

End of an Era: Lantern and Other Gongti Clubs Close Up

Tom Arnstein - theBeijinger

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Revelers were caught off guard this past Saturday when news began to circulate on social media about the rumored demise of Lantern, one of Beijing's longest-running clubs and what many consider to be the home of techno in the capital.

Sadly, the rumors were true, and after ten years of euphoric dancing set to an unflinching 4/4 beat, the club bid farewell to its final patrons as the sun rose over Sanlitun on Sunday morning. The send-off was particularly muted on account of the club having been closed for nearly six months due to the coronavirus pandemic, opening for a single day in June before the second wave forced it to lay dormant once again.

And although the announcement came as a shock, Lantern's eventual shuttering seemed inevitable given the planned renovations to Workers' Stadium and the building of a nearby subway over the next couple of years. The same renovations claimed another stalwart of the scene, Vics, just last week and this latest round of forced closures has wiped out the remaining venues deemed to be "inside" the Gongti complex, including Mix, Playhouse Global (PH), and Elements Club, as well as all venues in the stadium itself.

Speaking to the Beijinger, Lantern founder and resident DJ Weng Weng described how venues like Sir Teen, Legend Beer, and a smattering of other establishments to the north of the stadium are currently shielded from shutting down but that "it is assumed that they will have to move in the future" as "The entire style of Gongti will also be revised."

Lantern's two rooms gave its DJs space to experiment with different genres.

Lantern first got its start in the basement of Sanlitun's 3.3 Mall circa 2008, but closed after less than a year. Nevertheless, determined in their need to bring techno to the masses, Weng Weng and his crew didn't let that dissuade them and they soon found their home in the underground bunker-like space by the Workers' Stadium West Gate.

The steps down to the club's two dancefloors would become an iconic part of the Lantern experience: descending them you couldn't help but feel the rush of not knowing what exactly the evening would bring, while several hours later they were the teeming arena for partygoers to bond over what they just experienced.

In the early days, the club helped nurture some of Beijing's earliest experiments with techno, acting as a testing ground for the founders' musical pursuits – birthing Acupuncture Records, a medium for them to share their collective creative output – and later, the foundation for "China's first electronic music festival," INTRO. Its decks would eventually be graced by techno heavyweights like Booka Shade, Rødhåd, Ryogo Yamamoria, and Héctor Oaks, among countless others.

Even as Beijing slowly regains its footing and clubs begin to open up around the city – Zhao Dai and Dada reopened this past week – Lantern's closure marks another huge loss for Beijing's nightlife scene which, like in many cities around the world, will likely come out of the coronavirus pandemic unrecognizable from what it was before.

When we interviewed Weng Weng ahead of Lantern's 10-year anniversary last October, he told us, "I have worked hard for this and although there have been many difficulties along the way, I will persist in making Lantern the best techno club in Beijing." Now that he is searching for a new venue, it's the hope of every Beijing clubber that he will soon be able to continue doing just that.

Gongti Turns 60: A Look Back at the Stadium's Moments in History

Joey Knotts - theBeijinger

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Contrary to popular foreigner belief, “Gongti” is more than just a spot in Sanlitun around which the city’s hottest clubs have gathered. This August, Beijing’s Workers’ Stadium will celebrate 60 years of sporting events since it opened in August of 1960.

Over the years, its capacity of 66,161 has enabled countless fans to watch major events live, and while the stadium falls short of the title for largest stadium in Beijing – that honor goes to the National Stadium – what it lacks in size, it more than makes up for in history.

Currently, the stadium is undergoing major renovations that have led to closures of nearby venues, but when it gets up and running again, its future is sure to be as rich as its past. Here are our top moments in Workers’ Stadium history:

1961: The World Table Tennis Championship

In the world of table tennis, the 1960s are remembered as the decade that China began to dominate the rest of the world in the sport. Today, the country holds 145 World Table Tennis Championship gold medals, and it all started when China hosted its first championship in 1961. The actual championship was held next door in Worker’s Gymnasium, but a sizable opening ceremony was held at the stadium.

That year, China swept up the medals, winning gold in men’s team cup, as well as both men’s and women’s singles. Altogether, the country took three gold medals, four silver medals, and eight bronze medals, forever changing the way that ping-pongers would view Chinese players.

1985: The May 19 Incident

The HK team celebrates their victory at Workers' Stadium

May 19, 1985 is one of the most infamous dates in the saga of the rivalry between the China national football team (“Team Dragon”) and the Hong Kong football team (“The Strength”). That day in Workers’ Stadium, thousands of Chinese fans were hoping for a victory that would qualify their team for their first World Cup. When Hong Kong beat the People’s Republic two to one, fans were more than a little disappointed, taking to the streets for the country’s first-ever football-related incident of “hooliganism.” China would not qualify for the Cup until 2002.

1990: Asian Games Opening Ceremony

The Asian games being held in Beijing was a stepping stone to something much bigger. "Unity, Friendship, and Progress," was the motto at the first Asian Games to be held in China, a momentous occasion that would pave the way for Beijing's 2008 Olympic bid. Workers' Stadium not only hosted the football matches for the games, but also the opening ceremony, when representatives of the participating countries glided into the stadium from the sky with their respective flags printed on their parachutes.

1993: Women's track world records

World-record track runner Wang Junxia runs carrying the Chinese flag

In September of 1993, Chinese track star Wang Junxia set two world records within five days of one another - both at Workers' stadium. The feats earned her the nickname "the magic deer of the East".

After having set her first world record in Stuttgart, Germany that August (despite having been ill just before the race), she went on to set the 10,000-meter record, which she held onto until 2016, and 3,000-meter record, which she still holds today. The second and third place records in that category were also set at the stadium that day by her teammates, Qu Yunxia and Zhang Linli.

1996: Guo'an Comes to Gongti

The Sinobo Guo'an football team actually predates Workers' Stadium, having been founded in 1951. However, the team spent its first 45 years at another stadium in southern Dongcheng known as Xiannongtan Stadium (don't worry if you have never heard of it - there are no nightclubs there).

It wasn't until 1996 that the team migrated to the more prestigious stadium. Currently, Guo'an plays at the National Stadium while Workers' undergoes renovations, but they will return to their rightful home in 2023.

1999: First Concert (See note)

The first concert performance at the stadium was very much in the fashion of the time. Just before the turn of the century, Workers' Stadium held its first major concert, allowing pop star A-Mei to grace the stage as part of her second concert tour. That paved the way for dozens of packed concerts at the venue, including big-time performers such as Jay Chou (2008), Mariah Carrey (2014), and Linkin Park (2015).

2008: An Olympic Dream Comes True

Argentina successfully defended their Olympic title at the stadium in 2008

Worker's Stadium was originally intended as the main venue for the 2008 Olympics, but that role was eventually handed off to the National Stadium, which was built for that purpose.

However, Workers' still hosted the Olympic football tournaments. A total of 16 men's teams and 12 women's teams. China did not place in either tournament, though, with the Argentinian Men's team and the US Women's team taking the gold medals.

Beijing's Two CBA Teams Qualify for the Playoffs, Only One (or Neither) Will Emerge
Champions

NOTE: that was not the first concert at all. One of the first I actually attended was in 1985, the concert by Wham! (George Michael), the first Western band to perform in China as the country began to open up after the Cultural Revolution, the hour-long concert for 15,000 people.

See:

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/2057286/george-michael-china-how-singer-made-it-over>