

The Traditional Chinese Architecture Series • Five Books on Ancient Architecture in Beijing
中国古代建筑知识普及与传承系列丛书 • 北京古建筑五书

BEIJING COURTYARDS


北京四合院 (英文版)



Jia Jun
贾珺 著



清华大学出版社
Tsinghua University Press



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Dedicated to People Interested in the Traditional Chinese Architecture

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For those interested in traditional Chinese architecture

Planned by Wang Qun and Zhu Wenyi

Presided over by Wang Guixiang and Wang Xiangdong

Executed by the School of Architecture, Tsinghua University

Sponsored by China Resources Snow Breweries Co., Ltd.

General Preface (I)

In early 2008, we finally finished our negotiation with Tsinghua University and held a brief press conference. Faced with perplexed-looking journalists and irrelevant questions, I thought to myself: this cooperative project is really necessary.

Behind all the clamor for “becoming a power” and “the rise of China”, Chinese people do not lack wisdom, determination, enthusiasm, or even fundiy. What we lack—and this is essential—is “originality”, both in our products and in our thoughts. Without originality there would be no distinction, and without distinction there would not even be an identity.

The most distinct we have is our culture. The academia says that architecture is the crystallization of a nation’s culture. However, as Mr. Liang Sicheng said, quite politely, “Ancient buildings that have stood for centuries and neighborhoods filled with artistic charms, which are prominent embodiments of a nation’s culture, are often totally sacrificed for so-called ‘improvement’.”

Our purpose is to do something for the dissemination of knowledge about traditional Chinese architecture. We want to help to spread and hand down such knowledge by inviting experts to write books for the public. When we started, we were surprised by two facts because of our ignorance: first, that so many veterans and new talents are working so hard and so fruitfully in this field; second, that research in this field suffers from such a stunning shortage of funds.

We hope that the publication of the Traditional Chinese Architecture Series: Popularization and Continuation will make its due contribution to the spread of such knowledge, give more publicity to the results of the research done by veterans and new talents in the field, provide a means for readers to know more about traditional Chinese architecture, and add to our originality.

Wang Qun

Managing Director of China Resources Snow Breweries Co., Ltd.
Beijing, Jan. 1, 2009

General Preface (II)

One day in 2008, Professor Wang Guixiang told me that the negotiation for a big cooperative project was under way. China Resources Snow Breweries Co., Ltd. was going to invest as much as 10 million yuan in Tsinghua University's efforts to study traditional Chinese architecture and spread knowledge about it. That is an astronomical figure for such a purely theoretical field. As the president of the school, I took the news seriously and soon followed Professor Wang to the headquarters of CR Snow Breweries, where I met Managing Director Wang Qun in a large conference room. He impressed me as an affable and smiling man.

Even since that day, I had been pondering over a question: how can traditional Chinese architecture be related to beer, which came from the West? Mr. Wang's smile seemed to imply the answer: although there is apparently no relation between architecture and beer, things will change after CR Snow Breweries joins hands with Tsinghua—the study of traditional Chinese architecture will bear the deep mark of Snow Beer.

Shortly after that, a contract-signing ceremony was held at Tsinghua University, which gave me another opportunity to meet Mr. Wang. I still remember one episode of the event: having stamped the seal on the inauguration plaque which symbolizes cooperation, he saw that the ink was rather pale and sighed with regret. All at once I recognized his character—a perfectionist mindful of each and every detail.

A person who is strict with himself represents an enterprising company, which will surely put a strict demand on its partners. This quality is shared by its partner, the Architectural Design & Research Institute of Tsinghua University. Despite its modest size, this team can trace its history to the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture founded eighty years ago with financial assistance from the patriot Zhu Qiqian. Six decades ago, Liang Sicheng brought this undertaking to Tsinghua and wrote the first systematic book on history of Chinese architecture. Today, thanks to the hard work of Professor Wang Guixiang and his colleagues—some his junior and others his senior—as well as all the others in the architectural history community, the study of traditional Chinese architecture has borne a wealth of fruits. This team is yet another powerful force, and its cooperation with an equally powerful company is bound to produce outstanding results.

Managing Director Wang Qun and Professor Wang Guixiang, an entrepreneur and an architect, have brought about a successful marriage between the business field and the culture & education field. I am convinced that this cooperative project will usher in a new era for the study and dissemination of traditional Chinese architecture.

Zhu Wenyi

Dean of the School of Architecture, Tsinghua University
The campus of Tsinghua, dawn of Jan. 22, 2009



Elegant Houses in the Capital: the Beijing Courtyards

Foreword

Everybody can roll out a long list of structures typical of Old Beijing, such as Tiananmen, the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, Beihai, Liulichang, the Imperial College, Tanzhe Temple and White Cloud Temple, each with unique charm and secrets. The city gates, palaces, temples, gardens and monasteries adorn the inside and outside of the historic city like precious stones. However, Beijing would not be complete if it only had the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven and Beihai, for the courtyards (Chinese quadrangles) all over the city, which are rich in Beijing culture, are no less indispensable as part of Old Beijing's cultural heritage.

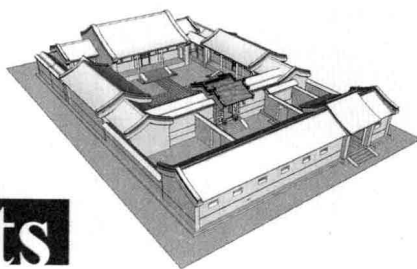
Courtyards, the most typical form of residence in Beijing, are found in every *hutong* (alley) of the city.

A courtyard is composed of a main gate, an opposite house (*daozuo*), a festooned gate, a main house, side houses and a backside house. The form may range from simplicity to complexity according to the owner's status and the scale of the structures. It has a square, symmetrical layout representing the hierarchy, a natural and solemn style and a secluded courtyard in the dense shade of trees, which makes the most ideal residence for Beijingers. All of the houses are built with the typical official style of the north, with dignified colors showing the good taste of northern culture, in sharp contrast with the delicate houses in regions south of the Yangtze River.

Since the Yuan Dynasty, courtyards of various sizes have been home to princes, ministers, wealthy merchants, scholars and common people. Splendor and simplicity are interwoven by grand mansions with many houses and compact yards. With light and spacious yards, broad main houses, elegant festooned gates and delicate side houses, courtyards have been the stage for Beijingers' everyday life for centuries, and their charm is eternal.

If the city wall is the skin of Beijing and the Forbidden City its heart, the courtyards all over it are its flesh and blood. Without them, Beijing would lose its flesh, blood and the simple and honest air handed down from centuries ago and turn into a second-rate city without a soul. It is a common responsibility for all those who love Beijing to cherish the courtyards, protect them, and preserve these valuable structures and the traditional culture they embody.

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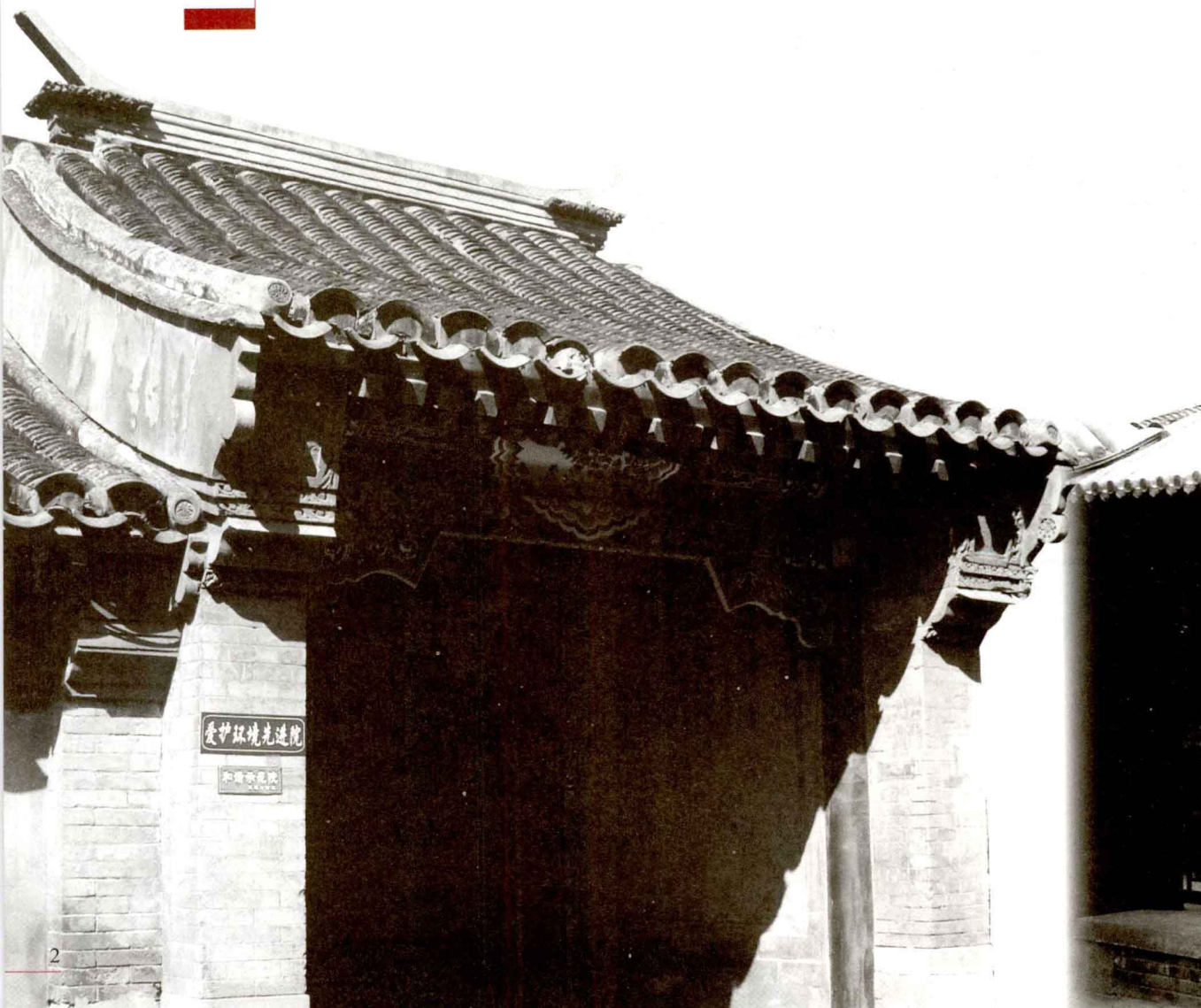
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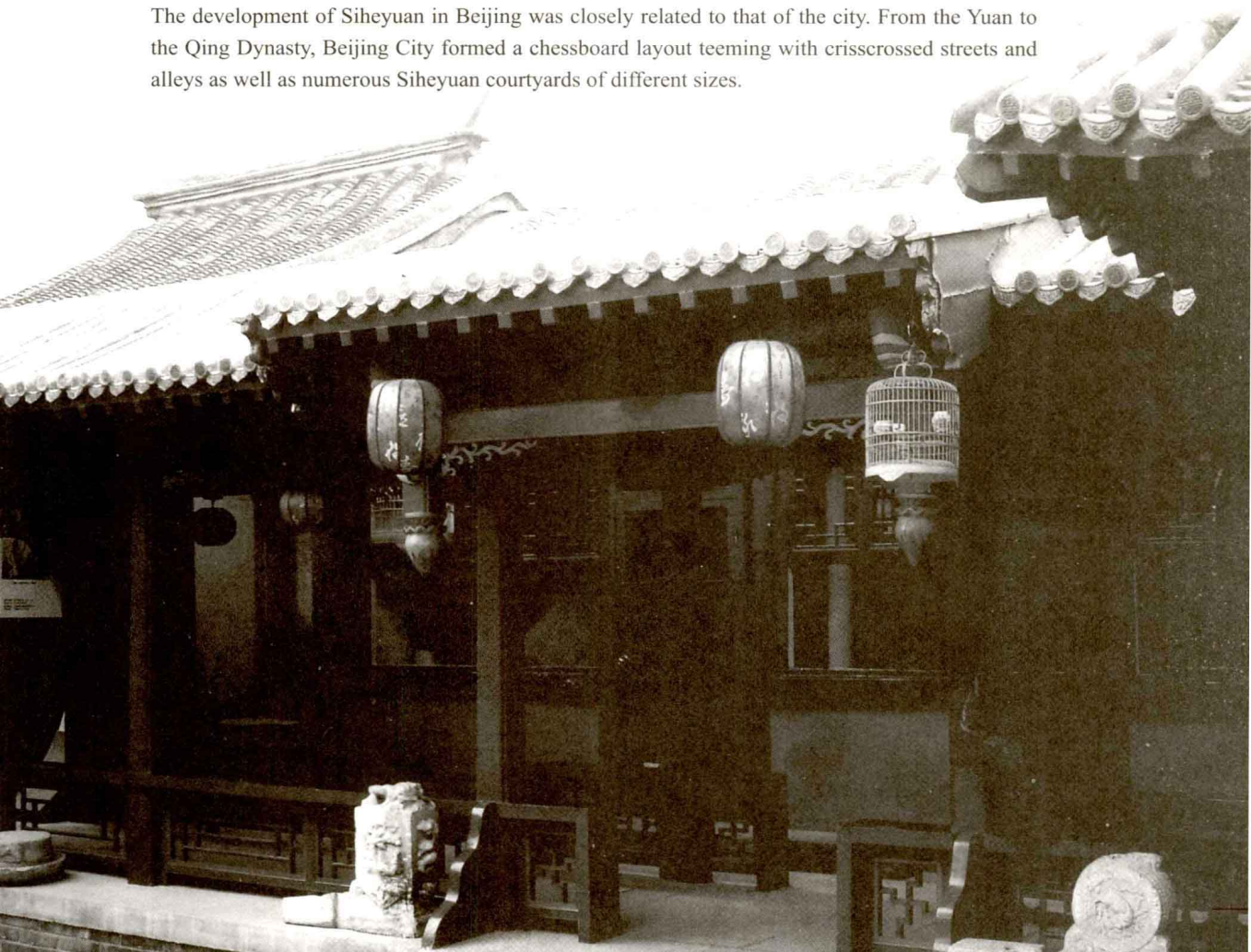
Chapter I

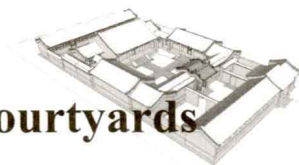


Courtyards and Beijing

Siheyuan is a four-side enclosed courtyard. It has a time-honored history in China, and can be found at the courtyard site of the Western Zhou Dynasty, in the bricks with decorative patterns of the Han Dynasty, in Dunhuang murals of the Tang Dynasty and in the painting of *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, distinctive four-side enclosed courtyards were built in many regions throughout the country, which formed a splendid residence system with Siheyuan of Beijing.

The development of Siheyuan in Beijing was closely related to that of the city. From the Yuan to the Qing Dynasty, Beijing City formed a chessboard layout teeming with crisscrossed streets and alleys as well as numerous Siheyuan courtyards of different sizes.



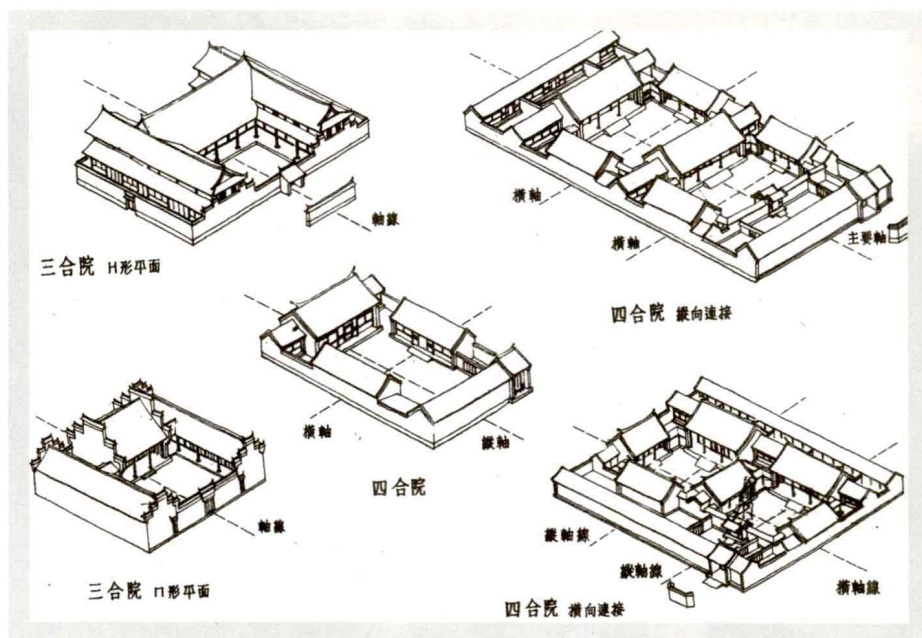


The Evolution of Chinese Courtyards *Siheyuan*

Old Beijingers call *Siheyuan* (courtyards) by the name of *Sihefang*, or “residence enclosed by houses on the four sides”. In fact, many of the traditional Chinese residences are in the form of enclosed compounds, which are generally referred to as *heyuan*, and the Beijing Courtyard is the most typical variety (Fig. 1-1-01).

Chinese courtyards have a long history. There are the ruins of a house of the Western Zhou Dynasty (Fig. 1-1-02) in Fengchu Village, Qishan, Shaanxi, which consists of

a front yard and a back yard and is enclosed by houses on four sides. Modern scholars have deducted from pre-Qin records that there used to be a screen wall in front of the main gate, that the main house in the front yard was the front hall for banquets and ritual activities, that the main house in the back yard was the rear house for the owner’s everyday life, and that the houses in the east and the west were inhabited by other members of the family. The form of the residence shows a clear distinction between the inner part and the outer part as well as the hierarchy within the family.



(Fig. 1-1-01) The forms of heyuan residence