

A Twentieth-Century Walled City

Wobbling Pivot and Armature of State Power

Broad avenues, parks, and public squares open up the contemporary urban world to the mass assemblies essential to modern commerce, culture, and politics. By contrast, early-twentieth-century Beijing, as a physical entity, remained a city stubbornly defined by walls, walled enclosures, and gates.¹ The fifteenth-century Ming plan of the capital decreed boxes within boxes and cities within cities. The habits of vernacular architecture extended this principle into neighborhoods and residences.² Towering walls of tamped earth with brick facing formed the square Inner City (*neicheng*) and, adjacent to the south, the rectangular Outer City (*waicheng*; fig. 1). (The Inner City was conventionally divided into East, West, and North “Cities” or districts. See map.) The Inner City enclosed the walls of the Imperial City, which, in turn, framed the yellow-roofed, red-walled Forbidden City and the emperor’s throne room. In his memoir of Republican Beijing, newspaper man Li Chengyi, quoting a line spoken by an emperor in a Beijing opera, remembered a cityscape composed of circles within circles: “In the midst of a great circle lies a small circle. Within the small circle stands a yellow one.”³ Within the compass of these great walls and a grid-work of imperial thoroughfares lay a mosaic of walled enclosures containing the mansions of the powerful, the smaller courtyard residences of the monied, propertied, and degree-holding classes, and the courtyard slums of the laboring poor.

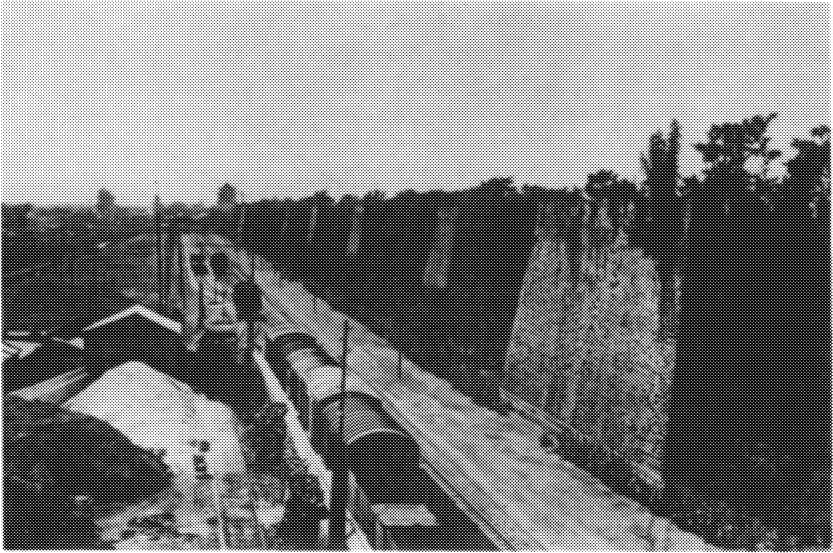


Fig. 1. The wall separating the Inner and Outer Cities. Qian Gate and the western branch of the central railway station are visible in the distance. In the aftermath of the Boxer uprising in 1900, the portion of the wall pictured here was placed under foreign jurisdiction as a means of guaranteeing the security of the Legation Quarter immediately to the north. From Heinz v. Perckhammer, *Peking* (Berlin: Albertus-Verlag, 1928).

The hard symmetry of Beijing's monumental plan was softened by the random, mazelike wanderings of alleyways (*hutong*) typical of most neighborhoods and, seasonally, by nature. In the late fall and winter, the "special blueness of the sky, intensity of the sun and brilliance of the moon" placed the city's unique architectural ensemble of palaces and walls in brilliant relief.⁴ In the spring north China's famous dust storms obscured the composite order of these elements, as did tree foliage in the summer when Beijing became a "forest city."⁵

In the late-Qing and Republican era, change directed toward the physical and social transformation of Beijing stirred and developed. Beginning at the turn of the century, reformers and



Fig. 2. On this modern Beijing avenue, a mule-cart driver has ignored the prohibition against narrow-tired vehicles using the paved, center section. Note the presence of gutters, street lamp, and flanking lines of young trees marking the borders of the unpaved side roads. Pedestrians naturally preferred the macadam to dusty or muddy mule-cart tracks. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

entrepreneurs introduced inventions and institutions intended to make the city a fit capital, first for a modern empire, and then for a republic. As a physical space, Beijing seemed alternately to invite and to resist change. Strips of macadam could be laid without much trouble down the centers of wide, Ming-vintage avenues. But in order that narrow-wheeled country carts, which ruined pavement, could continue to travel in the city, the sides of the roads had to be left unpaved.⁶ Alongside the new pavement, work crews installed water pipes, street lamps, postboxes, public latrines, and telegraph and telephone poles and lines. A new, uniformed police force built kiosks and deployed its members beside the thoroughfares. The tasks of the police included keeping mule drivers off the pavement and protecting postboxes and utility equipment from vandalism and pilferage (figs. 2 and 3).⁷ In 1910 Qing officials reportedly contemplated tearing down the city walls



Fig. 3. A Beijing alleyway (*hutong*). Narrow, twisting side streets were left unpaved. This commercial *hutong* boasts a long line of businesses, including a hat shop and a jewelry store. Note the old-style signboards and intricately carved facades. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

and laying streetcar track in their place.⁸ Considering that at that time Beijing's walls still symbolized, concealed, and protected imperial authority and the person of the emperor, the notion was a radical one. Although the city walls, as the expression of cosmological canon, still had a potent ally in the sheer inertia of these ordered ranges of earth and brick, modern-minded Chinese began to imagine their removal.

By the birth of the Republic in 1912, a rusty, potholed grid of wire, pipe, and macadam mimicked, if not threatened, the ancient geometry of the city's walls and gates. New government bureaus, universities, factories, and foreign legations functioned as modern enclaves in the midst of preindustrial and culturally traditional Beijing. The streets themselves, with their complement of new devices and social roles, including telephone communications, rick-

shaw and (eventually) automobile travel, and formal policing of public behavior, systematically projected modern ideas and invention throughout the city. As Marshall Berman has observed, the modern avenue, of which Hausmann's Parisian boulevards and Petersburg's Nevsky Prospect are outstanding examples, is a "distinctively modern environment," which "served as a focus for newly accumulated material and human forces: macadam and asphalt, gaslight and electric light, the railroad, electric trolleys and automobiles, movies and mass transportation."⁹ When the European city was exported whole or in part to the Third World, modern avenues of the kind constructed in early-twentieth-century Beijing formed both the skeletal structure and the nervous system of a new urban organism.¹⁰

In some cities, like Shanghai, modern enclaves and infrastructure transformed urban life. The city itself became an enclave in the midst of a preindustrial hinterland. In most other cities, especially those like Beijing, located inland from China's maritime fringe, the changes were less decisive. But the attendant emergence even in smaller numbers of new buildings housing factories, universities, and modern government, and of new people, like proletarians, capitalists, and a cadre of politicians and assorted professionals, represented a significant alteration in the pattern of urban life. Anarchists throwing bombs, students making speeches, and entrepreneurs floating joint-stock companies could not fail to make an impression even if a uniformly politicized citizenry or a forest of smokestacks did not yet exist to underscore their long-term significance.

Imperial Beijing, with its cosmologically dictated ceremonial and administrative architecture, congested commercial districts, and flat expanses of courtyard residences, easily absorbed the initial transformative threat posed by a few modern buildings and machines and a thin layer of pavement. But the fragility, even the absurdity, of ventures advertising themselves in the form of malfunctioning, sometimes dangerous machinery, hectoring policemen, and shouting rickshaw men could not disguise the insistent way in which new technologies and practices pressed up against the lives of Beijing residents and subtly altered the speed, scale, and direction of city life. Once the empire's unwobbling pivot encased in massive walls, Beijing began a long and halting re-



Fig. 4. Fashionably dressed men and women enjoying a sled ride. For centuries simple sleds like this one had been available for hire on the "palace lakes" north of the Imperial City. The laborer pulling the sled wore special shoes equipped with iron hooks that gripped the ice. Once the sled picked up speed, the puller hopped on to coast along with his passengers. (H. Y. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu: The Life Cycle of a Peking Man*, vol. 2 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], pp. 132-133.) UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos.

emergence as the armature of modern state power wrapped in telephone and telegraph wire and powered by mass nationalism instead of a mandate from heaven.

By the 1920s this redirecting of city life was well advanced. A streetcar system operated, along with scores of modern factories, dozens of newspapers, a racetrack, cinemas, an airfield, and several railway stations. Political parties, a chamber of commerce, labor unions, patriotic societies, literary clubs, and professional societies of lawyers, bankers, and newspaper reporters claimed tens of thousands of members. But despite the inspired imaginings of late-Qing planners, streetcar track, while it ran through and within the square and rectangular template formed by the Inner and the Outer City, did not replace the city walls. Nor did labor unions and professional associations push aside craft and merchant guilds. They competed and cooperated with each other in an increasingly complex blending of organizational and leadership styles and strategies.

Some cities are like palimpsests. The imperfectly erased past is visible even though only the imprint of the present can be clearly deciphered. By contrast, Beijing in the 1920s, as a human and physical entity, clearly preserved the past, accommodated the present, and nurtured the basic elements of several possible futures. Few cities in China in the 1920s looked so traditional and Chinese and at the same time harbored the essentials of modern and Western urban life. In fact, the city's physical ambiguities provide a metaphor for the uneven and incomplete social transformations of the Republican period. With everything added by way of new technologies and social practices and little taken away through the uniform application of factory system, modern administration, or thoroughgoing social revolution, Beijing cultivated incongruities and forced accommodation between old and new forms of production and social action (fig. 4).

Beijing and Beiping: Taking the Measure of a Capital in Decline

West of the Forbidden City and within the walls of the Imperial City lie three artificial lakes or seas (*hai*): Bei (north), Zhong (middle), and Nan (south). The two southern lakes, or “Zhong-

nanhai," are surrounded by palaces and pavilions, which form the southwestern corner of the Imperial City.¹¹ The main entrance to the Zhongnanhai complex is Xinhua Gate, which faces south on Changan Avenue, running east and west. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, emperors and the court used Zhongnanhai as a retreat from the more austere setting of the Forbidden City. Following the 1911 Revolution and beginning with President Yuan Shikai, most Republican heads of state used Zhongnanhai as residence and office complex.¹² Since 1949 top officials of the People's Republic have lived and worked in the same, palatial setting.

While the 1911 Revolution left imperial Beijing physically intact, dethronement of the emperor jarred political authority loose from the symbolic design of the city's walls and palaces. After 1911 real and putative power resided transiently in Zhongnanhai, in the cabinet offices at Iron Lion Lane in the East City (the eastern districts of the Inner City), in the parliament building in the West City just north of the wall separating the Inner and the Outer City, or in the imperialist bastion of the Legation Quarter. The Forbidden City was given over to parks and museums and, until he was expelled in 1924, the residence of the deposed Manchu monarch. This spatial decentering of political Beijing presaged the wobbling, errant course of the Republic and the degrading of Republican institutions located variously in reconverted palaces and mansions, like Zhongnanhai, and Western-style buildings, like parliament.

Zhongnanhai, which served as headquarters for the Republic's first head of state, also housed its last resident in Beijing: Marshal Zhang Zuolin. As military dictator based in Beijing from December 1926 to June 1928, Zhang presided over the demise of the Beijing Republic (prior to its rebirth in Nanjing under the Nationalists).¹³ Continuing a slide toward insolvency begun early in the decade and accelerated by Zhang's military adventures, impoverished officials contrived to sell brick from the city walls and ancient trees from imperial temple grounds to pay government salaries.¹⁴ Even by comparison with previous masters of the Beijing regime, Zhang Zuolin's commitment to republican virtue was feeble. He marked his tenure in office with sacrifices to Confucius and other gestures hinting at imperial ambitions.¹⁵ Admittedly, he never went the full route followed by Yuan Shikai, who in 1915

and 1916 tried to make himself emperor. Perhaps Zhang understood that declaring himself monarch would have only substituted “a parody of the empire” for “the parody of a republic.”¹⁶

By spring 1928 Zhang Zuolin’s forces were in retreat from the allied armies of the Northern Expedition led by Chiang Kai-shek. The militarist prepared to leave Zhongnanhai and Beijing and return to his base in the northeast. Just after midnight on June 3, 1928, a twenty-car motorcade carrying Zhang sped out of Xinhua Gate, heading for Beijing’s East Station and a special armored train bound for Mukden (Shenyang).¹⁷ Shortly before dawn the next day, on the outskirts of Mukden, a bomb planted by the Japanese army blew up the car Zhang Zuolin was riding in and mortally wounded the warlord.¹⁸

For the next week, in a pattern followed in the 1920s on previous occasions of flight and conquest, a consortium of prominent ex-officials, merchants, and bankers governed the city through a Peace Preservation Association (*zhian weichi hui*). The body maintained order with the help of Zhang Zuolin’s garrison commander, Bao Yulin, who remained behind Zhang’s retreating forces with a contingent of soldiers. The consortium also orchestrated an orderly transfer of power from Zhang’s troops to the Nationalists. On the morning of June 8, raggedly dressed advance elements of General Yan Xishan’s peasant army entered Beijing through the southern gates of the Outer City.¹⁹ Meanwhile, by prearrangement, General Bao and his troops, looking impressive after months of urban garrison duty, took leave of the city from Chaoyang Gate on the eastern side of the Inner City. Xiong Xiling, a former premier, a Beijing entrepreneur and philanthropist, representing the Peace Preservation Association, gave a speech praising Bao’s performance as garrison commander. The Beijing chamber of commerce presented Bao with honorific gifts and provisions for his men. A group photograph was taken to commemorate the event.

As in the past when the capital changed hands, Beijing became the site in June and July for meetings among the victors. Chiang Kai-shek and the militarists who supported the Nationalist drive to the north arrived in Beijing aboard armored trains to consult each other and pay respects to Nationalist-movement founder Sun Yat-sen, whose remains had been temporarily interred in the

Temple of Azure Clouds in the hills west of the city at the time of his death in 1925. But this time the meetings did not have, as they had in the past, the goal of reconstituting a national government in Beijing. The Nationalists had chosen Nanjing as their capital and renamed Beijing (“northern capital”) Beiping (“northern peace”).²⁰

In moving the capital to Nanjing, the Nationalists were following the wishes of Sun Yat-sen, whose death from cancer had come during a fruitless attempt to negotiate unification of north and south. The choice of Nanjing also made strategic sense in that a southern capital removed the regime’s center from proximity to the Japanese threat in the northeast. Nanjing was located in the midst of China’s economic heartland and closer to the southern cradle of the Nationalist revolution in Guangdong.

However, the Nationalists were also motivated by their strong dislike of Beijing. Nationalists partly blamed the city and its inhabitants for the failure of the Republic and expressed concern lest their own movement become contaminated by contact with the old capital.²¹ Even in speeches appealing to city residents to support the Nationalist cause, Nationalist leaders could not refrain from condemning the mix of Manchu, militarist, and Communist influences thought to be concealed in Beijing. On June 30, 1928, at a rally held in Central Park (soon to be renamed Sun Yat-sen Park) just west of Tianan Gate, city residents listened patiently in the rain as a military official from Hunan, named Li Pinxian, praised Beijing’s fame as a cultural center as he attacked its more recent history. Beijing, he declared, “has been occupied by warlords as well as by the poisonous vestiges of monarchy to the point that customs and habits have become deeply corrupted.”²² Worse still, Communists had taken advantage of the fact that Beijing was “rife with corruption” to promote a cause that appeared attractive by comparison. Li concluded his speech by testifying that on his way out to visit Sun Yat-sen’s tomb in the Western Hills he saw a man wearing a Manchu-style queue and that many people could be seen wearing Qing-era summer hats. These, he said, were “obstacles to carrying out the revolution” and “ought to be eradicated.”

Beijing residents, through the press and local organizations like the chamber of commerce and the hotel guild, mounted a vigorous defense of the city’s reputation and her fitness to be the capital.

Beijing, they pointed out, was “grand and imposing.”²³ What other city in the country could boast such a magnificent array of palaces and museums? Nanjing might be at the center of the eighteen-province heartland of the country, but China also included Xinjiang and Mongolia. Reestablishing the capital at Beijing would send a signal to Russian and Japanese imperialists that greater China and its northern borders would be defended. As if to prove the depth of Beijing residents’ nationalist feelings, the Beijing chamber of commerce sent an open telegraphic message to the nation, announcing a drive to raise funds to erect a bronze statue of Sun Yat-sen in Beijing and plans to host a national festival in his memory.²⁴

The Nationalists charged guilt by association. Beijing people posed as innocent bystanders. One petition sent to Chiang Kai-shek and his colleagues slyly pointed out that although talk of “Beijing corruption” was certainly “fashionable,” since the Nationalists had arrived in Beijing they too had established numerous bureaus and official organs. Official statements sounded much like past declarations. Following the Nationalists’ own logic, would not these actions likewise be a form of corruption?²⁵

Needless to say, the Nationalists were irritated by the Beijing residents’ attempts to be accommodating in a fashion tailored to their own interests and regarded them as a confirmation of their prejudices against the city. When Chiang Kai-shek arrived in Beijing on the morning of July 3 he greeted the crowd of local notables and organizations, which had been waiting all night at the train station for his arrival, with a wave of a hat, a brief word of thanks (*xiexie*, *haohao*), and a refusal to have his photograph taken.²⁶ He and his entourage left almost immediately for the Western Hills to pay their respects to Sun’s body. Afterwards, as he left the Temple of Azure Clouds, a reporter asked him about “the question of the national capital” and Chiang replied, “In Nanjing, of course.” One year later, when Chiang returned to the city in an unsuccessful attempt to forestall a revolt by two of his erstwhile northern militarist allies, several hundred merchants marched on the hotel he was staying at and demanded the return of the capital.²⁷ Chiang termed the request “ridiculous” on the grounds that the whole matter was purely an “affair of state.”²⁸ To residents of the “old capital,” long accustomed to viewing

national affairs as a local industry, loss of paramount administrative status and the rebukes delivered by Chiang and his fellow Nationalists constituted grievous blows to both livelihood and city pride.

As the decade progressed fewer and fewer political authorities outside the capital had paid any attention to the government within the walls, except as a target for attack. While some ministries and bureaus continued to function, the regime faced mounting difficulties in paying its employees even a bit of what they were owed.²⁹ Staffed by unpaid and demoralized officials, government offices became derelict places.³⁰ Even so, a palpable administrative and political aura clung to the city. As long as there was a chance that an effective national government might be reestablished in the city, tens of thousands of political aspirants and hangers-on hovered about in a cloud of connections, factional intrigue, and patronage.³¹

As the national government faded and finally disappeared in the 1920s, leaving only archives and museums as markers of the high tide of early Republican administration, Beijing retained a "heavy official atmosphere."³² The city exuded what others more prosaically termed a "bureaucratic odor."³³ Beijing's hotels, inns, provincial hostels, restaurants, theaters, teahouses, parks, and bathhouses continued to provide a congenial setting for the practice of politics. The city's newspapers mirrored political goings-on with varying degrees of accuracy and distortion. Much of the economy had direct or indirect ties to government and politics, ranging from the service sector, which housed, fed, transported, and amused officials and politicians to less likely beneficiaries, like the bicycle trade, which equipped the messengers stationed outside government offices and private mansions.³⁴

Beijing society naturally oriented itself toward power—the city's principal product and resource for over five hundred years. The early Republic encouraged the continuation of this orientation in a form that made Beijing people appear servile and spoiled to outsiders. "Generally speaking, Beiping society is utterly feeble and decrepit. . . . When Guangdong people are at the end of their rope, they face the danger directly. Shandong people leave hearth and home to struggle on elsewhere. But Beiping people make a point of acting like the bereaved heirs of the Qing empire."³⁵ In a

mocking way, the author of this passage, who knew Beijing well in the 1920s as a practising social researcher, suggests that the removal of the capital in 1928 and the city's loss of status had been anticipated by the personal and collective loss experienced by Qing bannermen, who were in a literal sense "bereaved heirs" of the old regime.

The banners, identified by the color and pattern of their battle flags, were the original fighting units of the Manchus. After their seventeenth-century conquest of China, bannermen and their dependents were settled in and around the capital and throughout the empire in strategically placed communities.³⁶ In the 1920s, bannermen and their families, who included Chinese and Mongolians but who were predominantly Manchu, still constituted one-third of the city's population of approximately one million.³⁷ They were popularly regarded as having lost their martial spirit and retained an unwarranted sense of entitlement. In outward appearance, customs, and habits bannermen differed little from the average Chinese resident of the city. Given their more than 250 years of residence, Manchu bannermen had become quintessential Beijing people (*Beijing ren*). Bannermen were entitled to receive stipends and rations in accord with their status. But these monies and benefits had diminished considerably by the eve of the 1911 Revolution.³⁸ As stipend payments became irregular and anti-Manchu sentiment mounted, bannermen were satirized and ridiculed as lazy wards of the state and as absurdly devoted to defending their declining status.³⁹

After the 1911 Revolution, the Republican government continued to pay banner stipends and rations, although by the early 1920s these payments were in arrears, like most government obligations.⁴⁰ As their financial situation became ever more precarious, Manchus began to take whatever work they could find. Thousands became policemen and soldiers. Tens of thousands pulled rickshaws. Others found jobs as peddlers, servants, prostitutes, actors, and storytellers.⁴¹ In this regard it is difficult to tell what observers found more disconcerting: the Manchus' alleged indolence or their unseemly willingness to fill low-status occupations, many of which required considerable enterprise and hard work.

The decline of Beijing Manchus became synonymous with the

decadence of the imperial regime. As the Republican state experienced a comparable, accelerated decline, stereotypical representations of Manchus as a “feudal” residue seemed germane to an accounting of Beijing’s essential character. As a friendly southern observer remarked in his assessment of post-1928 Beiping, the old capital was “placid, passive, easygoing, conservative, venerable, leisurely, and feudal.”⁴² The city’s style of life resonated with the softening or corrupting of government in the 1920s, not because the old capital was corrupt in the ordinary sense of the word (*fuhua*), but because, like most capitals, it made its living and derived its meaning by following the lead of officialdom.

In addition to sharing and supporting a politics of decline, which placed a premium on hanging on at all costs to whatever scrap of power remained within reach, Manchus and the decadent Republic had a common preoccupation with the care and feeding of politically derived status. If by the mid-1920s Beijing no longer fulfilled its traditional role as a setting for the large-scale production and use of political power, the city continued to cater to displays of status and rank. Beijing people were willing players in this game because many of their livelihoods depended on the spending habits of political operators of all stripes and, it appears, because they found the manipulation and use of status and power aesthetically pleasing. As inveterate theatergoers and avid fans of Beijing opera, city residents of all classes could appreciate clever twists of plot, subtle gestures, and calculated bravado exhibited by ministers and warlords, as well as by ordinary folk caught up in the many situations where official Beijing intruded into the broader arena of urban life.

A seriocomic example of how complex this game could be occurred on an April morning in 1924 on an avenue outside Xuanwu Gate in the Outer City. A heavily laden, mule-drawn night-soil cart driven recklessly down the center pavement of the street was stopped by a policeman on watch. The policeman chided the driver for abusing the mule and for illegally driving the cart on the paved center section of the road. The newspaper account of the incident reported that the carter replied angrily, “with eyes flashing,” “What business is it of yours?”⁴³ The two men drew a crowd and argued for nearly an hour. When the policeman finally told the driver he must accompany him to the station, the man

“laughed coldly” and said, “Let me tell you something. This night-soil cart [and the excrement within] is from the presidential palace [at Zhongnanhai]. You wouldn’t dare take me to the station.” The policeman would not be bullied, and he was not entirely persuaded that the driver was who he said he was. Members of the crowd offered to mediate, but to no avail. The newspaper account concluded by noting that “by then there was no choice but to go to the station. Whether or not he was really from the Presidential Mansion we were unable to determine.” The claim to be in possession of sewage from the mansion of President Cao Kun, who had shamelessly bribed legislators to obtain his office the year before, undoubtedly had less potency than one made when Zhongnanhai was occupied by someone as powerful as the Republic’s first president, Yuan Shikai. But even in decline, official Beijing still affected the calculations of those who fell within its diminishing circle of influence.

Beijing was famous in the 1920s not only for its venal politicians, rapacious warlords, job-hunting officials, and idealistic students, but also for its courteous but insistent policemen, rancorous mule drivers and night-soil carriers, polite but status-conscious shopkeepers, officious streetcar conductors, and artful pickpockets. An admiring observer suggested that Beijing people placed “in a difficult situation are able to fight.” But they are also more likely to retain their composure because their sense of “human relations” (*renqing*) is so acute.⁴⁴ A combination of confidence and wariness natural to those who lived at or near the center of the Chinese political world made Beijing people circumspect in the way they sized up situations. As the case of the policeman and the night-soil carter suggests, city residents displayed both persistence and prudence in charting a course through the uncertainties associated with status, power, and things redolent of a bureaucratic odor.

Local Politics in a Centerless Polity

If Beijing is measured against the course of its decline and fall as China’s capital, one can surely make a case for its essential decadence. The city’s monumental structures, which once projected immense power and authority, by the 1920s graphically recorded

the progress of decay. A journalist who visited Zhang Zuolin in Zhongnanhai in 1928 observed that the palace complex was in poor repair. "The paint and lacquer is peeling off in large chunks and broken panes of glass, instead of having been replaced, are found mended with glue and paper."⁴⁵ A European traveler who toured the Forbidden City found that "ideas of physical decay and death . . . haunted one at every turn . . . The Palace itself was dying; grass grew thick on its eaves; and even its official custodians had begun to sell its treasures. Other monuments were going the same way."⁴⁶ Late-Qing and early-Republican reforms failed to reverse this trend even though they left as legacies the partial modernization of city life.

As old Beijing crumbled new Beijing rusted, suggesting not so much a bright structure of modern technique competing with peeling paint and lacquer as two forms of decay. Decay at the center in the form of run-down palaces, electric power outages, and militarized civilian institutions offered a visual and social impression of city life likely to provoke critical, even despairing, comments by cosmopolitan Westerners, who associated decadence with the "Orient," and by censorious Nationalists, who saw Republican corruption superimposed on Manchu complacency. If these judgments were true, then the only chance remaining for Beijing, and by extension for the rest of Republican China, was to submit to moral and social renovation at the hands of self-proclaimed revolutionaries like the Nationalists or their Communist rivals.

However, beyond the compass of Zhongnanhai, the Forbidden City, and the foreign legations lay a Beijing more complex and vital than the romantic meditations of foreigners or the polemical attacks of political radicals might suggest. The city had one of the finest police forces in Asia, staffed in the main by supposedly indolent Manchu bannermen. While Beijing newspapers and news services were often creatures of warlords and politicians, the size and output of journalistic enterprise in the city had few rivals in the country. The city's university system although buffeted by financial problems and political repression, employed some of China's best minds and produced some of the decade's most famous political activists. And against the stillness of Beijing as home to museum, archive, and decomposing bureaucracy, rose the bustle of the marketplace, which sounded "a cacophany, a pande-