Arts & Architecture

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ARTS

The arts scene in Běijīng has come a long way in the past two decades, with a once underground arts movement now firmly established above ground. Following alongside China's dizzying social and economic transformation, Běijīng artists are riding a wave of creative energy that's putting many of them on the international map. With its excellent cinema, theatre, music and visual arts venues, the capital serves as the most important meeting place for artists in China and is an excellent place to see for yourself the enduring vitality of Chinese traditional and contemporary arts.

LITERATURE

Běijīng has been home to some of China's towering literary figures, including such heavyweights as Lao She, Lu Xun, Mao Dun and Guo Moruo. Over the past 100 years, Běijīng writers have penned their stories of sorrow, fears and aspirations amid a context of ever-changing trends and political upheaval. Nowadays, with the explosion of the internet and popular culture, there's an enormous flurry of literary activity, ranging from politics to pulp, from blogs to porn. Běijīng remains one of China's most important literary centres, with a dynamic group of writers, many young and upcoming, who are turning the Chinese writing scene on its head.

Contemporary Chinese literature is commonly grouped into two stages: pre-1989 and post-1989. After China came under the control of the communists, most writing in 20th-century China tended to echo the Communist Party line, with dull, formulaic language and humdrum plotlines. Writers were required to fill their work with stock phrases such as 'the great, glorious, correct Communist Party' and create cardboard characters that embodied political ideals. Writing was banal and unimaginative, with little allowance for creative embellishment.

After Mao's death in 1976, Chinese artists and writers threw off political constraints and began to write more freely, exploring new modes of literary expression. Western books began to appear in translation, including works by authors such as Faulkner, Woolf and Hemingway. The Chinese also developed a taste for more mainstream fare like Kurt Vonnegut and even Jackie Collins. This deluge of Western writing had a great impact on many Chinese authors who were exposed for the first time to a wide array of literary techniques and styles.

An important writer to emerge during this period is Zhang Jie, who first drew the attention of literary critics in the late 1970s with the publication of her daring novella *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* (1979). The book challenged the traditional structure of marriage with its intimate portrayal of a middle-aged woman and her love of a married man. Chinese authorities disparaged the book, calling it morally corrupt, but the book was extremely popular with readers and won a national book award. Zhang went on to write the novels *Heavy Wings* (1980) and *The Ark* (1981). *The Ark*, about three women separated from their husbands, established Zhang as China's 'first feminist author'. Shen Rong was another talented female author to appear during the 1980s. Her novella *At Middle Age* (1980), tells the plight of a Chinese intellectual during the Cultural Revolution who must balance her family life with her career as a doctor.

Several literary movements appeared during the late 1970s and 1980s, including a movement called 'Scar Literature', in which writers for the first time dared to explore the traumatic events of the Cultural Revolution. Another literary movement that also emerged was called 'New Realism', which explored issues that were previously taboo, such as AIDS, party corruption and other contemporary social problems. One of the most controversial novels to appear in the 1980s was *Half of Man is Woman,* by Zhang Xianliang and translated into English by Martha Avery. The novel gives a candid exploration of sexuality and marriage in contemporary China and Zhang's book became an international bestseller. Another of Zhang's works that has been translated into English is *Getting Used to Dying* (1989), about a writer's new-found sexual freedom, also translated by Martha Avery.

After the tragic events of 1989 the desire for a more 'realist' type of literature grew in China, paving the way for a new group of writers, such as the now internationally recognised 'hooligan author' Wang Shuo, a sailor turned fiction writer, who has become known for his satirical stories about China's underworld and political corruption. Wang's stories, which are dark, gritty and take jabs at just about every aspect of contemporary Chinese society, have made him none too popular among Chinese authorities, who believe him to be a 'spiritual pollutant' and a bad influence on his readers. One of Wang's most contentious novels, *Please Don't Call Me Human*, first published in 1989, was written after the events of Tiananmen Square and provides a mocking look at the failures of China's state security system. Wang's works appeal to a broad spectrum of Chinese society, despite being banned. He has written over 20 books as well as screenplays for TV and film. Books available in English include *Playing for Thrills* (2000) and *Please Don't Call Me Human* (1998), both translated by Howard Goldblatt.

The literature that came out of the 1990s was certainly a far cry from the Maoist tracts of earlier years. The 1990s saw an explosion of experimental writing, with many works probing the boundaries of risky and often controversial subjects. Wang Meng, former minister of culture, became famous for his stream-of-consciousness style of writing and his satirical take on everything from politics to Chinese medicine. His collection of short stories, *The Stubborn Porridge and Other Stories* (1994), translated by Zhu Hong, is a smart, scathing look at modern Chinese society. The composer, playwright and author Liu Sola, who began writing in the mid-1980s, became internationally recognised a decade later with her novel *Chaos and All That* (1994), translated by Richard King, about a Chinese woman in London who writes a novel about growing up in Běijīng during the Cultural Revolution.

BĚIJĪNG BOOKSHELF

- *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* (1990) – by Lu Xun, translated by William Lyell. Lu Xun is considered the father of modern Chinese literature and this classic was the first of its kind to be written in a first-person narrative. The story is a criticism of Confucian repression in pre-revolutionary China. *Diary of a Madman* was also the first short story written in *baihua* (colloquial speech) apart from its first paragraph.
- *Camel Xiangzi* (1981) – by Lao She, translated by Shi Xiaoqing. A masterpiece by one of China's most beloved authors about a rickshaw puller living in early-20th-century China.
- *Blades of Grass: The Stories of Lao She* (2000) – translated by William Lyell. This collection contains 14 stories by Lao She – poignant descriptions of people living through times of political upheaval and uncertainty.
- *Beijinger in New York* (1993) – by Glen Cao, translated by Ted Wang. The author's own immigrant story about a young Běijīng couple in New York and their difficult transition to life in the West.
- *Black Snow* (1993) – by Liu Heng, translated by Howard Goldblatt. Liu Heng, author of the story that formed the basis for the film, *Ju Dou*, wrote this compelling novel about workers in contemporary Běijīng. A superbly written book and a fine translation.
- *Empress Orchid* – Anchee Min (2004). Historical novel about Empress Cixi and her rise to Empress of China during the last days of the Qing dynasty. Good historical background of Běijīng and entertaining to read.
- *Peking Story: The Last Days of Old China* (2003) – David Kidd. This is a true story of a young man who marries the daughter of an aristocratic Chinese family in Běijīng two years before the 1949 Communist Revolution. The writing is simple, yet immersive.
- *Beijing: A Novel* (2003) – by Philip Gambone. A well-written account of an American working in a medical clinic in Běijīng who falls in love with a local artist. One of the few books out there to explore in depth the intricacies of Běijīng gay subculture.
- *The Noodle Maker* (2004) – by Ma Jian, translated by Flora Drew. A collection of interconnected stories as told by a state-employed writer during the aftermath of Tiananmen Square. Bleak, comical and unforgettable.
- *Sounds of the River: A Young Man's University Days in Beijing* (2003) – by Da Chen. A humorous account of the author's life as a student in Běijīng. The writing is lyrical and uplifting.
- *Lake with No Name* (2004) – by Diane Wei Liang. An intelligent memoir of a young woman's involvement in the events leading up to 4 June 1989. The author writes movingly of her relationships with many of the activists involved.
- *Foreign Babes in Beijing: Behind the Scenes of a New China* (2005) – by Rachel Dewoskin. An easy-going account of a young woman's five years spent in Běijīng during the mid-1990s.

China's rampant commercialisation and excessive materialism have given an emerging generation of authors a new platform. Younger authors, who remember nothing about the Cultural Revolution and to whom the events at Tiananmen Square remain a vague memory, are writing instead about the loneliness and decadence of modern city life. Escapism is a common theme in contemporary novels, often through sex, drugs and alcohol. The provocative novel *Beijing Doll* (2004), by Chun Shu (Sue), translated by Howard Goldblatt, is written by a high school dropout who lives a life of sex, drugs and alcohol. Called a 'punk memoir', the book is currently banned in China for its disturbing account of teenagers caught up in Běijīng's dark underbelly. Annie Wang's *The People's Republic of Desire* (2006) also holds nothing back with its candid exploration of sexuality in modern Běijīng. The acclaimed novelist Ma Jian also picks up on the theme of escapism, but infuses his work with a sense of nostalgia. *Red Dust* (2004) by Ma Jian, translated by Flora Drew, is a poignant story of the author's three-year trek through Guizhou, Burma and Tibet. One of the most moving works to appear in English within the past few years is *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2006) by Yiyun Li. The short stories in this collection, told in haunting prose, reveal the lives of ordinary Chinese caught up in the sweeping cultural changes of the past twenty years. This book won the Guardian First Book Award in 2006.

Over the past several years the internet has given rise to a vibrant, alternative literary scene. A large number of established and wannabe authors are posting their poetry, personal diaries and even novels on the internet and attracting huge numbers of readers. It's estimated that there are over 17 million blogs in China and that number is growing. Government censors find it difficult to control works on the 'net, in contrast to the tight editorial controls on print media. Authors often blog away about controversial topics such as sex and politics without too much fear of political repercussion. Lin Qianyu is the latest in a number of internet celebrities. He's a 19-year-old high school dropout whose fantasy novel *Carefree: A Crusade Legend* won the grand prize in Sina.com's (www.sina.com; the largest Chinese-language web portal in the world) online writing competition. Writer Ning Ken's story *The Veiled City* was posted online and landed him the Lao She Literary Award, one of the most prestigious awards in China.

CHINA'S CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE *David Eimer*

When Brian Wallace arrived in China as a backpacker in 1984 there was no visible contemporary art scene. Artists were viewed with suspicion and were frequently subject to harassment and worse by the authorities. They showed their work to each other and their friends only inside the safety of their own homes. But just as China has transformed itself into an economic powerhouse, so Chinese artists have made the long march from obscurity to global recognition and their work has become prized by both mainland Chinese art collectors and foreigners.

Part of that success is due to Wallace, an Australian who grew up in a small country town in New South Wales. Having returned to China to live in 1986, he opened the **Red Gate Gallery** (p79), Běijīng's first space devoted to contemporary art, in the imposing Southeast Corner Watchtower in 1991. In 2005, he opened his second gallery in the flourishing 798 Art District in Dashanzi (p103).

Wallace represents, or has represented, just about every contemporary Chinese artist of note. His role in helping develop China's booming art scene means he's often referred to as the 'father of contemporary Chinese art'. 'Other people have said that. I would never say it,' protests the amiable, bearded Wallace. In fact, when he started out in the late '80s, it was a simple case of helping out mates. 'My friends were artists and in those days there were no galleries, so we started to organise exhibitions for them.'

Things have changed dramatically since then. Paintings by artists like Fang Lijun, Zhang Xiaogang and Yue Minjun can fetch US$1 million at auction, as the advent of mainland Chinese buyers has helped drive prices up. 'In the last couple of years, galleries overseas have started to pick up on contemporary Chinese artists, museums have started to buy and now the auction houses have kicked in. Their job is to talk up the market of course, which they've been doing quite well,' says Wallace.

Painters and sculptors are the artists who've benefited the most from the boom. 'The more traditional forms are the most popular. The market for photography has eased off a bit. Mainland buyers, who make up 20% of our customers, are more conservative than overseas buyers. They like the contemporary work, but they stick to paintings rather than the more conceptual stuff,' points out Wallace. Nor have female artists prospered as much as the men. 'I think it's more difficult for women artists. They don't necessarily hold up half the sky in the art world.'

In the past, Chinese artists were often accused of being derivative and in thrall to their Western contemporaries. Wallace believes that's no longer the case. 'They went through a period where they absorbed everything, but now they're much more confident and appreciative of the attention they're getting. The stamp of approval gives them a lot of confidence. There's a lot of gutsy stuff out their now.'

While China's filmmakers and writers are still subject to stringent censorship, the visual arts have been treated more leniently. 'The government has accepted, or realised, that young artists aren't going to bring down the country,' says Wallace. 'But we know the political limits and we have had to take shows down in the past when they've been over-the-top politically.'

With an ever-increasing range of art available, visitors to Běijīng who want to buy a piece can find something to suit every taste and price range. 'You can get some very valuable prints by very important artists for hundreds of dollars, or we can sell you a large oil painting for US$200,000', says Wallace. With the demand for Chinese art set to continue, you could end up with a bargain.

VISUAL ARTS

With scores of private and state-run galleries and a booming art market, Běijīng is a fantastic place to witness the changing face of contemporary art in China. While traditional Chinese art is still practised in the capital, Běijīng is also home to a large community of artists practising a diverse mix of art forms including performance art, installation, video art and film. Běijīng artists commonly compete internationally in art events, and joint exhibitions with European and North American artists are common. The capital plays host to a number of art festivals, including the Dashanzi International Arts Festival, held every spring, and the Běijīng Biennale, held every two years in September/October, which attract artists, dealers and critics from around the world. Greater freedom from government control and international recognition has helped many Běijīng artists reach new levels of economic success and some have even entered the pop cultural mainstream.

Similar to what was happening in the Chinese literary scene, Chinese artists experienced a creative renaissance after the death of Mao in 1976. Some painters began using the realist techniques they learned in China's art academies to portray the harsh realities of Chinese peasant life in modern day China. Others broke away from the confines of 'socialist realism' and moved into broader territory, experimenting with a variety of contemporary forms. Many turned to the West for inspiration and tried to incorporate Western ideas into their works.

One such group of artists, the Stars, found inspiration in Picasso and German Expressionism. The short-lived group was very important for the development of Chinese art in the 1980s and 1990s, leading the way for the New Wave movement that appeared in 1985. New Wave artists were greatly influenced by Western art, especially Marcel Duchamp, and through their work challenged traditional Chinese aesthetics. One New Wave artist, Huang Yongping, became known for destroying his works at exhibitions, in an effort to escape from the notion of 'art'. Some New Wave artists transformed Chinese characters into abstract symbols while others used graphic images in their work in order to shock viewers.

Performance art also became popular, with many artists wrapping themselves in plastic or tape to symbolise the repressive realities of modern day China.

The pivotal turning point for contemporary Chinese art came in 1989. In February of that year, Běijīng's China Art Museum (p85) sponsored an exhibit devoted exclusively to Chinese avant-garde art for the first time, inviting all of the important artists of the past decade to exhibit. On the opening day of the exhibition, artists Tang Song and Xiao Lu fired pistol shots at their own installations and the exhibition closed. Both artists were arrested but released several days later.

The upsetting events that followed June 1989 caused many artists to become disillusioned with the current political situation in China and idealism soon soured into cynicism. This attitude is reflected through the 1990s and artworks are permeated with feelings of loss, loneliness and social isolation. Many artists left China to find greater artistic freedom in the West. Two of the most important Běijīng artists to characterise this period of 'Cynical Realism' are Fang Lijun and Yue Minjun. Both created grotesque portraits of themselves and friends that convey a sense of boredom and mock joviality.

Experiments with American-style pop art were another reaction to the events of 1989. Inspired by Warhol, some artists took symbols of socialist realism and transformed them

into kitschy visual commentary. Images of Mao appeared against floral backgrounds and paintings of rosy-cheeked peasants and soldiers were interspersed with ads for Canon cameras and Coca-Cola. Artists were not only responding to the tragedies of the Tiananmen massacre but also to the rampant consumerism that was sweeping the country.

Reaction to the rapid modernisation that is affecting Běijīng as well as other Chinese cities has been a current theme of much of the art from the 1990s to the present day. Urban development and accompanying feelings of isolation and dislocation are themes of Běijīng video artist Zhu Jia. In his video titled 'Double Landscape', a man is being served coffee by a mannequin dressed as a woman. The banality of the video and its lack of drama or narrative are meant to be representative of the meaninglessness of urban existence. The artist Yin Xiuzhen has become internationally renowned for her artistic commentaries (eg visual installations) on globalisation, urban waste and the destruction of Běijīng's traditional architecture.

Throughout the 1990s, artists who felt marginalised from the cultural mainstream found escape from political scrutiny by setting up their own exhibitions in non-official spaces outside of state-run institutions. Many relied on the financial support of foreign buyers to continue working. Despite political pressure from authorities, some artists began to receive international attention for their art, sparking a worldwide interest in Chinese art. A defining moment for artists was in 1999, when 20 Chinese artists were invited to participate in the Venice Biennale for the first time.

In just a few short years, the art climate in Běijīng has changed dramatically. Many artists who left China in the 1990s have returned, setting up private studios and galleries. Government censorship remains, but authorities often turn a blind eye to work once considered politically subversive. It's estimated that in 2006, there were more than 300 art galleries in Běijīng, the majority opened after 2001. Half of these galleries are Chinese-owned, and as well there are dozens of foreign galleries that have opened branches in Běijīng.

Dashanzi, a factory-turned-gallery zone in northeastern Běijīng is a favourite destination for artists and buyers. Created in 2001, this once quiet enclave has transformed into a thriving neighbourhood of lofts, galleries, bookshops, design studios, cafés and bars, all tucked into a small section of Dashanzi called 798 Art District (p103) – named after Factory 798, a disused electronics factory complex built in the 1950s by East German architects. Here, Mao's ideals are reinterpreted through the artistic works of China's new visionaries, resulting in a lively, enigmatic and sometimes controversial community that attracts artists, dealers and critics from around the world. For an excellent behind-the-scenes look at the vibrant Dashanzi art community, be sure to get your hands on *Beijing 798: Reflections on Art, Architecture and Society in China,* edited by Běijīng artist Huang Rui.

TOP TEN BĚIJĪNG ART GALLERIES

- Courtyard Gallery (p86) – This contemporary Chinese art gallery has recently relocated from its Forbidden City location to Caochandi, a few kilometres northeast of the 798 Art District.
- Red Gate Gallery (p79) – Founded by an Australian, this gallery has a focus on contemporary Chinese art.
- 25000 Cultural Transmission Center – Also known as 'The Long March Space,' the 25000 Cultural Transmission Center promotes artistic works often excluded from Běijīng's mainstream art scene.
- Wan Fung Art Gallery (p77) – Gallery representing contemporary artists working in traditional painting, oil painting, watercolour painting, sculpture and mixed media.
- 798 Art Space (p103) – German Bauhaus warehouse (gallery within 798 Art District) with over 1200 sq metres of art space exhibiting works of Chinese contemporary artists.
- China Art Archives and Warehouse – Exhibition space devoted to experimental art in China.
- L.A. Gallery Beijing – Gallery dedicated to cultural exchange between artists internationally.
- Chinese Contemporary Art Gallery – This gallery shows mainly group exhibitions of contemporary Chinese artists.
- Millennium Art Museum – Also called the World Art Museum, this museum exhibits ancient and modern art from around the globe.
- China Art Museum (p85) – This was the first gallery in Běijīng to exhibit modern Western artworks and remains a pivotal institution in China's contemporary art scene.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE PAINTING

The origins of Chinese painting lie in the Bronze Age, beginning with representational figures of humans, animals and demons inscribed on bronze vessels. The emphasis on brushwork and line in these works was and remains the defining element of traditional Chinese painting. In fact, the character *hua*, 'to paint', represents a brush tracing the boundaries of a field. While Western painting values colour, composition and texture, the quality of a Chinese painting has shown from early on the great importance placed on brush technique.

Painting flourished during the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907). The most painted subjects were scenes of court life, as well as animals. The Tang also saw a rise in the popularity of landscape painting. The idyllic natural worlds depicted in Tang landscapes are beautifully detailed in brilliant washes of blues and greens.

During the Northern (AD 960–1127) and Southern Song (1127–1279) dynasties landscape painting rose to new heights of excellence. Song painters preferred moody, romantic landscapes with mist-covered mountains and imaginary locales.

With the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) painting took on a much different tone to that of the Song dynasty. Yuan paintings have large empty spaces and are quite austere compared to those of the Tang and Song.

The Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1911) saw a return to earlier styles of painting. Conventional subject matter was conveyed in startling new ways, with more emphasis on patterns and bright colours.

MUSIC

In 1986 during a 'World Peace' music concert held in Běijīng, a young trumpet player named Cui Jian walked on stage, strapped on a guitar and played a song that would forever change the sound and look of Chinese popular music. With its distinctly abrasive vocal style and lyrics describing feelings of loneliness and alienation, 'Nothing To My Name' ('Yi Wo Suo You') was unlike any song ever performed by a mainland Chinese musician.

For early Chinese rock bands like Tang Dynasty and Black Panther, the riffs and power chords of heavy metal from the '70s and '80s (ie Led Zeppelin and Rush) provided the inspiration to pick up guitars, grow long hair and start a band. This 'First Generation' of Chinese rockers took inspiration from classic rock, heavy metal, and punk's aggression and abrasiveness.

Since those early days, Chinese rock has continued to flourish and Běijīng has gained the reputation as China's rock-music mecca. Acts like ambient breakbeaters Supermarket, post-punk outfit SUBS, metal groups Spring and Autumn (Chunqiu), Suffocation (Zhixi) and Ritual Day (Shijiao Ri), and the Nirvana- and Doors-influenced Cold Blooded Animals, share the stage at Běijīng's numerous live-music venues (see p148) with rockers Black Panther, Sand (Shazi), Xiao He, the highly popular Second Hand Roses (Ershou Meigui) and more established acts. Look out also for hip-hop acts Dragon Tongue, CMBC and MC Da Kuan.

DJ culture has also come to China with Běijīng's new wave of clubs. Club-goers can now get their grooves on to the booming sounds of hip-hop, house, drum-and-bass, techno and trance in addition to the popular sounds of home-grown Chinese house music.

This infusion of new styles and sounds has left an indelible impression on Chinese society, especially its youth culture. Today the sight of a long-haired Běijīng homeboy with a guitar strapped to his back is about as common as that of a cigarette vendor or taxi driver. TV music programmes and radio shows play songs by rock acts almost as frequently as they do pop crooners and divas, while even hotel bars feature rock bands on a regular basis. Indeed, with such an infusion of new sounds and styles it appears that Chinese rock is here to stay.

Rock festivals worth looking out for include the open-air MIDI Music Festival at the Beijing MIDI School of Music (☎ 6259 0101, 6259 0007) – held every October (changed from May) when a vast array of heavy metal, punk and jazz bands perform live. Another excellent festival is the Beijing Pop Festival (www.beijingpopfestival.com/music) held every September in Chaoyang Park. In 2006, the venue sold 12,000 tickets and featured the international acts Supergrass, Placebo, Norway's Don Juan Dracula, and local hard rockers AK47 and Muma.

For classical music and opera lovers, the five-day International Music Festival is held every May and attracts internationally renowned composers from China and abroad. Performances are held at the Central Conservatory of Music and the Beijing Concert Hall (p150). The Beijing Music Festival (www.bmf.org.cn) is held for around 30 days during the months of October and November and features musical performances by opera, jazz and classical artists from around the world. For live music venues, see p148.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MUSIC

The Chinese believed that the chimes of the large sets of bells (seen in Confucian temples and at the Great Bell Temple in Běijīng) corresponded with the *dào* (way). A concordant pitch would signify all was well between heaven and earth. Similarly, the Chinese believe that all music influences the equilibrium of the *dào*.

Historically, music served a ceremonial or religious function, rather than as entertainment. Confucian students studied music not to rouse the emotions, but to seek inner quietude and balance. The *Book of Songs (Shījīng)* and the *Book of Rites (Lǐjì)*, two books of the Confucian canon, dwell on song, the rhythms of life and the function of music. It fell to folk song traditions to reflect the musical enjoyment of the common people and China's rich ethnic mix.

Traditional Chinese musical instruments include the two-stringed fiddle (*èrhú*) – famed for its desolate wail – the two-stringed viola (*húqín*), the vertical flute (*dòngxiāo*), the horizontal flute (*dízi*), the four-stringed lute (*pípa*) and the Chinese zither (*zhēng*).

To appreciate traditional music in Běijīng, catch performances at the **Lao She Teahouse** (p147) or the **Sanwei Bookstore** (p148).

CINEMA & TV

The cinematic output of Fifth Generation directors, whose works were received with standing ovations worldwide in the 1980s and 1990s, was a high-point for Chinese film. *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), directed by Chen Kaige, and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), directed by Zhang Yimou, were garlanded with praise and reaped several major film awards. The lavish tragedies, starring icons such as Gong Li, radiated a beauty that entranced Western audiences and made their directors the darlings of Cannes.

Sixth Generation film directors shunned the exquisite beauty and lush palette of the Fifth Generation and rendered instead the angst and grimness of modern urban Chinese life. Their independent, low-budget works put an entirely different spin on mainland Chinese filmmaking, but their dour subject matter and harsh film style (frequently in black and white) left many Western viewers cold.

The Beijing Film Academy graduate Zhang Yuan set a precedent for gritty, independent filmmaking with *Mama* (1990), a beautiful but disturbing film about a mother and her autistic child. This small film, created without government sponsorship, had a large influence on future filmmakers. Zhang followed up *Mama* with *Beijing Bastards* (1993), which focussed on the preoccupations and drug-taking lifestyle of Běijīng's youth. Another important film, *Frozen* (1995), directed by Wang Xiaoshuai, also strayed into controversial territory with its disturbing examination of suicide. *Beijing Bicycle* (2001), also directed by Wang Xiaoshuai and inspired by De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, is a tale of a Běijīng youth seeking to recover his stolen bike.

Today, except for a few directors who are able to attract domestic and overseas investments, such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, Chinese filmmakers are constantly dealing with a shortage of funds, small audiences and high ticket prices. To cap it all, many Sixth Generation films went unseen inside China. Both Fifth and Sixth Generation directors have constantly run into problems with the authorities and the most controversial were clipped by the censors or banned outright. Other retaliatory measures included revoking their passports so they could not attend foreign film festivals. Regardless, the movie industry carries on, producing surprisingly high-quality films on tiny budgets.

Some of the most intriguing movies of the past few years include the films of Feng Xiaogang, known for *Big Shot's Funeral* (2001, starring Donald Sutherland) and most recently *The Banquet* (2006), a lavish historical epic starring China's new leading lady Zhang Ziyi. On a much simpler note, Zhang Yuan's *Little Red Flowers* (2006) is a poignant story of a young boy adapting to the rigid conformity of Chinese kindergarten and is well-worth seeing. A film that caused a buzz at international film festivals is Jia Zhangke's *The World* (2005), which follows the lives of youth and migrant workers employed at a Běijīng theme park. A good place to screen Chinese films by established and emerging directors is at the Beijing Student Film Festival, a 20-day event held every April. Films are shown at various venues around the city – you can check *That's Beijing* (www.thatsbj.com) for screen times.

On TV, most Chinese prefer to watch contemporary sitcoms and soaps imported from South Korea or Japan (collectively called *rìhánjù*, literally 'series from Japan and South Korea') or films made in Hong Kong and Taiwan (collectively called *gǎngtáipiān*), rather than those produced locally. Chinese productions portraying contemporary life fail to depict the world realistically, but Chinese viewers lap up the ubiquitous Chinese historical costume dramas.

PERFORMING ARTS

Theatre

As spoken drama is a recent introduction to China and opera traditionally took the place of storytelling, theatre remains an emergent art. An increasing number of theatrical companies are coming to Běijīng from abroad, however, and local theatre companies are staging more and more productions, many of which are influenced by Western technique and content. For stage events in Běijīng, consult the stage listings of *That's Beijing*.

Opera

Beijing opera is still regarded as the *crème de la crème* of all the opera styles prevalent in China and has traditionally been the opera of the masses. Intrigues, disasters or rebellions usually inspire themes, and many have their source in the fairy tales and stock characters and legends of classical literature.

The music, singing and costumes are products of the opera's origins. Formerly, opera was performed mostly on open-air stages in markets, streets, teahouses or temple courtyards. The orchestra had to play loudly and the performers had to develop a piercing style of singing, which could be heard over the throng. The costumes are a garish collection of sharply contrasting colours because the stages were originally lit by oil lamps.

The movements and techniques of the dance styles of the Tang dynasty are similar to those of today's opera. Provincial opera companies were characterised by their dialect and style of singing, but when these companies converged on Běijīng they started a style of musical drama called *kunqu*. This developed during the Ming dynasty, along with a more popular variety of

BEST FILMS ABOUT BĚIJĪNG

- *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) – Eschewing the lavish colour of Fifth Generation directors and observing Běijīng through a realist lens, Wang Xiaoshuai's film follows young and hapless courier Guo on the trail of his stolen mountain bike.
- *The Last Emperor* (1987) – Bernardo Bertolucci's celebrated (seven Oscars including best director, best costume design and best cinematography) and extravagant epic charts the life of Henry Puyi during his accession and the ensuing disintegration of dynastic China.
- *Beijing Bastards* (1993) – Starring rocker Cui Jian, Yuan Zhang's documentary-style cinematography tags along with a rock band in Běijīng, grittily capturing the energy of Běijīng's alienated and discontented youth.
- *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (1995) – Using original footage from the six weeks preceding the Tiananmen massacre, Richard Gordon and Carma Hinton's moving three-hour tribute to the spirit of the student movement and its annihilation is a must-see.
- *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) – Charting a dramatic course through 20th-century Chinese history from the 1920s to the Cultural Revolution, Chen Kaige's film is a sumptuous and stunning narrative of two friends from the Beijing opera school whose lives are framed against social and political turmoil.
- *The Making of Steel* (1998) – Lu Xuecheng directed this intriguing film about a rebellious young man and his involvement in Běijīng's underground music scene during the 1970s and 1990s.
- *The World* (2005) – Jia Zhangke's social commentary on the effects of globalisation is set in a Běijīng theme park called 'World Park', where workers and visitors play out their lives among replicas of the world's monuments.
- *Blooming Flowers in Springtime* (2002) – This exquisitely beautiful short film by Chang Zheng tells the story of a young deaf-mute couple in Běijīng and the trials of bringing up their hearing son.
- *Shower* (1999) – Though at times overly sentimental, this endearing film about a bathhouse owner and his sons warmed the hearts of both Chinese and foreign audiences. Directed by Zhang Yang.
- *For Fun* (1992) – Directed by Ning Ying, China's most renowned female filmmaker, this film follows the life of a retired custodian at a Beijing opera theatre and his humorous attempts to transform a group of grumpy senior citizens into opera singers.

THE WHO'S WHO OF BEIJING OPERA

There are four types of actors' role: the *shēng, dàn, jìng* and *chǒu*. The *shēng* are the leading male actors and they play scholars, officials, warriors and the like. They are divided into the *laoshēng,* who wear beards and represent old men, and the *xiǎoshēng,* who represent young men. The *wénshēng* are the scholars and the civil servants. The *wushēng* play soldiers and other fighters, and because of this are specially trained in acrobatics.

The *dàn* are the female roles. The *lǎodàn* are the elderly, dignified ladies such as mothers, aunts and widows. The *qīngyī* are aristocratic ladies in elegant costumes. The *huādàn* are the ladies' maids, usually in brightly coloured costumes. The *dǎomǎdàn* are the warrior women. The *cǎidàn* are the female comedians. Traditionally, female roles were played by male actors, but now they are almost always played by females.

The *jìng* are the painted-face roles and they represent warriors, heroes, statesmen, adventurers and demons. Their counterparts are the *fújìng*, ridiculous figures who are anything but heroic.

The *chou* is basically the clown. The *cǎidàn* is sometimes the female counterpart of this male role.

play-acting pieces based on legends, historical events and popular novels. These styles gradually merged by the late 18th and early 19th centuries into the opera we see today.

The musicians usually sit on the stage in plain clothes and play without written scores. The *èrhú*, a two-stringed fiddle that is tuned to a low register and has a soft tone, generally supports the *húqín*, a two-stringed viola tuned to a high register. The *yùeqín*, a sort of moon-shaped four-stringed guitar, has a soft tone and is used to support the *èrhú*. Other instruments are the *shēng* (a reed flute) and the *pípa* (lute), as well as drums, bells and cymbals. Last but not least is the *ban*, a time-clapper that virtually directs the band, beats time for the actors and gives them their cues.

Apart from the singing and the music, the opera also incorporates acrobatics and mime. Few props are used, so each move, gesture or facial expression is symbolic. A whip with silk tassels indicates an actor riding a horse. Lifting a foot means going through a doorway. Language is often archaic Chinese, music is ear-splitting (bring some cotton wool), but the costumes and make-up are magnificent. Look out for a swift battle sequence – the female warriors involved are trained acrobats who leap, twirl, twist and somersault into attack.

There are numerous other forms of opera. The Cantonese variety is more 'music hall', often with a 'boy meets girl' theme. Gaojia opera is one of the five local operatic forms from the Fújiàn province and is also popular in Taiwan, with songs in the Fújiàn dialect but influenced by the Beijing opera style.

If you get bored after the first hour or so, check out the audience antics – spitting, eating apples, plugging into a transistor radio (important sports match perhaps?) or loudly slurping tea. It's lively audience entertainment fit for an emperor. For recommended theatres that stage performances of Beijing opera see p147.

ARCHITECTURE

Běijīng today is an eye-popping fusion of old and new. On every street corner there's the buzz of jackhammers as streets are torn up and traditional buildings are razed to make way for new roads, hotels, restaurants and office complexes – all in preparation for the 2008 Olympics, where officials hope to showcase the city as a model of material success. Authorities have planned an entire makeover of the city, with construction in the works for a new light rail and subway system, a new expressway and the expansion of streets in the downtown urban core. Don't despair – even under all the noise and construction, parts of the old city still remain; architectural masterpieces like the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven are off limits to developers and remain one of the best reasons to visit China's sprawling, enigmatic capital.

Traditional architecture in Běijīng is a legacy of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), as seen in the magnificent Forbidden City, Summer Palace and the remaining *hútòng*, small alleys and courtyard style homes, in the centre of the city. Few buildings now stand in Běijīng that predate the Ming dynasty. Because early buildings were constructed with wood and paper, most were not meant to last very long. The longest standing structure in Běijīng is the Great Wall, built in 3 BC though what you'll mainly see today around town are Ming dynasty rebuilds. One of the best places to see the ancient architecture of China is at the **Beijing Ancient Architecture Museum** (p83), which has exhibits of architecture ranging from early mud huts to examples of Ming and Qing palaces.

Chinese architecture normally falls into four categories: residential, imperial palaces, temples and recreational. Residences in Běijīng were once *sìhéyuàn*, houses situated on four sides of a courtyard. The houses were aligned exactly – the northern house was found directly opposite the southern, the eastern directly across from the western. *Sìhéyuàn* can still be found in a few remaining pockets in central Běijīng, though most have disappeared.

Traditionally the Chinese followed a basic ground plan when they built their homes. In upper class homes as well as in palaces and temples, buildings were surrounded by an exterior wall and designed on a north–south axis, with an entrance gate and a gate built for spirits that might try to enter the building. Behind the entry gates in palaces and residential buildings was a public hall and behind this were private living quarters built around a central court with a garden. The garden area of upper-class gentry and imperial families spawned an entire subgenre of 'recreational architecture', which included gardens, pavilions, pagodas, ponds and bridges. The Forbidden City (p87) and Summer Palace (p102) remain the finest examples of imperial architecture remaining in Běijīng. In fact, the Forbidden City is the largest architectural complex in China, covering over 72 hectares. Fine examples of temple architecture can be seen at Beihai Park (p84), the Lama Temple (p91) and at Chéngdé (p203).

Běijīng's building mania accelerated in the 1990s, with a housing renovation policy that resulted in thousands of old-style homes and Stalinist concrete structures from the 1950s being torn down and replaced by modern apartment buildings. During the 1990s Běijīng destroyed so much of its architectural heritage it was denied a World Heritage listing in

BĚIJĪNG'S DECORATIVE ARCHWAYS

Many of Běijīng's streets, alleys and place names are named after temples, city gates, markets and bridges, some of which have survived to the present, but many have not. Chaoyangmen Nandajie and Chaoyangmen Beidajie in Cháoyáng district mean, respectively, 'the street south of Chaoyang Gate' and 'the street north of Chaoyang Gate'. Nothing remains of Chaoyang Gate as it was pulled down in the 1950s; it survives in road names alone. Baiyun Lu is named after its namesake Taoist temple, the White Cloud Temple (Báiyún Guàn; p97), which survives to this day. Tiānqiáo, Hǔfángqiáo and Gānshíqiáo are place names that remember now-vanished bridges (*qiáo*).

The etymology of such street names may be easy to trace, but not many Běijīng youngsters know how Xisi, Dongsi, Xidan and Dongdan came to be named. In fact, they recall the now-levelled *páilou,* or decorative arches, that used to stand there.

Páilou, still visible along the street that runs just south of the Confucius Temple (p85) on Guozijian Jie, were erected at entrances to numerous streets and alleys of note in Běijīng. Also known as *páifāng, páilou* served a decorative rather than a practical function, and were adorned with a horizontal inscription board. Few survive today, but at one time Běijīng had more *páilou* than any other city in China.

Dongdan and Xidan, which respectively mean 'East Single' and 'West Single' recall the individual *páilou* that stood there. Dongsi and Xisi, which mean 'East Four' and 'West Four', refer to the four *páilou* that were erected at the crossroads at each spot. At both the Dongsi and Xisi crossroads, four wooden *páilou* were constructed, facing the four points of the compass. The *páilou* survived until the 1950s, when they came down to make way for road widening. The single *páilou* that existed at Dongdan and Xidan – each three bays wide and supported by four huge pillars – dated to the reign of Ming emperor Yongle. They were similarly levelled for road widening.

The Arrow Tower and Zhengyang Gate at today's Front Gate (p76) can still be seen, but a huge *páilou* once stood there as well. Some older Běijīng residents still refer to Qianmen as Wǔpáilou (five *páilou*), referring to the now-vanished five-bay Ming dynasty archway that rose up south of Zhengyang Gate. The *páilou* was torched when Qianmen was set on fire as foreign troops entered Běijīng in 1900 to quell the Boxer uprising. The archway was reconstructed when Cixi returned to Běijīng in 1901, but came down for good in the 1950s when Qianmen Dajie was widened. Other *páilou* that have disappeared include the three archways that stood outside the Dagaoxuan Temple (p118).

Apart from those on Guozijian Jie and a marvellous glazed archway in the Imperial College (p85) itself, several other *páilou* survive in today's Běijīng. The archway in Zhongshan Park (p83) is a three-bay, four-pillar *páilou,* tiled in blue with triple eaves. It used to stand at the western entrance to Xizongbu Hutong in Dongdan, before being moved to the park in 1919. Three *páilou* stand in front of the Lama Temple (p91), a vast *páilou* can be seen in front of the White Cloud Temple (p97) and across from the entrance to Dongyue Temple (p94), on the far side of Chaoyangmenwai Dajie.

2000 and 2001. This prompted the government to establish 40 protection zones throughout the older parts of the city to protect the remaining heritage buildings. Despite these attempts at protection, Unesco claims that since 2003 a third of the 62km square area that makes up the central part of the old city has now been destroyed, displacing close to 580,000 people. Since Běijīng was awarded the Olympics, demolition has increased dramatically.

One of the hardest hit areas is the central neighbourhood of Qianmen, once the home of scholars and Beijing opera singers. The area has been rundown for years and with the Games on the horizon, residents believe that officials are afraid of foreigners seeing the area as an eyesore. Preservationists and residents have petitioned for government protection but even after a new resolution was passed in 2005 to protect Běijīng's historic districts, many places like Qianmen weren't included because they were approved for demolition before the order was passed.

The Olympic building frenzy has stirred up plenty of controversy in other areas too. Some local architects are resentful of foreign architectural firms hired to design the Olympic buildings and many wonder how the city will ever pay for the elaborate structures, which include the Beijing National Stadium, National Gymnasium, Olympic Aquatic Park, Convention Center, Olympic Village, and the Wukesong Cultural and Sports Center.

Some of the buildings planned for the Olympics are more contentious than others. The National Stadium, dubbed a 'bird's nest' by locals, was designed by the Swiss architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron. Bowl shaped and covered with an interlocking web of steel bars and beams, the building is regarded by many Chinese as positively associated with nature (and bird's nest soup – a luxury treat). The National Stadium will be the site of the Opening Ceremony and Closing Ceremony as well as track and field events and soccer finals.

Sitting alongside the National Stadium is the National Aquatics Center, a fantastic-looking shimmering 'cube' of water, designed by the Australian firm PTW. Winner of the 2006 Popular Science 'Best of What's New in Engineering' prize, its watery appearance is meant to balance the 'fiery' characteristics of the bird's nest next door.

By far, the most controversial buildings is the new National Grand Theater, designed by French architect Paul Andreu, which is being built on the west side of Tiananmen Square. Despite the designer's claim that the building's unique design is in harmony with nature – dome shaped with a circular roof and sitting on a square-shaped lake – locals have disparagingly dubbed it an 'egg'. Many see the building as an outlandish example of foreign architectural madness, an eyesore compared to the traditional architecture of the Forbidden City nearby.

BĚIJĪNG'S TOP TEN MOST NOTABLE BUILDINGS

- Forbidden City (p87) – to many, this elegant Ming dynasty palace is the symbol of Běijīng. Its grand scale and traditional architecture provide a marvellous glimpse into China's imperial history.
- Summer Palace (p102) – with its majestic halls, gardens and galleries painted with scenes from Chinese mythology, this is one of the loveliest spots in the city to see traditional Chinese architecture.
- Peking University – designed in 1919 by an American architect, the university follows traditional Chinese design, combined with Western features such as a pitched roof and large windows.
- Peace Hotel – built in 1953, this hotel is regarded as the first modern building in Běijīng. It launched an era of Soviet-influenced architecture that lasted through the 1950s.
- Great Hall of the People (p77) – one of many buildings erected during Mao's Great Leap Forward. Its massive size is meant to symbolise the power and strength of the Chinese people.
- CCTV Building – designed by Rem Koolhaas, this futuristic building is shaped like a gigantic 'Z' and has generated an unprecedented amount of controversy over its shape – to many Chinese it resembles a person kneeling.
- National Aquatics Center (above) – this iridescent 'cube' of water has won international awards for its innovative design, including 'The Most Accomplished Work in Atmosphere' at the 2004 Venice Biennale.
- National Stadium (above) – this building, with its translucent lattice-like mesh of steel bars, is one of the most unique Olympic buildings to be built for the 2008 Olympics.
- National Grand Theater (above) – the most controversial building of all, Paul Andreu's 'egg' shaped dome hasn't won any awards from Běijīng residents for its radical, but to some, outlandish, design.
- National Gymnasium – to many, this striking building looks like a traditional Chinese folding fan. There are plans to turn it into a fitness centre for locals after the Olympics.

Food & Drink

Food & Drink

Běijīng today offers a dazzling array of local and global cuisines served with a flavour and fervour on par with most international cities. The city has something for everybody – from inexpensive food stalls to five-star gourmet restaurants.

Běijīng cuisine combines the best of cuisines from around China, with a preference for warm, filling dishes, due to its northerly location. Many dishes reflect the influence of the Mongols, with an emphasis on mutton and flat breads. Wheat-based noodles, buns and dumplings are preferred over rice and, of course, Běijīng's most famous dish is Peking duck (see the Story of the Duck boxed text on p127), a must-try for anyone visiting the capital.

Eating well in Běijīng doesn't have to break the bank. Budget eats can be found in the night markets and down small sidestreets where a bowl of noodles or dumplings will cost very little. A formal restaurant, with tablecloths and waiting staff, will be more expensive but provide more choices. Restaurants featuring international cuisine will be the priciest. Regardless of the establishment, always verify prices before ordering. Prices for certain items like seafood can vary from place to place and you don't want a shock when you see the bill.

Most top-end restaurants in Běijīng have some kind of English menu, although translations from Chinese are often literal and rather amusing (anyone for 'fried pig stomach on cabbage'?). Smaller restaurants will provide a menu in Chinese or have placards posted on the wall featuring daily specials. For help with Chinese menus check out the Menu Decoder (p48) or go with Chinese friends and let them order. In general, it's better to eat Chinese food in a group as you'll be served a wider variety of dishes.

CULTURE

ETIQUETTE

At first glance, Chinese food etiquette may seem like a minefield, but in fact today's Chinese are quite tolerant of tableside misdemeanours, especially as the meal unfolds. Meals can commence in Confucian fashion – with good intentions, a harmonic arrangement of chopsticks and a clean tablecloth – before spiralling into a Taoist mayhem, fuelled by incessant *báijiǔ* (白酒; white spirits) toasting and furious smoking all round. Large groups in particular often wreak havoc wherever they dine and vast quantities of food can be left strewn across the table at the end of a meal. However, there are some basic rules to follow when eating with Běijīng friends or colleagues that will make things at the table go as smoothly as possible.

Everyone receives an individual bowl and a small plate and teacup. If food contains bones or seeds, park them on your side dish (or even on the tablecloth, unless the restaurant is smart). The rule of thumb and the best trick in the book is to observe what your Chinese co-diners are doing and follow suit. Chinese waiting staff may hover annoyingly at the elbow while you ponder the menu, but there's nothing wrong with asking them to go away for a while.

It's good form to occasionally drop some food into your neighbour's plate as they will appreciate it and reciprocate the gesture. Also remember to fill your neighbours' tea cups when they are empty, as yours will be filled by them. You can thank the pourer by tapping your middle finger on the table gently. On no account serve yourself tea without serving others first. When your teapot needs a refill, signal this to the waiter by taking the lid off the pot or say *jiāshuǐ* (加水; 'add water').

Chopstick skills are a necessary means of survival when eating out. If you haven't mastered the tricky art of eating with two sticks you could find yourself on a crash diet without even trying! Don't despair if at first much of the food lands on the table or in your lap and not in your bowl or mouth. Eating in this way takes practice and most Chinese are understanding when it comes to foreigners and chopstick problems. They certainly have their own problems when it comes to steak knives and forks. When eating from communal dishes, don't use your chopsticks to root around in a dish for a piece of food. Find a piece by sight and go directly for it without touching anything else. And remember that while dropping food is OK, never drop your chopsticks as this is considered bad luck.

It's perfectly acceptable to smoke during the meal, unless you find yourself in a no-smoking zone. If you do smoke, hand your cigarettes around as Chinese smokers (virtually all male) are naturally generous and stinginess will raise eyebrows. As in other neighbouring Asian countries, toothpick *(牙签; yáqiān)* etiquette is for one hand to shield the mouth while the other excavates the teeth with the tool.

The arrival of the bill is an excuse for selfless histrionics. The Chinese – especially the Běijīng Chinese – pride themselves on unwavering generosity in public. Unless you are the host, you should at least make an attempt – however feeble and futile – to pay, but you will be thrust aside by the gaggle of hands gesturing for the bill. If you insist on paying, you could prompt loss of face to the host, so only go so far and then raise your hands in mock surrender. Going Dutch is almost unheard of in Běijīng, so if you invite someone out for dinner, be prepared to foot the bill.

BANQUETS

The banquet is the apex of the Chinese dining experience. Virtually all significant business deals in China are clinched at the banquet table.

Dishes are served in sequence, beginning with cold appetisers and continuing through 10 or more courses. Soup, usually a thin broth to aid digestion, is generally served after the main course.

The idea is to serve or order far more than everyone can eat. Empty bowls imply a stingy host. Rice is considered a cheap filler and rarely appears at a banquet – don't ask for it, as this would imply that the snacks and main courses are insufficient, causing embarrassment to the host.

It's polite to wait for some signal from the host before beginning to eat. You will most likely be invited to take the first taste. Often your host will serve it to you, placing a piece of meat, chicken or fish in your bowl. If a whole fish is served, you might be offered the head, the cheeks of which are considered to be the tastiest part. Try and at least take a taste of what was given to you.

Refrain from drinking alone. Imbibing is conducted via toasts, which will usually commence with a general toast by the host, followed by the main guest reply toast, and then settle down to frequent toasts to individuals. A toast is conducted by raising your glass in both hands in the direction of the toastee and crying out *gānbēi* (干杯), literally 'dry the glass'. Drain your glass in one hit. It is not unusual for everyone to end up very drunk, though at formal banquets this is frowned upon. Raising your tea or water glass in a toast

EATING DOS & DON'TS

- Don't wave your chopsticks around or point them at people. This is considered rude.
- Don't drum your chopsticks on the side of your bowl – only beggars do this.
- Never stick your chopsticks vertically into your rice as they will resemble incense sticks in a bowl of ashes and will be considered an omen of death.
- Wait to be seated when entering a restaurant.
- Don't discuss business or unpleasant topics at dinner.
- Do try and sample all dishes, if possible.
- Don't let the spout of a teapot face towards anyone. Make sure it is directed outward from the table or to where nobody is sitting.
- Never flip a fish over to get to the flesh underneath. If you do so, the next boat you pass will capsize.

is not very respectful so, unless you have deep-rooted convictions against alcohol, it's best to drink at least a mouthful.

Don't be late for a formal banquet; it's considered extremely rude. The banquet ends when the food and toasts end – the Chinese don't linger after the meal.

HOW BĚIJĪNG PEOPLE EAT

To the Chinese, eating is an excuse to socialise and forge friendships across the dinner table. Chinese restaurants are bright, garrulous and crowded places where people get together with family and friends to unwind and enjoy themselves. A social lubricant, dining also provides the nouveaux riches with an opportunity to flaunt their wealth, so ostentation is a common ingredient. Friends in the West may go out for a beer, but the Chinese will opt for a *rènào* (热闹; 'hot and noisy') meal punctuated with increasingly vociferous shots of *báijiǔ*.

Typically, the Chinese sit at a round table and order dishes from which everyone partakes; ordering a dish just for yourself would be treasonable. It's not unusual for one person at the table to order on everyone's behalf. Usually among friends only several dishes will be ordered, but if guests are present the host will order at least one dish per person, possibly more. At formal dinners, be prepared for a staggering amount of food, far more than anyone could possibly eat.

Epicureans advise that the key to ordering is to request a variety and balance of textures, tastes, smells, colours and even temperatures. Most Chinese meals start with some snacks, perhaps some peanuts or pickled vegetables. Following the little titbits come the main courses, usually some meat and vegetable dishes. Soup is often served at the end of the meal as well as noodles or rice.

Most Chinese eat early, often as early as 11am for lunch and 5pm for dinner, but lots of trendy late-night Běijīng eateries buzz for 24 hours. Breakfast is the one meal that many foreigners have problems with. Chinese breakfasts generally include dumplings, *yóutiáo* (fried breadsticks), *congee* (rice porridge), pickled vegetables, peanuts and soya-bean milk: all worth bearing in mind as you get excited about your gratis two-star hotel buffet breakfast. If you can't face it, Western breakfasts are widely available in hotels and cafés around town.

Chinese restaurants may not be everyone's cup of *chá:* bright, brash and noisy, they are rarely spots for romantic meals, unless you steer yourself very upmarket. For most Chinese the quality of the food is paramount and eating is enjoyed as an overt display, rather than the Western preference for privacy. Service can be gauche and sometimes little attempt is made to make your meal an overall experience.

STAPLES

NOODLES 面条

In Běijīng, *miàntiáo* (noodles) are eaten more than rice, which is a more common staple of south China. Noodles can be made by hand or by machine but many agree that hand-pulled noodles *(拉面; lā miàn)* are the tastiest and the spectacle of their manufacture is almost as great a treat as eating them. First the cook stretches the dough in his hands, shakes it gently up and down and swings it so the dough twists around itself many times before becoming firm. The dough is pulled and stretched until it becomes very fine.

Noodles are thought to have originated in northern China during the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), when the Chinese developed techniques for large-scale flour grinding. Not only were noodles nutritious, cheap and versatile, they were portable and could be stored for long periods. Legend credits Marco Polo with introducing noodles to Italy in 1295 after his experiences in China.

The Chinese like to eat noodles on birthdays and during the New Year because their long thin shape symbolises longevity: this is why it's bad luck to break noodles before cooking them. The other popular staple of Běijīng and north China is *mántou* (馒头), dense and rapidly-filling steamed buns.

RICE 大米

There's a saying in Chinese that 'precious things are not pearls or jade but the five grains'. An old legend narrating the origin of rice claims it was a gift from the animals. The fable tells how China was once overwhelmed by floods that destroyed the crops and caused massive famine. One day some villagers saw a dog running towards them with bunches of long yellow seeds on its tail. When the villagers planted the seeds, rice grew and hunger vanished.

The Chinese revere rice not only as their staff of life but also for its aesthetic value. With a mellow aroma not unlike bread, its texture when properly done – soft yet offering some bite, the grains detached – sets off the textures of the foods that surround it. Flavours are enhanced by its simplicity – rice is the great unifier of the table, bringing other dishes into harmony.

Rice comes in many different preparations – as porridge *(粥; zhōu)* served with savouries at breakfast, fried with tiny shrimps, pork or vegetables and eaten at lunch or as a snack. But plain steamed white rice *(白饭; báifàn)* – fragrant yet neutral – is what you should order at dinner.

REGIONAL CUISINES

All of China's cuisines converge on Běijīng, from far-flung Tibet to the hardy northeast, the arid northwest and the fecund south. The most popular cooking styles are from Sìchuān, Shànghǎi, Hong Kong, Guǎngdōng (Cantonese) and Běijīng, but if you want to explore China's full compendium of cooking styles, the capital is *the* place to start.

BĚIJĪNG 京菜

Běijīng cuisine is classified as a 'northern cuisine' and typical dishes are made with wheat or millet, whose common incarnations are as steamed dumplings *(饺子; jiǎozi)* or noodles, while arguably the most famous Chinese dish of all is Peking duck. Vegetables are limited, so there is a heavy reliance on freshwater fish and chicken; cabbage and turnips are some of the most ubiquitous vegetables found on menus as well as yams and potatoes.

Not surprisingly, the influence of the Mongols is felt most strongly in Běijīng and two of the region's most famous culinary exports – Mongolian barbecue and Mongolian hotpot – are adaptations from Mongol field kitchens. Animals that were hunted on horseback could be dismembered and cooked with wild vegetables and onions using soldiers' iron shields on top of hot coals as primitive barbecues. Alternatively, each soldier could use his helmet as a pot, filling it with water, meat, condiments and vegetables to taste. Mutton is now the main ingredient in Mongolian hotpot.

Roasting was once considered rather barbaric in other parts of China and is still more common in the northern areas. The main methods of cooking in the northern style, though, are steaming, baking and 'explode frying' (*bàochǎo;* 爆炒) – a rapid method of cooking in which the wok is superheated over a flame and the contents tossed in for a swift stir-frying. The last of these is the most common, historically because of the scarcity of fuel and, more recently, due to the introduction of the peanut, which thrives in the north and produces an abundance of oil. Although northern-style food has a reputation for being salty and unsophisticated, it has the benefit of being filling and therefore well-suited to the region's punishing winters.

SÌCHUĀN 川菜

Famed as China's fieriest cuisine, approach the menu with caution and flagons of chilled H2O. A concoction of searing red chillis (introduced by Spanish traders in the early Qing dynasty), star anise, peppercorns and pungent 'flower pepper' *(花椒; huājiāo)* – a numbing herb peculiar to Sìchuān cooking – dishes are simmered to allow the chilli peppers time to seep into the food. Meats are often marinated, pickled or otherwise processed before cooking, which is generally by stir- or explode-frying.

Landlocked Sìchuān is a long way from the coast, so pork, poultry, legumes and *dòufu* (豆腐; tofu) are commonly used, and supplemented by a variety of wild condiments and mountain products, such as mushrooms and other fungi, as well as bamboo shoots. Seasonings are heavy: the red chilli is often used in conjunction with Sìchuān peppercorns, garlic, ginger and onions. Hallmark dishes include camphor-smoked duck, Granny Ma's tofu and spicy chicken with peanuts.

CANTONESE 粤菜

This is what non-Chinese consider 'Chinese' food, largely because most émigré restaurateurs originate from Guǎngdōng (Canton) or Hong Kong. Cantonese flavours are generally more subtle than other Chinese styles – almost sweet – and there are very few spicy dishes. Sweet-and-sour and oyster sauces are common. The Cantonese are almost religious about the importance of fresh ingredients, which is why so many restaurants are lined with tanks full of finned and shelled creatures. Stir-frying is by far the most favoured method of cooking, closely followed by steaming. Dim sum *(点心; diǎnxīn),* now a worldwide Sunday institution, originated in this region; to go *yám cha* (饮茶; Cantonese for 'drink tea') still provides most overseas Chinese communities with the opportunity to get together at the weekend. Dim sum can be found in restaurants around Běijīng.

Expensive dishes – some that are truly tasty, others that appeal more for their 'face' value – include abalone, shark's fin and bird's nest. Pigeon is a Cantonese specialty served in various ways but most commonly roasted.

DUMPLINGS, UNWRAPPED

There's an old saying that 'nothing tastes better than dumplings'. In fact, the Chinese have been eating this tasty home-style food since the Han dynasty! Dumplings have traditionally been eaten during Chinese New Year, their half-moon shape thought to resemble ancient gold ingots and bring good luck. Nowadays, you can get them at any time of year but they're the most popular in the north. Try this recipe for your own version of this tasty dish. (Makes 35 to 40 dumplings).

Chinese Dumplings

1 pack dumpling wrappers
300g (10 oz) ground pork
150g (5 oz) minced Napa cabbage
2 bunches of chopped coriander (cilantro)
1 bunch of chopped spring (green) onions
100 g (3½ oz) chopped ginger
2 cloves of finely chopped garlic
1 tbsp dark soy sauce
1 tbsp sesame oil

Sauce

4 tbsp light soy sauce
1 tbsp sesame oil
1 tbsp vinegar
Chilli oil to taste
2 cloves of chopped garlic

Combine the ingredients for the filling.

Moisten the edges of a dumpling wrap and put a small amount of filling in the centre.

Fold the wrap over and pinch together in a crescent shape, making a tight seal.

Place the dumplings one at a time into a large pot of boiling water. When the water comes to a hard boil, pour in one cup of cold water. Wait for the water to come to a boil again and repeat with the cold water. Do this one more time. When the dumplings rise to the top, drain and transfer to a large plate. Don't overcook or the dumplings will fall apart.

Mix all the ingredients together for the sauce and serve in small, individual bowls.

SHÀNGHǍI 上海菜

Shànghǎi cuisine is generally sweeter and oilier than China's other cuisines. Unsurprisingly, Shànghǎi cuisine features plenty of fish and seafood, especially cod, river eel and shrimp.

Fish is usually *qīngzhēng* (清蒸; steamed) but can be stir-fried, pan-fried or grilled. Crab roe dumplings are another Shanghainese luxury.

Several restaurants specialise in cold salty chicken, while drunken chicken gets its name from being marinated in Shàoxīng rice wine. *Bāo* (煲; claypot) dishes are braised for a long time in their own casserole dish. Shànghǎi's most famous snack is *xiǎolóngbāo* (小笼包), small dumplings containing a meaty interior bathed in a scalding juice.

Vegetarian dishes include *dòufu*, cabbage in cream sauce, *mèn* (焖; braised) bean curd and various types of mushrooms, including *xiānggū báicài* (香菇白菜; mushrooms surrounded by baby bok choy). Tiger-skin chillies are a delicious dish of stir-fried green peppers seared in a wok and served in a sweet chilli sauce. Fried pine nuts and sweet corn is another common Shanghainese dish.

Dàzháxiè (大闸蟹; hairy crabs) are a Shànghǎi speciality between October and December. They are eaten with soy, ginger and vinegar and downed with warm Shàoxīng rice wine. They are delicious but can be fiddly to eat. The body opens via a little tab on the underside (don't eat the gills or the stomach).

UYGHUR 新疆菜

The Uyghur style of cooking reflects the influences of Xīnjiāng's chequered past. Yet, despite centuries of sporadic Chinese and Mongol rule, the strongest influence on ingredients and methods is still Turkic or Middle Eastern, which is evident in the reliance on mutton for protein and wheat for the staple grain. When rice is eaten, it is often in the Central Asian version of pilau (*plov*). Nevertheless, the influence of Chinese culinary styles and ingredients makes it probably the most enjoyable region of Central Asia in which to eat.

Uyghur bread resembles Arabic *khoubz* (Indian naan) and is baked in ovens based on the *tanour* (Indian tandoor) model. It is often eaten straight from the oven and sprinkled with poppy seeds, sesame seeds or fennel. Uyghur bakers also make excellent *girde nan* (bagels). Wheat is also used for a variety of noodles. *Laghman* are the most common: noodles cooked *al dente,* thick and topped with a combination of spicy mutton, peppers, tomatoes, eggplant, green beans and garlic. *Suoman* are noodle squares fried with tomatoes, peppers, garlic and meat, sometimes quite spicy. *Suoman goshsiz* is the vegetarian variety.

Kebabs are common, as they are throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, both shashlik- and tandoori-style. *Samsas* or *samsis* are the Uyghur version of samosas: baked envelopes of meat. Meat often makes an appearance inside *chuchura* (dumplings), which can be steamed or fried.

VEGETARIAN 素菜

China has a long history of Daoist and Buddhist philosophers who abstained from eating animals, and vegetarianism can be traced back over 1000 years. The Tang dynasty physician Sun Simiao extolled the virtues of vegetarianism in his 60-volume classic, *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold*. Legend has it that Sun lived to the ripe old age of 101. However, try telling this to your waiter who brings out a supposedly pristine veggie or tofu dish decorated with strips of pork or chicken. The majority of Chinese have little understanding of vegetarianism and many consider it a strange Western concept.

Because of China's history of poverty and famine, eating meat is a status symbol, and symbolic of health and wealth. Many Chinese remember all too well the famines of the 1950s and 1960s when having anything to eat was a luxury. Eating meat (as well as milk and eggs) is a sign of progress and material abundance. Even vegetables are often fried in animal-based oils and soups are most commonly made with chicken or beef stock. Saying you don't eat meat confuses many Chinese who may interpret this to mean seafood is OK, or even chicken or pork. Trying to explain the reasons behind why you don't eat meat brings even more confusion. Men especially are looked down upon because not eating meat is thought to decrease sexual virility.

However, in larger cities such as Běijīng, Shànghǎi or Guǎngzhōu, vegetarianism is slowly catching on and there are new chic vegetarian eateries appearing in fashionable restaurant districts. Buddhist temples also often have vegetarian restaurants.

Buddhist vegetarian food often consists of 'mock meat' dishes made from tofu, wheat gluten and vegetables. Some of the dishes are quite fantastic to look at, with vegetarian ingredients sculpted to look like spare ribs or fried chicken. Sometimes the chefs go to great lengths to create 'bones' from carrots and lotus roots. Some of the more famous vegetarian dishes include vegetarian 'ham', braised vegetarian 'shrimp' and sweet and sour 'fish'.

SNACKS 小吃

Snacking in Běijīng is great fun and a good way to explore the local cuisine. A tasty Muslim treat is lamb kebabs *(烤羊肉串; kǎo yángròu chuàn),* often sold in night markets or outdoor restaurants.

Běijīng has plenty of tasty breads, such as bread stuffed with leeks and eggs *(韭菜饼; jiǔ cài bǐng),* thin and crunchy pancakes (煎饼; *jiān bǐng*) and bread filled with diced pork *(ròu bǐng; 肉饼)*. During winter it's common to see people eating sugar-coated crab apples on a stick and roasted sweet potatoes *(红薯; hóngshǔ),* which are sold by the roadside. For more information on snacks see the Street Food Běijīng Style boxed text, p122.

DESSERTS & SWEETS 甜点

The Chinese do not generally eat dessert, but fruit is considered to be an appropriate end to a good meal. Western influence has added ice cream to the menu in some restaurants, but in general sweet stuff is consumed as snacks and is seldom available in restaurants.

One exception to the rule is caramelised fruits, including apples *(拔丝苹果; básī píngguǒ)* and bananas *(拔丝香蕉; básī xiāngjiāo),* which you can find in a few restaurants. Other sweeties include shaved ice and syrup *(冰沙; bīngshā);* a sweet, sticky rice pudding known as Eight Treasure Rice *(八宝饭; bābǎofàn);* and various types of steamed bun filled with sweet bean paste.

DRINKS

NONALCOHOLIC DRINKS 无酒精饮料

A fundamental part of Chinese existence, tea is celebrated by an ancient saying as one of the seven basic necessities of life, alongside fuel, oil, rice, salt, soy sauce and vinegar. The Chinese were the first to cultivate tea *(茶; chá),* and the art of brewing and drinking tea – popular since the Tang dynasty (AD 618-907) – shows few signs of losing steam.

China has three main types of tea: green *(绿茶; lǜchá)* or unfermented; black tea *(红茶; hóng chá),* which is fermented; and wulong *(乌龙茶; wūlóngchá),* or semi-fermented. But there are numerous varieties, from jasmine *(茉莉花茶; mòlìhuāchá)* and chrysanthemum *(菊花茶; júhuā chá)* to pu'er *(普洱茶; pǔěrchá),* Iron Guanyin *(铁观音; tiěguānyīn)* and beyond. Cheap restaurants often serve on-the-house pots of weak jasmine or green tea. Higher quality brands of tea are available in teashops and supermarkets. Traditionally,

DRINKING IN THE CITY

Beer *(啤酒; píjiǔ)* is Beijing's favourite tipple, but besides imported brands, you'll have to settle for the Chinese beers, of which Yanjing Beer, Beijing Beer and Tsingtao are the bestselling labels. Canned and bottled in brown and green bottles, Yanjing Beer is both watery and unremarkable, but it is extraordinarily cheap.

China's drinkers are slowly developing a taste for wine *(葡萄酒; pútaojiǔ),* but prices at restaurants can be outrageously expensive. China furthermore ferments its own wine, with Dynasty and Great Wall some of the better known. Many Chinese brands, however, are very sweet and cling to the teeth.

To aid digestion and get rapidly sozzled, Chinese men often drink *báijiǔ* with lunch and dinner. Despite being loosely translated as wine, the potent potion is in fact a clear spirit fermented from sorghum (a type of millet). *Báijiǔ* is used for toasts at banquets; if you are invited to *gānbēi* (literally 'dry the glass') you will be expected to drain your glass. The drink is a searing, eye-wateringly strong tipple that will quickly have you sliding off your seat and taking the tablecloth with you, so go easy on it. Rice wine *(mǐjiǔ)* is intended more for cooking than drinking.

Chinese hard-core drinkers sociably congregate in packs and are the last to be bundled out of restaurants as the shutters crash down. Chinese finger-guessing games require little intelligence and become the last resort of the seriously drunk in eateries the land over.

Chinese would never put milk or sugar in their tea but things are changing. Now 'milk tea' *(奶茶; nǎi chá)* is available everywhere in Běijīng, often served cold with a whopping amount of sugar. Thirst-quenching bubble tea *(珍珠奶茶; zhēnzhū nǎichá),* a hot or cold concoction sold in a variety of sweet flavours, is also widely available.

Coffee *(咖啡; kāfēi)* long ago took Běijīng by storm and cafés of wildly varying quality have covered town like a rash, with even the bastion of the Forbidden City being controversially breached by Starbucks. Prices are on a par with the West, with cups of coffee costing around Y25 to Y30. Note that McDonalds offer free coffee refills – ask the staff to *xùbēi kāfēi* (续杯咖啡).

Soft drinks *(汽水; qìshuǐ)* can be found at every turn, along with bottled water. Milk *(牛奶; niúnǎi)* and yoghurt *(酸奶; suānnǎi)* are available from supermarkets and convenience stores, along with powdered milk *(奶粉; nǎifěn)*.

ALCOHOLIC DRINKS 酒精饮料

Beer *(啤酒; píjiǔ)* – once anathema to Chinese alcohol-lovers – is now embraced as the alcoholic drink of choice in town. China's most famous beer is Tsingtao, a German inheritance from the early days of the 20th century, still brewed up in the namesake port town of Qīngdǎo. Among locally-brewed labels are Běijīng Beer and Yanjing Beer; a bottle will normally cost Y2 to Y3 in street shops and small bottles of beer retail for around Y15 to Y25 in bars. Most of China's beers are uniform in taste and strength, but a wide selection of foreign brands – both brewed in China and imported – line the shelves of Western bars and supermarkets.

China has cultivated vines and produced wine for an estimated 4000 years although wine-producing techniques differ from those in the West. Western producers try to prevent oxidation in their wines, but oxidation produces a flavour that Chinese tipplers find desirable and go to great lengths to achieve.

Many Chinese 'wines' are in fact spirits. Occasionally literally translated as 'white wine', *báijiǔ* (see the boxed text, above) is a heady spirit with a sharp, sweet smell hovering somewhere between nail polish remover and turpentine. The most expensive and prestigious is Maotai, but Běijīng's most popular white spirit is the locally distilled Erguotou – a cheap and utilitarian path to inebriation.

Chinese diners also appreciate wines with herbs and creatures soaked in them, which they drink for their health and for restorative or aphrodisiac qualities. Wine fortified with dead bees or pickled snakes is also desirable for its alleged tonic properties – in general, the more poisonous the creature, the more potent the tonic effects. Hejie Jiu (lizard wine) is produced in the southern province of Guǎngxī; each bottle contains one dead lizard suspended perpendicularly in the clear liquid.

MENU DECODER

USEFUL WORDS & PHRASES

I don't want MSG.	*Wǒ bú yào wèijīng.*	我不要味精
I'm vegetarian.	*Wǒ chī sù.*	我吃素
Not too spicy.	*Bú yào tài là.*	不要太辣
menu	*càidān*	菜单
bill (cheque)	*mǎi dān/jiézhàng*	买单/结帐
set meal (no menu)	*tàocān*	套餐
Let's eat!	*Chī fàn!*	吃饭
Cheers!	*Gānbēi!*	干杯

THE BASICS

rice	*báifàn*	白饭
noodles	*miàntiáo*	面条
salt	*yán*	盐
pepper	*hújiāo*	胡椒
sugar	*táng*	糖
soy sauce	*jiàngyóu*	酱油
chilli	*làjiāo*	辣椒
egg	*jīdàn*	鸡蛋
beef	*niúròu*	牛肉
pork	*zhūròu*	猪肉
chicken	*jīròu*	鸡肉
lamb	*yángròu*	羊肉
vegetables	*shūcài*	蔬菜
potato	*tǔdòu*	土豆
broccoli	*xīlánhuā*	西兰花
carrots	*húluóbo*	胡萝卜
sweet corn	*yùmǐ*	玉米
green peppers	*qīngjiāo*	青椒
soup	*tāng*	汤
chopsticks	*kuàizi*	筷子
knife	*dāozi*	刀子
fork	*chāzi*	叉子
spoon	*sháozi*	勺子
hot	*rède*	热的
ice cold	*bīngde*	冰的

STAPLES

Rice Dishes

jīdàn chǎofàn	鸡蛋炒饭	fried rice with egg
jīchǎofàn	鸡炒饭	fried rice with chicken
jīdàn mǐfàn	鸡蛋米饭	steamed white rice
shūcài chǎofàn	蔬菜炒饭	fried rice with vegetables
xīfàn/zhōu	稀饭/粥	watery rice porridge *(congee)*

Noodle Dishes

húntun miàn	馄饨面	wontons and noodles
jīsī chǎomiàn	鸡丝炒面	fried noodles with chicken
jīsī tāngmiàn	鸡丝汤面	soupy noodles with chicken
májiàng miàn	麻酱面	sesame paste noodles
niúròu chǎomiàn	牛肉炒面	fried noodles with beef
niúròu miàn	牛肉面	soupy beef noodles
ròusī chǎomiàn	肉丝炒面	fried noodles with pork
shūcaì chǎomiàn	蔬菜炒面	fried noodles with vegetables
tāngmiàn	汤面	noodles in soup
xīarén chǎomiàn	虾仁炒面	fried noodles with shrimp
zhájiàng miàn	炸酱面	bean and meat noodles

Bread, Buns & Dumplings

cōngyóu bǐng	葱油饼	spring onion pancakes
guōtiē	锅贴	pot stickers/pan-grilled dumplings
mántou	馒头	steamed buns
ròu bāozi	肉包子	steamed meat buns
shāobǐng	烧饼	clay-oven rolls
shǔijiān bāo	水煎包	pan-grilled buns
shuǐjiǎo	水饺	boiled dumplings
sùcài bāozi	素菜包子	steamed vegetable buns

Soup

húntun tāng	馄饨汤	wonton soup
sān xiān tāng	三鲜汤	three kinds of seafood soup
suānlà tāng	酸辣汤	hot and sour soup

CUISINES

Běijīng & Other Northern-style Dishes

běijīng kǎoyā	北京烤鸭	Peking duck
jiāo zhá yángròu	焦炸羊肉	deep-fried mutton
qīng xiāng shāo jī	清香烧鸡	chicken wrapped in lotus leaf
sān měi dòufu	三美豆腐	sliced beancurd with Chinese cabbage
shuàn yángròu	涮羊肉	lamb hotpot
sì xǐ wánzi	四喜丸子	steamed and fried pork, shrimp and bamboo shoot balls
yuán bào lǐ jī	芫爆里脊	stir-fried pork tenderloin with coriander
zāo liū sān bái	糟溜三白	stir-fried chicken, fish and bamboo shoots
jiǎozi	饺子	dumplings
mántou	馒头	steamed buns
ròu bāozi	肉包子	steamed meat buns

Shànghǎi Dishes

xiánjī	咸鸡	cold salty chicken
xiāngsū jī	香酥鸡	crispy chicken
zuìjī	醉鸡	drunken chicken
sōngzǐ yā	松子鸭	duck with pine nuts
xièfěn shīzitóu	蟹粉狮子头	lion's head meatballs with crab

sōngrén yùmǐ	松仁玉米	Fried pine nuts and sweet corn
hǔpíjiānjiāo	虎皮尖椒	tiger skin chillies
xiǎolóngbāo	小笼包	small dumplings containing a meaty interior bathed in a scalding juice

Cantonese Dishes

bái zhuó xiā	白灼虾	blanched prawns with shredded scallions
dōngjiāng yánjú jī	东江盐焗鸡	salt-baked chicken
gālí jī	咖喱鸡	curried chicken
háoyóu niúròu	蚝油牛肉	beef with oyster sauce
kǎo rǔzhū	烤乳猪	crispy suckling pig
mì zhī chāshāo	蜜汁叉烧	roast pork with honey
shé ròu	蛇肉	snake
tángcù lǐjǐ	糖醋里脊	sweet and sour pork fillets
tángcù páigǔ	糖醋排骨	sweet and sour spare ribs

Sìchuānese Dishes

bàngbàng jī	棒棒鸡	shredded chicken in a hot pepper and sesame sauce
dàsuàn shàn duàn	大蒜鳝段	stewed eel with garlic
gānshāo yán lǐ	干烧岩鲤	stewed carp with ham and hot and sweet sauce
gōngbào jīdīng	宫爆鸡丁	spicy chicken with peanuts
huíguō ròu	回锅肉	boiled and stir-fried pork with salty and hot sauce
málà dòufu	麻辣豆腐	spicy tofu
mápó dòufu	麻婆豆腐	Granny Ma's tofu
shuǐ zhǔ niúròu	水煮牛肉	fried and boiled beef, garlic sprouts and celery
yúxiāng ròusī	鱼香肉丝	'fish-resembling' meat
zhàcài ròu sī	榨菜肉丝	stir-fried pork or beef tenderloin with tuber mustard
zhāngchá yā	樟茶鸭	camphor tea duck

Beef Dishes

háoyóu niúròu	蚝油牛肉	beef with oyster sauce
hóngshāo niúròu	红烧牛肉	beef braised in soy sauce
niúròu fàn	牛肉饭	beef with rice
tiěbǎn niúròu	铁板牛肉	sizzling beef platter
gānbiǎn niúròu sī	干煸牛肉丝	stir-fried beef and chilli

Chicken & Duck Dishes

háoyóu jīkuài	蚝油鸡块	diced chicken in oyster sauce
hóngshāo jīkuài	红烧鸡块	chicken braised in soy sauce
jītǔi fàn	鸡腿饭	chicken leg with rice
níngméng jī	柠檬鸡	lemon chicken
tángcù jīdīng	糖醋鸡丁	sweet and sour chicken
yārou fàn	鸭肉饭	duck with rice
yāoguǒ jīdīng	腰果鸡丁	chicken and cashews

Pork Dishes

biǎndòu ròusī	扁豆肉丝	shredded pork and green beans
guōbā ròupiàn	锅巴肉片	pork and sizzling rice crust
gūlǔ ròu	咕噜肉	sweet and sour pork
háoyóu ròusī	蚝油肉丝	pork with oyster sauce
jiàngbào ròudīng	酱爆肉丁	diced pork with soy sauce
jīngjiàng ròusī	京酱肉丝	pork cooked with soy sauce
mùěr ròu	木耳肉	wood-ear mushrooms and pork
páigǔ fàn	排骨饭	pork chop with rice
qīngjiāo ròu piàn	青椒肉片	pork and green peppers
yángcōng chǎo ròupiàn	洋葱炒肉片	pork and fried onions

Seafood Dishes

gélì	蛤蜊	clams
gōngbào xiārén	宫爆虾仁	diced shrimp with peanuts
háo	蚝	oysters
hóngshāo yú	红烧鱼	fish braised in soy sauce
lóngxiā	龙虾	lobster
pángxiè	螃蟹	crab
yóuyú	鱿鱼	squid
zhāngyú	章鱼	octopus

Vegetable & Bean Curd Dishes

báicài xiān shuānggū	白菜鲜双菇	bok choy and mushrooms
cuìpí dòufu	脆皮豆腐	crispy skin bean curd
hēimù'ěr mèn dòufu	黑木耳焖豆腐	bean curd with wood-ear mushrooms
jiāngzhī qīngdòu	姜汁青豆	string beans with ginger
lǔshuǐ dòufu	卤水豆腐	smoked bean curd
shāguō dòufu	砂锅豆腐	clay pot bean curd
tángcù ǒubǐng	糖醋藕冰	sweet and sour lotus root cakes
hóngshāo qiézi	红烧茄子	red cooked aubergine
sùchǎo biǎndòu	素炒扁豆	garlic beans
sùchǎo sùcài	素炒素菜	fried vegetables
yúxiāng qiézi	鱼香茄子	'fish-resembling' aubergine
jiācháng dòufu	家常豆腐	'home style' tofu

DRINKS

píjiǔ	啤酒	beer
báijiǔ	白酒	white spirits
kěkǒu kělè	可口可乐	Coca-Cola
yézi zhī	椰子汁	coconut juice
nǎijīng	奶精	coffee creamer
kāfēi	咖啡	coffee
niúnǎi	牛奶	milk
kuàngquán shuǐ	矿泉水	mineral water
hóng pútáo jiǔ	红葡萄酒	red wine
mǐjiǔ	米酒	rice wine
qìshuǐ	汽水	soft drink (soda)
dòujiāng	豆浆	soya bean milk
chá	茶	tea
kāi shuǐ	开水	water (boiled)
bái pútáo jiǔ	白葡萄酒	white wine
suānnǎi	酸奶	yoghurt

History

History *Jasper Becker*

THE RECENT PAST

The rebuilding of Běijīng is the greatest urban project attempted in China since the 14th century, when the great Ming Emperor Yongle (1360–1442) made Běijīng his capital. After former President Jiang Zemin launched the project in 1998, China spent at least US$200 billion, not counting more than US$40 billion specifically for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. By lavishing three times the amount Athens spent on hosting the 2004 Games, the 2008 Games will be the costliest in Olympics history. Yet China can proudly show off a new capital with a modern infrastructure and eye-catching designs, created by the top names in international architecture. All worthy of a great global power.

Yet, on the other hand, the losses are incalculable. China's leaders have comprehensively destroyed the historical fabric of Běijīng, and the damage to the collective memory of the Chinese has been immense. This city has been home to five dynasties, including two of the greatest – the Ming and the Qing – and most of the greatest events in the nation's turbulent modern history have played out here. Four dynasties (Liao, Jin, Yuan, Qing) belonged to 'barbarians,' although it is not politically correct to say so anymore. Only one dynasty, the Ming, was truly Chinese. This is also where the project to modernise China was born, where the first Chinese republic was born and where, later, Chairman Mao Zedong realised his ambition to recast Chinese society by so thoroughly erasing the 'feudal Confucian legacy' and turn the Chinese – as Mao said – into a 'blank sheet of paper'.

The new Běijīng is thus intended to symbolise how the Chinese Communist Party has fulfilled its mission to build a new China. The historical legacy now consists of a handful of buildings and streets, islands in a forest of glass and concrete towers. With the relocation of over three million residents from the city centre, communities who have lived in the capital for centuries have gone and been replaced by newcomers – some ignorant of its traditions and customs.

FROM THE BEGINNING

As a youth in the 14th century, the future Emperor Yongle was sent by his father to live as the Prince of Yan in the abandoned ruins of the former capital of the Yuan dynasty (present-day Běijīng), established by Kublai Khan. The Mongols called the city Khanbalik, and it was from here that the descendants of Genghis Khan ruled over the largest land empire in history. This is where Marco Polo, one of many thousands of foreigners drafted to help the Mongols govern China, came to serve as an official. Běijīng was really only the winter capital for Kublai Khan (1215–1294), who chose to spend the summer months at Běijīng's sister city, Xanadu, which lay to the north, 6000ft up on the steppes. This was called the 'upper capital', or 'Shàngdū' in Chinese, while Běijīng was 'Dàdū' or great capital.

At first sight, Běijīng seems a curious place to select as the capital of the Yuan empire, or indeed any empire. For one thing, it lacks a river or access to the sea. It is on the very outer edge of the great northern plain, and very far indeed from the rich rice granaries in the south and the source of China's lucrative exports of tea, silk and porcelain. Throughout history the Han Chinese considered this barbarian territory, home to a series of hostile predatory dynasties like the Liao (907–1125) and the Jin (1115–1234). To this day Chinese historians describe these peoples as primitive 'tribes' rather than nations, perhaps a prejudice from the ancient antipathy between nomadic pastoralist peoples and the sedentary farmers who are the Chinese.

Běijīng first became a walled settlement in AD 938 when the Khitans, one of the nomadic 'barbarian tribes', established it as an auxiliary southern capital of their Liao dynasty. It was sometimes called Yànjīng, or the 'city of swallows' and this is still the name of a beer produced by a local brewery. When they were overthrown by Jurchens from Manchuria, the progenitors of the Manchus, it became Zhōngdū or 'middle capital'. Each of these three successive barbarian dynasties enlarged the walled city and built palaces and temples, especially Buddhist temples. They secured a supply of water by channelling streams from the dry limestone hills around Běijīng, and stored it in the lakes which still lie at the heart of the city.

TOP THREE HISTORY BOOKS

- *Peking: Temples and City Life 1400–1900* (Susan Naquin) Exhaustive and scholarly portrait of Běijīng's religious and social fabric during the Ming and Qing dynasties.
- *The Siege at Peking* (Peter Fleming) Celebrated account of the Boxer Rebellion and the historic siege of the Foreign Legation Quarter.
- *The Hermit of Peking – The Hidden Life of Sir Edmund Backhouse* (Hugh Trevor-Roper) Classic historical investigation into the eccentric activities of translator and scholar Sir Edmund Backhouse.

The Khitans relied on the Grand Canal to ship goods like silk, porcelain, tea and grain from the Yangtze Delta. Each successive dynasty shortened the Grand Canal. It was originally 2500km long when it was built in the 5th century by the Chinese Sui dynasty to facilitate the military conquest of northeast China and Korea. From the 10th century it was used for a different purpose: to enable these northern peoples to extract the wealth of central China. Běijīng's role was to be the terminus.

For 1000 years, half a million peasants spent six months a year hauling huge barges from Hángzhōu up the Grand Canal to Běijīng. You can still see the canal after it enters the city from Tōngzhōu, now a suburb of Běijīng, and then winds around the Second Ring Rd. The tax or tribute from central China was then stored in huge warehouses, a few of which still remain. From Běijīng, the goods were carried out of the West Gate or Xizhimen, and taken up the Tanqin Gorge to Bādálǐng (p193), which once marked the limits of the Chinese world. Beyond this pass, the caravans took the road to Zhāngjiākǒu, 6000ft above sea level where the grasslands of Inner Asia begin. The Mongols referred to Zhāngjiākǒu as Kalgan; 'the Gate'.

This pass was also the favourite route chosen by invaders like Genghis Khan who wanted to attack China. The ultimate aim of Khitans, Jurchen, Mongols and Manchus was to control the lucrative international trade in Chinese-made luxuries. Chinese dynasties like the Song faced a choice of paying them off or staging a bloody resistance. The Southern Song did attack and destroy Běijīng, but when it failed to defeat the Liao dynasty of the Khitans it resorted to a strategy of 'using the barbarian to defeat the barbarian'. It made a pact with the Jurchen, and together they captured Běijīng in 1125. But instead of just helping to defeat the Khitans, the Jurchen carried on south and took the Song capital at Kāifēng. The Jurchens, however, chose not to try to govern China by themselves and instead opted to milk the Southern Song dynasty. The Mongols became the first 'barbarian' tribe to attempt to rule China. They ruled from Běijīng for just short of a century, from 1272 to 1368.

MING DYNASTY BĚIJĪNG

Běijīng can properly be said to be a Chinese city only during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), when the Emperor Yongle – whose name means perpetual happiness – used over 200,000 prisoners of war to rebuild the city, construct its massive battlements, rebuild the imperial palace and establish the magnificent Ming tombs. He forced tens of thousands of leading Chinese families to relocate from Nánjīng, the capital founded by his father, and unwillingly settle in what they considered an alien land at the extremity of the Chinese world. Throughout the Ming dynasty it was constantly under attack by the Mongols, and on many occasions the

TIMELINE

500,000BC	pre-11th century BC	8th century–3rd century BC	AD 938	1153	1215
Peking Man inhabits Běijīng region	First Chinese record of settlements in Běijīng area	Yànjīng, capital of the state of Yan, located near Běijīng	Běijīng established as auxiliary capital of the Liao dynasty; city walls first built	Běijīng becomes Jin dynasty capital; city walls expanded	The Mongols, under Genghis Khan, sack Běijīng

horsemen reached the very gates of Běijīng. Mongol bandits roamed the countryside or hid out in the marshes south of the city, threatening communications with the empire.

Everything needed for this gigantic enterprise, even tiles, bricks and timber, had to be shipped up the Grand Canal, but in time Běijīng grew into a city of nearly a million residents. Although farms and greenhouses sprang up around the city, it always depended on the Grand Canal as a life-line. Most of the canal was needed to ship the huge amounts of food needed to supply the garrison of more than a million men which Yongle press-ganged into building and manning the new Great Wall (p191). This Wall, unlike earlier walls, was clad in brick and stone, not pounded earth, and the Ming emperors kept enlarging it for the next 250 years, adding loops, spurs and watchtowers. For long stretches, the fortifications run in two parallel bands.

Běijīng grew from a forward defence military headquarters into an administrative centre staffed by an elite corps of mandarins. They had to pass gruelling examinations which tested candidates' understanding of classical and Confucian literature. Then they were either assigned to the provinces or selected to work in the central government ministries, situated in what is now Tiananmen Square, south of the Meridian Gate and the entrance to the Forbidden City (p87). Each day the mandarins and the generals entered the 'Great Within' and kowtowed at an audience before the emperor. He lived inside like a male version of a queen bee, served by thousands of women and eunuchs. Ming emperors were the only males permitted to live in the palace. Yongle established rigid rules and dreary rituals, and many of his successors rebelled against the constrictions of the heavily controlled life.

Under later Ming emperors, the eunuchs came to be more trusted and more powerful than the mandarins. There were 100,000 by the end of the Ming dynasty – more than any other civilization in history. A few became so powerful they virtually ruled the empire, but many died poor and destitute. Some used their wealth to build grandiose residences and tombs, or patronised temples and monasteries located in hills outside the walls. The eunuchs tended to be Buddhists (while the mandarins honoured Confucius), as it gave them hope they would return as whole men in a future reincarnation.

Over time Běijīng became the most important religious centre in Asia, graced by more than 2000 temples and shrines. Daoists and Buddhists vied for the favour of the emperor who, as a divine being, was automatically the patron of every approved religious institution in the empire. As the residence of the emperor, the Chinese regarded Běijīng as the centre of the universe. The best poets and painters also flocked to Běijīng to seek court patronage. The Forbidden City required the best porcelain, furniture, and silverware, and its workshops grew in skill and design. Literature, drama, music, medicine, mapmaking, astrology and astronomy flourished too, so the imperial city became a centre for arts and sciences.

Although early visitors complained about the dust and the beggars, as they do now, most were awed and inspired by its size, magnificence and wealth. Ming culture was very influent in Japan, Korea, Vietnam and other neighbours. By the close of the 15th century the Ming capital, which had started out as a remote and isolated military outpost, had become a wealthy and sophisticated Chinese city.

Despite the Great Wall, the threat from the north intensified. The Manchus, (formerly the Jurchens) established a new and powerful state based in Shěnyáng, (currently the capital of Liáoníng province) and watched as the Ming empire decayed. The Ming had one of the most elaborate tax codes in history but corrupt eunuchs abused their growing power. Excessive taxation sparked a series of peasant revolts. Silver, the main form of exchange, was devalued by the import of silver from the new world, leading to inflation.

One peasant rebel army, led by Li Zicheng (1606–45), actually captured Běijīng. The last Ming emperor, Chongzhen (1611–44), called on the Manchus for help, and after crossing the Great Wall at Shānhǎiguān (p200), helped rout Li Zicheng's army. They then marched on Běijīng, where Emperor Chongzhen hung himself on a tree on Coal, or Prospect, Hill (p91), which overlooks the Forbidden City. Chongzhen lies buried in the Ming tomb a short distance from the grander Ming tomb complex, and now there's a small artificial snowfield near his tomb.

1260
The first Yuan emperor, Kublai Khan, transforms the city and names it Dàdū

1368
Zhu Yuanzhang takes Běijīng and founds the Ming dynasty

1368–1644
City wall reshaped; Great Wall rebuilt; basic layout of moderrn Běijīng established

QING DYNASTY BĚIJĪNG

The Manchus established their Qing dynasty in 1664, although it took several decades before they completed the conquest of the Ming empire. As a foreign dynasty, they took great pains to present themselves as legitimate successors to the Chinese Ming dynasty. For this reason they kept Běijīng as their capital and changed very little, effectively preserving Yongle's city. The Manchu imperial family, the Aisin Gioro Clan, moved in to the Forbidden City, and imperial princes took large courtyard palaces.

Soon the Aisin Gioro family began to feel that living inside the confines of the Forbidden City was claustrophobic. The great Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722) effectively moved the court to what is now called the Old Summer Palace (p101), a vast parkland of lakes, canals and palaces linked to the city by the Jade Canal. The Manchus, like the Mongols, enjoyed hunting, riding, hawking, skating and archery. In summer, when Běijīng became hot and steamy, the court moved to Chéngdé (p203; formerly Jehol or Rehol), a week's ride to the north. At Jehol the court spent three months living in felt tents (or yurts) in a walled parkland.

The Manchu army was divided into regiments called banners, so the troops were called bannermen *(qírén)*. Each banner had a separate colour by which it was known and settled in a particular residential area in Běijīng. The Embroidered Yellow Bannermen, for example, lived near the Confucius Temple (p85), and a few are still there today. Only a minority were actually ethnic Manchus – the rest were Mongols or Han Chinese.

Běijīng was a Manchu city and foreigners used to call it the 'Tartar City': 'Tartars' being the label given to any nomadic race from Inner Asia. The Han Chinese, forced to wear their hair in a queue (pigtail) as a symbol of their subjugation, lived in the 'Chinese city' to the south of Tiananmen Square. It was the liveliest, most densely populated area, packed with markets, shops, theatres, brothels, guild houses and hostels for provincial visitors. If Chinese people wanted to get to north Běijīng, they had to go all the way round the outside walls. The Bannermen posted at all the gates prevented anyone from entering without permission. Right up to 1900, the state provided all Bannermen families with clothing and free food that was shipped up the Grand Canal and stored in grain warehouses.

It was the Manchu Bannermen who really created a Běijīng culture. They loved Beijing opera, and the city once had over 40 opera houses and many training schools. The sleeveless *qípǎo* dress is really a Manchu dress. The Bannermen, who loved animals, raised songbirds and pigeons and bred exotic-looking goldfish and miniature dogs like the Pekinese. And after the downfall of the Qing Empire, they kept up traditional arts like painting and calligraphy.

Through the centuries of Qing rule, the Manchus tried to keep themselves culturally separate from the Chinese, speaking a different language, wearing different clothes and following different customs. For instance, Manchu women did not bind their feet, wore raised platform patens (raised shoe), and wore their hair coiled in distinctive and elaborate styles. All court documents were composed in the Manchu script; Manchu, Chinese and Mongolian script were used to write name signs in places like the Forbidden City.

At the same time, the Qing copied the Ming's religious and bureaucratic institutions. The eight key ministries (Board of Works, Board of Revenue, Board of State Ceremonies, Board of War, Board of Rites, Board of Astronomy, Board of Medicines, and Prefecture of Imperial Clan Affairs) continued to operate from the same buildings in what is now Tiananmen Square. The Qing dynasty worshipped their ancestors at rites held in a temple which is now in the Workers Cultural Palace (p82), south of the Forbidden City. They also built a second ancestral temple devoted to the spirits of every Chinese emperor that ever ruled. Until recently it was a girls' school but has since been turned back into a museum.

They encouraged the study of Confucius in order to strengthen the loyalty of the mandarins employed by the state bureaucracy. And they carried out the customary rituals at the great state temples like the Temple of Heaven (p79). By inclination, however, many of the Manchu emperors were either shamanists or followers of Tibetan Buddhism. The Shamanist shrines have disappeared, but Běijīng is full of temples and stupas connected with Tibetan Buddhists. The

1403–25
Reign of Emperor Yongle sees construction of Forbidden City and Temple of Heaven

1644
Founding of the Qing dynasty

1850–68
Taiping Rebellion

Emperor Qianlong considered himself the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Manjusri and cultivated strong links with various Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas. Many visited – a round trip usually lasted three years, and special palaces were built for them. The Dalai Lama's ex-palace is now rented out by the government of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Manchus deliberately fostered the spread of Tibetan Buddhism among the warlike Mongols in the hope of pacifying them. Běijīng therefore developed into a holy city attracting pilgrims of all kinds.

EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI & THE FOREIGN DEVILS

Of course, the arrival of the first Jesuits and other Christians made Běijīng an important centre of Christianity in China. Emperor Qianlong employed many Jesuits who, among other things, built for him the baroque palaces and stone ruins that can still be seen in the Old Summer Palace (Yuánmíng Yuán; the Garden of Perfect Happiness), which was burnt down in 1860 by a combined force of British and French troops.

After the military defeats of the Opium Wars (1839–42 and 1856–60), the Western nations forced the Qing emperors to allow them to open formal embassies or legations in the capital. Hitherto, the emperor had had no equal in the world – foreign powers could only send embassies to deliver tribute, and they were housed in tributary hostels.

The British legation was the first to open after 1860. It lay on the east side of Tiananmen Square and stayed there until the 1950s when its grounds were taken over by the Ministry of State Security. By 1900, there were a dozen legations in an odd foreign ghetto with an eclectic mixture of European architecture. The Foreign Legation Quarter (p76) never became a foreign concession like those in Shànghǎi or Tiānjīn but it had banks, schools, shops, post offices, hospitals and military parade grounds. Much of it was reduced to rubble when the army of Boxers besieged it in the summer of 1900. It was later rebuilt.

The last of these foreign embassies did not leave until 1967, and, though much of the Legation Quarter has been destroyed during the past decade, it is still worth a visit. You can see the lion and unicorn above the entrance to the British legation, and the French legation is still there, even though it has been given to Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk as his residence.

The Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908), a daughter of a Bordered Blue Bannerman, was a young concubine when the original Summer Palace was burned down. Cixi allowed the Old Summer Palace to fall into decay, associating it with a humiliation, and instead built herself the new Summer Palace (Yíhé Yuán, p102). She was left with a profound hatred and distrust of the Western barbarians and their ways.

Over the four decades in which she ruled China 'from behind the curtain' through a series of proxy emperors, she resisted pressure to change and reform. After a naval defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1895, young Chinese officials put forward a modernisation program. She had some of them executed outside Běijīng's walls then imprisoned their patron and her nephew, Emperor Guangxu (1871–1908). She encouraged the Boxers, a quasi-religious cult, to attack Westerners, especially foreign missionaries in northern China, and when Boxers besieged the Foreign Legation Quarter in 1900, she stood by. When the allied forces marched in to Běijīng to end the siege, she fled in disguise, an ignominious retreat that marked the final humiliation that doomed the Qing dynasty. When Cixi returned in disgrace a year later, China's modernisation had begun in earnest, but it was too late to save the Qing dynasty – it fell in 1911.

REPUBLICAN CHINA

After 1900, the last tribute barges arrived in Běijīng and a railway line ran along the traditional invasion route along the Juyong Pass to Bādálǐng. You can see the handsome clocktower and sheds of Běijīng's first railway station (Qian Men Railway Station, p76), recently restored, on the southeast corner of Tiananmen Square. Běijīng never became an industrial or commercial centre – that role went to nearby Tiānjīn, as it lies on the coast. Yet it remained the leading political and intellectual centre of China until the late 1920s. China's first (and only) parliament was established in Běijīng in what was once the imperial elephant house, now out of sight in the sprawling headquarters of Xinhua, the state news agency.

In the settlement imposed after 1900, China had to pay the victors heavy indemnities. Some of this money was returned to China and used to build the first modern universities, including what are now the Oxford and Cambridge of China – Qinghua and Peking Universities. Běijīng's university quarter is in the Hǎidiàn district, near the Old Summer Palace (some campuses are actually in the imperial parkland). Intellectuals from all over China continued to gravitate to Běijīng, including the young Mao Zedong, who arrived to work as a librarian in 1921.

Běijīng students and professors were at the forefront of the 1919 May Fourth Movement. This was at once a student protest against the Versailles Treaty, which had awarded Germany's concessions in China to Japan, and an intellectual movement to jettison the Confucian feudal heritage and Westernise China. Mao himself declared that to modernise China it was first necessary to destroy it. China's intellectuals looked around the world for models to copy. Some went to Japan, others to America, Britain, Germany or, like Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai, France. Many, of course, went to study Marxism in Moscow.

As the warlords marched armies in and out of Běijīng, the almost medieval city began to change. Temples were closed down and turned into schools. The last emperor, Puyi, left the Forbidden City in 1924 with his eunuchs and concubines. As the Manchus adapted to the changes, they tried to assimilate and their presence faded. Western-style brick houses, shops and restaurants were built. City gates were widened and new ones added, including one at Jianguomenwai to make way for the motorcar. Běijīng acquired nightclubs, cinemas, racecourses and a stock exchange; brothels and theatres flourished. Despite political and diplomatic crises, this was a period when people had fun and enjoyed a unique period of individual freedom.

Generalissimo Chiang Kaishek united most of the country under Chinese National Party (KMT or Kuomintang in Chinese) rule and moved the capital to Nánjīng. Even after 1928, Běijīng's romantic air of decaying grandeur attracted Chinese and Western writers and painters trying to fuse Western and Chinese artistic traditions. Some of 20th-century China's best literature was written in Běijīng in the 1920s and 1930s by the likes of Lao She, Lin Huiyin, Xu Zhimou, Shen Congwen and Qian Zhongshu.

It all came to end when Japan's Kwantung Army moved down from Manchuria and occupied Běijīng in 1937. By then most people who could had fled – some to Chóngqìng in Sìchuān province, which served as Chiang Kaishek's wartime capital. Others joined Mao Zedong in his communist base in Yan'an. Many universities established campuses in exile in Yúnnán province. And the collection of imperial treasures was secretly removed, eventually ending up in Taiwan where it can still be seen in a Taipei museum.

The Japanese stayed in Běijīng for eight years and, before their WWII defeat in 1945, had drawn up plans to build a new administrative capital in an area to the west of the city walls near Gongzhufen. It was a miserable time for Běijīng, but the architecture was left largely untouched by the war. When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, Běijīng was 'liberated' by American marines. The city once again became a merry place famous for its parties – the serious events took place elsewhere in China. When the civil war broke out in earnest between nationalists and communists in 1947 the worst fighting took place in the cities of Manchuria.

In 1948, the Communist Eighth Route Army moved south and encircled Běijīng. General Fu Zuoyi, Commander-in-Chief of the Nationalists Northern China Bandit Suppression Headquarters, prepared the city for a prolonged siege. He razed private houses and built gun emplacements and dug-outs along the Ming battlements. Nationalist planes dropped bags of rice and flour to relieve the shortages, some hitting skaters on the frozen Beihai Lake. Both sides seemed reluctant to fight it out and destroy the ancient capital. The rich tried to flee on the few planes that took off from a runway constructed at Dongdan on Changan Avenue (Changan means 'avenue of eternal peace'). Another airstrip was opened at the Temple of Heaven by cutting down 20,000 trees, including 400 ancient cypresses.

On 22 January 1949 General Fu signed a surrender agreement, and on 31 January his KMT troops marched out and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered. A truck drove up

1900 Boxer Rebellion and siege of the Foreign Legation Quarter

1908 Empress Dowager Cixi bequeaths power to two-year-old Puyi, the last emperor

1911 Collapse of the Qing dynasty; Sun Yat-sen declared president of the Republic of China

1926 The Kuomintang embark on the Northern Expedition to unify China

1928 Capital moved to Nánjīng

1937 Japanese occupation of Běijīng

Morrison St (now Wangfujing Dajie) blasting a continuous refrain to the residents of Běijīng (or Peiping as it was know then): 'Welcome to the Liberation Army on its arrival in Peiping! Congratulations to the people of Peiping on their liberation!' Behind it marched 300 soldiers in battle gear. A grand victory parade took place on 3 February with 250 assorted military vehicles, virtually all American-made and captured from the KMT over the previous two years.

AFTER 1949

In the spring of 1949 Mao Zedong and the communist leadership were camped in the Western suburbs around Badachu, an area which is still the headquarters of the PLA. On 1 October 1949, Mao Zedong mounted the Gate of Heavenly Peace (p76) and declared the founding of the People's Republic of China, saying the Chinese people had stood up. He spoke only a few words in one of the very few public speeches he ever made.

Mao then moved into Zhōngnánhǎi, part of the chain of lakes and gardens dating back to Kublai Khan. Marshal Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) had lived there too during his short-lived attempt to establish his own dynasty after 1911. During his final two decades Mao lived in a courtyard house on an island in the lake called Yingtai where the Empress Dowager had her nephew, Emperor Guangxu, locked up after 1897. Mao spent much of his time sprawled across a huge double bed surrounded by shelves of books, many about Ming history.

Nobody is quite sure why he chose Běijīng as his capital – nor why he failed to carry out his intention to raze the Forbidden City and erect new party headquarters on the site. Designs were drawn up in the late 1960s but never implemented. The Forbidden City was closed for nearly 10 years and became overgrown with weeds.

After 1949 many of new China's top leaders followed Mao's cue and moved their homes and offices into the old princely palaces (*wángfǔ*) – inadvertently preserving much of the old architecture. Mao wished to turn Běijīng from a 'city of consumption into a city production.' 'Chairman Mao wants a big modern city: he expects the sky there to be filled with smokestacks,' said Peng Zhen, the first Party Secretary of Běijīng, to China's premier architectural historian, Liang Sicheng, as they stood on the Gate of Heavenly Peace looking south.

Thousands of factories sprang up in Běijīng and quite a few were built in old temples. In time Běijīng developed into a centre for steel, chemicals, machine tools, engines, electricity, vinegar, beer, concrete, textiles, weapons – in fact everything that would make it an economically self-sufficient 'production base' in case of war. By the 1970s Běijīng had become one of the most heavily polluted cities in the world.

The move to tear down the city's walls, widen the roads, demolish the distinctive *páilou* (ceremonial arches) started immediately after 1949, but was fiercely contested by some intellectuals, including Liang Sicheng, who ran the architecture department of Qinghua University. So in the midst of the demolition of so many famous landmarks, the municipal authorities earmarked many buildings and even old trees for conservation. However, it was all to no avail – Mao's brutal political purges silenced all opposition. In the 1958 Great Leap Forward, the last qualms about preserving old Běijīng were abandoned. A new plan was approved to destroy 80% of the old capital. The walls were pulled down, but a series of ring roads were never built.

Those intellectuals who escaped persecution in the 1950s were savagely dealt with during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Qinghua University became the birthplace of the Red Guards. In the 'bloody August' of that year, Běijīng's middle-school students turned on their teachers, brutally murdering some of them. In August and September of 1966, a total of 1772 people were killed in the capital, according to a report published by the *Beijing Daily* after 1979. The numbers exclude those beaten to death as they tried to escape Běijīng on trains – their registration as residents of Běijīng was suddenly cancelled. The headquarters of the Cultural Revolution in Běijīng had been in the Jianguomenwai area, and has since been demolished. The site is now occupied by the Si-tech Department Store.

By 1969 Mao had fallen out with Moscow and he prepared China for a nuclear war. The remaining population was turned out to build tunnels and nuclear fall-out shelters. Bricks from the city walls and even the Old Summer Palace were used to build these. You can still visit the tunnels and shelters built during those years in many places, such as Ditan Park (p86), where the tunnels are used as an ice rink, and the Beijing Underground City (p74). At Yuetan Park the tunnels have been converted into a shopping arcade. This underground city is connected by road and rail tunnels, which still allow the top leadership to move around Běijīng in secret.

In Mao's time the geomantically inspired symmetry of Běijīng was radically changed. The north–south axis of the Ming City was ruined by widening Changan Ave into a 10-lane, east–west highway. This was used for huge annual military parades or when visiting dignitaries arrived and the population was turned out to cheer them. In the 1950s, the centre was redesigned by Soviet architects and modelled on Moscow's Red Square. Three major gates and many other Ming buildings, including the former government ministries, were demolished, leaving the concrete expanse you see today.

Mao used the square to receive the adulation of the millions of Red Guards who flocked to Běijīng from 1966 to 1969 but, from 1976, it became the scene of massive anti-government protests. After 1969 Mao exiled the Red Guards along with 20 million 'educated youth' to the countryside, but in 1976, when Premier Zhou Enlai died, there was a large and apparently spontaneous protest on the square which was put down by the police. In 1976, Mao himself died.

Deng Xiaoping (1904–97), backed by a group of veteran generals, seized power in a coup d'etat and threw Mao's widow, Jiang Qing (1914–91), and her ultra-leftist cronies into the notorious Qincheng prison outside the city, where Mao had incarcerated so many senior Party veterans. This still exists not far from the Ming Tombs.

At the third plenum of the 11th Party Congress, Deng consolidated his grip on power and launched economic reforms. At the same time thousands of people began putting up posters, along a wall west of Zhōngnánhǎi, complaining of injustices under the 'Gang of Four' (Jiang Qing and her three associates) and demanding democracy. The Democracy Wall in Xidan has now disappeared and been replaced by a shopping mall. Deng initially appeared to back political reforms, but soon the activists were thrown in jail, some in the Beijing No 1 Municipal Prison. This famous prison no longer exists, it was demolished in the mid-1990s.

Many of the activists were former Red Guards or the exiled educated youth. After 1976 they drifted back to the city but could only find jobs in the new private sector running small market stalls, tailor shops or restaurants. After the universities opened conditions remained poor and the intelligentsia continued to be treated with suspicion. Frustrations with the slow pace of reforms prompted fresh student protests in the winter of 1986. Peasants did well out of the first wave of reforms, but in the cities many people felt frustrated. Urban life revolved around 'work units' to which nearly everyone was assigned. The work unit distributed food, housing, bicycles, travel permits and almost everything else. Běijīng was still a rather drab dispiriting place in the 1980s; there was much more to eat but everything else was in a lamentable state. For 30 years, there had been little investment in housing or transport.

In January 1987 the Party's conservative gerontocrats ousted the pro-reform Party chief Hu Yaobang and, when he suddenly died in the spring of 1989, Běijīng students began assembling on Tiananmen Square. Officially they were mourning his passing but they began to raise slogans for political reform and against corruption. The protests snowballed as the Communist Party leadership split into rival factions, causing a rare paralysis. The police stood by as the protests spread across the country and workers, officials and ordinary citizens took to the streets. When the military tried to intervene, Běijīngers surrounded the tanks. The students set up tents on Tiananmen Square and went on a hunger strike. When the premier Li Peng held a dialogue with the students that was aired live on TV, student leaders sarcastically upbraided him.

The students created the first independent student union since 1919 and celebrated the anniversary of the May Fourth Movement with a demonstration in which over a million took to the streets. For the first time since 1949, the press threw off the shackles of state censorship and became independent. When Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev entered on a state visit, and was enthusiastically welcomed as a symbol of political reform, it seemed as if the Chinese Communist Party, too, would embrace political change. Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang

1949
Communist victory over the Kuomintang; founding of the People's Republic of China

1950s
Most of Běijīng's city walls and gates are levelled to make way for roads

1966
The Cultural Revolution is launched

1976
Death of Mao; death of Premier Zhou Enlai sparks spontaneous protests

1979
Deng Xiaoping's reformist agenda commences

1980s
Temples and monuments restored for tourism; construction boom begins

led the reformist faction, but the older-generation leaders, led by Deng Xiaoping, feared the worst. They decided to arrest Zhao and retake the city with a military assault. On the night of 3 June, tens of thousands of troops backed by tanks and armoured personnel carriers entered the city from four directions, bulldozing aside the hastily erected barricades.

Many people died, and by the early hours of 4 June the troops were in control of Tiananmen Square. In the crackdown that followed across the country, student leaders escaped abroad while the Party arrested thousands of students and their supporters. In the purge of Party members that followed, China's reforms seemed to be going into reverse.

The 1989 pro-democracy protests were the largest political demonstrations in Chinese history. Since then Běijīng has seen only one major protest when, in 1999, the followers of the Falun Gong movement surrounded Zhōngnánhǎi.

Things only began to change when Deng Xiaoping emerged from the shadows and set off in 1991 on a so-called 'southern tour', visiting his special economic zones in the south and calling for more and faster change. Despite opposition in the Party, he won the day. China began a wave of economic reforms, but, today, the political system remains unchanged. Reforms transformed urban China and brought new wealth and opportunities to most urban residents. At the same time some 40 million workers in state-owned factories lost their jobs. Deng's reforms pulled in a tide of foreign investment, creating two economic booms, after 1992 and 1998. Stock markets reopened, state companies privatised, and private enterprise began to flourish, especially in the service sector, creating millions of new jobs. Over 100 million peasants left the countryside to work on construction sites or in export-processing factories. The factories were moved out of Běijīng, a city which has once again become a 'centre of consumption'.

The economy was given a huge impetus by decisions to rebuild all major cities virtually from scratch, privatise housing, and sell 50- or 70-year land leases to developers. There was resistance by Party Secretary Chen Xitong to the destruction of Běijīng's centre. During the '80s and early '90s, Chen approved redevelopment plans that aimed to preserve and restore Běijīng's historic centre and characteristic architecture. Chen had earlier helped persuade many army and civilian work units to vacate historical sites they'd occupied during the '70s. However, in 1995, he was ousted by Jiang Zemin who in 1995 had him imprisoned on corruption charges.

Once the Beijing Party apparatus was under his direct control, President Jiang approved plans to completely rebuild Běijīng and replace its inhabitants. This was part of the nationwide effort to rebuild the dilapidated and neglected infrastructure of all Chinese cities. The 'trillion-dollar' economic stimulus package has been carried out with remarkable speed. In Běijīng more than a million peasants, housed in dormitories on the construction sites, have worked round the clock. By 1999, new shopping malls, office blocks, hotels and luxury housing developments were being thrown up at astonishing speed. Nothing so fast or on so vast a scale could ever have happened in any other country in the world. Only an absolute dictatorship with the vast human and industrial resources of China at its command could ever have achieved this.

Jiang wanted to turn Běijīng into another Hong Kong, with a forest of glass-and-steel skyscrapers. The new municipal leadership threw out the old zoning laws, which limited the height of buildings within the Second Ring Rd. It revoked existing land deeds by declaring old buildings to be dilapidated slums. Such regulations enabled the state to force residents to abandon their homes and move to new housing in satellite cities. Under the new plan, only a fraction of the 67-sq km Ming city is being preserved. The city still boasted more than 3679 *hútòng* (historic residential alleyways) in the 1980s, but only 430 were left according to a field survey carried out in 2006 by the Beijing Institute of Civil Engineering and Architecture.

Some see this as a collective punishment on Běijīng for its 1989 rebellion, but others see it as the continuing legacy of Mao's Cultural Revolution and the late Qing dynasty reformers. Many in the current leadership are engineers and ex-Red Guards, including President Hu Jintao, who graduated from Qinghua University during the Cultural Revolution. They are determined to jettison everything from the past and bury recent history. Běijīng's new architecture is designed to embody their aspiration to create a new, forward-looking, hi-tech society, and mark the realisation of the goal of a new modern China.

1989	1997	2001
Tiananmen Square massacre	Death of Deng Xiaoping; reconstruction of Běijīng launched	Běijīng chosen to host the 2008 Olympic Games

The Olympics

The Olympics

That Běijīng is hosting the Olympics just 28 years after China first took part in the Games is a remarkable achievement. Having refused to participate in the Olympics from 1949 until 1980 because Taiwan was allowed to compete under the name Republic of China, the Chinese are now eagerly counting down the days till the 2008 Games begin on 8 August.

For the Chinese, the Olympics will be a massive coming out party, the most potent demonstration yet of China's arrival on the world stage as a genuine superpower. With events being staged in Hong Kong, Qīngdǎo, Qínhuángdǎo, Shànghǎi, Shěnyáng and Tiānjīn as well as Běijīng, there's a very real feeling that the 2008 Olympics belong to all of China and not just Běijīng.

But it is Běijīng that will be the focus of attention. Since 2003, the capital has been turned upside down as venues are constructed and the city's infrastructure completely overhauled. This transformation has come at a huge price. It's estimated that the total cost of hosting the Games will be US$40 billion, making the 29th Olympiad by far the most expensive ever held.

OLYMPICS HISTORY: ANCIENT TO MODERN

The history of the Olympic Games dates back to 776 BC. Held every four years in honour of the Olympian gods, the Games were staged at Olympia in Greece and were open to all free Greek males. Later, the Romans were allowed to compete. Women were barred from both participating in and watching the Games.

Conceived as a test of body, mind and will, winners received a wreath made of olive leaves. Winning didn't just mean individual glory, but was an honour for the athlete's birthplace. This led to corruption, in the form of bribing judges. In AD 66, the first in a long line of Olympic scandals took place, when a drunken Emperor Nero was declared winner of a chariot race, despite failing to finish the course.

The rise of Christianity put an end to the ancient Olympics. They were abolished in AD 393 by the Christian Emperor Theodosius as part of a purge of pagan festivals.

The Games were revived in 1896 thanks to the efforts of a Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Distressed by the effects of the Franco-Prussian War, de Coubertin hit on the idea of using sport as a way to foster goodwill between nations. He organised a world sports congress in Paris in 1894, which gave birth to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and two years later the Games were staged once more. Fittingly, Athens was the site of the first modern Olympics.

Despite the Baron's hopes, the Olympics have failed dismally as a deterrent to wars. The outbreak of WWI saw the cancellation of the 1916 Games, while the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the last before WWII, turned into a showcase for the Nazi regime. It would be 12 years before they were held again. By then women, allowed into the Olympics in 1900, were competing in more and more events.

Throughout the Cold War era the Olympics were increasingly politicised, as nations used the high profile of the Games to protest the Soviet invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, Britain's intervention in the 1956 Suez crisis, and the apartheid policies of South Africa. The protests hit a peak in 1980, when the USA boycotted the Moscow Olympics in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviets and many of their East European allies responded four years later by boycotting the Los Angeles Olympics. But the low point of Olympic history came at the 1972 Munich Games, when 11 Israeli athletes were murdered by Palestinian terrorists.

The end of the Cold War coincided with professional athletes being allowed to compete in the Olympics. At the same time, the use of drugs to boost performance became widespread – an issue that has affected the Games credibility, as have allegations of corruption within the IOC. A number of IOC members and organisers of the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games were sanctioned, after it emerged that bribes had been offered to IOC officials.

Corruption and drugs aside, perhaps the biggest threat to the future of the Games is their very success. The Olympics have become so vast and expensive to stage that few nations can afford to host them.

LOCAL VOICES

Liu Qianwen knows exactly where she was when she heard that Běijīng had been awarded the 2008 Olympics. 'I was in a taxi when the result was announced on the radio,' she recalls. 'I was happy and excited, but not very surprised. We lost out last time, so it should have been us this time. We deserved it.'

A 23-year-old engineering student from Běijīng, Liu's university, the Beijing Institute of Technology, is one of the venues for the Games. The judo and tae kwon do events will be held in the university's gymnasium and Liu is hoping to attend.

Like most Běijīngers, she's pleased with the work that's been done to improve Běijīng's infrastructure and thinks the disruption to everyday life is a small price to pay. 'The transport system in particular is going to be much better,' she says. Above all, Liu believes the Olympics will offer foreigners an insight into her hometown. 'The world will know much more about Běijīng after the Olympics.'

MASCOTS: IT'S ALL IN THE NAME

In Chinese they are *Fúwá*, literally 'good luck dolls', but to the rest of the world they are the official Olympic mascots. Initially called 'The Friendlies', until someone decided that sounded too close to 'friendless', the five cartoon characters, two females and three males, will tour the world before the Games kick off.

Bèibei, Jīngjing, Huānhuan, Yíngying and *Nīni* were unveiled at an elaborate ceremony in Běijīng in November 2005. Each one represents an animal or element, respectively a fish, giant panda, fire, Tibetan antelope and swallow, as well as particular sports and each of the five Olympic rings.

But there is far more to them than that. Each *Fúwá* has a double syllable name because that is a common way to form affectionate nicknames in Mandarin. And when the first syllables of each *Fúwá* are joined together you get the phrase *Běijīng huānyíng nǐ*, or 'Běijīng welcomes you'.

THE BĚIJĪNG OLYMPICS

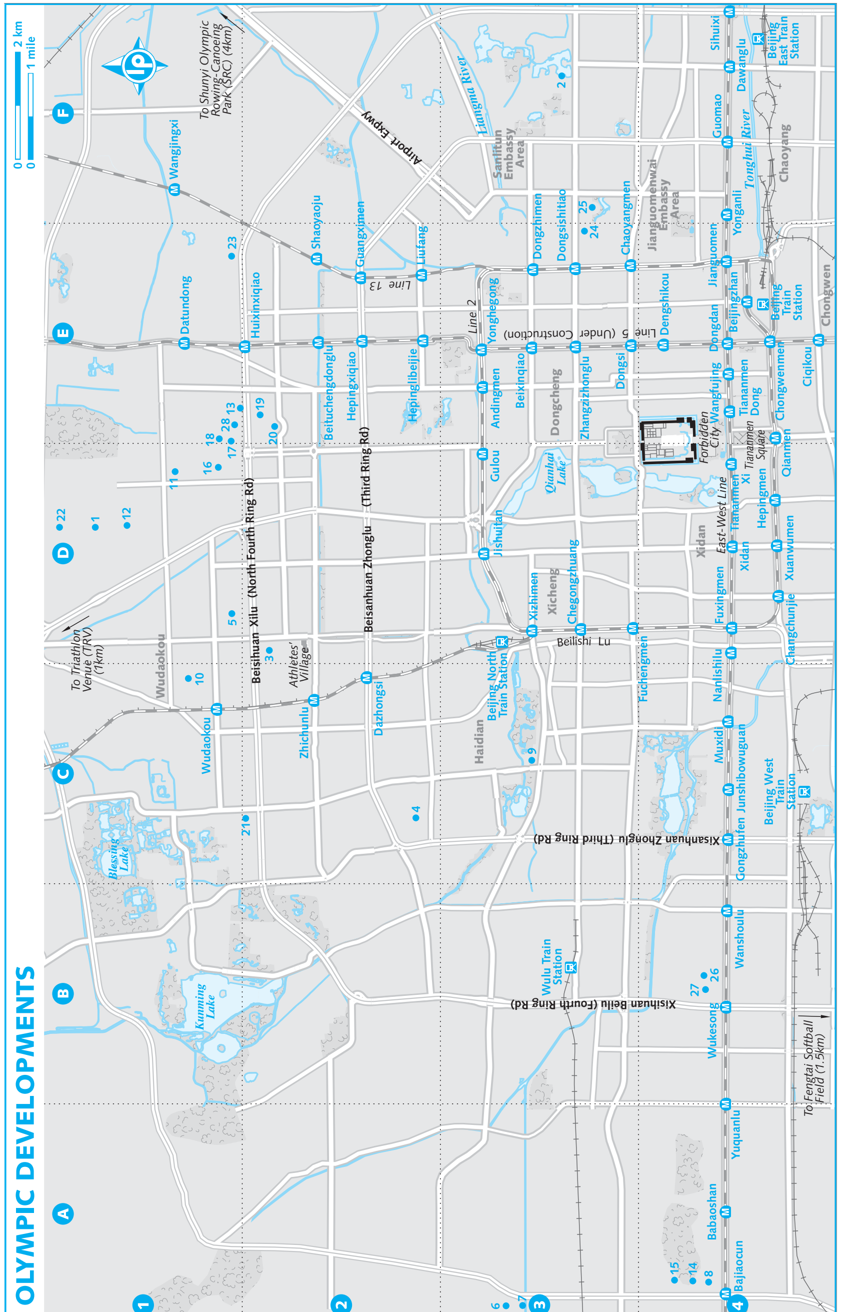
When Běijīng was awarded the 2008 Olympics on 13 July 2001, having previously lost to Sydney for the chance to host the 2000 Games, it was the cue for wild rejoicing across not just Běijīng but all China. Bids to stage the Olympics from both past and future hosts from the developed world, such as Barcelona and London, have sparked furious debate over the cost of hosting the Games and their potential benefits. However, there has been no such dissent in China.

Běijīng's passion for the Games was demonstrated when the call for the 70,000 volunteers needed went out; 43,000 people applied in the first 48 hours. Běijīngers have also responded enthusiastically to the way their city is being upgraded for the Games. New subway lines and improved roads will join the 12 venues being constructed for the Olympics as a lasting legacy of 2008.

SEX PLEASE, WE'RE ATHLETES

In the ancient Olympics, athletes competed in the nude to better show off their muscled bodies. Times have changed, but if the example of recent Olympics is anything to go by, then for some of the 10,500 athletes who will call the Olympic Village in the north of Běijīng home for two weeks, the Games are an excuse for a bacchanalian-like celebration.

The combination of adrenalin, toned bodies and the close proximity of fellow competitors inspires a vigorous social life amongst Olympic athletes. At the Athens Olympic Games in 2004, one company supplied 130,000 condoms to the Olympic Village but more were needed. 250,000 condoms were handed out at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, while the Sydney Olympic Games ran out of condoms so quickly that the organisers had to arrange extra supplies. Běijīng organisers have been silent on their plans for this issue, but clearly they need to be prepared.



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Archery Field 奥林匹克森林公园射箭场	1	D1
Beach Volleyball Ground 沙滩排球场	2	F3
Beihang University Gymnasium 北京航空航天大学体育馆	3	D2
Beijing Institute of Technology Gymnasium 北京理工大学体育馆	4	C2
Beijing Science and Technology University Gymnasium 北京科技大学体育馆	5	D1
Beijing Shooting Range CTF (BSF) 北京射击场飞碟靶场	6	A3
Beijing Shooting Range Hall (BSH) 北京射击馆	7	A3
BMX Field 小轮车赛场	8	A4
Capital Indoor Stadium (CAS) 首都体育馆	9	C3
China Agricultural University Gymnasium (CAG) 中国农业大学体育馆	10	C1
Fencing Hall (FCH) 国家会议中心击剑馆	11	D1
Hockey Field 奥林匹克森林公园曲棍球场	12	D1
International Convention Centre 国际会议中心	13	E1
Laoshan Mountain Bike Course (LSC) 老山自行车场	14	A4
Laoshan Velodrome (LSV) 老山自行车馆	15	A4
National Aquatics Center (NAC) 国家游泳中心	16	D1
National Indoor Stadium (NIS) 国家体育馆	17	E1
National Stadium (NST) 国家体育场	18	E1
Olympic Sports Center Gymnasium (OSG) 奥体中心体育馆	19	E2
Olympic Sports Center Stadium (OSS) 奥体中心体育场	20	E2
Peking University Gymnasium (PKG) 北京大学体育馆	21	C2
Tennis Center 奥林匹克森林公园网球场	22	D1
Urban Cycling Road Course (CRC) 城区公路自行车赛场	23	E1
Workers' Indoor Arena (WIA) 工人体育馆	24	E3
Workers' Stadium (WST) 工人体育场	25	F3
Wukesong Baseball Field 五棵松棒球场	26	B4
Wukesong Indoor Stadium 五棵松体育馆	27	B4
Ying Tung Natatorium (YTN) 英东游泳馆	28	E1

Of the new sites, the most impressive are the centrepiece National Stadium (the 'bird's nest', p38), and the National Aquatics Center (p38), known as the 'water cube' for its shape and bubble-like exterior. The 'bird's nest' and the 'water cube' were both designed by foreign firms, but there has been little public anger over this. Chinese architects have been employed as junior partners in all the foreign-designed projects and the desire of the Chinese to create an Olympics to remember means that nationalistic concerns have been put to one side.

This, however, won't be the case when it comes to the crowds who will fill every one of the 30 venues staging the Olympics in Běijīng. China only won its first Olympic gold medal in 1984, but has made no secret of its desire to top the medals table in 2008. The slogan of the 2008 Games might be 'One World, One Dream', but the Běijīngers watching them will be fiercely partisan and patriotic.

TOP VANTAGE POINTS

With most of the events taking place inside stadiums and university gymnasiums, the only Olympic event that people are guaranteed to enjoy for free is the cycling road race. Scheduled to take place on 9 August, one day after the Games open, the 200km course will start at Tiananmen Square (p81). After heading north through the city, the world's top cyclists will ride to the Great Wall. The riders then face seven punishing circuits of the nearby hills, which will be a great place to catch some of the action.

Although no details had been confirmed at the time of writing, it is likely that giant video screens will be set up at various places around town for people to watch the Games. Ritan Park (p95) is one possible central location. Check local expat magazines (see p227) for more details.

THE PRACTICALITIES

The Games run from 8–24 August 2008. The start time of 8pm on the eighth month of the eighth year of the 21st century was carefully chosen as a particularly auspicious day for the Olympics to begin. Eight is the luckiest number in Chinese culture and is traditionally associated with prosperity.

Tickets have been available since early 2007. Prices are much lower than those of recent Games: 58% of the seven million tickets that went on sale cost Y100 or less. Tickets for the opening ceremony range from Y200 to Y5000. For the preliminary rounds of events, they go from Y30 to Y300, for finals, Y60 to Y1000. Fourteen per cent of tickets have been reserved at a discounted rate for students. The official website for the 2008 Olympics (http://en.beijing2008.com) has details of how to buy tickets.