

School of Design and Art

Body in the Forbidden City

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:Peng Liu.....

Date:3/10/2015.....

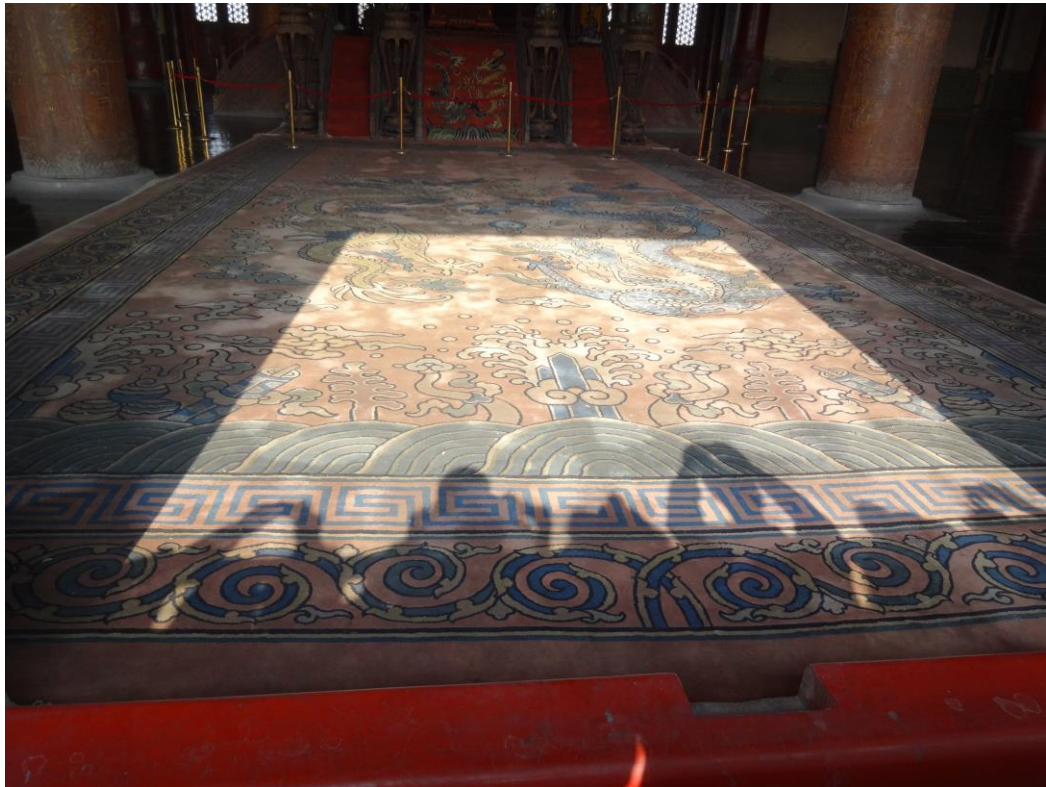


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Abstract

This research offers an investigation into Chinese/Confucian bodies through exegetical writing using analytical discourse and creative practice in the form of painting. It reflects on diverse perspectives about the body in Chinese society during different historical periods. The space of the Forbidden City, Beijing, is an ideal site for analysing understandings of the Chinese body, as the space itself, such as its layout, designs and regulations, are all inscribed with Confucian values and cultural meanings.

The exegetical writing focuses on the interrelationship between bodies and the space, and analyses Confucian bodies in the Chinese context in terms of both physical entity and cultural embodiment as human beings are “simultaneously part of nature and part of culture” (Turner: 197). Ficto-Criticism is used to investigate the interaction between the space and a number of selected Confucian bodies. The resulting imagined scenarios, which interrogate these interrelationships restores an immediacy and aliveness to the body engaging with the space.

As a practicing artist, I translate my bodily experience into the language of painting. Thus, in this research I also take an artistic approach in examining the interrelationship between my body and the space of the Forbidden City. The interrelationship between the everyday actions of my body in the space has been re-thought and expanded in the studio. The process of translating is investigated via my bodily movement, as an embodied Confucian subject who has a relationship with the practice of painting. The resulting paintings, not only reflect how my body is acted upon by institutions as a culturally embodied being, but also how my body has the capacity to form new actions to express its individuality to the world.

Introduction

The background of my body and its interests

My body is a hybrid of Chinese thought and Western¹ education. I consider ideas from Western philosophies and theories, and mobilise them in consort with Chinese thought to create an innovative platform, to extend existing concepts and re-interpret historical phenomena. As a practicing artist who uses my body as a vehicle in the studio to express and translate my bodily experience into the language of painting, I pay particular attention to the body. I am fascinated by discourses on cultural and physical bodies in Western sociological theories that regard, as sociologist, Chris Shilling notes, the "... [body] as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society" (Shilling: 12). My own experiences of bodily control in both creative practice and everyday life in different societies have made me re-consider the role of the Chinese body² in terms of its physical entity and cultural embodiment.

The Chinese body has experienced profound changes in Chinese society over the last one hundred years, from Feudal patriarchy to Post-Feudal uncertainty in the Republican period, followed by New China with its 'Cultural Revolution', the economic boom, the One Child policy, and so on. As one born and raised in China during the 1980s and 1990s, my body has physically experienced only some of the later changes; however my cultural body has been nurtured by that society's historical traces, which allow my body to better understand, emotionally perceive and culturally comprehend those historical bodies and moments. Such social and emotional connections were abruptly disrupted with the relocation of my body to Australia. The experience of seasonal weather conditions opposite to the northern hemisphere, along with the alien landscape that confronted me after a twelve-hour flight, immediately caused my physical body some disorientation, while the sudden change in customs made my cultural origins seem remote. Nevertheless, the subsequent experience of living in Australian society has provided my body with new experiences at the same time, thus consolidating the idea of reconsidering the (my) Chinese body in terms of physical entity and cultural embodiment across varying historical contexts.

Specifically, I am interested in using Western theories to examine how the Chinese body embodied with Confucian values interacts with the rapid and dramatic social changes in China. I realise that Confucianism as a national ideology has always been present regardless of the social and political changes in the past century, providing guidance in every aspect of daily life, such as 'Li', which is called "Confucian humanism" (Fingarette: 2) by Herbert Fingarette, Western modern philosopher. Although I acknowledge that the ideology was deliberately interpreted and amended

¹ Acknowledging Australia has a unique relationship to Western culture being physically removed from "the West" and geographically closer to Asia, the term "Western" is used through this document to connote a lineage of discourses drawn from European and North American historical traditions.

² In the context of my discussion, the Chinese body refers to the body that lives in China and is exposed to Chinese ideologies such as Confucianism.

by Feudal governments for their own good, nonetheless the guidelines provided by Confucianism at a common level are rigid and dogmatic in my perception. Confucianism seems to indulge in instructing every body on what (not) to do in everyday life on the surface, but the philosophical origins underpinning its doctrines (why bodies have to behave, or things have to be done, in a certain way) are blurry, sometimes even mystical and confusing, in contrast to Western analytical thinking. As a result, my body relays the expectations of Confucian ideology in Chinese society on a daily basis without really recognising it. It was not until my body had experienced a different culture as part of living in another society that I started to understand myself as being Chinese, possessing a Confucian embodied body, and comprehending its position in relation to the rest of the world. This realisation of my body in relation to the world provides me with a different perspective and an additional lens to view and deal with every aspect of my life, which impact on my body in emotional terms as an embodied cultural being and in aesthetic terms as a practicing artist. There is now an intimate relationship between paint and my body after many years of artistic practice. My paintings aim to create an effect for the audience, where the figurative elements convey immediate meaning with underlying expressive emotions. The paint neither serves as a medium/material to mimic the actual world, nor as a way of self expression. Rather, the paint, transformed into brushstrokes and realised through the actions of painting, reflect my bodily movements in the studio and translate my culturally embodied experience into the language of paint, in order to affect my audience.

This research offers an investigation into Chinese/Confucian bodies in exegetical writing using analytical discourse and creative practice in the form of painting, and aims to reflect on diverse perspectives about the body in Chinese society during different historical periods.

The space of the Forbidden City, Beijing, is an ideal place to analyse the Chinese body, as the space itself, such as its layout, designs and regulations, are all inscribed with Confucian values and cultural meanings, and its historical traces have resonated with Chinese bodies more or less across time. The space of the Forbidden City has been both witness and party to dramatic social political movements in the last one hundred years, which have caused its position to shift from servicing royal families as the centre of the ruling class to becoming a historical monument that is open to the public in the present day. The space of the Forbidden City allows a wide range of Confucian bodies to unfold their stories from within – such as, but not limited to, the bodies of emperors, eunuchs, officials and Red Guards, as well as my own body. The rich contextualisation of these bodies in that space illuminates a complex interrelationship between the bodies and the space. Therefore, this interrelationship becomes the focus of this research, which aims not only to re-investigate the Chinese/Confucian body in terms of Western theories, but also to reflect on the space of the Forbidden City at the same time. The research is realised in both exegetical writing and creative practice.

Theoretical reference in the exegesis

Confucian values and doctrines create a cultural platform to mobilise social theories throughout the exegesis. Confucian values, such as ‘Li’ in particular, are considered as a system of norms and propriety that determines how a person should properly act in everyday life, and the notion of “abstract quality as a rational standard of value for individuals” is cited extensively (Zito: 104), pointed out by Anthropologist, Angela Zito. Although social movements in recent centuries have interrupted the continuity of Confucianism as a national ideology in Chinese society on the surface, nonetheless it always exists in Chinese bodies as these bodies are historically inherited and “cultural embodied beings” (Shilling: 10). This study focuses on the interrelationship between bodies and the space, and analyses Confucian bodies in the Chinese context (with reference to selected historical events) in terms of both physical entity and cultural embodiment as human beings are “simultaneously part of nature and part of culture” (Turner: 197), claimed by sociologist Bryan S. Turner. In contrast to dualistic views on the body, which are problematic because they split the body into either a biological phenomenon in naturalistic terms or an infinitely malleable form in social constructionist terms, the body is reconciled as “simultaneously a social and biological entity which is in a constant state of becoming” (Shilling: 27). As the natural body and the cultural body are equally important, the complexity of their interrelationship is noted by sociologist Mary Douglas:

The social [cultural] body constrains the way the physical [natural] body is perceived...The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other (Douglas: 78).

To contextualise this understanding in terms of Chinese content – specifically, to explore the interrelationship between bodies and the space of the Forbidden City – is an even more complicated process. The capacity for bodily movement (or lack thereof) in the space becomes a means to reflect on this interrelationship, as Douglas notes: “As a result of this interaction [exchange of meanings between two bodies], the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression. The forms it adopts in movement and repose express social pressures in manifold ways” (Douglas: 78). Hence, the selected Confucian embodied beings and the multiple ways in which their movement in the space are manifested will be investigated in detail.

Although I examine a wide range of historical bodies in the space, I have consolidated the research by investigating and framing it using my own cultural experience and views on the Forbidden City. My cultural perception of the space as an adult is different from being in the space as a child, which therefore reflects my body as “an unfinished biological and social phenomenon” (Shilling: 12) that is constantly updating itself as the result of participating in different cultures or societies. The contrast within my own views reflects the changing of the cultural relationship between my body and the space,

which is reflexively discovered through my bodily movements in approaching and trying to understand the space.

Many anthropologists have theorised the significance of walking as a method to understand the world, such as Tim Ingold; Sarah Pink et al.; John Wylie). Relatedly, one of my bodily activities conducted in the space of the Forbidden City involves walking through the main gate hall in specific weather conditions. In French philosopher Jacques Derrida's terms, walking locates "[the body] poised between the country ahead and the country behind, between one step and the next, epiphany and penumbra...spectral; between there and not-there" (Derrida cited in Wylie: 237). Of particular relevance to my project is the process of constant arriving/departing and the forms my body adopted when moving through the physical space subject to weather conditions. The interrelationship between the body and the space is examined through testing my body's physical limitations in accommodating the physical/weathered space.

Given "human beings are teachable, improvable and perfectible through personal and communal endeavour especially self-cultivation and self-creation" (Epps: 62), claimed by anthropologist Henry Harrison Epps, our bodies are equally able to be trained, disciplined, and restrained to obtain "suitably-ordered" (Dyck: 2) bodily actions, in sociologist Noel Dyck's term, and become "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977: 138) in French philosopher Michel Foucault's term in order to survive in society. The Confucian body is re-considered in terms of bodily discipline in the space of the Forbidden City in order to discover the body's involvement in relations that "are political not only in an implicit sense, but explicitly and consciously" (Foucault cited in Mauss: 71). In the case of Feudal China, for instance, body discipline was not only a technological term – exemplifying the disciplinary mechanisms or control in accordance to Foucault's theories – but an exercise of the complex hierarchical social relationship between bodies from all levels, such as the body of an ordinary subject and the body of the emperor, which is determined by 'Li', along with other Confucian values. Consequently, according to French sociologist Marcel Mauss, the body becomes "an object of techniques and strategies that bear on its materiality [physicality, such as the body of the eunuch] in order to channel it, train it, mould it and subject it" (Mauss: 71) for the sake of fulfilling its concrete political purpose.³ The question of how such social relationships are established in the space of the Forbidden City will be examined in order to find out how the design, regulations and atmosphere of the space discipline and turn the body into "a certain kind of subject" (Mahmood: 838), described by anthropologist Saba Mahmood, which reflects their interrelationship.

As a practicing artist, I also take an artistic approach in discussing the interrelationship between my body and the space. The process of translating my bodily experience into the language of painting in the studio is investigated via my bodily movement in the studio, as an embodied Confucian subject and its relation to paint. As art historian and

³ Sections on the body of the eunuch in Chapters One and Two elaborate on this point.

art critic James Elkins notes: “Paint is a cast made of the painter’s movements, a portrait of the painter’s body and thoughts...[it] records the most delicate gesture and the most tense...[and] tells whether the painter sat or stood or crouched in front of the canvas” (Elkins: 5). The interrogation of embodiment/disembodiment in creative practice provides a different perspective to consider my hand as “not simply part of the body [in everyday perspective], but the expression and continuation of a thought” (Frenhofer cited in Merleau-Ponty: 7), explained by French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and painting, as “the language of pictorial art, because it is static, is the language of timelessness” (Berger: 28), stated by art critic John Berger. The interrelationship between my body and the space in everyday actions has been re-thought and expanded in the studio, hence not only reflecting how my body is acted upon by institutions as a culturally embodied being, but also how my body has the capacity to form new actions to express its individuality to the world.

Writing method

Writing is “path-making” (Ingold: 15) and its relation to the reader may be summed up as follows by writer Rebecca Solnit: “To write...is to carve a new path through the terrain of the imagination...To read is to travel through that terrain with the author as guide” (Solnit: 72). The investigation into the interrelationship between body and space has involved many factors such as architectural space, historical narratives, social traditions and critical theories, body movements and cultural embodiment, which requires an inclusive approach to exegetical writing. Consequently, the best way to reconcile these disparate elements and construct a coherent narrative is to write Ficto-Criticism,⁴ which is a combination of fiction, theory and critical writing in a single text described by Dr. Noel King as “a kind of writing that is said to deliberately blur the distinction between literature and literary-critical commentary” (King: 270). This approach allows me to discuss the complexities of the interrelationship by constructing imagined scenes to make comprehensible sense, rather than relying on conventional narratives or critical analyses only. As writer Heather Kerr notes: “In postmodernism, the privileging of ‘depth’ is understood to have been replaced by the fascination of ‘surface’” (Kerr: 93). Interpretative and fictive writing fascinate readers by restoring the sensations, in particular detailing the body’s actions and reactions in imagined scenes framed by analytical discourse. This way of writing creates a sense of being with the body in the space, whereby readers can be affected by the fictive atmosphere of the body’s movement in that space while still being included in academic discussion. This vivid and ‘pictorial’ approach to writing is aimed at amplifying my critical points of view in terms of illuminating the mutual impact between body and space, and sounding much more appealing and convincing. Moreover, such reading experiences are rarely provided in plain history records, which has prompted me to experiment with this combination of interpretative and fictive

⁴ Ficto-Criticism is a writing practice characterized by a mix of critical and fictive language, including: self-reflexivity, the fragment, intertextuality, the bending of narrative boundaries, crossing of genres, the capacity to adapt literary forms, hybridized writing, moving between fiction (invention/speculation) and criticism (deduction/explication) of subjectivity (interiority) and objectivity (exteriority) <http://writerresponsetheory.org/wordpress/2005/09/30/wrt-and-fictocriticism/> retrieved on 19th April 2016.

writing within the framework of analytical research.

The role of analytical writing

The analytical writing provides essential information about the history and cultural background of the Forbidden City and its people. This information has been selected from existing documents regarded as historical fact and becomes the foundation for further discourse on the interrelationship between body and space in the imagined scenarios. These historical records are important to acknowledge from the outset of the research as the Forbidden City is seen as a historical monument; however, the records are inadequate in elaborating the complex interrelationship between the space of the Forbidden City and the bodies within it across the different historical periods.

The surviving historical documents offer only a cursory look at the Forbidden City and its people over a period of more than 500 years, and they have been made and passed down subjectively according to the entitled interests of a minority. The documents only cover some specific historical moments from over five centuries and only represent one particular perspective. These pieces of information are sometimes disjointed, incomplete and even contradictory as the Forbidden City went through several periods of violent social turbulence and historical evolution. Therefore, careful selection and critical interpretation of this information is required as part of the preparation necessary to examine the interrelationship between the bodies and the space. Analytical writing, apart from providing speculations based on historical context, may be inadequate to expand on the research in the way interpretative and fictive writing can do by restoring a sense of vivid bodily movement in the space as a means to reflect on their complex and erratic interrelationship.

The role of interpretative and fictive writing

A specific perspective has been constructed to examine the interrelationship between body and space by re-arranging selected historical facts and connecting them into a certain logical order through the interpretative tone of my voice. The fictive writing allows me scope to scrutinise the depicted details of body actions and reactions with/in the space, in order to unravel architect Eva Perez de Vega's characterisation of "the body...as a collection of force fields, or vectors...[that] affects a space through its changing movement within it...[and, in turn,] allows the body to perform as an extension of the space and the space as an extension of the body's action" (Perez de Vega: 400). Both the sense and the idea can be captured by means of the fictive depiction of each body action.

The fiction unfolds the potentialities of bodily movements in an imaginative space with rich subtleties and a sense of aliveness, which are absent from historical records. In particular, fictionally situating a body or group of bodies in an imagined social environment allows me to scrutinise every action and reaction taken by the bodies in relation to the space, physically as well as culturally. A certain social atmosphere can be imaginatively formed in those scenes through the accumulated presence of every

object within and every bodily action taken, wherein the bodily movements and gestures become expressions of personal feelings and social emotions being exchanged with others and the space itself. Bodies are live characters in my text rather than fixed historical records. Therefore, bodies can be re-examined by situating them in live scenarios; at the same time, the space can be re-discovered, too, through its interaction with live bodily movements. This mutual engagement is constitutive of an interrelationship between the bodies and the space that can only be captured and expressed properly through the depiction of bodily movement in every detail in the fictive writing.

Studio methods as creative approach

Background

As a visual artist, I am fascinated by the artistic aspects of the Forbidden City, in particular its space. Formed by the different styles of architecture, the space is designed in terms of cadences. As my body walks through the space, I see the architecture as differentiated primarily according to sequences, and secondarily by its size and shape. The shift in the size and shape from one building to another forms the cadence which creates an impression on me. The impression of walking in this space is decidedly different from the one anthropologist John Wylie notes in his experience of strenuous walking in country: “The Path ahead resonated not in muscles or bones but in nerves” (Wylie: 235). Nevertheless, my experiences of these variable and constantly changing aspects perceived while my body moves are reflective of the art of the space, which I respond to in my painting and, in turn, offer to the audience. Moreover, these artistic effects are not only about visual perception, but also engage with other human sensibilities – for example, walking in the space is a whole body experience that includes not only sight, but also sound, smell and touch.

The engagement of the body with an artwork through multiple sensibilities is essential to Chinese art in all forms. For example, the Chinese scroll painting *Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival* (1736)⁵ requires viewers to take a close look, as it is only 35.6 centimetres in height and depicts busy riverside scenes, including more than 4000 characters. In order to view a part of the painting up close, viewers inevitably lose sense of the rest of the painting, which is out of their line of sight; as a result, viewers have to physically walk along the 1152.8-centimetre-long scroll in order to see it in its entirety. Therefore, bodily engagement is involved, alongside visual impact. Moreover, not only are multiple scenes presented one after another to make up a busy street as a visual representation, but there are scenarios involving every figure and object in association with their surroundings in various events, which create dynamic and subtle narratives to attract and engage the viewers visually. The details in the gestures of every figure, as well as other objects, were deliberately drawn to guide viewers physically through the work.

⁵ The original painting (528cm in length and 24.8cm in height) was created by Zhang Zeduan during the Song dynasty, and kept in the Forbidden City, Beijing. The most famous re-created version was done by five artists (Chen Mei, Sun Gu, Jin Kun, Dai Hong and Cheng Zhidao) in 1736, and kept in the National Gu Gong Museum, Tai Bei.

As one of the work's distinctive visual phenomenon, viewers, regardless of how they view the painting, always realise that there are some figures facing, pointing, or gesturing towards the same direction in which the viewers are moving, which, in turn, creates the illusion of moving together with the figures. When viewers are so thoroughly engaged with the atmosphere of the work, their initial intention of making a complete journey from one end of the painting to the other becomes secondary. Instead, they enjoy visually following the figures, while physically moving back and forth, and automatically interacting with the gestures of the figures and objects. The viewers' walking, as determined by the painting, results in physically walking a distance that is always much longer than the length of the painting. The range of bodily participation – such as walking alongside and backwards, stooping to see, and swivelling the head back – is key to the interaction between viewers and the painting, and it acts to consolidate the cultural and artistic impact upon the viewers. Moreover, instead of having a fixed point of view, the involvement of walking causes a constantly changing viewpoint while looking, which reinforces the sense of moving together with the figures. The painting is designed so that it not only attracts its viewers by the fixed pictorial effect, but also engages them to physically walk along with it, and even has a bodily affect by controlling their walking pace. The recent re-creation of the painting, such as the animated version made and shown to the public at the Shanghai World Expo in 2010, also focuses on viewers' bodily engagement with the artwork.

In this exegesis, I propose that the space of the Forbidden City is conceived as an “art object” (Liu: 267) said by contemporary artist Peng Liu, that requires the participation of bodily movement to interact with it. On one hand, the space has an enormous capacity to move the body around, and to interact with the body through its physical design and cultural inscriptions. On the other hand, the body is capable of moving physically and able to be moved culturally. The complex relationship between the body and the space of the Forbidden City is foregrounded when the body encounters the space, in terms of stretching the body's physical entity and realising its cultural embodiment, whilst at the same time reflecting the varied states of the space in different historical periods.

How do I seek to find answer

To investigate the complex relationship between my body and the space of the Forbidden City, studio practice is brought into the investigation alongside the exegetical writing over the same period of time. The creative practice entail a number of strategies adopted in order to investigate including the way my own memory formed conceptualizations of the space, visits to the space of the Forbidden City (field trips) during the research process, walking as part of the process, the use of photography to archive memories and contexts of the space, my own sketches, notes and journal publications during the research as well as the use of existing research documentation (historical photographs and diagrams) informed the development of thinking in relation to the manifestation of ideas through my body into the material existence.

The research is an iterative process between theory and practice that reflects how exegesis and paintings relate to each other. During the investigation process, the iterative process is manifested as the field work informs studio practice, studio practice informs field work, and archival research adds depth of understanding of history and theory. Paintings reflect ideas from theory discussed in exegesis which reveals how my body is historically and culturally embodied.

Field Research

The field studies were carried out during the same period of each year (December and January) over six years (from 2010 to 2015) with normally two or three visits paid to the site each trip. The field trips started as soon as the idea of travelling came to my mind. From preparing myself for the departure day to boarding a plane then transferring to a second one by either running across half of the airport or waiting for hours for it, neither of which is pleasant, were all part of the field trips. During the time of travelling back and forth between Perth and Beijing, my body was exposed to environments of social and physical change that my body acted and reacted to which in turn formed part of the memory of the trip. For example, the perceptions of my body conceptualizing the space was partly affected by the long flight to China from Western Australia by moving from 35 plus degrees Celsius to minus degrees; and perhaps by the turbulences on the way. In the section 2.3 on page 99, the impact of weather upon my body is examined that demonstrate how my body conceptualize the space in winter condition in Beijing and why winter period is chosen for the field study. Notably, through number of visits, the space of the Forbidden City seemed slightly different with something new catching my attention during each visit and adding an extra layer in my body. As the size of the space is enormous (72 hectares),⁶ it took me a few visits to physically walk, as well as conduct other bodily activities, through every courtyards and rooms. The bodily activities in the space are the key part of the process of gathering data for my preparation for translating my bodily experience into the language of painting at my studio. The experience of walking through the main gate on page 102 is an example to show how my body accommodate the physical and cultural space in freezing cold condition which challenge the normal routine of my body. Such onsite activities out of my daily routine enhance my bodily experience in the space that inform studio work.

Acknowledging there is a long history of walking in urban spaces as an expressive act, such as Baudelaire's Flaneur and Benjamin's analysis of the Flaneur, Guy Debord, the Situationists International, and the *Derive*,⁷ these concerns are not the focus of the research. Rather, the discussion focuses on how discomfort, anxiety and restraint of the body unfold through embodied encounters in the space of the Forbidden City. In that sense, walking, understood as an embodied activity, is mobilized in the investigation in response to a recent upsurge in mobility research in particular with the

⁶ Until 2013, there has been only 62% of total space of the Forbidden City is open to public.

⁷ See Guy Debord (1956) *Theory of the Dérive*. For full discussion.

focus of affective-emotional geographies as emerging topics of inquiry. Body, therefore, is considered a cultural and political being and my perspective in the research in creative practice is individually shaped by my cultural and political experience. The case study in the section 2.4.1 on page 108, restoring the process of nonlocal officials meeting the emperor, shows the various aspect of bodies walking in the space understood and re-interpreted through my view in contemporary time. Such experimentation informed by my field study has provided layers of ideas in investigating the research question that also informs my creative practice. To contextualize walking during China's modernization process, for example, due to the lack of motor vehicles, walking and bicycling were the main methods for common people to engage with public space until 2000. Therefore, the constant walking experience (4 to 6 hours on a day visit) within an urban environment not only revives the sense of walking hidden inside of my body for more than a decade long, but also the experience of walking as a means of observing the space.

As discussed on page 72, particularly, the bodily activities of field work have demonstrated my body, filled with life experience, fully equipped with history, knowledge and self-consciousness, produce ideas that reinforce the existing experience about the space. These experience and ideas are transformed through body in studio resulting in paintings. Hence, painting is a vehicle through which ideas are explored and bodily experience are translated. One of the ideas in the space, elaborated on page 79 for example, is the experience of wandering around without a specific destination in mind – being lost, which I start to pay more attention to the shifting of my body's action and reaction from one room to another, thereby highlighting the subtlety of the dialogue between the physical body and the cultural body *and* the space. In turn, such bodily experience accumulated in the space informs my painting at studio.

Photos

During the process of my body gathering data in the space through various activities, photography was used to archive memories and contexts of the space. The photographs reminded me of the specific bodily connectivity with the scene in each visit, and helped to differentiate them as weather and sunlight shown in each photograph was never the same. Major buildings were photographed to document the various routes undertaken during each visit. Meanwhile, I was more interested in and taking pictures on some “insignificant” corners and rooms where the places have strong sense of historical residues due to lack of maintenance. The scenes taken were personal and intuitive views such as corners with fallen bricks or cracks partly hidden behind weeds, which I found far more attractive than freshly painted major buildings. While keep documenting various routs, however, the images selected into the exegesis, such as in the section 1.4, tend to be personalized which show how/what my body visually seeking in the space, rather than being touristy. Therefore, the photos attached in exegesis are part of the research that provide visual evidence to the discussion of interaction between body and the space. As my body walked not just along the path “but outwards to distant sights and scenes, back to the past and to places in the

imagination” (Edenser 2008:135), the photos taken in the scene allow me to walk back to the space imaginatively and metaphorically while physically painting at studio.

Visual diaries and archival search

Visual diaries are those light sketch books carried around with a pencil. While my body was overwhelmed with emotions and feelings, the visual diary, including sketches and notes made at the scene, record particular moments which needed to be reviewed alongside photographs to provoke the bodily experience when in the studio. The visual representation made on the visual diaries are not necessary in scientific and realistic drawing, rather the lines and marks are the record of my physical and cultural response to the scene. In other words, the making of the visual diary in the scene is one of those onsite activities, such as photographing and walking, which engage my body in interaction with the space. Making same sense, as an important component, the activity of reading the existing research documentation in the archives located within the Forbidden City such as historical photographs and diagrams, also informed the development of thinking in relation to the field activities and the manifestation of ideas in the creative practice.

Studio

The paintings, an important component of the process of this research, were created in oil on canvas using multiple methods developed from critical inquiry and visual experimentation. The scale and length of final work, a thirteen meters long painting, consisted of thirteen individual panels of 100cm by 170cm. The scale of the final paintings was designed to create an embodied experience, so that viewers could imagine and therefore gain a sense of the experience of the spaces. The combined length of the panels, also allows the viewers to experience the sensation of walking in the site depicted and recreated a virtual space through the scale in relation to the body. The all-encompassing size of the artwork combined with the expressive layers of colour added to the visualization of the emotional intensity of the site that was embedded in my body. The abstraction of the scale and ratios of the spaces, combined with the expressive layers of colour reflects the expression of my remembered bodily experiences as well as the feelings of my body removed from the culture and significance of the space.

Whilst the exegesis examines four different voices and characters interacting with/in the space: the emperor, the eunuch, the Red Guard and myself, the focus of the creative practice rests solely on the experience of my body in the space through experimenting with various painterly strategies and methodologies in studio. Neither the overall composition of the final work, nor the scale of architectural space and figures rendered in each panel are necessarily visually authentic to the space, rather the paintings reflect a synthesized bodily experience of mine over a period of time in the space materialized through paint. In other words, the final painting is not made to visually represent the four different types of bodies discussed in the exegesis, rather it is an independent inquiry into the interrelationship between my body and the space with the awareness

of their existence.

Paintings is seen a layering of ideas, the discussion on page 81 for example shows how seeing the newly renovated space, weaken the sense of the passage of time, create pitiful emotion on my body which subsequently transformed into painting. In this sense, the space depicted in the paintings (page 134) is a synthesis of emotions and feelings of my body as participant in the scene rather than a fixed visual perception recalled from memory, which my cultural body is expressed and translated in painting. Manipulating paint to produce ideas, the studio experience informs the further field activities as my body see the space of the Forbidden City slightly different with something new catching my attention every time I visit.

In the exegesis, the chapter three provides the examination of creative practice in relation to idea making, particularly the cultural embodiment in creative practice. Discussion on Confucian thoughts and its impact on my body in studio is investigated on section 3.2 which I have explained how my body, with the knowledge of the techniques and being influenced by the aesthetics of Chinese painting for example, to create paintings in studio that creative practice is a way of working through and understanding my body as the Chinese inherited as well as an individual – a hybrid of Chinese culture and Western critical method. Meanwhile, the disembodied hybrid body on page 143 is also evidently reflected in practice. Therefore, creative practice is a method to produce new ideas which are analysed within theoretical framework in exegesis, and the ideas theorised in writing is reflected in further creative practice.

Structure layout

This research explores the interrelationship between the body and the space of the Forbidden City in terms of Western theories in the Chinese context and within a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary framework. The body of the research is realised in exegetical writing and a series of creative work, which are mutually supportive in the investigation of the interrelationship. Making paintings involves sophisticated bodily movement and engagement between body and paint which, in turn, extends body theories by exploring cultural embodiment in creative practice. The intimate bodily experience in painting reinforces the exegesis by providing parallel bodily experimentation in the studio separate from conducting bodily activities in the space of the Forbidden City. By making painting a form of research in this way, there is a dialogue between the paintings and the exegesis, and it is a strategy to investigate the attendant issues. The paintings are communicative and expressive – a way of my body ‘talking’ about its bodily experience in a visual language. I have created a series of figural paintings as an artistic interpretation of my bodily experience in the space of the Forbidden City. A series of 13 panels in total is displayed together horizontally to form a narrative ‘panoramic’ vista of the space. With further development of the research, more panels will be added to physically expand the vista and consolidate its visual impact on the audience when viewing it from a distance as well as engaging with its details up close. The paintings have made a substantial contribution to the

research as reference material to reinforce the exegetical writing, and as an independent authority capable of dealing with the same issues within its own operating system.

The exegesis contains three chapters: Chapter One deals with bodies in the space of the Forbidden City during different historical periods; Chapter Two examines how bodies interact with cultural, physical and disciplinary space; and Chapter Three focuses on bodily movement in the studio space. The body as a physical entity and culturally embodied form is contextualised via its immersion in this spatial environment and re-interrogated vis-à-vis various events in different historical periods.

The first chapter examines how selected bodies under the influence of Confucianism interact with/in the space of the Forbidden City during different historical periods and establishes a set of images of the Chinese body under (Post) Feudal culture and ideology. In addition to collecting and connecting available historical facts as a foundation for the discourse in this chapter, I have reflexively selected and re-assembled this historical information through my critical views. In particular, there is strong personal sentiment embedded in my interpretative and fictive tone of voice in writing about how these bodies experience the space during several events. The deliberate inscription of such artistic/personal sentiments in my voice not only reinforces my individual views on unveiling the relationship between body and space which is overlooked in historical records, but also sends a strong message about the position of my own body in relation to that space and other historical bodies, which is discussed in the last section of the chapter, and expanded on throughout Chapter Two.

Continuing the discourse on the interrelationship between the body and the space of the Forbidden City, the second chapter takes a slightly different approach by using my body as the vehicle to examine the interrelationship under the categories of cultural space, physical space and disciplinary space of the Forbidden City in terms of Western theories. A range of bodily activities is conducted in the space in order to interrogate my body as “simultaneously part of nature and part of culture” (Turner: 197) and as the result “of its entry into, and participation in, [different] society” (Shilling: 12), while at the same time re-considering the role of the space in contemporary times. My body, embodied with Confucian values and life experience accumulated in different societies, is physically tested through bodily activities in a space that is inscribed with cultural meanings, subjected to weather conditions and disciplined in its layout design.

As I am a practicing artist as well as an academic researcher, the final chapter focuses on my bodily movement in the studio as the process of translating my bodily experience in the space of the Forbidden City into the language of painting. Acknowledging both the intensity of bodily experience within the space of the Forbidden City and an awareness of its culture and history, I examine the possibilities of my bodily movement in expressing that experience in the studio as the third approach to investigating the interrelationship. My body is acted upon by institutions

(such as the concept of Grand Unification), which are embedded in everyday actions and invariably brought into the studio when making artwork; at the same time, my body acts as an individual experiencing cultural dislocation and personal disembodiment within culture (such as the impact of the One Child policy upon my body), experiences which are also present in the studio. Therefore, my bodily movement in the studio, which is expanded and re-thought from everyday actions, aims to translate both experiences of being *a* Chinese and *the* Chinese into painting while still maintaining a fine balance in between.

Notes for the reader – use of Chinese script

I have used *pinyin* Romanisation except when citing sources that use the Wade Giles system. All Chinese quotations are translated by me unless otherwise specified.

Chapter One: Body (Bodies) in the Space: Historical narrative

1.1 Introduction

The first chapter is divided into three sections, which interrogate the interrelationship between the body (bodies) and the space of the Forbidden City (Beijing, China) in the Feudal period⁸, the post Feudal period, and the present day. To help contextualise the shift in the nature of the space from the headquarters of the ruling class to a historical monument, the body, as “man’s (SIC) first instrument and technical object” (Mauss: 75), is analysed in relation to the evolving (social) space during these three specific historical/social periods. As German sociologist Norbert Elias notes, “Neither human bodies nor human history could exist without the interlocking of biological and social factors” (Elias cited in Shilling: 152). The examination of the interrelationship can help to illuminate the complexity of bodies and, at the same time, re-consider the space of the Forbidden City in terms of nature, culture, and society. Interpretative and fictive elements are introduced into the investigation in order to help make better sense of this complexity.

In this exegesis, the body’s experience of the space will be examined with reference to particular historical periods and the respective types of bodies associated with them, namely, the body of the eunuch in the Feudal period, the body of the Red Guard in the Post Feudal period, and my body in the contemporary period. Each type of body also raises a question about what is the price they paid to (attempt to) experience in that space, which ultimately connects each section into a series.

⁸ The exact definition of the Feudal period or Imperial period of China is still being debated in the study of Chinese history and it is not the focus of this exegesis; instead I shall refer to the period before 1905 in China as the Feudal period. The Feudal period in Western history saw kings/queens and their families rule the countries/states, and wars would repeatedly break out between states and between family members, which caused fragmentation after the primary king/queen was dead. To prevent similar things from happening in China, the Western definition of ‘Feudal period’ ended around 221 B.C. in China. Since then, the emperors owned the entire country instead of distributing land into smaller pieces. Emperors’ families were normally ‘detained’ within the capital area to prevent rebellions. The massive land, however, could not be managed by a single human being; various systems were brought in to select the elite from among the common people to manage the country together with the emperor. Driven by Confucian values, the examination system for selecting officials was one such strategy established in 605 A.D.

1.2 Body in the Forbidden City in the Feudal Period

The first section considers the history of the Forbidden City in Feudal times, followed by an explanation of Confucianism, and how it influenced the public and private spaces in the Forbidden City as well as the people living in the Feudal time. I will then focus on two specific types of bodies – the body of the emperor and the body of the eunuch – under the categories of powerful being, cultural being and natural being to elaborate how these two types of bodies, which represent the top and the bottom of the social hierarchy, interact with/in the space of the Forbidden City. Elias notes that “while human bodies remain irreducibly biological, however, evolution has equipped them with [cultural/social] capacities which release them from dependence on further biological change” (Elias cited in Shilling: 152) in terms of surviving. Interestingly, the body of the eunuch had to undergo “biological change” by being castrated in order to exchange a better position for its cultural/social body. I could assume the cultural body is the beneficiary from the castration, however, both bodies suffer from the consequences as castration is not an evolution in any sense and the loss is permanent.

The Forbidden City is the former Imperial Palace, from which twenty-four emperors of the Ming and Qing Dynasties ruled China for some 500 years – from 1420 to 1911. The Ming Emperor Yong Le, who usurped the throne from his nephew and made Beijing the capital, ordered its construction, on which approximately 10,000 artists and a million workmen toiled for 14 years from 1406 to 1420. The idea of Chinese ancient architecture as being “magnificent and majestic” (Yu: 1), said by archaeologist Yu Zhuoyun, is manifested significantly in the space of the Forbidden City. The city occupies 72 hectares, contains a river 2000 meters in length, incorporates 20 bridges and features 12 different styles of architecture. Behind the high wall of the Forbidden City, the history unfolds itself from dynasty’s prosperity to its decline, which has been witnessed and remembered by the spaces within. The Revolution of 1911 ended more than 2000 years of the Feudal system in China, which was marked by the Emperor Pu Yi’s abdication. As anthropologist Zhou Suqin has noted, Pu Yi, who is well known as the Last Emperor, was only six years old then, and the image of Long Yu Empress Dowager “...weeping in acquiescence while unwillingly announcing” Pu Yi’s abdication became the representation of this historical turning point of China from Feudal society to modern society (Zhou 2006: 1). The Forbidden City ended its 491-year history as the centre of ruling power and royalty. As Zhou has also noted, the royal family were allowed to stay in the living area of the Forbidden City after the Revolution of 1911 but were evicted in 1924 due to political turmoil. From 1913 to 1914, the government of the day shifted all the treasures from Shen Yang Palace and Re He Palace to the Forbidden City, and made it into a museum that first opened its gates to the public on national day on the 10th of Oct 1914. As part of the profound change in its social system, Confucianism, as the national mentality/ideology, in conjunction with the Feudal system of more than 2000 years, also come to an end. (See Appendix 1 for a detailed timeline relevant to the history of the Forbidden City)

According to anthropologist John Berthrong, Confucianism was developed from the Chinese ancient philosopher Confucius as an ethical and philosophical system which flourished since the Han dynasty (202 B.C. – 220 A.D.) (Berthrong: 132). Legalism⁹ was popular during the War (Warring) States period in China, but after its official abandonment during the Han dynasty, Confucianism was highly praised by the ruling class and became the official and national ideology. Apart from Buddhism and Taoism which came into people's spiritual life for a period of time after the Han dynasty declined, such as during the Sui and Tang dynasties, almost every Chinese emperor used Confucianism as their ruling tools/doctrines to systemise social orders, behaviours and values in combination with harsh punishment. The Prime Minister in Sun dynasty Qin Hui pointed out the reality of imperial China as "Confucian on the outside, but Legalist within" (Qin Hui: *Ten Expositions on Tradition*). This combined ruling strategy has been favoured by the ruling class ever since. In other words, a part of Confucian values was purposely used to sugar-coat the harsh Legalist reality that underlay the Imperial system.¹⁰ In comparison to Legalism's focus on the dark side of humanity, which has been criticised by contemporary scholars¹¹ for not being sustainable and responsible for its abandonment by the ruling class after the Han reunification of China, Confucian concepts construct a stable/fixed hierarchy by positively defining and detailing everyone's role in the society.

The essence of Confucianism concerns this world and the family, rather than God or the afterlife, which indicates "human beings are teachable, improvable and perfectible through personal and communal endeavour especially self-cultivation and self-creation" (Epps: 62). One of the Confucian ethical concepts is 'Li'¹², which is called "Confucian humanism" (Fingarette: 2) by Western modern philosophers. "People cannot live without 'Li'; things cannot be done without 'Li'; country cannot be governed without 'Li'" (Zhao cited in *Xun Zi: Xiu Shen*: 97), interpreted by anthropologist Zhao Guangchao. It is a system of norms and propriety that determines how a person should properly act in everyday life – "abstract quality as a rational standard of value for individuals" (Zito: 104). This particular concept was adopted by the ruling class to consolidate the imperial social hierarchy – a specific relationship which effects and restricts each other – putting people into fixed social characters, such as the idea of "son should not be disobedient to the father regardless, and common people should not be disobedient to emperor regardless" (Huang: 84), explained by sociologist Huang Hesheng. These Confucian values, politicised the people not only

⁹ Chinese Legalism was one of ancient philosophies emphasising strict obedience to the legal system during the War (Warring) States period. "It was a utilitarian political philosophy that did not address higher questions like the purpose and nature of life" (philtar.ac.uk/encyclopedia). The name Legalism was added afterwards, and its concept is broad and includes various subjects. Proponents of Legalism lived and appeared in different times of history but most of them had no master-apprentice relationship and they never called themselves Legalists. The most important figure and contributor Han Fei Zi propounded rulers of the day three tools to govern his subjects and reinforce his strengths: *Fa*, *Shu* and *Shi*. After the Han dynasty, Legalism, or a part of its ideas, merged with Confucianism and surreptitiously played a major role in imperial government.

¹⁰ During the Sui and Tang dynasty, Buddhist ideas were also part of the external face of the imperial system.

¹¹ Chen, Hongyi. (2013). "对古代法家思想传统的现代反思" (Reflection on Legalism in Contemporary time). Retrieved: <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/67208-3.html>

¹² I have used *pinyin* Romanisation except when citing sources that use the Wade Giles system.

for the sake of ensuring, according to anthropologist Ann Anagnost, “social control and ideological domination but is essential to the party/state’s own self identity...” (Anagnost: 131). In other words, in this vast society, ‘Li’ provided reference for everyone in every situation to consult on a daily basis to establish common and universal value in the society which continued for generations. However, by emphasising ‘Li’ in both moral rituals and architectural manifestations, the people were “stitched into [their] subject positions” (Anagnost: 131) and their lives were structured through the regulation and the rituals of ‘Li’, which resulted in nation-wide depersonalisation and dependency. Anagnost also points out that the framing of the Chinese body in the Feudal period in terms of “‘people as one’... conceals the internal fragmentation and diversity not only of ‘the people,’ but also within the party organization itself” (Anagnost: 131). This ideological framing further results in diminished individual value and creativities as well as self-confidence and thoughts, and heavy dependence on the positions in charge – that is to say, the head of the family in all levels, namely, Father, Local Official, Emperor – and an inanimate society is formed. The examination system¹³, which was held every three years for over 2000 years and used as a system to select officials, was abolished in 1905. This marked the end of official Confucianism – however its influence has continued to impact on the daily lives of the people.

Outside of the Forbidden City the lifestyle of common people was simple and independent from each family. The main economic policy during the Feudal period was “民无恒产故无恒心...重农抑商” (focus on farming rather than trading) that helped the ruling class to further stabilise their domination by giving the common people a little farmland to live on (Zhou 2010: 44), written by sociologist Zhou Suqin. Every family, depending on their land, could have a self-contained and sustainable living environment as the land could be passed down to subsequent generations. As long as the common people were politically and economically affiliated with their land that minimised the chance of any peasant uprisings, which were always the trigger of any ruling dynasty’s collapse. On the moral side, the concept of ‘Li’ restrained common people even more tightly. For instance, the idea of “do not travel far if there is elder at home” (Confucius: Li Ren) not only economically ensured there would be enough labourers working on their land, but also in moral terms showed respect to elders and reinforced the hierarchy between family members, which is also understood as Chinese/Confucian filiality. Other ideas about “actions taken before considering ‘Li’ are bad actions” (Zhou 2006: 23) and the necessity to “see emperor like the father” (*Study of Chinese Culture*: 47) further constrained the common people to the ethical precepts of this type of patrilineal society in which only the male could inherit the throne while the female did not even have a proper name. The ruling class embraced the concept of ‘Li’ in every aspect of daily life in order to fulfil its political purpose,

¹³ The regular examination system created staff turnover and allowed ordinary people to join the ruling class. It stabilises the country by giving everyone hope. According to the national survey in 1795, there were 122 participants in that year of examination who were between 70-80 years old; 92 participants were more than 80 years old. In 1770, a candidate, named Li Wei from Jiang Xi province, was awarded by the government for his spirit of persistency after he failed the examination again at the age of 99. The oldest candidate is recorded at the age of 106.

as Zito points out: "...monarchy [the emperors] drew its power from its categories significant in everyday life, embodying such morally charged imperatives as filiality through use of a shared repertoire of gesture, architecture, and language" (Zito: 105).

Candidates who passed the entry examination at the county level could access public schools to study and prepare for the imperial/national examinations held once every three years with each comprising a series of three examinations in total (Chang). Local squires would donate a place or venue and also found a suitable teacher so that the children of the peasants could be educated. The teachers who taught there had normally passed the entry examination at the county level but failed at one of the following imperial examinations, and so they relied on the small payment from peasants to survive while preparing themselves for the next chance to retake the examinations. This was a common scenario for candidates until they either succeeded or became too old to study. In contrast, rich families would keep their children at home and provided them with private tuition before sending them to private school. In terms of the use of daily language, everyone was comprehensively taught by their parents since they were little and then at private school for further education in order to be 'acceptable' in society. The curriculum at private school focused on preparing for the imperial/national examinations¹⁴ which were orientated by Confucian values as determined by the imperial government. A part of the education on using 'appropriate language' in terms of 'Li' comprised programming the body (brain) through oral/abstract language (oral indoctrination), which is communicative and efficient but, on the other hand, may cause misunderstandings between individuals. Therefore, to ensure the conception of 'Li' is firmly and deeply embodied in every body, the ritual of gesture, introduced as a consolidation of the oral indoctrination, came into daily life to amplify the effect of the ideology through active and concrete bodily language, which serves as a direct form of visualised interaction. When a body presents a pose or gesture in front of others, the body shows its commitments to the regulation of 'Li' and, at the same time, places a demand on others to respond 'accordingly and appropriately' in bodily actions. Gestures always come as a series and they are exchanged one after another, thus constructing bodily conversation. Learning gestures is a bodily indoctrination, which is applied to different biological functions apart from using language, directly programming the physical body in terms of its every movement in society. As a result, the gestures become habitual and second nature and passed down over the generations. In some cases, the bodily conversation in exchanging gestures is much more dynamic than oral conversation, for instance, when the emperor/father rebukes his officials/sons, the body of the emperor/father can talk, but the others who are subjected to criticism respond in a series of gestures to demonstrate their filiality in 'Li' as well as their social position in the hierarchy. The one subjected to criticism must change their gestures accordingly when the sentiment of the tone of the emperor/father's voice changes.

¹⁴ Achievement in the examinations always meant getting a local official job afterward, which is the only way to escape the poverty, and makes every family and student do their best in accordance with Confucian principles.

Architecture was the physical platform for implementing the concept of 'Li', and served as a symbol of the actualisation and immortalisation of the mentality that spread into every corner of the country, and amplified the hierarchy in society which was already rigidly stratified. Every building and architectural construction was built and named by its master and differentiated in size and decoration according to 'Li' to reflect the master's social position, such as the height of ceiling. A successful businessman, for example, could have a massive house built with materials that he thought would best display his wealth; however, he was not allowed to choose the colour of his roof tiles¹⁵ due to his social position. It was considered a serious offense if there was any design, decoration or object appearing in a building where it was not supposed to. The design of every building therefore reinforced a strong sense of the social hierarchy that affected every body on a daily basis.

For centuries, the emperor lived in the Forbidden City, the centre of power of the nation; and the lifestyles of the common people reflected this with the father at the centre of power in the family unit. Such strong and centralised power was needed in Feudal China due to its massive territory and population. The constant growth of its population actually increased the intensity of the centralised feudal monarchy. As Turner notes: "It is population pressure...which stands behind the expansion and development of new regimes and regimes of control" (Turner: 161-162). China had developed a thorough social system in the form of the imperial system to maintain its centralised political power and legal traditions over its massive population. However, such strong power by the emperor was unbridled, causing everybody to live in uncertainty and resulting in the lack of dynamism and creativity as a nation, which will be discussed in the next section.

The concept of 'Li' was implemented on the people living inside the Forbidden City in accordance to that rigid hierarchy, too. Every body had its role and social position to play in that space. The regulation of the movement of bodies was differentiated from place to place to fit the social position of bodies within the hierarchy. For example, ministers needed to learn certain language and gestures to communicate with emperors appropriately during their meetings in terms of the liege relationship (monarch-subject), whilst maids needed to learn the specific language and gestures to serve their masters in terms of the master-servant relationship. Actions and reactions, including facial expressions, strictly restricted the interaction between bodies in the Forbidden City thus constructing an intensely codified society. However, by simply concealing themselves and following 'Li' whatsoever, like a robot, did not guarantee subjects a stable life or career – and it was far from depicting the whole picture of living in the Forbidden City. As Shilling claims: "Actions at any time could decide a person's place in society and [furthermore] success in this status competition demanded a finely honed set of impression management skills. People had to 'meticulously weigh the gestures and expressions of everyone else', carefully fathoming 'the intention and

¹⁵ The roof tile in golden colour was reserved for the emperors; green was used by royal relatives and high officials; and grey was for the rest regardless.

meaning of each of their utterances” (Shilling: 157). The only way to survive living in that space, be it as an official coping with promotion or demotion, or as a concubine favoured by the emperor, was to obtain a strong sense of ‘impression management skills’, high emotional intelligence and perhaps, most of all, a mighty and healthy heart. Actions and reactions taken by the bodies in the Forbidden City were required in order to adapt oneself to the ever-changing circumstances around the clock – being sophisticated, manipulative, vigilant and active on the inside, while remaining passive and conventional on the outside and sugar-coated, as it were, with the regulation of ‘Li’. Appropriate actions were required from everyone, including the emperors whose bodies were under the affect of ‘Li’ as well.

There were in total 24 emperors who lived in the Forbidden City. Apart from the third emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Li, who built the Forbidden City in 14 years during his reign, the emperors that followed in the Ming and Qing dynasties were all born after the Forbidden City was built. These emperors had to adjust their bodies to the existing regulations in the Forbidden City. In other words, they were impacted on by the Forbidden City saturated with Confucian values on an everyday basis that trained their bodies into being emperors. These emperors, in turn, affected, modified and upgraded the layout of the Forbidden City, reshaping the space into better efficiency to reinforce the concept of ‘Li’ so as to consolidate the power of the ruling class. This mutual interaction between the bodies of emperors and the space of the Forbidden City was driven by Confucian values that made every thing deserving of merit without question.

The use of Confucian values in architectural design trained bodies into habitual behaviour. For instance, the threshold not only functions as a blocker to stop rain or dirt coming inside and draw a line between inside and outside space, but its design is also endowed with Feng Shui¹⁶ that reflects the concept of ‘Li’. The threshold is made from offcuts of the roof beam. According to Feng Shui, the roof beam in Chinese architecture is very important because it would help stabilise the house and avoid evil spirits, and as such it is always made from the best material in comparison with other wooden structures in the building, such as columns and window frames. The threshold, due to its relation with the roof beam, logically becomes an important part of the building, too, which is always conjured together with the roof beam by the Feng Shui geomancer. Striding across the threshold with the left foot first for a man and the right foot first for a woman is seen as ‘appropriately acting within ‘Li’. In contrast, stepping on the threshold when moving inside or outside is deemed inappropriate and regarded as having no manners.

The thresholds in the Forbidden City are relatively bigger and thicker in proportion to

¹⁶ According to Shi Shao, in “儒学视野下的‘风水’观”, the concept of Feng Shui came later than Confucianism, which is always associated with Yin-Yang, the Five Elements and the idea of filiality. Feng Shui, under the influence of Confucianism, reflects ancient enviroics and psychology which pursues harmony between mankind and nature (Shi).

the buildings. (Some of them are more than 30cm in height and 30cm in width). Therefore, the act of crossing the threshold is incongruous with the normal way of walking and instead requires more effort and extra attention needs to be given to the bodily movement, as in lifting one's foot up to a certain height with one hand holding the long gown (as per the imperial dressing code) and placing the other hand against the door frame to keep the body in balance. This would be more difficult if both hands are occupied with objects. By physically experiencing the space and the architecture in such a manner, one gains better understanding of the concept of 'Li' as embodied in the space. The physical size of the threshold is consistent with social positions, and indicates which and whose territory the body strides into. The complex series of physical actions the body has to take to move into and out of the territory reinforces the psychological impact of the hierarchy on the body as part of the regulation of 'Li' in the space. The existence of the threshold, along with its requirements on bodily actions, creates a sense that every corner of the space is under the surveillance of 'Li' and controlled by the power of emperors. The body of the emperor is amplified by the space that conveys the impression that his power is beyond the body's physical limitations. To the people who lived in the Feudal period, the Forbidden City was a symbol of Confucianism from the start – it reinforced Confucian ideals and participated in imaging ideal Feudal society over the centuries.

Another example of the specific use of space dictated by the concept of 'Li' is the Chinese quadrangle courtyard, which has been a way of life for several thousand years. The layout of the quadrangle courtyard is designed using symmetrical axes so that the rooms in the courtyard can be assigned to different persons in accordance to their social positions. The main buildings, which were occupied by the master and his immediate family, must sit on the principal axis with other smaller buildings symmetrically down both sides for distant relatives and servants (Zhao: 144), noted by anthropologist Zhao Guangchao. The outer wall of the centre yard, which was initially intended for defence, became the boundary demarcating inside/outside and private/public. The design of the winding corridor, as well as the doors and windows, functions to interact with the centre yards and allows the atmosphere to travel into every corner. From the common people to the royal family, from an ordinary quadrangle courtyard to the emperor's palace, this concept of construction was shared by every building, every courtyard and every city. By enlarging a quadrangle courtyard, one gets a palace; by enlarging a palace one gets a city.

Every quadrangle courtyard was socially and economically distinguished through size and decoration. For example, the different fantasy animal figures appearing on the roof ridges not only functioned as practical forms of architectural support but also symbolically represented social differences. The ridges are considered the weakest point of the wooden architecture where any leaks always start first. Apart from preventing possible leaking by putting extra tiles in the form of the animal figures along the ridges to function like weights to hold down the structure, these figures, which were derived from fairytales, symbolically display an image of social status

through the number and type of animals represented. Common people were not allowed to have any, while the emperors had the maximum number of figures with auspicious meaning and symbolism. People belonging to other social positions in between the common people and the emperors, such as the royal family members, officials and squires, could only use their respective animal figures and even then the number of figures that could be used were limited in accordance to their social standing. The appearance of these animal figures on the roof ridges therefore functioned to remind everybody that they lived in a hierarchical society.

Figures 2 and 3. Ordinary quadrangle courtyard and its ridges in Beijing with no fantasy animal figures on it. 北京四合院.¹⁷

Figure 4. Prince Gong Mansion and its ridges with a limited number of animal figures on it in Beijing. 恭王府.¹⁸

Figure 5. Prince Gong Mansion and its ridges with a limited number of animal figures on it in Beijing. 恭王府.¹⁹

Figure 6. The Forbidden City and its ridges with the maximum number of animal figures on it in Beijing²⁰

Figure 7. The Forbidden City and its ridges with the maximum number of animal figures on it in Beijing²¹

The Forbidden City in Feudal times functioned as a part of the social system. The layout of the Forbidden City, as a physical installation, activated and protected the feudal code of ethics. The layout of the Forbidden City is an ordinary quadrangle courtyard in a massive and luxurious way. The Forbidden City was constructed in the centre of Beijing, reflecting the idea to “build the palace in the centre of the capital” (Lv Shi Chun Qiu cited in Zhou 2006: 19) as ‘being in the centre’ – or “centring”, according to Zito (Zito: 105) – which represents the highest regard in terms of ‘Li’. Every building in the Forbidden City is differentiated by mass, scale, dimension, format, colour and decoration according to the use of the buildings. For instance, the buildings for emperors are always massive, meticulous, highly decorated and facing the South,²² while the other buildings are small, ordinary, flat and variable in size according to their function. As prescribed by ‘Li’, the Forbidden City is composed of tens of thousands of semi-open or enclosed spaces formed between buildings in variable scales which require the bodies, wandering in the space, to interact appropriately according to their social positions.

There are two typical spaces in the Forbidden City where residual historical concepts of ‘Li’ most strongly apply: the public space and the private space.

¹⁷ Retrieved: <http://course.szu.edu.cn/bieshusheji/pic.asp?bigid=6&page=2&types=1651>

¹⁸ Retrieved from:

http://blog1.poco.cn/myBlogDetail.php?&id=7041550&user_id=52348442&pri=&n=0&stat_request_channel

¹⁹ Retrieved from: <http://tszyk.bucea.edu.cn/gdwhlczyk2/jzysp1/wfmj1/3581.htm>

²⁰ Retrieved from: <http://www.tlzd.net/image/fqjjqmw.html>

²¹ Retrieved from: <http://www.nipic.com/show/4/79/d414460ee439fc2e.html>

²² Weather-wise, facing south would make the house warmer in winter and cooler in summer. In addition, there was a psychological reason: people did not want their main doors facing north due to the fact that the main threats to the imperial governments were always from minorities in the north.

The first half of the Forbidden City is the official (public) area that occupies 80 thousand square meters in total and comprises three major buildings, sitting on axis, which are massive and dignified with huge squares in front of each of them. The use of public space was strictly guided by 'Li' in Feudal times and this extended to the Meridian Gate.

The Meridian Gate was one of those major gates representative of public space in the Forbidden City. The gate has two components above the ground, the base part and the architecture built on the top. The base is a stone wall 12 meters high; and the structure which contains 9 rooms side by side is 60.05 meters wide in total. On the base part, right under the building in the centre, there is a giant double-door entrance accompanied by smaller double-door entries at each side plus one more door hidden the corner of both sides. In Feudal times, only the emperors could use the central entry, which is approximately 25 meters long and 5 meters high in an arch shape. There were only two exceptions: once-only-in when the empress is allowed to go through the main gate into the Forbidden City on her wedding day; and once-only-out when the top three achievers in the imperial examinations came out from the Forbidden City after being appointed to official positions. With the exception of the emperor, walking through the main entry was a once in a lifetime experience for a small number of people and it was an impossibility for the majority.

There were only a few occasions during the year that required the emperor to go through the gate whenever events took place at Meridian Square, such as making announcements to address the nation, holding special ceremonies, or reviewing troops. According to *Zhou Li*, which was published between 403 B.C. – 221 B.C. and seen as one of the Confucian classics, the Meridian Gate along with other four gates sitting on centre is considered the highest regard and the representation of kingship as a part of the concept of 'Li'. Gates in groups of five have been seen as an important component of every palace in Chinese history since the Zhou Dynasty (mid 1100 B.C.), 300 years earlier than Confucianism (770 B.C.). Gates in these groups of five were "initially used for observing the movement of celestial bodies" during theocratic period so that a sense of mystery and superpower could be inscribed in the gates "inherited by the emperors when kingship replaced theocracy" (Wang: 124), noted by sociologist Wang Zilin.

The living (private) space of the Forbidden City was located in the second half of the city in contrast to the official/public space. It was the space of the emperor's everyday living area as a home that provided everything a human being needs, albeit in a much more elegant and luxurious way, with the buildings and space also built according to the concept of 'Li'. An ordinary quadrangle courtyard could be as simple as having one main building approximately 15 sqm and one secondary building down both sides to form a centre yard of less than 100 sqm in total. By contrast, the private space in the Forbidden City occupies more than 30 hectares with more than 300 building and 7000 rooms wherein the courtyards and corners in between buildings are almost countless.

Every quadrangle courtyard or building has a name and position in the social hierarchy which only the appropriate people were allowed to live in, visit, or pass by. It was home for the emperor himself only and there were strict rules applied along with harsh punishment in every detail that maintained and consolidated his absolute power. A security guard or a maid working in the living area would not have an opportunity to see the emperor very often. The emperor spent most of his time in two or three favourite buildings because the size of the entire living area was too big for a single human being to physically occupy on a daily basis. The rest of the places he rarely visited was either appointed to family members and concubines or used by eunuchs and maids.

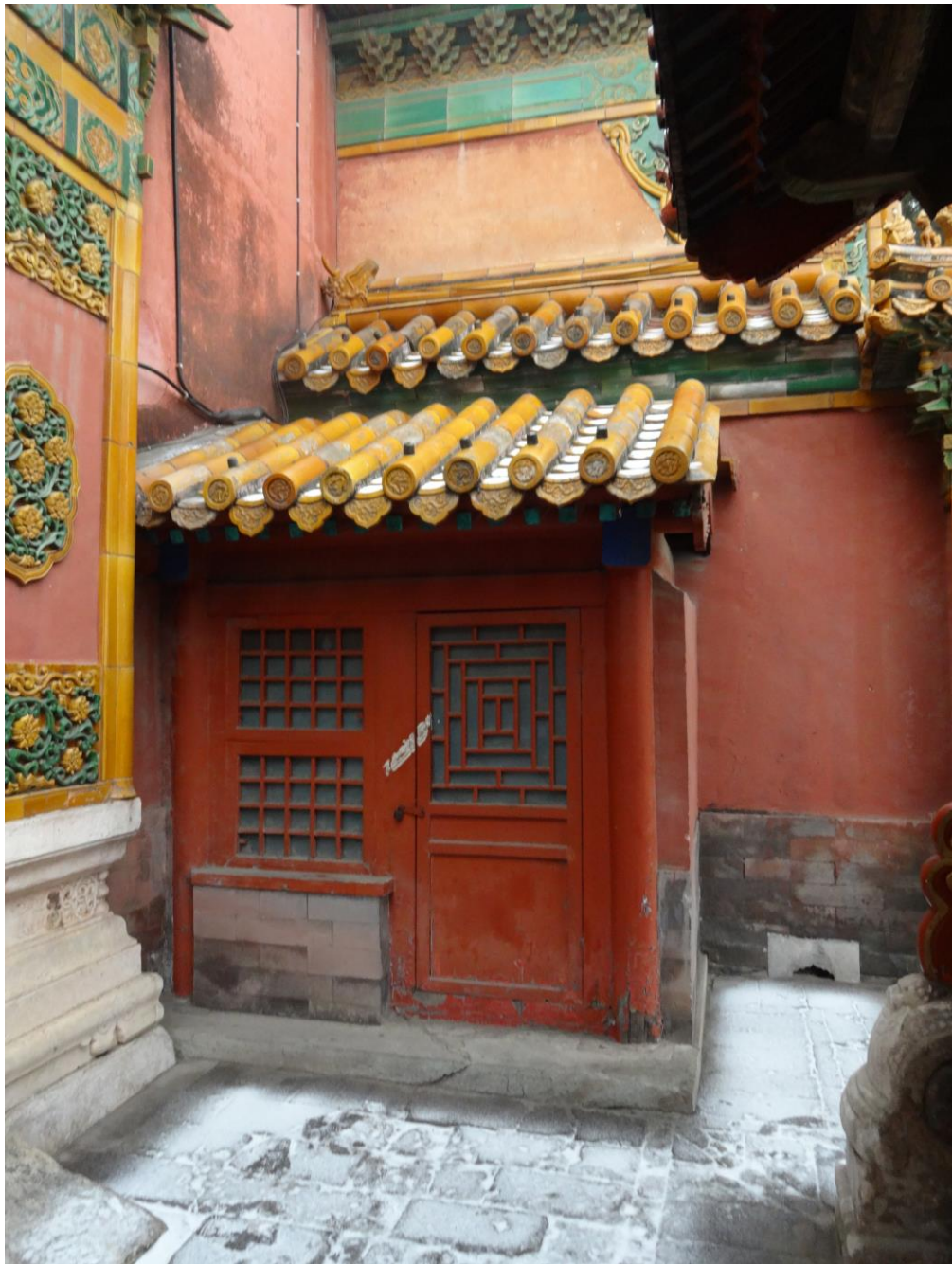


Figure 8. A little room for doorman located inside of each door, 2013, photo: Peng Liu

The space can be analysed according to its impact upon two types of bodies in the category of power being, cultural being and physical being, regardless of whether the space was private or public. Those bodies represented the top and bottom of the hierarchy: the body of emperors and the body of eunuchs demonstrate their own body techniques to accommodate the specificity of the social space in Feudal time. As anthropologist Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow argue, “each society has its own habits, and body techniques identified in one society or historical period may have no equivalent in another” (Williams & Bendelow cited in Mauss: 49). These two types of bodies, who lived in the space of the Forbidden City in the Feudal time under the domination of Confucianism, elaborate a strong engagement with the space and a paradoxical relationship between each other. The space determined their social positions and their individualities were overlooked. Instead their physical bodies were heavily regulated by the space and behaved accordingly, and their cultural bodies were reshaped into an appropriate and fixed state within the hierarchy. Everything and everyone seemed to play their roles strictly in accordance to ‘Li’ except in special circumstances. During the events such as making announcements to the nation, or special ceremonies, these bodies were momentarily free from their fixed social positions, and allowed to experience the space through a different perspective, physically as well as culturally.

The body of emperor as a powerful being was explicit in the Tai He building especially when ceremonies were held. The Tai He building is one of major buildings in the Forbidden City located on a central axis, measuring 35.05 meters in height, 64 meters in length, and 37.21 meters in width. Some of the important ceremonies and festivals were held at the square in front of this building while the emperor sat inside, looking out over the space he was hosting. A stage measuring 7 square meters and approximately 2 meters in height, and with stairs down both sides and the front, was set up in the middle of the building. A golden chair with carved dragon patterns was placed in the middle of the stage with a partition (or screen) half enclosed from behind. This is where the emperor sat and hosted the events.

The emperor always chose to approach the centre stage from the stairs on the left side which would lead the body to the chair in the middle. As the body of emperor walked into the Tai He building from the back door, tens of thousands people would normally be already waiting at the square. The body of the emperor walked in a particular rhythm, which he learnt from his father and cannot be simply described as being either slow or fast. It was a walking pace intended to make the multitude hold their breath while waiting with their heads down. The longer (albeit in moderation) they waited in extreme solemn silence, the more fear they sensed in the air and the more anxious they felt. This rhythm was therefore not only constitutive of the engagement between the body of emperor and the space, but it was also an ineluctable process whereby the rhythm of the bodily movement transformed the unfathomable power of the body of emperor into the air for everyone else to breathe in as fear. This deliberate pace was a purposeful bodily movement designed to stifle any questioning of the emperor’s

absolute power. And even then, this is presuming that an individual would even dare to question this power in his or her mind.

While walking toward to the chair through the building, the emperor's body was always supported by a servant's hands even though the physical condition of the emperor's body was fine, with the power of the body appearing as if fully recharged from the walking. There was always a eunuch standing or walking next to the body of emperor to voice any messages after carefully observing the emperor's bodily movement. As a result, the emperor could host the event by just assuming various bodily gestures while sitting. Every movement of the body, no matter how tiny, had its intentionality which cannot be misread. As a good gesture reader, an accomplished eunuch would be able to see not only the gesture of the physical body, but also the message of the cultural body.

By extending one's hands while sitting on a chair, an ordinary body can physically reach or control the objects within approximately a meter or more in diameter. However, the body sitting on the golden chair with carved dragon patterns could simply wave its hand to demote any official in the hall, execute anyone in the square, and even change the layout of the city. This body, as befits its high social position, could outdo its physicality and make an impact beyond its physical entity. Given all the potentialities this body can actualise in terms of its power, it must interact with/in the space, and with other bodies in the space, in its own unique way.

The cultural body of the emperor is manifested in its display of power. The body of the emperor was born to the world just like any other person. The life experience of the body, which was gained under the existing regulation of the Forbidden City, trained an ordinary body into the emperor and turned an average body into a bearer of the absolute power. In this sense, the emperors were produced purposely in and by the Forbidden City as a stereotype in terms of its cultural requirement. In the process of producing a 'qualified' emperor since earliest childhood, the body of the emperor needed to be always under the influence of 'Li', which was omnipresent in every aspect in the Forbidden City. "According to Elias, the process of 'growing up' in Western society is nothing other than 'the individual civilizing process to which each young person, as a result of the social civilizing process over many centuries, is automatically subject from earliest childhood'" (Elias cited in Shilling: 160).

However, things were slightly different in Chinese imperial societies where the process of growing up was oriented towards meeting the level of civilisation defined by a single ideology. The individual civilising process was less to do with being individual, rather every body was judged under the concept of 'Li'. Individuality was purposely eroded during the process of growing up, which made the nation politically stable, but ideologically stagnant at the same time. Since birth, the body was immediately under the control of the society, which had acculturated its values and customs over centuries. After living in the society for many years, through adopting and adjusting, punishing

and rewarding, the resulting body would eventually act and react in certain ways to meet the regulation and expectation that had existed in the Forbidden City for centuries, which made bodies into stereotypes; “consequently, their instinctual life must very rapidly be subject to strict control...” (Shilling: 160). The individuality of the body was ignored and restrained in order to be a ‘qualified’ emperor. Moreover, the body of the emperor, by taking the role as the head in the feudal society, needed to behave firmly according to expectations. As Shilling notes: “To keep one’s place in the intense competition for importance at court, to avoid being exposed to scorn, contempt, loss of prestige...[o]ne must wear certain materials and certain shoes. One must move in certain ways characteristic of people belonging to court society. Even smiling is shaped by court custom” (Shilling: 158).

Every movement of the body of emperor is calculated and measured under ‘Li’. For example, the holding of special events, for occasions such as Luna festival rites, is intended to showcase the emperor’s unchallengeable power to the rest of the world. With all major officials and generals presenting and watching alongside the emperor, it is actually the body of emperor that was controlled by the events. These events were scheduled and structured with the establishment of the Forbidden City initially as a part of the ritual in ‘Li’. The events had been held on a regular basis, year after year, on the same day and same time of the day, according to the Lunar calendar. Once the regulation was in place, it was unwittingly out of the emperor’s hand.²³ Rather, the body of emperor was guided by regulation all the way through the events, acting and reacting under the expectation of ‘Li’, and only in reference to their ancestors. Every bodily movement of the emperor on the stage while holding the events was under the scrutiny of others and measured by them according to ‘Li’. The body of emperor was not just acting as a representation of his biological entity, but also reacting as an incarnation of the regulation of the Forbidden City. The body became the bearer of the absolute power endowed by the concept of ‘Li’, yet that same body was restrained by it at the same time.

The body of the emperor interacted with the space in terms of its cultural being, and its physical body would simultaneously sense the atmosphere of the space as soon as the body stepped into the building through the back door. The space was saturated with the social affect/tension from the body’s physical movement. With every step the body took in moving toward the stairs, the body was adjusting itself to assimilate into the atmosphere. It was an atmosphere full of tremendous momentum from dozens of officials silently queuing to one side and hundreds thousands of men neatly standing in the square. These bodies were not just “a closed container-thing...but rather...a complex concatenation of ever more intimate boundaries” (Zito: 117). To physically occupy the space was to culturally reinforce the intensity within that space. These bodies waiting in the square were socially positioned, which brought meaning into the space not only through their cultural/social representation but also their physical

²³ It was very difficult to change or modify the structure of the events without good reason; even the emperor himself who was supposed to have absolute power could do nothing about it.

gesture/presence – “a complex concatenation” – which allowed the affect to travel from one individual body to another.

Although the walk to the chair was only a few meters, and only a few bodily movements were needed whilst sitting on the chair, it would take a huge effort for the physical body of the emperor to complete these actions in terms of confronting and controlling the atmosphere. This physical body did what all others do – breathing, sensing the atmosphere and reacting appropriately in bodily movement in the space of the Forbidden City. The mannered series of physical interactions helped the body situate itself in the space, balancing its uncertain mind and calming its nerves, while walking onto the stage step by step. When the body was sitting down and facing the rest of the world, its cultural body succeeded its physical body and, at the same time, music came out to break the silence – the event started.

Despite being in the same atmosphere, another type of body had a different experience, and may have even perceived the scene in an opposite way. Working as servants, this type of body only existed in the Feudal period and was known as the eunuch. The body of the eunuch, which was a male with an incomplete physical body, was interrogating the space as well. They were the lowest ranked people in society, as most of them were from extremely poor families, and they were always illiterate. One of the main sources for conscripting eunuchs was from desperate parents who were struggling to make a living. They sold their children at a very low price to the senior eunuchs who regularly came out from the Forbidden City to recruit new servants for the royal family. These children were sold at a very young age and knew nothing about being a eunuch and their life ahead in the Forbidden City. Senior eunuchs castrated²⁴ the children, renamed them, and kept them aside as apprentices before they were qualified to serve the royal family in the Forbidden City. During the years of apprenticeship, they learnt and memorised all the rules and regulations by following senior eunuchs, either through observation, or punishments if they made mistakes.

Figure 9. Tools for castration

Figure 10. Castration Scene, Eunuch Museum, Beijing

An alternative source of eunuchs, due to the harsh living conditions in some cases, were adult males, who would ‘willingly’ castrate themselves first, and then handed themselves in to officials to seek positions in the Forbidden City as eunuchs, as a means for survival. The number of self-castrated adult seeking ‘jobs’ in the Forbidden City far exceeded demand in some years, such as 1475 A.D. during the Ming dynasty. In that year, these men caused some disturbances as they gathered around the Forbidden City after being rejected. These men were punished by the imperial government and were described, based on their ‘self-castration’ behaviour, as “rebellious against deities and violating social values, self extinction” (Ming Xian Zong

²⁴ In some cases, the castration would be done before recruitment. There were even a few private organisations that provided the service as a business when the demand for castrations was high.

Shi Lu cited in Wen: 3), noted by sociologist Wen Gongyi. In response, the imperial government of the day issued a ban on adult self-castration, but this did not work. Given that the emperors had wives and concubines living in the Forbidden City, plus a vast number of female servants, every male servant, who was more capable in physical work than female servants, needed to be castrated before serving in the Forbidden City to prevent adulterous conduct²⁵. The emperor was literally the only full-bodied male in the living area of the Forbidden City. This type of polygamous custom is considered by literary critic Malek Alloula in her parallel discussion on Algerian society under French colonial control where the harem "...is an erotic universe in which there are no men. This lack of the phallus is eloquently symbolized by the two figures of the High Lord [the emperor], who can neither enjoy all the women in his seraglio nor satisfy them, and of the eunuchs..." who are described as "the absolute negation of the male principle" (Alloula: 96). The descriptions by Alloula in *The Colonial Harem* correspond to the situation in the Forbidden City where the eunuch occupied a unique position in the social hierarchy, and who kept challenging that hierarchy, yet never successfully, while suffering the most from it.

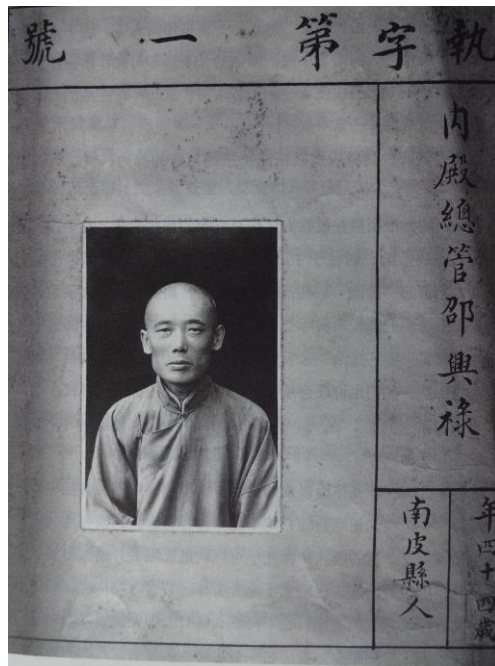
There were two essential items that every eunuch wore on a daily basis. The first one are knee pads to protect their knees because they are required to kneel down a lot on most occasions, given that they are positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Even the head eunuch, after serving and surviving in the space for decades, would, without exception, still need to use the knee pads – granted his were made from the fur of golden snub-nosed monkeys (*Rhinopithecus roxellana*) to reflect his higher social position. The second item is a towel worn around the waist inside the robe. The towel covers the lower half of the body to catch any drops of liquid from the crotch. A castrated body loses its urinary control significantly after the operation and the constant dripping would become worse as the body gets older. Therefore, a towel is needed to avoid the fluid dripping on the floor, even though it makes the body smell bad.

²⁵ It was compulsory for all eunuchs to undertake an annual medical examination in order to check for fake castrations.



Figure 11. A statue of a eunuch in his middle age, 20 centimetres high, Forbidden City Museum, Beijing





Figures 12 & 13. Photos of manager eunuch Zhang Qianhe and manager eunuch Shao Xinglu listed on the first page of the Eunuch Register

Female servants and body guards could quit their jobs (or redeem their freedom) and return home after serving in the Forbidden City for a period of time; however, eunuchs had to stay and serve in the Forbidden City till death once the selection and the castration was done. Some eunuchs were either orphans from the street or had lost contact with family members after being sold. Besides, after serving in the Forbidden City for decades, they usually had nowhere else to go to and so they continued to stay, regardless of the living conditions, until they died of old age or when they lose their working ability.²⁶ In some cases, even if they knew where to find their family, they were too ashamed to see them as they were incapable of reproducing, which is regarded as unfilial in terms of Confucianism. Moreover, their appearance would have changed gradually after being castrated. For example, they stopped growing beards, their voice became higher pitched, and their bodily actions leaned towards being feminine due to the lack of androgen/masculinity. These changes put them into the category of nothing, neither male, nor female, and they occupy no position in the context of Confucianism. Their reputation in common society was equally negative and regarded as being against Confucian values, too, which prescribe: “the body is endowed from parents, should be meticulously looked after.” (*Xiaojing*). Being castrated was considered unforgiveable, as even hair was not allowed to be cut under this ideology. The

²⁶ When the eunuchs became too old to work, they were evicted from the Forbidden City with a bit money to allow them to die and be buried somewhere else. Approximately 25 kilometres northwest of the Forbidden City is a place called *Zhong Guan Cun* (the eunuchs’ village), where the evicted older eunuchs would live gregarious lives helping one another. These elder eunuchs had no children or relatives who could bury them after death and visit their graves annually as a part of ‘Li’, so they had to help each other, whereby the still living would bury and visit the dead with the expectation that others would do the same for them. Some eunuchs could make a bit of extra money by recommending eunuch candidates for jobs in the Forbidden City. An alternative place (like “bead house”) would have been Buddhist or Daoist temples. Eunuchs needed to choose one in advance, and make regular donations over the decades while working in the Forbidden City, in order to keep a bed for their final years living at the temple.

Confucian scholars during Feudal times heavily criticised them as “an abyss of disgraces and be of the most heinous guilt” (Wen: 5). Modern archaeologists discovered, after opening the coffins of eunuchs, every decomposed corpse was accompanied by a life-size penis made of bronze. This discovery demonstrates that eunuchs were mentally tortured by Confucian ideology for being castrated and possessing an incomplete body, and subsequently wished forgiveness from their parents and society by ‘fixing’ their body with a bronze penis in death. Therefore, during Feudal periods, being a eunuch was a choice out of no choice.

The number of eunuch servants in the Forbidden City reached its peak of 3300 in 1757. They continued to be treated inhumanly: “any transgression is paid with loss of life after subjection to the worst torments, applied with cruel refinement” (Alloula: 96). This type of body experienced the space of the Forbidden City in terms of cultural oppression as a second-class servant and physical abuse as a castrated man.



Figure 14. China's last eunuch Sun Yaoting (1902-1996) at the Temple of Great Deliverance, 1992



Figure 15. Sun Yaoting and Guang Hua (Buddhism) Temple presided in Beijing (Jia 2008)

Every year, when festivals or ceremonies were held at the square of Tai He building, the head eunuch, as the representative of this type of body in the Forbidden City, became illustrative of its singularities in terms of physical being, cultural being and power being. In regard to physical being, this incomplete body is allowed to stand on the same stage with the emperor, approximately 2 meters to the left hand side. His head looks downwards slightly a few meters ahead while his back hunched a bit with both arms crossing the chest. This incomplete body was regarded as a ‘walking stick’ to support the emperor walking through the building all the way to the chair; and it is the one a few steps in front who voices the emperor’s messages when required during the event. For the rest of the time, this incomplete body had to be part of the background, minimising the sense of its own existence to others. The incomplete body stood slightly behind the emperor. During the events, which normally started early in the morning and lasted the whole day, the incomplete physical body would have no rest but to serve hearty meals to the emperor all day continually while itself not being allowed to drink any water, not to mention eating any food. Just standing for a whole day was tiring enough, however the body of the eunuch had to pose in specific positions in order to observe the emperor without using any obvious bodily movement to attract unnecessary attention. Appropriately voicing the emperor’s intention or message to the crowd might earn him a present; on the other hand, misreading the intention would result in harsh punishment at the end of the day, which would make his physical body suffer even more. The body of the eunuch needed to maintain a state of high alertness every minute all day long to deal with any circumstance, which quickly exhausted the physical body.

The body of the eunuch, in terms of cultural being, is rather complex. The body improved its living condition dramatically – from worrying about the bare necessities of life in a poor village, to the moment of dressing itself expensively and standing on

the stage with the emperor to look out on the crowd. The body had transformed itself to experience the best possible things in this culture. Although the body presented itself next to the emperor, slightly behind, to see what the emperor sees, to feel what the emperor feels, to experience what the emperor experiences, nonetheless this body remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This incomplete body did not see, feel, or experience the space like the emperor, as the body of the incomplete was not the body of the emperor. However, the incomplete body ironically had the privilege to geographically stand on the stage with the emperor to look out on the space, seeing all chief officials queuing in front of the building and tens of thousands of honour guards performing at the square. The images of an old poor childhood memory reappearing in its head to coincide with the magnificent visual impact created by the scene in front of him must have caused him to feel overwhelmed. Moving from the bottom to the top, he must have surely acquired a better understanding about being at different places of the hierarchy.

The more events this body accompanied the emperor to, the less desire he wanted to imagine itself to be the emperor. The ever-traumatic pain from its wound of castration dragged its mind back to the reality whenever the body was dreaming itself as the emperor expressing power over events or just having an ordinary family lifestyle, almost without exception. Even just a tiny wish to have a normal life seems to be too much, as a castrated body has no position, no dignity and no dream under the concept of 'Li'. The castration cannot be reversed. This body could literally stab the emperor to death to supersede his power as he was just approximately two meters away; however, apart from being accused as an usurper, which is unacceptable according to 'Li', no one would ever acknowledge a castrated body as an emperor under 'Li'. The body would end up in a situation worse than ever before.

This unchangeable future strained the body and made it wish less and less to the point of numbness and hopelessness. It is not because the body is afraid to take chances as Chinese imperial history is dense with usurpation stories; it is the consequence, as determined by 'Li', which clearly indicates the body is doomed as soon as castrated. The excruciating pain tends to get worse every time the body wakes up from its dream as the body can do nothing to improve its situation, but to accept it and remain at the bottom of the hierarchy till death. One of the details revealed in studies on Chinese history may provide a glimpse into the cultural being of eunuchs, particularly in the case of rich senior eunuchs: they would spend massive amounts of money to buy the castrated penis back²⁷ to make them feel a bit better in terms of 'Li', which shows that

²⁷ After the castration, the penises were kept in mixing bags with lime/kalk (an ancient way of preservation) by an official or business organisation. All the penises were separately and individually kept in little bags, marked only with numbers (to prevent theft) and hung on the wall. In the cases mentioned above, some eunuchs would buy back their penises after becoming rich, and they were buried together with them after they died, following the Confucian ideology. The body has to be kept as a whole under this ideology: "the body is endowed from parents, should be meticulously looked after." Most eunuchs, however, who could not afford to buy back their penises, had to be buried with a bronze penis. Regardless of whether the eunuch was rich or poor, buying back the penis was always expensive. To prevent stealing, dozens of identical bags were hung on the wall without any information except a number, which eunuchs had no way of identifying, and so they had no choice but to pay. Only the person who did

the cultural body of the eunuch was strongly constrained by this ideology. The life and bodily experience of interacting with the regulations of the society and the space of the Forbidden City under the concept of ‘Li’ would invariably result in the paradoxical body (bodies) of the eunuch in which its cultural body is oppressed to the point of seeming death, yet it is still physically breathing.

Given the richness of bodily experiences in physical and cultural terms, the power being of the body of eunuch is even more intriguing. The body of the eunuch in its deep physical disgrace and extreme cultural oppression is desperately earning what little dignity through its power being. Eunuchs, including even the head eunuch, did not have any official title and were banned from involvement in any official decisions in making the Feudal law.²⁸ Offenders would be tortured to death. It was always a sensitive issue in Feudal times as there were precedents of the downfall of dynasties caused by the eunuchs’ dictatorship. On the other hand, after serving the emperor closely for decades and becoming ‘trusted, loyal and devoted’, the head eunuch could somehow always find a way to influence the emperor through the interaction between physical bodies and thoughts exchanged between cultural bodies.

The head eunuch did not see the emperor as an immortal symbol with absolute power, but rather a human being, an ordinary body which did what every one else did, such as sleep, walk, and possessing emotions and feelings. After serving for a long time, the head eunuch came to know the emperor best and became ‘trustworthy’. The role of the head eunuch was, in part, to be a messenger who would pass messages from the emperor down to the officials. This incomplete body therefore occupied a special position in the hierarchy, working as mediator between the emperor and the rest of the world. Moreover, on certain occasions, such as when stepping forward to voice the announcement from the emperor during events, this incomplete body became an even more sophisticated and powerful being than the emperor. In these moments, regardless of the content of the announcement, the incomplete body understood that it was his own high-pitched voice that literally and loudly went into every official’s ear, and made a biological and psychological impact on tens of thousands bodies at the square²⁹. In these moments, it was the incomplete body, the voice of the body that hijacked the cultural body of the emperor and became the symbol of absolute power for everyone to worship. During these events, every move of the incomplete body, such as when presenting a tributary, or passing down a signed document, acted as a messenger roving between the emperor and his administrations. The incomplete body travelled between

the castration knew the match between the numbers on the bag and the bodies castrated by his hand. There is another example to demonstrate Confucian values in keeping body as a whole: there were always a few shoemakers in the crowd watching criminals being beheaded in the public space. After the execution was over, the shoemakers would come forward to offer the victim’s family the opportunity to stitch the victim’s head back to the body, so he or she could be buried in one piece.

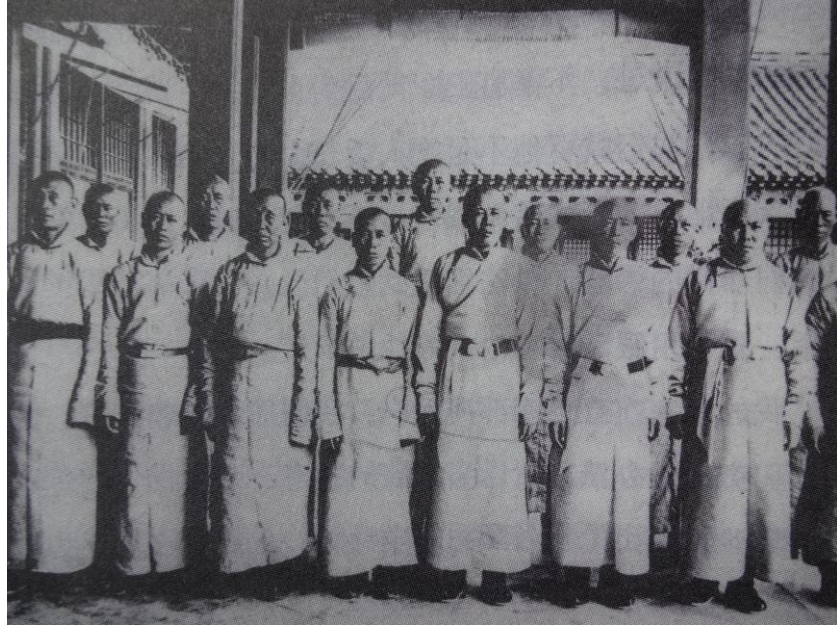
²⁸ Such regulations were applied firmly in the early dynasties, but eventually became looser during the later dynasties.

²⁹ There were a few eunuchs in power who were called ‘the standing emperor’. For example, Liu Jin was the head eunuch of Emperor Ming Wu during the Ming dynasty and was in power from 1505 to 1510. He was sentenced to death, by being cut into pieces, after his ambition to usurp power was unveiled.

the emperor's space and the others. Arrogantly announcing emperor's decision or menially presenting items to the emperor, this incomplete body changed its facial expression and attitude all the time accordingly, and the constant changing circumstances allowed the body to experience the space from different perspectives, even some unique points of view.

After these 'glorious' moments, the event was over, and the incomplete body ended up in its cold, bleak, one-room house, with no one around – hearing nothing but its own voice echoing in its head; recalling the events over and over again; feeling nothing but its ever-unforgettable pain agonising over its castrated physical body. The experience of mimicking the emperor's power did not ease the pain but made it even more physically explicit and culturally unbearable. With all these unique social and physical strings attached to it, the castrated body becomes another extreme dynamic body interacting with/in the space.





Figures 16 &17. Eunuchs serving food and a group photo of eunuchs in the Forbidden City (Jin & Shen: 81 & 326)



Figure 18. The cold, bleak, one-room house, 2013, photo: Peng Liu

The body of the eunuch who is equipped with high social skills can become wealthy

and influential to a degree, after years surviving in the space³⁰. A huge price is paid physically, culturally and psychologically by the body of the eunuch in order to survive, whereby any gains acquired by the body in the space is considered a payoff for being castrated. In contrast to the body of the eunuch in the imperial space of the Forbidden City, the body of the Red Guard had intimate and intensive experience in the space of the Forbidden City from a different perspective during the Post-Feudal period, which will be unveiled in the next section.

³⁰ Not every eunuch could be wealthy and influential, as the bottom line for being castrated was to survive.

1.3 Body in the Forbidden City in the Post-Feudal Time

The second section of this chapter explores the relationship between the space of the Forbidden City and the people who lived in the period of Post-Feudal China. I will discuss some relevant historical events and the changing role of the Forbidden City from one in which it was the centre of the ruling class to when it became an historical architectural monument after the Feudal system collapsed. The investigation on the relationship focuses on a particular historical circumstance, namely, the ‘Cultural Revolution’, and a specific group of bodies – the Red Guard in the Maoist period who had been significantly influenced by Maoism, instead of Confucianism. I examine the action/reaction of the Red Guard in the space of the Forbidden City during the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in terms of that body’s political and cultural being in this specific historical moment. At the end of this section, the phenomenon of Confucianism’s resistance and Communism’s deformation is brought in not as a means to compare and contrast their ideologies, but to illuminate how bodies are historically inherited and culturally embodied. The physical entity and cultural embodiment of bodies will be more fully discussed in Chapter Two.

Relevant historical events

There was a period of conflict that lasted for decades in Beijing after the Feudal system collapsed. The Forbidden City was affected, re-named the Palace Museum, and opened to public in 1925. A few years later, the treasures that were displayed and kept in the museum were shifted to the south in order to avoid the Japanese invasion in 1933. Part of the treasure was transported to Tai Wan in 1948 by Jiang Jie Shi after he lost the civil war to the Chinese communist party. The Forbidden City was eventually re-opened to the public in January 1949, the same year that the new China was established.

The Forbidden City was originally designed in accordance with the entire city planning of Beijing during the Feudal times, which included many types of architecture built across greater Beijing, such as temples, gates, walls and bell towers. Most of the architecture outside of the Forbidden City was demolished in the few past decades due to reasons such as political turmoil, wars and recent economic reform. After the 11th party congress held in 1978, China opened its gates to the world – and, in particular, its economy. Following the profound social changes that have taken place, the Forbidden City has become a physical obstacle in regard to traffic developing in modern Beijing, as it occupies 72 hectares in the centre of Beijing. Several plans to reshape the Forbidden City were discussed in order to accommodate the economic growth. None of the plans were approved because they would have involved changing the layout of the Forbidden City, and so it has survived until today. However, much architecture located outside of the Forbidden City has had to give way to broader roads, demolished as a result of the increasing number of vehicles on the roads. The initial ancient capital, which was built and centred on the Forbidden City, has had a major facelift with steel skyscrapers and modern roads that make the only surviving ancient space even more sentimentally provocative to its audience.

The changing role of the space

During the transition, the space of the Forbidden City changed its political dynamic from the platform of the rigid Feudal system to a showcase of its own history to the public, but remains under the influence of the concept of ‘Li’. Public bodies, which were forbidden to approach the Forbidden City, were allowed to physically experience the space by paying for a ticket.³¹ Even though the space lost its capacity to control public bodies politically, its rich historical traces saturate the ambience and still exercise their impact on cultural bodies. Visiting the Forbidden City has become the ‘must have’ experience, as the activity of visiting itself demonstrated public awareness of the new political era. The cultural impact of the space upon the bodies continues, although these days it is hidden under the guise of a scenic spot and historical site. Previously, conducting bodily activities in the space as ordinary people would have been punishable by death in Feudal times; now, however, people are increasing their cultural awareness and consolidating a sense of belonging by giving their bodies first-hand experience in the space. Dynasties may change, along with their role in enforcing cultural control on the body, yet cultural embodiment continues.

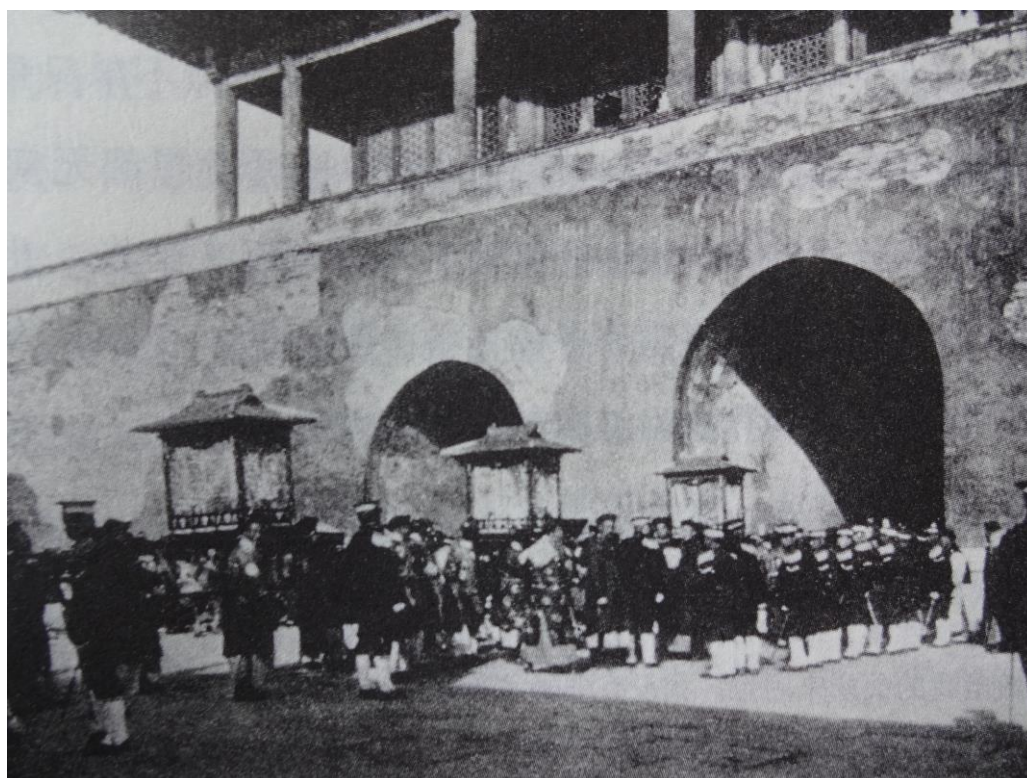


Figure 19. Modern policeman were in charge of keeping order at the scene of emperor Pu Yi’s marriage ceremony at Shen Wu Gate, 1/12/1922 (Johnston: 407)

³¹ According to Zhou Su Qin, on the day of official opening (10/10/1925) and the following day, the standard ticket for an adult was 50% off (0.5 Yuan), which most people then could afford (Zhou 2006: 177).

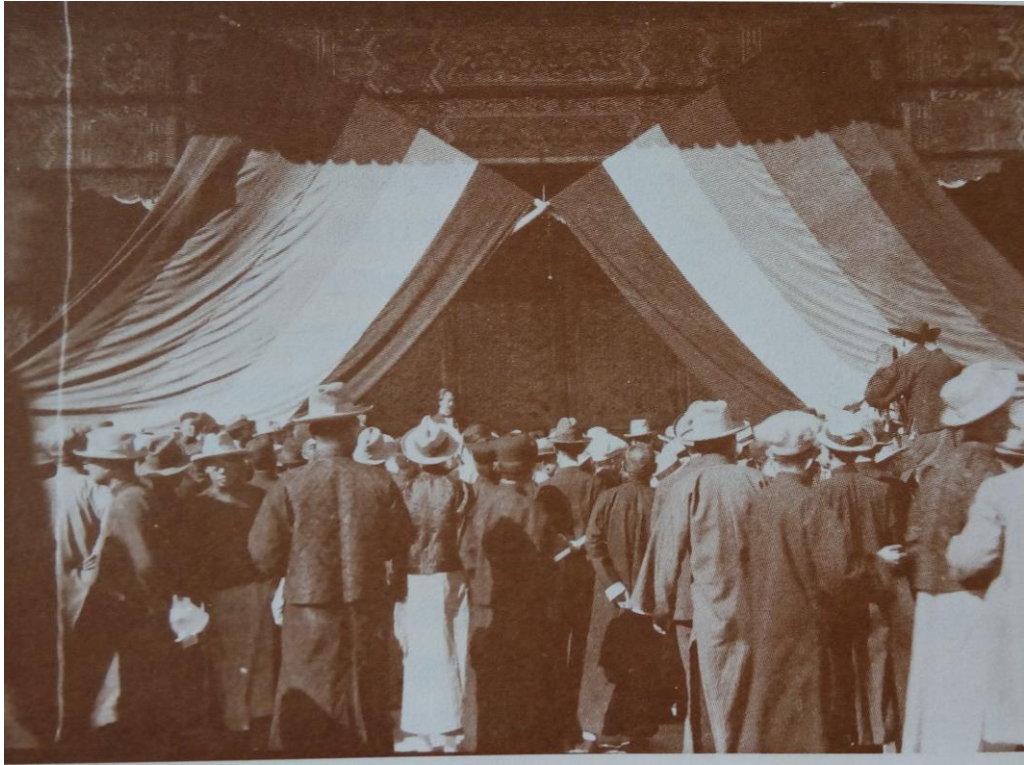


Figure 20. Opening ceremony in Qian Qing gate at 2pm 10th October 1925 (Zhou: 170)



Figure 21. Crowds of visitors at Zun Yi Gate on the opening day of the Forbidden City, 10th October 1925
(Zheng: 3)

The cultural and historical value of the Forbidden City³² has remained protected from several conflicts between Chinese political parties as well as from foreign invasions. In the first half of the twentieth century, the space of the Forbidden City was rather quiet with common bodies enjoying their ability to fully explore the space, even while so much political turmoil and military strikes were happening outside the Forbidden City in Beijing. The space of the Forbidden City uses its cultural residues to connect bodies, space and time, and works as a portal to allow bodies to travel within their own memories. Bodies, which have lived through the period of transition of the Forbidden City, find themselves in cultural consonance with the space so much so that every corner and detail of the space makes perfect sense to them, but manifested in a way they had never imagined – an exquisite taste of the culture that only the emperors could have had in the past.

The space of the Forbidden City is full of rumours and stories as it was closed to the public. Common bodies could only hear a word or two from time to time, discontinuous and incomplete, which made the spaces seem even more mysterious and fascinating especially when the bodies could physically and visually discover if the scenes they could finally experience in any way matched their memories. The buildings are still there, but men are no longer the same ones. On 10th October 1925, common people dressed in western styles could finally explore the space in wonderment as part of a large crowd on the opening day. These bodily experiences create a sense of travelling back in time, travelling in the memory of the space. The historical traces, became memories of the space, accompanied with unanswered questions, and moved the bodies from one corner to another, creating a cultural impact on the assembled bodies.

The body of the Red Guards and the ‘Cultural Revolution’

The Forbidden City was no longer the centre of the ruling class and would have stayed as a historical monument, just like other historical heritages sites³³ in Beijing; however, the ‘Cultural Revolution’ happened. As the western world approached the end of Modernism, China had the ‘Cultural Revolution’ between May 1966 and October 1976, as an extreme version of the modernist tendency to reject tradition. The central themes of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ were to explode ‘old thought’, ‘old culture’, ‘old custom’, and ‘old habit’³⁴. During this time, the Forbidden City became an immediate target, not only because it was considered to have cultural significance outside of its historical relevance, but also because it commemorated an obsolete Feudalist culture and its implication of Confucianism.

³² For a further discussion on this, please refer to Zheng Xinmiao’s “故宫的价值与地位” (The cultural and historical value of the Forbidden City) (Zheng 2008).

³³ Other historical heritage sites in Beijing included: the Great Wall, the Ming Tombs, the Summer Palace, and so on.

³⁴ The slogan came out first in an article titled “横扫一切牛鬼蛇神” (To get rid of evil people of all kinds) in *People’s Daily* (1/6/1966): “...To get rid off all the old thought, old culture, old custom, old habit that come from exploiting classes poisoning people over thousands of years...”

With the establishment of the communist party, Marxism became the dominant ideology across the country, an ideology that was supposed to emphasise the concept of democracy and science.³⁵ Some Confucian values, however, contradicted Marxism, causing dissensions, and resulted in it becoming the target of the ‘Cultural Revolution’. For instance, the concept of ‘Li’ in Confucianism was commonly interpreted as absolute in constructing the hierarchy in society by putting everyone into fixed positions in terms of filiations and monarch-subject relations. In the hierarchical society, everyone must be faithful to the people positioned above them and be kind-hearted to the people below. This absolute ethics-driven society caused personal oppression and mental torture that restricted the way of thinking and way of life, and became resistant to social development particularly in science and technology. Therefore, it received fierce criticisms from Chinese Marxists during the early period of new China.

The concept of ‘Li’ was also in conflict with the values of the Marxists in China who believed that the proletariat should be the ones in charge of the country. The conflict between the two ideologies lasted only a short period. Confucianism diminished quickly as its political support – the Feudal system – had collapsed beforehand. However, during the early period of new China, even though Confucianism was abandoned without any hesitation, the original concept of democracy and the right of proletariat in Marxism was miscarried, too. Instead, the Chinese vision of communism and the personality cult of Chairman Mao, which were both driven by political purpose, became the ideology of the nation, which marked an immediate return of a new vision of ‘Li’ and its hierarchy in modern China society. The Chinese vision of Communism in its early stage was a facelift of Confucianism, which the nation’s political beliefs largely remained, and the ‘official standard’ (nature of bureaucracy) underneath the name of ‘Marxism’ had little to do with the economy, not to mention the precise and delicate logic of Marxist thought. This nature of bureaucracy has resulted in a nation that always appreciates and sometimes exaggerates the role of man in history.

There were perhaps two reasons which caused Confucianism to rapidly deteriorate. Firstly, this ideology was convicted as a part of an eroded Feudalism that was responsible for several significant historical events which undermined the nation in the past century, such as the signing of the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*³⁶ in 1894 after losing the war to Japanese. The nation had suffered and been frustrated by the repeated defeats in international wars for over a century and was desperately looking for solutions. The Feudal government and its official ideology logically became the target.

³⁵ As I will discuss in Chapter Three, there is a parallel between Maoism, and Confucianism being declared as the official/national ideology in China.

³⁶ The treaty ended the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 as a clear victory for Japan. There were Five Articles in the treaty: China recognises the full and complete independence and autonomy of Korea; China cedes to Japan in perpetuity the full sovereignty of the Penghu islands, Taiwan and the eastern portion of the bay of Liaodong Peninsula together with all fortifications, arsenals and public property; China agrees to pay to Japan as a war indemnity the sum of 200,000,000 Kuping taels (worth billions in today’s dollar); and so on. Please see: (Hare; Sedwick; Cheng & Lestz). The impact of the great defeat to Japan is still felt by the common people in China, with a sense of patriotic duty rising against Japan in recent years, such as the tension in the South China Sea.

Secondly, due to the ‘political habit/inertia’³⁷ inherited from the Feudal political system, people were always looking for an appropriate individual ‘master/householder’ to lead them out of the chaos,³⁸ rather than a reasonable political system. Understandably, the nation’s political nature of dependency inevitably accelerated the perishing of Confucianism and its substitution by Maoism. The phenomenon of the personality cult of Chairman Mao demonstrated the perception that Mao/Maoism was simply ‘more appropriate’ and greater than Confucius/Confucianism. In addition, common people did not have access to the original Marxism or the concept of Communism due to the unstable social environment and illiteracy; instead, people could only receive all information second hand through the slogan – the re-interpreted messages from the Chinese Communist party which were heavily politicised.³⁹

Although Confucianism was an ideology that had lasted for more than 2000 years in China, it was officially abandoned within days, which raised the question of whether the abandonment was reasonable. Some political manifestations undercored the interrelationship between Confucianism and Maoism in the early period of new China. For example, one of political strategies used by the communist party to expedite Confucianism’s decline was to create a unified political voice across the country. The unified political voice was achieved through extensive propaganda, which created enormous political pressure on every individual in the society who had to side with the party. Specifically, Confucianism had to be criticised in all circumstances so as to avoid being singled out and considered backward.⁴⁰ Interestingly, this political strategy initially stemmed from Confucianism: “individuals should be amenable to the collective (mainstream),” (*From Confucianism to Collectivism*) which implied the potential consequences an individual may suffer in Chinese politics if he/she was politically contrary to the majority. This idea was adopted as part of Confucian values by the Feudal ruling class to maintain its political domination. And it was ironically used against Confucianism by the communist party to accelerate the downfall of Confucianism to reinforce its own political domination during the ‘Cultural Revolution’. In this sense, Confucianism was not abandoned completely, but rather it went underneath the name of ‘Maoism’ or ‘Chinese Communism’ in response to the world undergoing modernisation.

The notification announced by the central government on 16th May 1966 marked the beginning of the ‘Cultural Revolution’. Beginning on that day, destructive and anti-social behaviours were carried out,⁴¹ and the momentum of the movement developed

³⁷ During Feudal China, talented people were selected into government through the examination system to govern the country along with emperors, which made the governments dynamic and creative. In contrast, the illiterate majority were locked into the regulations that gave them limited scope to think and do, leaving them little alternative but to follow. Because of this tradition, common people were always wishing to have enlightened emperors and officials who could solve every problem for them.

³⁸ The nation had chosen several leaders with different ideologies before Mao and his Chinese version of Communism, however, all of them failed. An example is Sun Zhong Shan’s Nationalism

³⁹ View the Party’s latest propaganda film on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9MI8NpEx-s>

⁴⁰ The unified political voice was also used to express how much individuals love Chairman Mao in meetings at all levels, and so on.

⁴¹ For example: Red Guards had destroyed 45 Lama Temples, and buried around 680,000 religious texts and

quickly. On 18th August 1966, Chairman Mao and Lin Biao⁴² granted the first interview to the Red Guards at Tian An Men Square to acknowledge their role in the movement. The Red Guards were constituted by ‘left’ wing politicians and party members as well as pre-members who became even more unscrupulous after the previous behaviours were accepted and encouraged by the greatest leader Mao. On the next day, in the morning after the interview with Chairman Mao in the square, groups of Red Guards appeared at the front of the Forbidden City shouting the slogan ‘abandon Four Olds’⁴³ and asked staff to open the gates so they could get in to strike, smash and burn the Forbidden City, which was seen as symbolic of the Four Olds. The gates were firmly shut as the staff had received the information from Premier Zhou⁴⁴ beforehand, whose decision saved the Forbidden City then.



Figure 22. Destroyed religious articles in the front yard of Da Zhao Temple during ‘Cultural Revolution’, Tibet. This image indicates the level of destructiveness carried out by the Red Guard during the movement and implies the possible catastrophe to the Forbidden City if they got in.⁴⁵

artifacts in August in Qinghai province.

⁴² Lin Biao (5 December 1907 – 13 September 1971) was a major Chinese Communist military leader who was pivotal in the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, especially in Northeastern China. Lin abstained from taking an active role in politics after the civil war, but became instrumental in creating the foundations for Mao Zedong’s cult of personality in the early 1960s. Lin was rewarded for his service to Mao by being named Mao’s designated successor during the ‘Cultural Revolution’, from 1966 until his death.

⁴³ Four Olds: ‘old thought’, ‘old culture’, ‘old custom’, and ‘old habit’.

⁴⁴ Zhou Enlai (5 March 1898 – 8 January 1976) was the first Premier of the People’s Republic of China, serving from October 1949 until his death in January 1976. Zhou served under Mao Zedong and was instrumental in consolidating the control of the Communist Party’s rise to power, forming foreign policy, and developing the Chinese economy.

⁴⁵ Such activities are also understood as iconoclasm against idolatry and W. J. Thomas notes there is a symmetry between iconoclasm and idolatry in which “acts of ‘creative destruction’ (spectacular annihilation or disfigurement) create ‘secondary images’ that are, in their way, forms of idolatry just as potent as the primary idols they seek to displace” (Thomas: 21).

The first interview with the Red Guard granted by Chairman Mao can be seen as a gathering driven by political purpose. It was a political stratagem that had a long history in Feudal periods. The political ritual always took place before significant movements to stimulate morale and justify the purpose *and* after the movements to acknowledge the achievement and look forward into the future. By deploying the same concept from Feudal times at the first interview, Chairman Mao was not only complimenting people in the sense of acknowledging their past achievements and proposing expectation on them for the future, but also seeking to “distribute subjects [people] onto a bureaucratic grid for the purpose of specification and judgment” (Anagost: 133-134). The gathering keyed the movement and purified the people within. Fueled by Mao’s personal popularity, the gathering defined the movement in political correction and cultural heritage *and* glorified people’s contribution in the movement in a dualistic point of view that fixed everyone to the same political position along with the ruling class. This gathering made a singular impression on everyone, who subsequently had no second thoughts and waited for further instruction from the ruling class, which was exactly what the ruling class needed in order to develop the social movement into a bigger scale.

In comparison with the Confucius rituals from Feudal period, the political gathering on Tian An Men square on the 18th of August 1966 marked the return of ‘Li’ and its hierarchy in its communist vision. In terms of governing the country, the concept of ‘Li’, which educated people to ‘be loyal to the emperors⁴⁶, and defend against invasion regardless’, was inherited by the communist party in the form of the vision ‘to be loyal to Chair Mao only and defend all kind of invasions such as thoughts and cultural invasions’. Therefore, the gathering at Tian An Men Square was no different to any one of the Feudal rituals where people expressed their loyalty to emperors/masters and emperors/masters reinforced their power over the people. Soon enough after the ‘ritual’, the ‘Cultural Revolution’ spread extensively and drastically onto the ‘enemies’ who were subjectively labelled as ‘old thought’, ‘old culture’, ‘old custom’ and ‘old habit’. The ‘Cultural Revolution’, as a perspective, partly started from an individual’s (Mao’s) fears that the fruit of the revolution of new China may be seriously threatened, and subsequently became a political movement under the name of culture.

Given Chairman Mao’s extraordinary success in terms of his leadership during the Second World War and Civil war, there was no doubt that his popularity during his time was just like every founding emperor in history. The radical personality cult of Chairman Mao made every Red Guard on the square quickly and comfortably match up to their glorified title as ‘advanced communist’ and be loyal to Chairman Mao against the people with ‘Four Olds’. The scene validated what the *Confucian Analects* (453-221 B.C.) state: “the emperor should treat officials [the Red Guards] with ‘Li’, officials [the Red Guards] should return with loyalty”. The interview granted with the

⁴⁶ Confucius said: “the emperor should treat officials with ‘Li’, officials should return with loyalty” 君使臣以礼,臣事君以忠. *Confucian Analects*. James Legge, 1893. Retrieved from: http://www.cnculture.net/ebook/jing/sishu/lunyu_en/

Red Guards at Tian An Men square was seen as ‘Li’ given by Chairman Mao; in turn, the Red Guards needed to reciprocate with loyalty in pushing forward with the radical activities to new levels. Once again, the political values of Confucianism in hierarchical terms re-appeared again; this time, under the name of Maoism.

Furthermore, by giving the movement or the people a name, the ‘Cultural Revolution’ and the Red Guard respectively in this case, the “bestowal of status honours...[and] demonstrates the power of the state [the communist party] to define discursive positions in political culture through its classificatory strategies – its power to name and to sort persons into the hierarchically arranged categories of a moral order” (Anagost: 133-134). Naming, as a part of the political rituals during the Feudal period, re-appeared in Mao’s period. In the *Confucian Analects*, Confucius pointed out the first thing needed to be done in terms of administering the government is: “to rectify names”⁴⁷, or naming. Confucius suggested that every political movement needs to be named first (well-reasoned), so that the subsequent activities carried out under its name (reason) are justifiable and reasonable, and to ensure that the outcome of the movement will be politically legitimate, morally justifiable, and culturally acceptable. The political act of naming, by the communist party, was no different to the Feudal period. It strongly displayed the political nature of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ – a ‘revolution’ that started from the top (to name) to the bottom (to whom are named) – and also demonstrated the extraordinary capacity of the bodies in its adaptation of these ‘gloried’ abstract names/concepts. The power to name the bodies and their movement is the power to grant license to the actions taken by the bodies in the movement to be free from consequences. By not imposing any restrictions, the bodies were certainly endowed with more destructive powers in the movement, not only resulting in drastic physical actions as there was nothing worth doing except ‘revolution’, but also causing aggressive cultural violence as the target of the ‘revolution’ is the abstract concept of ‘old cultures’. Hence, a competition of being extreme starts among radicals who believed in, or were brain-washed into, obtaining a ‘better world’ overnight through revolution, but they had already lost the war in the first place.⁴⁸

A group of Red Guards gathered and walked along the exterior wall of the Forbidden City, attempting to get in through one of those gates. They stopped at Shen Wu Gate, approximately 30 cm thick and firmly shut, as they saw a few human figures on the wall. In a number of hours, the confrontation became intensified between the Red Guards and the staff who kept telling them to go home from above the 12 meter-high wall (the wall is 10 meters thick at the bottom and 6 to 7 meters thick at the top). These young bodies were dressed in green uniforms, with two red clips in the shape of a star attached – one clipped on the front of the hat, the other on the chest – and the shoulder

⁴⁷ Confucius: Book XIII: Zi-Lu 名不正则言不顺，言不顺则事不成。 (If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success) *Confucian Analects*. James Legge, 1893.

⁴⁸ Such circumstance is omnipresent in human history, such as the French Revolution, which reflects the importance of being conservative which is, in essence, against the ideology of having a better world overnight through revolution in terms of balance in politics.

straps were in red as well, without any official insignia displayed. Everybody wore a flat bag with one strap on the shoulder across their chest, displaying the slogan 'serve the people' printed on the bag, plus a badge with Mao's head on it. The words 'Red Guards' were clearly printed on their armbands in red as well. As they yelled slogans, their arms waved in the air, holding a little red book in their hands, which contained published quotations from Chairman Mao.

The scene was rather beautiful in terms of colour, yet surreal in its social content. From above, the morning sun slanted down the flat yellowing ground textured with the irregular shapes of pebbles; on the ground, a crowd of shuffling bodies appear like a flesh-coloured cloud, with specks of gleaming redness, partly hidden and partly visible against the background of green uniforms. The impression of this visually perceived scene was not extraordinary, until complemented by the bodies' energetic voices, yelling the quotations from Chairman Mao, filtered into the air to show the social political content of the scene. The sound allows this visually-not-extraordinary-scene to be immediately perceived as socially intensive, which is reconfirmed by the details of the dressing style, which might have been easily overlooked in the first place, like the red stars, indicating that this is a social and political demonstration. Acting as a collective body, these physical bodies set the space as their hypothetical enemy. By approaching the space from a particular social angle, the bodies were motivated by a singular political and cultural mission, which they communicated through their physical actions and reactions on the surface, and cultural determinations underneath. The physical bodies were captured with strong visual impact which I will detail below, however the cultural bodies were perceived even more aggressively and drastically under the influence of Mao, saturating into the atmosphere and dominating the scene. The cultural bodies redefine the scene with their cultural embodiment, which goes much further beyond the impact of physical bodies.

Following French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, "'Nature' itself, as apprehended in social life by the sense organs, has been modified" (Lefebvre: 68). The physical space was no longer 'nature' or neutral after it was perceived by body senses in social content. For example, the morning sun was brighter than it was in the minds of the Red Guards as they were carrying out a 'honoured' mission; but, at the same time, the morning sun was dimmer than it was in the minds of the staff who were looking down from the high wall and stressed out by the scene below. The physical scene may have its own independent meaning; in this case, however, I will focus on the bodies in terms of their physical actions and cultural embodiment, which reflect the space from that particular perspective. For example, the actions of groups of bodies, which teamed up, dressed same, and roved from one gate to another, construct a kind of tension between these bodies and the space. Their bodily actions, embedded with cultural meaning, produced a certain social atmosphere, which made the physical space socialised and culturalised.⁴⁹ With this tension saturating the space, the cultural

⁴⁹ In Hegelian terms, "...humans as social beings...produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world..." (Lefebvre: 68).

bodies were foregrounded over the physical bodies and the cultural/social space dominated the physical scene. The tension, seen as social production, was produced from the bodies and intensified through grouped bodily activities.

After they realised the gate was shut before they arrived, the Red Guards took a few steps backwards, looking for clues after they could not push the gate open. One of these bodies caught sight of figures moving on the wall and updated the rest as the information quickly passed around. One of these bodies took a few more steps backward to find the best angle to observe the situation on the wall without tiring his neck by raising his head for too long. This action was immediately observed and copied by everybody else in just a few seconds, as “imitating is natural instinct” (Le Bon: 111) noted by French sociologist Gustave Le Bon. As these bodies shuffled around to get the best view, they always stayed together, just like a school of fish, discussing why the gate was shut, in whispers. One of these bodies recognised the situation and started shouting to the staff on the wall, asking them to open the gate. Once again, this behaviour was followed by the rest of the bodies in variable volumes. Some of these bodies were shouting, waving their hands, jumping to see better, or looking around with caution. This phenomenon in the space indicated that every body in the group was having the same sentiment and could be interpreted as depersonalised because they were all doing the same actions (Le Bon: 3). Group behaviours were formed, but driven only by the cultural body, in this intense cultural space.

After the fortified demands lasted for a while without any positive response, it escalated. One of these bodies sneaked out of the group and walked toward the gate. He extended his hand to touch this gate, which was hundreds of years old and felt cold, tough, and heavy, as he pushed and pulled using his bare hands to attempt to open it. His actions attracted a couple of other bodies’ attention, too, who left the group to follow him, and they all ended up banging and kicking the gate with “impulsion, mutability, and impatience”⁵⁰ (Le Bon: 20). After a while, the bodies were hyper in moving back and forth between the gate and their group in this approximately 20 square meters space, forcefully occupying and interrogating the space with their variable physical actions on the surface and unified cultural commitment underneath.

Even though they understood that their effort to open the gate was useless, they kept doing it and the purpose of the actions changed from opening the gate through their physical power to demonstrating their cultural and political commitment as ‘advanced communists’ and loyalists to Chairman Mao. In other words, the cultural and political commitment for every body to take a part in the actions became more important than the original purpose of the action, not only in this case, but also more widely as the phenomena spread to every corner in China during the ‘Cultural Revolution’, which, in my opinion, was a type of national-wide group behaviour on an enormous scale

⁵⁰ For further comments on group behaviours – such as: “Brain function is at a standstill in group behaviours...Group behaviours are completely under the stimulation of spinal nerve as an instinctual responses” – please see *A Study of the Popular Mind* (Le Bon: 20).

lasting over a decade. In this sense, the cultural bodies were more foregrounded/prominent than the physical bodies; the cultural space dominated the physical scene. The bodies set themselves against the gate, and the physical experience of bruises and pain the bodies received when they were kicking the gate was overlooked, as these bodies were so caught up in the cultural commitment of the actions in the space. In a parallel discussion, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Norman Doidge notes in one of his case studies that a body with similar injuries feels less pain in the battlefield than in everyday life, from the perspective of neuroplasticity⁵¹ as "...neuroplasticity contributes to both the constrained and unconstrained aspects of our nature" (Doidge: 318). Perhaps how the brain initially decides to feel the pain in either a constrained or unconstrained way is largely up to the perspective of the cultural body. There are many examples of similar battlefield stories from recent wars in China's history, such as scenarios in which prisoners of war did not cooperate to divulge secrets till afflicted to death in a torture chamber by enemies. I assume the prisoners would feel relatively less pain in a torture chamber than in everyday life circumstances, not only because of Doidge's observation in terms of neuroplasticity, but also the prominence of the cultural body in the scene. For example, the torture was brutal and inhumane during the Japanese invasion (1938-1945), which has been documented in videos and photography. The scenario of war prisoners being tortured can be perhaps understood as the cultural body of captured communists temporarily dominating their physical body to withstand the unbearable pain. Moreover the body of captured communists could perceive the physical scene of the torture chamber as a subjective cultural space, which served as a platform to irrationally demonstrate their loyalty to their cultural and political beliefs, in order to overcome the torture on their physical body. This may explain how in some situations the captured body does not express any fear during torture, but rather becomes furious and aggressive toward the enemy, while clearly understanding such behaviours can only cause the physical body to meet with harsher punishment.

After several hours, their physical bodies became exhausted from such intensive actions driven by their cultural bodies, and so they retreated, as their cultural bodies were constrained by their physical limitation, while still chanting quotations from Chairman Mao in a tired and hoarse voice. The gate was left with punch and kick marks and scratches on its lower part, and haphazard footprints in front of it that highlighted this specific moment in history.

The behaviour of these bodies in contravention of 'Li' in Confucianism and Feudal laws was overwhelmingly actualised during the period of 'Cultural Revolution' in New China. Within a few hours, those bodies thought that they lifted themselves from the bottom of the hierarchy of 'Li' to the top in terms of experiencing and abusing the royal space as the symbol of Confucianism. However, the destructive activities were not their political goal as the Feudal system and Confucianism were no longer the top

⁵¹ Neuroplasticity refers to changes in neural pathways and synapses due to changes in behavior, environment, neural processes, thinking, emotions, and to changes resulting from bodily injury.

of the social hierarchy then, rather the destructive activities represented the achievements of the Red Guards as they rose to the top of the social hierarchy, to show their loyalty, and to worship their new masters during the early period of New China. The destructive activities were licensed by the leading class and conducted under the name of “political turnaround to be leading class” (Xiong), noted by writer Xiong Feijun. The social system has changed since 1949, yet the Red Guards, as ordinary people in this case, remained at the bottom of society politically and culturally. Their political and cultural positions were cast in terms of a dependency, as they were required to act and always push every action to extremes in order to show not only their fawning loyalty, but also the desire for stronger power. The Red Guards did not have the option to fulfil their cultural and political purpose by working their way up through the imperial examination as it was long gone, consequently they chose to take a chance through extreme action in a political movement.

The marble statues of Chairman Mao superseded the ones of Confucius and they were rapidly erected across the country. The *Little Red Book* substituted the *Confucian Analects* and every family/individual possessed a copy. However, the way of thinking and way of life remained the same as bodies are historically inherited and culturally embodied beings, with Marxism spreading widely across the country in name only. It reflects how Marxism, in its original form, was seen as a borrowed alien concept implemented in Chinese society, and it had to be significantly simplified and modified in order to be understood by the existing culture and its people. It seems that the cultural body can decide which part of the novelty can be accepted, rather than wholly absorbing the policy because the expected impact of the implementation is compromised when it contradicts the continuity of people’s cultural taste.

In the scene depicted above, the space, retired from its political role in the Feudal time, was unilaterally dragged into a conflict by the actions and reactions of the bodies of Red Guards in modern time, which made the whole scene surreal. In a sense, the bodies of the Red Guards were under the delusion that they were going to replace the emperor in the modern time. The gates, the space and the entire Forbidden City were subsequently shut for five years until the 5th of July 1971.

It is useful to sum up the discussion so far by comparing and contrasting the bodies of eunuchs and Red Guards in association with the space. While the bodies of eunuchs in Feudal times underwent countless trials and tribulations to hone their social skills, the bodies of Red Guards had the vain hope to gain instant wealth and better social position through radical and drastic political movement. However, not many Red Guards made their way up after the ‘Cultural Revolution’, and their inhumane behaviours⁵² have been heavily criticised by the society after Mao’s period. Although, the bodies of Red

⁵² In some cases, the Red Guards abused their school teachers to death. The latter were wrongly accused as complicit in the “Four Olds”. The ‘misbehaviours’ of their family members were reported to the authorities. Ethics and family values, which were considered the most important values in this nation, were abandoned and meant nothing to the bodies of Red Guards.

Guard did not have to castrate themselves to be considered appropriate bodies to serve Chairman Mao, they had to be emotionally frenzied in order to provoke their physical bodies toward radical activities. Thereafter, some Red Guards were disgusted with themselves, which is the price the bodies paid for their destructive approach to the space of the Forbidden City as well as their role in the ‘Cultural Revolution’.

In the past decade, millions of people have visited the space every year. The relationship between bodies and the space has shifted again. In the next section, I use my own body as the vehicle to interrogate the space by obtaining first-hand bodily experience from my recent visits to the Forbidden City, and coming to terms with the price my body has paid for experiencing the space in contemporary times.

1.4 My Body in the Forbidden City

When I was growing up in Beijing during the 1980s and 1990s, I experienced changes in economic and social life in terms of reform and open policies taking place in China. Along with the remarkable economic boom in the first decade of the 21st century, Confucianism has regained its popularity in Chinese studies in China after almost a century of its abolishment, and is seen as very important part of intangible national cultural heritage. The political purpose behind the return of Confucianism, along with large numbers of Confucius schools established across the world, is to consolidate China's cultural impact in the world alongside its economic success. During this resurgence, Confucianism and its values are being thoughtfully re-examined and historically re-judged in relation to contemporary issues in recent years which, in turn, makes me re-consider my own bodily experience in the Forbidden City with a reflexive awareness of Confucianism. As a representation of Chinese ancient architecture and social beliefs, the Forbidden City, through its layout and building materials, provides a strong contrast amidst the hundreds and thousands of modern steel and glass skyscrapers in Beijing. I have always appreciated the design, concept and skills apparent in the creation of the historic buildings. Every corner of the site is associated with Chinese culture and its traditions, which can be interpreted through Confucian values that contribute to a holistic image of the nation. And every time I am in the space, my body responds to the culture that resonates within the atmosphere in a silent but vibrant way.



Figure 23. The aged space and its shade, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

There is a strong connection between the private courtyard of the emperor and the courtyard where I grew up in the 1980s in Beijing – a typical traditional quadrangle courtyard that shares the same concept as the one in the Forbidden City. My block was a rectangular shape and houses were built along each side that left the centre space empty and all the entries of the rooms faced onto this central yard. The rooms were of different sizes as they were initially meant to be used for different purposes or by people with different roles in the family. Given the overcrowded population in China during my childhood, three or four families shared one quadrangle that was originally built for only one family in Feudal times. As a result, some parts of the courtyard had to be restructured to cope with the need for independence and privacy for each family. This style of living continued until the recent decade of economic boom, when the land was taken by the local council for city re-planning and everyone had to move into high-rise apartments. My family was no exception. All I am left with are childhood memories. The old mud brick walls and rooms, the tree which was hundreds of years old in the yard that provided nice shade during summer, and the cooking smells from other families that seeped across the yard, are now all gone due to this contemporary urban planning.

During my childhood, I occasionally visited the Forbidden City and was attracted by the emperor's private living courtyard, not only because it had a more complex layout, but also I was amazed by the lavish decor, such as the detailed paintings on the partitions, the solid wood furniture with dragons on it next to the windows, the vivid colour of the vase on the table; in every aspect, it was a much better and higher standard of living than my own. The layout of the buildings and the decoration of the rooms were familiar to me, but much more sophisticated, so I always compared my own little place and imagined what my home might have looked like before it was subdivided for more families to live in.

One particular bodily experience of that space resurfaces when, as an adult, I revisit those quadrangle courtyards located at the living area of the Forbidden City. By wandering through the groups of quadrangles – in particular, the numerous central yards – I become alert. It is an open space with sunlight and fresh air; however, the yards are enclosed tightly by houses, incised by paths from the doorways, subdivided and occupied by plants, trees and rockeries. Everything has its own place, their own roles to play in this well-planned space which makes this open space seem enclosed and intensified so that even the air seems heavy with stasis. My perceptions in the central yard sensed through organs construct my own world as Lefebvre comments: "... the (absolute) Idea produce the world... the human being, by dint of struggle and labour, produces at once history, knowledge and self-consciousness – and hence that [human] Mind...reproduces...Idea" (Lefebvre: 68). I brought my body filled with life experience, fully equipped with history, knowledge and self-consciousness, into the central yard to continue its experience within the space, to produce ideas that reinforce the physical and cultural experience, and create understandings about the space of my

very own.



Figure 24. Exploring courtyards, 2012, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 25. Exploring courtyards, 2012, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 26. Exploring courtyards, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

The formal layout leaves me feeling like a stranger intruding into the space but with no alternative other than to cross the territory. The space should seem amiable and friendly to me as I am familiar with the layout, the material, and the decoration; however, I feel discomfort, even a bit anxious, as though I am being ‘watched.’ All those happy childhood memories associated with the space flash back but they do not help me to cope with my anxiety. Rather I question the authenticity of my own memory. The space provokes my physical body as it is experienced through my cultural position. Where I am standing was the emperor’s living courtyard. Regardless of how similar it is to my childhood home, my cultural body feels it does not belong in the space because I am an ordinary person, not an emperor. I feel the odd sense that my cultural body is still being partly dominated and influenced by the old Feudal ideology. In other words, the Feudal social/cultural relationship between the body of emperors and me as an ordinary body is provoked while my cultural body is perceiving the central yard, which is reflective of the impact of the space upon my cultural body, feeling ambiguous and twisted, a mismatching in time. Mencius⁵³ (372-289 B.C.) defines the Feudal social/cultural relationship between the body of emperors and the body of ordinaries as follows: “people are the most, followed by state, the emperor of light”, which indicates the people-centric idea that the emperors are supposed to approach ordinary bodies directly through consulting ordinary people. However, this ideal relationship was overlooked by most of the emperors during Feudal times because the amended

⁵³ Mencius, also known by his birth name Meng Ke or Ko, was born in the State of Zou. He was an itinerant Chinese philosopher and sage, and one of the principal interpreters of Confucianism.

Confucianism had already trained the ordinaries into a docile body. The only time the power of emperors were delimited, admittedly to a small extent only, was in the form of the rituals and ceremonies held every year in which the emperors report to the gods about their achievements in governing and wish for a bumper harvest year ahead for the agricultural nation. Other than that, there was no actual oversight on the power of the emperors in the imperial system. Moreover, spirituality did not play much of a role in everyday life, as the essence of Confucianism's main ideology was "humanism" (Fingarette: 2) concerning this world and the family, rather than God or afterlife, which ultimately liberated the body of emperors from the fear of karma and the supernatural, and did the same to ordinary bodies as well. Consequently, without fear or respect as a means to seek leverage from the gods, Confucian bodies only considered the political relationship between people⁵⁴ so much so that inordinate desires for power and materialism spread, which, in turn, inscribed the nation with a sense of political centredness.

On one hand, Confucian emphasis on humanism disciplined ordinaries into a docile body; on the other hand, it inevitably downplayed the mythical aspects of the body of emperors, resulting in doggerel on the street, such as "皇帝轮流做，明年到我家"⁵⁵ (Every dog has its day and my turn is coming by the next year). Such language reflected a common idea among the ordinaries that anyone can substitute the tyrannical emperor. This resulted in the *Da Ze Xiang* uprising in 209 B.C.⁵⁶ due to unbearable burden, for example. Peasant uprisings expressing the idea of revolt were supported through violence and the victors from the wars subsequently became the new rulers representing people's will.

Without genuine concern and consultation as a healthy way to sustain the relationship between the body of the emperors and the body of ordinaries, the Feudal government had to maintain its domination through harsh punishment and rigid social hierarchy, which resulted in class contradictions between the rulers and the ruled. The harsh punishment and rigid social hierarchy created an enormous amount of fear in individual ordinaries that was not rooted in the fear of God or the afterlife, but nonetheless strangled the creative drive of the nation at same time. There were insufficient ways for ordinary people to voice their opinions in the Feudal system after the grand unification by each dynasty.⁵⁷ A more consultative relationship only appeared occasionally during the period of governing by enlightened officials which eased the tension between the body of the emperors and the body of ordinaries; however, rigid social hierarchy was always the main theme. Hence, a historical pattern

⁵⁴ In my opinion, other civilisations that focus on the relationship between people and God (for example, India), or between people and Object (for example, Europe), have deliberately misread Confucianism by the Feudal ruling powers as one of the contributors that led Chinese society into a rigid hierarchy and 'bureaucratic centred' nation.

⁵⁵ Wu Cheng En. 西游记 第七回

⁵⁶ Si Ma Qian (145/135-86 B.C.), *Shi Ji* 召令徒属曰：“公等遇雨，皆已失期，失期当斩。藉弟令毋斩，而戍死者固十六七。且壮士不死即已，死即举大名耳，王侯将相宁有种乎！”徒属皆曰：“敬受命。”

⁵⁷ Examples include: Tang (618-907 A.D.), Song (960-1279 A.D.), Yuan (1271-1368 A.D.), Ming (1368-1644 A.D.), and Qing (1626-1911 A.D.).

emerged wherein the longer the dynasty lasted, the more rigid the social hierarchy became, and the greater the revolution that inevitably occurred at the end. The political proposition of Confucianism concerning the relationship between the emperors and ordinaries was idealistic in the Feudal system. Nevertheless, as I wander about in that same physical space, the awareness of its history causes a paradoxical affect on my body by imagining a social relationship with the body of the emperor, which is physically absent but culturally present, resulting in my feeling that the central yards are at once familiar yet strange, and welcoming but exclusionary at the same time.



Figure 27. Corners of courtyards with endless doors within doors in the Forbidden City, 2012, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 28. Corners of courtyards with seemingly endless doors within doors in the Forbidden City, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

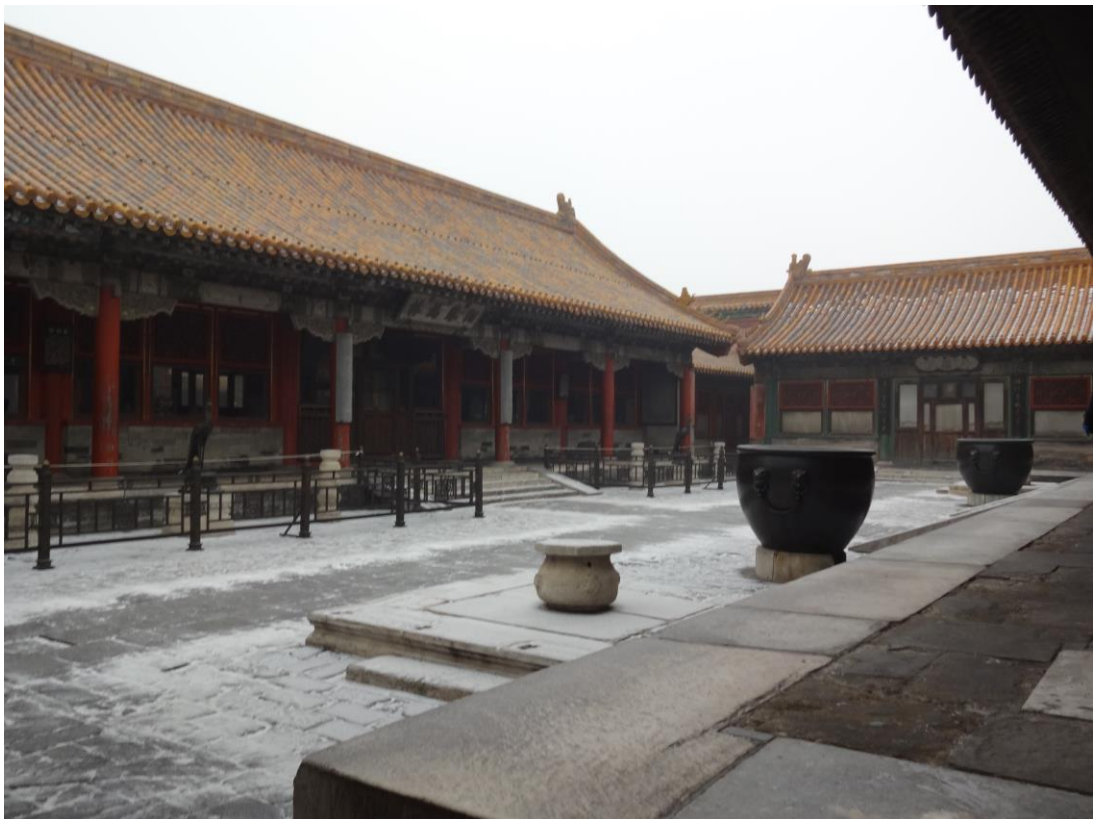


Figure 29. Courtyard formed by houses with two bronze water vats normally placed near houses in case of fire.

According to *Da Qing Hui Dian* (大清会典), there are 308 water vats made from iron, bronze and gilding bronze located in different courtyards according to differing social positions, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

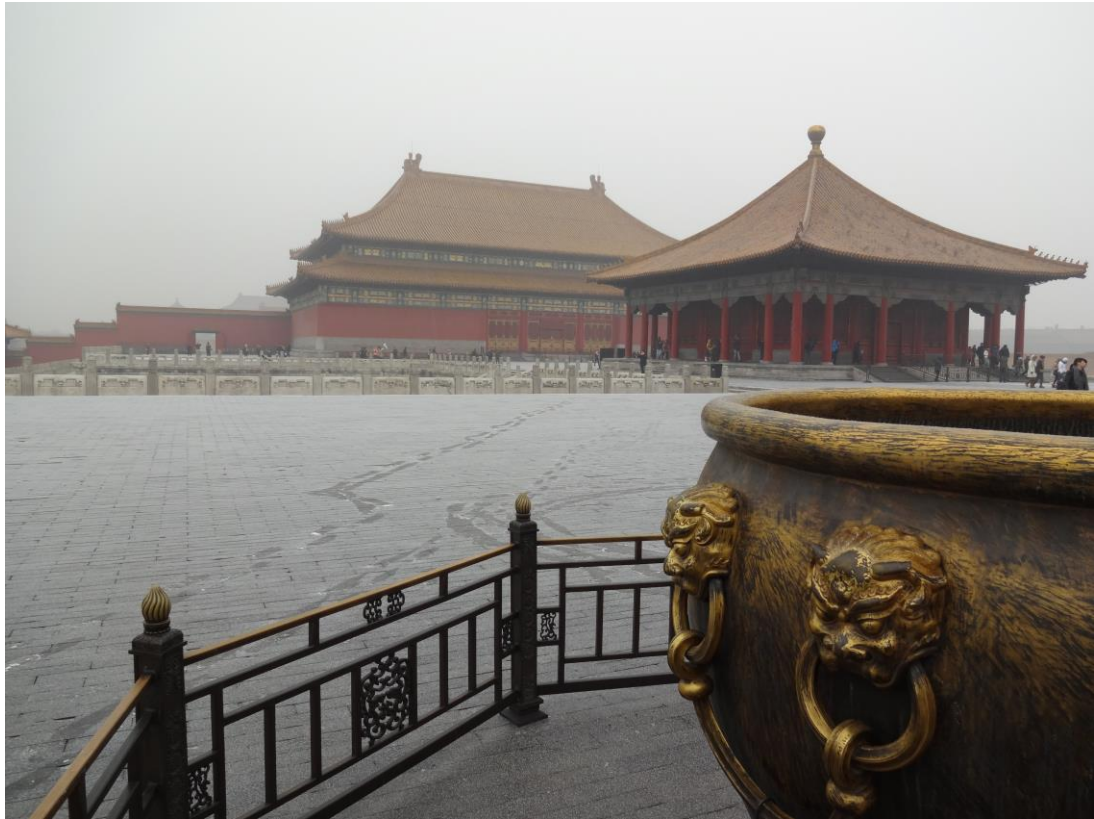


Figure 30. One of gilding bronze water vats behind the Tai He Dian with the scratches made by the Eight-Power Allied Forces during the invasion in 1900, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

When wandering through the many courtyards, houses and pavilions, I am attracted to the designs of the windows. Unlike the house where I used to live which had only one style of window – a simply patterned one-panelled window that opened by pushing the left side outward – the designs of the windows in the living area of the Forbidden City are variable as well as functional. The window designs complement the other architectural decorations and relate to how the body moves in that space. For example, if a window in the reading room faces the central courtyard and there is no obstruction, then the pattern on the window is likely to be sparse and the window intentionally functions to frame the view. The sparse patterns allow enough illumination into the room, and maximise the view within the frame. In addition, the decorativeness of the pattern is coherent with the rest of the architectural design of the walls and interiors. On the other hand, if the window does not offer a nice view – that is, if it is half sheltered by a column as a part of the pavilion, or blocked by another wall, or a corner of a building – then the window is likely to be densely patterned in order to minimise the unwanted outside view. The emphasis of the design is on presenting a sense of wholeness inside, but still allowing fresh air to flow in. The pattern styles are almost infinite as many design ideas were accumulated throughout history. Some of them are casual because the windows appear in the yards or parks, and some of them are elegant

because they are a part of the parlour decoration. They vary according to the differing tastes of the house masters and the creativeness of the craftsmen. Regardless where the windows appear, on a door or a wall, one concept shared in common is that they are the connection between one side to the other side. The windows allow the body a certain amount of communication with the other side; and the choreographed patterns on the windows regulate that communication. Windows play an important role in the space and how the space presents itself to the body. An enclosed room and a room with extensive views through windows impact differently on the body. Moreover, in the case of the courtyards of living areas, the frequent appearing of the variable windows, along with the large number of doorways, provide choices for the wandering bodies. The bodies have to select one to walk or see through, only to face dozens more again. These windows and doorways function as visual clues to offer the bodies a sense of security in the space, but they are, at the same time, paradoxically complicit in disorienting the bodies, and challenging their short-term memory and sense of direction within that space. The bodies experience, as noted by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard “...the always rather anxious impression of ‘going deeper and deeper’ into a limitless world” (Bachelard: 185) in this enormous space, with countless courtyards, similar but not exactly the same. These physical layouts create a sense of endless wandering for the bodies to experience, one courtyard after another to the extent that “... if we do not know where we are going, we no longer know where we are” (Bachelard: 185). Being lost at some point becomes part of the bodily experience in the living area. By wandering around without a specific destination in mind, I start to pay more attention to the shifting of my body’s action and reaction from one room to another, thereby highlighting the subtlety of the dialogue between the physical body and the cultural body *and* the space.



Figure 31. The shadow of window frames in the Forbidden City, 2013, photo: Peng Liu

Figure 32. Examples of window frames and captive views in Chinese architecture

When I see that some of buildings have been re-painted with fresh paint in order to restore what they looked like in the first place, I feel a bit pitiful. As part of the maintenance of this ancient massive wood-constructed architecture, the fresh paint and renovations nonetheless significantly weaken the sense of the passage of time. The only places I can still find that sense are those corners in the Forbidden City that are locked up from public view, and can only be glimpsed partially through doors and windows. For officials, those places might be the least important, according to the standard history, as neither were there any important people who lived there, nor any vital events that happened inside. Those places are the ‘ordinary’ places in the Forbidden City. However, in my opinion, they contain the most intensive information about the space because they have been untouched for decades. For instance, along a wall in the far west end of the Forbidden City, there is a pair of entry doors. They are unimportant as far as I can tell. The doors are sealed with two paper strips glued across each other and with the time of the sealing written on it. Below the paper strips, there is a snib lock⁵⁸ that locks the pair of doors and is covered with rust. Looking through the crack in between the pair of doors, I can just about see a collapsed stone column lying in pieces on a roughly ten-square-meter ground area, in front of a very small single door house. The stone column is well carved, as the animal and human figures

⁵⁸ A Chinese traditional lock that allows doors to be closed without the lock engaging.

are vividly rendered, but fallen into pieces, which makes me wonder if I could reassemble them back together after searching the ground for all the pieces. Looking slightly to the left, I guess that the little house might have just one room inside. My face comes close to the crack and my hands push the doors slightly inward to try to get a better view. It does not help much as it is all rusted. The one third of the house which I can see is old, older than any other building in the public areas. The red paint has turned into pale pink under the sunlight. The upper part under the roof has retained its colour better as it is out of reach from the sunlight, but it is partly rotten, and I can smell the damp and musty air. But I like the scene. I like the way the heavy stone column has fallen and hit the ground, smashed into pieces. I imagine that no one has walked in the area ever since then. I like the uneven colours of the house because I sense it has weathered over hundreds of years. I like the wooden part that has rotted over time and which will perhaps need hundreds of years to finally reduce into dust. I like that the space is physically constituted by manmade objects, but spiritually saturated with the sense of man's absence. The scene is absolutely still on its surface, but vibrates underneath, as the communications between the body and the space *and* between my physical and cultural body never stop.

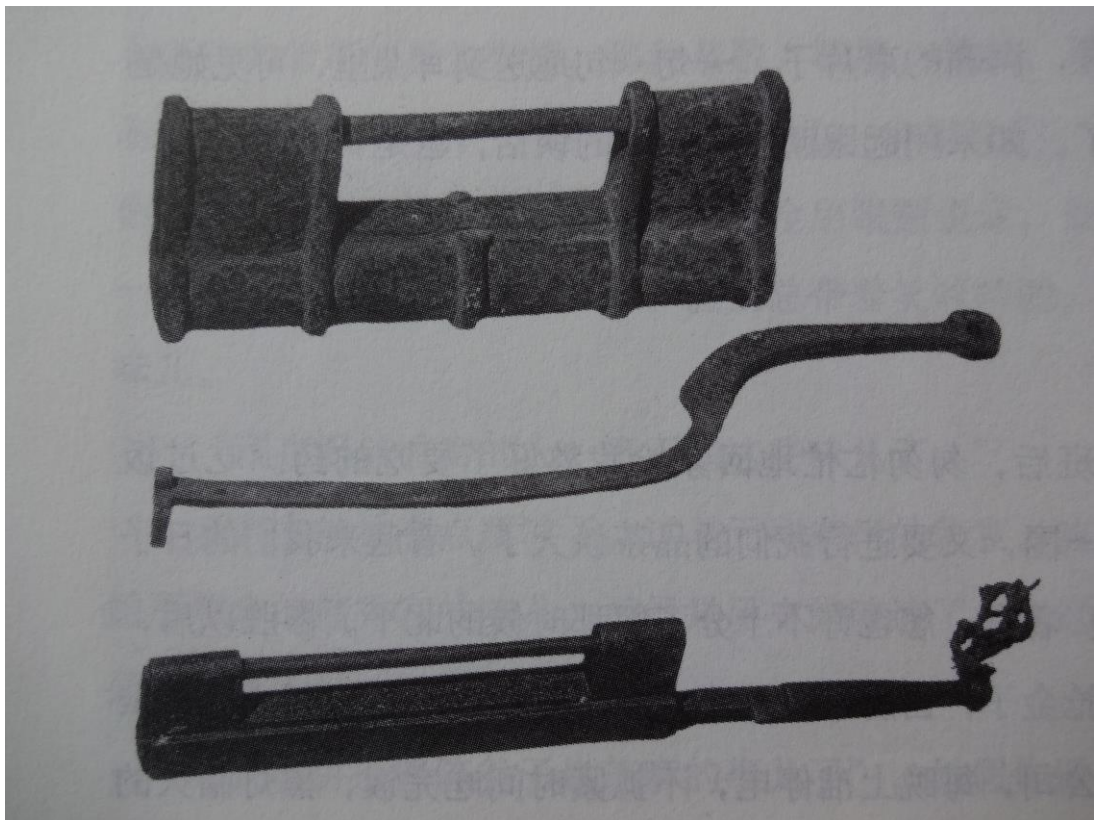


Figure 33. Traditional snib locks/catches in the Forbidden City (Jin & Shen: 50)



Figure 34. Peeping into hidden corners through locked doors, 2013, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 35. Locked doors, 2013, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 36. Signs and fences indicate No Public Access with locked doors, 2012, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 37. Signs and fences indicate No Public Access with locked doors, 2014, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 38. Signs and fences indicate No Public Access with locked doors, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

As the dialogue continues between my two bodies (the physical and the cultural) and the Forbidden City, I realise I am in a familiar, yet strange space and question the initial purpose of my visit. Did I come here to experience the space through my body (bodies), or was it to experience my body (bodies) through the space? Perhaps both. Biologically, I am affected by the space and, simultaneously, I am culturally affected. This protected monument which pauses itself in history still functions in the contemporary time as a space that interrogates and towers over every body within its territory.

My visits are conducted after the transition in the role of the Forbidden City has been completed, from the platform of the rigid Feudal system to a showcase of its own history to the public, which poses the question of what price my body has paid to have such an intimate experience of the space during this contemporary period. Unlike the body of eunuchs, my body does not need to be physically castrated beforehand and culturally restrained by the rituals of 'Li' in order to be allowed to walk in the space. And unlike the body of Red Guard, whose cultural/social bodies caused their physical bodies to be shut out by the gates, my body does not carry any destructive political agenda into the space. Despite the effort put into the research, I realise that there is

little chance to obtain a complete understanding of the body of the eunuch and the body of the Red Guard, as the space, which is reflective of both of the bodies, is at a significant remove from its Feudal/Post-Feudal context by the time I walk in. My contemporary experience of the space and its effect on my body (bodies), which is an experience without internal survival pressure (the body of the eunuch) and external political force (the body of the Red Guard), is always obsessively in negotiation with the past, but equally filled with imagination about its history. The endeavour to gain contemporary experience in the space and on the body (bodies) is always associated with the eagerness of my body in wanting to know the past. My contemporary body is exposed to a substantial amount of information in this digital age, resulting in a body programed with multiple virtual perspectives and proactive in its imagination, which would be activated when it interacts with the world. Under such exposure, my body is no longer singular and fixed, but rather a collection of variables, flexible according to the various demands from the outer world. The relation of my body to the space and its cultural history is therefore always in terms of multiplicity, such as wanting to know the past, both real and imagined. My body is not only able to involuntarily adjust itself to resonate with the ambience of the space in the most appropriate way, and shift itself accordingly whenever the space changes in subtle ways; but also to present itself as a composite body at the same time. My body is capricious in wanting to know the past while living in the contemporary period. This paradoxical experience is perhaps the price my body (bodies) has paid in order to be in/with the space of the Forbidden City.



Figure 39. My body is trying to look into one of these locked and ‘unimportant’ one-bedroom houses and view its interior, 2013, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 40. The interior view of the locked and ‘unimportant’ one-bedroom house, 2013, photo: Peng Liu

Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated the space of the Forbidden City and the notion of the human body through the interaction between the body and the space in three specific periods of history that highlight the effects of Confucianist ideology in China. Each chosen period illuminates the particularity of the interactions between the body and the space, which is differentiated from one another, and realised through different ways of writing, while at the same time drawing links and making comparisons between the three periods. The mutual investigation on the space of the Forbidden City and the body of the emperor and the body of the eunuch draws on scenarios that took place during the Feudal times, which was the period of great prosperity for the ideology of Confucianism. The second section examines the relationship between the space of the Forbidden City and the body of Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution against the background of the heyday of Maoism and the decline of Confucianism. In the final section, I take my own body into the space of the Forbidden City to gain first-hand experience of the relationship between my body and the space, and to conduct the mutual investigation on my body (bodies) and the space through my contemporary mind that is loaded with historical awareness. In the three historical periods, the space of the Forbidden City has been explored with reference to three types of bodies and their own unique ways of interacting with it, which reinforces the idea of bodies as

historically inherited and culturally embodied. Moreover, through the investigations on the space of the Forbidden City, a foundation has been laid for further analysis of the space in terms of Body Theory under the categories of cultural space, physical space and disciplinary space in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Body (Bodies) in space: Discussion on Body Theory

2.1 Introduction

This chapter emphasises the discourse of my own bodily experience in the space of the Forbidden City under the categories of cultural space, physical space and disciplinary space. My experience in the space as addressed in the last section underscores the complexity of the relationship between my body specifically as a physical container of different ideological and social experiences, and the space as a repository of China's historical residues. At the end of the first chapter, it is clear that the involvement of the body is significant in interpreting the (social) space in much the same way that the atmosphere of the space contributes significantly to understanding my own body behaviours. Therefore, further mutual investigation into both the space of the Forbidden City and the (my) body will focus on the relationship in-between which will be carried out under the categories of cultural space, physical space and disciplinary space with reference to relevant sociological theories.

2.2 My Body in the Cultural Space

This section begins with a discussion of the body in terms of sociological theory, followed by a comprehensive investigation into the activities of my body when it first returned to the space of the Forbidden City as an adult. This investigation considers my body in terms of its cultural embodiment, and at the same time, unveils the space through a cultural lens. It is important to acknowledge here that the biological entity that is my body is equally important and should be seen as simultaneous and inseparable from its cultural embodiment. In a later section I will provide some different perspectives in examining the complex relationship between my physical body and the space.

2.2.1 The body in terms of its physical entity and cultural embodiment

Shilling regards the body "...as a material, physical and biological phenomenon which is irreducible to immediate social processes or classifications...our senses, knowledgeability and capability to act are integrally related to the fact that we are embodied beings" (Shilling: 10). The body can be defined in terms of a physical (natural) entity and a cultural embodiment, as well as an interrelationship between these two conceptual understandings. Turner notes that human beings are "simultaneously part of nature and part of culture...and culture shapes and mediates nature...[and] nature constitutes a limit on human agency" (Turner : 197). Culture shapes the physical entity so that a certain type of social identification or label can be read on the body in society. In addition, culture mediates the physical entity so that every move of the body in interacting with others in society (as in affecting and being affected by others) has its cultural perspective. My body, in its every thought, every move, and every reaction, presents an image of being Chinese. Both my physical appearance and my approach to the world has been affected by my cultural position, including where I was born, my family, my education and upbringing, and the society

around me.

According to Douglas, “The physical body is never immediately perceived, but always experienced through the mediation of cultural categories...” (Douglas: 68). Cultural categories work as a lens perceiving the physical body through a number of different adjusted perspectives. So the physical body is always perceived partly and temporarily through one or more of these perspectives. Moreover, when a new lens is added to the body’s framework of understanding, such as, but not limited to, the body placing itself in a new society, there could be some unknown aspects of the physical body discovered or perceived through this newly acquired lens. In other words, after a piece of information has been newly received by the body it would cause a reshuffle of the existing information in relation to one another in the body. The greater the number of different social environments which the physical body experiences, the more cultural categories and information gained that result in the body acquiring greater complexity and sophistication.

The response of my body in the spaces of the Forbidden City indicates the unfolding communication between the physical body and the space, and culture. The perceived communication such as the focuses and interests of my body on particular aspects of the space are always modified by my cultural understandings. Moreover, the focus and the interests of the body as it interacts with the outer world often changes over time. In the following discussion I will examine the performance of my physical and cultural bodies in the private and public spaces of the Forbidden City.

2.2.2 Adult view of the spaces of the living courtyard

In recent visits, as an adult, I question my old views and how as a child I looked at the Forbidden City. My memories of my childhood experience of the space are discontinuous and vague. Moreover my experiences since then, as a migrant to Australia and as an artist, give me a different perspective from which to look at the space. Now as adult I remember things I enjoyed as a child, such as the mysterious animal figures lined up on the roof, and the beautiful dragon patterns drawn on the wall, as though a part of a fairy tale, but these aspects no longer attract me. Now I see something fascinating that did not catch my attention as a child, such as: the imperfect animal figures lined up on the roof, with a few of them missing, thus indicating untold stories; the cracks on the wall which are big enough to put my fingers in; the paint peeling off from the columns that show the paled colour underneath; the paved floors and paths polished into smooth surfaces or broken into pieces due to the shuffling of thousands of footsteps; sporadic weeds growing on the roof behind the gates and along the side walls, how they dance in the wind... These changing perspectives are inevitable as my body is no longer the body in the 1980s; it has been through many things in many places, and so my body is more experienced, even sophisticated, just as Shilling notes: the body is “...an unfinished biological and social phenomenon which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society” (Shilling: 12). Thus since childhood every move my body

has taken is connected with the societies in which I have lived. My everyday experience is constantly added to my body, transforming it into a newer state. And the changing perspectives over a period of time are the evidence of the body as an unfinished and never finished biological and social phenomenon.

When I first returned to the Forbidden City as an adult after being absent from this culture for many years, the actions of my body in a particular room which had just opened to the public illuminate its changing perspectives. The room offered a space in which to explore memories through bodily movements, which also paved the way for updating my body's self-awareness by receiving new information in the space.

The room, which is approximately 15 square meters, was located in the everyday living area. After I stepped into the room, my eyes were immediately caught by the right hand corner of the room where a set of furniture was placed against the wall. The set contains a table, a chair on the left hand side, and a chair on the right hand side, as well as a small mirror on the table reflecting a part of the window beside the chair. The sunlight came into the room in approximately a 45 degrees angle through the window, which brightened two thirds of the table and a corner of the mirror. The atmosphere was that of a typical winter afternoon in Beijing where the sunlight may illuminate half of a room, but does not necessarily bring enough warmth in with it. This scene triggered so many old memories associated with my childhood in my grandpa's home which had a comparable layout and similar furniture in one of his rooms. Every object in the scene was so familiar that I felt as though I used to be in this very room and it was hard to convince myself otherwise. My memory of living with grandpa connected me to the scene quickly and I pictured an image of myself as a child. I was standing next to the table, raising my head, and watching my grandpa who was sitting on the left hand chair reading, or chatting with a guest who was sitting on the right hand chair. And there was my grandma as well walking in with fresh tea and cakes which I would have a small piece to share, but with no idea where it was stored at home.

This particular childhood experience gave me a fixed perspective to evaluate the room and the scene. As Douglas notes: "the physical body is a microcosm of society, its experience always sustaining a particular set of cultural meanings, a particular social order" (Douglas: 68). My body perceived the scene as though I was still a child, quietly standing to one side and observing the space. The room and its furniture might have their own significance in terms of history, but, at the moment when I was picturing myself standing there as a part of the scene, it only mattered as a part of my childhood experience from the point of view of a 10-year-old boy.



Figure 41. Views of different living rooms in the Forbidden City, 2014, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 42. Views of different living rooms in the Forbidden City, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

While my mind was still occupied by the old memory, I started moving slowly toward the table. A red line drawn on the floor in front of the table stopped my body shuffling forward: I am not supposed to get any closer. I could see every detail of the table: the texture of its surface indicating the type of wood; the joints and patterns on the legs showing the makers to be highly adept in crafting; a few scratches and the colour fading on the table top suggest it has been through many periods in history. My body then bent itself down on one knee so my eyes were at the horizon of the table top and my nose could sniff the wood. Another wave of old memories came to mind. My grandpa's table along with other furniture were confiscated and destroyed during the 'Cultural Revolution'. This was like watching a silent slide show in my head, where one memory triggers another which is then, in turn, linked by me to yet another one in a haphazard manner. I seemed to drown in my memories in a state confusion and with a sense of time collapsing. Even though I knew I was not supposed to, as soon as my fingers touched the table, the tactile stimulus broke my recollections and dragged me back to the material world. A shadow of my finger cast by the sunlight immediately caught my eye. Everything else became caught up in that second: I felt very warm as half of my body was bathed by sunlight; my eyes struggled to open fully as my face was turned towards the sun, yet I could see the dust flying in the air under sunlight; I heard the voices of other visitors...and I was drawn back into the present. These are more than just the experiences of recalling my childhood memories; these are the experiences of both my physical and cultural body interacting with the space, returning to that culture to update its regulation within it.

After years of living in different societies, my body has accumulated new experiences and I now view the space of the Forbidden City differently, and see it as provocative and breathtakingly attractive. When I am in the space I am not merely recalling my old childhood memories, rather this space is much richer and more intensive and it is completing the image of me as a person brought up in this specific culture. Recollections can often happen in our daily life, such as when we see, hear or touch something familiar that we have experienced before. This type of recollection from one's memory has a personal limit; however, the experience in this specific space is more than just recalling from personal memory. Historically, the space is already inscribed with culture, before the body enters it. It is not an experience of simply recalling memory from my body; this is an experience of my body receiving new stimulus and information, and interacting with the space – which becomes a place to realise who I am as a part of the culture through bodily experience.

While interacting with the space, my body experiences its own physicality as well as the affects of cultural history. As Douglas argues: "The physical body is never immediately perceived, but always experienced through the mediation of cultural categories..." (Douglas: 68). Wylie adds there is "no certain physical motion which is, as it were...pure" (Wylie: 235). Physical actions are always mediated through a cultural lens. And the physical actions are not considered innocent as they reflect (and under the direction of) the body's cultural embodiment. Therefore, physical actions

cannot be explained within the action itself and cannot be examined separately from its cultural context. The physical actions, rather, are the interpretation of the body's cultural embodiment, which are shaped and filtered by the cultural body within the body's physical limitation. The physical actions are the outcome of the interaction between physical body and cultural body in dealing with the complexity of the worlds.



Figure 43. Living rooms in different styles, 2014, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 44. Living rooms in different styles, 2014, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 45. Living rooms in different styles and the curiosity of visitors, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

The actions and reactions of my body in the space of the Forbidden City indicate what I am in terms of my physical entity as well as how I am in terms of cultural embodiment. For example, my body physically reacts with anxiety because I sense my cultural exclusion from this space. My cultural body makes my physical body perceive the space in this certain way because, as Douglas argues, “the physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society” (Douglas: 78). My physical response to the space of the courtyard of the Forbidden City as being exclusive is determined by my cultural response in light of being an ordinary Chinese in the space, not an emperor. This space pushes and pulls my body at same time causing a strong conflict within me.

2.3 My Body in the Physical Space – Experiencing the space of the Forbidden City in terms of light and temperature

Acknowledging the impact of the role of social relationships on my cultural body, the encounter between my physical body and the space is emphasised in this section to further explore the interrelationship between the space and the body. As Shilling points out: “Social relationships may profoundly affect the development of our bodies in almost every respect...but bodies cannot simply be ‘explained away’ by these relations. Human bodies are taken up and transformed as a result of living in society, but they remain material, physical and biological entities” (Shilling: 10). My physical body is constantly communicating with the space in all weather and environmental conditions, such as light, temperature and pollution, while walking through it, reflecting the space in variable moments and resulting in bodily experience. Perez de Vega describes the encounter between physical body and a space in these terms: “the body...as a collection of force fields, or vectors...affects a space through its changing movement within it...[and] allows the body to perform as an extension of the space and the space as an extension of the body’s action” (Perez de Vega: 400). Perez de Vega’s words indicate the interaction between moving body and the space is constant and mutual, so walking is adopted as the main bodily activity in exploring the space.

Walking is recognised as an embodied way of knowing (Pink; Wylie; Lee & Ingold) and there may be different aspects of walking emphasised by urban choreography, psychogeography or ethnography, which use walking, “understood as multisensory” (Pink et al.: 4), to reflect sociological concerns. My walking in the space of the Forbidden City is not simply transportation to get from one place to another, “but it is in itself a form of engagement integral to our perception of an environment” (Pink et al.: 3). I extend the concept of walking include other bodily activities, such as touching, hopping, squatting, crouching, to maximise the understanding of the engagement of my body in the space. Walking in the Forbidden City can also be seen a break from city life “which actively dulls the senses”, as noted by sociologist Mark Paterson in a parallel discussion, and recalls “the romantic-era desire to escape the city...through the activity of walking in the countryside” (Paterson: 777). Walking in the countryside or the Forbidden City is an escape from the city whereby “the walker returns to his senses” (Edensor: 86), described by anthropologist Tim Edensor. Therefore, an active bodily experience is to be expected from walking in the space of the Forbidden City.

My recent visits to the Forbidden City have always occurred during winter as it is relatively less crowded than summer. My body can sometimes have opportunities to be in the space alone, such as in a courtyard, interacting with the space without interruptions from others. More importantly, the winter period provides variable weather conditions, such as snow, rain, wind, and freezing temperatures – or all of these together. These weather conditions amplify the impact of the space upon my body at the physical level. For instance, to achieve the goal of walking through the main gate in different weather conditions as an adult, my physical body forms a series

of new actions and reactions in the space that reflect its physical capacity in accommodating new environments. As Marcel Mauss points out: “[Body’s] adaption to a physical, mechanical or chemical aim...is pursued in a series of assembled [new] actions” (Mauss: 75). To form a new series of assembled actions and reactions in order to complete the goal of walking through the main gate, my body needs to reassess the external conditions, which are not only dominated by the physicality of gate and its decorations and designs, but also subject to weather conditions. The weather conditions were different every time I visited the space, which affected my perceptions of the space in terms of providing my body an ever-changing multisensory experience.

On a typical winter’s day in Beijing, the sun is hidden behind the grey sky, which is saturated with half cloud and half smoke from coal fires that provide heat to every apartment of its 22 million residents in the city. In the Forbidden City, there is limited heating in order to minimise the chance of fires, as its architecture is made from timber. The desire is to preserve the authenticity of the space with as little modern interruption as possible.



Figure 46. Red wall of the Forbidden City along with the frozen moat spanning 52 meters in width in winter, Beijing, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

My eyes seem to be the only part of my body that likes this weather condition, neither too dark so that I can see things within an approximate 50-meter radius, nor too bright so that the reflections of light on the buildings make me uncomfortable. The city is restless with fast-moving people on the street, in contrast with the inharmonious air which is dry, still and chilly, so much so that I am feeling a bit breathless. I have arrived at the main entry gate of the Forbidden City when the temperature reached its peak of the day, just below zero degrees Celsius, but I could not tell the exact temperature as my body is tightly wrapped by layers of thick clothes, hat and mask, except for the eyes, the only part of my body naked to the air. There is a sense of timelessness inside my body caused by the surrounding ambience when I stand in the square at front of the main gate before entering. The thickness of the clothes, from top to bottom, feeling neither cold nor warm, isolates my body from sensing the outer world. The half-cloudy-half-smoky air, which makes the sky simultaneously an ever and never-changing grey, shelters the sun completely and, at the same time, deprives every body and every object its shadow. This optical illusion makes everything visually flatten and feel timeless under the grey daytime sky, which only appears during winter in Beijing.

It does not take me long to discover the stereotypical tourist groups, who are tirelessly taking dozens of photos of themselves with the main entry gate in varied and sometimes expressive body gestures, but with identical smiles, and later rushing through the gate to catch up with their long-gone tour guide without paying attention to anything else on the way. These tourists are often looking at the space through their cameras or camcorders and busy documenting their route, rather than experiencing the space through their eyes and bodies. This scene repeats itself over and over again, with the flat sky as a grey background that overwhelms my body with a sense of confusion about time and space.

Looking at the high red wall and the tunnel-like main entry gate by raising my head slightly, my eyes are quickly attracted by the variation of colours on the high wall, not only because of the different marks, such as watermarks or bird poop thinly scattered on the wall that has turned the red into a textured range of pinks, but also this half-foggy-half-smoky air, like layers between my eyes and the wall, is mediating and mixing the pinks while my body moves toward to the entry. For every step my body takes, the perspective of the building caught by my eyes changes, the half-foggy-half-smoky air alters the surroundings, so the red colour of the high wall and the perception of the ambience changes in a very subtle way. In other words, the communication between my body and the space starts in the action of walking (Ingold; Pink). My eyes are happy and the rest of my body is still in its solitude with gentle wind approaching my back from behind, pushing my body moving forward and feeling neither cold nor warm...

My previous impression of the main entry gate changes when I walk through it now as an adult. I have found that my physical body reacts quite actively. And this complex, new physical bodily experience changes my perspective of the space culturally as well.

My bodily movement in the space is, to borrow Derrida's words, "poised between the country ahead and the country behind, between one step and the next, epiphany and penumbra,...spectral; between there and not-there, perpetually caught in an apparitional process of arriving/departing" (Derrida cited in Wylie: 237). There is great implication "between one step and the next" of mine that is rich and full of potentialities.

My action of walking in the Forbidden City allows my body to constantly adopt or discard the information from its surroundings while moving forward in the manner of time and space. This method of walking does not have a particular destination, or restricted by time, which, along with minimum social interruptions, differentiates this experience from that of the tourists. The process of the walking in the space, manifested as the interaction between the body and the space, indicates the richness of the residuals of the space as well as the potentialities of the physical body, which are both largely overlooked on a daily basis. Walking, the "apparitional process of arriving/departing", is re-interpreted through my bodily interactions with the space in the Forbidden City.

When I stand in front of the tunnel-like entrance of the main gate and its building on the top, the Meridian Gate is huge compared to my body. The gate is 25 meters in depth and 5 meters high, which allow specific weapons such as a long spear and halberd, and flags, to be carried in and out by soldiers during ceremonies. My eyes become the first part of my body to experience the main gate but they are unable to see past the gate because of the medical condition known as high myopia,⁵⁹ as my eyes struggle to accommodate any dramatic changes in the light. Moving from outdoors, which is perfect for the comfort level of my eyes, into the dark hall can cause flashing dots to appear in my eyesight and lead to light headaches afterwards as my eyes have to automatically strain hard to see.

⁵⁹ High myopia is a condition of the eye where the light that comes in does not directly focus on the retina but in front of it. This causes the image that one sees when looking at a distant object to be out of focus, but in focus when looking at a close object. It is seen as a degenerative changing of the eye shape and results in eyesight loss.

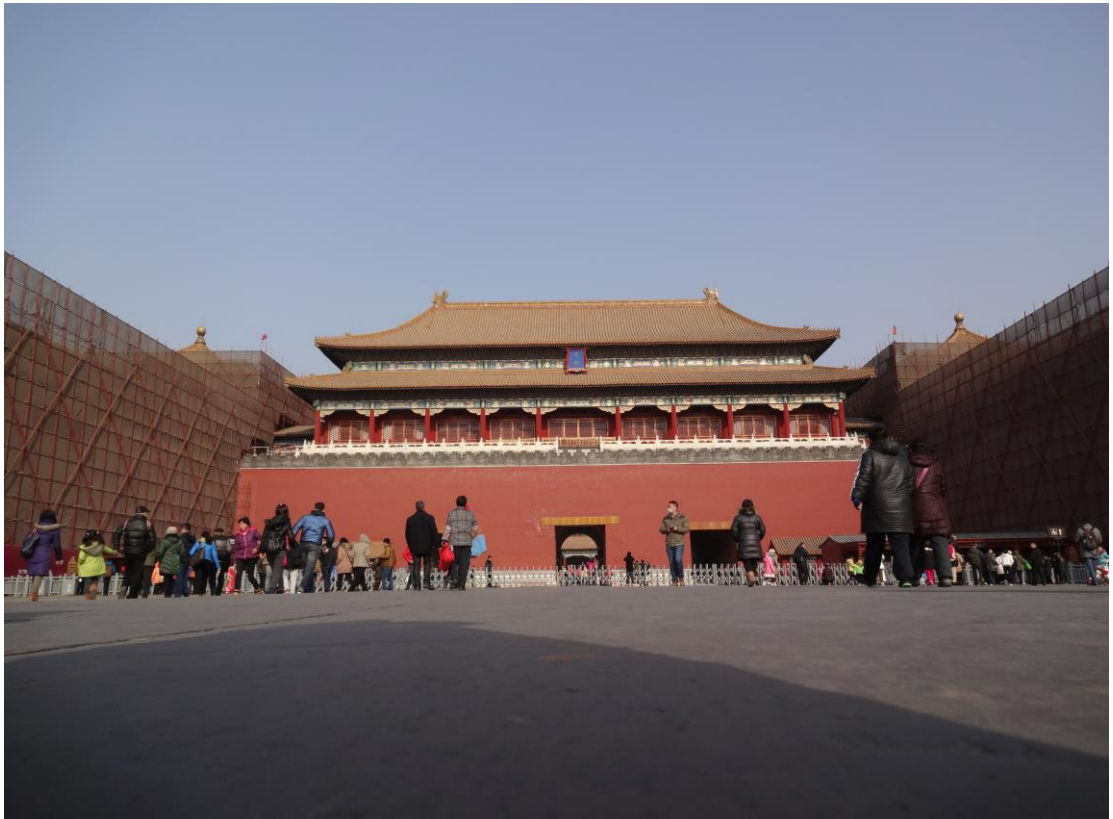


Figure 47. Part of Meridian Gate under re-construction, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

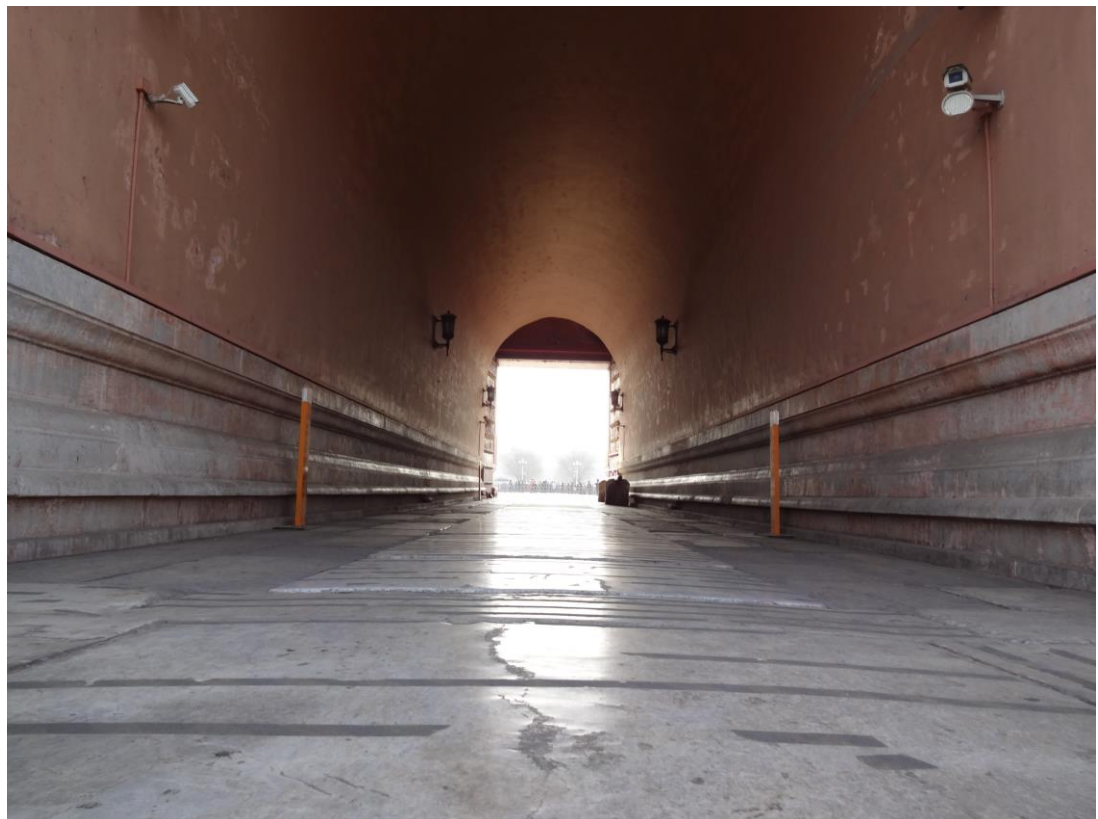


Figure 48. One side of the Meridian Gate hall, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

As soon as my body steps into the gate hall, I realise the only illumination for this tunnel-like gate is the natural light at the end of the hall and the rest is in complete darkness. My eyes are uneasy as walking into the darkness causes dizziness and slight headaches as my eyes try very hard to adjust. I take off my spectacles and half close my eyes to reduce the uncomfortable visual experience of feeling indisposed in this dark space. I end up taking off my gloves and holding my spectacles in my bare hand while walking. In these first few minutes of walking as if in slow motion, my hands, having been desensitised by the thick gloves, are now liberated to touch the surrounding objects and sense the temperature. Apart from my eyes which do not enjoy the experience, my hands become the other part of my body directly exposed in the atmosphere, feeling the chilly air and discharging body heat from my finger tips. I cannot tell the detail of the arch, the patterns on the stone wall or the shape of the paved path, as my visual ability is partly constrained. Instead my hearing ability becomes extraordinarily sensitive. Along with my footsteps on the uneven marble path, echoes bounce around and mix with other sounds. I get a fuzzy sense of the situation according to the sounds and my unclear vision.

Direct contact is made between my body and the building as I walk along with my fingers occasionally touching the side stone wall to help my body regain a bit of balance and feel more secure while my vision is blurred. Compared with the outside temperature, the stone wall is a lot cooler and moist, and makes shivers run down my spine occasionally. My body is no longer hidden behind the thick clothes, but my fingers, through their interaction with the stone wall, bring fresh stimulus to the body. Even though only two or three of my fingers gently touch the wall, the contact forms the communication between my body and this wall of the Meridian Gate in the middle of winter. The damp and freezing stone wall begins to wet my fingers within a second of touching it as my fingers bring warmth to the cold surface, causing condensation and leaving some sandy granules on my finger tips on retraction. The fine granules are perhaps a mixture of dust, sand and smoke particles frozen together in the subzero temperature, and some granules start disassembling and melting due to my body temperature especially when I rub my finger tips together. Apart from the experience of touch using my finger tips, which brings my body into direct contact with the space, I realise the protection and the isolation provided by the thick clothes have kept the rest of my body warm. My body has to adjust to the difference in the temperature and ambience, too.

My body stops and starts as it moves through the gate hall. As I move through the space, my body is in contact with the wind in the air, surrounded by the granules blowing off from the stone wall, and other visitors who also walking around, which forms the dynamic communication between my body and the space, linked by one step after another, fulfilled by one action to the next. But “to stop [in the space] is to be hemmed in...[and] become attentive, suddenly, to the details and textures that are immediately to hand” (Wylie: 238). Therefore, to still the body against the wind is to have quality time to experience the stone wall and its irregular and rough surface which

has never been exposed to natural light since it was built, and to acknowledge the space and time the gate hall occupies and divides the two completely different worlds, the modern on one side and the ancient on the other. Walking through the main entry gate is a means to communicate with the space through my body's actions and reactions under specific weather conditions. The relationship between my body and the space is like between "subject and object, [which] could become soluble, osmotic, in the engaged, involved practice of walking" (Wylie: 239).



Figure 49. My body wrapped with thick clothes half way through the Meridian Gate, 2012, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 50. The back of Meridian Gate after went through the gate, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

When my senses return after adapting to the specific environment, I realise my stumbling body only occupies a small space in the hall and seems insignificant in comparison to this strong and stable architecture. While my physical body accommodates the situation, my cultural perspective of the space is conditioned by those physical compromises and is, in turn, changed too. In this case, my physical bodily experience reinforces the exclusion from the space initially perceived through my cultural position.



Figure 51. A sense of walking endlessly derived in the space of the Forbidden City in the snow which the foggy colours of variable grey and red make me perceive the space indefinitely, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

2.4 My Body in the Disciplinary Space

As I have previously argued, wandering through the space, which is already inscribed with culture, is a form of experience whereby my body receives new stimulus and information from the interaction. This inevitably results in my body changing its normal routines in order to cope with the space. This section will explore the disciplinary power of the space in terms of its design impact upon my body. The analysis is facilitated by the task of comparing the journey to meet the emperor taken by nonlocal officials in Feudal times and my own bodily experience in contemporary times.

Working in concert with the architectural space, which is designed to reflect the social position of its masters in the hierarchical society, bodily behaviours in the space have been anticipated. In this sense, the body becomes a moving ‘space’ as every move and gesture of the body is designed to convey cultural meanings, and the space itself becomes part of the gestures made by the ‘body’. The body and the space reinforce each other, and both are disciplined and integrated at all times. A body that fails to be coherent in acting with the space will result in physical/social punishments for that body. As Elias notes: “the fear of loss of face in the eyes of others [one of the social punishments] instilled in individuals a habitual reproduction of distinctive [and hierarchical] conduct and the strict drive control underlying it” (Elias: 254-55). Self-discipline and body restriction are practiced and exercised in order to be appropriate and to avoid social isolation or physical abuse. Furthermore, the space, with its well-designed corners serving as a concrete disciplinary environment, functions to educate bodies through multisensory means. A body that survives or even thrives in that cultural/social space is capable of “foresight, self-restraint and prudence beset by anxieties” (Elias: 311). The disciplinary power of the space is collusive in producing a sophisticated body capable of expressing its skills in the space of the Forbidden City as the cultural platform.

2.4.1 Restoring the process of nonlocal officials meeting the emperor

In Feudal China, nonlocal officials needed to learn etiquette at the Ministry of Rites located to the North East outside of the Forbidden City, before entering the Forbidden City to meet the emperor. They walk in procession, from the moment they enter the first gates,⁶⁰ till when they kneel down to meet the emperor. This action displays an aspect of what the space was designed for: disciplining and controlling bodies. The question of how much of the Feudal disciplinary control is still left on my body in contemporary times is investigated by me imitating the Feudal procedure of ‘nonlocal officials meeting the emperor’ – by going through several gates spread across the official area to experience the disciplinary impact of the space upon my body in this specific scenario at this contemporary moment.

⁶⁰ There were originally five main gates located one after another with enormous squares in between: Da Qing Men (demolished in 1954), Tian An Men, Duan Men, Wu Men, and Tai He Men (the Gate of Supreme Harmony) sitting along the centre line of the official area.

Noel Dyck points out two possible definitions of discipline,⁶¹ one of which “may comprise programs of training, especially pertaining to mind and character, which aim to reproduce preferred forms of conduct” (Dyck: 2). The Ministry of Rites in Feudal China operated like ‘schooling’, providing intensive short courses that lasted for a few days, to train nonlocal officials in obtaining “suitably-ordered” (Dyck: 2) bodily actions as a part of the preparation for their once-in-a-lifetime journey to meet the emperor. The buildings of the Ministry of Rites were located in the square between Da Qing Men⁶² and Tian An Men, just before entering the official area of the Forbidden City. On the day of meeting the emperor, the nonlocal bodies have to walk a distance of around 2 kilometres, which affords enough space and time to allow the experience of the walking process to fully impact on the bodies. Furthermore, these country officials were purposely led to experience the gate wall of the Tian An Men from one side and its enormous square, which was full of warriors patrolling in and out while receiving training. Such visual impact would create a sense of fear and uncertainty on their future journey, as what the bodies perceived was the most magnificent buildings and walls they had ever seen and the scenes beyond the gate wall could only be greater.

The training course emphasised the details of bodily movements and gestures in preparation for the day of meeting the emperor, such as variable ways of standing, walking, kneeling down and so forth, as well as specifying the dress code and use of language, with warnings that any misconduct could lead to fatal consequences. To crystallise every detail during the course, the training aimed to pass the comprehensive discipline onto the bodies so as to clarify any “possible confusion” (Foucault 1977: 197), which in turns puts everybody on the same page. The experience of participating in the course – including practicing and memorising the complex etiquettes, hearing consequences of failed cases and visualising the enormous gate wall while fearing what was inside – served to make the bodies psychologically anxious and worried, and culturally re-shaped and disciplined them prior to even physically entering the Forbidden City.

In this sense, the course provided by the Ministry of Rites worked in the opposite way to how Marcel Mauss describes training courses in swimming wherein “particular care is taken to get the [bodies] to control their dangerous but instinctive ocular reflexes, before all else they are familiarized with the water, their fears are suppressed, a certain confidence is created, suspensions and movements are selected” (Mauss: 74). As the preparation for meeting the emperor, the training course did not help the bodies to achieve what Mauss describes, but instead increased their fears by destroying their confidence, and sought to control them by restraining their movements physically and culturally. This is the preparation which had to be done in order to ensure a maximum

⁶¹ Dyck also defines how discipline “... may be located within sets of rules established for the purpose of exercising control over people...” (Dyck: 2).

⁶² “Da Qing Men” (1644) is the name of the gate in Qing dynasty, which was also called “The national gate”. It was called “Da Ming Men” during the Ming Dynasty. And it was renamed again to “Zhong Huang Men” in 1912 after the Revolution of 1911. The gate was demolished in 1954 due to the expansion of Tian An Men square.

impact upon the bodies during the process of walking to meet the emperor.

The country/nonlocal bodies had already become “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977: 138) before arriving at the Ministry of Rites, foreshadowing the efficiency of the training course in producing what Foucault calls “subjected and practiced” bodies and behaviours within a short period. The ideology of ‘Li’, as life-long ‘schooling’, provided rules and regulations for bodies to refer to in every aspect of daily life so that the bodies were under constant discipline and control. This phenomenon reflected the second definition of discipline according to Dyck: “...discipline may be located within sets of rules established for the purpose of exercising control over people...” (Dyck: 2). For Foucault, disciplinary power is “a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it” (Foucault, 1977: 138) and that form of disciplinary control is “a technology” (Foucault, 1977: 215). Dyck’s definition shifts the focus to the strong relationship between the bodies – who applied the controls and the bodies to whom it would be applied. In the case of Feudal China, discipline is not just a technological term – referring to disciplinary mechanisms or controls, following Foucault – but an exercise of the social hierarchical relationship between the body of ordinaries and the body of the emperor. The design of the walking route for nonlocal officials to meet the emperor is a good example to see how these controls and disciplines are applied on the bodies through the design of the space.

In Feudal China, the emperors adopted ‘Li’ and Confucian values as the tools to discipline bodies in order to reinforce their rule. The disciplinary power of the hierarchical social relationship can be described using Foucault’s terms: “The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly” (Foucault, 1977: 173). Accordingly, emperors had the “single gaze to see”, to scrutinise every body and every thing constantly, to the extent where they would “...be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape” (Foucault, 1977: 173). This was the perception the emperors wanted their subjects to have, which is to be seen as the centre of fatherly affection as well as the centre of harsh punishment, and to be simultaneously revered and feared, which constructs a paradoxical feeling inside every body/subject.

On the day of meeting the emperor, the nonlocal bodies need to be ready since early morning and wait in one of the wing-rooms next to the Da Qing Men gate for permission before they could start walking through the side doors of the following four gates.⁶³ The permission comes in the form of an announcement from the doormen, who are always low-end eunuchs. The announcement is firstly made at the building of Tai He, the centre of the Forbidden City, where the emperor works and meets officials on a daily basis. The announcement is not communicated in a written form delivered

⁶³ Every gate was built with smaller side gates intended for daily use and only the emperors can walk through the main gate.

by a messenger or guard who physically travels through all the gates to the waiting bodies. Instead, the message is passed through the gates via the voices of eunuchs, who shouted it out beside each main gate, one after another, and always in a high-pitched tone.

First of all, a series of bodily actions is conducted by the head eunuch after he receives the order from the emperor, which may be in the form of just a small gesture or eye contact. The body of the eunuch walks down the centre stage through the side stairs using a pace that is neither slow nor fast. He then pauses a second to regain his body balance and tweaks his already extremely tidy clothes before continuing to walk toward the open front door of the Tai He building. When he reaches the doorsill, which is approximately 30cm high and 25cm thick, he lowers his head and uses his left hand to lift up his lappet, while his left foot lifts across the doorsill, carefully followed by his right foot so as to avoid stumbling.

In order to warm up his vocals prior to calling out the message, the head eunuch would clear his throat huskily, followed by a pause, while he stands absolutely still, approximately five steps from the doorsill. The servants and bodyguards in his sight would have time to stop moving and lower their heads while waiting for his voice. The body of the eunuch acts in a deliberate rhythm that is neither slow nor fast, as he enjoys the moment from his perspective, partly because his aged body no longer allows him to do energetic motions. The more cherished the emperor, the more comfort and sophistication the eunuch would display in his actions. The series of actions by the body of the head eunuch, such as pausing, tweaking clothes, clearing throat, and so on, may be considered unnecessary for serving the purpose of delivering the message on one hand but, on the other hand, these actions reflect his social position in the hierarchy and they are manifestly enjoyed by his body.

The message, which comprises a short phrase of just a few words, including the title of the officials and their names, is called out loudly in a long and high-pitched voice that can only be made by the castrated body. The sound not only goes into everybody's ear with considerable biological and psychological impact, but also its echoes bounce around this empty and enormous square, which make the voice last longer and become more unbearable.



Figure 52. Group of local officials (Bland & Backhouse: 151)



Figure 53. The centre stage in Tai He building, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

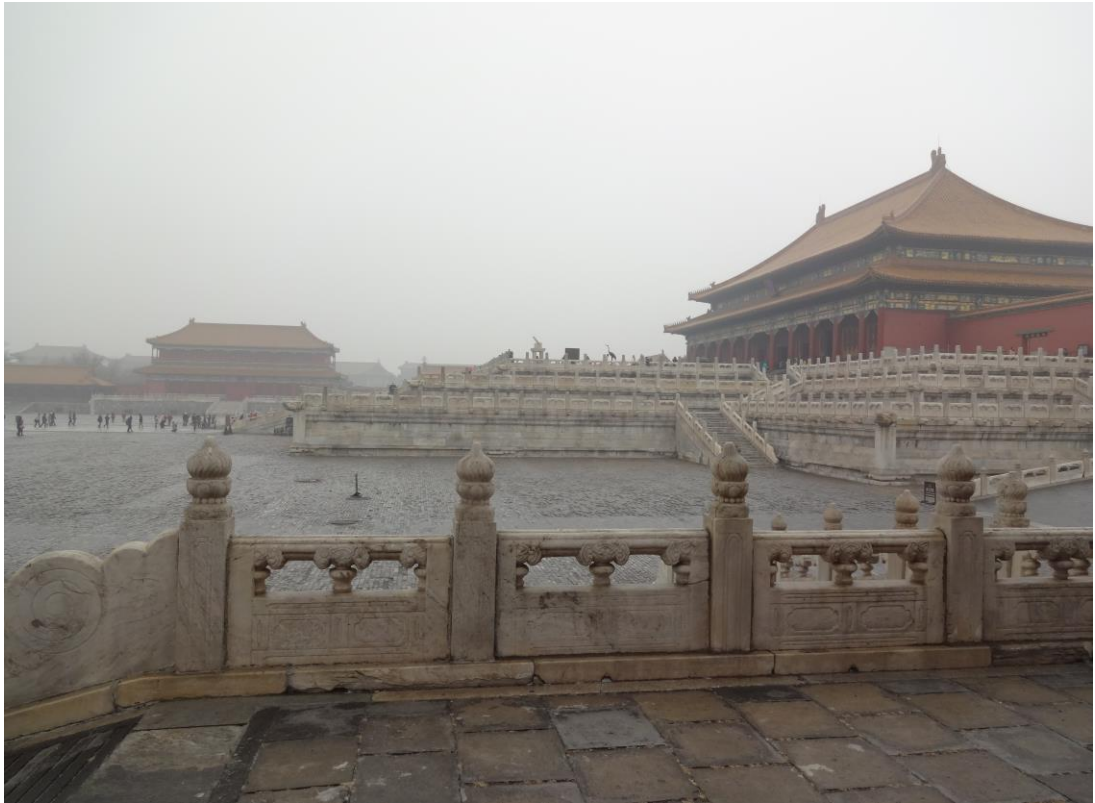


Figure 54. Side view of Tai He building, 2012, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 55. Imagining the almost empty space filled with the voice (and the echoes of the voice) of the head eunuch, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

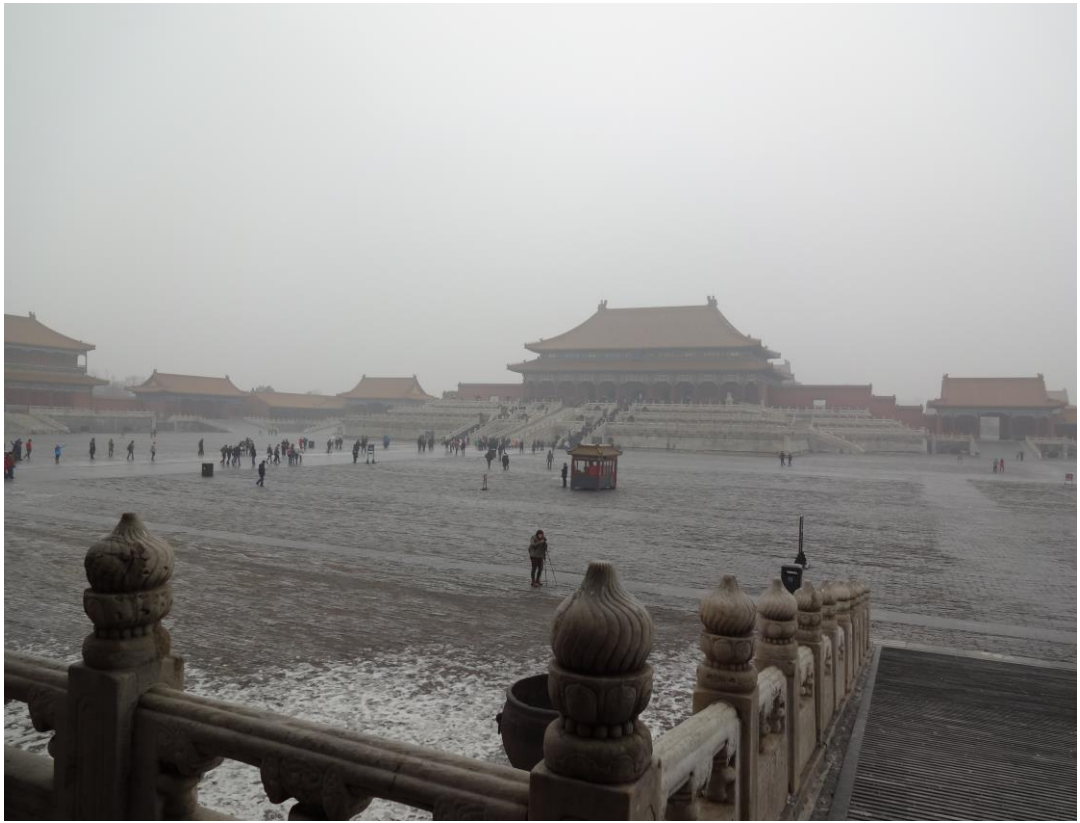


Figure 56. Imagining the almost empty space filled with the voice (and the echoes of the voice) of the head eunuch, 2012, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 57. Imagining the almost empty space filled with the voice (and the echoes of the voice) of the head eunuch, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

The sound immediately reaches the next gate where a less cherished eunuch acts as a doorman, waiting for the message while imagining the movements of the head eunuch at the Tai He building and wondering when he himself would reach that elevated position. This much less favoured eunuch, who does not yet earned the right to act in his own ‘neither slow nor fast’ style, has to rather quickly turn around and run through the gate to relay the message to the eunuch at the next gate. He has to shout out the message before the echoes of the voice of the head eunuch disappears completely. And so it follows, the message voiced and shouted by the castrated bodies one after another, mixed with the echoes of previous shouting, is relayed through five gates and the squares in between. Before the inexperienced nonlocal bodies receive the last shout (or the last echoes of the shout), they would have been lashed by the echoing voices many times already. The bodies are in a state of high alert since hearing the first shout and the subsequent echoes only make the bodies anxious and bewildered as they are a sign that the journey of ‘meeting the emperor’ is going to start in a minute.

Once the message arrives, the journey soon starts with the low-end eunuch, as the doorman, leading the bodies to walk through the side door of the Tian An Men gate toward to the next inner main gate, “Duan Men”, where another waiting low-end eunuch will take over the lead to continue the journey further down to the next gate. And so it follows until the bodies reach the fifth gate, “Tai He Men” (the Gate of

Supreme Harmony), where the bodies need to wait once again for further instructions. Since early in the morning on that day, the bodies have had to wear official robes that are strictly commensurate with their social positions and official titles. As anthropologist Carla Freeman points out in her parallel discussion about uniforms in the modern office: “Within the arena of the office, dress...may serve as powerful metaphors of corporate discipline” (Freeman: 177). The official robes worn on the day of meeting the emperor need to be well presented like never before: the patterns on the front of the robe indicate the level of the official; the court beads can only be worn as an accessory in the robes of the civil officials at level four or above, and by the military officials at level three or above; while the colours and the materials of the court beads distinguish the official levels. Such hierarchical rules also applied to the court boots, the court hat that shows different ranks according to the button made from precious stone on top, and so on (See Figures 58 & 59). The bodies are disciplined from the moment the official dress is put on.

Figure 58. Golden pheasant rank badge, 2nd rank civil servant, and silk tapestry with painted details. China, Qing Dynasty, late 18th – early 19th century. Denver Art Museum.

Figure 59. Dorgon (Duō'ěrgūn) (1612/11/17 – 1650/12/31), also known as Hošoi Mergen Cin Wang, the Prince Rui, was Nurhaci's 14th son and a prince of the Qing Dynasty⁶⁴

However, with such meticulously detailed official robes on, the physical mobility of the bodies is reduced, which increases the tension on the bodies following behind the eunuchs. These official robes are brand new and never been worn until this morning. The bodies, who are used to riding on sedan chairs in their respective precincts, do not feel comfortable walking in new boots over a long distance, especially while wearing the tight and heavy robes. While the bodies struggle with their own physical discomfort, the guiding low-end eunuch starts talking to the bodies by briefly introducing himself first. His voice is so soft that no one can hear, even the bodies right behind him have to listen attentively so as not to miss any words. The low-end eunuch greets the bodies in a tone that is neither warm nor cold, because the eunuch does not know – and, in some cases, the bodies themselves do not know – whether they are here for good or bad intentions. During the short conversation, the low-end eunuch always offers the bodies a couple of important tips on seeing the emperor, which are second-hand accounts the eunuch has heard from others, as his social position is too low to have a chance to see the emperor himself. The seemingly friendly reminder from the eunuch helps the bodies to relax a bit; however, the conversation is purposely made to advocate the eunuch himself to the bodies by repeating his own name frequently throughout the quick conversation. If the assumption of the low-end eunuch is right in terms of which bodies are here for good, then they would return with expensive gifts or favours afterwards as a form of thanks for these important tips. More importantly, establishing such social networks is beneficial for both the eunuchs and nonlocal officials for their

⁶⁴ Retrieved from: <http://wenwen.soso.com/t/z137154.htm?ch=w.wty.tdzt>

future in the long term.

The nonlocal bodies, who are experienced in the hierarchical social system, understand that the purpose behind the neither-warm-nor-cold conversation with the eunuch is never about helping out, but rather it poses a demand from the eunuch who asks for benefits by showing off his solid contact with the masters inside the Forbidden City. Hence, after meeting the emperor, the bodies must express their appreciation to the low-end eunuch by returning benefits/favours in one way or another.⁶⁵ Such social interaction is an outward expression of thanks for receiving ‘helpful’ tips but actually prevents the eunuch from being bad mouthed in front of his masters, which may have a negative impact on their political careers in the Forbidden City. The act of walking through the space, which is supposed to be a series of plain physical motions, becomes an opportunity to build the social network between the people outside of the Forbidden City and the eunuchs inside, which is otherwise prohibited by the Feudal law. Once the contact is established, it is mutually beneficial because nonlocal officials end up with ‘insiders’ to talk up their achievements to the masters in the Forbidden City for a chance at quick promotion, and the eunuch ends up with outside supporters to supplement his minimum wages and earns a greater standing among other eunuchs in the Forbidden City. Therefore, the quick conversation is a performative show of cordiality with no overt statements or promises but it is still full of implications that have to be done in moderation, as the low-end eunuch does not want to be involved in the consequences of being too friendly, or risk mentioning his name too often to the bodies in case the meetings did not go well or the tips did not work.

These two types of bodies – the low-end eunuch and the nonlocal official bodies – physically walk together for just a few minutes, one slightly ahead of the other, with their thoughts in completely different worlds. The body of the low-end eunuch is the dogsbody in that area – which includes the gate he is in charge of, all the way across the square to the entry of the next gate – who spends days and nights within that designated area attending to all the menial daily tasks, such as cleaning, gardening and occasionally taking people across the area. After years working here, the low-end eunuch, who remains at the bottom of the hierarchy, knows the area so well that he sees himself as an intimate part of the space, although he is inevitably always curious about what lies beyond the area. The nonlocal official bodies, who are comfortable and confident in their high ranking positions in country regions, ironically do not have any sense of superiority, security or comfort here; instead they are anxious and restrained in contrast to the body of the low-end eunuch in the space. This space makes two types of bodies, who normally occupy particular positions in the strict social hierarchy, interact in the reverse manner.

In this sense, the space results in two types of bodies having two completely separate focuses while physically walking together. The eunuch, focusing on the present time

⁶⁵ The Feudal laws forbade any direct or indirect contact between officials and eunuchs to prevent corruption or conspiracy against the state.

with his raised head, leads the pace while carefully and mindfully inserting hints into the dialogue, which is mainly dominated by his abnormal voice. His physical body keeps time with his tone and walking pace to consolidate his purpose of asking for benefits and building social contact through the conversation. On the other hand, the official bodies are overwhelmed, as their minds are fully preoccupied with every hypothetical scene for meeting the emperor, and memorising the appropriate bodily actions and language to use in any possible circumstance over and over again, which he had learnt at the Ministry of Rites. The officials' bodies, while walking slightly behind the low-end eunuchs, are physically tired from wearing their heavy robes and new boots, and constantly and nervously glancing at the changing surroundings using minimal bodily actions while walking. These bodies are also culturally restrained by the complex rites – for instance, the bodies have to lower their heads while walking to show respect, but they are psychologically stressed from not knowing what lies ahead. Appropriate response is restricted to the conversation with the eunuch and for these overwhelmed bodies it is the only thing that they have to help them deal with the space. The limited response permissible from the officials' bodies actually does not bother the eunuch for the conversation becomes a soliloquy for showing his own 'grandeur', which he seems to enjoy. Perhaps in those few moments the low-end eunuch earns a little dignity by telling others what to do, rather than being harshly told what not to do for most of the time in the space.

After a few minutes of walking, these two types of bodies may be contrasted via their physical actions: the body of the low-end eunuch walks comfortably with his head raised and dominates the conversation with his own interests, his voice and the rhythm of his voice; however, the bodies of nonlocal officials follow closely behind, flattering the low-end eunuch in the conversation with fake smiles on their faces, while keeping their heads slightly lowered, suffering from stiff muscles all over their bodies. There is an unambiguous distinction of the relative social positions between these two types of bodies as their clothing clearly and accurately indicates, however, the physical interactions between the bodies do not reflect their social positions. Such phenomenon can be better understood when contextualising the interactions in terms of the space – the bodies are walking inside the Forbidden City. The space, through its physical layout and social/cultural inscription and character, impact upon the bodies that have, in turn, reversed their social positions – which only serves to amplify the body behaviours expected within the space.

Just before they arrive at the next gate, the low-end eunuch quietly repeats his own name one last time and wishes the best of luck to the nonlocal bodies for the rest of the journey ahead. When they approach the next doorman, the low-end eunuch slows down his pace and nods with an exaggerated flattering smile on his face toward the doorman, who is another eunuch ranked one level higher. The low-end eunuch quickly takes one step to the left and lets the whole body of the nonlocal official be directly exposed to the next eunuch. The next eunuch, who has been waiting at the door since the first shout by the head eunuch, quickly nods back to the low-end eunuch and greets

the nonlocal bodies with a few words in a neither-warm-nor-cold tone, and then turns around to lead the bodies on the next leg of the journey to the next gate. The transition of passing the nonlocal officials to the next eunuch only lasts for a few seconds. The handover between the eunuchs has to be done quickly to not only minimise the interruption of each transition and avoid any suspicious speculation from others nearby, such as the bodyguards, but also to ensure a little extra time for the next eunuch to do ‘walking while talking’ for their own interests; this can only be done when walking across the enormous squares when nobody else is closely around.

By the time of arrival at the third gate (the Meridian Gate), the nonlocal bodies have lost count of the number of doors and partly surrendered as their bodies are physically tired and mentally exhausted under the impact of the space – *and* from having to deal with the cunning and guile of the eunuchs one after another. By this point, these nonlocal bodies would never expect that their sentiment toward the eunuchs could change. However, after passing through the Meridian Gate, where the Forbidden City officially starts, the dynamics of the space changes, which, in turn, significantly impacts on the interaction and relationship between these two types of bodies.

The scene in the Taihemen Square is extremely silent, with every inch of the square exposed under the harsh sunlight, and the nonlocal bodies cannot trace any sound or motion from anything or anybody, even the eunuch hardly says a word. The nonlocal bodies need to walk across the Taihemen Square without stopping. It is the size of two football fields divided into two parts by the Inner Golden Water Bridge in the middle as the only architecture in the square. Apart from the minor buildings and bodyguards located far down both sides and facing the square, which look smaller and blurry in the distance, there is nothing nearby to allow the nonlocal bodies to visually or physically refer to while walking. The enormous and almost an empty square creates a sense that everything and everybody is completely exposed under the ‘gaze’ of the emperor without any possibility of hiding or escaping whatsoever. The bodies are anxious, panicked and vulnerable; they feel naked as they walk forward, thinking of nothing but the lessons learnt from the Ministry of Rites – and feeling more constrained and rigidly disciplined as a result.

The only way to deal with this agonising experience under the scrutiny of the absolute power of the emperor is to do what the emperor wants – behave accordingly and closely follow one of the emperor’s servants, the eunuch, whom the nonlocal bodies would normally treat with scorn, but now regards in amiable, even brotherly, terms. The deceitful and repulsive eunuch becomes the only one the nonlocal bodies can rely on to cross the square to the next gate without fainting along the way. The gabbling eunuch becomes the life raft of the nonlocal bodies to keep themselves afloat, which results in them walking a bit closer to the eunuch involuntarily. The negative tension that has built up between the nonlocal bodies and the previous eunuchs during the walkthrough are overlooked by the nonlocal bodies at this moment. The nonlocal bodies no longer consider themselves as vain high officials coming with power, wealth,

and strong social networks. The nonlocal bodies just want to survive the day as they realise what they have seen in their region is nothing compared to the space of the Forbidden City and wonder how the eunuchs have survived in a place saturated with such pressure and fear. The space disciplines the bodies by putting them in variable circumstances where the interactions and relationships in/with the space are changed constantly, and which are all harsh and trying, so that the bodies are broken down several times until they become docile.

After the bodies arrive at the final gate, Gate of Supreme Harmony, where they have to climb stairs in order to get through, they can rest for a bit while awaiting further instructions. The eunuch would leave the bodies there as he walks to the head eunuch to take further instructions. Before the eunuch makes his way back, the bodies can start to make better sense of the surroundings with shilly-shally bodily movement as they are still under the shock from the walkthrough. The 'waiting moment' is also designed to further discipline the bodies. The bodies stand at the gateway, approximately 5 meters above the ground. By looking behind, the bodies see the full view of the Taihemen Square, which the bodies have just experienced and only occasionally had a chance to glance at while keeping their heads down. It is rather spectacular to look down at the square from above and the bodies would have no clue how their bodies managed to walk through the square in such an intense atmosphere and they are glad they have physically made it. Turning around and moving a few steps forward to look through the gate frame, another enormous square appears in front of the bodies, which they undoubtedly have to continue walking through. The 'waiting time' is to allow the bodies to gain a tiny bit of relief from looking-behind, which is immediately destroyed when looking-ahead. The bodies are once again defeated by the space and left with frustration and discouragement regarding their onward journey, which only makes the bodies more docile.



Figure 60. Climbing stairs and looking into the further journey at next gate, 2012, photo: Peng Liu

Soon enough, the nonlocal bodies make their final journey, walking through the square toward to the Taihedian building, which is the biggest architecture in the Forbidden City built on top of an approximately 20-meter high marble stage located at the other end of the square. The Taihedian Square is similar in size to the previous square with no other buildings blocking the line of sight, which makes the white sandy ground look seemingly endless. The eunuch quietly guides the bodies with the only sounds coming from his boots stepping on the sandy ground and the rustling of his clothes. He does not speak a word as they are very close to the heart of the Forbidden City, which make every body exercise extra caution so as to avoid any unnecessary troubles. The nonlocal bodies, walking directly under the sunlight all the way through, sweat and struggle to cope as these are not young and energetic bodies. These are bodies in their fifties or sixties that have fought for their social positions over many years of striving and surviving in the society in order to have the chance to meet the emperor. However, all their efforts, life experience and accomplishments seem insignificant in the context of the Forbidden City and their complacency, pride and self-confidence diminish and deteriorate along with each passing gate and square. This is exactly what the emperor wants – for every body to feel insignificant in the face of his absolute power through the use of the space. The bodies keep plodding on in the square like slaves walking across the Gobi Desert with shackles on. The sun only gets brighter and hotter, with the fine white sand reflecting the sunlight directly onto their faces and so they have to keep their heads lowered all the time. The golden glazed roof tiles are shining and

dazzling under the sunlight, which makes the scene even brighter so much so that the bodies have literally nowhere to rest their eyes.

Through their almost closed eyes, the open doorways hiding under the rooves of minor buildings along both sides of the square are the only things they can comfortably steal a glance at. The brighter outdoors makes those doorways seem darker inside and the bodies feel like they are being constantly watched from a distance by people inside those buildings. The bodies were actually told at the Ministry of Rites that they would be watched all the way through. Even though the bodies feel like they are being watched by the bodyguards and doormen they had left behind, they could never confirm that feeling because they did not dare to look back while walking. They feel that every motion of their body is being meticulously read by someone who always refers back to the rituals for any possible misbehaviour. The ‘gaze’ of the emperor, the absolute power of the emperor, is in every corner of the Forbidden City; in every body’s mind, every body and every thing is measured against the rituals with the ever-present possibility of harsh punishment for any impropriety. As “the gaze is integral to systems of power and ideas about knowledge” (Sturken & Cartwright: 94), bodies who believe they are constantly being watched, even though they cannot directly see who or what is watching them, would modify their behaviours for their own good.⁶⁶

The bodies of the nonlocal officials are relentlessly and overwhelmingly manipulated several times in the preceding scenes, resulting in restrained and terrified bodies that do not think for themselves, but act accordingly as required, as the only way to survive. After climbing hundreds of marble stairs decorated with carved clouds to represent ascending the sky, the bodies finally gather outside the Supreme Harmony Hall, which is just a few steps away from the head eunuch. These bodies are in a state of complete surrender: emotionally defeated by the amazing scenes they never imagined; culturally subjugated by the rigid, complex and comprehensive rituals; physically spent from their still freshly inscribed bodily experience in the space. The bodies of nonlocal have been subdued by the impact of the space upon their bodies, regardless who they are, as they have become docile bodies by the time they complete their journey to meet the emperor.

2.4.2 Retracing the route of meeting emperor myself in contemporary time

The route of meeting emperor does not impact on my body in the exact way as on those Feudal bodies, as the main players/factors of the scene, the emperors and its Feudal social system, are absent from the space. Because of this, the details of the space, seen as historical residuals, emerge and become attractive and eye-catching in drawing in my body. As I walk along the route, sensing the residuals, my body is largely besieged by the involvement of contemporary elements/environments in the space that my body can neither ignore nor easily contextualise. A bit awkward and perplexed, I realise the space is disciplining my body in an unexpected way.

⁶⁶ For Foucault, the gaze as a particular dynamic in power relations and disciplinary mechanisms is discussed in *Discipline and Punish* with reference to Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the Panopticon in building practice.



Figure 61. Modern elements in the space of the Forbidden City, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

The contemporary disciplining of my body in the space is a synthesis of recalling bodily experience from the past and filling in the rest with my imagination, as my body does not walk into the space as a blank or neutral medium. The wide range of multisensory experiences received by my body in the contemporary age has broadened my views, so much so that, most of the time, new bodily experience keeps coming even while my body is still ruminating on previous experiences. The sudden presence of modern elements in the space, which always appear as mismatched or incongruous objects, create an impact upon my body in terms of provoking a response, sometimes in an imaginative way. Although these newly installed modern elements may not be valued aesthetically and seem disruptive to the sense of authenticity in the space, they paradoxically make my body proactive in responding to the incongruity. These modern elements are caught in glances by my body as I am walking, which force my thoughts to quickly respond, as the image of a modern telephone booth, for example, may still largely occupy my mind, along with its peculiar implication discomforting my cultural body, while my physical body is already around the next corner, where the experience of seeing/receiving new things is already in motion. The contemporary body is disciplined in multiple and rapid exchanges with the outer world, where there is no

time to allow the current impression to be properly recognised, understood and finally absorbed in the body, before receiving the next new experience. Consequently, I feel the day is going by faster, as my sense of the passage of time becomes blurry, and my memory becomes less reliable. I feel like I am living in a world of multiple dimensions.

Soon enough after starting my route, I realise that restoring the route is not likely to be easy and authentic. The first gate (Da Qing Men) was demolished to make Tian An Men square during the 1950s so I have to cut my route of ‘meeting the emperor’ short by starting from the second gate – Tian An Men, where I find myself surrounded by tens of thousands of tourists. Following the crowds half way through, my body has little experience of the space, but is instead stressed and frustrated by the noise of the crowds. The real disappointment comes when I am ready to walk through the side doors of the Meridian Gate: all four side doors are closed permanently to the public and so I have to walk through the main gate instead. Only emperors and a few important people during specific occasions can walk through the main gates in Feudal times. The bodily experience is far from what I had expected and it shifts my focus to consider how my body deals with the contemporary conditions/version of the space after being disciplined by the awareness of its cultural history.

Even though the design of the route in the space in Feudal times does not impact on my body like before – for example, my body is not always subject to the gaze of security guards due to the large number of tourists, and my body is hidden in the crowd rather than being singled out and exposed – my body still proactively responds to the contemporary disciplinary power of the space. When I become aware there are a massive number of surveillance cameras installed everywhere in the space, I realise that my body is literally under a constant ‘gaze’, just like those Feudal bodies. A transformed version of the ‘gaze’ is completed, from a culturally driven formation based on Confucian values in Feudal times, to a 21st century technologically driven formation in contemporary times, servicing the same purpose – a comprehensive watching by the authorities, but generating different affect. In terms of the electrical ‘gaze’, as Freeman notes in relation to panoptic video display, “...every [body] can be electronically observed without pause or error” (Freeman: 175); the electrical ‘gaze’ – the fact of being watched by the authorities behind the cameras – is on my body from multiple angles without pause or error. Moreover, my body is aware that every action and reaction of my body in the space is not only constantly under the watch of the authorities, but also visually recorded by the electrical ‘gaze’ as a file that can be kept and reviewed, which results in my physical body being disciplined, acting appropriately and accordingly in order to avoid punishment. Unlike the Feudal bodies where error may be only found in the moment, the contemporary body can be electronically stored as data for days and even years, and judged later on. However, Confucian values, which reinforced and completed the emperor’s ‘gaze’ to discipline both physical and cultural bodies in Feudal times, have been stood down in contemporary times. The electrical ‘gaze’ only disciplines my physical actions and cannot discipline my cultural body, which could have moved from a Confucian to a

catholic, a mammonist or an anarchist while wandering through the space. In other words, the absence of the impact of Confucian values upon bodies makes the transformed electrical ‘gaze’ discipline my body fully in terms of the physical body, but with little effect on the cultural body. Moreover, the designed route is also heavily disrupted by the large crowds of tourists to the extent that the expected impact upon my body was not forthcoming.

In this specific circumstance, my cultural embodiment is provoked into filling up the absence of a contemporary version of ‘Confucian values’, and cooperating with the surveillance cameras to discipline my body in the space. When the surveillance cameras (along with other contemporary elements such as the No Flash sign) do not appear in my sight, my cultural imagination sprawls, based on my cultural awareness of the history as well as the physical and visual presence of the space. By imaginatively immersing myself into the space in this manner, my body starts to feel tipsy from travelling between the actual space and the cultural space. My imagination rapidly grows while constantly looking for a sense of cultural belonging in the space. The stronger the sense of cultural belonging my body has discovered, the tighter its discipline on my cultural body. My body comes back into balance – physically disciplined by the electrical ‘gaze’ and culturally disciplined by the sense of cultural belonging in the space.

My body is not considered a ‘blank canvas’ when I brought it into the space for, as Saba Mahmood claims, “the objective conditions of a society are inscribed in [my] bodies” (Mahmood: 838). Consequently, my body would look for certain things in the space associated and coherent with what has already been culturally inscribed in my body. Moreover, the practice of looking for certain things in the space is a self-taught pedagogical moment in which “historically and culturally specific embodied capacities” (Mahmood: 838) are being changed in the process. My body is looking for the certain things which my body is interested in and finding them reinforces its culturally embodied sensitivity and capacity. In this sense, the longer my body spends in that space, the greater impact its upon my body, and the stronger its disciplinary work on my body. Therefore, acknowledging the situation that almost every social body (in a state of awareness) would physically respond to being disciplined more or less under the direct watch of the authorities, the discipline my cultural body received in this contemporary version of the space is largely due to my cultural embodiment, which is already inside my body before entering the space. The impact of the design of the space, tarnished by the contemporary elements, is puzzled back together through the sense of cultural belonging in my imaginative version of the space.

In addition to the role of surveillance cameras in everyday society in Perth, Western Australia, where I currently live and study, a further example of body discipline, may be brought in as a parallel discussion. According to Nine News Australia, “the Armadale rail line has been revealed to be the most dangerous for passengers. It’s the

line [public space] where most attacks have taken place.”⁶⁷ Though most attacks were recorded by surveillance cameras in the train station, which can be used as information and evidence afterwards, the surveillance cameras (and railway platform speakers) have insufficient capacity to directly impact on the bodies (that is, stopping the assaults) in comparison with the guards’ physical presence at those locations. Apart from scrutinising behaviours like the surveillance cameras, the physical presence of the guards is able to enforce social discipline on the cultural body of potential offenders through bodily interactions, such as face-to-face talking and other gestures. Unless walking off the scene silently, the bodies of potential offenders are most likely to be involved in interactions with the guards. The interactions impact on the bodies of potential offenders via efforts to re-discipline those bodies and bring them back into line, effectively turning their bodies into “a certain kind of subject” (Mahmood: 838). The subject is understood as being reasonable and acceptable in public space; consequently, minimising misbehaviours and anti-social behaviours.

Such efforts to bring bodies back into discipline are diminished and compromised when the actual presence of the guards is replaced by a technological mode in which only the surveillance cameras and the speakers deal with the bodies of potential offenders at the scene. The intimate contact between guards and offenders is lost in the scene and so, too, does the influence on the offenders.

⁶⁷ Retrieved 19 February 2014 from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBpUptjvP2Y>

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated my bodily experience in the space of the Forbidden City under the categories of cultural space and physical space, which highlight the complex relationship between my body and the space. The relationship is further examined in terms how my body carries out on-site tasks within that disciplinary space. To make stronger sense, an imaginative scenario is created in fictive writing, which underscores the comparison and contrast between Feudal bodies and my body in different historical periods. The involvement of (my) bodies in the space is significant in the sense of reflecting the social/cultural atmosphere of the space while, at the same time, understanding my body within that particular context. My body is an embodied being that is acted upon by institutions and every action indicates its cultural origins. In the next chapter, I will focus on my bodily movement in the studio space to interrogate my body not only as a representation of Chinese culture/society, but also as individual and artistic.

Chapter Three: My Body in the Studio Space

3.1 Introduction

Focusing on my body as a practicing artist, this chapter explores how my bodily memory and experience of the spaces of the Forbidden City might be translated into the language of painting through the movement of my body in the studio space. The interrogation of the movement of my body in creative practice is driven by the idea that the body, as well as being an individual (Foucault, 1998), is acted upon by institutions (Foucault, 1991),⁶⁸ as a representation of class, gender, race and so on. My bodily movement in the actions of painting inevitably reflects the institutions acting upon my body as a representation of Chinese culture/society, and also highlights my individuality in response to the world.

To examine my bodily movement in creative practice and my artwork from this particular perspective, I shall consider two institutional practices and their impact upon my body as examples to elaborate the issue. The first one is the concept of the grand unification, which has appeared in every aspect of Chinese society as an inherited historical thought and cultural embodiment upon my body, followed by an analysis of the social impact of the One Child policy on my body. The two selected historical phenomena interpreted through my critical view perhaps provide a platform to understand my bodily movement in the studio, which results in artworks.

⁶⁸ According to Deleuze in his book *Foucault*, body discipline “cannot be identified with any one institution or apparatus...precisely because it is a type of power, a technology, that traverses every kind of apparatus or institution, linking them, prolonging them, and making them converge and function in a new way...” (Deleuze 1988) *Foucault*. Trans. Sean Hand. London: Athlone.

3.2 Cultural Technique in Creative Practice – exploring the cultural embodiment in the movement of my body in studio space

3.2.1 Introduction: Body and Painting

As an academic researcher as well as practicing artist, I am interested in my bodily movement and techniques in the act of painting which inevitably reflects the institutions enacted upon my body as representation of Chinese culture and society, and also highlights my individual practice as an artist in response to the world. According to Shilling, Turner, Douglas and Mauss, the body is historically inherited and culturally embodied, as I have discussed in the previous chapter (Shilling: 10-12; Turner: 197; Douglas: 68-78; Mauss: 75). My bodily experience of wandering in the space of the Forbidden City is mediated by its historical and cultural formations. As Turner notes, human beings “are simultaneously part of nature and part of culture [...] and culture shapes and mediates nature...[while] nature constitutes a limit in human agency” (Turner: 197). Specifically, my body is affected by the concept of grand unification which is reflected in its actions and reactions. I am interested in the Confucian conditions of the limits to what is possible in the techniques of painting and how the techniques of painting rely upon and resist the grand unification promised by Confucian thought. Every action is, as Douglas notes, “always sustaining a particular set of cultural meanings, a particular social order” (Douglas: 68).

The concept of grand unification is apparent in the space of the Forbidden City in that the design of every courtyard is in hierarchical relation to each other, not only physically connected and distinguished through hidden doorways, corridors, and verandas, but also the styles and plants suggest their coherency within the city as the head of this hierarchical society. My body responds to the architectural space in certain ways whereby the visual perception and tactile experience of touching surfaces of wooden columns, cornerstones, and fallen roof tiles consolidate the interactions of my body with the space under the concept of grand unification, as my body forms techniques to approach corners and other details.

My everyday bodily actions, embodied with historical thought and cultural meaning, is considered a “cultural meme”⁶⁹ (Merleau-Ponty: 7), which obtains rich sensations and experience through multiple senses in the space of the Forbidden City that subsequently need to be re-thought and expanded in order to express my bodily experience in the studio. Merleau-Ponty describes the relationship between lived object and post-impressionist painter as follows: “The lived object [in nature] is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contributions of the [human] senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start” (Merleau-Ponty: 5). His words imply our body is able to be affected and every artist has his or her very own techniques to

⁶⁹ According to Merleau-Ponty’s notes in *Cezanne’s Doubt*, “[Humans] can invent pleasurable objects by linking old ideas in a new way and by presenting forms that have been seen before. This way of painting or speaking “second hand” is what is generally meant by culture” (Merleau-Ponty: 7), the cultural embodiment of body in its actions is considered second hand, in which the body is also called a cultural animal or a cultural meme.

translate such affect into the language of art in the studio. Frenhofer further notes the role of the hand as a bodily technique in studio: “A hand is not simply part of the body (in everyday perspective), but the expression and continuation of a thought which must be captured and conveyed” (Frenhofer cited in Merleau-Ponty: 7), and result in brushstrokes. Therefore, my everyday habitual actions are re-thought and expanded to form a new series of bodily techniques in the studio in order to express my bodily experience in the space of the Forbidden City. Body techniques in the studio are not only culturally embodied representations of social contexts, but they are also artistic – being individual in response to the world. In this regard, painting becomes the documentation of my body movement in the studio space. Indeed, as James Elkins notes: “Paint is a cast made of the painter’s movements, a portrait of the painter’s body and thoughts [...] [it] records the most delicate gesture and the most tense [tensest] [...] [and] tells whether the painter sat or stood or crouched in front of the canvas” (Elkins: 5). Each brushstroke reflects particular bodily techniques formed in the studio which is a combination of cultural embodiment and artistic expression that would have barely appeared together in everyday life.

As a practicing artist who was trained under the influence of the concept of the grand unification, I was taught to paint relationships on canvas as one of many ways to handle the medium. Every colour and brushstroke, painted in terms of tones, perspectives and the size of brushstrokes, serves to build the relationships in between in order to construct a coherent system which balances positive and negative shapes. There is no such thing as a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ colour or brushstroke. There are only appropriate or inappropriate colours and brushstrokes. The dynamics of the painting is altered with every colour and brushstroke painted on canvas. Painting therefore becomes a process of constant balancing. As Bernard discerns, “each stroke must ‘contain the air, the light, the object, the composition, the character, the outline, and the style.’ Expressing what exists is an endless task” (Bernard cited in Merleau-Ponty: 5). And the purpose of expressing on canvas is not to showcase my ability to capture shapes and colours from nature or memories, but to see and, indeed, foresee how my next brushstroke interacts with the existing marks on canvas, to construct the foreseen faultless atmosphere of my painting being looked at, as my cultural body has intended and expressed. Berger describes the moment when the painting is finished as “[n]ot when it finally corresponds to something already existing...but when the foreseen ideal moment of its being looked at is filled, as the painter feels or calculates it ought to be,” (Berger: 26) which is determined by the cultural body.

3.2.2 The concept of grand unification in everyday embodied body movement and my body techniques in studio space

The concept of grand unification is understood as Dao, which originated from Laozi, founder of Daoism, and has variable definitions, including ‘communality’ in some English translations. The grand unification was advocated in China by major ancient philosophies such as Confucianism, Daoism and Mohism, and in processes like Legalism, to reflect the respective philosophers’ understanding about the world. The concept has been cultivated in the minds of the people and is omnipresent in all aspects of Chinese society, be it in terms of politics, culture, and the individual.

Confucius points out: “天下有道，则礼乐征伐自天子出” (“If the nation is unified under one centre, the nation is in good shape”). This implication of the concept of grand unification in politics encouraged centralisation. As a result of this ideology, almost every political leader in the history of China has considered the actualisation of the nation’s grand unification as their fundamental goal, for according to Daoism the idea of unifying the nation is fulfilling god’s will.⁷⁰

Liu Che, the Wu emperor in Han dynasty, adopted Dong Zhongshu’s suggestion in *Interactions between Heaven and Mankind*, to “罢黜百家，独尊儒术” (“venerated Confucianism, meanwhile banned the rest of philosophies and ideologies inherited from the Warring state period”). This political move established Confucianism as the only official ideology in China, which applied the grand unification to an ideological perspective.

The idea of the grand unification is interpreted and embedded in daily life, forming a set of body techniques in relation to the hierarchical society, for example, the mid-autumn festival which is one of the two most important festivals in China. By using the astronomical phenomena of the full moon as both a symbol and a metaphor, it represents the nation in unification as well as a family reunion.

In terms of Confucian values, every common person should reunite with their family to celebrate the festival by having a family feast. The feast not only gathers the family, but also suggests the nation which is seen as a big family that shall be unified too. For example, many poems from the Tang and Song Dynasty are themed on the full moon to express their nostalgia as well as the wish of a unified nation. Poet Li Bai wrote in Tang dynasty: “举头望明月，低头思故乡” (“I raised my head and looked out on the

⁷⁰ The emperors who unified the country have been glorified and remembered as founding Fathers by history regardless of the heavy price paid in terms of the high death toll, decades of poverty and backward economy caused by the unification wars. By contrast the emperors, who avoided bloodshed by signing agreements that lost a part of the territory in exchange for peace and cultural prosperity, are remembered as fatuous and self-indulgent. Any deficiency/loss in terms of the national interest, such as the ceding of territory or the payment of indemnities, was considered destructive against the centralisation. Thus the emperors always took the blame regardless of the complex and tangled political and economic circumstances. Despite just barely surviving under the exorbitant taxes, common people also wished the grand unification as their assurance of living in peace, which is described in *Tai Ping Guang Ji*: “宁为太平犬，不做乱世人” (It is better to be a dog in the grand unification period than be a man in a chaotic period). Politically, the concept of grand unification was planted into every body’s mind in all classes of society.

mountain moon; I bowed my head and thought of my far-off home”); and poet Su Dongpo wrote in Song dynasty: “不应有恨，何事长向别时圆?” (“Sorrow and regret should be avoided for the moon; yet why you always turn full at departure moment?”). The moon cake is one of the festival foods made in the shape of a full moon as a symbol of perfection in family reunion.

Even people who work far away from home all year round must make their way back home in time for the family feast to celebrate and express their filial piety, which is one of essentials in Confucianism. The very first evidence of body technique occurs when family members who are returning home from business trips must step across the doorsill and greet their parents straightaway in the principal room. Following Confucian values, a well-educated man would salute his parents with a formal full ketou to express filial piety. This form of address was considered one of the “rituals of abject servitude” (Hevia: 181) by anthropologist James L. Hevia. There were nine types of ketou which, as body techniques, were applied in everyday life and highlighted the hierarchical society orientated by the centralisation.

The actions of ketou involve everyone’s physical participation as manifestation and reinforcement of its cultural engagement with the idea of centralisation so much so that the reinforcement of each on the category of the other sustained the social hierarchical for more than 2000 years. The everyday accumulated bodily memories and experience of participating in the idea drive the bodies to behave accordingly and technically *and* impact upon the bodies to reinforce the ideology over and over again. The concept of grand unification is widely accepted and implemented in the nation as a cultural reference, which disciplined every body into a fixed role in the hierarchical society, illuminating Michel Foucault’s description of culture as “a hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, [and] at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion” (Foucault, 2001: 173). The sense of grand unification in the hierarchical society became a part of the national identity for centuries, not only as an abstract concept, but also as a concrete cultural embodiment for the population on a daily basis.

As a result of this cultural embodiment, my body intuitively paints by delicately placing and adjusting every brushstroke in relation to the previous marks in order to construct a collective and systematic world. My brushstrokes, as James Elkins notes in a parallel discussion, are “the evidence of the artist’s manual devotion to his image” (Elkins: 3), which provides the balance between the sense of stability created by the composition and the sense of infinite possibilities created by the subtlety of the colour (Figure 63). There is neither strong contrast in using colours, nor sharp edges painted, as if the air I painted has not only softened every object, but also has integrated every object into the holistic atmosphere. The world is “a mass without gaps” (Merleau-Ponty: 5) and the ultimate purpose of grand unification underneath its hierarchical structure is in ever-pursuit of a virtuous circle – a mystical interpretation and expectation about world order in terms of Chinese ancient philosophy. The scene of

painting “is not just one of my visual perceptions recalled from memory but a bodily experience as participant in the scene” (Liu: 25) and my cultural embodiment, which are expressed and translated through body techniques into the language of painting in the studio. The constantly moving body perceives the colour of the space as infinite, and it seems as if the space itself vibrates.



Figure 62. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series two* Oil on canvas 100cm X 170cm, 2010, photo: Peng Liu

While I physically explore and form my very own techniques (as the language of painting), the intention of applying certain body techniques to ensure understanding and to create an appropriate artwork is historically inherited. For example, in early tenth century, Jing Hao first theorised the types of brushstrokes called *笔法记* (“The Theory of Brushstrokes in Chinese Landscape Painting”) for depicting different types of objects. The theorised brushstrokes specify particular bodily movements for depicting certain objects, such as variable ways to use the fingers to hold Chinese brushes and the amount of pressure to put into each brushstroke. The theorised bodily movements and techniques would create sufficient communication and establish a hierarchical relation between depicted objects, which translate the painter’s cultural understanding of grand unification into the expression of Chinese landscape painting.

The sense of grand unification in Chinese landscape painting can be achieved via many methods and different techniques according to each individual artist. For instance, Guo Xi’s painting techniques, which are called “the angle of totality” or “floating perspective,” displaces the static eye of viewers by producing multiple perspectives in two-dimensional scroll painting, and constitutes his artistic interpretation of the sense of grand unification (Figure 63). There are three kinds of spatial distance that present the characteristic concepts of space in his composition of the scroll painting. The depicted mountains sit on the central axis of the scroll in the foreground, midground

and distant views, and display a sense of rugged altitude as the first type of spatial distance. On the left side of the scroll, the mountain is painted as a gentle slope so that it seems to be located thousands of miles away; this represents the second type of spatial distance. The mountain river in the valley appearing on the side of the mountain indicate the depth of the abyss as the third type of spatial distance. The mountain is painted in a S-shape which is partly hidden by fog. The trees are painted in variable shades of greys changing dramatically to create a sense of constant change and a perennial vitality in everything. Berger points out: "... the image [painting] implies a passage of time. Looking at it, the spectator sees Before, During, and After. The Chinese sage takes a walk from one tree to another... Yet the ensuing images are still static whilst referring to the dynamic world beyond their edges..." (Berger: 26-28). All these complexities are designed in the composition and expressed through specific techniques to reflect the overall diversity of the mountain and all its aspects in the time and space of the Northern hemisphere. The principles to express such complexities in painting, according to Monk Jiao Ran's interpretation in terms of the concept of grand unification in art, is: "至险而不僻, 至奇而不差, 至丽而自然, 至苦而无迹, 至近而意远, 至放而不迂, 至难而状易" ("express novelty without incongruity; beauty is in accordance with its natural tendency; the finer in detail the deeper in meaning; be authentic not pedantic; realize complex concept in simple shape"). Jiao's interpretations render the abstract and mythical concepts into concrete rules for artists to refer to as a guide when practicing Chinese landscape painting.

Figure 63. Guo Xi, *Early Spring*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 158.3cm x 108.1cm, 1072, National Palace Museum, Taipei

The sense of grand unification in Guo's painting is interpreted as a sense of coherence and harmony, partly due to painting's two dimensional format, which has the ability to do so, and as Berger notes in a parallel discussion, "[because] painting is static, it has the [automatic] power to establish a visually 'palpable' harmony" (Berger: 27). In his paper "Mountains and Waters", Guo notes: "The clouds and the vapours of real landscapes are not the same [during] the four seasons. In spring they are light and diffused, in summer rich and dense, in autumn scattered and thin, and in winter dark and solitary. When such effects can be seen in pictures, the clouds and vapours have an air of life" (Guo cited in Grousset: 195). Guo further observes: "山以水为血脉, 以草木为毛发, 以烟云为神采, 故山得水而活 [...] 水得山而媚" ("Mountain and water come alive by the mutual endorsement on each other. Water makes mountain vibrant; and mountain makes water animate") (Guo cited in Barnhart: 372). Every object/living being becomes full of vigour by interacting with others being depicted to altogether create a sense of coherence as a whole. The vibrant communications between depicted objects reinforce the aliveness of individuals within the atmosphere of the painting. Moreover, this painting expresses double meanings that not only eulogise the dynamic scene created by the relationship between every depicted object, but also imply the concept of grand unification wherein every object is supposed to play their part, as appropriate, in the centralised atmosphere.

Under the influence of this concept and with an additional awareness of body techniques in terms of Chinese painting, my body has brought its cultural habits into the studio while interrogating its own process of translating bodily experience into the language of painting through bodily movement. In particular, the process of depicting in paint the colour of the light, temperature, and atmosphere of spaces shaped by buildings, and how bodies interact with these affects, is like communicating on the canvas what happens between my body and the space of the Forbidden City. My body, when making paintings, then, becomes a vehicle for expressing my remembered bodily responses to the resonances of the space. And through the compositional construction of the image, my body is able to find the best combination among colours, lines and forms to interpret those experiences under one unified voice. In the process of translating, from idea to object, the movements and techniques of my body help me to revive those bodily experiences from the space of the Forbidden City. During the constant movement of my arm and my hand, holding the brushes, I look for the best moment to leave a brushstroke on the canvas in the most appropriate angle. Every move of my body, along with every colour left on the canvas, is a representation of the ideology that my cultural embodied body has inherited from history and, in turn, creates the painting.

The movement of my physical body in the studio enacts my cultural body in the sense of provoking memories of the inscribed experience and embodied knowledge from the space of the Forbidden City. The dynamics of the studio assimilate into the space of the Forbidden City, not through some display objects such as printed photos taken in the space, but through my body's physical and cultural presence in the act of painting. Apart from interacting with brushstrokes, the bodily movement also involves the rest of the studio, such as wall, lights, tables, palette, little things placed behind easels, and the air around my bodies, which are inevitably glimpsed as part of the background as my body travels between canvas and palette. The bodily actions in the studio are, as Merleau-Ponty notes, constitutive of "a process of expression [...] to grasp the nature of what appears to us in a confused way and to place it [on canvas] before us as a recognizable object" (Merleau-Ponty: 6). Such bodily movement and techniques housed within, which may be differentiated from everyday actions, are culturally embodied and individual in artistic terms. Therefore, painting, as a technique, is a material form of memory, and at the same time it is an immaterial form to generate viewers' affective and intuitive responses by allowing the viewers to imagine. Berger notes: "A painting only has a beginning and an end insofar as it is a physical object: within its imagery there is neither beginning nor end" (Berger: 27). The unchanging painted form of my painting is supplemented and brought to life by the imagination of the audience.

To continually consider painting as the record of my bodily movements and techniques in the studio, the rhythm of my painting (constructed by composition, colour, and brush marks) is connected with my variable perceptions sensed in the space, reflecting my

bodily experience, and affecting my viewers through its pictorial depiction. My use of colour is subtle, vivid and individualised, as the original colours of the buildings merely serves as a reference point. Specifically, the colours shown in my paintings (see figure 64 and 65) display a collection of colours that my body perceives while moving in the space at a particular time, rather than the actual colour of the paint on the building perceived through a fixed geometric or photographic perspective. This is called “the lived perspective” (Cezanne cited in Merleau-Ponty 4), emphasising how the colours perceived by my body constantly changes in subtle ways with every step taken by my body in the space over a period of time. And “this visual rhythm is the translation of my bodily experience in the space, not only representing a still scene at a specific moment, but also visualizing a set of body movements/techniques accumulated in the space over a period of time” (Liu: 25-26) as well as in studio.

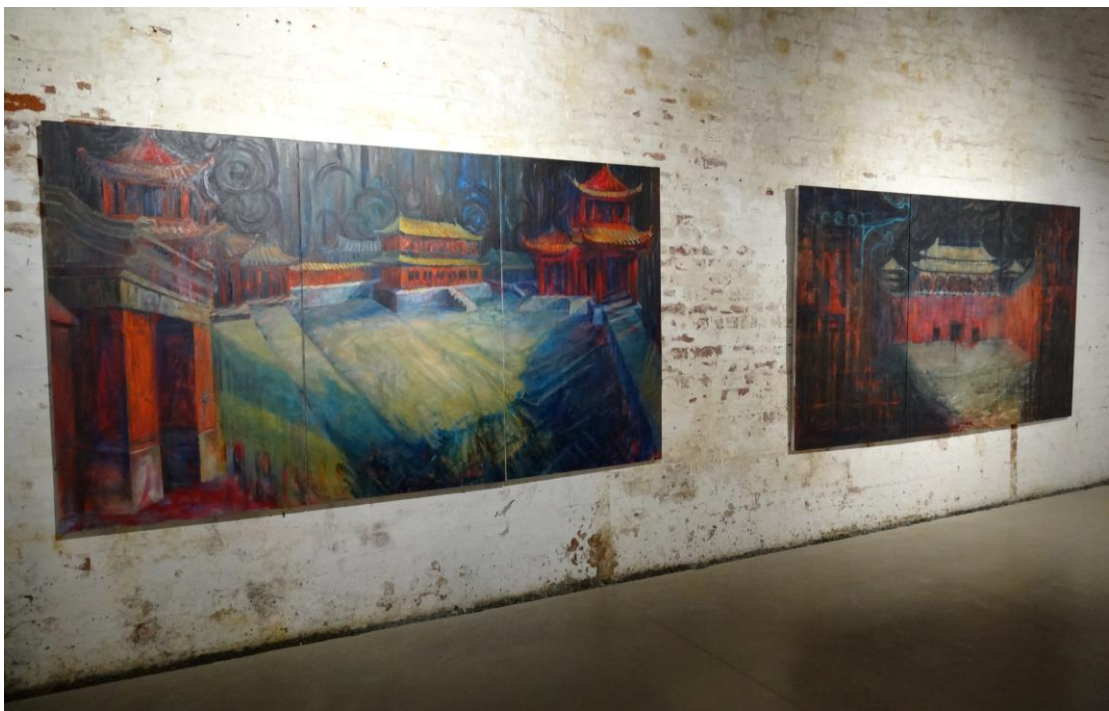


Figure 64. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series three* Oil on canvas 170cm X 300cm, 2014, photo:
Peng Liu

My body is historically inherited and culturally embodied as the result of participating in different societies and my bodily experience is perceived “through the mediation of cultural categories” (Douglas: 68); the sense of the cultural is always reflected on my body in its everyday life and creative practice. My body techniques in dealing with everyday society are re-thought and expanded in the studio space, which highlight my body as culturally embodied being, whilst exposing my individuality as an artist in response to the world.

3.3 Body, Painting and the One Child policy

3.3.1 The One Child policy

When the fear of global overpopulation clouded the world during the 19th and 20th centuries, the One Child policy was issued in the name of controlling the population. Published as an open letter⁷¹ on 25th September 1980, the policy has been applied in China ever since⁷². According to anthropologist Thomas Robert Malthus's prediction: "The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race" (*An Essay on the Principal of Population*)⁷³. This pre-modern prediction made some politicians across the world fearful of the possible chaotic situation caused by shortages in the food supply in the near future. Some actions were taken around the world. For instance, the Indian government under Indira Gandhi had conducted surgical ligation on more than eight millions males to slow down its population growth in 1974.

The One Child policy has created a series of social impacts affecting generations in almost every aspect of social life. The policy, previously defined as absolutely correct and beneficial, has become questionable and many concerns about its negative impacts have been raised. As a practicing artist, born and raised under the policy, my body has experienced the shifting point of view toward it. This intimate experience with the policy has been re-thought and translated through my bodily movement into the language of painting.

⁷¹ An open letter "To the communist party member and the communist youth league in regard to controlling China's population growth" was published on 26th September 1980 in *People's Daily* CN 11-0065. ISSN 1672-8386. The policy was strictly applied on communist members, officials, and people working in state-owned enterprises who were living in cities. In contrast, farmers may have 1.5 children, which is interpreted in some situations as being allowed to have a second child if the first one is a girl. According to the sixth Census of Population completed in 2010, the population of farmers is 934,707,073. In the case given in the discussion, the scenario is based on the city lifestyle.

⁷² In recent years, the policy is getting looser, whereby parents who are both the only child in their family are allowed to have a second child.

⁷³ Thomas Robert Malthus. *An Essay on the Principal of Population*

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/malthus/ch07.htm> retrieved on 19th April 2016.

3.3.2 The impact of the One Child policy upon my body and my painting

The expectation on Chinese artist is preferably proposed by Ming Dynasty Chinese painter, scholar, and calligrapher Dong Qichang as: “画家以天地为师，其次山川为师，其次以古人为师” (“artist shall obtain inspirations from Dao, then from natural phenomenon as second best, then from ancient masters as the last”).⁷⁴ It reflects the fundamental understanding of Chinese art in association with the concept of the grand unification – the realisation of art in its material form shall be self-contained, coherent and harmonious. Given that each individual artist has an historically inherited and culturally embodied body, which is acted upon by institutions as a representation of his or her race, class, gender and so on, the art would be comprehended and expressed differently.

In my case, the social impact of the One Child policy upon my body is reflected in my daily actions and thoughts: “Although it is certain that a person’s life does not explain his work, it is equally certain that the two are connected” (Merleau-Ponty: 8). My bodily movement in studio is affected by such emotions and feelings that are inevitably reflected in my paintings. Hence, I will give two examples to articulate the emotional and personal impacts of the policy upon my body, which have caused a sense of cultural/social dislocation as well as personal disembodiment, as manifested in my paintings through bodily movement in the studio.

My everyday learning and participation in Chinese society and literature over twenty years, such as practicing calligraphy, ink painting, and memorising poetries and so on, underline that a big family is normal. At the same time, however, this is may be starkly contrasted to my own family. The experience of interacting in a big family occasionally occurred when I visit grandparents during school or public holidays, where I meet my ‘sisters and uncles’. During the visits since I was little, I have noticed an interesting situation in regard to the changing of appellations under the policy. Over the course of the long history of the Chinese language, there has developed an appellation for each and every relative in the family, which can be difficult to remember without using them on a daily basis. In order to ease the maladjustment brought in by the policy, I am asked by my grandparents to change the appellation on some relatives, such as calling my cousins (表姐 Biao Jie) “sisters” (姐姐 Jie Jie) instead. In my grandparents’ opinion, changing the appellation would bring the family members closer, which still sounds like I am in a big family with many siblings. Such adoption reconciles the contradiction between the wish of having a big family in traditional terms and the One Child policy in modern times. And it becomes omnipresent and common sense that when I call out to my “sisters” I mean my cousins, as presumably I, or my generation, have no blood brothers or sisters.⁷⁵ Such subtle influences embedded into daily actions have given me the perspective to understand and evaluate the policy and its direct/indirect relation

⁷⁴ Dong, Qichang. 秋兴八景图 (*Qiu Xing Ba Jing Tu*), Shang Hai Museum. 1620.

⁷⁵ Another example in regards to changing of appellation to bring family members closer is to give non-blood family members a title which only the close relatives can have, such as, I am asked to call my aunts’ (mother’s sisters’) husbands Jiu Jiu, which is the title for my mother’s brothers in tradition.

to my body.

The conflicts between Chinese tradition and the policy, observed and experienced by my body, allow me to see the issues in multiple micro-perspectives and provide me with alternate views on every detail and action in the daily routine of my body. The impact of the policy constructs a temporary ‘paradoxical’ relationship between my body seeking and appreciating the sense of grand unification as the representation of my race, class, and gender *and* my individual body which captures the sense of social/cultural dislocation in changing the appellations. My body starts to raise its own voice, craving for expression, to be identified as an individual against being a stereotyped Chinese. Such individuality is provoked and captured through my bodily movement in the studio recorded in the language of paint. Although I acknowledge my cultural body is in every movement without exception as “we are embodied beings” (Shilling: 10), it is my individual/artistic body that decides the way to re-interpret and express itself in the language of painting. My body is a conduit, and the bodily movement is the process of translation, translating the cultural body into artistic realisation.

One of many social impact brought about by the One Child policy is its dislocation to social values – in particular, the way of life in a big family living under Confucian values, that had lasted for centuries is abruptly abolished. Yet the idea/wish of having big family is still embodied in every body as historical residue, such as filial piety being defined in terms of having descendents, as interpreted by Mencius: “不孝有三，无后为大” (having no descendent is considered worst in filial piety in common understanding).⁷⁶ This is further interpreted in the patriarchal society as the preference for a male child to carry on the family name.

It is not difficult to abide by the social value when every family can (and can afford to) have several children. However, such historical residue is contradictory to the modern policy that creates an interesting social phenomenon. In some cases, the bodies of parents, as historical inherited and cultural embodied beings inscribed with such Confucian values, may likely have a second child by paying huge penalties if their first child is a girl. Such social phenomenon became ubiquitous in second-tier and third-tier cities⁷⁷ which is largely ascribed to the Opening-up policy⁷⁸ that has resulted in the recent economic boom, thus assuring that parents could afford to pay the penalties.

Unlike the One Child policy which has taken effect immediately, the Opening-up policy only starts to benefit parents in around fifteen years time. In other words, when the parents are able to afford the huge penalties to have a second child, their first child would have already grown into a teenager. Therefore, a social phenomenon appeared

⁷⁶ Mencius. “Three ways of unfilial”. *Mencius – Lilou*. Retrieved 29 August 2014: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/3708298.htm>

⁷⁷ Such as Shan Xi, Gan Su.

⁷⁸ Starting in December 1978, it is also called ‘Chinese economic reform’. The policy aimed to reform domestic economic structure known as the planned economy and open up to trade with the rest of the world.

during this historical period: in some families with two children, the older one is always a girl and the second one is of a very young age.

The social phenomenon of having two children with a big age gap in between them, under the prohibition of the One Child policy, indicates the type of social/cultural dislocation every body confronts. Furthermore, in the cases where parents have ended up with two daughters, for instance, a sense of personal disembodiment may be experienced within the families: The older daughter would question her parents about giving birth to a much younger sibling and, by extension, the place of their deep-rooted Feudal patriarchal thought in modern society. It would be near impossible for the younger daughter to imagine her dispirited parents on the day she was born – as a girl rather than a boy. The parents, who were driven by the cultural motive of having a baby boy under Confucian values, are in an awkward situation of having explain themselves to their daughters⁷⁹. The parents are tormented by the cultural dislocation effected by the policy on their bodies, particularly as longstanding historically inherited and culturally embodied beings. It would always be a sensitive issue between family members which remains unspoken and would grow in everyone's mind whenever a fight breaks out and risks tearing the family further apart. And every body in the family would wonder about alternative scenarios had the situation or policy been different.

The social impact of the One Child policy, both intimately experienced and closely observed, left my body feeling 'paradoxical', dislocated in culture and disembodied in person, and in possession of a complex relationship with the society, which is itself undergoing a period of dramatic transformation. Such feelings are embodied in my daily thoughts and everyday actions, which affect my bodily movements in the studio.

Hence, my painting can be seen an artistic translation of the 'paradoxical' feelings, the sense of coherence and harmony is formed through composition, colours and brushstrokes, following Confucius, who states, “夫有平和之声，则有蕃殖之财。于是乎道之以中德，咏之以中音” (“the truth and norm is fully embodied in the sound of coherence and harmony”), and allow communications to occur when this virtuous circle or balance is in place (Confucius cited in Zuo).⁸⁰ At the same time, I interrogate my individual position in relation to the grand unification through the untidy colours in variable greys and the dishevelled brushstrokes: “To an artist, a picture is both a sum of ideas and a blurry memory of 'pushing paint,' breathing fumes, dripping oils and wiping brushes, smearing and diluting and mixing” (Elkins: 2). My actions when painting are the expression of my bodily experience of being dislocated and disembodied in the society. They are the actions indicating what my body is sensitive to and capable of, sitting or standing while mixing colour on a palette without looking it, gently blowing the canvas before placing a brushstroke, and pushing the colour with

⁷⁹ In some cases, the parent would keep giving birth and paying penalties until a body boy born.

⁸⁰ Zuo, Qiuming. *国语-周语 (Guo Yu – Zhou Yu)*. Trans. Ding, Fusheng. Shanxi Publisher, Shanxi, 2007.

cloth and fingers to feel the paint grinding over the surface of the canvas. These bodily movement/techniques, which are artistic and creative, provoke and translate what my body is in the studio.

And the painting, after a process of working and re-working, has arrived in a state of ‘balance’, not only between my cultural body as *a* Chinese and *the* Chinese, but also a consensus between the moment when it was finished to my satisfaction and the moment when it is looked at by audiences, as “prophecies, received from the past,” (Berger: 27) affecting my audiences in front of the canvas at the present moment.

My body is the result of the accumulation of every moment in its involvement of everyday living and experiencing the societies I am in, which the body is constantly balancing and updating to be sociable and reasonable. As a practicing artist, the everyday bodily experiences are re-thought and expanded in painterly actions, which my artistic/individual body voices and records in paint. Therefore, my paintings represent not only the cultural embodiment and social impact upon my body from significant events and ‘ordinary’ things in daily life, but also critical viewpoints of my individual body in response to the world. And to translate both voices into painting with good balance is an endless task.

This chapter has investigated the role of my bodily movement in the studio space and its relation to painting. The bodily movement in the studio, as the expansion of everyday action, is historically inherited and culturally embodied on one hand; and, on the other hand, reflects the individual body raising its voice to critique cultural dislocation and personal disembodiment in the society. The analysis of the impact of the concept of grand unification has demonstrated how embodied knowledge is acted upon by institutions as a representation of class, gender, race and so on in everyday society. Therefore, bodies are fully loaded in which every thought and every move can be located within its cultural origins. In comparison, the discussion on the social impact of the One Child policy reveals my individual body in terms of experiencing cultural dislocation and personal disembodiment in everyday society, which is inevitably brought into the studio as emotions and feelings embedded within painterly actions. Hence, my bodily experience in the space of the Forbidden City in terms of both cultural embodiment as *a* Chinese under the concept of grand unification and personal disembodiment as *the* Chinese under the One Child policy is expressed through bodily actions in the studio and translated into the language of painting.

Conclusion

My personal background, which integrates an understanding through eastern and western lens, provides me with a unique position to examine the interrelationship by adopting Western theories and simultaneously extending their applications to Chinese culture. The research on the interrelationship between body and the space has revealed a new perspective to re-consider the Confucian bodies in terms of Western theories and a new understanding of the space of the Forbidden City in the moment of interacting with the bodies in contemporary thought. The recognition of the haptic experience of the body, which is beyond “straightforward skin contact...a cutaneous touch” (Paterson: 768) in the space, makes the body become the “instrument of research” (Crang: 499). The Forbidden City, then, becomes a material form of memory, like a portal to access the past. It is as much an immaterial form, for the Forbidden City generates viewers’ affective and intuitive responses, allowing the viewers to imagine ancient time and space even though they are physically in present time and space. The activities conducted in the space were multisensory and importantly included touch. As American folklorist, ethnologist, and historian Simon J. Bronner notes in *The Haptic Experience of Culture*, “Seeing is believing, but feeling [touching] is the truth...the essential haptic experience in our daily encounters constitutes a cultural principle, a basic quality or element influencing the customary processer of cognition and behavior” (Bronner: 352-53). I have engaged this precept to amplify the investigation on the interaction between the body’s biological operation and the cultural environment, although I do not employ hybrid terms such as “physiocultural” (Bronner: 351).

The interrelationship between body and the space is rather complex. In this exegesis imaginable scenarios are written in terms of Ficto-Criticism to investigate the interaction between the space and a number of selected Confucian bodies. Such a way of interrogating the interrelationship between the space and the body has restored a sense of the aliveness of the body in engaging with the space, which creates a stronger sense of the body as “simultaneously part of nature and part of culture” (Turner: 197) and helps to make manifest the cultural inscription of the space. This style of writing has allowed the subtleties of the interaction to be scrutinised and addressed in order to re-consider the bodies as being acted upon by institutions and the differences between the various types of bodies. The way of writing is an intellectual approach to the issue which involves complexities, such as mobilising Western theories in Chinese thoughts and dealing with historical narratives. My bodily movements when painting in the studio are also brought into the discourse, which expands the discussion of body embodiment into the field of creative practice.

The creative part of the research makes significant contributions to the study as it has provided an additional strategy to examine the interrelationship between (my) body and the space of the Forbidden City. As Pink, Hubbard, O’Neill and Radley note: “art practices opens a whole new set of potentials for communicating outside of [traditional]

academic context... [known as] ‘knowledge transfer’” (Pink et al.: 6).



Figure 65. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series three*, oil on canvas, 1300cm X 170cm, 2015, photo: Peng Liu

The final work was exhibited and constructed out of five discrete scenes sandwiched together resulting in some of these depicted spaces woven into each other while others appeared to be simply juxtaposed next to each other. By showcasing the paintings together, the exhibition reflected the changing perceptions of my body as it moved through the spaces of the Forbidden City over time, and the shift in painting techniques that my body favoured during the studio work. The discordant compositions and use of multiple light sources in each scene created for the viewer feelings of being stifled and unable to enter too far into the scenes, yet also they are given various avenues to move out of or around the picture plane. This creates a maze or labyrinth like composition which is akin to one of the essential bodily experiences of wandering through enormous number of courtyards in the Forbidden City.



Figure 66. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series three*, oil on canvas, 300cm X 170cm, 2013, photo: Peng Liu (First scene of the final painting created)



Figure 67. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series three*, oil on canvas, 300cm X 170cm, 2015, photo: Peng Liu (Last scene of the final painting created)

In terms of colour, mixing directly on the canvas to form tonal variations was the main strategy used consistently across the work. The surface of the work and mottled brushstrokes took on various manifestations. The third panel from the left for example was painted flat and thin in tonal variations in order to create visual contrast to the short brushstrokes laid firmly and economically on the top, which created a sense of

floating brushstrokes.



Figure 68. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series three*, oil on canvas, 300cm X 170cm, 2015, photo: Peng Liu



Figure 69. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series three*, oil on canvas, 300cm X 170cm, 2015, detail, photo: Peng Liu

In the fourth panel from the right as another example, a plaque with Chinese calligraphy hanging above a doorway is depicted. This was an experiment with ‘wet in wet’ painting where I kept adding layers and brushstrokes while the previous layers and brushstrokes were still wet. It is a typical example of directly mixing colours on canvas resulting in thick layers and brushstrokes that are almost like sculpturing forms on canvas. Particularly, this technique requires an immediacy of action. Every brushstroke or knifing laid on canvas is the synthesis and a simultaneous play of my body as it considers several aspects at once such as: the wooden texture of the plaque, the romantic charm of the calligraphy, and the direction of the light source.



Figure 70. Peng Liu, *the Forbidden City Study series three*, oil on canvas, 100cm X 170cm, 2015, detail, photo: Peng Liu

As a result of the various techniques employed, the paintings translated my bodily knowledge which in turn, when exhibited in the gallery space created an impact upon the audience. In so doing the investigation in paint reinforces the ideas concerning embodiment discussed in my exegesis but in the form of a visual language. With further development of the research, more panels will be added to physically expand the vista and consolidate its visual impact on the audience when viewing it from a distance as well as engaging with its details up close. The paintings have made a substantial contribution to the research not only as reference material to reinforce the exegetical writing, but also as an independent authority capable of dealing with the same issues within its own operating system. This research into the relationship between Chinese and Western thoughts concerning the body and spaces of the Forbidden City has thus been realised through two forms of understanding, exegetical writing and creative practice.

In recent decades, coexistence and cooperation between the eastern and the western worlds have increasingly established diverse international communications. I believe that deeper understanding and cross cultural awareness are essential to create meaningful coexistence and a truly cooperative environment. It is hoped this research could provide some insight and help open up a pathway toward deeper integration of eastern and western concepts in both theoretical and practical ways.



Figure 71. Body in the space of the Forbidden City, 2014, photo: Peng Liu

Body in the Forbidden City

The end

Appendix 1 Detailed timeline relevant to the history of the Forbidden City

Ming Dynasty:

- 1406 Yong Le Emperor issued an order to build the Forbidden City in Beijing
- 1420 The Forbidden City was built

Qing Dynasty:

- 1644 Shun Zhi emperor
- 1905 The Imperial Examination was repealed by the Feudal government
- 1911 The Revolution of 1911 ended the Feudal period
- 1913-1914 The government of the day shifted all cultural relics and national treasures from Shen Yang and Re He to the Forbidden City. The museum was built in the Forbidden City in 1914 and opened to the public on 10/10/1914.
- 1924 The Last Emperor, Pu Yi, moved out from the Forbidden City
- 1925 The Forbidden City was re-named as the Palace Museum and opened to the public
- 1949 The Forbidden City was re-opened to the public after the civil war
- 1966 The Forbidden City was closed due to the ‘Cultural Revolution’
- 1971 The Forbidden City was re-opened to the public

Appendix 2 Selected Research Activities

Academic Journal Articles (double/triple blind reviewed)

- Liu, P. 2015. “Cultural Technique in Creative Practice – exploring the cultural embodiment in the movement of my body in studio space” in ‘technique’ *A Journal of Media and Culture (M/C Journal)*, Vol. 18 No. 2. Australia.

Book Chapters

- Liu, P. 2014. “The impact of space upon the body in the Forbidden City: From the perspective of art” in *Body Tensions: Beyond Corporeality in Time and Space*, ed. Kristy Buccieri, 23-35. Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, UK.

Conference Proceedings (peer reviewed)

- Liu, P. 2014. “The impact of space upon the body in the Forbidden City” in *Exploring Bodies in Time and Space*, ed. Loyola McLean, Lisa Stafford and Mark Weeks, 99-106. Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, UK.
- Liu, P. 2014. “Forbidden City as Art Object” in *Deleuze in China*, ed. Gao Jihai, Paul Patton, and Ying Jing, 267-273. HENAN University Press, Zheng Zhou, China.
- Liu, P. 2007. “Visual Arts Process Diary” in *Dialogues & Differences in Arts Education Conference*, Sydney, Australia.

Solo Exhibitions

- Liu, P. 2016. *Space and Body*, oil on canvas, Perth, Australia, Queen Victoria 1, Perth, Australia.

Group Exhibitions

- Liu, P. 2015. “Culture, Body, and Paint” in *SoDA15*, oil on canvas, Perth, Australia, John Curtin Gallery. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFREykriPM8>
- Liu, P. 2015. “GMT +8” in *IMPACT9 International Printmaking Conference*, linocut printmaking, China Academe of Art, Hangzhou, China.
- Liu, P. 2015. “The Forbidden City” in *Art Olympia*, oil on canvas, Exhibition Hall of Toshima-ku, Tokyo, Japan.
- Liu, P. 2014. “The Forbidden City Study series 4” in *Staff Room 2014*, oil on canvas, Fremantle, Australia, PS ART SPACE.
- Liu, P. 2013. “The Forbidden City Study series 3” in *Staff Room 2013*, oil on canvas, Fremantle, Australia, Level 2 Myer Building.
- Liu, P. 2011. “The Forbidden City Study series 2” in *SoDA11*, oil on canvas, Perth, Australia, John Curtin Gallery.

Conference Presentations and Attendances

- Presented at *1st Global Conference time, Space and the Body*, Sydney, Australia, 2013.
- Presented at *2012 Kaifeng International Deleuze Conference*, Henan, China, 2012.
- Attended at *IMPACT 9 International Printmaking Conference*, Hangzhou, China, 2015.
- Attended at *deregulating looking & curating design Symposium*, Perth and Fremantle, Australia, 2014.
- Attended at *Panorama Symposium*, Perth, Australia, 2014.
- Attended at *Sustainable Aesthetics Conference*, Perth. Australia, 2013.
- Attended at *The Science of Stelarc Symposium*, Perth. Australia, 2013.
- Attended at *Transcendental Meditation Symposium*, Perth. Australia, 2013
- Attended at *Surviving Skills for Humanities Symposium*, Perth, Australia, 2011.

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