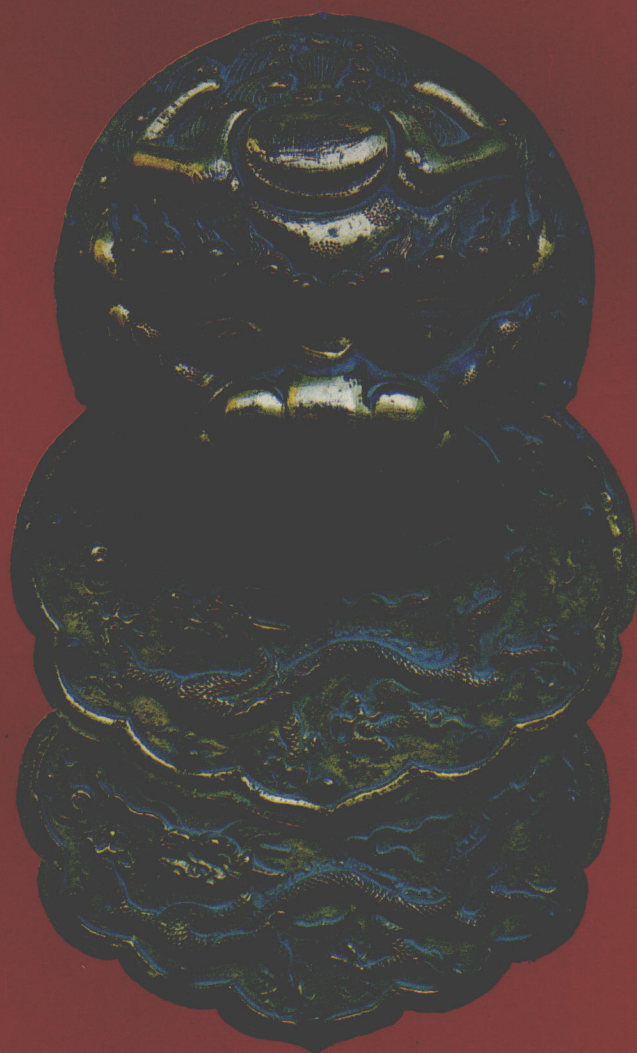


Yan Chongnian

BEIJING

—THE TREASURES OF AN
ANCIENT CAPITAL



Morning Glory Publishers
Beijing, China

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

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This book is the result of a pleasant surprise. In September 1984 an editor of the Morning Glory Publishers came to me with a proposal for a book on the history and culture of Beijing. I was told that the book would be illustrated with a great number of excellent photographs of our ancient city, and that it would have to be both entertaining and academically valuable.

While I was flattered by the offer, I could see that it was one of the most challenging jobs ever presented to a researcher in this field. But for two reasons I could not decline the offer. First, there were so many people who would like to know more about Beijing, including hundreds of thousands of tourists and other visitors from all over the world and ethnic Chinese coming back for home visits. And second, as a long-time resident of Beijing who had been studying it for years, I felt I was obliged to contribute my bit to the current understanding of the city.

A historical review of Beijing reveals that it is a giant cultural project accomplished through the efforts of many generations. The earliest inhabitant in this area, so far as we know, was Peking Man who made his home here some 700,000 years ago. The city was built and rebuilt through the centuries, but it was not until the 13th century, under the Yuan dynasty, that it became the national capital. Today's Beijing is largely the result of the work done under three dynasties — Yuan, Ming and Qing, during which the city attained its full glory and won recognition as a leading metropolis of the world.

The first characteristic of Beijing is, of course, its long history. If we leave aside the prehistoric times when the area was the settlement of Peking Man and his successors, the history of the city dates back at least to the 11th century B.C. when it became the city of *Ji*, which means "thistle," at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty. With a 3,000-year history, Beijing is one of the oldest cities in China and the world.

The layout of a city usually follows a philosophy. Historically dominated by a feudal monarchy, Beijing has a layout which makes a strict distinction between the principal sector and the auxiliary ones. Planners of the city under all dynasties acted on the principle which subordinated each and every person to the monarch and placed religious authority next to monarchical power. Under the Ming and Qing dynasties, designers of Beijing drew an axial line from north to south, placed the imperial palaces exactly at the center of the city, and symmetrically laid out the halls and palace walls, altars and temples, gardens and parks, government offices and civilian settlements on the two sides of the axial line. The palace complex, the imperial city, the inner city, and the outer city formed four square enclosures, each outside the other, even though the wall of the outer city remained unfinished because of a lack of resources. The whole design was based on the idea of seclusion and conformed to the socio-political

hierarchy. The same philosophy applied to the layout of the gardens and parks, including the Imperial Garden in the Forbidden City, the Celestial Lake in the Imperial City, the altars and temples in the Inner City, and even the "Three Hills and Five Gardens" in the western suburbs. It may be interesting to compare the layout of imperial Beijing with that of Washington D.C. which grew out of the American War of Independence. Basing themselves on the concept of democracy and independence, designers of the American capital gave prominence to the Capitol and left the Lincoln Memorial open to the public on all sides. The second characteristic of Beijing, we may conclude, is a perfect integration of the feudalistic concept of monarchical supremacy with superb architecture and garden designing.

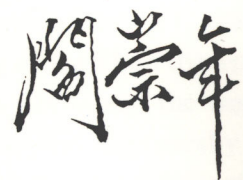
Beijing's long history as a capital city, particularly its 800-year experience as a dynastic capital from the beginning of the Jin (Jurchen) dynasty in 1115 to the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, made it a colossal museum of art. The exhibits range from whole palaces and gardens, man-made hills and streams, towers and pavilions, corridors and terraces to rockeries and stone sculptures, trees and flower beds, rare books, paintings and calligraphy, jewels and silver and gold utensils. A huge treasurehouse of art — this may be considered a third characteristic of Beijing.

The fourth characteristic of Beijing has to do with its people. The city was built at a location joining the Central Plains dominated by a farming population with the regions north of the Great Wall, the domains of nomadic peoples. Beijing was often the scene of rivalry among China's different ethnic groups as well as a melting pot for all of them. The protracted struggles among them and their fusion were an important reason why China's economic, political and cultural center moved eastward, and why Beijing became the capital for the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties in the process. The buildings and gardens one finds in Beijing today represent a crystallization of the best in the culture of each and every ethnic group. Living together in the capital city, people from different ethnic groups have influenced one another in customs and habits with regard to clothing, the family menu, the style of housing construction, and even articles of daily use. One group became familiar with the religious beliefs of the others. In time, a festival for one of them changed into a common one for all.

I have tried to present a clear picture of Beijing's history and culture. Shi Tao, the famous Chinese painter of the 17th century, said that he usually surveyed a great number of grotesque peaks as raw material for his paintings. I am not a painter, but I too had to examine every interesting bit of material to put this book together, so that a panorama of Beijing could be composed through the pictures and the text. Historically the book starts from the dawn of the Stone Age and the rise of bronze culture and goes down to the initiation of the city of Ji as capital for the ancient state of Yan, the role of the city as an important military stronghold in North China during early dynasties, and its designation as capital city for three more states called Yan. Then it deals with

the periods in which Beijing served as Southern Capital for the Liao dynasty, Middle Capital for the Jin (Jurchen) dynasty, Dadu (Great Capital) for the Yuan dynasty, Beijing (Northern Capital) for the Ming dynasty, and Jingshi (the Capital) for the Qing dynasty. The historical review is interspersed with accounts of interesting events and anecdotes about famous people. The palaces and halls, altars and temples, gardens and mausoleums are described in details, and special passages are devoted to education, science and technology, literature and art, the life of the imperial family, and the customs of the people.

The book is a joint creation. I borrowed extensively from the research done by my predecessors and contemporaries in history, archeology, cultural relics, traditional Chinese architecture, traditional gardening, and historical geography. My thanks are due to the editors, translators, photographers, artists and printers, whose hard work made this publication possible.



(Signed) Yan Chongnian

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BEIJING UNDER THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES

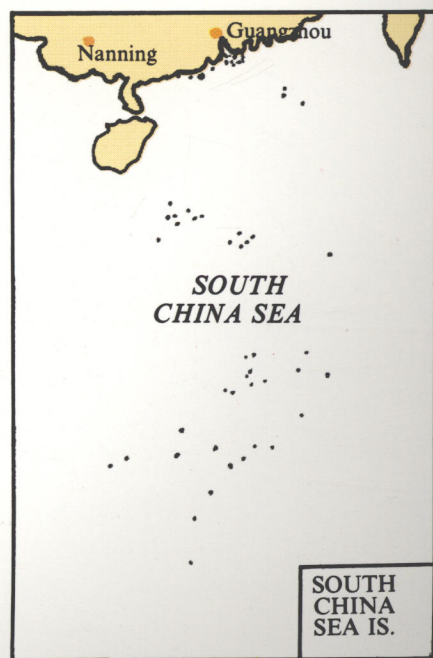
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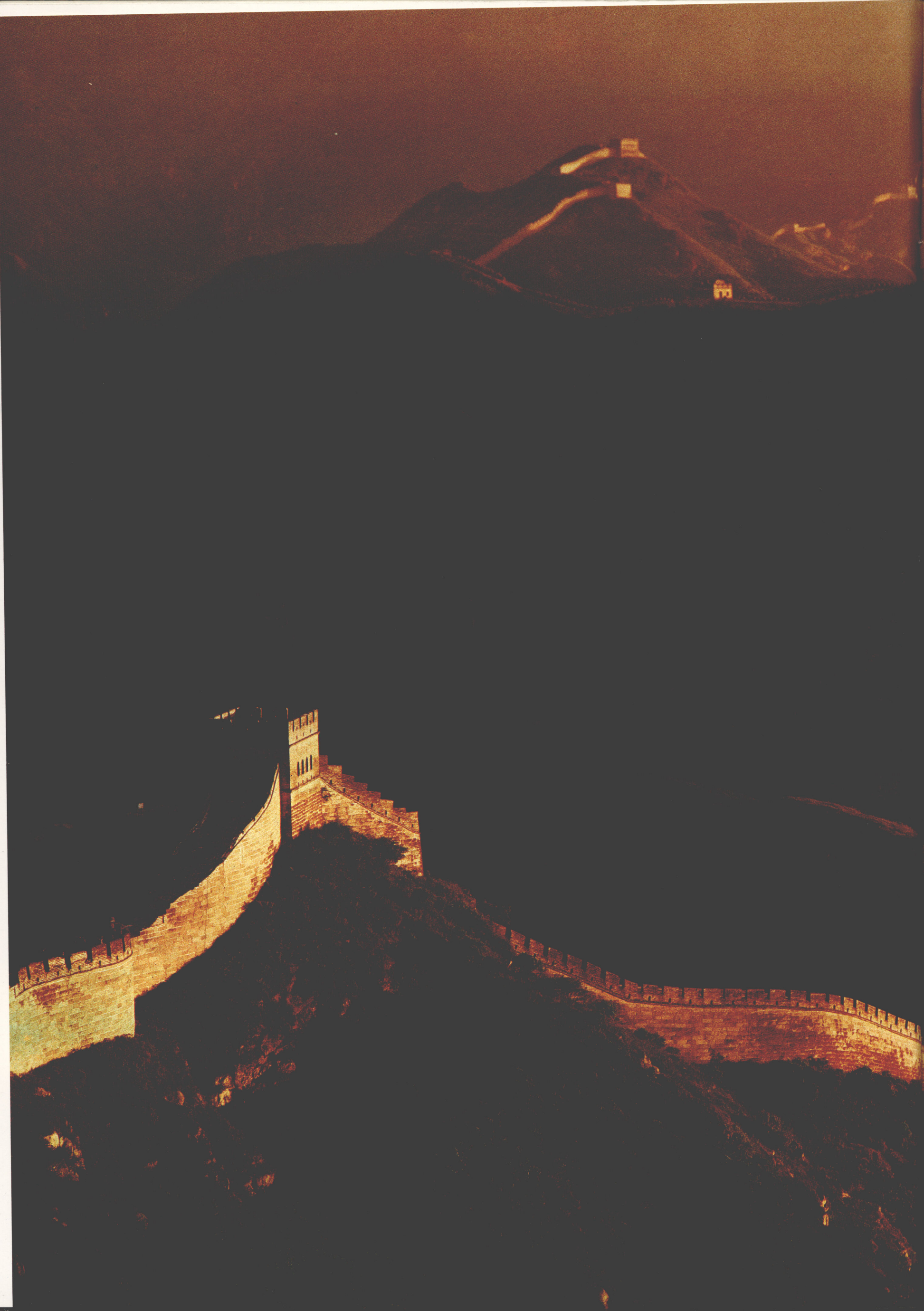
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Sketch Map of China Showing Location of Beijing









INTRODUCTION

If you look at a map of China, a vertical line and a horizontal one will catch your attention. The vertical line is the Grand Canal starting from Beijing in the north and terminating at the lake city of Hangzhou in the southeast. The horizontal line running in a east-west direction is none other than the Great Wall. The world boasts many historical relics, but few of them can compare with these two, in terms of age, size, significance and impact.

The Great Wall, for centuries a defence barrier against nomadic invaders, and the Grand Canal, a vital artery for bringing food grain from South China to the north, no longer perform their traditional functions. Yet they have acquired a greater cultural value and are being marveled at by visitors from all over the world in warm weather or biting cold.

The colossal relics are lined by cities and towns which remain part of the hustle and bustle of present-day China. One of them is Beijing, otherwise known as Peking, the national capital.

A wealth of myth and legend adorns the history of Beijing, giving the city a romantic tinge as a specimen of Oriental culture and intriguing all those who dream of the jade towers on celestial bodies so often visualized by China's classical poets.

One may ask: what is the motif of the city's layout? The answer is the predominance of monarchical and religious authority. The Forbidden City at the center symbolizes the immensity of power enjoyed by the emperor, who in turn must obey and carry out the Mandate of Heaven. An ascent to the Pavilion of Ten Thousand Spring Seasons in Jingshan Park (Prospect Hill or His Majesty's Hill Park) enables one to appreciate the magnificence of the imperial palaces: the Forbidden City skirted by the Tongzi River and covered by an ocean of shining glazed tiles.

Bird's-eye view of the Forbidden City, which covers an area of 720,000 square meters, with more than 9,000 rooms

