

Tales of Old PEKING

**Words and images taking you inside
the walls of China's tumultuous
capital**

By Derek Sandhaus

“To this city everything that is most
rare and valuable in all parts of the
world finds its way...”

Marco Polo



Peking Chronology

Around 500,000BC: Peking Man appears in the caves of Zhou Kou Dian, southwest of Peking.

3,000BC-581AD: The Yan and Ji people settle near Peking establishing the cities of Ji and Yanjing.

226BC: China's first emperor Qin Shihuang seizes Ji and incorporates it into his empire.

581AD: Peking, now a relatively large city is known as Zhuo Jun.

618: Changes name to You Zhou and becomes a trading center and military stronghold.

916: You Zhou is seized by the Liao Dynasty from Inner Mongolia and renamed Nanjing (Southern Capital).

1153: The Jin Dynasty moves its capital to Peking, giving it the name Jin Zhongdu (Central Jin Capital).

It is the political epicenter of North China.

1215: Genghis Khan conquers Jin Zhongdu and changes the name back to Yanjing.

1271: Genghis' grandson Kublai Khan founds the Yuan Dynasty with its capital at Peking, calling it Dadu (Great Capital). This is the first time it becomes the capital of the entire Chinese nation.

1274: Marco Polo and family arrive.

1276: The first hutongs, narrow city alleyways, are constructed.

1368: The Ming Dynasty is established with its capital in

Nanjing. It changes the city's name to Beiping (Northern Peace).

1403: Emperor Yongle moves the capital back to Peking, giving it its current name, Beijing (Northern Capital), called Peking by later English speakers.

1406: Emperor Yongle orders the construction of the Forbidden City, completed 14 years later. A larger city is built around the palace intersected by an 8-kilometer north-south axis.

1564: Expanded further south to include what would become the Chinese City.

1601: Matteo Ricci becomes the first foreigner to visit the Forbidden City.

1644: The Manchu cross the Great Wall and install the Qing dynasty in Peking.

1793: Lord Macartney leads the first British Embassy to Peking.

1816: Lord Amherst leads the second unsuccessful British Embassy to Peking.

1860, October 6: Anglo-French Troops storm Peking, ending the Second Opium War.

1860, October 18: Treaty of Peking is signed, allowing foreign diplomats to enter Peking. Lord Elgin orders the destruction of Yuan Ming Yuan the same day.

1861: Construction begins on the Legation Quarter. Empress Cixi rises to power.

1898, June 11-September 21: Emperor Guangxu initiates the Hundred Days' Reform and is forced out of power by Cixi.

1900, June 20-August 14: Boxers lay siege to the Legation Quarter.

1900, August 16: Missionaries under siege at Beitang are rescued.

1901, September 7: Boxer Protocol is signed.

1908, November 14: Emperor Guangxu is poisoned and dies two days before Empress Dowager Cixi.

1912, February 12: The Qinghai Revolution forces the abdication of China's last emperor, Puyi.

1912, March 10: Yuan Shikai becomes China's first president.

1916, January 1: Yuan declares himself Emperor, several provinces secede from the Republic, and he dies shortly thereafter.

1917, July 1-July 12: Puyi restored to the throne.

1919, May 4: Thousands of students in Peking protest the outcome of the Treaty of Versailles and foreign influence in China, setting off a national movement.

1925, March 12: Sun Yat-sen, democracy proponent and founder of the Kuomintang, attempts to bring stability to Peking, but dies while visiting.

1928, June 28: Chiang Kai-shek, Sun's protégé, reunites China and moves the capital to Nanking. Peking is once again renamed Beiping.

1937, July 29: Shortly after the Marco Polo Bridge incident sets off the Second Sino-Japanese war, Peking falls to the Japanese army.

1945: Allied soldiers liberate Peking.

1946-1947: Poorly behaved US troops

ignite a new wave of anti-foreign protests.

1949, January 31: Communists troops seize Peking.

1949, October 1: Mao Zedong proclaims the foundation of the People's Republic of China.

Rulers of Note

Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)

1271-1294: Kublai Khan

Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

1402-1424: Yongle

1572-1620: Wanli

1627-1644: Chongzhen

Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

1644-1661: Shunzhi

1661-1722: Kangxi

1722-1735: Yongzheng

1735-1796: Qianlong

1820-1850: Daoguang

1850-1861: Xianfeng

1861-1908: Empress Dowager Cixi

1861-1875: Tongzhi

1875-1908: Guangxu

1908-1911: Puyi

First Republic (1912-1916)

1912-1916: Yuan Shikai

Warlord Period (1916-1928)

Second Republic (1928-1948)

1928-1948: Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek

Japanese Occupation (1937-1945)

People's Republic of China (1949-Present)

1949-1976: Mao Zedong

1979-1992: Deng Xiaoping



Introduction

Peking has always been viewed as one of the world's most mysterious cities. For Westerners, it was for hundreds of years a forbidden city, but its role as the capital of the world's greatest empire has made it the focus of enormous curiosity since the days of Marco Polo in the 13th century.

The story of Polo's visit to Khanbaliq, the great capital of the Mongolian-dominated Chinese Empire, is an inspiring tale of a traveler in a faraway land forging a powerful relationship with an utterly alien people based on curiosity and mutual respect. He was in awe of the elaborately conceived city that would one day be called Peking, sophisticated beyond the wildest imaginings of a Medieval European. The tentative Silk Road links across Asia along which Marco Polo is said to have traveled could have been the beginning of a much earlier relationship between Europe and China, but it was not to be. The Mongol empire that provided the opportunity for such travels collapsed, and the next known contacts were not to occur until Europeans mastered the sea-lanes around Africa and across the Indian Ocean to the China world.

They found a China, under the Chinese Ming emperors, that was becoming more not less xenophobic and was uninterested in the

barbarians of the West or their offers of trade. With the exception of a few Catholic priests in the 17th century, no Westerners are known to have set foot in Peking for about 500 years.

The West that returned to China's capital in the late 18th century had in the meantime overtaken China in terms of military technology. This was the beginning of the age of colonialism and China was another corner of the globe in which to plant a flag and open shop. But in Peking, the colonial West found an equal to their arrogance and stubbornness. For thousands of years, China had been the unquestioned heart of East Asian power and the Chinese emperors considered anything outside of their purview to be unworthy of respect.

What followed was ugly.

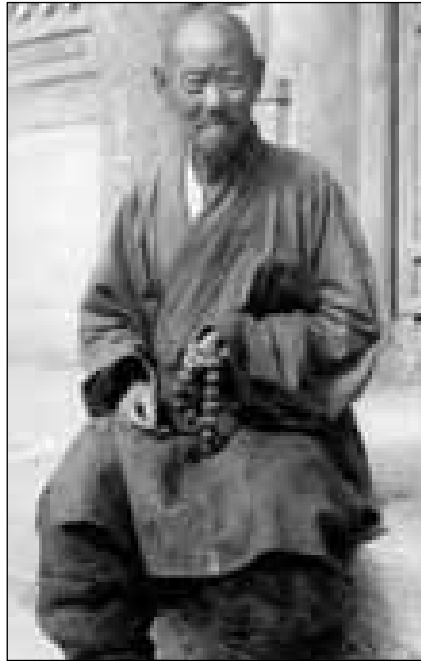
Peking became the flash point of confrontation, characterized by almost complete misunderstanding on both sides. For many long years, the Chinese even refused to allow the westerners to live in the city at all, and it took the two Opium Wars to force them to allow Britain and other countries to open Peking legations in the early 1860s.

The tightly-knit community of foreign diplomats lived in a walled compound known as the Legation Quarter, just to the southeast of the Forbidden City. Most of them hated it. They found Peking uncomfortable, dirty and incomprehensible. Few of them spoke Chinese and their interactions with the local community were limited almost exclusively to servants and unreceptive, often



hostile, Chinese government officials. They were sent to secure concessions, not agreements, and were deeply resented because of it.

On the other hand there was the Chinese Imperial court which, under the increasingly decadent and ineffective Manchus, was remote, inaccessible and mired in political intrigue. Despite a steadily fragmenting Empire, their belief in their superiority was absolute. The people of Peking also shared in that feeling of self-importance that comes with living at the center of the known universe (as is true of New York today). The presence of the foreigners with their endless demands and weird



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customs was seen as an insult. It is not surprising that this mixture of misunderstanding and mutual loathing sometimes boiled over and manifested itself in violence.

One of the key moments in the period covered by this book is the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and the siege of the foreign legations that followed. Old Peking was never more high-profile around the world than during the 55 days of the siege. But this book also looks beyond the drama of war to the chaotic quaintness of Peking's back streets and the awe-inspiring magnificence of the palace of the emperors, the Forbidden City.

This is not a traditional history of the city of Peking, and there is no need to read it from start to finish. It is rather a jumble of items which evokes the city's past. To chronicle every significant event and personality in Peking's rich history would be impossible. The aim instead is to recreate a sense of the time and place through a pastiche of historical snippets – stories, quotations, cartoons, postcards and hastily scribbled drawings.

This history is not complete or balanced in any way. It includes the words of diplomats, emperors, sinologists and random visitors, who provided some of the most vivid descriptions of all. Their perceptions, real and imagined, combine to create a memory of Peking that lingers on to this day.

One final note on the name Peking. This city, now known as Beijing (Northern Capital), has been called many things: Yanjing, Zhongdu, Khanbalic and Peiping. The Chinese government decreed that its name should be spelt as Beijing in the 1970s, but it was not until the late 1980s that the spelling took hold. Today, the romanization 'Peking' seems an anachronism, but then the city of Beijing today is a very different place from what it was in yesteryears. So Tales of Old Peking it is.

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Shanghai
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Peiping (北平) or Northern Peace was the name given to Peking by the Republican government when the capital was moved to Nanking in 1927. When the Chinese Republican government fled to Taiwan after their defeat in 1949, they continued to use this nomenclature as late as the 1970s and the name change back to Peking (Beijing) still remains officially unrecognized in Taiwan.

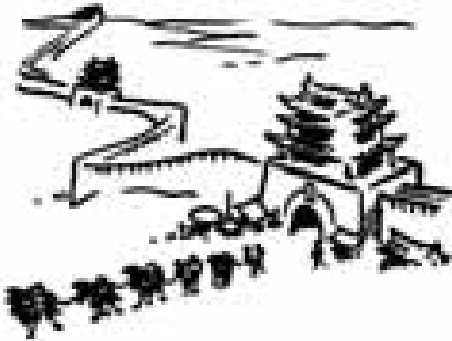
Most Impressive

*From "China and its Progress" by
James Harrison Wilson, 1889*

The walls of Peking, twenty-four miles around and about forty feet high, are a fair type of the city walls found everywhere, and also of the great wall wherever it is penetrated by the old highways, connecting the seat of government with the outlying dependencies. And here it may be worthy of remark that these city walls constitute by far the largest and most impressive works of the Chinese race, unless I except the great river embankments and the grand canal.



The walls of Peking were first built by Emperor Yongle in 1435, but torn down in 1965 to make way for Beijing's Second Ring Road and subway. Only a small section and three original gates still stand today.



These are the walls and gates of Khanbalig,
The mighty capital of Kublai Khan,
Whose Armies went from out these haughty gates,
O'er half the world as then was known to man.

Anonymous