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"All Under Heaven" -- Megaspaces in Beijing

Abstract

Staging the 2008 Olympics is heady stuff for the modern descendants of the Middle Kingdom. Though its emperor once possessed a divine mandate to rule "All Under Heaven," China's international role has been far more circumscribed during the last century and a half. Now the Chinese believe their luck has changed. Playing host to the largest of all modern peacetime extravaganzas perfectly suits the current Chinese political imagination, succinctly if not subtly expressed in the Beijing Olympic Slogan, "One World, One Dream." Through the magic of media, the 2008 Games will certainly reach all under heaven, a scale the Chinese have embraced by sending an Olympic flag to orbit the earth for five days in 2005 aboard China's second manned space mission, Shengzhou VI (Zhao 2005).

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Staging the 2008 Olympics is heady stuff for the modern descendants of the Middle Kingdom. Though its emperor once possessed a divine mandate to rule “All Under Heaven,” China’s international role has been far more circumscribed during the last century and a half. Now the Chinese believe their luck has changed. Playing host to the largest of all modern peacetime extravaganzas perfectly suits the current Chinese political imagination, succinctly if not subtly expressed in the Beijing Olympic slogan, “One World, One Dream.” Through the magic of media, the 2008 Games will certainly reach all under heaven, a scale the Chinese have embraced by sending an Olympic flag to orbit the earth for five days in 2005 aboard China’s second manned space mission, Shengzhou VI (Zhao 2005).

The image of the world as China’s sphere of influence could be seen in talk about the Olympic torch relay, the most ambitious ever. The “Journey of Harmony” would, according to Beijing Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (BOCOG) head Liu Qi, be the most territorially extensive ever, crossing 85,000 miles and five continents, tracing the ancient Silk Road and ascending Mt. Everest (nailing down China’s claim to Tibet), before reaching the capital (Channel NewsAsia 2007). When state television broadcast “Rise of the Great Nations,” presenting the histories of nine world-dominating modern nations including the United States, the Netherlands, and England (Beijingmike

2007), there was scant need for the series to name China as the coming tenth to ascend to greatness for its domestic audience. Many citizens are said to believe their leaders have a secret strategy that will make this century China's. Meanwhile, visually lush programs about the history of ancient China are endlessly recycled on the West-directed English-language channel.

Architecture has long been at the heart of Chinese statecraft, so it is no surprise that built form has a special role to play in the XXIX Olympiad. The character of Olympic public space is part of the effort to change the subject from protests about China's human rights record, its role in Darfur, its labor practices, and the lingering memory of the 1989 massacres of protesters in the streets near Tiananmen Square by giving expression to "the firm belief of a great nation, with a long history of 5,000 years and on its way to modernization, that it is committed to peaceful development, harmonious society and people's happiness," as the BOCOG Web site insists (BOCOG 2005). Always just offstage, the past is a resource for reinventing not only the Maoist legacy recent leaders have been at pains to go beyond, but less savory elements of the current regime as well.

Taken as a whole, Olympic construction, emblemized in Olympic Green and its venues, is the latest in a series of contemporary public works projects including the Tibet-Qinghai railway (the world's highest) and the Three Gorges Dam (the world's largest) that form a stately procession forward from the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and Tiananmen Square, all of which will greet Olympic visitors in newly restored splendor. The massive coordination of people and resources that produced each of these works in times past hints of a historically preordained sweep to the "harmonious society" invoked by Hu Jintao as a national goal. As well, it deflects concern for the several millions who have borne the brunt of Olympic development directly, either as laborers without rights or protection, or citizens who have lost homes and livelihoods in this latest wave of urban redevelopment (Watts 2005). The harmonious society also appeals to newly resurrected Confucian values of respect for authority and stability. Maligned during the Maoist era, this most venerable of Chinese political traditions has reemerged as an invented tradition for legitimizing the considerable domestic social burdens created by a rising China.¹

According to the social theorist Henri Lefebvre every society produces its characteristic material spaces (1991). Lefebvre posits a trialectic of contending and contradictory forces that can go some way to

plumb the multiple material layers of the current Olympic drama, though any such framework for such sociospatial complexity must be suggestive at best. Lefebvre's first layer is the space conceived by rulers, architects, planners, and bureaucrats. It expresses what Amos Rapoport has called designers' values (1982). This officially authorized spatial imagination of Beijing 2008 seeks to project, above all, the image of a sophisticated modern country open to a world that will be enthusiastically receptive in its turn. For this purpose, Olympic planning and execution have been shared out among the State Council, the Beijing Municipal Government, the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee, the Chinese Olympic Committee, the International Olympic Committee, and a collaborating army of sponsors, developers, architects, and construction crews. The same could not be said for many of the people most directly affected by it. Still, Olympic goals occupy a prominent place in the 10th and 11th Five-Year Plans and all supporting texts addressing the development of specific spaces and projects. These goals are publicly articulated on BOCOG's Web site, which offers official commentary on Olympic preparation and will be the authorized site for the festival itself.

Lefebvre's second layer emerges as those whose lives unfold in the effort to bring "conceived" space to life struggle to shape it to their own symbolic and material uses. Here are manifest all the desires and passions of users' values of reception, resistance, accommodation, and revision. Debates about the character of particular uses and structures, struggles over building and implementation decisions, and responses to their impact on urban life occur here. In Beijing such debates have generated new vocabularies and rhetorical resources for surrogate discussions about the political future of China itself. Concrete practices of construction and use, the third layer of the Lefebvrian trialectic, tack back and forth between officially "conceived" and vernacularly "lived" levels to produce actualized structures and spaces that in the present case will contain the activities of athletes, officials, and luminaries, and will anchor the large and animated crowds without which no Games can be considered successful. The realized spaces and the communities (including the crowds!) that are thus created will continue to modify their new spaces when the Games are done. Briefly sketched, this is how space for Lefebvre is the unending work of a whole society, an oeuvre.

Meanwhile, the Chinese have officially and informally embraced the Games as a moment of national history. Newspaper coverage of the bidding process riveted public attention while posters and slogans ap-

peared everywhere in the run-up to the announcement of the 2008 Olympic host city. When word came, Beijingers pulled out the stops for a dazzling "flag-waving, horn-honking, music-jamming, firecracker-exploding" party. Millions of citizens have since been enthusiastic participants in Olympic preparation, though not everyone has been equally swept up. There have also been protests, riots, and the occasional suicide. Organized resistance to the sharp elbows of planners has come from improvised and shifting alliances of artists, intellectuals, and professionals. Whatever their views, all Beijingers have picked their way through the dizzying pace of small and large changes and their after-shocks in the dramatic transformations under way.

The ongoing demolition of what remains of the old, often dilapidated republican city reflects the regime's desire to remove every obstacle to China's modernizing vision of itself and to make Beijing a contemporary showcase. The urban renewal of Beijing has been a project of every regime since the collapse of the Qing dynasty.² The period of post-1978 reforms has engendered especially great social strains. Citizens have endured intense urbanization, growing inequalities between the wealthy and ordinary workers, the displacement and impoverishment of agrarian peasants by industrialization, and massive environmental degradation. To contain the resulting pressures for accountability and democratization simmering just beneath the surface, there are strong pressures to vindicate the post-Mao direction of Deng Xiaoping and his market-oriented successors with an iconic Olympic success.

Since 1960 host cities have counted on the Games to jump start lagging urban economies (Hanwen and Pitts 2006; Owen 2005). Beijing's economic miracle needs no fanning. Government figures recorded more than 12 percent growth in 2006 (*Economist.com* 2007a). By melding globalization, local needs, and cultural tradition the regime hopes to transform Beijing from a major regional city to a full-fledged world capital on a par with Singapore, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. That effort stands behind the official presentation of the Games as a "Green, High-tech, Olympics for the People." Mindful of international anxiety about the pace of China's development for resource competition and the environmental pollution (China produces 17 percent of global carbon emissions, second only to the United States' 22 percent) (*Economist.com* 2007b), the "Green" Olympics aims to present China as an ethically and technologically responsible environmental steward. The "High-tech" Olympics will promote a China possessed of first-world commu-

nications, transportation, and building technologies. For the "People's" Olympics, China hopes to demonstrate a level of domestic and ethnic enthusiasm that will impress visitors and its own populace. To accomplish all this, the Chinese claim to be spending in the range of \$30 to \$40 billion, up from \$14 billion for Sydney, the previous record (*Economist.com* 2007a).

Olympic Challenges

For a country whose economy is not as large or sturdy as those of first-tier industrial nations, this is a high stakes, risky undertaking. Olympic deadlines, however, are certain. For a month in 2008 a city of 15 million permanent residents and 4 million from elsewhere in the country will receive more than 2.5 million visitors, among them some 17,600 athletes and officials and at least as many members of the press. For the Games to succeed, Beijingers know that this influx must be greeted with seamlessly functioning communications and transportation infrastructure, comfortable and plentiful accommodation, ample food and water, clean enough air and streets, a courteous and able service population, and a level of public order that is effective without being threatening to tourists, some of whom may have more than sports on their minds—all under the acute observation of foreign journalists.

Since 2001 herds of bulldozers, cranes, and scaffolds have chewed up huge swathes of the city in order to raise hundreds of multi story buildings generated by Olympic planning. New maps of the city have been issued every three months (Harris 2006). By 2008 there will be a total of 800 hotels with 130,000 rooms compared to 458 hotels with 84,812 rooms in 2005 (Owen 2005, 13–14). Thirty-one sports venues are mandated for Beijing and six more for the host cities of Qingdao, Hong Kong, Tianjin, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Qinhuangdao. Sixteen of these will be completely new; all but three will be upgraded. Some \$3.6 billion is earmarked to crisscross Beijing with fiber optic cable for information and telecommunications infrastructure. Olympic Green, the main venue of the Games, will have full access to broadband, Wi-Fi, and networking technology (Ness 2002).

Beijing has undertaken dramatic new transportation initiatives. Existing satellite airports have been renovated. A new \$1.9 billion terminal designed by Norman Foster in the shape of a flying dragon, the

totem animal of Beijing, will make Tianjin International Airport the world's largest at a million square meters. Three new ring roads have been built along with new interurban rail links to surrounding cities. On tap for 2008 are 1,000 kilometers of new highways and 84 kilometers of new train lines (Harris 2006). Eight new subway lines will stretch across the city, including two special lines connecting the airport with Olympic Green. Beijing's original two lines have been renovated for automated ticketing.

Olympic construction has made a significant contribution to China's double-digit economic growth. In 2004 the *Economist* reported that national spending on construction was 16 percent of GDP, growing 8 to 9 percent annually, just behind America and Japan. China consumes more than half the world's cement production, a bit more than a third of its steel, a bit less than a third of its coal. It is second only to the United States in consuming wood and petroleum. It builds an average 2 billion square meters of floor space annually, roughly half the world's total. Twenty to thirty billion more are planned by 2015 (Jakes 2006).

In 2006 Beijing hosted an Olympic dress rehearsal in which thirty-five leaders of developing nations came to the China-Africa Forum while 810,000 police, public officials, and retired party members directed traffic and kept public order. Out of town vehicles were banned; government workers stowed their car keys and walked or biked to work. When an IOC inspection team visited Beijing in 1993, police sweeps removed street children, the unemployed, beggars, and street vendors from view (Broudehoux 2004, 198). Similar measures to cosmeticize public space are doubtless in place for the 2008 Games. In 2006 officials were forced to deny rumors that a million migrant laborers would be expelled from the capital before the Games, and the mentally ill confined to hospitals (*Economist.com* 2006). Public plans to create frictionless space for visitors include selective traffic bans, sending workers away from the city on well-timed vacations, and energetic campaigns against spitting, smoking, line-jumping, and foul language. Classes to teach tourist-friendly English to police, taxi drivers, and ordinary citizens are in full swing (Marquand 2004).

Less publicly visible, but logistically critical, are adequate water supplies for Olympic visitors, hotels, and the new greenbelts springing up all around the city. Deep in a seven-year drought, Beijing's average per capita water availability is 300 cubic meters annually, far below the

1,000 cubic meter international benchmark (Xinhua 2006c). The city's current maximum daily consumption of 2.42 million cubic meters will swell to 2.7 million during the Games. To meet this demand the municipal government plans to divert 400 million additional cubic meters from reservoirs in neighboring agricultural provinces. This is a point of regional contention since these areas also suffer from water shortages as a result of drought, population increase, and industrial overuse (Hornby 2006).

Organizers have vowed to make Beijing's air as clean as Paris's by the beginning of the Games. Such an achievement seems unlikely. Prosperity, geography, and coal make Beijing one of the most polluted cities in the world. Lung-damaging nitrogen dioxide and sulfur emissions spew from a disproportionate number of coal-burning power plants and factories across China, much of which ends up in the north, where Beijing is (Sheridan 2006). Fierce dust storms from the Gobi Desert blow into the city, blinding traffic and delaying flights. Three and a half million cars are expected to clog city streets by 2008. A pall of dust from 24-hours-a-day, year-in and year-out construction hovers over the city. Not only residents and tourists are at risk, but alarmingly, marathoners who will run along streets where particulate levels exceed U.S. safety standards three and four times (Li 2006; Watts 2005). To scrub the air, Beijing has invested \$5.4 billion (Owen 2005; Ness 2002). More than 100 of the worst-polluting textile, pharmaceutical and chemical factories have relocated beyond the city, among them two major polluters, the Capital Iron & Steel group and the Chemical Industry Area (Xinhua 2006b). Other factories and construction sites will halt work or follow reduced schedules weeks before the Games. Furnaces of less than 20 tons, including a number of home furnaces, are being converted to clean fuels. In addition to imposing new emission standards on automobiles, 90 percent of the city's 20,000-odd public buses and 70 percent of its 67,000 taxis will convert to natural gas (Xinhua 2006b). During the Games clouds will be seeded to induce rain, and roads sprayed daily to dampen down particulate matter. The planned installation of 8,000 public toilets for the Games (USA Commercial Service 2004) will require 4,700 new restrooms and the demolition of 2,800 hutong-alley public toilets (Marquand 2004). Four hundred miles of sewage pipes will be renovated or added to city streets (Watts 2006) to treat 90 percent of Beijing's sewage in modern plants by 2010, compared to 60 percent in 2002 (Ness 2002).

Olympic Space

Nearly half of Beijing's competition venues are sited on Olympic Green, the purpose-built 2,800-acre park where the major festival venues will be located. The Green sprawls in a rough T-shape across the fourth and fifth ring roads in Chaoyang district. Additional venues are spread out among eight universities in the Haidan district of northwest Beijing; the so-called Northern Scenic Area of Shunyi district and the Ming dynasty tombs; and the Western Community area in Shijingshan district. The dominant Western aesthetics of these spectacular structures with which the Chinese mean to present themselves to the world has sparked a contentious civic debate. The most passionate controversies involve the National Grand Theater, which occupies politically charged real estate just off Tiananmen Square, and the new China Central Television (CCTV) headquarters that will launch its new institutional home by broadcasting the Games from start to finish. Though neither building is officially an Olympic venue, both occupy a prominent role in the campaign to display a glamorous urban face to international visitors. The National Grand Theater is intended to showcase the high culture of Beijing, and the close association of CCTV with the Games signals the regime's focus on China's image for the duration.

The National Grand Theater

The National Grand Theater is a giant silver ellipsoid dome set on an artificial square pool and entered through an underwater tunnel. As Beijing's preeminent performance venue, it will be home to a 2,416-seat opera house, a 2,017-seat concert hall and a 1,040-seat theater. At night its semitransparent skin will offer a glimpse of the performances within it, staging a very public spectacle for passersby (Rjorr 2006). The theater stands just off Chang An Avenue, west of the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square. It is a dramatic stylistic departure from the sacred architectural legacy next to it.

The theater began as Zhou Enlai's dream of completing Mao Zedong's legacy of Ten Great Buildings around Tiananmen Square. Diverting economic resources to build it was politically out of the question during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Subsequent Party infighting about what kind of monument was most suitable for the space caused more delay, a debate that grew sharper af-

ter the 1989 democracy protests made the regime wary of drawing people to Tiananmen Square. While interest in stimulating an active arts culture or creating a distinguished modern cityscape like that of long-time rival Shanghai was slow in coming to this city of ceremonial and administrative tradition, the rivalry with Shanghai ultimately moved the project forward. After Shanghai renovated its centrally located People's Square in the 1990s, adding the Urban Exhibition Hall, the National Museum, and the Grand Theater to general architectural and urban planning acclaim, the National Grand Theater was reimagined as a prestigious Beijing icon able to stand tall next to both Shanghai's Grand Theater, an elegant modernist structure by the French architect Jean-Marie Charpentier, and the Sydney Opera House, a galling reminder of Beijing's failed 2000 Olympic bid.

The National Theater was designated as the most important cultural project in the 10th Five-Year Plan. Because of, or in spite of, this fact, five rounds of domestic competition failed to produce a design acceptable to the State Council. International architects were solicited and, after a hasty show of public consultation, the Council settled on Paul Andreu, designer of the Pudong International Airport and the innovative Charles de Gaulle Airport (*Volume 5* n.d.). Andreu had also been the finishing architect for the Grande Arche in Paris following the death of Johann Otto von Spreckelsen, its original architect. Modern and gracefully monumental, the arch is an homage to the nearby Arc de Triomphe. If the Chinese had hoped for something as historically sensitive, this was not what they got. Andreu's selection, widely reported abroad, was not announced at home for nearly a year. This was apparently to avoid embarrassing the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the founding of the PRC with the news that after forty years of deliberation, a Westerner had been chosen to erect a resolutely futurist landmark in hallowed Chinese national space.³

When the plan for the giant glass and titanium egg and artificial lake finally surfaced, forty-nine members of the Chinese Academy of Science and Academy of Engineering petitioned Jiang Zemin demanding a reversal. They were followed by 109 Chinese architects denouncing its aggressively avant-garde appearance and "illogical" interior (*China Daily* 2004). Critics charged that the \$536 million cost—more than the Sydney Opera House, four times the Lincoln Center in a country with one quarter the GDP of the United States—would raise ticket prices to a level only the most privileged could afford (*China Youth Daily* 2004). Also of concern was the symbolism (and maintenance costs) of a large

pool in a city of scarce water resources. Official descriptions of the design—sparkling drop of water, silver tear, pearl and eggshell—did battle with popular insults: theater as alien egg, big tomb, boiled egg, French opera house, flying saucer. Xiao Mo, an architectural historian from Tsinghua University, memorably charged that the red desert dust constantly blowing through Beijing would give the dome the look of “dried dung” (Kahn 2004). In an unprecedented move, even the state-sponsored *China Daily* sided with the project’s opponents. Several construction halts and the unrelated collapse of an Andreu-designed terminal at Charles de Gaulle finally provided face-saving safety reasons to scale back the project and trim its cost by \$200 million.

Despite its avant-garde style, the theater does gesture strategically to tradition. Building and lake together evoke the square earth and round heaven of ancient Chinese cosmology. An earth-red masonry wall at the theater entrance echoes the color of the walls of the Forbidden City. The 46-meter height of the building exactly matches the elevation of the nearby Hall of the People, thus respectfully observing the ancient imperial taboo forbidding any structure to stand taller than the footrest of the Emperor’s Throne.

CCTV

In imperial China the only exceptions to this taboo were the royal Bell and Drum Towers, visible at every point as the tallest structures in the ancient city. From these public monuments issued the loudest communal noise as well, clanging and beating as the city gates were locked each night and unlocked at dawn. In a society where commoners were forbidden to behold their rulers, imperial power daily penetrated domestic life by imposing dominion over space and time. Something of this ancient role is reprised by a new skyline topper, the 750 foot (230 meter) headquarters of the CCTV broadcasting system, ceaselessly beaming the presence of the twenty-first century state into domestic space. Though not the tallest structure in Beijing, it is by any cultural measure the loudest. Designed by Rem Koolhaas for the Office of Metropolitan Architecture, the trapezoidal square-looped building occupies its own 10-hectare site at the heart of a new Central Business District east of the Forbidden City. The first of 300 planned towers planned for the CBD, the CCTV “Twisted Donut” consists of two vertical sections leaning toward one another at 60-degree angles and bent at

right angles into horizontal connectors at top and bottom to form a continuous Möbius-strip loop. The architect has mischievously suggested that the irregular patterning visible on the structure’s face traces the forces traveling through it. This, says a reviewer,

raises the question of why a Chinese media conglomerate would want to express the structural forces of its building. The juxtaposition of the fully glazed, hence transparent, building surface with an irregular grid would seem to symbolically reveal the hidden institutional power struggle in a large state-owned organization. It is safe to assume that the Chinese authorities do not interpret this symbolism as a general cry for independent journalism, otherwise the project would not have received the green light. (Horsley n.d.)

With a straight face Koolhaas also argues that his colossal edifice does not point to the sky and so is not a skyscraper but an “earthbound structure” (Leonard 2004). Regardless, it houses the complete apparatus of the state system—administration, news, broadcasting, program production, and studios. More than 10,000 employees will circulate through the continuously communicating, self-contained site complete with its own hotel, shopping, and parking facilities.

Critics have been harsh. Ian Buruma (2002) has deplored the unseemly tussle among Western “starchitects” for the privilege of erecting a temple to state information control:

There is nothing reprehensible about building an opera house in Beijing, or indeed a hotel, a hospital, a university or even a corporate headquarters. But state television is something else. CCTV is the voice of the party, the centre of state propaganda, the organ which tells a billion people what to think.

Having warmed up, Buruma piles on the criticism:

[I]t is true that architects are often drawn to power. Le Corbusier tried to interest the Vichy regime and Stalin in his projects. Philip Johnson was a bit of an amateur black-shirt. Before leaving Germany, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe were too close to the Nazis. One can see why. To build on a grand scale you need authority and a lot of money. And architects with a utopian bent, who dream of transforming not just skylines but the way we live, are natural suckers for totalitarianism. And, indeed, suckers for capitalist excess.

In a similar vein Spanish critic Luis Fernández-Galiano (2003) writes that the tower conveys “the communicatory ambition of China’s totalitarian capitalism and its determination to adapt to the symbolic codes of western economies.” Koolhaas’s response is that the final answer on China’s future is not in. Offering his own communicative take on the tower, he likens its appearance to that other imperial message medium of choice, ancient calligraphy (Leonard 2004).

Nor has the tower escaped criticism for its \$750 million price tag. Wu Liangyong, cofounder of the architecture department at Tsinghua University and a director of early feasibility studies for a number of Olympic venues, publicly deplored the tower’s original \$5 billion yuan (\$603 million) estimate as outrageously extravagant, writing: “I’m not against novel ideas, or unconventional or unorthodox designs, as that is what the art needs . . . But we cannot put aside engineering and structure, we cannot overlook our culture, or the cost. China is not rich enough not to care about 5 billion yuan” (*People’s Daily Online* 2004).

The partly completed tower has been the focus of grassroots dissent as well. The demolition of a nail house standing in the way of site construction in April 2007 became an emblematic story of local resistance to the tower in particular and the ruthless pace of urban redevelopment in China generally (Reuters 2007). In China a “nail” is a stubborn troublemaker who refuses to be flattened. A nail house is the last house left standing on a tract marked for demolition because its owners refuse compensation from developers and hold out against eviction orders by the courts. Several nail houses across China have brought national and international publicity to street protests, several suicides, and other desperate efforts by local residents with few legal remedies and no say in the fate of their homes and neighborhoods in spite of energetic efforts by the regime to block press coverage.

Olympic Green Venues

Set down in the heart of the city, both the National Grand Theater and the CCTV tower provide highly visible targets for vigorous civic debate around officially “conceived” and vernacularly “lived” space. By contrast, Olympic Green has been largely shielded from public view by the high construction fence that surrounds the site. The final look of the Green will remain something of a mystery until the opening of the

Games, and there is reason to believe it will differ in important details from the layout presented in the winning master plan by Sasaki Landscape Architects of Boston. Three parcels comprise the Green. Northernmost is Forest Park, a squarish 1,680-acre plot three times the size of Manhattan’s Central Park but likewise intended to reduce urban heat and noise with vast expanses of green. The abutting second parcel, the 1,000-acre (405 hectare) Central Area drops vertically toward the fourth ring road along the imperial spine of old Beijing. Here are celebrity venues for the major athletic contests and ceremonies, and open areas for containing Olympic crowds. To the south and east of the Central Area is the third parcel, the site and stadium complex of the 1990 Asian Games, the first mega sporting event in China. More modestly sized than Forest Park, this parcel is formally integrated by an axis running northwest from the Asian Games stadium through the Central Area.

The entire Green is tethered by a seventeen-mile (twenty-four km) path that extends the north-south boulevard running through the Central Area of the Green to the north gate of the Imperial City and beyond to the enormous new train station connecting Beijing to the rest of China. The design, which features trees and grand esplanades, is the work of Albert Speer, Jr., and has been compared to the axis envisioned for Adolf Hitler’s Berlin by Speer’s father. Speer demurs, calling his boulevard “a philosophical and religious axis. . . . We transformed the Chinese character *zhong*, which means middle, into an axis surrounded by an ecological garden” (Bernstein 2003). He adds, “This is not an axis representing power. It’s an axis that looks back to two and a half thousand years of Chinese history.” Maybe. But *zhong* invokes *Zhongguo*, the name of the kingdom that claimed as its rightful domain “all under heaven,” which meant, roughly, the center of the civilized world for most of those two and a half millennia. No Chinese citizen would miss the allusion.

National Stadium

The glamorous showpiece of the built Olympics is the National Stadium. This dazzling confection will be the setting for the Steven Spielberg-choreographed opening and closing ceremonies and all major track and field competitions and football finals. The 91,000-seat sta-

dium is the biggest commission ever undertaken by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, of Tate Modern and de Young Museum fame, who have aspired to make it "the most visible icon in contemporary China." Their original structure was a daring structural response to the problem of concealing the retractable all-weather roof insisted on by the Chinese. Its solution was an arrangement of mutually supporting curved steel rods crisscrossing in apparently random fashion to create a huge basketlike structure that appears visually weightless. In the words of the competition document (Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Planning n.d.):

The stadium is conceived as a large collective vessel, which makes a distinctive and unmistakable impression both when it is seen from a distance and from close up. It meets all the functional and technical requirements of an Olympic National Stadium, but without communicating the insistent sameness of technocratic architecture dominated by large spans and digital screens. The spatial effect of the stadium is novel and radical and yet simple and of an almost archaic immediacy.

At the same time the gray outside, red inside color scheme paid tribute to Chinese building tradition by repeating the color scheme of an archetypal Beijing courtyard. The roof that occasioned the original design problem was eventually discarded, partly in response to a report by the Chinese Academies of Science critical of the stadium's "outlandish visual effects" and questioning its seismic safety, and partly to an across the board cost-cutting order imposed on all Olympic-related construction in 2004 (Marquand 2004).⁴ The look of the stadium improved, a number of construction and maintenance headaches were eliminated, and \$37 to \$40 million was saved.

Hoping to kick-start the popular naming tradition that is a sign of beloved Chinese buildings, the architects strategically compared the look of the stadium to the crackled glaze of a ceramic vase and the lattices in a Ming window in their original proposal. What caught the judges' fancy, however, was the Swiss team's casually offered analogy of the steel rods to the delicate twigs of a bird's nest, and the plastic membranes stuffing the openings to the grass and leaves that pack a nest. Instantly, the stadium became the Bird's Nest, auspiciously conjuring up the edible nest of the cave swift, the main ingredient of a prized Chinese delicacy associated with ritual feasting.

The stadium is self-consciously green, housing a natural air ventilation system central to its much-trumpeted sustainable design (Rjorr 2006). A spacious ambulatory between the outer structure and the interior bowl contains a hotel, a shopping mall, and public areas meant to be open at all times. "What we think is the strength of this project is the space in between, the concourse, which is to be filled with life" in a continuous pageant. Even in Beijing's sometimes harsh climate, observes de Meuron, "the people use . . . public space—to dance, to play cards" (Lubow 2006), a prescient nod to the motivating nonpolitical atmosphere of Olympic Green that appears to be its larger national purpose.

Water Cube

Across from the Stadium is the other celebrity building on the Green. The \$100 million 7.8-acre National Aquatic Swimming Centre by the Australian firm PTK has been nicknamed the "Water Cube" for its blue skin of irregularly patterned water bubbles. With a floor space of 70,000 square meters, it contains five pools; has room for 17,000 spectators; and will host swimming, diving, synchronized swimming, and water-polo finals. Its rectangular frame is a network of slender steel pipes linked by 12,000 load-bearing nodes that distribute the building's weight. Filling in the exterior cell-like geometry that articulates its shimmering skin are 100,000 square meters of a Teflon-like membrane eight one-thousandths of an inch thick that are state of the art in strength and energy efficiency. The architects claim these panels will let in more light and heat than glass while slashing total energy costs by 30 percent and daytime lighting costs by half (Xinhua 2006b). Green engineering also extends to the reuse of double-filtered, backwashed pool water, and rainwater collected in subterranean tanks to fill the pools.

The architects have taken pains to impose meaning on form by publicly linking the pipe and node structural geometry to natural systems like crystals and molecules. They point to water as an ancient symbol of tranquility and happiness and connect the bubblelike clusters of the outer skin to the circular heavens and the shape of the building to the square earth of ancient Chinese universe.

Discontent and Disgruntlement

Embedded bows to traditional cosmology aside, the assertive Western look and feel of the most visible Olympic structures has been a contin-

uing source of civic grumbling. Forced to accept the program of the Games as a showcase of Occidental sport, dependent on Western media to frame the festival for much of the global audience, many Chinese expected that the major landmarks of Olympic built form, visual stage sets for media images of the Games, would certify their Chinese, or at least Asian, character. Instead, a celebrity stable of foreign superstars has made embarrassingly apparent the lack of a distinctive Chinese interpretation of modern architecture for the country's coming out party in its emblematic new national space.

There are certainly enthusiasts, many young and hip, who have embraced the cultural mixing of China and the West (Becker 2004). The syrupy official line puts the best face on it. In stilted English, the *People's Daily* calls Olympic Green "the cream of urban architectural construction and urban planning of Beijing in the history of architectural art at all times in all countries." Describing a promotional marathon race from the Forbidden City to the National Stadium (doubtless meant to stir local enthusiasm and downplay poor air quality), it continues: "One is Oriental and the other Occidental, wholly modern. It is another integration of ancient oriental culture with modern Olympic Games sports and a spectacular scene of harmony of Chinese with Western cultures" (*People's Daily* 2001).

Forests of gleaming skyscrapers designed by Western architects seem to reprise on a grand scale the multistory buildings erected by Western legations at the end of the nineteenth century. In the next century the New Culture Movement embraced Western modernism as the model for reconstructing Chinese society on the ruins of dynastic tradition. Then, too, Western adventurers stood ready to exploit the transition (Dong 2003, 30–31). Today China is "the largest construction site in the world" for Western architects in search of new frontiers. As *Business Week* (Bell 2007) puts it:

Beijing, in particular, is a city of eggs awaiting a clutch of architectural omelettes, with whole districts razed for redevelopment. And why not? From a western perspective, China represents a colossal opportunity, the physical manifestation of architectural ideas that, until now, had only found their expression in elaborate computer-generated imagery or in small, bespoke projects.

Absent a prominent coterie of Chinese architects to steer the building boom that followed the Deng reforms, many observers regard every

new Western-style building as a loss of Chinese identity. It does not help that substandard building quality and aesthetic banality have often come along for the ride. "On the one hand, you have these two projects—CCTV, which could only be built in China, and the stadium," Pierre de Meuron has written, "and you have on the other hand thousands of uninteresting projects, like mushrooms" (quoted in Lubow 2006).

Architectural critic Deyan Sudjic (2005) echoes themes widely voiced in and outside China: "Cars move around disconnected clumps of newly completed towers," and "entire new districts appear arbitrarily as if from nowhere." He adds:

A city that, until 1990, had no central business district, and little need of it, now has a cluster of glass towers that look like rejects from Singapore or Rotterdam. And these, in turn, are now being replaced and overshadowed by a new crop of taller, slicker towers, "the product of the international caravan of architectural gunslingers that has arrived in town to take part in this construction free-fire zone."

Chinese intellectuals, activists, and architectural professionals have not been hesitant to broadcast similar conclusions. As early as 1999 Wu Liangyong used the annual congress of the Union of International Architects to denounce Western theories of architecture as inapplicable to China's changing and complex environment (Li 2000). Wu called for developing countries to explore their own paths "according to their conditions, rather than copying models of industrialized nations." "The foreign moon is not always better than the moon in China," seconds Ma Guoxin, chief architect for the Beijing Architectural Design Institute (Gluckman 2001).

Returning to Beijing after a year in Europe, journalist Lin Gu described his feeling of disorientation. "This city is increasingly unrecognizable, and it feels alien, all this avant-garde architecture," he writes. "Many people in Beijing have been brainwashed to think big buildings—however ugly—are modern" (Gluckman 2004). "'Overstatement' is now the main approach in design, bold form the main character," writes architect Li Xiaodong (2000, 402). Feng Jicai, an activist working to save the slender remnants of republican Beijing, observes, "In the 1960s and 70s, we destroyed our culture angrily. In the 1980s to now, we're destroying our culture happily" (Meyer 2003). Looking back on a century of unthinking modernization lately kicked into high gear,

Kongjian Yu, founder and dean of the Graduate School of Landscape Architecture at Beijing University, and a principal of the first private landscape design firm in China, ventures this pessimistic diagnosis (*LAND Online* 2006):

[O]ur cities are now becoming the same. Why? Because we neglected the natural environment, we neglected the cultural heritage, and we destroyed too much. We destroyed the everyday living structures, even people's houses. Things have not been designated as historical sites, and they are all gone; they have all been destroyed. Millions of square meters have been destroyed in every city. And it is the natural landscape and the cultural heritage that make a city different from others. So, when we wiped out all of this cultural heritage and these vernacular landscapes, and when we didn't respect the natural landforms, the natural water systems, the natural vegetation, the whole city became man-made with no meaning or form. Sometimes it looks like you've just dumped an American city in the middle of China.

The dilemma of a culture that cannot return to the past but has not seized its own architectural path to the future is captured by I. M. Pei, who has sought to establish a Chinese interpretation of modern architecture informed by its own tradition:

Chinese architecture is at a dead end, totally. There is no way for them to go. Chinese architects will agree with me on that . . . The days of the temples and the palaces are not only economically out of reach but ideologically unacceptable to them. They've tried the Russian way, and they hate those buildings. They are trying to take the Western way. I am afraid that will be equally unacceptable. (Li 2000, 393)

In the 1980s Pei, who was born in China, championed a "new vernacularism" featuring the modest white walls and gray tiles of traditional domestic style. Admired by many academics and intellectuals, it nonetheless proved too nostalgic, too delicate, and too technologically backward to prevail against the ambitions of China's modern developers.

Mao's Ghost

China's lack of an identifiable modern architecture goes back, as so much does, to the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. Nor is it of small

consequence that China's ancient building traditions had persisted nearly unchanged up to the fall of the Qing. In the wake of that collapse, energies long compressed by imperial enclosure were suddenly drawn out into newly revealed spaces animated by nationalist enthusiasm (Dong 2003, 82). Partly in response to the public park movement gathering steam in Japan and the West, imperial gardens, hunting grounds, and ceremonial sites were opened to vibrant experiments in public life and politics including mass rallies organized by republican activists to express their democratic aspirations (Padua 2006, 33). In time the T-shaped intersection in front of Tiananmen gate became so associated with nationalist and antigovernment protest that Tiananmen Gate was the only conceivable place from which Mao, standing atop it, could declare the birth of the People's Republic. Here, too, the lingering imperial association was propitious since the Chinese characters for Tiananmen may be rendered as "receiving the mandate from Heaven and stabilizing the kingdom."

As it turned out, Mao wielded architecture as ruthlessly as any emperor. His monumentally expanded Tiananmen Square was larger than either Moscow's Red Square or Mexico City's Zocaló, a vast revolutionary plain without walls or gates, the traditional markers of Chinese cosmological and social order. Though Tiananmen visibly rebuked the closed power of the Forbidden City, Mao shamelessly traded on its deeply embedded psychological authority by annexing the square as a kind of giant imperial forecourt. Every architectural gesture associated with Tiananmen was carefully calculated, beginning with the widening of Chang An Avenue into a major traffic artery. Slashing through the ancient inviolable north-south axis, the boulevard severed the walled city from the socialist square, signaling the triumph of socialism over the past and creating a grand promenade for displays of socialist military power. Even before the founding of the PRC, Mao had dreamed of a Monument to the People's Heroes at the center of Tiananmen. Its chief designer wrote, "We . . . recognized that the axis of the present Square is no longer the past Imperial Path. The importance of the Monument will be most effectively accentuated by this central position" (Wu H. 2005, 25). To a later critic the Monument constituted "a revolutionary-proletarian obscenity in the middle of the sacred way" (Leys 1977, 54).

Clearing a fifty-acre open space at the dense heart of a traditional urban patchwork of endlessly articulated walls within walls was no small undertaking. Ancient city ramparts and blocks of tiled-roof courtyard

houses that had formed the city's elegant aesthetic since the Ming dynasty were leveled. To celebrate the PRC's first decade, Ten Great Buildings devoted to government and commemorative purposes went up during a ten-month, twenty-four-hour-a-day building frenzy around the borders of Tiananmen and along Chang An Avenue. Their severe Soviet monumentalism implemented with technical help from Moscow was another break with traditional form (though not a complete one—the symmetry, horizontality, and serial columns of socialist neoclassicism recall features of traditional Chinese style) and trumpeted a new antifeudal aesthetic. Their stolid gaze framed the spectacles of mass assent that came to be the legitimizing ritual of twentieth century state power.

During the Cultural Revolution, architects suspected of bourgeois tendencies were unable to publish or get approval for their designs. Access to all foreign architectural texts was strictly forbidden, and training programs started in the republican era were shut down. Not a single architect was trained for a decade. Many that had been working were sent to the countryside, factories, and the army for reeducation (Liu 2003, 45). Beijing's growth was brought to a halt, the better to revitalize the countryside as the privileged space of social renewal. By such means the sustained and patient cultivation necessary to the evolution of any architectural art was deliberately destroyed, another casualty of the Cultural Revolution.

When Deng Xiaoping's Four Great Modernizations shifted resources back to the cities there were, therefore, few practitioners to implement the new program of office complexes, hotels, and skyscrapers (Bezlova 2003). Visiting Western architects and the creation of training opportunities abroad for Chinese architectural students were called on to fill the gap as the profession struggled to reconstitute itself. Aspiring Chinese designers looked to Western postmodern styles with little understanding of their ironist mannerism. The result was a hybrid kitsch of decorative Western-style detail appliquéd on Soviet-style grandiosity.⁵ Recolling from this incoherent mimeticism, the mayor of Beijing briefly required every new tower block to sport a Chinese-style pagoda roof, which were popularly labeled "watermelon rinds."

The 1989 democracy protests marked still another turning point in the regime's relation to space. By effectively seizing Tiananmen Square the June Fourth Protesters challenged state power at its physical and symbolic core. Refusing to play the acquiescent and submissive role demanded of Chinese citizens, they dared the state to reclaim its own

space. It did so with a horrific display of force in the surrounding streets that deeply damaged its standing at home and abroad. Defined for centuries by their unquestioned control of space, China's rulers found that monumental space was no longer sacrosanct in a television age, but politically ambiguous and highly vulnerable.

Olympic Green as a Successor to Tiananmen

This brings us to Olympic Green as a monumental successor, or perhaps an antidote, to Tiananmen Square. According to the Confucian understanding that what is superior is northernmost to what is inferior, the Green's northern extension of the fourteenth century imperial axis of earthly and cosmic order "leads" it to completion in the twenty-first. There is also talk of the Green as a "second capital" to relieve pressure on the dense, untidy jumble of central Beijing (*People's Daily* 2001). If the Green is the new living room of the people, Tiananmen Square looks more like the relic of a completed phase of Chinese history. Without overtly rejecting Mao, such a shift at least dislodges him. The gesture is infinitely more subtle than Tiananmen's drastic refocus of public representation away from the Forbidden City.

Open and unwallled Tiananmen was an epochally new kind of Chinese political space where masses of citizens could gather as the corporate body of the nation to affirm the socialist state. In an extraordinary departure, Forest Park and the Central Area are officially imagined as glitzy leisure spaces for public pleasures. The official vision of post-Olympic commercial, exhibition, sports, and entertainment spaces on the Green and elsewhere paints a civic portrait of obedient consumers attuned more to immediate gratification than politics. In Lefebvrian terms the Green is a wholly new conceived space, a cagey gamble by a new generation of rulers who are betting that stripping national space of overt political content will diffuse its potential for "lived" protest. They are likely encouraged by nearly two decades of public response to commercial malls and nighttime strips (Wu H. 2005, 22).

In imperial China the boisterous and varied street life of commoners was crowded into festivals and markets conducted in the narrow *hutongs* between traditional *siheyuan* walls. Cathedrals, stadia, open squares, and other public gathering spaces familiar to the West were unknown since the only great open spaces were royal playgrounds. Lesser parks, temple and monastic gardens, and private scholar gardens

were reserved for the gentry. Mary Padua (2006, 31) finds key elements of classical Chinese garden style in the scholar's garden:

Private scholar gardens represented high culture and were designed for and by the literati—in this case, retired government officials—as places for contemplation. Garden design was influenced by Taoism and the yin-yang principles of harmony, where the garden contained the essence of the world with all things standing in proper relationship to each other. Mountains (artificial rockery) represented yang, the active stimulating force, while still water was intended to induce tranquility, representing yin, the passive principle that stands for darkness and mystery.

The winning master plan of Sasaki Associates for Forest Park alludes to many of these features. Its three-dimensional representation of Kunlun Mountain, a legendary axis mundi connecting Heaven and Earth and the source of the four great rivers of China, references the mythical origin of Chinese civilization. The 277-acre (1,122 hectare) Dragon Lake situated at the foot of the Sasaki Kunlun is in the shape of Ying Lung, the Responding Dragon of water, wealth, and good luck in Chinese lore, its long curving tail sweeping the length of the Central Area below. A peach tree flower forest edging Dragon Lake symbolizes immortality and references the idyllic society created by Tong dynasty poet Tao Qian, the cultural hero credited with inventing Chinese poetic tradition. Tao's wilderness cosmology corresponds with the emergence of the landscape *shan shui* school of Chinese classical painting that may have originated in poetic illustration. Tao Qian is associated with the spiritual refinement of a broadly civilized life (Hinton 2002).⁶ Additional references to a grand conception of tradition in the Sasaki plan depict the boulevard descending down the axial spine of the Central Area as serially segmented into thousand-meter plazas, each celebrating the achievements of a millennium of Chinese history.

One looks in vain to the official Web site that tracks the construction progress of the Green for any mention of all this. It briefly explains that Forest Park is divided into north and south parcels by the fifth ring road. It describes the northern portion as a forest of 800,000 newly planted trees. The south is described as a sculpted landform of hills, wetlands, meadows and upland forests of pine and deciduous trees. The whole is touted as a model ecology of indigenously biodiverse plants and animals in a sustainable natural habitat. But Kunlun Mountain and Dragon Lake have now become Main Mountain and Olympic

Lake and have migrated to the southern half of the park below the fifth ring road where they are said to display the art of the contemporary Chinese garden. The landscaped layers of classical mythology have disappeared. There is not a mention of thousand-year plazas. It appears that any whiff of feudal traditionalism has been decisively rejected for a resolutely depthless modernism.

In its simplified surfaces the apparent evolution of Forest Park away from the complexity of the Sasaki master plan also speaks to the experiences of a number of Western architects. Their tale is an opposite iteration of that told by Chinese architects about the flow of design contracts to their better organized, more glamorous Western counterparts. In this alternate tale, Western designers are lavishly courted and pursued by Chinese developers anxious to dangle Western experience and exposure before skeptical investors. Once a design is awarded, however, government overseers have the power to demand severe cost cutbacks if money gets tight. Already working, they claim, for 20 to 30 percent of what they could expect to charge outside China (Gluckman 2001), Western designers of record have found themselves forced aside in favor of their less pricey Chinese partners, with whom all foreign designers are paired by law, who are quick to discard Western-contributed aspects of an original design for less costly alternatives. Facing corruption, construction delays, and endless bureaucratic meddling, many Western architects have been unable to break even (Lubow 2006). Sasaki principal Dennis Pieprz has commented, for example, that the \$68.7 million ceiling ultimately imposed on Forest Park was too slender to justify the continued participation of his firm (author, phone interview, December 28, 2006).

Public Space as a Casualty Then and Now

Under Mao, Beijingers lived mostly in decentralized, self-sufficient work unit enclaves to which they were legally tethered for housing, employment, and essential social services. No large public space, mass transportation system, or even a central business district was allowed to disturb the close pattern of walled compounds that encompassed what remained of the republican city. This inherited urban fabric, which has been the sustained target of modernizing efforts since the beginning of the twentieth century, has given way to industrialization, market reform, and growing demands for living space in the post-Mao period.

Regime claims for the positive benefits of this transformation notwithstanding, the quality of travel within the city and space for exercise, play, and beauty have declined sharply for most citizens, swallowed up by endless constellations of glass office towers and gated enclaves whose scale broadcasts a lofty indifference to the texture of public life and whose security personnel manifest contempt for ordinary citizens. A once diverse urban texture has steadily mutated into an aesthetically and socially homogenized cityscape.⁷ Neighborhoods in which extended families lived for centuries in close-knit community networks have been lost. In 2005 the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) claimed to have verified 400,000 cases of forcible relocations of city residents as far as 25 to 60 km (16 to 37 miles) from familiar communities and social networks (COHRE 2005).

While arguing for the necessity of bringing modern sanitation and safe physical surroundings to acres of dilapidated neighborhoods, official statistics concede that roughly 40 percent of the approximately 3,700 hutongs recorded in the 1980s have now disappeared. In response, critics like Richard Ingersoll (2003) have articulated a strong oppositional rhetoric:

With the increased pace of development for the Olympic Games, the tightly woven hutongs, narrow alleys that serve the single-story historic courtyard houses surrounding the core of the Forbidden City and the Tian Tan temples, face imminent demolition or gentrification. The former will eradicate the memory of architectural form, while the latter will undermine the local class mix that gives these neighborhoods their vitality . . . Right next to the Forbidden City, for example . . . bulldozers are demolishing everything in sight, scooping out a huge hole in the ground for a multilevel shopping mall. When one realizes that the tens of thousands of people who participated in the demonstrations that led to the 1989 massacre filtered through the ancient capillaries of the hutongs to fill Tiananmen Square, this form of urban lobotomy does not seem so casual.

The hutongs are the only places left in Beijing that have architectural density and urban vitality. Otherwise, the cityscape—restructured during the past 20 years on a concentric web of ring roads, 10-lane highways, and hundreds of elevated interchanges—is dotted with countless new 15- to 30-story condominiums and office towers. Intense landscaping succeeds to some extent in mitigating the disturbing lapses in scale, style, and color of these new buildings. Armies of gardeners, it seems, have groomed every intersection and highway viaduct.

The district set aside for the "Olympic Green" will be no exception to this program of agoraphobic vegetation, replacing urban fabric with more easily maintained public spaces.

The use of public funds to transform the deteriorating compounds of the proletariat into leisure enclaves for the rich and the disintegration of the "urban public goods regime" remain contentious issues (Solinger 1995). In light of the government's modest compensation awards (30,000 lawsuits were filed in protest to municipal authorities in 2004) (Lin 2004), many citizens cannot afford the commodity estates that are replacing their old compounds and have been forced to seek housing on the periphery of the city. Critics argue that the privatization of the housing market has created an income-segregated cityscape that has further impoverished public life (Li and Yi 2007). Beyond the city, the industrialization of agriculture and the denial of resources to rural areas have driven nearly 200 million workers and peasants to cities such as Beijing in search of jobs and better lives. These floating workers have no access to state-subsidized goods, services, and opportunities available to legal residents and no entitlement to shelter or medical care. Many lack adequate food. A large number have joined the construction army of the building boom with its punishing working conditions and lack of legal protections. What will happen when these jobs decline is anyone's guess (Liu 2003, 46). Prostitution, homelessness, and petty crime are rising along with tensions between city residents and migrant workers.

Among those who have challenged the emergent spatial order of the regime, some have strategically used it to express their dissatisfaction. They include Zhang Dali, an artist from Harbin, an industrial city northeast of Beijing. Lacking a Beijing *danwei* (work unit) or *hukou* (living permit), he and other "floating" artists occupy an artists' colony near the ruins of the Summer Palace gardens, burned to the ground during the Boxer Rebellion and preserved as a testament to Western rapacity. Since 1995 Zhang has painted more than 2,000 images of his bald profile on freeways, condemned buildings and crumbling walls in the city (Wu H. 2000). He writes, "I go on these walls to enter their life. I open a dialogue with people. I assault them with the knowledge that this city is changing. I don't care if you take part or don't take part, you have to look at me" (Broudehoux 2004, 221). Though hundreds of city workers erased his images in advance of celebrations for the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, the government has not otherwise pursued him.

His mode of public engagement has enlisted positive press coverage, and admiring followers have marked new buildings they deem particularly offensive (Broudehoux 2004, 220–25). It remains to be seen how this Lefebvrian “lived” space will be tolerated for the Olympics. “Destroying Beijing,” an artist’s photograph from Zhang’s “Dialogue Series,” is here described by Wu Hung:

It depicts a large stylized portrait of a man’s head chiseled into a broken wall. However, there is a hole in the wall that allows the viewer to peer through the man’s head and see the Imperial Palace and the Palace Museum in the distance. . . .

The Imperial Palace is an obvious representation of tradition and the broken wall represents modernity. Tradition, situated in the dimly veiled distance, is in the process of being covered over—forgotten, but in the course of the destruction of memory China must experience an inchoate and broken modernity—broken and incomplete from its very beginning . . . We know that Chinese tradition will remain even after the wall has been completed. But once the hole has been repaired, this tradition will be forever unseen and forgotten. (Zhao and Bell 2005, 498)

Conclusion

From the perspective of the regime, the mission of the 2008 Olympics is to show an ambitious, confident China standing tall among the world’s advanced global powers. The stars of this outsized national moment are the grand and gaudy Olympic Green and its companion spaces, which for sixteen days in August 2008 will offer a spectacular visual backdrop for international attention. The newest model of the national patrimony is a carefully designed space that lacks both an obvious center and an explicit political focus. Grand state ceremonies will not take place here. The crowds that visit it will encounter super-sized distractions: splendid architecture, forested groves, shopping, eating, and elite sports spectatorship. The regime is banking on the scale of the Green, which dwarfs Tiananmen, to render it impervious to political appropriation. It is fortuitously segregated from ordinary communities of work and politics. Its extravagant entertainments and tended landscapes have little to offer the poorest and most disenfranchised residents of Beijing, who mostly live at the southern edge of the city, from which the Green is not readily accessible except by systems of transport

that lend themselves to state control should the need arise. The regime nonetheless confronts a nascent civil society that has creatively used resistance to the ongoing redevelopment of Beijing, on which the Games have conferred urgency and purpose, to fashion vibrant new networks of association and modes of discourse with a political coloring that may find other uses after the Games.

The message of the Green is that twenty-first century public life in China is a colorful, bustling affair, a green escape, a frictionless territory of upscale consumption and leisure. Its function is less to provide a setting where citizens may gather freely than to assemble and display the harmonious society idealized by the regime, in which consumption equates with culture to trump history, and islands of imperial and republican nostalgia survive if they are pleasing to a domestic and international elite.

Unlike Tiananmen, the visual space of Olympic Green does not belong unquestionably to the state, but it does not quite belong to the people, either. Like Tiananmen it is a triumphalist space that repositions authoritative public representation but speaks most clearly of commodity consumption. It argues that a national vision of harmony nestled within a regime of accumulation can overcome whatever problems arise from the forces that have created it. What Chinese citizens will make of it all when the Games are done, and how to address the growing tensions of postreform urban life gathering in the shadow of Ozymandias, is a continuing story.

NOTES

1. See D. Bell 2007.
2. See, for example, Dong 2003 and Wu H. 2005.
3. Ironically, Andreu’s design did address itself to high Chinese building tradition with bridges that provided a ceremonial entry and simple spatial and figural arrangements. See Liu 2003.
4. See also Hawthorne 2004.
5. This comment was attributed to Rem Koolhaas (2000), who, according to Wolf (2000), informed “students, who spend years in school and then more years in grueling apprenticeships, that, in China, 40-story buildings are designed on Macintoshes in less than a week. In the context of this hyperdevelopment, the traditional architectural values—composition, aesthetics, balance—are irrelevant.” 2000.
6. See also Yang 2005, 43–45.
7. An excellent discussion of China’s changed residential landscape is Wu F. 2005.

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