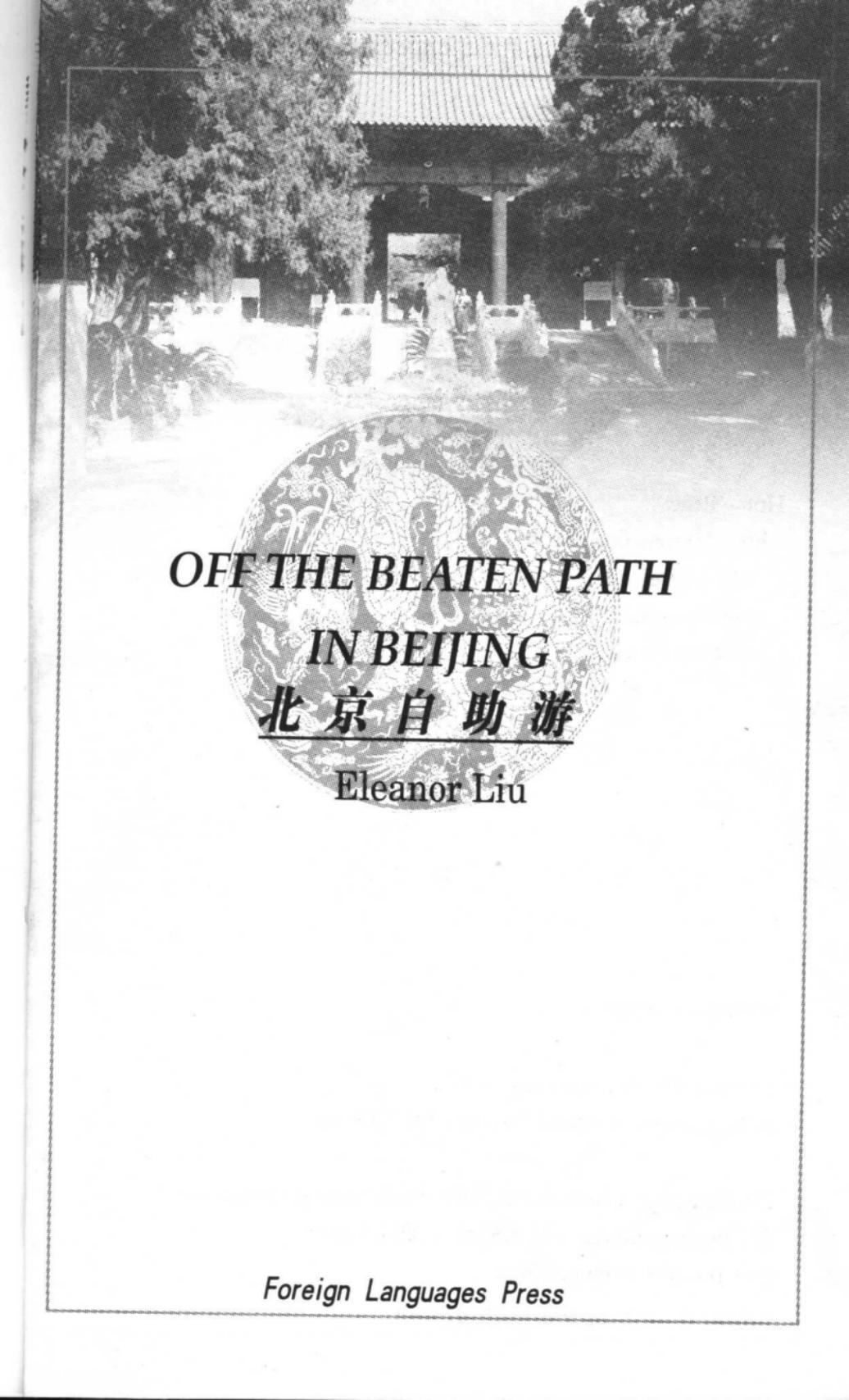


OFF THE BEATEN PATH IN BEIJING

北京自助游



Foreign Languages Press



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Eleanor Liu

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Liu Shuai

Professor Ding

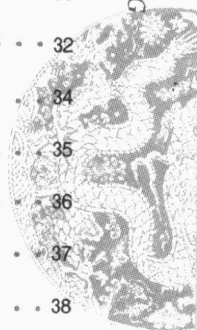
Members of the Beijing International Society Committee
Guides and citizens who helped us locate various places

Eleanor Liu

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Preface

For many years I have been part of a small group whose makeup frequently changes (I have been the only constant member) dedicated to exploring in and around Beijing, looking for interesting places of all kinds which are not on the regular tourist routes. Hence the title of this book, "Off the Beaten Track in Beijing." Even on our visits to well known places such as Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City we always managed to stumble on unusual and little-noticed features.

This ancient city is a treasure store of the quaint and the wonderful, sometimes just waiting around the corner. I have restricted myself to including only 94 locations in this book, but even this number will give you an idea of the scope for exploration. The descriptions and histories are not meant to be exhaustive, but are impressions and anecdotes which I feel touch on the essence of the places we discovered and make them come alive.

One of the greatest advantages and pleasures of living in Beijing, which is quickly becoming a cosmopolitan capital, is the opportunity to make friends with people from other countries and cultures. I now have friends all over the world from contacts I have made here.

The Tuesday Trotters, as we call ourselves from our habit of sallying forth on Tuesdays, choose our outings in many ways. We check the newspapers and special event notices in the hotels and tourist agencies. We also rely on our members for suggestions. We often meet someone who is interesting and arrange to take the group to meet them. Then one activity often suggests another as a follow-up. My teacher and friend, the artist Ye Xue has introduced us to several people and taken us to visit sites of historic importance. My son has introduced people who have

invited us to visit them. Some places turn out to be disappointments. For instance, a carpet exhibition was advertised that promised to tell us all about the history of carpet weaving and the romance of colors, materials, etc., but it turned out to be no more than a sales room. However, we discovered other interesting places in the neighborhood and had a great lunch in a nearby restaurant, so the day was rescued.

Attempts to communicate between people whose languages and cultures are different can be frustrating—like the time we arrived at a friend's house for a swim party only to find that the gardener had thought that an instruction not to drain the pool had been the very opposite—but they can also result in chortles—like the time we ordered a cake for a farewell party for one of the Trotters, and it turned up bearing the message “Good Buy.” There are also amusing mistranslations such as “confused nuts” for mixed nuts or “Silent Drawings” for “Still Life.” We found a brochure that proclaimed “This is a great resort for vacating.” At one time there was a tailor shop in Beijing with the sign “Ladies have fits upstairs.”

2 A Chinese-speaking member of our group helped a visitor bargain with a vendor. After a considerable amount of haggling, a purchase was made, whereupon the vendor said in excellent English: “Thank you, ladies, it has been a pleasure doing business with you.”

My life has been enriched by the friends I have made and the many fascinating things I have learned trotting around Beijing, and I look forward to many more adventures as well as many new friends.

I present this volume with the hope that it will encourage others to visit the places which gave me so much pleasure discovering in and around Beijing; I also hope it will encourage them to go out and explore on their own.

Eleanor Liu

Tiananmen Square: The Heart of Beijing

天安门广场：北京的中心

Tiananmen Square, the biggest public square in the world, covers 50 hectares, and measures 500 meters from east to west and 880 meters from north to south. It is the site of grand assemblies on occasions such as May 1, International Labor Day, and China's National Day on October 1.

In the center of the square is a flagpole, from which flutters the bright red national flag with five yellow stars. The red color signifies revolution, the big yellow star represents the Communist Party of China and the four smaller ones represent the Chinese people. This flag was first raised on October 1, 1949 by Chairman Mao Zedong, when he declared the founding of the People's Republic of China from atop the Tiananmen rostrum, which dominates the square from the north. Since May 1, 1991, the flag has been raised every day at sunrise. At 5:30 am, a group of guards appear at Tiananmen Gate. There are three guards in front, the middle one carrying the flag. Behind them, a group of 32 guards and a military band march along the north-south axis of the Forbidden City and cross the Golden River Bridge. They enter Chang'an Boulevard and begin a parade pace. The band plays the National Anthem while the flag is raised as the sun rises. The exact time is shown on the face of an electric clock in the square. It is a spectacular ceremony for early risers.

The first large-scale memorial built in New China was the Monument to the People's Heroes. It faces Tiananmen (Gate of Heavenly Peace) and its rostrum, which is the main south gate of the Forbidden City. The northern facade has a gilded inscription "Eternal Glory to the People's Heroes" in Mao's calligraphy. The southern facade has a longer inscription, composed by Mao but in the calligraphy of the late Premier Zhou Enlai. It reads: "Eternal glory to the people's heroes who laid down their lives in the people's war of liberation and the people's revolution in the past three years. Eternal glory to the people's heroes who laid down their lives in the people's war of liberation and the people's revolution in the past 30 years. Eternal glory to

the people's heroes who from 1840 laid down their lives in the many struggles against internal and external enemies, for national independence and the freedom and well-being of the people."

Around the square are several famous buildings – Tiananmen to the north, Qianmen (front gate) to the south, the Great Hall of the People to the west and the Museum



of the Chinese Revolution and the National Museum of Chinese History to the east. Apart from the Great Hall of the People, where state banquets and ceremonies are held, all these buildings may be visited for the price of admission. The Mao Zedong Memorial Hall, where the embalmed body of the founder of the People's Republic of China lies in state, stands in the southern part of the square. It may be visited by appointment.

On the front of the Tiananmen Gate and high above the crowds, hangs a huge portrait of Mao. The first portrait was put in place overnight on September 30, 1949, just before the declaration of the founding of New China. At first the portrait was hung only on National Day and Labor Day, for a total of 10 days a year. But it has been a permanent fixture since the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). The portrait is six meters high and 4.5 meters wide and weighs 1.5 tons. Made partly of fiberglass and reinforced plastic, it is the largest hand-made portrait in Asia.

The original stones used to pave the square were replaced later by light-red natural granite slabs from Yi County in nearby Hebei Province. Each slab measures 99.5 cm by 49.5 cm by 15 cm, and weighs 210 kg. Two lawns were also added, as part of the capital's greening campaign.

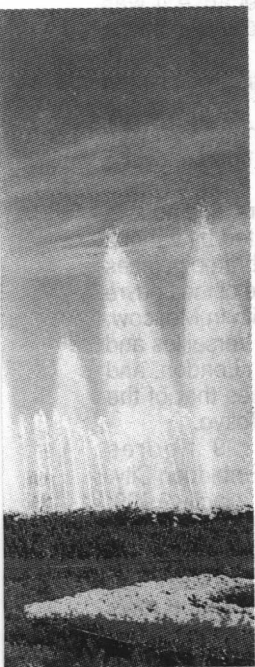
Some of the original paving stones were obtained by Li Yongtian, deputy secretary general of the China National History Society, who commissioned a company to cut them into pieces measuring 120 mm by 50 mm by 96 mm. These dimensions reflect China's 1.2 billion people, New China's 50 years of history and the country's 9.6 million sq km of land area. Another set of the stones measures 120 mm by 21 mm by 96 mm: the 21mm symbolizes the wish for a bright 21st century for the Chinese people. The bricks are packaged in silk boxes. The stone numbered 491001 has been donated to the Museum of the Chinese Revolution.

Tiananmen Square is a pleasant spot for visitors to saunter around on fine days, and a favorite venue for kite flyers.

How to get there: • • • • •

4 Jingshan Qianjie, Dongcheng District.

东城区景山前街4号。



The Forbidden City and the Palace Museum

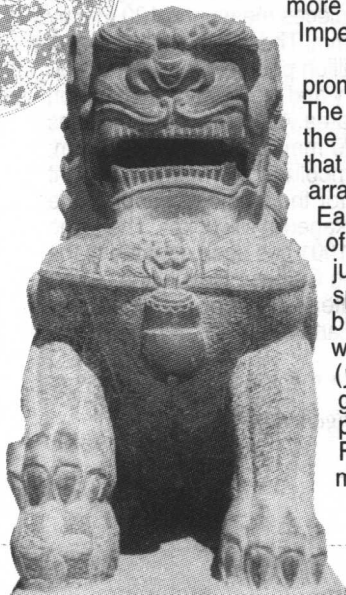
故宫和故宫博物院

The Purple Palace constellation was thought to be the abode of the God of Heaven, so the emperors of ancient China, who claimed to be the "Sons of Heaven," named their residence "The Purple Palace." Because it was forbidden to the common people, it was also known as the Purple Forbidden City.

Construction of the Forbidden City in Beijing was begun in the fourth year of the reign of Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty (1406), and was completed in the 18th year (1420). It was home to 24 Ming and Qing emperors over a period of more than 570 years.

It covers an area of 720,000 square meters, and houses one million rare and priceless relics collected by various monarchs. It is outstanding among the celebrated palaces in the world, having four times the floor space of the Louvre in Paris, more than twice that of the Kremlin in Moscow, more than ten times those of the Palace of Versailles and Buckingham Palace in London, and more than three times that of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.

The number 9 figures prominently in the Forbidden City. The rooms number exactly 9,999; the nails on every door (except that of the East Flowery Gate) are arranged in 9 rows of 9 each. The East Flowery Gate has 8 rows of 9 to a row, but it is not known just why; some say it was the spirit gate through which the biers of deceased emperors were carried, so it had an even (*yin*) number. However, this gate was also used for other purposes. All the steps in the Forbidden City are in nines or multiples of nine. The ancients



regarded nine as the largest numeral, a number to which only emperors were entitled. It also has the same sound as the Chinese word for "everlasting," so it symbolizes the emperor's wish that his reign would last forever.

The predominant color of the Forbidden City is yellow. According to the ancients, the universe is made up of five elements – metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Earth is the most basic of them all, and yellow, the color of earth, was almost exclusively used for emperors.

There is only one building in the Forbidden City with a roof of black tiles—the Wen Yuan Ge—the royal library. Black represents water, and water can overcome fire. Since fire was a constant danger to the book collection under the library's roof, the black tiles were a sort of "fire insurance."

All the buildings in the Imperial City are made of wood or brick. The wall circling the city contains 12 million bricks, each weighing 24 kilograms. High-quality bricks of a tawny color, polished and tightly fitted together, were used to pave the floors of the three main halls of the Inner Court. A special glue made from steamed glutinous rice and egg white was used to hold the bricks and stone slabs in place. Under this "gold brick" floor are furnaces and tunnels that supplied heat to the rooms on the left and right of the middle room, which opened to the outside. There were charcoal braziers in the main hall, used for heating in the winter. Charcoal was also used for cooking. There were no chimneys as such to let the charcoal smoke out, but openings for ventilation served the purpose.

Tens of thousands of huge stone slabs were used to construct the imperial compound. The largest lies behind the Hall of Preserving Harmony. Weighing 250 tons, it was hauled there during the Ming Dynasty some 50 km from Fangshan County, west of Beijing, by 20,000 laborers in the space of 28 days. It was done in winter, by making a road of ice, upon which log rollers were placed. Because the road had to be straight, any houses or other impediments in its way were demolished.

The stone has a border of spiraling grass carved in low relief. Its motif is nine dragons soaring among drifting clouds. The carving we see today is not the original one done in the Ming Dynasty; according to the records, in the 26th year of the reign of Qing Emperor Qianlong (1762), he ordered the

Board of Palace Affairs to have the carvings on the slab removed and a new design engraved on it to celebrate his mother's 70th birthday.

There is another stone carving of the same size on the front terrace of the Hall of Supreme Harmony. However, that one is made up of three slabs of different sizes pieced together. Records show that the carving on it was done in the Wanli reign period of the Ming Dynasty (16th century), when the "Three Great Halls" were being erected.

One of these halls is the Hall of Supreme Harmony, which was the venue for important court ceremonies, such as the rites of enthronement, and celebrations of imperial birthdays and royal weddings. To show the absolute authority and divine power of the emperor, dragon designs of superb craftsmanship adorn the hall from top to bottom. On the roof, the beams and rafters, the ceiling—everywhere there are countless dragons paying homage to the Son of Heaven.

Below the vaulted ceiling, the mid-section of which is decorated with flocks of dragons, there is a gold-lacquered throne carved in openwork and also bearing dragon designs, with a screen, both on a dais that descends to the floor level by a flight of seven steps. The back and armrests of the throne are engraved with dragons and the seat rests on an I-shaped pedestal. There is a total of 408 dragons on the throne, on the screen and the ornaments on and around the dais.

In fact, a rough estimate puts the total number of dragons painted, incised or carved in the interior and exterior of the Hall of Supreme Harmony at 13,844—flying, coiling or twisting, and all resplendently signifying the divine power of the emperor.

One cannot visit the Forbidden City without being impressed by the grandeur of the bygone imperial days of the Chinese Empire, and by the superb skill of the workers and artisans who built this magnificent palace complex.

 *How to get there:* * * * * *

4 Jingshan Qianjie, Dongcheng District.

东城区景山前街4号。