

## FREEMAN REPORT

JULY/AUGUST 2008

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## Quote Of The Month

*"We speak out for a free press, freedom of assembly, and labor rights not to antagonize China's leaders, but because trusting its people with greater freedom is the only way for China to develop its full potential."* ~ U.S. President, **George W. Bush**, delivering a major Asia policy speech in Thailand during his seven-day trip to Asia. President Bush balanced his remarks on China's human rights issues with praise for China's market reforms. He commented, *"A peaceful and successful future for this region requires the involvement of both China and the United States...China and the United States share important economic interests."*

**Source:** The White House, August 7, 2008

## Trivia Question

Which country is the world's largest renewable energy producer? (cont pg 3)

The Freeman Report provides an open forum for individual opinions and commentaries on China. All opinions expressed in the feature essay of the report are those of the author.

## FEATURE ESSAY

## Iconic Architecture, Heritage and Contemporary Urban Form: Beijing's Misinterpretation of "Modernity"

BY JEFFREY L. SOULE, FAICP

I have worked on city planning issues and projects in China for the last twelve years. The expectations of the Chinese government for the role of the Olympics have generated huge expenditures on high visibility public projects. The question is not whether the Olympics should or should not be part of China's global emergence, but rather what the impact of these projects is, and how they express the notion of a modern China through urban form. As a planner, key questions for public investment are: "who pays?" and "who benefits?" The price tag for the major public buildings in anticipation of the Olympics represents a trade off for other less visible, yet in my opinion more important efforts to improve the quality of life in general. China has made this Olympics a national endeavor, whereas others have been a function of more modest city and private enterprises. Los Angeles, for instance, used mostly existing venues.

I will not get into the debate on the aesthetic points of Beijing's new buildings; rather I will simply question the cost to the citizens from the entire country to pay for works of great expense and ask what has been the value of this exercise. More importantly, is China willing to look at this effort objectively and what can be learned going forward?

*Modernity as Technology versus City Character*

How Beijing is using the Olympics to showcase a peculiar notion of what is "modern" represents a phenomenon that can be seen elsewhere in the world – Dubai, for instance. This view of modernity as a function of technological gymnastics is misplaced. Contemporary (cont pg 2)

## In The News

**GENEVA** The World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute panel confirmed a ruling against Beijing's import tariffs for car parts, which marked the first legal defeat China had suffered since joining the WTO in 2001. The complaint had been lodged by the United States, European Union, and Canada. China is expected to appeal, arguing that the tariffs are necessary to prevent manufacturers from avoiding the car duty by importing large segments of cars and assembling them locally. However, the U.S., EU, and Canada claim that the tariffs are a protectionist measure which discourages imports and forces foreign part-makers to shift manufacturing to China.

**HOKKAIDO** Climate change topped the agenda of the G8 summit which took place in Japan in July. China, along with other "Group of Five" developing economies, rejected the proposed target to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, arguing that rich nations like the United States must take more aggressive steps. The failure to reach an agreement was seen as a major disappointment and reflected the continued split between rich and poor nations in international climate negotiations. The debate among the 16 major economies will shift to the Copenhagen talks in 2009 on a new deal to replace the Kyoto Protocol.

means “of its time”, and things that are of their time should build upon and celebrate all periods and use appropriate technology, not technology for its own sake. Only by understanding and reinforcing Beijing’s many layers can city fabric and “harmony” be expressed. Beijing’s leaders talk about the concept of culture and history, but you can hardly see it in the way the city is growing and developing. The relationship between the expression of character and the urban form should be much closer. One fundamental problem with this peculiar notion of modernity is the implicit belief that history and development are in conflict. This is a misunderstanding of the organic nature of how cities grow and adapt and quite untrue from an economic perspective as well.

Each new building in Beijing competes for attention and detracts from attention to the city as a whole. Beijing is becoming much like cities anywhere in the world rather than encouraging new architecture to reinforce the unique city it was even forty years ago, when Edmund Bacon pronounced it one of the world’s great works of art. The mechanically planned roads and subway stations are placed without thought of neighborhood access, while businesses and public monuments are all engineered in isolation from the needs, values and activities of the people.

Although gifted with a civilization of over 5,000 years, this drive for “modernity” has made Beijing leaders feel the need to cover the city with foreign icons depicting their notion of progress. The few remaining fragments of the historic city have been overshadowed by an urban form with little grace, style, context or compassion, designed for architecture magazines but not inhabitants.

### *Narrow Planning and Design Process*

Most officials are not trained in city planning and cannot be expected to understand how to shape the fabric and incorporate the layers that build a livable city. Trendy and self-absorbed architects have manipulated the Chinese leaders with promises of modernity and progress. The Chinese State Council was bullied into approving the opera house as an expression of “artistic taste”, for instance. Many Chinese academics, whose advice is sought after, are also making money either acting as commercial contractors, or joining with foreign firms to get design projects. This should disqualify them from giving their advice in official capacity. Notwithstanding, the most favored design selection system allows Chinese experts to make deals with developers and foreign designers. Disguised as “competitive”, this process creates a closed system where officials, architects and the jurors all play the same game with no contribution or meaningful interaction from the people who must live with their choices.

The result is disturbing for three reasons. Beijing, a once-grand and unique place, has been replaced. Secondly, the resulting urban form does not effectively solve the issues of urbanization. And lastly, the opportunity cost of these expressions is enormous in human terms.

City officials and those who want to please them have confused “modernity” with aggressively bizarre and unusual shape – a caricature of the dada movement only with real places rather than fine art. Because no one dares to gainsay them, they believe they are building a “modern city.” A few foreign architects whose designs would have been rejected in their home countries have found a sympathetic audience. Let me single out one major exception: the new terminal 3 at the Beijing Capitol Airport. It has been praised by others already, but I will add mine here, not only for its thoughtful design but for its adherence to energy saving and transit oriented principles.

### *The Loss of Beijing*

If city officials had to view Beijing from their feet as the most citizens do, and not from a helicopter, a speeding limousine, or an expensive model to look down upon, they would understand that a city is more than a collection of iconic buildings. This obsession for “modern” design would not be so troubling if it were confined to one or two buildings. The problem with Beijing is every building is designed as an icon ignoring texture and urban fabric. In the absence of a legally binding plan and design rules that manage and maintain the city’s character, without an understanding of options based on analysis and a larger civic vision, Beijing has, for me, lost its sense as a coherent city. Today it is just a chaotic visual landscape punctuated by the musings of architects and engineers to be traversed by automobile.

It is a sad thing that the country with the greatest historical legacy for designing cities has distanced itself from its own past. Ancient Chang An was the largest and grandest city in the world and the wonderful Da Du, the ancient Beijing, inspired awe in Marco Polo. The understanding of the city as a collection of cultural and physical layers is missing in today’s Chinese planning. Even many planning “experts” in China are not actually trained in comprehensive planning or urban design. Stemming from the planned economy, where planning was simply the implementation of development schemes preordained, the view of planning as a comprehensive blend of social, economic, cultural and physical issues to be resolved has only recently begun to develop in China. Many plans are still driven by the desire for three-dimensional expressions of wealth and power. While economic policies have reformed since 1979, the rigid, mechanical view of planning as engineering and the arrangement of buildings resists change. (*cont pg 3*)

A different vision of Beijing would have developed a sense of its history not in the precious preservation of a few historic buildings, but in sensitive incorporation of the scale, texture, rhythm and character that was unique to historical Beijing. A planning process needs to be established that is open to an interactive and constructive dialogue occurring systematically over time and in many layers among politicians, policy makers, developers, residents, scholars, young and old, and rich and poor.

### *After the Olympics*

China and its capital will have to adjust to the post-Olympics period. After the event is over, Beijing should assess itself and rethink its planning and development priorities. Developing true vision for Beijing would identify shared values, and create a civic decision making process that reflects those values. Defining a more human-scaled approach that gives credibility to the notion of harmonious development should be a goal for the future. City planning based on economic, social and physical opportunities is required to respond to the true challenge of modernity. This kind of analysis and thoughtful discussion should have preceded the rush to create a “modern” Beijing. To paraphrase a Frank Lloyd Wright quip, doctors bury their mistakes but the citizens of Beijing and China will have to live with these decisions for a long time.

Nonetheless, the expanded subway system, forest mountain park, tangible facilities along with concerns about air quality, regional cooperation, strategic planning, and providing enough water for the future population are part of the legacy of the Olympics. Reflection on what was done and what has been learned should be the task at hand for Beijing after the torch is passed to London.

**Jeffrey L. Soule is director of Outreach and International Programs at the American Planning Association (APA).**

APA is organizing a study tour to China in October for anyone interested in learning more. See <http://www.planning.org/apainchina/studytour/index.htm>.

## Publication

“Assessing Chinese Government Response to the Challenge of Environment and Health,” CSIS, June 2008

By **Charles Freeman**, Chairholder, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS, and **Xiaoqing Lu**, Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

This report examines the health impact of pollution in China and the government response to this emerging challenge. The authors highlight the key barriers to effective environmental health governance in China, including inadequacies in bureaucratic coordination, public participation, and international partnerships. The report concludes with a set of recommendations to improve China’s response to its environmental health challenge.

[Click here for a PDF version of the report]

## Conference & Event

**July 17**      *Report Rollout: The Challenge of Environment and Health in China*

**Charles Freeman**, Chairholder of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies, and **Xiaoqing Lu**, Research Associate of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies, presented the findings of their co-authored report, “Assessing Chinese Government Response to the Challenge of Environment and Health.” **Trevor Houser**, Partner of the Rhodium Group and Visiting Fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, served as a discussant and offered his perspectives on the emerging challenge and the government’s response.

## What’s New

We are pleased to welcome Mr. Zhao Gancheng, who has recently joined CSIS as a visiting fellow with the Freeman Chair in China Studies. Mr. Zhao is director and senior fellow of the Department of South Asia Studies at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, focusing his research on China-India relations. Mr. Zhao will spend the next three months with the Freeman Chair.

## TRIVIA ANSWER

**China is the world’s largest renewable energy producer as measured by installed generating capacity**, according to a recent report from the Climate Group. The country is also the world’s top manufacturer of solar cells and will be the leading exporter of wind turbines by 2009.

**Source:** “China to be world’s top manufacturer of green energy,” *Bloomberg*, August 1, 2008.

## PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FREEMAN CHAIR 2007/2008\*

\* Please visit our website to access archived publications dating back to 2002.

### 2008

#### June

"Assessing Chinese Government Response to the Challenge of Environment and Health," CSIS, June 2008

By **Charles Freeman**, Chairholder, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS, and **Xiaoqing Lu**, Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

La Democrazia Gestita [Managed Democracy], *Aspenia*, No. 41, 2008, Aspen Institute Italia

By **Melissa Murphy** (contributing author), Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

#### May

"China-Europe Relations: Implications and Policy Responses for the United States," CSIS, May 2008

By **Bates Gill**, Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and **Melissa Murphy**, Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

#### February

*Foresight: 2008*, Exclusive Analysis Limited, London: 2007

By **Melissa Murphy** (Contributing Author), Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

"Assessing China's Response to the Challenge of Environmental Health," *China Environment Series 9*, China Environment Forum, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2007

By **Xiaoqing Lu**, Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS, and **Bates Gill**, Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

#### January

"Trade with China: The E.U. Speaks with an American Accent," *Atlantic Outlook*, vol. 2, no. 1, CSIS, January 29, 2008

By **Charles Freeman**, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

"Critical Questions: China's Economy and the Subprime Crisis," CSIS, January 29, 2008

By **Charles Freeman**, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

"Decoding Chinese Politics: Intellectual Debates and Why They Matter," CSIS, January 2008

By **Melissa Murphy**, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

### 2007

#### November

"China: An Olympic Hangover?," *Global Forecast: The Top Security Challenges of 2008*, CSIS, November 2007

By **Charles Freeman**, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

"China's Civil Society Organizations: What Future in the Health Sector?," CSIS, November 2007

By **Bates Gill**, Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, **J. Stephen Morrison**, Director, Africa Program, CSIS, and **Xiaoqing Lu**, Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

*The China Report 2008*

**Melissa Murphy** (contributing author), Exclusive Analysis Limited, London: 2007

#### October

"China's Response to HIV/AIDS and U.S.-China Collaboration," CSIS, October 2007

By **Xiaoqing Lu**, Research Associate, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS, and **Bates Gill**, Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

#### September

"Assessing China's Growing Influence in Africa," *China Security*, vol. 3, no. 3, Summer 2007

By **Bates Gill**, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS, **Chin-Hao Huang**, Research Assistant, Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS, and **J. Stephen Morrison**, Director of the Africa Program, CSIS

## FREEMAN FACTS:

### Beijing Olympics

1. Over the past 7 years, Beijing has spent US \$17 billion on a large-scale green drive ahead of the Games.
2. 34,000 troops and 110,000 policemen, armed police officers, and security guards will be positioned during the Games.
3. 1.4 million volunteers will be mobilized to offer support for Beijing's Olympics security campaign.
4. Approximately 15,000 residents in Beijing have been relocated for the construction of Olympics facilities.
5. About 800 of the city's 1,200 *hutongs* – narrow alleys formed by lines of traditional courtyard residences – have been demolished in the run-up to the Games.

**Sources:** PricewaterhouseCoopers, South China Morning Post, The Washington Post, Xinhua

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Center for Strategic and International Studies 2007

### THE FREEMAN CHAIR IN CHINA STUDIES

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## About the FREEMAN CHAIR IN CHINA STUDIES

The *Freeman Chair in China Studies* was established at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in 1994 to advance the study of China and to promote understanding between the United States and the countries of the Asia Pacific region. The Freeman Family—Luther Freeman as a clergyman, Mansfield Freeman as a scholar-business leader, and Houghton Freeman as a corporate executive in a global enterprise—have established a tradition of contributing to international understanding through practical experience in East Asia and China.

The United States has a long-standing relationship with China and the countries of East Asia, which play increasingly important roles in future international economics, politics, culture, and security. In the diplomatic, public policy, business, and government fields, the peoples of both China and the United States will benefit from greater mutual appreciation and understanding through broadly based international exchange.

The Freeman Chair's active policy-oriented agenda is dedicated to delivering informed public policy debates, expert briefings, and strategic policy recommendations on Greater China and East Asia to the diplomatic, policymaking, business, and government arenas.

### Current Research Projects

- China's domestic challenges and their consequences for U.S.-China relations and U.S. strategic interests
- The emergence of Chinese civil society and nongovernmental organizations
- China's HIV/AIDS crisis and its implications for U.S.-China relations
- Examining the economic, trade, and financial tensions in U.S.-China relations
- China's relations with key regions—including Central Asia, Europe, and Africa—and their implications for the United States
- China's military modernization and its impact on regional security
- U.S-China-Taiwan relations

To learn more about our program and ongoing research projects, please visit our website at <http://www.csis.org/china/>