



China's  
Peaceful  
Development  
Series

# Building Livable Cities for Human Settlement

Cui Lili



Foreign Languages Press



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Building Livable Cities  
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# Foreword

On January 1, 2007, in Beijing, 447 public bus routes began to provide preferential fares for digital card users: 60 percent discount for adults, and 80 percent off for students. A 90-minute journey, from the West Third Ring Road in Haidian District to Chaoyang District in eastern Beijing, only cost 1.4 yuan for an adult or 0.7 yuan for a student. Beijing residents have all welcomed the lower fares, and in just one month alone, 6.2 million digital cards were sold.

Lowering the costs of public transportation was one of the measures the Beijing municipal government has undertaken in its

urban planning. On January 27, 2005, the State Council approved *The General Plan for Beijing's Urban Development (2004-2020)*, which details as a priority Beijing's development of its public transport system, gradually making public transportation the city's main means of transport. It is expected that by 2020, public transportation will account for 50 percent of passenger transport, with most people able to reach their workplace from home within one hour.

2 Over the past 50 years, Beijing had made six revisions to its urban construction plan, and *The General Plan for Beijing's Urban Development (2004-2020)* is in its seventh revision. The new plan has determined the direction of Beijing's urban construction as, "the nation's capital, an international city, a cultural city and a livable city." This is the first time that the goal of building a 'livable city' has been mentioned in Beijing's urban planning, and this concept is also appearing for the first time in a government document in New China.



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# Theories for Building Livable Cities

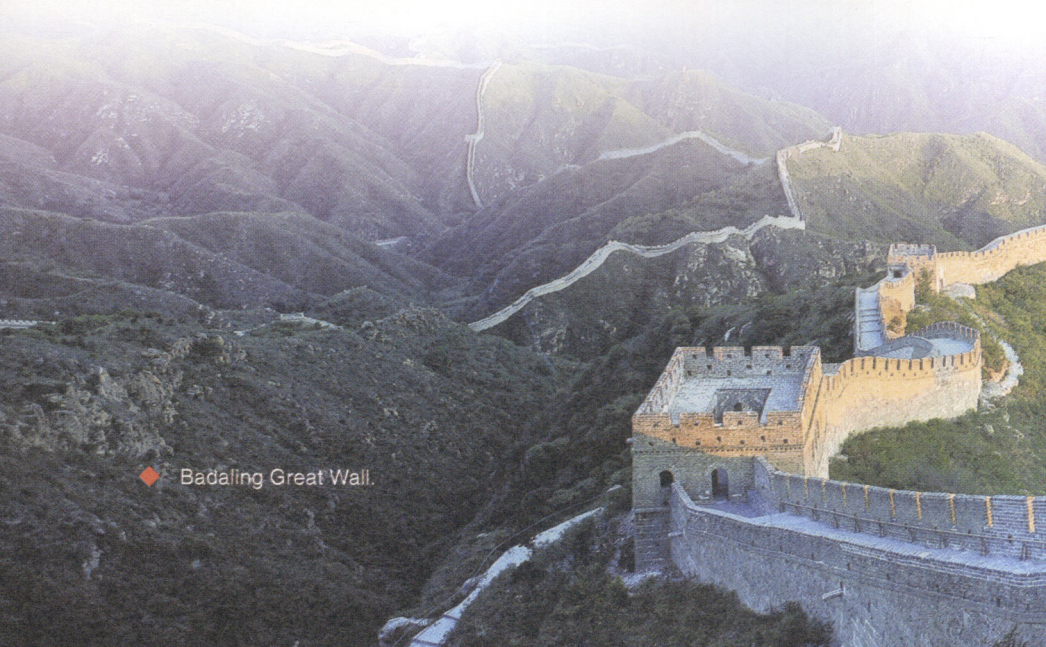
From dwellings in trees and caves to living in compact communities, humankind has always sought shelter for their own survival and living. Keeping out wind and rain, disaster and wild animals, and living in groups, were the basic requirements of primitive peoples for a living environment. With the evolution of early tribes, some of the “gathered groups” turned into “towns,” and some of the “towns” turned into “cities.” As a result, with the arrival of slave society, such cities as Yuancheng and Taicheng arose.

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## History of Cities in China

Listed as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 2006, Yinxu in Anyang, Henan Province, is seen as the site of the ruins of the Shang-Dynasty capital from 3,000 years

◆ Badaling Great Wall.



ago. Over the past 100 years, more than 160,000 pieces of tortoise shells with inscriptions, 10,000 pieces of bronzeware and 54 ruins of imperial palaces have been unearthed here. Inside the city walls, there are clearly defined zones for palaces, imperial tombs, citizens' residences, handcraft workshops and large sacrificial sites.

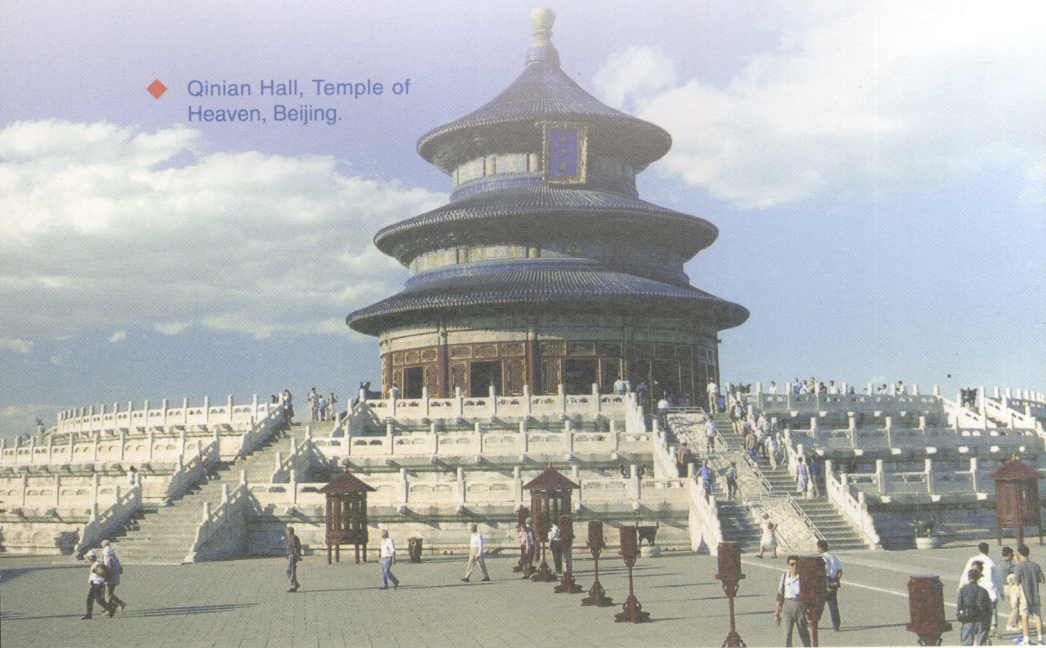
From archeological findings and historical records, people can usually determine the initial reasons for the formation of every city. A natural environment suitable for living is the basic requirement when people choose a location for a city. The Qinling Mountains, which mainly run through Shaanxi Province, have plenty of animal and plant resources, and is regarded as the dividing line between China's north and south, as well as



the watershed of the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers. At the northern foot of the Qinling Mountains lie the Guanzhong or Central Shaanxi Plain, with a favorable climate and fertile lands midst the Weihe River waterways that flow across the area, with many tributaries providing a plentiful source of water. It is perhaps for this reason that at least 13 states in ancient China have built their capitals around the Qinling Mountains, of which Xi'an (known as Chang'an in ancient times) was the famed capital of the Tang Dynasty from the 7th to 10th centuries. A 2,000-year-old city, it was the largest city in the world of that time, seven times bigger than Byzantine, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Uniformity, symmetry and order were important

◆ Qianian Hall, Temple of Heaven, Beijing.



factors in a city's construction for the ancient Chinese people. The capital of the Zhou Dynasty (BC 1046-771) near Chang'an, though built so long ago, was well designed. According to *Zhou Rites: Industry*, the city was designed in a symmetrical square form, with three gates at each of the four sides of the city walls. There were straight and wide roads, which could accommodate nine chariots in a row, connecting the opposite gates and dividing the city proper into nine parts. The Ancestral Temple was built on the left, the Altar of Land and Grain on the right, with the Administration Hall in front and the marketplace in the rear, fully actualizing the imperial concept of "the emperor at the center" with "nine as the highest number" and a symmetrical layout. This architectural concept was followed for centuries, until the end of the imperial dynasties.

The philosophy of combining heaven with humans had been the conceptual basis for the construction of cities from ancient times. Attention was paid to the position of mountains and water, which a city should be surrounded by, while a house should face water with a mountain behind it. Guanzi, a famous philosopher of the 2nd century BC, said, "The capital of a state should be built either at the foot of big mountains or by large rivers." He also said that the location of a capital site should be convenient for daily life. Other than beautiful landscapes outside the city, it should also have hills



◆ Street sculptures in Nangang District, Harbin.

and waters within the city, with winding rivers and streams to add to the city's vitality and wonders. Many Chinese ancient cities, like Kaifeng, Hangzhou, Suzhou and Beijing, had crisscrossed streets and rivers, connected bridges and pavilions, and hills covered with trees and flowers, creating a lovely combination of landscape with architecture. This was known as "enjoying landscapes in the city, with pleasant trees and streams around the busy streets of the downtown area." This embodied the pursuit of an ideal living environment for the Chinese people.

Convenience of transport was another important factor for the emergence and growth of cities. Chinese cities before the 19th century were mainly built along the Yellow River and Yangtze River valleys and thoroughfares. This shows that water and land transportation was the key to the trade of commodities and the travel of people during the period of agricultural civilization, with handicrafts and commodities as the basis of the main urban economy. The painting *Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival*, by Song painter Zhang Zeduan in the 12th century, gives a vivid picture of urban facilities and people's work and life in the ancient Chinese city of Bianliang (today's Kaifeng). The painting depicts scholars, peasants, merchants, physicians, monks, officials, women, children and boat trackers, along with market scenes, of people selling and buying, strolling in the streets, drinking, pulling boats, pushing carts, in sedan-chairs, and riding horses. There are shops, wine bars, teahouses, official mansions, village homes, thatched huts, bridges and boats, displaying the prosperity of the capital.

The industrial revolution promoted the emergence and development of cities. After entering the 20th century, large cities with a population of over a million emerged one after another. In 1915, there were 43 cities in China with a population of over 100,000, among which 22 were port cities, and 2 large cities with popu-

lation of over one million, of which one was a port city. Port cities were further developed after foreign capital entered China through unequal treaties. At first the ports were for trade, and then developed with industry. Gradually the city population expanded, with developing industry polluting the environment, thus sharpening the contradictions between urban development and environmental protection.

## Scholarly Conceptions of Living Environments

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From the 1970s onwards, humanity began to be more concerned with energy crises, environmental pollution, climate change and inadequate fresh water, until these issues have become the focus of international society.

In 1972, the UN Conference on the Human Environment held seminars on population, resources and the environment, pointing out that it was irrational for humanity to develop economies at the cost of health, calling on people to pay more attention to environmental pollution. In 1977 and 1981, the International Modern Architecture Association issued the *Charter of Machu Picchu* and the *Warsaw Declaration*, which expounded the following views: industrial development, urban expansion and the processing and reprocessing of nature by powerful mechanical forces have led humanity to gradually drift away from nature, both in terms of

ideology and lifestyle, such that living environments are worsening and ruining people's health, physically and mentally. Therefore, it clearly pointed out that architecture should be integrated with environmental health.

In 1996, the UN *Global Report on Human Settlements* regarded the new era as “an urbanizing world.” In the same year, the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements raised the point that “cities should be the suitable places for human settlement,” a sentiment that has now become a common understanding internationally.

In the 1990s, some concepts related to livable cities began to be brought up in China, such as environments for human settlements, ecological cities, green cities, hygienic cities, garden cities, etc. Among these concepts, the most influential became the issue of human settlement environments, raised by Wu Liangyong, academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering and director of Tsinghua University's Center for Human Settlements.

At the end of the 20th century, Wu Liangyong established the theories of “broad-sense architecture” and human settlement environments, which has since been popularly accepted and promoted by many architects in the world. He also drafted the *Charter of Beijing*, which came to be widely recognized as an important guiding document for the International Association of Modern