

## DEMOGRAPHIA



### BEIJING: FAST TRACK TO PROSPERITY

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	13,800,000	Buenos Aires, Calcutta, Cairo
Urbanized Area* Population	7,500,000	Manila, Nagoya, London (inside the green belt)
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	200	Cairo, Auckland, Albuquerque, Delhi, Sapporo
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	518	
Population per Square Mile	37,500	Bangkok, Lagos
Population per Square Kilometer	14,600	
Capital of China 11 <sup>th</sup> largest urbanized area in the world		
Urbanized Area Atlas: <i>Beijing Quichesiji Ditu</i> ce, purchase at bookstores (approximately 100 maps)		
*Continuously built up area		

13 October 2003

Somehow it just felt like Phoenix --- a city of broad streets and dispersed employment, with large commercial buildings having sprouted up virtually all over. Of course, there are differences. Beijing is far more dense than Phoenix --- it is one of the densest urbanized areas in the world. Its buildings are much larger. And it has a far better freeway system. One might argue that there is no Forbidden City in Phoenix --- I would argue there is no city at all, but that is for another *Urban Tour*. My impression remains --- this is rather like the Phoenix of the Valley of the Sun rising just south of the Great Wall.

I had been met at the airport by municipal officials from the nearby city of Tianjin (I had presented a seminar on privatization to them in the United States 18 months before). Like Beijing, Tianjin is a city-state. Some years ago, Beijing, Tianjin, Chongqing and Shanghai were established as municipalities with virtually the same powers as provinces. Tianjin itself is a metropolitan area of approximately 10 million, and only 60 miles from Beijing. There is much open space between the two urban areas, and the urban core of Tianjin is smaller, at approximately 4,000,000.

After a visit to the Great Wall and a very tasty lunch that I suspect cost pennies in US currency, we drove toward Tianjin, through Beijing. As we entered Beijing, my hosts missed the off ramp for the fourth ring road (Beijing will soon have five, though the first is just the surface road around the Forbidden City). Having studied the map of Beijing, I knew that we had at least one more opportunity -- the third ring road, from which the Motorway to Tianjin exits, and I was able to help plan the new alternate route.

On the road to Tianjin I noticed trucks carrying coal. It was then that I had my first real appreciation of the role played by freight rail in the United States. Virtually all of the coal that is moved by freight railroads could be moved by truck. The result has been a number of papers and presentations on the role freight rail plays in holding down traffic congestion, especially in the urban areas that coal laden trucks would have to pass through.

After a rewarding trip to Tianjin, I returned to Beijing by train. It was a nice ride. The train was full. It was one of those double deck trains similar to what is run by the national railway system of the Netherlands. I arrived at the Beijing Railway Station that is located at the southeastern corner of the second ring road (the ring roads are really rounded rectangles).

There I had a most interesting experience with a couple of cab drivers. I was already prepared with my Chinese language maps of Beijing. I knew exactly where my hotel was and pointed it out to a couple of drivers. None seemed to have any idea what I wanted. Finally, I found one who followed my directions. I had to tell him where to turn.

I stayed at a very nice Crown Plaza Hotel, just to the east of the Forbidden City. It was on a major street with enough shopping to make one believe there had never been a communist revolution. Of course, the Chinese are very practical about their ideology --- as the saying goes, whatever works we will call socialism. Entrepreneurialism is all around. There are the small souvenir shops. There are large shopping centers, and in them some familiar western store names. Within two blocks of my hotel was Sun Dong An Plaza, a seven story enclosed shopping mall (pictures).

I walked to the Forbidden City and visited Tiananmen Square. The Forbidden City is one of the world's great architectural masterpieces --- perhaps the greatest. It seems to go on forever. It was about 15 degrees Fahrenheit, or nearly 10 below Celsius, but I never felt the cold because the city was so interesting. At the entrance is a large portrait of Mao Tse Tung, which I presumed was not part of the original décor. The area is also good for a walk after dark.

But perhaps because the core of the city is taken up by the large Forbidden City, Beijing is much less centrally oriented than other Asian urban areas. The new commercial development is along the ring roads, and the newest development is the farthest away.

I was less successful in Beijing than in Shanghai with respect to car rentals. I was never able to make anyone understand that I would be happy just to get a car --- that I was not in the market for a car and driver. Eventually, I gave up. The bellman had a friend who would be happy to go where I told him to for a day for \$100. So this rental car tour was a little different. A driver was included.

We drove around each of the ring roads, with the exception of the fifth, which is not yet completed. Large commercial buildings are to be found on each and large residential blocks. I cannot vouch for the quality of the construction, but the Chinese are doing a remarkable job in making their large residential blocks architecturally pleasing. I first noticed this in the residential blocks that line the rail route from Hong Kong through Shenzhen to Guangzhou a few years ago.

The ring roads are two to three miles apart. Though Beijing is very compact for an urban area of 7,500,000, the commercial development is anything but compact. It is obvious that this is a city making substantial economic progress, and that the automobile must necessarily come into far greater use in the future. Necessarily because when people can afford them they will buy them, a

factor that is intensified by the fact that the dispersed development pattern of Beijing simply cannot be served by any form of public transport at a price anyone can afford.

Between the ring roads are expanses of the old, narrow streets (or alleys) called Hutongs. Gradually these are being demolished, it is said, as planners seek to reconstruct the city in a more modern fashion. The dwellings along the hutongs are often occupied by single families and are predictably small.

One comes away from Beijing, and other east coast cities in China, with a feeling that these places have achieved middle-income world status and will soon be high-income world places. Western and central China, I am told, is much different. But in Beijing you see an urban area well on its way to the prosperity that would be the product of human endeavor virtually everywhere if governments would simply let it happen. One might have all manner of criticism of some Chinese government policies. But the economic progress is impressive and cannot be denied.



Entrepreneurship at the Great Wall of China



Great Wall, East Side of Motorway



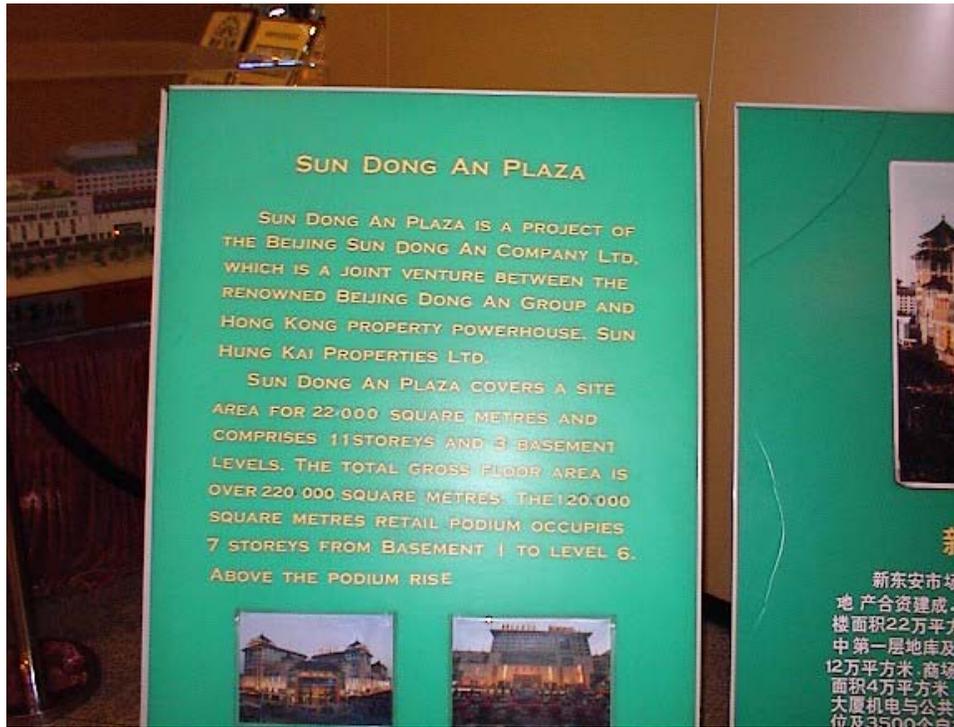
Beijing Station



Taxis in Front of Beijing Station



Sun Dong An Plaza (Shopping)



Sun Dong An Plaza



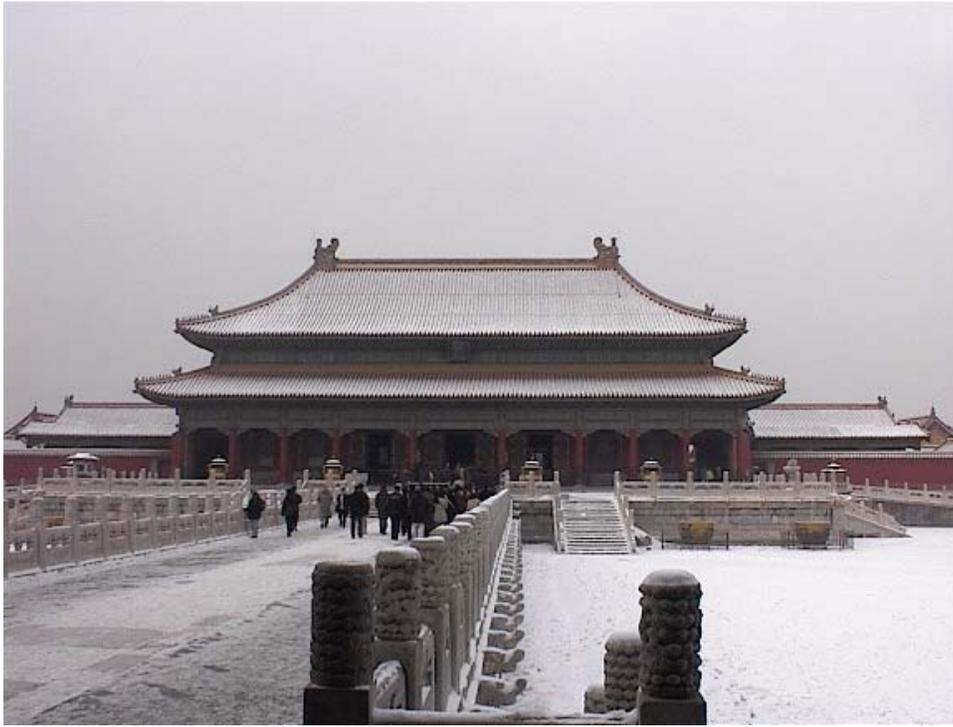
Sun Dong An Plaza



Government Building, Tiananmen Square



Forbidden City



Forbidden City



Forbidden City



2nd Ring Road



View from 2<sup>nd</sup> Ring Road



3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road



4<sup>th</sup> Ring Road



4<sup>th</sup> Ring Road



Suburban Beijing



Hutongs --- Central East Beijing

By Wendell Cox

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