

Beijing Hutong Conservation Study

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My opinion of Beijing Hutong Conservation Study

After I read "Beijing Hutong Conservation Study" several times, which is made by IHF and participated from Tsinghua University School of Architecture, I think this conservation study was well done.

At first, they put feeling and understanding of importance value to protecting Beijing old city, a National Historical City as well as a renowned International Historical City, and on base of this they started conservation work. They made deep survey about the historical development and present conditions of Beijing old city, and also made detailed analyzed result of survey. Especially this conservation plan objectively reflected and studied the life conditions and living environment in the old city, the resident feeling of Hutong Si-He-Yuan, and also the reason why the Hutong residential building was decay. They expressed the necessity of improving the Hutong resident living conditions, and also made model plan and ideal for this.

In the conservation study, it mentioned that Hutong resident should participate in restoration and also future maintaining work. I think that is a very important point, it was shown that direct idea of 'people's city built by people and managed by people'. It's also essential base of Hutong residential building be protected in long-running and sustainable development in healthy way.

About Hutong tourism, this conservation study also did objectively reflect that Hutong tourism has brought the benefit to resident and improved the basic infrastructure in Hutong community. On the other hand the study also stated that Hutong tourism also brought new problems such as broken traditional Hutong atmosphere, traffic jam, etc. These problems need to be solved.

At the end of this conservation study, they made proposal for rehabilitation of two model courtyards: no.58 and no.60 at Zhong Lou Wan Hutong, specifically mentioned how to increase the living space and condition. I think that is one of ideal that we should accept.

Suggestion:

Based on this study, I suggest that according to different value and different level of residential building, we should find different ways to protect them, using as Hui Guan, residential building, tourist facilities, culture and sport place, etc. Of course, the historical building, which is under preservation or has made preservation sign by government, we should follow the regulation to restore historical building. I think that historical building needs to be restored well, used well, managed well, then it will really be protected.

As mentioned above whether it is right or wrong, for reference only.

Luo Zhenwen

28/5 2004

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Preface

At present, the pre-eminent problem existing in our country's urban construction is that some city leaders only see the economic values of natural and cultural relics but know little about the historical, scientific, cultural and artistic value of them. They seek only economic benefits and development while neglecting protection, so damage to natural and cultural relics are occurring frequently. Some city leaders simply deem the constructions of high-rise buildings as urban modernization while paying insufficient attention to protection of natural scenes and historical and cultural relics. Their large-scale dismantling and building during old city reconstruction have damaged many traditional districts and buildings with historical and cultural values. Some other city leaders prefer to demolish true historical relics and build false historical sites and artificial scenes. Though they have spent a large amount of money the results are neither fish nor fowl. We must resolutely correct such wrong practices.

Quoted from a speech given by China State Council member Premier Wen Jiabao at the 3rd representative conference of China Mayors' Association, entitled How to properly handle the relationship between the modernization of a city and the protection of historical relics.



Beijing Hutong Conservation Study:

The future of Old Beijing and the conflict between modernization and preservation

Introduction

The topic of this plan is the conflict between the modernization of Beijing and the preservation of its cultural heritage. Over the past decade, rapid development has led to a remarkable improvement in the quality of life for many citizens. At the same time, however, much of the historic urban fabric of the capital has been lost. Major roads now bisect ancient neighborhoods, whilst in many areas, recent re-development has wiped out the subtle architectural texture and spatial arrangement of the preceding centuries. The atmospheric Hutong lanes, the traditional residential homes, and the Si-He-Yuan courtyard houses - all are fast disappearing as the city races forwards into the 21st century. In recent years, the government has placed a number of Hutong lanes under protection, but what exactly this protection means is not clear. Many Beijing people are now concerned that, at the current rate, redevelopment will soon engulf and destroy the ancient courtyard houses forever. Groups and committees have formed to debate many of the practical issues surrounding redevelopment and conservation. Can a city the size of Beijing afford to have one-storey housing at its centre? Aren't the courtyard houses much too dilapidated, and lacking in comfort, to be saved? How can the local resident community be protected from relocation? How can rights of ownership be balanced against the needs of commercial re-development? Whilst these questions are being discussed, the re-development goes relentlessly on.

Many cities worldwide have found that rehabilitation, rather than re-development, of historic urban districts brings considerable benefits. This plan sets out to demonstrate that rehabilitation is also suitable for Beijing. The opinions of residents have been carefully researched and integrated into the plan. Some of the solutions proposed are self-contained, and could be used for the rehabilitation of individual courtyard houses. In order to preserve the character of a historic Beijing neighborhood, however, a larger cluster of Hutong neighborhoods must be targeted. This must be done with considerable urgency before the incursion of more major roads destroys the Hutongs' original urban context. The value of the Hutong lies in the spatial arrangement as much or more than in the architecture of the individual courtyard house. Therefore, concerned parties must be very clear from the outset about which remaining quarters of historic Beijing they intend to preserve.

Beijing is one of the world's most important historical cities, with a unique ambience balancing ancient and modern. Having reached this point of balance, Beijing planners must surely pause for thought. It would indeed be a great loss if this ancient capital were to become just another face-less mega-city.

1. Objectives of this Project

The objective of this project is to provide a concrete proposal for the conservation and subsequent rehabilitation of two of Beijing's historic Hutong quarters. The measures proposed could also be adopted for other neighborhoods, but the proposal focuses on the combined neighborhoods of Shichahai, Zhong-Gulou and Nanluogu Xiang. These areas are rare examples of intact historic residential areas now remaining in Beijing.

The principles behind the Conservation Plan are:

- * Preserving a maximum amount of the authentic historic structures
- * Preserving the townscape and original historic setting of Si-He-Yuan type housing in the Hutong lanes
- * Retaining the current mixture of subsidised housing, private house ownership, commercial buildings and services
- * Working with existing resident communities
- * Traffic regulation
- * Bringing living conditions up to an acceptable standard



What will remain tomorrow of Beijing's Hutong?

2. Beijing Historic Inner City Overview

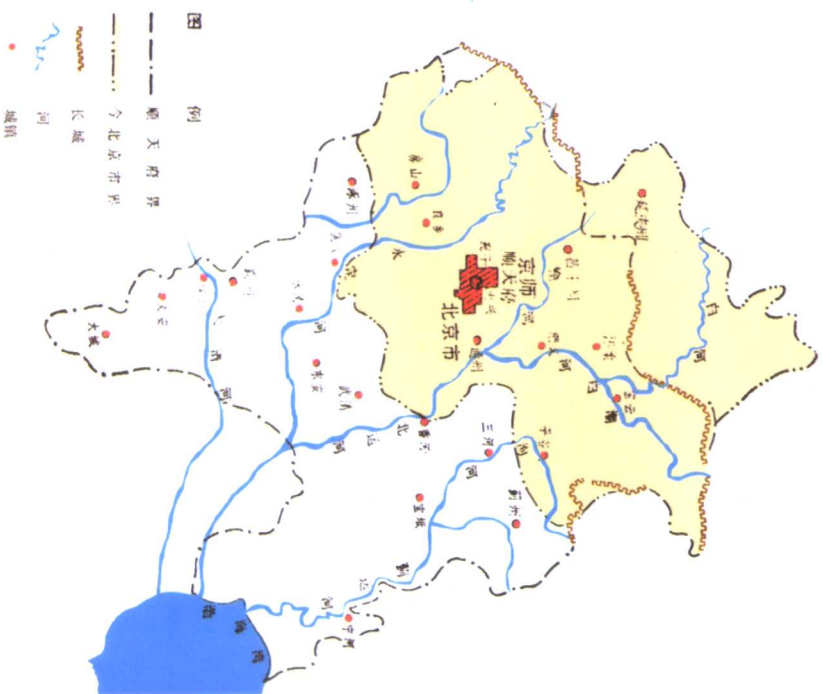
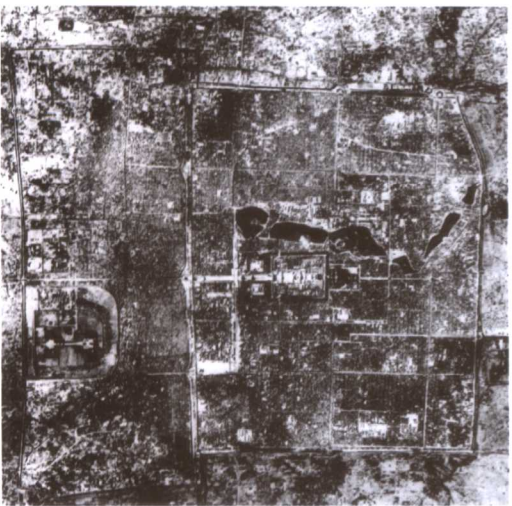
2.1 Geographical Setting

Beijing is located on a flat plain on 39.56 north latitude and 116.2 east longitude, with hills to the north and plain to the southeast. Several natural and artificial lakes and waterways within the central area are part of an ancient water-system bringing fresh water from Yu Quan Shan and providing recreational areas for the residential districts. The climate varies, being cold in the winter (-5 degrees Celsius day-time average), whilst hot and humid in the summer.

Beijing city has 13.6 million registered inhabitants. An additional estimated 4.09 million unregistered residents brings the total to 17.69 million people. The historic area of Beijing, bounded by the former city walls, housed 1.75 million inhabitants at the last census (1990). The remaining historic Hutongs are grouped in two main areas, with a total size of 62km². The more important of the two is the 38 km² area originally contained by the old city walls. These walls were replaced by the second ring road in the 1960s (the first ring-road refers to the walls of the former Imperial City, of which only some fragments remain). The second historic location is the area known as the 'outer city'. This 24km² area, located south of Qian Men gate, was originally also a walled city. The target area of the Conservation Plan is located between the Forbidden City and the northern section of the second ring road.

Satellite image of central Beijing in 1951

Source: <Beijing Old City> Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning & Design, 1996



Beijing location map

Source: <History of Beijing> Beijing University History Dep. 1999

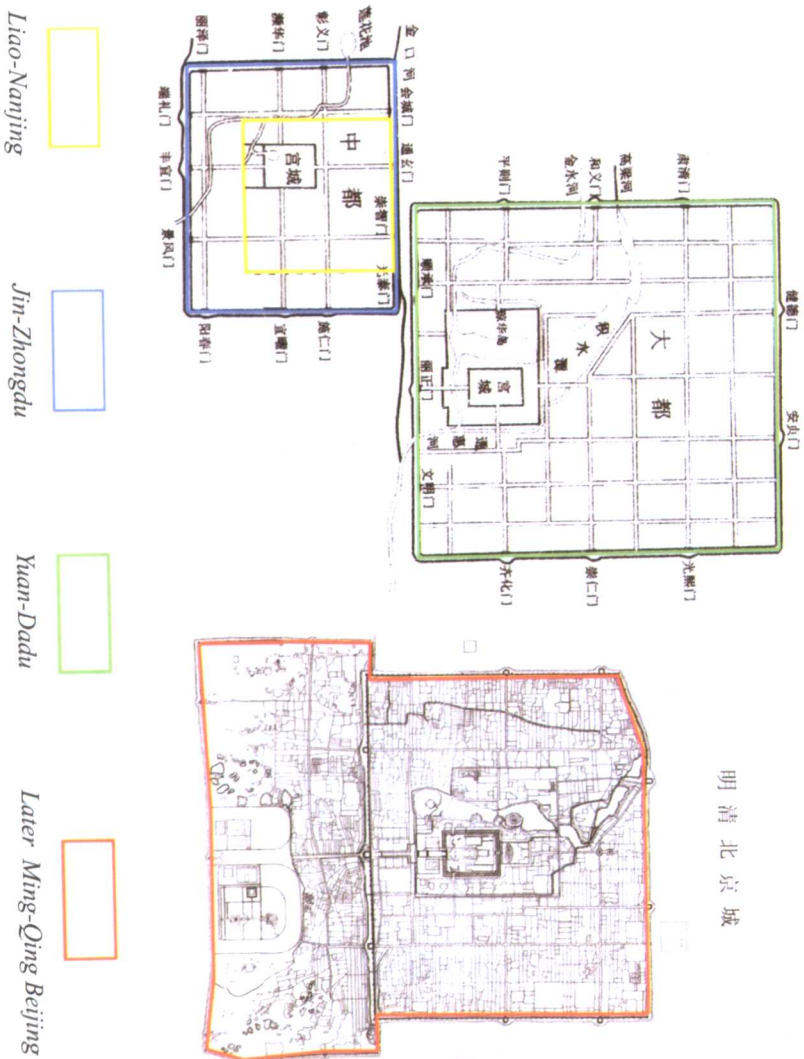


2.2 History

Archaeological findings suggest that the site of modern Beijing has been inhabited continuously for more than 3000 years. Its history as China's capital spans the Jin, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties.

In 938 Liao-Nanjing, on the site of modern Beijing, was established as the most southerly of 5 Liao dynasty sub-capitals. In 1153, under the name of Jin-Zhongdu, Beijing rose to become the most prominent capital of the Jin Dynasty. In 1267, Kublai Khan ordered the transfer of the Yuan dynasty's capital from Mongolia to a site located by north-east of the destroyed ruins of Jin-Zhongdu, named it Dadu in 1272. Dadu is regarded as the precursor of present-day Beijing. After the fall of the Yuan dynasty, in 1368, Dadu-Beijing temporarily lost its capital status, when the new Ming emperor moved the capital to Nanjing. The third Ming emperor Zhu Di decided to reinstate the Dadu site as the Ming capital, building a new capital there under the name of Beijing in 1421.

In 1644, the emperor of the Qing dynasty, Shun Zhi, decided to retain the capital in Beijing. Apart from a brief period during the civil war, Beijing has remained as the capital ever since.



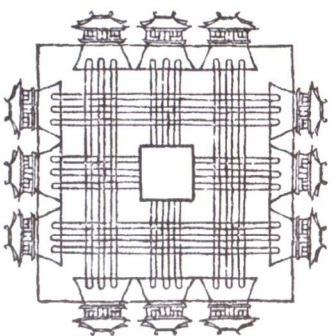
Liao-Nanjing

Jin-Zhongdu

Yuan-Dadu

Later Ming-Qing Beijing

Source: <Beijing Urban History and Geography>, by Hou Renzhi, 2000



<Kao Gong Ji · Jiang Ren>
Urban planning of Imperial city

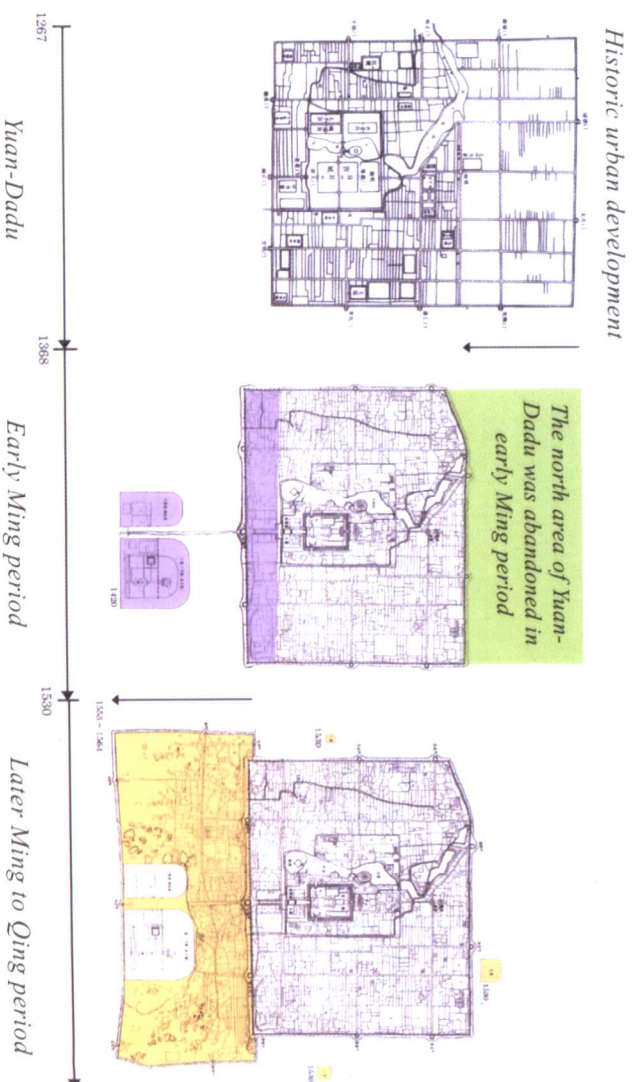
This principle was followed in the Yuan dynasty when Beijing's historic Hutong grid pattern was laid down. The grid was subsequently enlarged and adapted, taking its final shape during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The Yuan court's central palace compound was located slightly to the north of the present Forbidden City. It is a tradition that dynasties build their own palaces and temples, and demolish the old. According to archaeological research, the Coal Hill (Jin Shan) is in fact the pile of rubble resulting from the destruction of the Yuan dynasty palace.

2.3 Urban Structure

City Planning

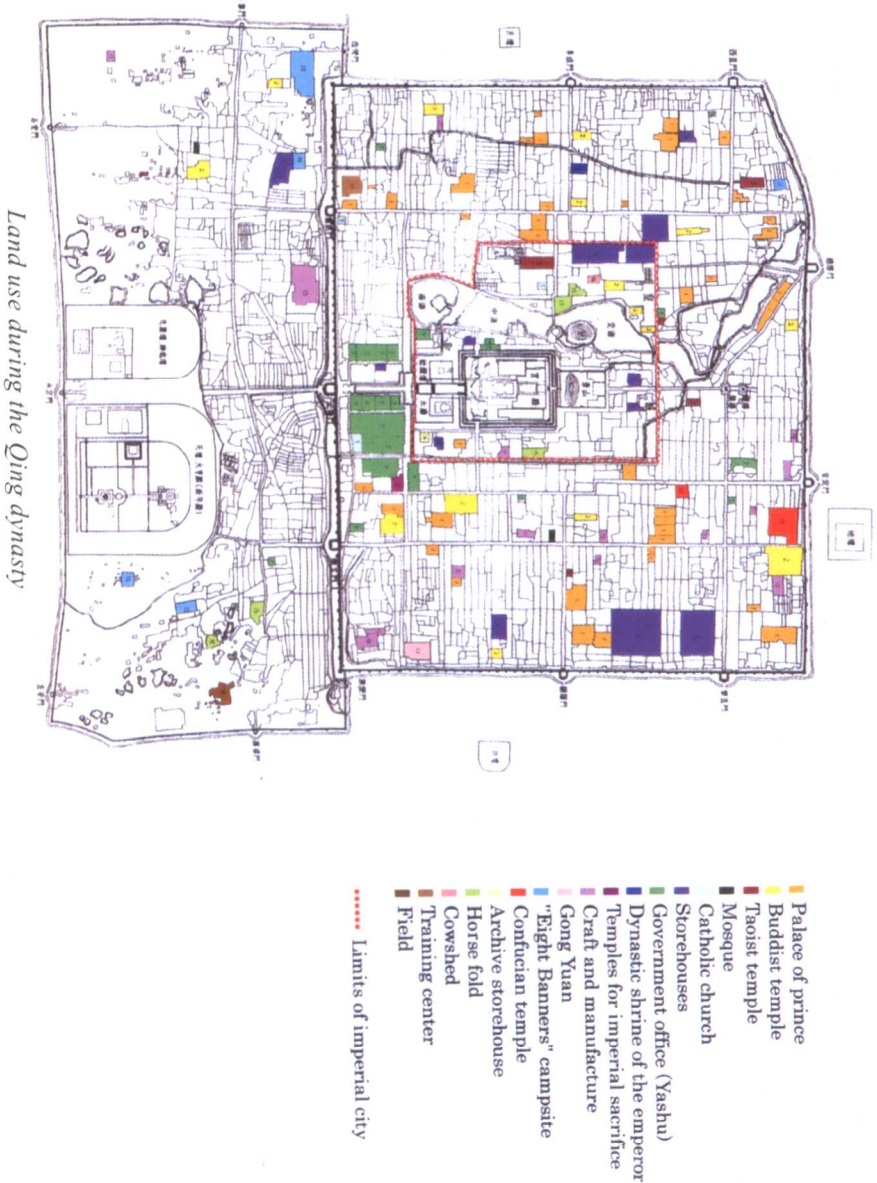
The urban design of Beijing's historic city is based on the Yuan Dynasty's thirteenth-century capital, Dadu. This makes Beijing one of the world's oldest centrally-planned cities, and an important living example of ancient Chinese city planning.

Principles for ancient Chinese urban planning, compiled towards the end of the Chun Qiu period (BC770-BC476), favoured a rectangular street grid with a palace in the centre, surrounded by temples and markets, and an auspicious number of 3 gates in four different directions.



2. Beijing Historic Inner City Overview

Beijing is laid out on a rectangular grid. The city is bisected by its 7.8km north-south axis. In the centre lies the palace complex of the Forbidden City, flanked by four temples, one in each cardinal direction. Yue Tan, Temple of the Moon, stands to the West. Ri Tan, Temple of the Sun, stands to the East. Di Tan, Temple of the Earth, stands to the North, whilst Tian Tan, the Temple of Heaven, stands to the South. The temples' location, established during the Ming Dynasty, reflects Yin Yang Wu Xing, the ancient philosophical school of the 'Five Elements'. Yin Yang Wu Xing also determined that the 'inner city' had 9 gates, whilst the 'outer city' had 7.



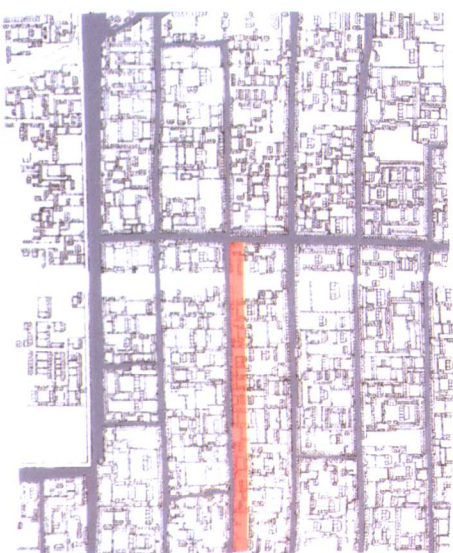
Land use during the Qing dynasty

Source: <La structure urbaine du vieux Pékin et sa Protection>, ÉFEO de Pékin, by Xu Pingfang, 2002

Hutong

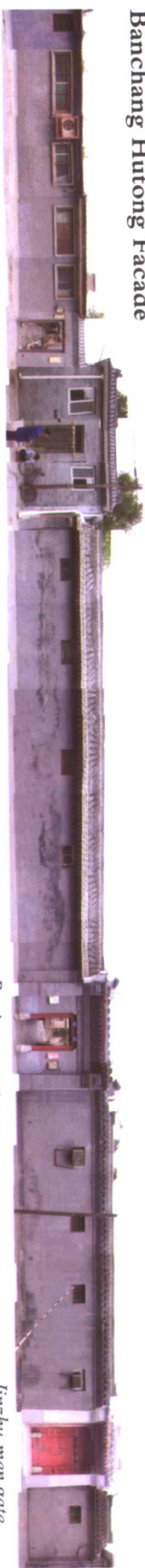
A 'Hutong' is a narrow lane. The term is believed to be Mongolian in origin, since it first appears in Beijing's Yuan dynasty records. There are several theories about the original meaning of the word, the most popular being that it means 'water well'. Yuan dynasty city plans show 3 types of street, big streets (around 37.2m wide), small streets (18.6m wide) and Hutongs (9.3m wide). Big streets and Small streets mostly ran North-South, whilst the Hutong lanes, mostly ran West-East.

Hutong lanes provide shelter from the wind and give a strong sense of privacy. Originally, many trees were planted in the courtyards, whilst more were planted later along the sides of the Hutong lanes. Maps from the Qing Dynasty and the Republican Era show that large numbers of important historic buildings, such as temples and monasteries (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucianist and local Deities) were once active throughout the Hutong areas. Many of these still exist today although many have been converted into housing.



Hutong alley structure (Qianlong map)
in Nan Luo Gu Xiang area

Banchang Hutong Facade



Public Toilet

Ruyi-men gate

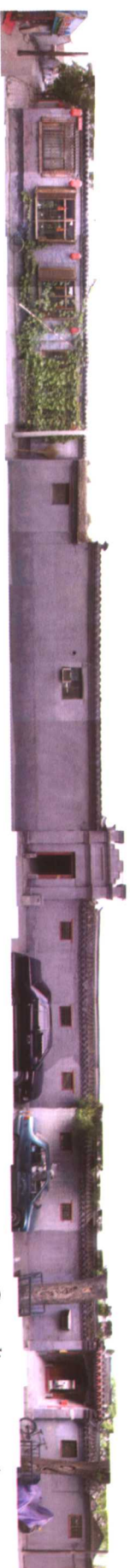
Jinshu-men gate



Xiao men lou gate

Guangliang-men gate

Local community office



Pass by bar

Western type gate

Guangliang-men gate

2. Beijing Historic Inner City Overview

Various Types of Buildings

The remains of Yuan, Ming and Qing period street patterns are of immense value to our knowledge of historic Chinese urban planning, archaeology and sociology. Beijing also retains thousands of historic buildings of various types, from different periods, contributing greatly to our knowledge of ancient Chinese architecture. These structures include palaces, imperial gardens, monasteries, temples, bridges, residential buildings, European style buildings and Revolutionary monuments from China's recent history. Of particular note are the Imperial Palace complex from the Qing and Ming dynasties, the temple of Tian Ning Si from Liao dynasty, Bai Ta Si Pagoda and Wan Song pagoda from the Yuan dynasty.



a. Yong He Gong -18 century-



b. Dong Tang -1904-



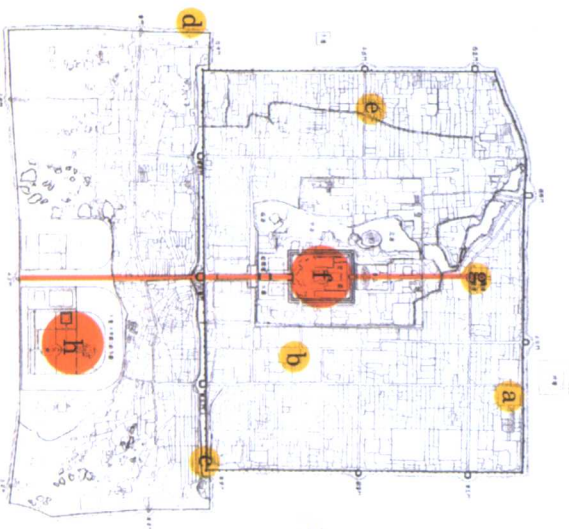
c. Ming city wall -15 century-



d. Tian Ning Si pagoda -10 century-



e. Bai Ta Si pagoda -13 century-



f. Ming Qing Forbidden City -15 to 19 century-



g. Bell tower -18 century-



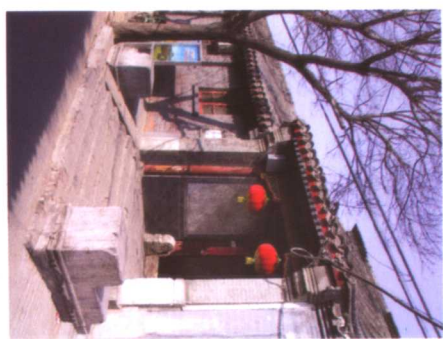
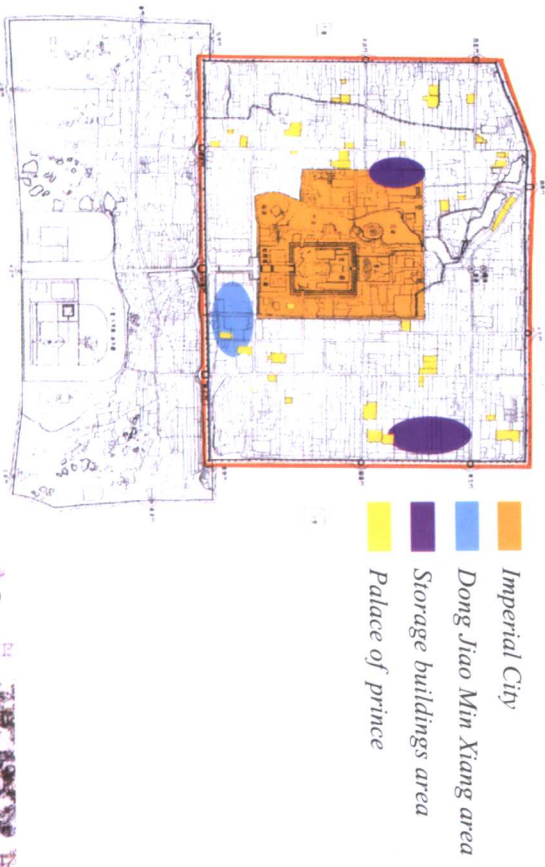
h. Tian Tan -15 century-



Area Feature
Despite a certain uniformity of height and limited variations in design, different residential neighborhoods still had distinct characteristics, reflecting the different social groups that inhabited them.

Inner City Feature

The inner city area measures 38km². The Imperial City stands in the center, and the city's planning was based on Yuan-Dadu. The streets were laid out mainly on a grid pattern. Most of the inner city was residential in character, with concentrations of large-scale courtyard homes of the upper classes. These include palaces and storage buildings of princes and other royals. Within a block located to the east of Tian An Men square known as Dong Jiao Min Xiang, there are many western-style buildings dating to the beginning of 20th century, mostly former foreign embassies.



Large-scale courtyard house



Gate of the palace of a prince



Wide Hutong street in inner city



Dong Jiao Min Xiang, former French post office

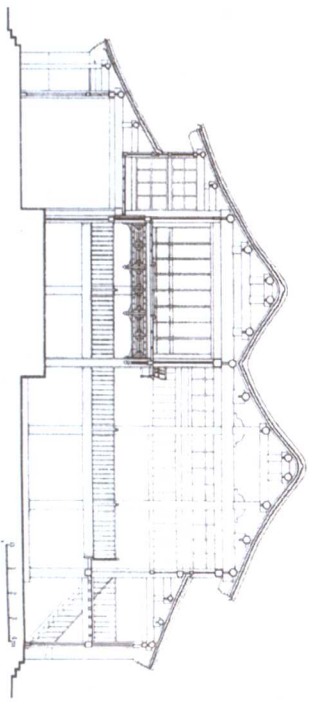


Storage buildings in Xin Nan Cang

2. Beijing Historic Inner City Overview

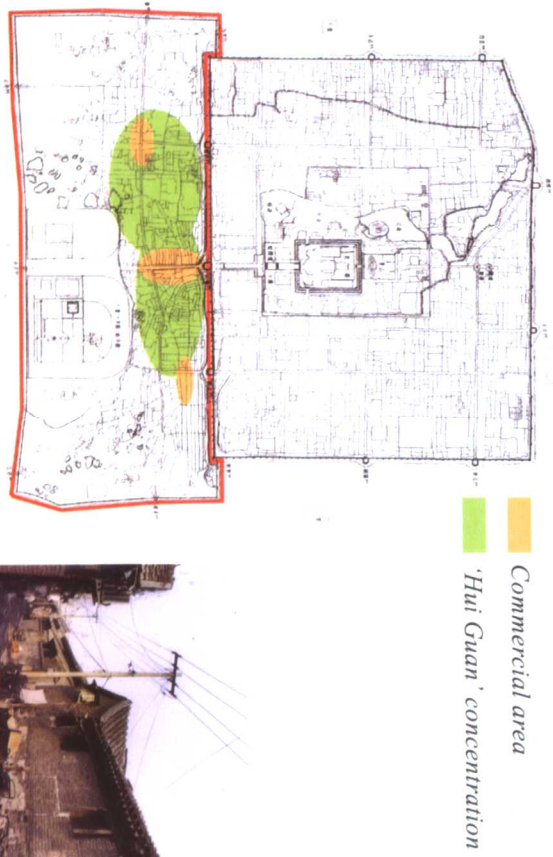
Outer City Feature

This area measures 24km², with the highest concentration of buildings in the northern part. In 1648, the Qing emperor Shun Zhi settled his compatriots, the Manchus, in the quarters surrounding his palace. Mongols were located in adjacent zones in the inner city and Han Chinese in the outer city. The outer city was not laid out along a grid pattern, so there are many crooked streets and narrow alleys. Buildings are to a much smaller scale than in the inner city. The outer city has traditionally been a commercial area. Traders from China's provinces tended to form their own neighborhoods, each drawing architectural inspiration from their respective native region. The institution of 'Hui Guan' was a liaison office between Beijing and local regions for traders and immigrants. The 'Hui Guan' provided free accommodation for visitors from local regions and some of them had their own opera theatres. The 'Hui Guan' also worked as an active community center. There were around 460 'Hui Guan' located within the outer city at the end of the Qing dynasty.



Hu Guang Hui Guan theatre

Source: <Xuan Nan Hong Xue Tu Zhi> by Wang Shiren, 1997



Commercial area

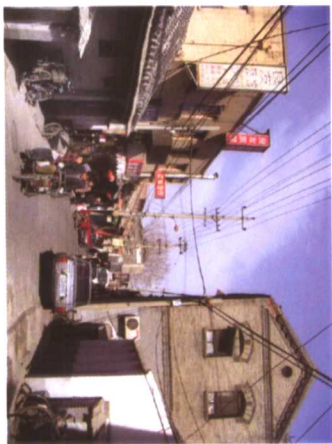
'Hui Guan' concentration



Various types of commercial buildings



Small-scale courtyard house



Narrow Hutong street in outer city



2.4 Residential Buildings

The traditional residential building of Old Beijing is the Si-He-Yuan, or courtyard house, consisting of low buildings grouped around one or several central courtyards.

In the Si-He-Yuan house, the main building (*Zheng Fang*) is preferably located on the northern side of the courtyard facing south, with two sub rooms to either side (*Er Fang*). On the Western and Eastern sides are the Xiang Fang. The south side comprises a building facing the street (*Dao Zuo Fang*) and a shadow wall (*Ying Bi*). The courtyard is accessed through a main gate at the southern end, and often there is a back door on the northern side. Generally, the main residential buildings are south-facing, designed to block the fierce northern winds but allowing sunlight to shine into the main rooms. This design is well-suited to Beijing's climate. A major attraction of the courtyard house is its secluded and peaceful atmosphere, affording a degree of privacy and calm within the city's bustle. The ambience of the courtyard house is closely tied to the traditional lifestyle of China's urban families.



Zheng Fang (main building)



Gate



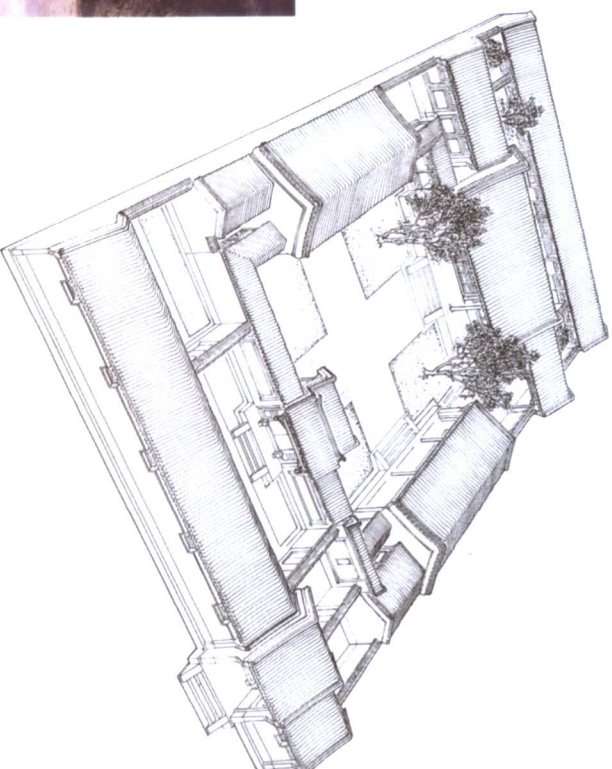
Gate decoration detail



Ying Bi (shadow wall)

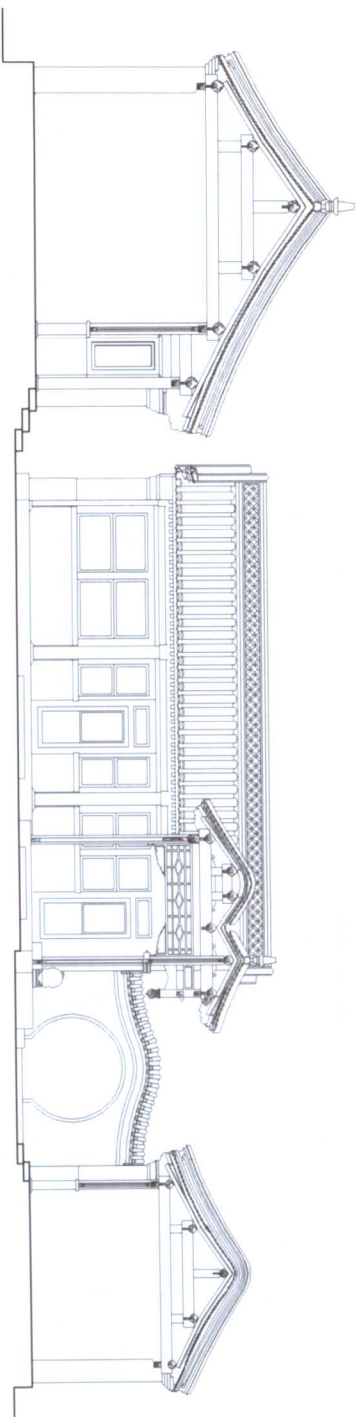


Men Dun (stone carving)



Si-He-Yuan buildings are timber framed, with brick walls and tiled roofs. The reddish colour of the painted timber beams and pillars contrasts with the grey bricks and tiles, creating the distinct Beijing Hutong combination.

Si-He-Yuan were subject to strict restrictions on height, design, colour and decoration in imperial times. The restrictions were graded according to the status of the owner. The limitations included rules on the colour and style of roof tiles, the colour of the outside walls and the decoration of the main gate. Within the inner city walls, before 1911, no residential building of more than one storey was permitted. It was considered unacceptable that ordinary beings should have houses taller than the walls of the Forbidden City.



Courtyard house section - Xian Ming Hutong no. 4 - drawing by Liang Yaqing

2.5 Courtyard Houses in Modern Times

The Si-He-Yuan were originally designed and built to house one family, but since the 1950s many were converted to house several families as tenants. With the limitations of space and infrastructure within a Si-He-Yuan, the standard of living is not compatible with that of modern apartment flats. Yet many residents appreciate the living environment and quality of Old Beijing, even if shared with three or four other families. The central location is convenient for work, schools and shops. If all the inner city Hutong residents were resettled beyond the fourth ring road, Beijing's traffic and transportation systems would collapse. Many Beijing residents also say that living on the ground floor is more healthy, since they remain in close connection with the Earth's energy. The Si-He-Yuan lifestyle has a long and ancient tradition, and is widely regarded as an essential element of Chinese culture.



A courtyard house shared by several families, extension buildings cover original open space.