

**FEATURES****1948: How Peaceful was the Liberation of Beiping?**

Dai Qing

The Sixty-eighth Morrison Lecture  
5 September 2007, The Australian National University**Editor's Note:**

The annual George E. Morrison lecture series was founded in 1932 by Chinese residents in Australia. It was, in their words, 'to honour for all time the great Australian who rendered valuable service to China'. After a war-time hiatus, the series was re-founded in 1948 and it has been hosted at The Australian National University (itself established in 1946) ever since. For more on the series, and George E. Morrison, go to: <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/pah/chinaheritageproject/morrisonlectures/index.php>

The text of Dai Qing's Morrison Lecture was translated by Geremie R. Barmé and John Minford, based on an initial draft by Anne Gunn. Dai Qing presented the lecture at the Coombs Lecture Theatre of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies in Chinese and a copy of the draft translation was made available to members of the audience. The Chinese original and the revised translation are published here for the first time. A PDF of the Chinese original can be downloaded here [\[PDF\]](#).

During 2007, Dai Qing was a Visiting Fellow at The ANU, funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant awarded to Geremie R. Barmé, Michael Dutton and Jonathan Unger. During that time she completed a project on the philosopher and activist Zhang Dongsun. In consideration of her work on Zhang, and in keeping with Barmé's own ARC-funded Federation Fellowship on 'Beijing as Spectacle', Dai Qing chose to speak on one aspect of Zhang Dongsun's activities, those related to the 1948 'liberation' of Beiping (the city having reverted to its early-Ming name from 1928 until being declared the capital of the new People's Republic of China in 1949). We would note that Dai Qing grew up in the family of Ye Jianying, the first Communist Mayor of Beiping/Beijing who is mentioned in the lecture.

\*\*\*

**A Ransacked House**

In June 1966, at the start of the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards set about ransacking houses all over Beijing. One of their targets was the philosopher and former political activist Zhang Dongsun.

Before the Communist victory in China's civil war in 1949, Zhang was the head of the Philosophy Department at Yenching University in Beijing. He became one of the fifty-six delegates to the first Central People's Government in 1949.

By 1966, however, he was no longer living in the prestigious university residential compound of the East Garden. He and his family no longer enjoyed the privilege of living in the Garden of Moonlit Fertility (*Langrun Yuan*), the old princely garden-mansion which had been turned into dormitories for lower-level teaching staff at what was now Peking University. He had long ago been evicted and allocated some space in a crowded courtyard house for common workers just outside the eastern wall of the university. After his falling out with Chairman Mao in the early 1950s, he had been 'put out to grass'. 'Don't kill him or execute him', Mao had instructed; just let him live. That did not mean, however, that the Red Guards were willing to leave him alone.

On that fateful day his 'visitors' were former students from the university's Biology Department. Their professor, Zhang Zongbing, was himself a likely target. He had studied for a doctorate at Cornell University in 1938, and therefore had dubious 'foreign connections'. But somehow they knew that his father, Zhang Dongsun, promised even better spoils. Dongsun's house was ransacked from top to bottom. Books, paintings, magazines, old documents—everything was strewn carelessly on the floor. The Red Guards picked their way through all of it, and whatever they determined to be 'feudal, capitalist or revisionist' (*feng zi xiu*) was thrown into a pile in the courtyard and burnt. They were particularly hopeful that they would find material from the US, or something that linked the older Zhang to the head of the reactionary Nationalist Party, Chiang Kai-shek. Unfortunately for them, Zhang's wife had been one step ahead and she had burnt all evidence of the family's connections with 'imperialism', as well as anything related to Dongsun's dealings with Mao, Liu Shaoqi (the President of China), or Premier Zhou Enlai. The only thing she'd missed was a letter to Zhang Dongsun from Premier Zhou: it had been left in the pages of a book.

It was also lucky for the old professor and his wife that they lived in small and cramped quarters. Anything not in regular use had been packed away in an old-fashioned chest and taken to their son's house for storage. The chest contained scroll paintings and some calligraphic couplets written for Zhang Dongsun by the famous thinkers and political activists of the late Qing and early Chinese Republic, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao.

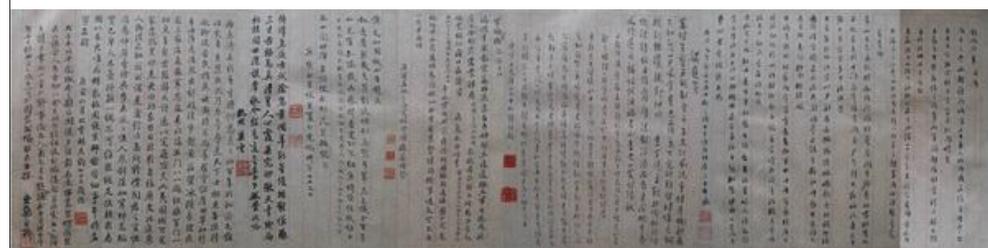
It is at this point in our story that the scroll at the centre of my talk this evening makes its appearance. It is called

'The Besieged City Unbound' (*Weicheng jieniu* 围城解纽). It too had been rolled up and put in the chest. The chest itself (with all of its contents) by all rights should have been destroyed when the Red Guards ransacked the younger Zhang's apartment. After all, 'rummaging through boxes and tipping out cupboards' was 'normal behaviour' for the Red Guards. But, by a stroke of luck, at the time the chest was being used as a desk by Zhang Kaici, Zhang Dongsun's grandson, a first-year university student. No one thought of checking what was lurking under the young man's maths and physics textbooks. And so the scroll survived.

### A City Besieged

'The Besieged City Unbound' is a calligraphic scroll created in 1949 when the city of Beiping was renamed Beijing and declared capital of the newly founded People's Republic of China. It is made up of poems written in Zhang Dongsun's honour by a number of interesting individuals, in somewhat unusual circumstances.[Fig.1]

[View a larger image](#)



Beijing (the

[Fig.1 'The Besieged City Unbound', commemorative poems in honour of Zhang Dongsun made into a horizontal calligraphic scroll (*henglian*), 1949.]

'Northern Capital') had been a capital city for five dynasties over a period of some 850 years. When Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government was established in Nanjing (the 'Southern Capital') in Jiangsu province in 1928, the old imperial centre of Beijing was renamed Beiping, or the North Pacified.

The years 1948 and 1949 saw the culmination of a civil war between the forces of the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalists. By now the Communists were approaching victory as a result of three successful, although bloody, battles which had involved a total of five and a quarter million troops. When the Communists took Beiping following a long siege—thereby 'unbinding the knot' of the military standoff in North China—the Nationalists faced certain defeat. Now the massed Communist forces were able to regroup and sweep through the south, taking the Nationalist capital of Nanjing, the commercial centre Shanghai, and then moving on to the southern city of Guangzhou.

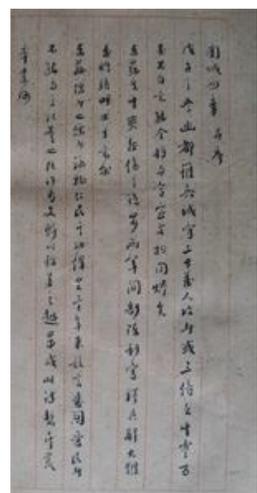
One of the individuals whose calligraphy appears on the 'Besieged City' scroll is Deng Zhicheng. There will be more to say about him below, but here I will first quote from his comments on the last days of the Communist siege. Beiping was, he said:

A city defended by 200,000 troops, under attack from an army three times that size. Inside the city were a million souls powerless to protect themselves. They faced extinction along with all the city's palaces and antiquities.

城守20万人，攻者或三倍之。生灵百万，不自意能全，将与宫室文物同烬矣。

How could this city besieged be freed from the threat of wholesale devastation? How could the 'knot' of the siege be 'unbound'? [Fig.2]

[View a larger image](#)



In March 1949, after what would be celebrated as the 'peaceful liberation of Beijing', Mao Zedong entered the city. On more than one occasion, both formal and informal, he stuck his thumb up in the air and said to his comrades as well as the 'democratic personages' present, that 'Mr Zhang was the key to the peaceful liberation of Beijing'.

Zhang Dongsun was at the time a professor in the Philosophy Department of Yenching University. Technically he was just an ordinary Beiping resident with a teaching job. He was neither a Communist nor a Nationalist Party member, although he was one of the leading figures of the Chinese Democratic League. Mao was referring to the fact that over the days from 6-10 January 1949, Zhang Dongsun had personally escorted a representative of Fu Zuoyi, the Nationalist military commander charged with the city's defences, to the Communist front-line headquarters. Thereafter, in his capacity as a mediator and conciliator, Zhang attended negotiations for the peaceful handover of the city. Or, in the words of Deng Zhicheng's poem on the 'Besieged City' scroll:

A humble man in cotton shoes with walking stick,  
 Travelled back and forth in winter's cold and snow;  
 Greeted respectfully by the military leaders,  
 His precious words brought conciliation to their talks.

[Fig.2 Deng Zhicheng's introductory comments on

不识青鞋竹杖藜，冲寒冒雪走东西，军中刁斗容长揖，席上琼瑶劝短提。

the last days of the Communist siege.]

Three weeks later, the People's Liberation Army entered the city.[Fig.3]

After another eight months, Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

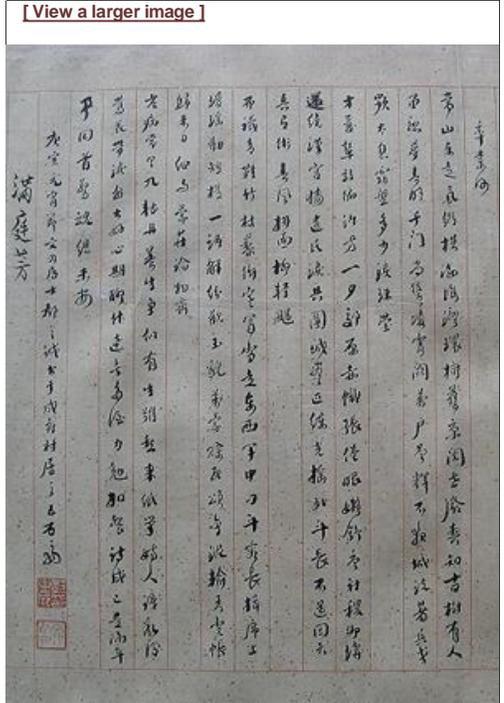
Before the victorious entry of the Communist forces, the Nationalists had prepared a special airfield at the Dongdan Sport's Ground in central Beijing for an emergency evacuation. The vast majority of the city's university professors and intellectuals declined the invitation to flee to Taiwan. Why would they want to? How could China's men of letters ever abandon this of all cities? Besides, had they not already seen proof that the Communist Party regarded intellectuals with special tolerance and respect? Did not the Party listen to their views with sincerity? Had not the Party guaranteed to safeguard their livelihood and support their research?

It would be unfair to say that the Communist cadres who made these assurances were deliberately lying. At most one could say that thereafter they were powerless to keep the undertakings they had made. Party propaganda would claim that 'Everyone was enthusiastic about remaining in [Beiping] so they could offer their services to the New China'. History even records Zhou Enlai, in high spirits, complimenting Liu Ren, the head of the underground Party organization in Beiping, with a play on his name: 'Liu Ren [劉仁], you're very good at making people stay [liu ren 留人]!'

The newly appointed mayor of Beiping was Ye Jianying. He was a modest and amiable man, known to be honest, upright and efficient; a man with an uncontested record of service. He immediately set about organizing a unity municipal government that included people from both the old and new regimes, and throughout was mindful of acting in consultation. Beiping people were delighted by the contrast with the brutal seizure of the city by the Nationalists following the defeat of the Japanese occupiers in 1946.

The new government line-up also speaks against the view that the Communists immediately imposed a one-Party dictatorship. Under the chairman, Mao Zedong, and the premier, Zhou Enlai, there were:

- Six vice-chairmen, three of whom were from democratic parties;
- Four vice-premiers, two of whom were non-Communists;
- Fifteen members in the Government Council or cabinet, of whom nine, or sixty percent, were democrats;
- Ninety-three people in offices under the Government Council's jurisdiction, of whom forty-two, or forty-five percent, were democrats.



[Fig.3 Deng Zhicheng's commemorative poems.]

In the city, which had once again reverted to its historic name Beijing, transport and communications were soon restored, prices stabilised, and business went back to normal. After years of war, people could finally pursue their lives in peace.

Everyone believed the propaganda. They believed that a day of warm breezes and brilliant sunshine would surely follow this 'new dawn'. At this time none of Mao's drafts and writings about the take-over of the city had been published, so no-one knew that all of this was part of Mao's pre-meditated 'policy for the entry into Beijing'. It was to be an entry that 'strictly excluded the manifestation of any "ultra-leftist" [radical] methods'.

[View a larger image]

In February 1950, four months after the establishment of the People's Republic, Professor Zhang celebrated the anniversary of his successful mediation between the two armies. As his friend the connoisseur Zhang Boju commemorated it:

A scholar  
 Fighting with his wits,  
 Resolved conflict with panache,  
 Eloquently framed a solution.[Fig.4]

书生凭舌战，折冲杯酒，慷慨陈谋。

Dongsun's old friends had found an ideal subject for their Chinese New Year greetings, and a fitting way to

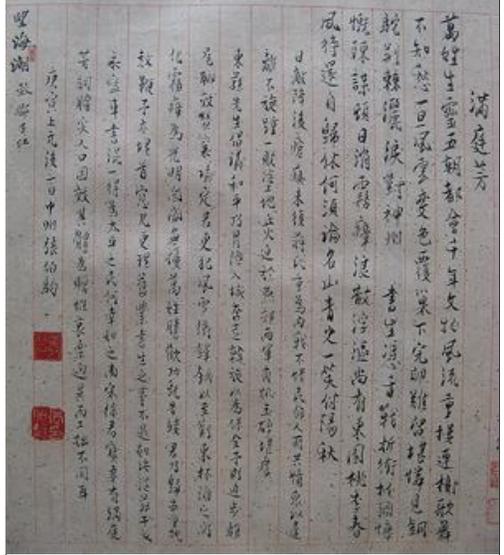
commemorate the lifting of the siege of Beiping. They wrote a number of poems dedicated to Dongsun, and the resulting work is the 'Besieged City' scroll that escaped the Red Guards in July 1966.

**A Community of Scholars**

The first piece in the scroll is by Deng Zhicheng. Deng was a scholar of classical Chinese born in 1887 (he died in 1960). A professor in the History Department at Yenching University, he was a proponent of 'evidentiary scholarship', that is the use of classical texts to provide evidence for Chinese historical research. For that Chinese New Year celebration in 1950 he wrote 'Besieged City: four seven-character poems with a preface'. In his preface he extolled Zhang Dongsun with the following words:

The magnificent achievement of this learned man benefitted China and all its people. For thirty years men have vied in their love for nation and people, but none can compare with him.[See Fig.2]

儒者济物仁民其功伟矣。三十年来竞言爱国爱民者，不能与之比量也。



[Fig.4 Zhang Boju's *ci* lyric poem written to the tune of 'Fragrance Fills the Courtyard' (*Man ting fang*) with explanatory note.]

The second contribution was a lyrical *ci* poem by Zhang Boju written to the tune 'Fragrance Fills the Courtyard' (*Man ting fang*). Zhang Boju was born in 1898 and became one of the country's most discerning, as well as generous, connoisseurs and collectors of antiquities. He died in 1982. In his remarks appended to his poem he wrote:

Mr Dongsun proposed peace. For this greater good he risked the dangers of repeatedly entering the city. I can but follow in the great man's wake and add my humble words of appreciation. [See Fig.4]

东荪先生倡议和平，乃冒险入城奔走斡旋，以为保全。予则追步骥尾，聊效赞襄议定。

Then there is Lin Zaiping's ballad in five-character lines. Lin was a highly respected scholar born in 1879 (d.1960). His life spanned the late-Qing era, the Republic and the early years of the People's Republic. [Fig.9] In his ballad he writes:

Mighty indeed our Dongsun,  
Astounding his achievements.  
A hero in the cast of Lu Lian,  
Single-handedly dispelling all threat.

壮哉吾东荪，成就乃尔奇，鲁连天下士，排患无扶持。

*Shi* and *ci* poems were also written by Fu Yuefen (1878-1951) [Fig., a specialist in European history; and the oldest person in the group, Xia Renhu (1874-1963), a professor in the Yenching Department of Chinese Language and Literature, also Chairman of the Board of Zhongshan Park in central Beijing.[Fig.6]

Zhang Dongsun himself added a colophon to the very end of the scroll:

[\[View a larger image\]](#)

In the winter of 1948 Beiping was besieged. Liu Houtong, Hou Shaobo, Peng Zexiang, Zhang Boju and I proposed a cessation of the hostilities in order to protect the city, its inhabitants and its cultural antiquities. As I enjoyed the confidence of both sides in the conflict, I was given the task of entering into negotiations [with the forces] outside the city. At the time I was fearful that I might fail, but fortunately the matter was resolved with a few words. Afterwards my friends saluted this event and dedicated these poems to me. I would simply observe that for me this one act far outweighs a lifetime of writing books. I have had this scroll mounted for my children and grandchildren.[Fig.10]

戊子冬北平围城。余与刘后同、侯少伯、彭岳渔、张丛碧，倡议罢兵以保全人民古物。以余为双方信任，使出城接洽。当时虑或不成，慄慄为惧，乃幸而一言得解。事后友人义之有此题咏。余亦自谓生平著书十余册，实不抵此一行也。因装成幅留示子孙。东荪自识

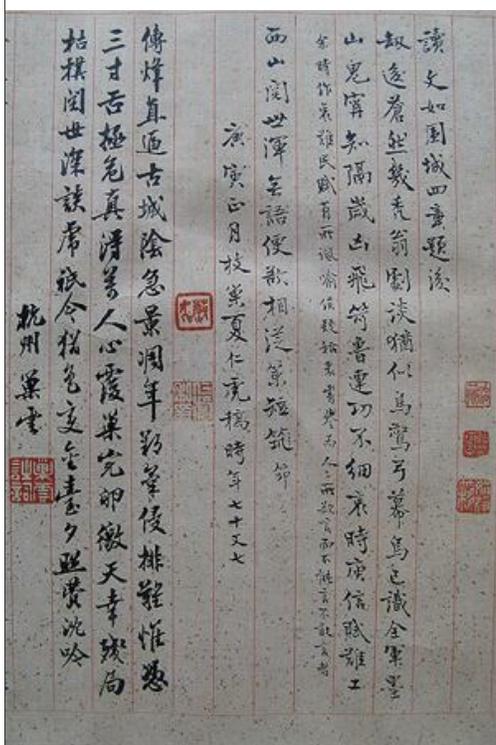
How keen was their elation! Beijing, with a red flag now fluttering in its skies, seemed to give concrete form to the ideals of a lifetime: national independence, an end to corruption in political life, a thriving economy and peace for the people. Moreover, at this crucial historical juncture, 'they themselves'—members of China's intelligentsia—had made a contribution. Zhang Dongsun's personal achievement was undeniable [乃幸而一言得解]; but even the others who had dedicated their poems to him felt that while they might 'lack the strength to truss up a chicken' [手无缚鸡之力], they had nonetheless, to quote Chao Yun, in their own way helped 'stave off calamity with their eloquence, helped win universal respect at a moment of grave danger' [排难惟凭三寸舌，极危真得万人心]. [Fig.6]

Not one of them sought honour or reward; not one of them was affected by envy. A mood of joyful optimism prevailed, free from any spirit of self-interest. They had done this for an ancient city that they loved, for a whole culture nurtured by that city. They themselves had been forged by the culture of that city and they saw themselves as its proud transmitters to future generations. To quote Zhang Boju's poem, they were 'proud to be teachers and scholars' [重执教鞭，埋首窗几]. This was because they knew full well that students were awaiting instruction, just as 'peach and plum trees in the Western Garden await the warm breeze of spring' [尚有东园桃李，春风待]. [See Fig.4]

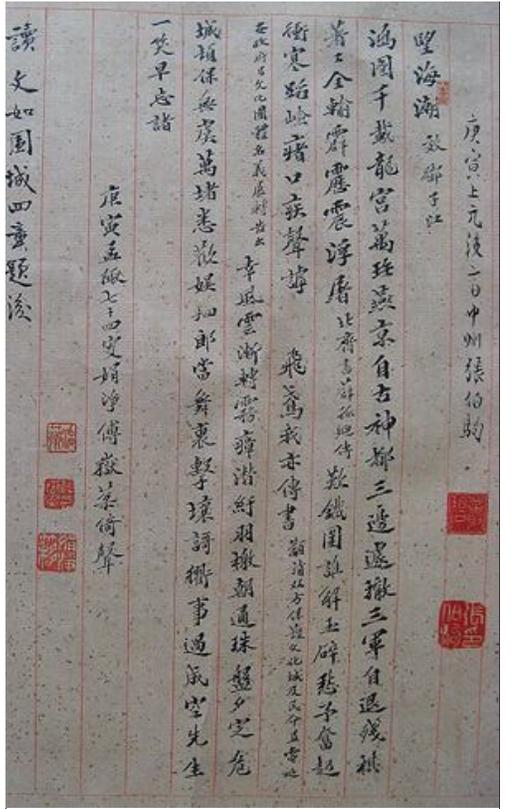
Sadly, as history was to prove, their altruism and idealism would be no match for the autocratic bullying of the new powerholders.

**A Strategy for Victory**

[View a larger image]



[Fig.6 Xia Renhu's poem.]



[Fig.5 Fu Yuefen's poem.]

But what was the real story? The two great warriors Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek were preparing for their life-and-death struggle. Apprehension prevailed and all feared that 'A gale [would] overturn the nest, [and] None [would] escape unharmed' [覆巢之下豈有完卵]. Could these men of letters really have hoped to 'protect the city, its inhabitants and its cultural antiquities' [以保全人民古物] just by 'proposing a cessation of the hostilities' [倡议罢兵]?

In his colophon Zhang Dongsun mentions others who had joined in his endeavours to save the city. Liu Houtong, Hou Shaobo, Peng Zexiang and Zhang Boju. Who were they? If they really made such an important contribution, why is it that today no one seems to know about it?

Or let me be blunt and ask: In what manner did Beijing's 'peaceful liberation' really take place? Was it, as the Chinese history books describe it, the result of 'Mao Zedong's magnanimous vision' and '[the Nationalist commander] Fu Zuoyi's sense of duty [to the Chinese people]'? Zhang Boju in his poem adds detail to the story, claiming that 'a scholar resolved [the] conflict'. But let us take a look at the actual events surrounding the 'peaceful liberation'.

**A Situation of Conflict**

By the autumn of 1948, in the third year of what Communist historians call the War of Liberation, the two forces that would decide China's fate were engaged in the final conflict. [Fig.7]

The Nationalists had lost about half their army in titanic battles in Liaoning and Huaihai. They still had one and a half million soldiers, 600,000 of whom were in the Northeast outside the Great Wall. The Communist army had grown from under 20,000 men a decade earlier to more than a million. (None of these figures is absolute since the situation on the battlefield changed every day.)

# 平津战役示意图



资料来源:《中国现代史地图集》 林汉志 编制 新华社发  
 [Fig.7 An overview of the Beiping-Tianjin Campaign (Jin-Jing zhanyi) in 1948.]

It was evident to everyone that the military and political situation was about to change dramatically. One of the most prescient people was Li Jishen, and he decided early on to become involved in the peace negotiations. Li was a four-star general in the Nationalist Army as well as being Chiang Kai-shek's closest associate until the war with Japan in 1937. After the war he had become Chiang's most implacable opponent within the Nationalist camp. He later became a leader of the Revolutionary Committee of the Nationalists in 1948, and finally the vice-chairman of the first government of 'New China'.

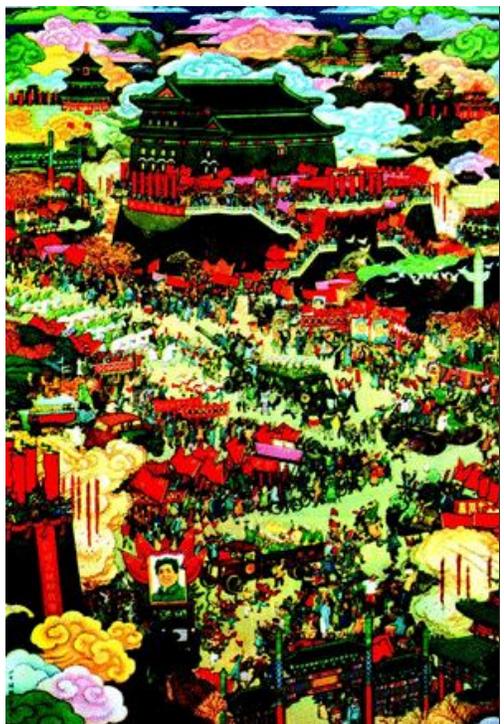
we have been discussing, Zhang Dongsun mentions Peng Zexiang as one of the group involved in the negotiations. Indeed, in November 1948, Peng had brought a letter from General Li Jishen in Hong Kong, which he handed over to Hou Shaobo (another of the figures mentioned in Zhang Dongsun's list). Hou had once saved the life of the commander of the Nationalist forces in Beiping, Fu Zuoyi, and he remained Fu's close friend. General Li urged Zhang Dongsun, as the man in charge of the Democratic League in Beiping, to participate in the negotiations, and offered the following advice:

Cut your ties with the Nanjing government, go it alone, take a third road. North China should declare independence and establish a coalition government. The new coalition government should take command of the army.

脱离南京政府，独树一帜，走第三条道路。  
 华北独立，成立联合政府。  
 军队由联合政府指挥。

Fu Zuoyi knew how influential Li Jishen was, and Li's suggestion suited Fu perfectly. He agreed to communicate his 'intention to sue for peace' to the Communist leadership, using Peng as the intermediary.

How did Peng convey this message? He managed to find one of Mao's former teachers in Beiping, a man by the name of Fu Dingyi who was the former dean of Mao's college in Changsha, Hunan province. Through him he made contact with the underground Communist Party organization and was able to send two letters to Mao. There was no response. Becoming anxious, the Nationalist commander Fu Zuoyi asked his own daughter to use her connections with the underground Party to send Mao a cable. Still no answer came. At this juncture the elderly Fu Dingyi decided to take Peng's letter to Mao himself. Although Fu was Mao Zedong's old teacher and had once saved the Party leader's life, Mao failed to invite him to his headquarters at Xibaipo in Hebei. Instead, on 18 November, Mao had his old teacher wait at the Communist army front-line headquarters in Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital.



[Fig.8 The Communist forces victoriously enter China's former imperial capital, woodblock print.]

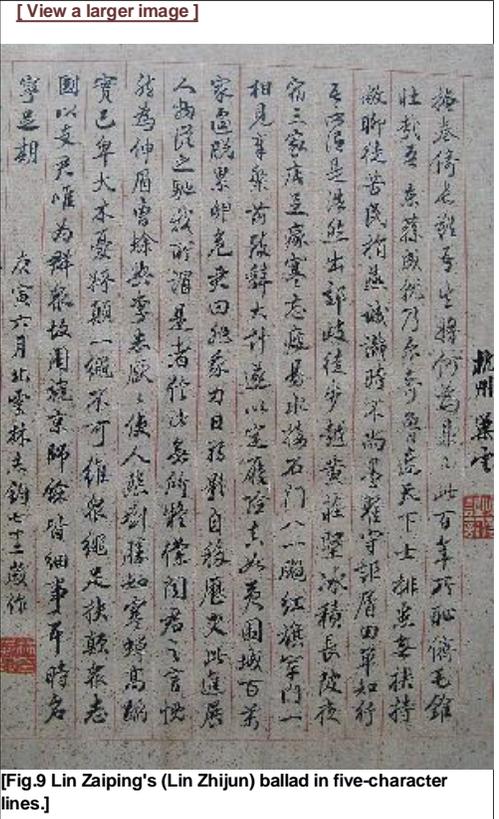
Let us recall the situation at the time:

A third force had emerged. Members of this group had conveyed a message to the Communists that Fu Zuoyi wished to negotiate a peaceful resolution. If there was such a resolution then a coalition government comprising Fu Zuoyi, the Communist Party and the third force could be formed.

Neither standard official Chinese histories nor 'apocryphal histories' (*yeshi*) have given sufficient weight to Fu Dingyi's failed trip to see Mao. In fact, if one carefully analyses Mao's actions from this point on, it is evident that all of those involved were blissfully unaware of the crucial moves

that Mao was making, as part of the 'peaceful liberation of Beijing'.

Now Fu Zuoyi received a reply by cable. But it came from the frontline headquarters of the North China Field Army, not from Mao himself. In retrospect it is obvious that Mao had pointedly feigned indifference to Fu's overture, and had undermined Fu's status by instructing a lower echelon army organ to send him a response. And yet it was Mao who drafted the cable dated 19 November 1948. It contained a non-committal request that Fu delegate 'a reliable representative to contact us'. Mao was playing a clever strategic game. For even as he was employing these delaying tactics on Fu he had on the previous day (when Fu Dingyi was sitting in Shijiazhuang) issued a crucial instruction. Originally, the Northeast Field Army had been ordered to rest and recuperate until mid-December. Now, on 18 November, they were suddenly instructed to advance immediately towards Beijing through the Shanhaiguan Pass of the Great Wall. 'These troop movements must be done under cover'. To further the deception he had his secretary, Hu Qiaomu, plant a false news story in the media to the effect that Lin Biao, the commander of the Northeast Field Army, was resting with his troops in Shenyang (the provincial capital of Liaoning outside the Great Wall) and that they were celebrating their recent military victory. In his own words, he wanted to 'take advantage of the situation to make sure that Fu Zuoyi didn't quit [Beijing]'.



[Fig.9 Lin Zaiping's (Lin Zhijun) ballad in five-character lines.]

Starting on 23 November, ten columns of the Northeast Field Army moved through the Great Wall at Shanhaiguan [where the Wall reaches the sea], while, two battalions of the North China Army arrived in the Ping-Jin [Beiping/Tianjin] district. By the end of the month they could see that Fu was still expecting to negotiate, and that his army 'remained in a defensive posture with no plans to withdraw'. In two weeks their deployment to 'encircle Beijing and cut the city off from Tianjin' was complete, and they were able to move troops at their leisure and take their time to recuperate.

Fu Zuoyi cannot have been completely unaware of these troop movements. He was unable to work out exactly what their plan was, but could no longer afford stand by unmoved. In mid-December, he dispatched a formal representative to negotiate with the Communists. It was still a low-key gesture, although the preconditions for the negotiations remained the same: Fu would retain control over his troops and a coalition government would be formed.

The Communists formally recognized this as a 'negotiation' [tanpan 谈判], whereas previously they had only been 'in contact' [chuan xin'r 传信儿]. This was what the history books call 'the first formal negotiation'. They made a counter offer that Fu would have found quite unacceptable: 'total disarmament and the redistribution of the Nationalist forces into the Communist Army'. They were buying time. The Communists knew that the true assault on the enemy at Beijing, Tianjin and Zhangjiakou would only be possible once their troops had rested sufficiently'.

Up to this point neither side has made the slightest mention of the safety of the ancient capital of Beijing, or the welfare of its citizens. Zhang Boju made it clear in his poem for Zhang Dongsun that this was what most concerned him and his friends:

Those countless souls,  
 And their capital for five dynasties, for  
 A thousand years of splendour.  
 The singing and dancing  
 On its pavilions and terraces  
 No thought of sorrow.

Suddenly the heavens darkened,  
 A gale upturned the nest;  
 None would escape unharmed.

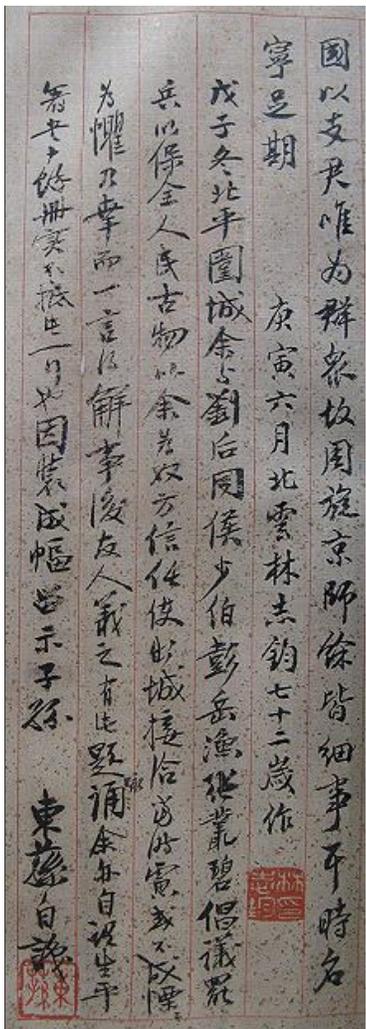
The pity of it!  
 The ruination!  
 Shed tears for our mighty land. [See Fig.4]

万姓生灵,  
 五朝都会,  
 千年文物风流。

重楼榭连,  
 歌舞不知愁。

一旦风云变色，  
覆巢下、  
完卵难留。  
  
堪怜见，  
铜驼荆棘，  
洒泪对神州。

Meanwhile the stalemate continued for ten days, as both sides prepared for battle. The forces of Lin Biao and Nie Rongzhen regrouped and recuperated. The Nationalist government was doing all it could to redeploy its 600,000 troops from North China to the south in preparation for its last stand.



[Fig.10 Zhang Dongsun's colophon, appended to the commemorative scroll.]

After successful battles on the outskirts of the greater Beiping-Tianjin area in which the crack units of the Nationalist army were annihilated, and the cities of Xin Bao'an and Zhangjiakou were taken, Mao Zedong believed he now had the wherewithall to force his opponent into submission. Meanwhile, from mid-December, Chiang Kai-shek had been sending reliable subordinates to discuss the situation with Fu Zuoyi. There was the Chief of the Nationalist Party's Operations Department, Hsu Yung-ch'ang, Cheng Chieh-min, head of his Secret Service, and finally his son Chiang Wei-kuo who brought a hand-written letter from his father. Even the Commander of the US Pacific Fleet made an appearance. They all urged Fu Zuoyi to withdraw speedily to the south.

Fu was also under constant pressure from troops belonging to the central Nationalist army. Others were on the verge of staging a revolt. Mao would delay no longer. At a time determined by him, with representatives and witnesses approved by him, a 'Peace Agreement' delivering the Communists complete victory was signed. It stipulated that:

Fu Zuoyi's Nationalist troops would become part of the People's Liberation Army; North China would become part of the Liberated Area under Communist Party control; Fu would be left with one army, and he would not be treated as a war criminal. Furthermore, he would keep his personal property, and his political position was guaranteed; The troops under his command would be treated leniently; and, Freedom of the press and religious belief was guaranteed.

Zhang Dongsun, the recipient of the scroll that is the topic of this evening's lecture, was delegated by Mao Zedong to witness this peace accord. The last stipulation about freedom of the press and religious belief was a sop to Zhang, who represented the cultural figures of Beiping. It was an empty gesture from Mao and Lin Biao to show how enlightened they were. No matter how excited the intelligentsia of Beiping may have been about this concession, there was no way they could supervise compliance to it—and this is still the case today. Half a century after the peaceful handover of the city of Beiping to the Communists, long years after the deaths of all the parties to the peace agreement, there is still no sign that these freedoms will be realized in China in the foreseeable future.

It is clear from the above sequence of events that the process of achieving the 'peaceful liberation' of Beiping was one in which Mao manoeuvred to gain time for the Communist army. He did this by

exploiting the political opportunism of China's 'Third Force' (that is, the democratic parties). He also exploited the passionate desire among cultural figures to preserve their ancient city intact. Regardless of all of their rushing around, the intellectuals were but pawns in the hands of the military men and politicians. They could be used or discarded depending on the situation. It is sobering to think that while the murderers on both sides of the political divide knew exactly what was happening, the intellectuals, for all their learning and eloquence had no sense that they were being used, neither then, nor in the first years of the People's Republic.[Fig.11]

**Burying the Scholars**

After 1950, the men of letters who participated in creating the calligraphic scroll with which I began this talk did little that was creative and showed little evidence of still being active. They were marginalized by the very regime they had embraced with such enthusiasm, the regime that had given them such a feeling of inclusion that they attempted to be involved. Why, we should ask, was this inevitable?

Let us consider the fate of each of them individually.

**Peng Zexiang**

Peng had been the first to communicate Fu Zuoyi's 'intention to sue for peace' to Mao. During the weeks that

Mao was redeploying troops Peng urged Fu not to be persuaded by Chiang Kai-shek or the Americans to abandon Beijing and retreat south. One would think that Peng had performed a laudable role in the 'peaceful liberation' of the old capital. But Mao would repeatedly accuse him of being a traitor to the Party. He warned Peng's subordinates to take no notice of him in the future. Peng had been a member of the 'Chinese Communist League' even before the Party itself was formed in 1921. In 1924, he returned from the Soviet Union and was made a provincial Party secretary. But, after 1949, this 'old revolutionary' who had contributed so much to the Party was allocated a lowly job as a translator with the People's Publishing House.

The reasons? The Communist Party found his support for a coalition government to be totally unacceptable. But even worse was his association with Li Jishen. Li was an astute careerist who was close to the recently appointed Acting President of the Nationalist government, Li Zongren. The Americans were also trying to cultivate him and it was possible that he would become the head of the new Third Force in Chinese politics. Of course, the most important target for the Communists remained the Nationalists, but they didn't want to give the Third Force an opportunity to gain strength either. There was no way that Mao would let Li Jishen take any credit for the liberation of Beijing. In the end, this once famous anti-Chiang Kai-shek hero was given a harmless sinecure: that of Vice-President of the People's Republic of China.



[Fig.11 Welcoming the 'peaceful liberation' of Beijing.]

### Deng Zhicheng

The historian Deng Zhicheng was the great-grandson of the Qing-era official Deng Tingzhen, a man famous for his involvement in the suppression of the opium trade. He was a refined and scholarly individual who had taken a professorial appointment in history at Peking University in 1917. He was also given an appointment by the Education Department as one of the editors of the new national history. Thereafter, he never left Beijing/Beiping. Apart from his job at Peking University he also taught at the Normal University, the Women's College of Humanities, as well as at Tsing-hua, Yenching and Fu-ien Catholic University.

He read widely, covering a multitude of topics from every field, from standard histories to miscellaneous essays and fiction. He would articulate his historical views in a pure and elegant classical prose that had all but disappeared following the cultural purge of the May Fourth era. He published a number of books: *Two Thousand Years of Chinese History*, *Trifling Records on Antiquities*, *Poetic Chronicle of the Qing Dynasty*, and *Reading Notes from the Mulberry Grove*. For a generation like my own, with our imperfect literary culture, his works are rich and evocative.

He wrote the eight volumes of his *Poetic Chronicle of the Qing Dynasty* in his middle years. He skimped and saved so he could afford to buy the over seven hundred collections of poetry and essay by writers from the early Qing period (the Shunzhi and Kangxi eras, 1643-1722) that he used in a work that 'used poetry as historical evidence'. They provided a rich source of materials not found in the history books, and he used them to write six hundred short biographies of writers from the early years of the Qing dynasty. During his tireless search for new material he collected a large number of precious books, such as *Jottings from the Wren's Hut* (an original manuscript by Dun Cheng, a friend of Cao Xueqin, and a valuable resource for studies of *The Story of the Stone*); a copy of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, with illustrations by the author Shen Fu, perhaps the only such copy in existence. After Deng had used these books for his research, he generously gave them away.

At the age of 65, in 1952, a year of education reform in tertiary institutions and ideological remoulding of intellectuals, Deng was the mainstay of the Yenching History Department. He was a teacher loved and esteemed by his students. It was only when the Marxist-Leninist historian Jian Bozan was appointed to head the History Department, that Deng retired, on full salary, receiving 'heartfelt consideration and special treatment from the Party and the People's Government', with special permission to use the title 'History Professor at Peking University'.

Deng Zhicheng died in the witheringly cold January of 1960, the year of the Great Famine. Before he died, he invited Dongsun to visit him in his house. Apparently he had something he wanted to say, but he died before he could see Dongsun again. Dongsun wrote a *ci* poem to the tune of 'Slow Yangzhou ditty' [*Yangzhou man*]. In the words of his colophon to that poem: 'It was only many days after his illness and death that I learn of [Deng Zhicheng's] passing. I also heard that no-one had come to pay their respects. I wrote this poem to lament his death' [文如病逝后多日始知, 并闻无人往唁, 赋此哭之]. One line from Dongsun's poem reads simply, 'Few of us have tears left to weep' [人间热泪已无多]. [Fig.A]

There used to be a beautiful inkstone on Deng's desk, inscribed with the words 'Spirit of mountain, essence of stone. We keep each other company day and night' [山之精, 石之髓. 朝夕相从, 惟吾与汝]. It was a fine piece dating from the Qianlong era [18th century], with inscriptions by successive generations of owners. It had come as part of his wife's dowry and had been his life-long companion. The ink used for Deng's poem on the scroll may have been ground on this smooth and lustrous old inkstone, which by now has probably been sold in one of the antique markets.

### Zhang Boju

Zhang Boju was known as one of the 'Four Young Princes' of the Republican era. He was China's most

celebrated private art collector. His father Zhang Zhenfang was related by marriage to the first president of the Chinese Republic, Yuan Shikai, and himself was Chairman of the Board of the Salt Industry Commercial Bank. Zhang and several of Yuan Shikai's sons studied together in the British Beiping Academy. By the age of nine he was writing classical verse and was hailed as a child prodigy. He was skilled at music, *go*, calligraphy and painting, and could not bear to contemplate the path planned for him by his father—a career in the army or in business. Instead he used his family's large fortune to indulge his love of antiques and art. He became an expert in this field, exchanging silver dollars, gold bars, jewellery, property, and even risking his own life (he was once kidnapped) to amass a collection of inestimable treasures that could rival that of the Palace Museum.

The scroll painting *Spring Outing* by the Sui-dynasty painter Zhan Ziqian (who flourished c.600 AD), the earliest extant landscape painting in China, had been in the collection of the Forbidden City, and had both a colophon by the Huizong Emperor of the Song dynasty and a poem inscribed by the Qing emperor Qianlong. Following the abdication of the Xuantong Emperor [Puyi] and his expulsion from the Forbidden City in 1924, Zhang Boju discovered that this painting had found its way into the hands of an antique trader. To save it from being sold overseas, he raised the funds for its purchase by selling off his own thirteen-hectare courtyard house and garden, the Garden of Resemblance (*Si Yuan*) in Gongxian Alley in Beijing, which had originally belonged to the Empress Dowager Cixi's Chief Eunuch Li Lianying. His collection also included:

A scroll by Lu Ji of the Jin dynasty (c.300 AD), one of the earliest surviving pieces of Chinese calligraphy; A piece of calligraphy by the Tang poet Du Mu; A piece of calligraphy by the Song poet Huang Tingjian; *Returning by Boat on the Snowy River*, a painting by Zhao Ji of the Song dynasty; and, *Living in the Mountains*, a scroll painting by Qian Xuan of the Yuan dynasty.

All these works occupy a unique place in Chinese art history. After 1949, Zhang Boju and his wife donated eight of the most valuable pieces from their collection to the state. The government offered them 200,000 *yuan* in acknowledgement of this gift, but they refused to accept any payment whatsoever.

In 1957, even Zhang Boju was labelled a 'Rightist'. If one carefully examines his expressed opinions, there is only one sentence that would have caused of causing the Communist Party even the slightest discomfort. Speaking as a lifelong connoisseur and collector of historical treasures, he once observed:

These days, it's very difficult to find calligraphy or paintings from the Song or Yuan dynasties. Anything that's any good has either been given to the government, or else to Kang Sheng or Deng Tuo [the head of the Party's secret service apparatus and deputy-mayor of Beijing respectively, both of whom had a penchant for antiques]. Forget about buying anything; it's impossible to so much as set eyes on a decent piece nowadays.

现在想找宋元字画，已经很困难了。如今，有了什么好的东西，不是交公家，就是拿给康生、邓拓。你莫说买，连见都见不到。

Apart from those things which were too precious to keep and were donated to the nation, the rest of the Zhang family collection was catalogued by the authorities for future 'donation', and was temporarily housed by the Zhangs. In 1966, the Red Guards came. They chucked the scrolls into the courtyard, set fire to them, and made Zhang Boju kneel by the fire and 'roast'. He could only plead with the 'young revolutionaries': 'Don't burn them! If you must burn something, burn me! Those things are national treasures, once burned they're gone forever.'

Zhang Boju, his wife and their only child were exiled from Beijing for twenty years. Because of his personal friendship with the Foreign Minister Chen Yi, Zhang had what was considered the good fortune to be transferred to Jilin Provincial Museum, where he was given the title of assistant director of the museum, which was at least a living. At Chen Yi's funeral in 1972, Mao Zedong saw a calligraphic couplet by Zhang Boju written in commemoration of his dead comrade. The extraordinary style and content of the piece caught Mao's eye. It was the first chance Chen Yi's widow had to inform Mao of Zhang's plight, and to ask for leniency for this poet whose life was inseparable from Beijing and its culture. With Mao Zedong's approval, at the age of seventy-seven Zhang Boju was allowed to return to his small courtyard house near Hou Hai in Beijing.

Zhang Boju died in Beijing in 1982. By then Beijing had grown to be a city of eight million, and not many were alive who even knew who he was. And how few were left who could appreciate his simple beliefs:

I do not wish to possess the things I collect. But they should stay forever in this land of ours, to be handed down from one generation to the next.

I sit at my desk and bury my head in my old books. This is the scholar's true task. May the weapons of war give way to eternal peace; may all be put in order. May the people live in tranquility. What greater happiness can there be than this?

予所收藏，不必终予身，为予有，但使永存吾土，世传有绪。埋首窗几，更理旧业。书生之事，不过如此。干戈永宁，车书混一，得为太平之民，何幸如之。

## Zhang Dongsun

I quote again from Zhang Dongsun's own inscription on the 'Besieged City' scroll:

As I enjoyed the confidence of both sides in the conflict, I was given the task of entering into negotiations [with the forces] outside the city. At the time I was fearful that I might fail, but fortunately the matter was resolved with a few words.

以余双方信任，使出城接洽。当时虑或不成，慄慄为惧，乃幸而一言得解。

Afterwards Zhang was invited as Mao Zedong's guest to Xibaipo (the Communist Party Central Committee headquarters before their entry into Beijing). Following Mao's move into Beijing, Zhang was frequently invited as a distinguished guest, and was present at banquets both large and small, participating in the most crucial consultations and decisions regarding government appointments. He also took part in a series of meetings before the People's Republic was established, including the solemn elections for the nation's Chairman, Vice-Chairman and various members of the Central People's Government.

The new regime installed him in a high position as a member of the Central People's Government and of the Chinese Political Consultative Committee (this last post he did not take up but gave to another professor). Mao even said to him personally: 'There are some new houses being built in [central government and Party headquarters at] Zhongnan Hai. Would you like to live in one of them?' Zhang declined and expressed his intentions quite clearly: he would continue to live and teach at the university. Mao didn't seem to be offended. 'I suppose you all want to be self-sufficient?', he retorted with a laugh.

In 1952, a 'thought reform movement for intellectuals' was launched. During this campaign Zhang's university was given the task of firing the first salvo. The Party work group in charge was told to select three people as the focus for the struggle: the president, Lu Zhiwei; the Dean of the School of Religion, Zhao Zichen; and the head of the Philosophy Department, Zhang Dongsun. They all expressed their willingness to 'thoroughly rectify the errors of the past'. The others won forgiveness from the Party. But Zhang's confession was not accepted. He had fallen from grace.

The reasons for his dramatic fall are many and complex. These are dealt with in full in the book that I have recently finished as part of my research here at The ANU's Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. Here I will give just one small detail: during a crucial vote for the Chairman of the new People's Republic, there was only one candidate: Mao Zedong. All the votes except for one supported his candidature. The one dissenting voice was that of Zhang Dongsun.

Six months later, in December 1952, by which time the thought reform movement was over, the Democratic League—Zhang Dongsun was one of its leaders—in the absence of any legal process found him guilty of treason. According to the Qing dynasty legal code and the Republican constitution, treason was a capital crime. When the group of 'democratic personages', people who hung obsequiously around the fringes of the Chinese Communist Party, recommended that he be 'dealt with to the full extent of the law', Mao Zedong personally intervened and gave him permission to 'resign'. With that Mao put him out to pasture. Zhang was no longer able to teach, give lectures or publish. He became one of the 'the walking dead', with no thoughts of his own, no voice of his own.

The 1980s brought reform and the opening of China to the outside world; then during the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, nearly all the unjust and wrongful cases dating back to the 1940s were overturned. But Deng Xiaoping personally wrote on Zhang's Public Security Bureau dossier that he was not to be rehabilitated.

What was really going on here?

I much thank my colleagues Jonathan Unger and Geremie Barmé for inviting me here as part of their Australian Research Council grant to work for the last ten months here at The Australian National University. During this time I have been able to pursue my line of research seeking an answer to this difficult question from half a century ago.

A philosopher once said that a university [daxue] is great [da] because of its great teachers, not because of its great buildings. The same is true of a city. You cannot just look at the streets and the buildings. You need to see the human beings living in the city, especially those who make up its cultural life.

They are all gone, the authors of the 'Besieged City' scroll. And the man it once saluted is gone too. They strove to find a solution, to 'unbind the knot'. They strove to save the old capital. They applauded the new regime, and wrote for it in a mood of high expectation, in the hope that Beijing would be protected and would flourish. They stood up for their city and its culture—its palaces and walls, its lanes, its young swallows flying back and forth among its willow branches, its dignified, courteous and warm-hearted citizens. But after a few years, even a few months, the culture they had defended was under threat and they, these professors, these 'defenders of civilization', together with their ideals, their hopes, their erudition, their very lives, had silently vanished, one by one. They vanished in a city which politics and power, mass movements, slogans and scheming, had changed beyond recognition.

This then is the story of the scroll known as 'The Besieged City Unbound'.

This is the story of the 'Peaceful Liberation of Beijing'.

Thank you.

[Share](#)

[Home](#) | [Editorial](#) | [Features](#) | [Articles](#) | [Briefs](#) | [New Scholarship](#) | [Behind the Scenes](#) | [Links](#)

© China Heritage Project, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific (CAP), The Australian National University  
Please direct all comments or suggestions to [contact@chinaheritagequarterly.org](mailto:contact@chinaheritagequarterly.org).  
This page last updated: April 21 2011 14:57:02.  
URL: [http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=014\\_daiqing.inc&issue=014](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=014_daiqing.inc&issue=014)