



ALLEYS IN BEIJING

北京胡同



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ALLEYS IN BEIJING

Born and bred in Beijing and having spent more than a half century of my life here, I probably qualify to be a “real old Beijinger”.

What is most unforgettable in Beijing? It is the many long and short, wide and narrow alleys and lanes. Whenever I go on a trip away from home, particularly on a trip abroad, what I miss most are the ancient, elegant, familiar, lovable and plain lanes. In other words, unless I am back in the lanes, I have not returned home. Home is inseparable from the alleys and lanes. Nor is Beijing separable from them. To a certain extent, the alleys and lanes are the soul of Beijing.

Then just how many alleys and lanes are there in Beijing? Veteran residents say: “The major ones number 360 and small ones are as many as hairs on an ox.” Men of letters have used the term of several thousand to describe the lanes. According to incomplete statistics, by 1949, there had been a total of over 6,000 lanes within the boundary of Beijing, out of which over 4,550 were located in the inner city districts. Naturally, the figure for today is much more impressive than that.

In my view, the term “culture” probably refers to a particular way of life. People of different times have different ways of life and thus live in different cultures. In this sense, for generations, people in Beijing have lived in a culture of lanes. As time goes by, especially with the progress of urban construction, lanes in Beijing are decreasing in number. On their ground, tall buildings are springing up. It is against this background, Shen Yantai and Wang Changqing, the couple photographers, have presented readers with this collection of *Alleys in Beijing*. Just as they

state it in the "Afterword" of this work, they were not prepared "for the sudden disappearing of the lanes which have presented a culture of a particular historic time. We feel it an urgent task to capture the sights and sounds through the camera lens, recording the historic footprints of the culture of lanes in this ancient capital city, the myriad vistas of people, their typical ways of life and customs and habits unique to these lanes. Our contribution may not amount to much of a creative surprise. It was meant an attempt to rescue a cultural heritage, collecting data of images for people to do research and studies of a passing culture in the future. We found this a worthwhile job, though it was hard and cost a lot of time and sweat. In doing so, we were not going after monetary payment, or an award of any kind, but simply driven by a sense of duty." Reading these words, shouldn't we cheer them for their rescue operation?

Having read the book, I was profoundly moved by "fiery" passions that are present throughout the work.

First, the passion of the photographers.

Interestingly, neither of the couple is a native of Beijing, as he was born in Shanghai in the south and she in Taiyuan, Shanxi, west of Beijing. But they all have lived for many years in Beijing and more importantly cherish a deep love of the city. They have a particular sentiment for the alleys and lanes here and their hearts beat to the rhythm of life in the alleys and lanes. To a certain extent, the lanes have become part of their life. As a result, when they focus their camera on the lanes, their own passion goes into their work, thus arousing a strong response from whoever sees their work. When I looked at their photos, I could not help thinking that what I was actually seeing was the abstract but ubiquitous souls of the photographers rather than the concrete images in the photographs. I believe this passion and sentiment are the most valuable and irreplaceable qualities of an artist, which renders the works with a strong vitality.

Second, the passion and sentiment in the works.

It can be said that every picture in the book, with or without people in it, whether taken in the spring sunshine, summer rain, autumn wind or winter snow, focuses on the people and thus on the sentiment in the alleyways. I want to particularly point out that the photographers have displayed a boundless love and longing for the alleys and lanes in Beijing through their pictures. They told this encounter. One day they walked in an old quadrangle house which was being torn down and saw an elderly man standing in front of broken walls. His entirely family had moved into

a new apartment building, but he was reluctant to part with the soon-to-disappear dwellings, where perhaps he had spent his life of childhood, youth, middleage and part of his senior years. He looked as if he wanted to cry, but managed to hold back his tears. He wanted to say something but words failed him. His last act was to pick and take away with him the last ripen Chinese wolfberry fruit. Perhaps it was this discovery with a shattering impact that gave them the inspiration for the picture entitled "Difficult to part with the old house". In this photo, an old man stood in front of a broken wall in a deadly quiet surrounding. He stared at what was in front of him with a helpless expression on the face. His mouth seemed to be moving but no words came out.... Works like this lead readers to vividly feel that the old man seems to just have had a heart-to-heart and moving conversation with the photographers. I remember the great writer Tolstoy once said that the impact of art was determined by three elements in the work and two of them being "the unique characteristics of the sentiment it conveys" and "the explicitness of such sentiment it conveys". The artistic impact of this photo is so enormous and profound that readers will find it hard to forget.

Finally, let me congratulate the publication of *Alleys in Beijing*. I look forward to seeing more, newer and better works from the two author-photographers.

In photography, I am a layman. What I have written is therefore an observation of an ordinary reader.

I thank the authors and the readers.



北京胡同

笔者生在北京，长在北京，半个多世纪过去了，大约算得上是个地道的“老北京”。北京城里最使人难以忘怀的是什么呢？就是那大大小小的、在南方被叫做街巷的胡同。每当我从外地特别是从外国出差归来的时候，最急于想见到的便是那一条条古朴的、幽雅的、熟悉的、亲切的胡同。或者说，只有见到了这些胡同才能算是回到了北京，回到了家。胡同与家分不开，北京与胡同分不开。一定意义上说，胡同就是北京的魂。

据说，“胡同”一词出现在金、元时代，来源于蒙古语系，是女真人和蒙古人进入中原以后，按照自己的习惯把城市的街巷称为“胡同”的。那么，北京到底有多少胡同呢？听老人们说：“大胡同三百六，小胡同如牛毛。”意思是，多得数也数不清。为此，文人们也有“庶五城胡同，浩繁几千条之间”一说。根据不完全统计，北京全城到1949年为止，已经有胡同6000多条，城区里的胡同有4550多条。自然，现在又要比这个数字大得多了。到底有多少，似乎谁也说不清。

我以为，所谓“文化”，大约就是人们的一种生活方式，不同的时代人们有着不同的生活方式，也就有着不同的文化。或许从这个角度来看，北京人正是祖祖辈辈生活在“胡同文化”里的。随着时代的发展，特别是随着城市建设的发展，北京城的胡同越来越少，代之一栋栋高楼大厦。正是在这种情况下，沈延太、王长青两位摄影家把这本《北京胡同》画册奉献给广大读者。正如他们所言：“我们深为胡同作为一个特定历史时代的文化的不辞而别而感到措手不及，胡同文化的面貌急待用摄影纪实的手法‘留真’下来。尽我们微薄的力量留下一些古都胡同文化的历史陈迹，胡同天地里的百姓世相，京味京韵的民俗风情和市井氛围，虽算不上惊人的创作，却干了一点抢救遗产的活儿，为后来者追寻、研究即将逝去的胡同文化，留一点形象的资料。这是摄影力所能及的一种功能，作为从事摄影的苦力，流点汗也是值得的，不求报酬，不图奖赏，责任感的驱使，仅此而已。”读到这里，难道我们还不应该为他们的“抢救”，为他们的“留真”拍手叫好，倍加称赞吗？

我看过画册以后，深深地被一个像火一样燃烧着的“情”字所吸引，所打动，所感染。

首先说作者的情。

说来也巧，两位摄影家都不是土著的北京人，一位生于江南的上海，一位生于山西的太原。然而，他们都久居北京，更重要的是热爱北京，他们对北京城的胡同情有独钟，息息相关，一定意义上说，胡同已经成了他们生命的一部分。因此，他们在用手中照相机进行纪实留真的时候，就不能不融进了自己沉甸甸的情感，从而使读者也得到强烈的共鸣。在欣赏作品的时候我就想，与其说是看到了照片上的具体形象，不如说是看到了作者那抽象的又无所不在的灵魂。我以为，这些也许是一个艺术创作者最可宝贵的东西，不可代替的东西，使作品能够富有强大生命力的东西。

其次说作品的情。

可以说，这里的每一幅作品，不管是有人物出现的，没人物出现的，也不管是在春光里，夏雨里，秋风里，冬雪里，作者始终把镜头对准了胡同里的人。因而，也就把镜头对准了情。我想特别要指出的是，作者通过作品表现出一种对于京城胡同的无限眷恋之情。作者讲了这样一件事——有一天，他们走进了一片正在拆迁的四合院老房子之间，看见在已经拆毁的断墙残壁前站着一位老人，他的全家已经搬进新建的公寓楼房，可他还是恋恋不舍地来看看这些行将消失的老房子，也许他就是在座老房子里生，老房子里长的，老房子里留下了他的童年，他的青年，他的中年，和他的一部分老年，他欲言又止，欲哭无泪，最后摘走了老院子里最后一束红透的枸杞子。大约正是这个具有震撼力的形象发现，使得他们创作了《故宅难舍》那幅照片。那里也有一位老人，也是站在已经拆毁的断墙残壁跟前，周围安静得没有一点声音，他双目凝视着眼前的一切，脸上呈现出有些茫然的表情，蠕动的嘴里仿佛有着说不出又说无尽的话……这些使读者真切地感觉到，老人似乎是刚刚和作者进行过一次推心置腹的，又激动万分的谈话。记得，大作家托尔斯泰说过，艺术感染力大小、深浅，取决于作品表现出的三个要素，其中的两个便是“所传达的感情具有多么大的独特性”和“这种感情的传达有多么清晰”。应当说，这幅照片的艺术感染力是大的，是深的，是使读者容易记住又不忍心忘掉的。

最后，我要衷心地祝贺《北京胡同》的出版，并企盼将来能够看到两位作者更新、更好、更多的作品问世。对于摄影艺术我是个外行，说不出什么精彩的意见来，写在这里的只不过是一个普通读者的观后感而已。

谢谢作者，也谢谢读者。



A bird's eye view of the intricate structures in the Forbidden City which were arranged in one after another courtyards of quadrangle houses. The paths and passages along the palace walls resemble alleys and lanes in civilian living quarters. The real differences lie in the terrible quietness and a cold solemnity and the absence of freedom and friendship.

俯瞰紫禁城可以看出，里面的重重宫阙犹如一座座四合院，宫墙夹峙下的宫街、宫巷，形同民间的胡同，只是徒有森严与冷寂，缺少温馨与自如。



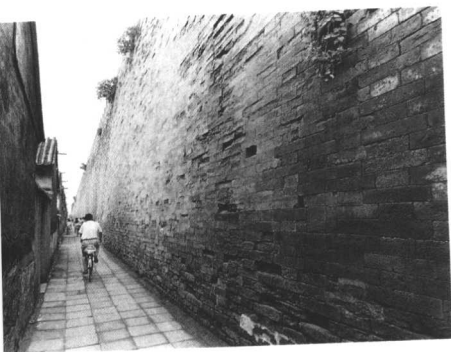
Connoisseurs grace the antique stand at the morning market.

早市上的古董摊常有行家光顾。



A morning market next to the palace wall. The appearance of markets like this in recent years in Beijing makes shopping easier for the residents.

临护城河而设的早市，每天拂晓开市，近午即散。



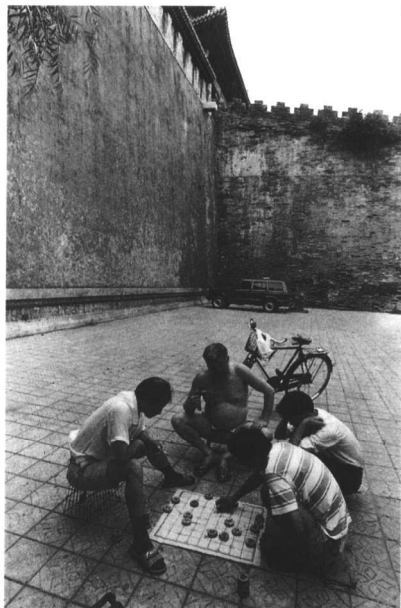
The lanes next to the Forbidden City appeared after the royal palace opened to the public, thus they were, relatively speaking, younger members of the family of alleys and lanes.

紧傍紫禁城的胡同。它们应形成于紫禁城开禁以后，是胡同家族中的新生代。

Just imagine the fun of a tour along the moat on such a tricycle.

乘坐这种人力三轮车沿护城河游览，别有情趣。





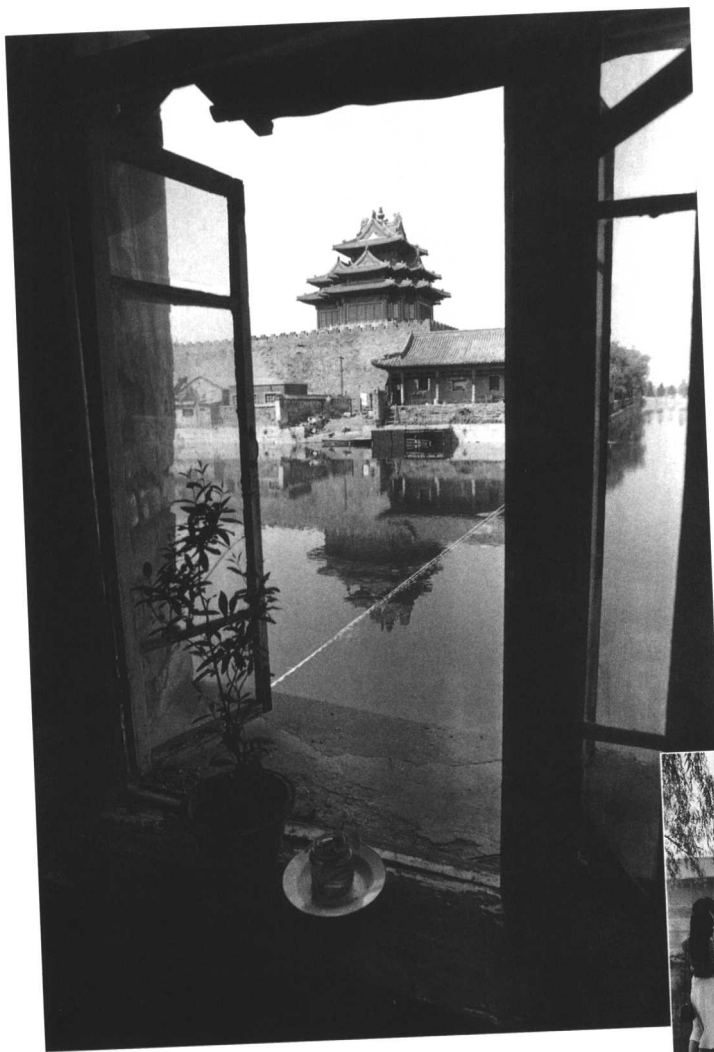
"Check, mate!" A match at the foot of the Forbidden City.

紫禁城下布阵对弈。

The trees by the palace wall are a sanctuary for both men and birds.

人和鸟都喜欢这傍着宫墙的林荫深处。



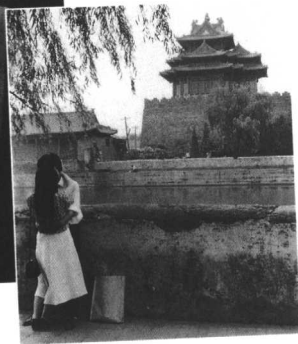


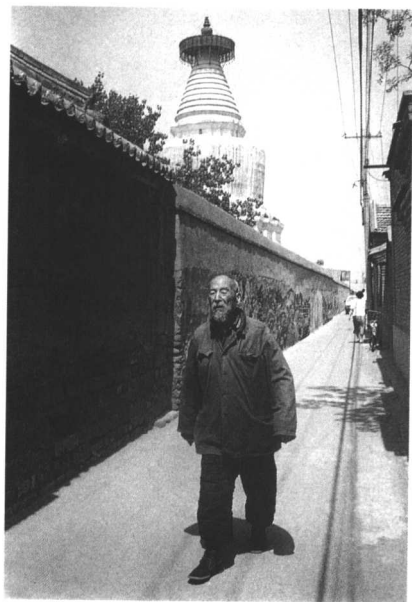
A view out of the window of a residential house at Beichizi. Across the moat on the east and west sides of the Forbidden City, are Nanchizi (South Pool) and Beichizi (North Pool) and Nanchang (South Long) Street and Beichang (North Long) Street. People living in these places do not have to go out of their house to take a look at the Forbidden City.

北池子一居民家的窗外景色。紫禁城东西两侧护城河的对岸,分别是南、北池子和南、北长街,住在这里的居民足不出户就能观赏到宫城里的景物。

The bushes and trees along the moat and the refreshing air they generate draw residents from the nearby alleys and lanes to come and do physical exercises. It is also a favorite spot for lovers.

护城河畔林木葱郁,清幽宜人。附近胡同里的居民早晚喜欢来此练拳健身,散步消闲;情侣们也视此为约会的绝佳之处。



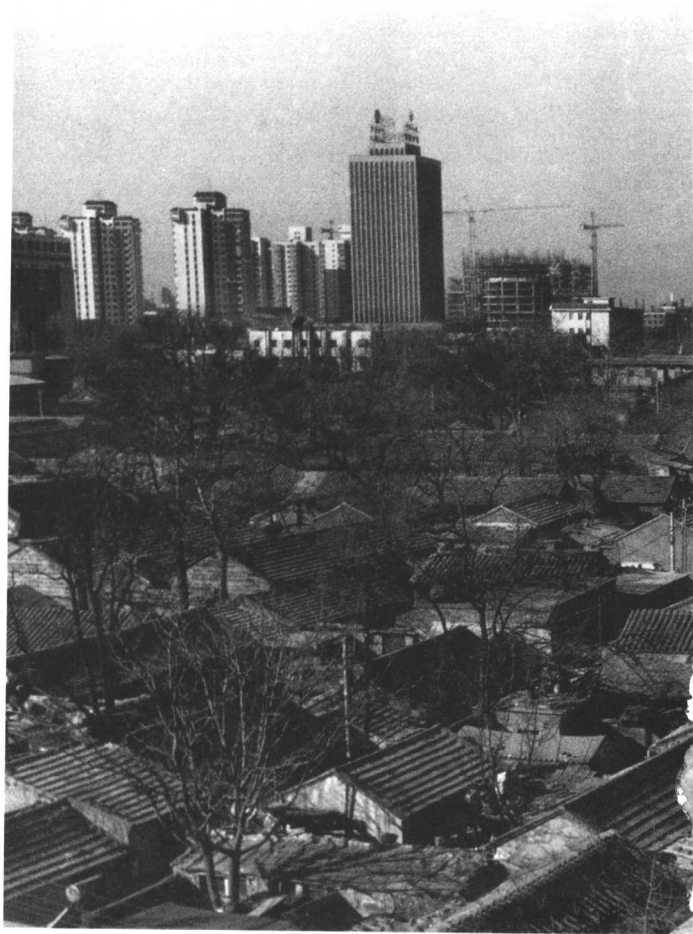


The lane east of the Lamaist White Pagoda in Miaoying Temple which is also known as the White Pagoda Temple. The lane on which the temple sits is called White Pagoda Lane.

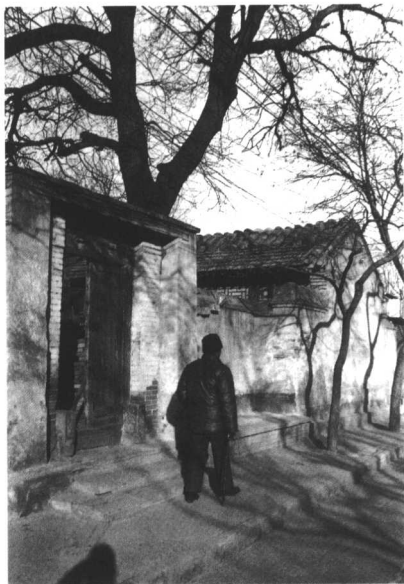
白塔寺东夹道。妙应寺内有一座喇嘛式白塔，所以寺又名白塔寺，它所在的胡同则名白塔巷。白塔寺东夹道位于白塔巷以东。

Lanes and houses near Miaoying Temple east of Fuchengmen in the West District. The temple, with a towering white pagoda built in 1279, stands in sharp contrast with the surrounding houses.

西城阜成门内妙应寺下的胡同。妙应寺建成公元1279年，其周围的胡同格局与之同时形成。





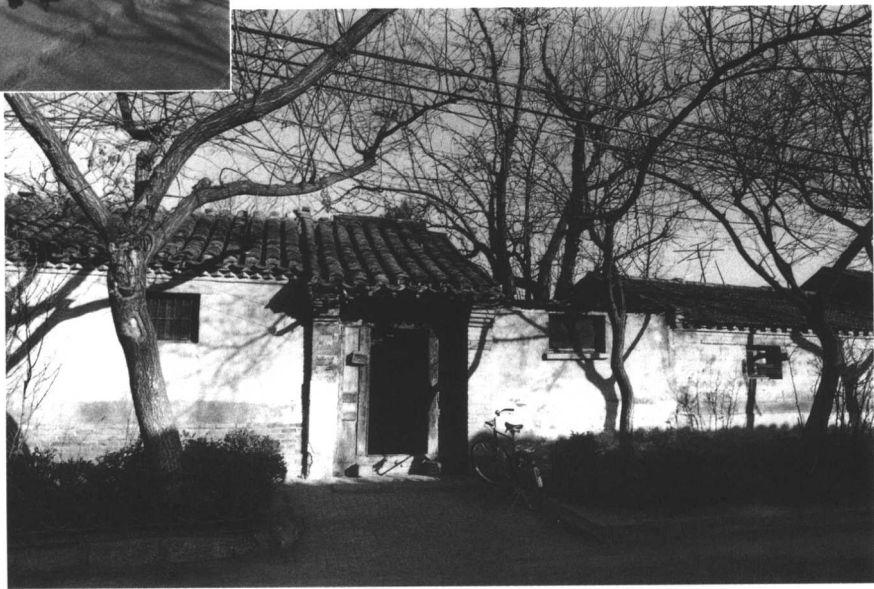


To admit light and facilitate communication at the time, city planners of the Yuan Dynasty set the width of the lanes in Beijing to be something equalling 9.24 meters. Even in winter, the lanes were filled up with sunlight so long as the weather was fine.

为了宜于通行和采光，元代规划的城区胡同宽度约为9.24米，由于两旁房舍低矮，即使在冬季，只要是晴和的日子，胡同里便充满阳光。

On both sides of this lane are quadrangle houses with entrances opening to the lane. Windows on the back wall of the house tend to be small, indicating the inward-looking and closed-off architectural style of these houses.

胡同两旁是古城传统的民居——四合院。院门临胡同，窗户开在墙壁上方，而且较小，呈现出内向、封闭的特点。





The gate tower at Qianmen, long regarded as the symbol of old Beijing. With its official name as Zhengyangmen, the gate to the center-south of Tiananmen was once the main entrance into Beijing proper. Since the 15th century, the street outside the gate has been a major commercial center in the capital.

被视为旧京象征的前门城楼。前门正名为正阳门，是北京内城的正门，位于天安门正南面。前门外大街早在十五世纪时就成为京城重要的商业区。