

BEIJING TRANSFORMED (AGAIN): AN EXPLORATION OF THE 2008 OLYMPIC BUILDING PROGRAM—ERODING THE 'FIGURE' OF A CITY OR OPENING PUBLIC GROUND?

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ABSTRACT

The scope and scale of Beijing's 2008 Olympics mega-projects are an unprecedented example of the transformation of large portions of an ancient city for the explicit purpose of providing ground for venues and their associated public arenas. This paper will review the discourse surrounding the building program where debate focuses on the prioritizing of political agendas to reconstruct the image of contemporary China. I will argue that the controversy surrounding Beijing's transformation needs to be viewed in the broader context of understanding the break-neck pace of modernization throughout Asia—a context that surfaces polarized views on the nature of the new urban terrains being generated. I present an optimistic view of the potential for the vast new park provided by the Olympic domain to create a significant public surface for Beijingers. I argue that this potential is mediated by three paradoxes presented by the Olympic refiguring of urban and national identity in China.

INTRODUCTION

“Beijing presents itself as a border condition in which an accelerated rate of change gives way to hybrid conditions that coexist at a magnified level: preservation and modernization; the low horizontal city of the hutong, and the vertical city of the skyscraper; the forces of the market and those of a closed political system; the new urban rich and the agrarian poor; the European paradigms of architecture and an Eastern culture embracing Westernisation and twenty-first century change”.¹

The Games provide a direct stimulus for the rapid transformation of a host city by both private and public sector organisations with an agenda to not only provide the necessary games infrastructure, but also capitalise on this once-off opportunity to bathe the city in the spotlight of the international media. The building programs that precede the big event sees vast sums of public and private money mainlined into capital works that re-figure both a cities' form and image. The Games provide a rare and concentrated opportunity to investigate a cities' transformation within a short time frame: the eight years or so between a bid city winning the Games and the actual event. Furthermore, the complex relations between citizen, city and nation-state highlighted in the flurry of media interest during this time, as well as during the Games, provide rich ground for the examination of often competing agendas between these interest groups.²

While the scope and scale of Beijing's 2008 Olympics mega-projects do provide a fascinating focus for reviewing urbanism at speed, what is unique to Beijing's Olympic site is the sense that the site is just one island of accelerated development in a city - and indeed a nation - that is urbanizing at an unprecedented rate. Set against this backdrop, the Olympic site becomes doubly interesting as other agendas—political agendas and implications for public space—are reified.

The Games also present an opportunity for a nation to to develop a meta-narrative of creating a global city.³ Beijing's Olympic slogan “One World, One Dream” encapsulates this idea of a presenting China as a nation equal to its international

¹ Tina DiCarlo, "Pre Text," *Perspecta, The Yale Architectural Journal* 39, no. Re_Urbanism: Transforming Capitals (2007).

² J. R. Short, *Global Metropolitan: Globalizing Cities in a Capitalist World* (Routledge, 2004).

³ T. J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World* (Princeton Architectural Pr, 2008), pg 106

counterparts; the Olympics providing a capstone event to its three decades of economic regeneration. Interestingly, the Olympic slogan can be translated from the Chinese as “One Same World, One Same Dream” which has been interpreted as a statement that embodies the aspiration of the Chinese people to achieve the same living standards and levels of comfort enjoyed in the West. The imperative for China is to present to the world during the media-saturated time frame of the Games, an urban figure that embodies not only the sense of national identity, but the aspirations of the Chinese people.

The Olympic status as a supranational event makes the Games site a global space.⁴ Significantly, over 1000 hectares of urban matter on the Olympic site were cleared, an act of creating a blank slate, a tabula rasa of open ground. (Refer Figures 1, 2 and 3). Because of the scale of urban reconstruction, instability exists surrounding the dominant narrative of the Beijing Games that makes them ‘subject to capture’.⁵ Global civil rights groups have sought leverage from the public-power of the Games to link the issues they deem important to the Olympic story—and the link is not a difficult one to make. In the face of wholesale clearance of residential urban matter, there is a legitimate human rights issue that should not be ignored, but what is notable is the prevalence of a mainly Western attitude of nostalgic lament for the loss of traditional city form.⁶ That all this ‘newness’ comes at the expense of traditional city fabric, the assumptions made appear to be that China is neglecting a historical imperative as it enacts these kinds of erasure as it rejects a fixed and singular notion of the ‘city’.

I will consider the proposition that there is an optimistic view of the potential for the emergent types of public space generated by Olympic Game-space, arising from three paradoxes presented by the rapid transformation of urban form in China and viewed from the physical and historical contexts of the Olympic Green and Forest Park. Firstly, that parks have a limited heritage in Beijing and are gaining in popularity, yet this newest park is reportedly largely uninhabited; the Olympic park presents an enigma in type and scale in rapidly modernising Beijing. Secondly, the Olympic green can be seen as a vast and unwalled garden. The wall in China has been identified as a marker of social space and collective subjectivity, yet as economic and urban reform sweeps aside this physical manifestation of a social order, the wall is still evident as a residual spatial syntax. What are the ways in which specific boundaries still operate in this context? Thirdly, China is now enacting the erasure and rebuilding of its cities: a process of modernisation that occurred in the West 150 years ago. Generic urban matter created in much of China is a byproduct of economic development and globalization—indistinct and ad-hoc—while the Olympic site contains a clear symbolism, and unique boundaries.

⁴ M. E. Price and D. Dayan, *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China* (Univ of Michigan Pr, 2008).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ A. Hornsby, "Hey Fuck! Where'd the City Go?: Abstract Dreaming/Pouring Concrete," in *The Chinese Dream: A Society under Construction*, ed. A. Hornsby and N. Mars (010 Publishers, 2008).



FIGURE 1: OLYMPIC GREEN, BEIJING. FEB, 2002. IMAGE FROM GOOGLE EARTH

Aquired using Google Earth's recent facility for historical imagery, this image demonstrates the extant structures on the Olympic site prior to demolition.



FIGURE 2: OLYMPIC GREEN, BEIJING . MAY, 2005. IMAGE FROM GOOGLE EARTH.
This Image DEPICTS The site with most of the existing structures demolished.



FIGURE 3: OLYMPIC GREEN, BEIJING .SEPT, 2008. IMAGE FROM GOOGLE EARTH
The image depicts the completed Olympic site, with Forest Park to the North replete with turf and trees and all Games Venues in place.

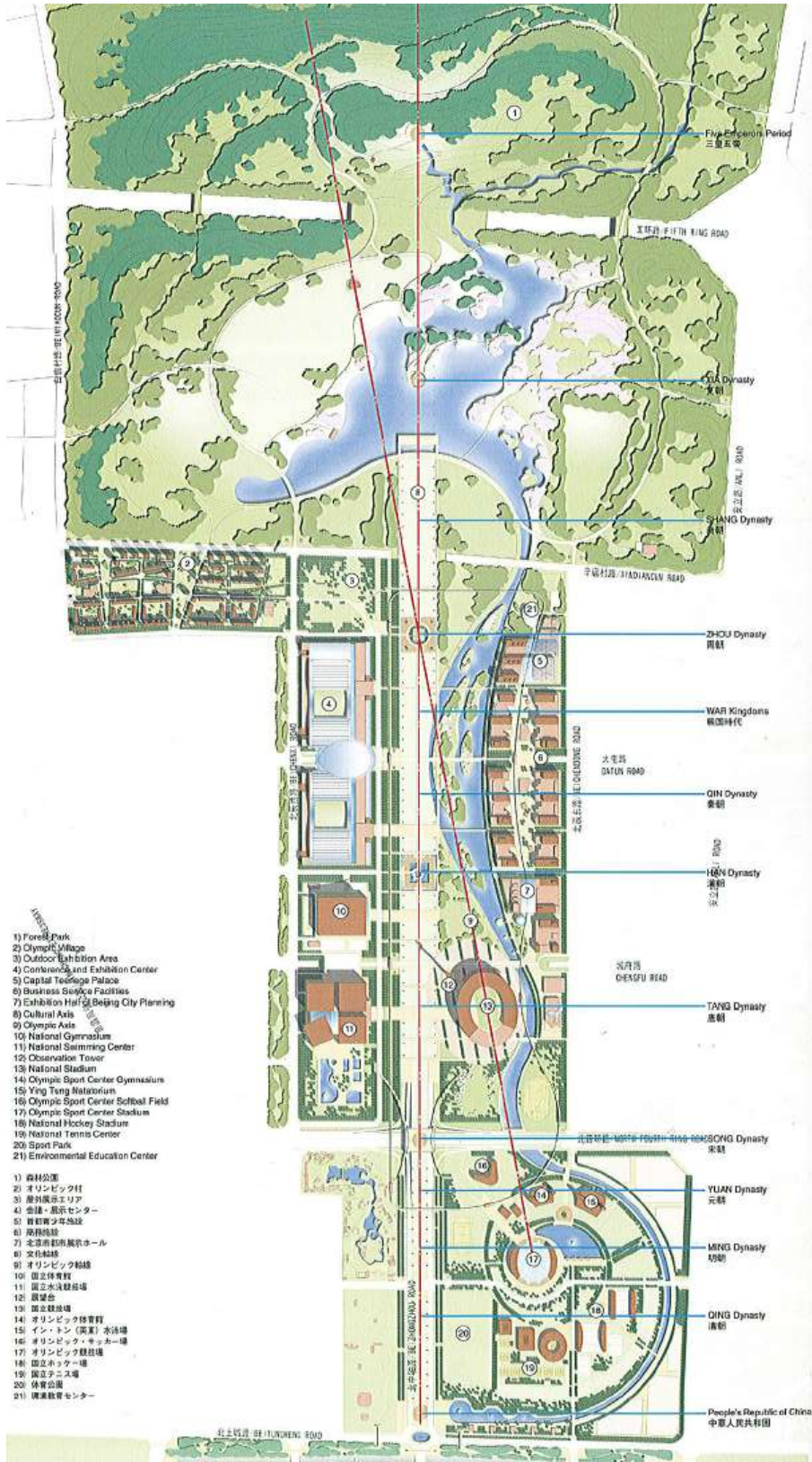


FIGURE 4 SASAKI AND ASSOCIATES 2002 OLYMPIC GREEN MASTERPLAN
 The paradox of the urban Park in Beijing: The Olympic Green.

Sasaki and Associates' 2002 winning scheme for the Beijing Olympic Green and Forest Park provides a contained and concentrated exemplar for the kinds of erasure and rapid morphological change being carried out in China. Formed roughly in a T-shape across the Fourth and Fifth Ring Roads in the Chaoyang district, the park was formed from city fabric scraped clean. Perceived as a 'new growth centre', city planners intend that the Olympic Green and associated venues might become a satellite town with the venues and public facilities providing a new hub, and importantly a new space for public recreation, for the rapidly growing development areas in this Northern fringe of Beijing.⁷

The design concept has three fundamental elements: The Forest Park, and its extension Southward, The Cultural Axis, the Northward extension and conclusion of the great Imperial Axis, and The Olympic Axis, linking the Asian Games site with the National Stadium. Each of these elements is layered with symbolism intended to increase legibility, identity and imaginability of both the Games site and thereby amplify the political 'message'.

The Forest Park presents a monumental instant forest planted in 2004 with mature trees. Connected by broad decks called 'ecological corridors' spanning across the Fifth Ring Road. The Southern section is designed for active uses (tennis, hockey and archery venues for the Games were included in this zone) and houses a subway station connecting the site to central Beijing, a shopping arcade and large outdoor amphitheatre and a 301 acre lake in the form of a dragon. Three artificial peaks created from excavated material circle the lake, the highest peak being located on axis with Beijing affording views of the Olympic Axis, Games venues and further away to central Beijing.⁸

The Cultural Axis embodies a monumental commemorative plaza, recalling China's great dynasties by chronological inscription in the plaza deck, segmented in 1000 metre sections, with each zone celebrating a millennium of Chinese history. Significantly, the 'Cultural Axis' is perceived as an extension of Beijing's ancient Imperial Axis which anchors central Beijing to its ancient city form and is the most important extant symbol of national and cultural identity in Beijing.⁹

The second axis proposed in the Sasaki Scheme is the Olympic Axis. Skewed across the Cultural Axis, this imaginary line connects the existing 1990 Asia Games site with the 'Birdsnest' stadium and a Sports Hero's Garden to the NorthWest and appears almost as an afterthought, dwarfed as it is in meaning and significance by the primary Cultural Axis.

While the use of symbolism within urban design schemes to bolster national identity and reinforce both overt and covert political agendas is certainly at play here (in the homage paid to the Imperial Axis in Sasaki's scheme, the appeal to ancient imperial epochs where China was a mighty empire on the world stage, as well as the provision of monumental urban gestures that in their sheer size appeal to a Chinese ideal of representing its international importance) what is interesting to note is the Olympic Green and Forest Park provide a new type of public space to the city of Beijing, previously little known in the Chinese garden tradition: a recreational green space as a public space. Traditional Chinese gardens were the domain of 'private scholars' and represented high culture and were designed for and used by educated elite as spaces for contemplation.¹⁰ Often walled, these spaces were part of a former Imperial complex, and not open to the people until the 1920's and 1930s, just prior to the ascendancy of the Communist party in 1949.¹¹ What the Olympic venue provides is a largely unfamiliar surface for public

⁷ R.Ong, "New Beijing, Great Olympics: Beijing and its Unfolding Olympic Legacy" *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 4, No2 (2004), pg44.

⁸ F R Steiner, "Olympic Hopeful: A City Short of Parkland," *Landscape Architect* 98, no. 3 (2008).

⁹ The office of Albert Speer (Jnr.) was commissioned to revitalise a 100 square kilometre long corridor linking the Olympic Green and Forest Park in the North, to the Forbidden Palace, Tiananmen Square in the centre of Beijing and a new 'Ecological Park' and transit terminal in the South. The imperial axis of Beijing, designed by Albert Speer Jnr. has been compared to the Hitler's vast ceremonial axis planned for Berlin and designed by Albert Speer during the 1930's. See Carolyn Marvin, 2008.

¹⁰ M Padua, "Modernity and Transformation: Framing the Park in Post Mao Chinese Cities," *Landscape Architect, IFLA Conference Papers* (May, 2006), pg 31.

¹¹ Judith Farquhar, "The Park Pass: Peopling and Civilizing a New Old Beijing" *Public Culture* 21 (Fall 2009), pg566.

gathering, an idea in itself that has chequered history within China as the political disposition of bodies in public space raises bloody histories and altercations between citizenry and ruling classes and the Communist state.

The provision of the Olympic Games' parks appear in this context to continue the tradition of opening a once forbidden enclave, the garden, to the citizens of Beijing. Yet, in spite of the fact that these new parks associated with the Olympic domain are open to the public, and do not require the purchase of an official 'Parks Pass' as do many of the older parks in central Beijing, there appears to be a reluctance to use these new green spaces. American journalist, Thomas Boswell notes that during the Beijing Games the venues and parks were eerily quiet. He suggests that the size of the Olympic Green was too vast to sustain a sense of publicity, and 'at least five times bigger than necessary to hold the number of people who actually use it'.¹² In the face of Beijing's rapid urban growth which will continue to densify the Chaoyang district, one wonders if the Park will eventually attract Beijingers.

Before examining the Olympic Green further, and its status as a vast and 'unwalled' public space, it is important to review how urban thinkers assess the current relationship of the capital to its historic diagrams, and in particular Beijing's structural DNA as a city of walls.

Paradox 2: A Genealogy of Walls

In his book, 'Beijing: The Nature and Planning of a Chinese Capital City', Victor F. S. Sit surveys the city's history of more than three thousand years, and notes Beijing's historical status as capital, cultural and political centre during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), as well as the earlier Liao, Jin, Yuan and Ming dynasties. Reviewing the origins of Beijing's form, Sit identifies that the early city was structured according to ancient Confucian principles of imperial city design dating back to the Han Dynasty Emperor Han Wudi (141-87BC) found in the *Zhou Li*.¹³ Within a section of this text devoted to the design of cities, the *Kaogongji*, the imperial capital is described in detail as a gridded morphology, secured from intruders by a city wall, and "set out as a square with sides of nine *li*, each side having three gateways. Within the capital there were nine meridional and nine latitudinal avenues, each of the former being nine chariot tracks in width."¹⁴ At the heart of the formal grid resided the emperor's palace, facing South and approached by a linear ceremonial axial route, representing the power of the emperor. This gridded structural form bisected by the Imperial Axis still underpins the morphology of Beijing today and the city still preserves much of its original central axis culminating in the Forbidden City, despite having lost its original city wall and undergone enormous city development.

While Sit and others have noted the prevalence of walls in the underlying structure of the Chinese city, David Bray, in his text 'Social Space and Governance in Urban China' considers the social implications of a walled morphology for the space of society: the manner in which the wall has historically normalised certain social practices in Chinese society, first in the traditional form of the city and family compounds, and then later in the Communist work compounds (*danwei*) introduced under Mao. Using the theoretical positioning of both Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, Bray speculates on the manner in which this morphology informs—and is in turn informed by— social practices and subjectivity.

Bray, referring to urban theorist Zhu Wenyi, points out that the 'macro' design of the walled and gridded form of the ancient city is often over emphasized at the expense of understanding the social spaces that constitute the everyday spaces of the city: residential, market and other 'commercial' zones. For Bray, the 'micro' practices of everyday life were enacted in the spaces of the grid, firstly in the form

¹² T Boswell, "Where'd Everybody Go?," *Landscape Architecture: Beijing's Olympic Green lacks a key ingredient - crowds of people using the space* 98, no. 10 (2008), pg 196.

¹³ F. S. Sit, *Beijing: The Nature and Planning of a Chinese Capital* (Chichester; New York: Wiley, 1995).

¹⁴ Quoted in D. Bray, *Social Space and Governance in Urban China: The Danwei System from Origins to Reform* (Stanford Univ Press, 2005), pg 22.

of neighbourhoods (*li-fang*) defined by the spaces between the interlocking grid of the avenues making up the city, and then in the residential compounds, the domain of the Confucian family, which were also walled. In this context, the wall represents the traditional Confucian order, marking and regulating the collective unit of the family and the imperial order of the city.¹⁵ These walled 'units' of society would in effect provide for a system of self-policing and facilitate social and moral order by constructing a sense of collective subjectivity, first within the family, and then later aligned within the workplace and state.

Considering that the Olympic program has accelerated the destruction of this traditional urban form of the 'walled city', it is necessary to explore firstly the mechanisms of the clearance of the old city and then to look at what arises as 'new' physical form: what emerges as a foil for sustaining social collectivity, or indeed public life. In order to point to some of the emergent urban forms, I will situate the urban transformation of Beijing within two contexts. Firstly, the French project of modernity in mid-nineteenth century (an early example of the impetus for rapid and wholesale demolition and reconstruction city fabric to elicit political and societal reform) and secondly urban growth in China in order to underscore the fact that the pace and intensity of new building taking place across China involves the erasure, replacement and expansion of China's urban areas at a rate almost unthinkable in a Western context.

"Destroy the Old to Establish the New" Chairman Mao 1966

Mao's famous slogan of the Cultural Revolution, encouraging the nation to rapidly industrialise, is now being re-enacted in contemporary China under a more literal guise. In Beijing, the erasure and rebuilding of the city appears to be driven by forces concerned to modernize and redefine the *appearance* of Beijing. Deemed unsightly, the dilapidated single courtyard homes (*siheyuan*) and the laneways (*hutong*) that support them are being systematically removed. Official statistics state that roughly 40% of the 3,700 hutongs recorded in the 1980's have now been erased.¹⁶ A resident of Beijing and political activist, Michael Meyer offers an emotive account of the demolition of the remaining courtyard homes in Dazhalan, South of Tiananmen Square. The *hutong* are under threat, he says, "from an unseen specter residents call the Hand. It enters the lanes at night and paints the Chinese character that means "raze", in ghostly white on the courtyard's grey walls. There is no arguing with the Hand".¹⁷

The destruction of the city's fabric, already well underway by 2001, was vastly accelerated in the rush to transform Beijing into a modern Olympic city. In "The Concrete Dragon", Campanella captures the zeitgeist of urban transformation in China's post-Mao era: "[B]y Spring 2005 some 300,000 people had lost their homes to Olympic related development projects, mostly in the vast, semi-rural district North of the City Centre, chosen for the Olympic Green".¹⁸ Much of the historic fabric of Beijing, from as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries, was erased and reconstructed into neo-traditional (faux) courtyard homes built to the edges of wider, gentrified and pedestrianised shopping streets.

The rationale for the large-scale demolition of urban fabric in Beijing is not so dissimilar to the ideas of urban renewal that informed the Modernist project. During the middle decades of the nineteenth century in Paris, social thinkers, architects, engineers and the ruling elite continued to search for new mechanisms to bring about greater efficiency in social order as well as improved hygiene to increasingly overpopulated inner city spaces. Paul Rabinow in his book *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, examines the conditions of French modernity. He identifies social *norms*, or *codifiable* patterns of behavior, in parallel with the instruments used to give *form* to these ideas: the synthesis of

¹⁵ A detailed explanation of the physical characteristics and social consequences of the walled compound typology of the Confucian family module is found in Bray (2005) pages 25-36.

¹⁶ Carolyn Marvin, "All under Heaven" - Megaspaces in Beijing," in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, ed. M. E. and Dayan Price, D. (University of Michigan Press, 2008), pg252.

¹⁷ M Meyer, "The Death and Life of Old Beijing," *Architectural Record* 07, no. 08 (2008), pg73

¹⁸ T. J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World* (Princeton Architectural Pr, 2008), pg 129.

historical and 'natural' elements into a legible schematic for the planned city as a template and regulator for modern society. According to Rabinow, urbanism provided a synthesis of historical and natural elements into an object and was "exemplary in its demonstration of man's ability to exploit, in a comprehensive functional form, and in the name of general welfare of the population, previously naturalized elements (geography, demography, hygiene) as subjects of pragmatic knowledge."¹⁹

Rabinow describes the tactics of modernism's grand duo, Louis Napoleon and Baron Haussmann, as they reorganised the surface of Paris. Approaching the city as a technical object to be worked on, improved and regulated, Haussmann's boulevards tore through the slums of Paris forging new roads which enabled traffic flow, cleared slums and opened up 'breathing space'. The boulevards created new bases of economic, social activity, bringing enormous numbers of people together. At the street level they were lined with small businesses and shops of all kinds, with every corner zoned for restaurants and terraced sidewalk cafes. Of importance to the project of improving the health of the city was a significant increase in the number and area of parks—a formal strategy intended to not only provide an aesthetic improvement, but also an instrument of hygiene.

Berman, in his seminal text, "All That Is Solid Melts into Air" imagines that the boulevards created a new socio-political condition: a space where one could be private in public, ultimately together without being physically alone. He notes an irony in the fact that the modern project allowed 'the physical and social transformations that drove the poor out of sight now bring them back directly into everyone's line of vision'.²⁰ In this way, the opening up of the old city makes visible the mechanisms of social exchange and political disparities.

This idea has particular resonance with the phenomenal re-cycling of Beijing's inner city spaces. The clearance of the slums (under the guise of modernizing the city) is similar to Rabinow's description of Hausmann's attitude to the city as a technical object to be worked on, improved and regulated. As the removal of the urban poor from Paris 'cleaned up' the appearance of the city interior, so too does the project of Olympic beautification, transplanting the socially disadvantaged residents of the *hutong* to the periphery of Beijing. Also, by removing the old city (de-walling) the Chinese government are reforming and making visible certain social and political disparities. As Berman suggests, the gentrification processes—in this case the removal of *hutong* of historic Beijing and the creation of recreational and commercial spaces in their place—allows for the creating of new, albeit conditional forms of, public space.²¹ China's contemporary public spaces hold this potential: to give visibility to an urban underclass who have the right to access these spaces.

Further to this idea, Mao's remodeling of Tiananmen Square is another example of the project and erasure and reconstruction for political purposes, and relevant here too in the tactical creating of a public space of assembly. Positioned adjacent the imperial court of the palace, Tiananmen gate represented the perfect location for Mao to declare the birth of the People's Republic. What followed was the clearance of 50 acres of urban fabric in the expansion of the imperial forecourt to create a vast square for public assembly. Trading on the embedded imperial legacy of the square by association, the new Square required none of the original gates or walls—the traditional markers of Chinese social order. Signalling the triumph of socialism over the past, Mao cut through the North-South axis with a Haussmann-

¹⁹ P Rabinow, *French Modern: The Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (London, England: MIT Press, 1989), pg12.

²⁰ Marshall Berman, "All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity," *Penguin Books* (1982), pg153

²¹ Meyer, 2008 opcit, pg 76. Anne-Marie Broudehoux in her book "The Making and Selling of Beijing" (2004) recounts the removal of the hutong in *Wangfujing* adjacent the forbidden city, and their replacement with Beijing's first shopping mall and Mc Donalds.

like boulevard forming the broad Chang An Avenue as a venue for state displays of military dominance.²²

To return once again to the Olympic site, Carolyn Marvin speculates that the Olympic Green was intended to supplant Tiananmen as a site of public gathering. If Tiananmen, as an open and unwallled civic space was an epochally new kind of Chinese public space where citizens could gather together to affirm the nation state under Mao, then how might the Olympic Green neutralise this possibility? She suggests that the siting of the Green to the North of Tiananmen was not a neutral gesture: according to Confusian logic that which is Northernmost is superior; the Green's Northern extension of the fourteenth century imperial axis extends to its successor in the twenty-first. In this way, Tiananmen Square looks "more like a relic of a completed phase of Chinese history".²³ Further to this idea, the super-sizing of the Green as a public space, 60 times larger than Tiananmen, appears to dilute the possibility for public assembly—there is no singular surface for public gathering on the Green.

While these strategies to disarm possible political instability may not have been deliberately deployed, it is clear that the resultant park eludes the potential for political unrest in its formal disposition. At great pains to not repeat the internationally televised Tiananmen student protests in 1989 during the 2008 Games, the ruling party employed all available strategies to avoid a repeat performance at the Olympic Green, from creating a monumentally vast public space with no fixed point of unified assembly to the omnipresent surveillance of CCTV systems positioned in light towers and on-the-ground security monitoring access.²⁴

A more compelling argument that the Games-space specifically neutralized the possibility of protest Marvin cites, is the idea that the Olympic Green is created as a 'glitzy leisure space for public pleasures'. She writes: "The official vision of the post-Olympic commercial, exhibition and sports and entertainment spaces on the Green paints a civic portrait of obedient consumers attuned more to immediate gratification than politics."²⁵ The assumption here is that as Beijing is increasingly mallified, its citizens are subdued into the mindless act of consumption rather than protest.

The final paradox I will outline in the paper is the rapid transformation of Beijing as an economic surface, or as Marvin puts it the 'mallification' of China, as a condition within which the Olympic Green Masterplan arises.

Paradox 3: China's Rapid Urbanisation

*"Beijing appears to be subject to an evaporating resistance to capitalist ideology. The astonishing building program the city has undertaken in preparation for the coming-out party of the Olympics is an obvious extension of this attitude. The insistent grandiosity, the incredible extent, the mobilization of labor, the fixation on symbolism, and the centralization of planning, all announce a representational project as well as an urban and architectural one."*²⁶

²² Carolyn Marvin "All under Heaven" - Megaspace in Beijing." In *Owning the Olympics : Narratives of the New China*, edited by Price M. E. and Dayan P. D: University of Michigan Press, (2008). Pg 247

²³ Ibid, Pg 249.

²⁴ T Boswell, "Where'd Everybody Go?," *Landscape Architecture: Beijing's Olympic Green lacks a key ingredient - crowds of people using the space* 98, no. 10 (2008)

²⁵ Ibid, pg 249.

²⁶ M Sorkin, "Learning from the Hutong of Beijing and the Lilong of Shanghai " *Architectural Record* (2008).

Beijing's Olympic transformation needs to be viewed in the broader context of understanding the phenomenal pace of modernization throughout China. Thirty years of market orientated economic reform in China, initiated in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping's 'Open Door Policy', has seen China modernise as it embraced the global principles of foreign trade. In this context, urbanisation appears to be considered only as a byproduct of capitalism.

China is the fourth largest economy in the world, and growing at ten percent per annum. Home to twenty percent of the world's population, China's enormous and poorly paid workforce is capable of reliable mass production on a scale unmatched in the rest of the world. China is also becoming more urban: it is estimated that up to four hundred million people will migrate from the countryside to Chinese cities before the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century.²⁷ This urban migration includes a predicted increase in China's population by 2020 to 1.55 billion, 60% of which will be living in cities. Housing this increasing population is driving urban growth, forging the creation of new and efficient forms of design, building and construction systems.

Tracking China's urban growth appears to take on a certain textual melodrama: urban theorists engage in the trade of superlatives as they attempt to comprehend and then respond to the scale of urban change. Some theorists argue that rapid urban growth is creating new urban environments for which there is 'no adequate terminology or any conceptual framework to describe, interpret and understand exactly those forces that could redefine or revitalize it'.²⁸ These new, or emerging morphologies are perhaps not new at all. Population increases are driving the expansion of Beijing's periphery, and indeed pushing at the very edges of the Olympic site. A large demand for housing, and a shortage of available land is driving suburbanisation in the form of 'periphery clusters'.²⁹ The spatial morphology of these peripheral developments is strikingly similar to gated communities that have been documented and decried as anti-urban in the West.³⁰ Adrian Hornsby refers to the rise of this type of Chinese urbanism as the appearance of the 'Slick City'. He nominates the many forms of these instant and ad-hoc new towns as suburban enclaves, factory villages, military settlements and 'themed' towns. He goes on to describe their emergence as discrete entities of discontinuous development within a larger urban structure, but 'always as clearly delineated from the pre-existing'.³¹ "Increasingly these are *slick cities*—clean residential strongholds fortified against their muddled surroundings."³² The economic calculus that drives the production of these typologies is one of profit as China embraces the opportunities for getting rich quickly offered by capitalism.

At first glance the emerging urbanisms within Beijing have a residual spatial syntax of being walled as the rise of the gated community takes hold in China. But what is missing is a sense of collective subjectivity that was so much a part of the Confucian compounds and *danwei*. As the 'slick' commercial city rides over the top of the old city, it is not immediately apparent if the self contained and spatially discrete settlements of the gated community will sustain any sense of collective, or public life. Adrian Hornsby argues that the repercussions for the public realm in the rise of this appropriated Western form in China signifies the demise of the public

²⁷ S Vendell, "The People's Urbanity of China and the Birth of a Megapolis," in *The Chinese Dream: A Society under Construction*, ed. N. Mars and A. Hornsby (O10 Publishers, 2008).

²⁸ C. J. Chung, B. Chang, and R Koolhaas, *Great Leap Forward: Harvard Design School Project on the City* (Harvard Design School, 2001). Koolhaas' introduction, page 6

²⁹ Jing and Qu Zhou, Lei, "Peripheral Cluster Versus New Town: A Comparative Study of Two Types of Peripheral Developments in the Beijing Metropolitan Region," *Footprint: Metropolitan Form* 05 (2009), pg105.

³⁰ Joel Garreau in his seminal tome, 'Edge City' documents the rise of the gated community in America. The fragmented and stratified result is critiqued by, among others, Sorkin in 'Variations on a Theme Park'

³¹ Commodified private housing, built by developers has been replacing the state-subsidised housing provided by the communist work units (*danwei*). The Danwei of the communist period had within their confines office, residential and communal spaces (including kindergartens, hospitals, and markets). Contemporary gated communities do not have these civilizing spaces as built fabric is turned inward such that the interior operations of the compound are privileged over the public domain to the street.

³² N. Mars and A. Hornsby, *The Chinese Dream: A Society under Construction* (O10 Publishers, 2008).

domain as public spaces are reduced to the voids between these buildings and streets are reduced to transit space; arterial connectors between nodes of development.³³ The public vibrancy of the *hutong* is being supplanted by over-scaled public plazas and highways as the city is 'stretched apart'.³⁴

The paradox that is presented here, is that on the one hand the Olympic Green presents a relief from the generic matter of the increasingly (sub)urbanized urban realm. In this condition opportunities for public life are increasingly commodified and privatised. If the public vibrancy of the *hutong* has been erased along with the compounds that supported this life, where then is public life to take place? Purpose built and managed by the state, the Olympic Green is at least designed and sustained as a public surface. Unlike the plethora of gated private housing developments at Beijing's fringe, and Western-style mega-malls, there appears to be *space* for the public on this site. On the other hand, as outlined earlier, the park appears to some urban commentators as a surface to neutralize the possibilities of public assembly and protest, in its vastness and appropriation of commercial surfaces.

Also, as the masterplan for the Olympic Green is completed with further mixed use development planned for its edges, there is increased opportunity for the park to be peopled. Announced at the start of this year KCAP Architects have won a masterplan competition for the Southern edge of the Olympic Park. The project provides 50 hectares of commercial, housing and office space and will activate the surface of the park—the Olympic Green may yet have a civilising population. As the development of urban matter continues to encircle the Green, it not only will continue to be increasingly populated, but it will also be physically enframed. As a site of spectacular significance to the Nation's identity it will sit apart from the ordinary city fabric, distinct and physically separate. This appearance of a massive bounded Park, while a typographically unfamiliar urban form, may yet become normalised as Beijing's citizens appropriate yet another Western type and turn it to their own specific uses.³⁵

³³ The arguments Hornsby raises here recall the critique of devolution of public space due to increased privatisation of the public realm by Mike Davis in his 1992 text "City of Quartz".

³⁴ Hornsby, *opcit.* pg 24.

³⁵ Judith Farquhar, provides further reason for optimism that the Olympic Green will be claimed by Beijing's citizenry as public space, so tightly controlled by the city and the state, as she notes the popularity of Beijing's parks. In her paper 'The Park Pass: Peopling and Civilising a New Old Beijing' she suggests that Beijing's green spaces offer a panacea to a rapidly densifying and increasingly hostile urbanity, and that in a reaction to this Beijingers are asserting their collective claims over its parks and vacant allotments.

Conclusions:

Beijing's Olympic site provides a unique surface to study the affects of rapid transformation of city form - exposing latent forces that govern the specific relations between citizen, state and city. I have outlined three intersecting paradoxes that emerge from the specificities of the Olympic Green and Forest Park and the rapid processes of urban transformation that brought them into existence.

Firstly, the paradox of the park was explored as an unfamiliar typology with questionable popularity, yet it does provide a valuable symbolic, recreational and community space. The remaking of Beijing in the leadup to the 2008 Olympic Games has provided a super-sized public surface that appears in its infancy to be underutilised and as such presents both the possibility for public occupation and civic ownership, or an(other) template of foreign urban matter, or another space of control, that awaits a future erasure. Time will tell if the Olympic Green will live up to its symbolic representation as a surface for the people, created for the "People's Games".

Secondly, in this paper I have considered the genealogy of the wall in Chinese urban life. Traditional Chinese urban form, bounded as it was by the wall, informed a sense of social space and in this was a productive mechanism for the construction of a collective subjectivity. With the historical form of the Chinese city steadily undergoing erasure in the face of rapid urbanisation and globalisation, the physical manifestation, or formal representations of a social fabric are being increasingly overtaken by generic built form that fundamentally alters the arrangement of urban life. As China becomes 'de-walled', I have posed the question, what are the contemporary manifestations of the wall? I have demonstrated the way in which collective subjectivity have been politically stage-managed in urban forms in the design of the Olympic Green.

Finally, the third section of the paper examines China's evaporating resistance to capitalism and the forms of *spatial instability* in the public realm that arise from this. I suggest that the terrain of the 'slick' or generic city presents a paradox for China as these predominantly Western forms still require negotiation of program, use and meaning. In this process the Chinese citizenry is also negotiating their identities in relation to the West in parallel with the generation of new urban form and the public spaces they support. The case study of the Olympic domain provides a unique exemplar for the examination of these negotiations.

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