonly portrayed. Though the 1960 guidebook says that “the Peking of today has undergone great changes and is quite different from what it was in the past,” as “the wall which formerly enclosed the city is now being demolished,”³⁸ it is extremely telling that the wall was finally demolished in 1965 to make way for *subway* construction.³⁹ Though Beijing’s leaders may have justified the demolition by dismissing the walls as being relics of the old society, the decision to demolish the walls was clearly not purely motivated by a desire to destroy all remnants of old Beijing; otherwise, the extensive efforts to preserve select historical sites as documented earlier would be completely nonsensical. Instead, the main impetus behind the demolition was ultimately the desire for modern transportation, a desire that first arose during the Republican era.

Stadiums, Sports, and National Parks

Another modernizing impulse of both the Republican and Communist governments was in the area of sports, a distinctly modern pursuit which in labor-intensive, pre-industrial Imperial Beijing would have been seen as ridiculous by most. An entire chapter in *Peking: A Tourist Guide* is devoted to Sports Centres, illustrating the importance of sports to the Communist government, at least symbolically. The guidebook depicts the growing importance of sports as being a Communist phenomenon, emphasizing discontinuity between the present and the Republican period:

“Before liberation, only a small number of people went in for sports in Peking. The reactionary

government did not pay any attention to sports and so sports declined; after liberation, under the Party’s guidance and care, sports began to flourish and develop extensively. Mass sports and physical culture became popular in schools, government organizations, army units, and other enterprises.”⁴⁰

The guidebook clearly presents the Nationalist government as being apathetic towards sports, in stark contrast to the Communist Party, who devoted significant resources to the construction of sports facilities such as the Peking Worker’s Stadium, the Peking Gymnasium, and the Hsien Nung Tan Stadium, among others.

However, this narrative is thrown into question when we examine the actual relations of the Republican government to sports. Especially striking is when we compare the Communist guidebook to *In Search of Old Peking* 25 years earlier; the authors complain in one section that it is “only a matter of time before the [outer enclosure of the Temple of Heaven] will be razed to the ground and converted into a municipal swimming-bath or stadium, or some other equally utilitarian structure.”⁴¹ Such a passage demonstrates a trend towards constructing modern sports facilities *before* the arrival of the Communists, indicating that we should rethink the Communist narrative of radical change between the Republican and Communist governments.

Another strong sign of continuity in this movement towards the increasing prominence of sports is the case of Capital Park. Capital Park was actually the former Temple of Earth that was repurposed into a park in 1925, and the southern section of the park had extensive modern sports facilities, including tennis, basketball, and soccer courts, a running track, a swimming pool, and swings. Xue Dubi, the man behind the creation of the park, explained his motives by saying “it is painful to witness the weakening of the people, the invasion of powerful countries, and the decline of our nation. It should be our fundamental principle to promote sports activities and encourage people’s morale.”⁴² Such a rationale clearly shows that during the Republican period, many authority figures did in fact pay attention to sports, in contrast to Communist claims, and furthermore paid attention to sports because of a nationalistic motive to strengthen the nation, reflected in the slogans hung around the park: “Promote militancy; encourage national spirit; advocate popular education; reshape national souls.”⁴³

Thus, despite the Communist government’s attempts to use sports to portray their own government as a radical break from the Republican past, we can see that this was obviously not the case. Just as the Communists used

38 *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 2.

39 Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, 176.

40 *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 156.

41 Arlington and Lewison, *Old Peking*, 113.

42 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 86.

43 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 86.



Before, before, and after: Imperial Tian'anmen, Chiang Kai Shek's portrait 1945 – 1949, and Mao's portrait, 1949 -

promotion of sports and their sports facilities as points of national pride, many Republican reformers, too, had fervent nationalistic desires to promote sports to improve Chinese morale and national strength. Yet again, just as in the case of transportation infrastructure, we see strong continuities between Republican and Communist Beijing in the promotion of sports. Though the Communists attempted to distance themselves from the Nationalist government, this advocacy of sports clearly had its origins in pre-Communist times.

Revolutionary Monumentality from Republican to Socialist Beijing: The Case of Tian'anmen

One of the biggest changes that occurred after “liberation” in 1949 was the creation of political monumental spaces that represented the greatness of the nascent People's Republic. The 1960 guidebook to Beijing informed visitors that “in the past ten years Peking has experienced a great upsurge in building construction,” promptly reeling off a list of new monumental constructions, among them the Great Hall of the People, the Chinese Museum Building, the Peking Railway Station, and the enlargement of Tian'anmen Square from “11 hectares to 40 hectares.”⁴⁴ With many of these buildings, the guidebook boasted of their massive scale, emphasizing their monumentality – for example, it describes the Great Hall of the People covers “an area of 171,800 square metres, larger than the area covered by all the buildings in the Imperial Palaces.”⁴⁵ Perhaps most explicitly political and monumental was the Monument to the People's Heroes, which merited its own entire detailed section in the guidebook, and “signifie[d] the Chinese people's respect for and remembrance of their revolutionary martyrs, mark[ed] their heroic struggle in fighting against internal and external enemies, and remind[ed] all who see it of the cause of China's present happiness and prosperity.”⁴⁶ This passage makes the purpose of this monument clear: the government's claim to legitimacy. By its construction, the government inscribed

its political claims into physical space.

But once again, though the guidebook and secondary literature emphasize the newness of this monumental architecture, we can actually locate the origins of this trend of monument construction in the Republican period, although it was less successful. When the Nationalists succeeded in taking Beijing in 1928, the Kuomintang, much like the Communist party, attempted to assert its own political claims of legitimacy through monument construction, such as one commemorating the martyrs of the 1911 Revolution at the Nankou train station, or another commemorating the Northern expedition build outside the north gate of the Summer Palace.⁴⁷ Though meeting with little local support, the construction of these monuments demonstrates the origins of monument construction with the Kuomintang. Even the events the Nationalist and Communist monuments were commemorating were often the same; one of the events the Communist Monument to the People's Heroes was dedicated to was the 1911 Revolution, the same event the Nationalist Nankou monument was dedicated to as well.⁴⁸

One of the most striking illustrations of this shared trend of political monumentalization was the case of the portraits at Tian'anmen Square. Tian'anmen Square was originally merely an imperial passageway of sorts, whose sole purpose was for the usage of the emperor. It had no special significance, illustrated by the fact that old maps failed to name it explicitly and demarcate it as an individual space.⁴⁹ However, with the stirrings of political consciousness and the mass student movements that began with the May 4th 1919 movement, Tian'anmen Square, as a large space conveniently located in the center of Beijing, was transformed into a space of national political significance.⁵⁰ As Tian'anmen Square became more and more symbolically important over the course of the 1920s, when the Nationalists took Beijing in 1928, they erected a

44 *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 15.

45 *Ibid.*, 15.

46 *Ibid.*, 22.

47 Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 88.

48 *Peking: A Tourist Guide*, 26.

49 Wu Hang, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), 18.

50 Wu, *Remaking Beijing*, 15.

portrait of Sun Yat-sen on Tian'anmen, flanked by slogans, which was presumably taken down after the Japanese occupied the city in 1937.⁵¹ In 1945, after the Japanese defeat, Chiang Kai-shek installed another portrait, that of himself. Naturally, this portrait, in turn, was replaced by Mao's portrait after the People's Liberation Army entered the city in 1949.

The case of the portraits at Tian'anmen explicitly demonstrates to us the continuing trend of national monument construction from its origins in the Republic straight into the Maoist era. Though the Communist government used monuments to make claims to legitimacy and signify a break from the Republican past, and though these monuments symbolized a different political entity – the CCP – from the Republican monuments – the Kuomintang – ultimately, the underlying historical trend was the same. That many of the monuments commemorated the same revolutionary histories, and that political use of portraits at Tian'anmen was preserved by the Communists, show that this modern monument construction under the Communists was not such a major change from the past as the Communist or secondary literature would have us think. Once again, we are presented with the reoccurring theme of continuity in these forces of modernization between the Republican and Communist periods – the only major difference in many cases being the name of the celebrated party or the face of the leader on the portrait.

Conclusion

Though the Communist era was a radical break from the Republican era in many respects, when we peel back some of the socialist veneer and rhetoric of the guidebooks of the early Communist government, we find that in fact many of the same forces that originated in Republican Beijing and shaped the contours of the city continued to do so in the Communist era. Rather than seeing the Communist government as destroying the remnants of “Old” Beijing in its drive towards a utopian socialist future – though that is certainly one valid way of reading it – we can see that the Communist government built upon many of the same modernizing impulses present during the Nationalist period in its creation of modern monuments, architecture, and infrastructure, as well as continuing a trend of historicizing imperial sites and turning them into places of national symbolic meaning. Though on the surface much had changed – new Soviet style buildings were constructed, Mao's portrait replaced Chiang's, the old city wall was torn down – the underlying historical forces remained fundamentally intact, pointing to a continuity between the two times that is often ignored.

Much of the impetus behind the narrative of a Communist break with a Republican past lay in the

revolutionary desire that propelled much of the changes and movements in modern Chinese history starting in the late Qing dynasty. Such revolutionary sentiments demanded the legitimization of the “new” as being progressive and nation-advancing, and the dismissal of the “old” as being backwards, no matter how different, backwards, or old the “old” really was, or no matter how new the “new” really was. Even if many of the activities that the Communist government carried out in Beijing built upon the actions of Republican governments past, the Communist government felt compelled to create a narrative that differentiated itself from the past Republican governments, leading to overemphasis on the radical differences between pre and post-1949 Beijing. One wonders how fundamentally different Beijing's architecture and physical spaces would have been if the Republican government had been allowed to continue instead of being replaced by the Communists.

Ultimately, by being able to shift through the physical transformations and rhetorical changes that were taking place in the early 20th century, we can pick out and identify this key modernizing impulse that has defined Beijing's trajectory ever since its origins, a modernizing impulse that I would argue extends even into today. As Beijing entered the 21st century, it continued its modernizing push, building a new airport, upgrading telecommunications infrastructure, constructing new subway lines, and creating new monumental places such as the Beijing Olympic stadiums, all while continuing to historicize and renovate historical places (such as by demolishing some *hutongs* while turning others into tourist districts) and burnish Beijing's image as a historical city, partially explaining the newfound nostalgia for “Old Beijing.” As Beijing continues to transform, maintaining its search for a modern Chinese identity, we will undoubtedly see these same forces at work into the foreseeable future.

51 Ibid., 69.