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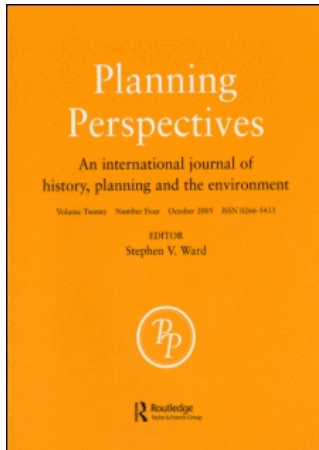
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The aesthetics of city-scale preservation policy in Beijing

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Chinese cities today represent a historically important case of the relation between city-scale preservation policy and urban design, and the role they play in the rapid transformation of urban environments. This article reviews Beijing's preservation and urban design policies as they existed in 1990, and as they evolved and responded over the following fifteen years of radical change. Beijing's master plan in the 1990s ambitiously attempted to define the preservation-worthy image of the entire old city, but did so in narrowly picturesque terms. The practice of 'protecting' designated historic structures by clearing the space around them, and the dependence on a totalizing view-from-on-high to define Beijing's overall characteristic form (as opposed to an experience of the city from its myriad public and private spaces), produced a city-wide preservation policy that was particularly handicapped in its ability to accommodate change.

Introduction

Chinese cities at the turn of the twenty-first century give a new urgency to the historical problem of relating massive urban redevelopment to the theory and practice of urban design and historic preservation. Astounded by the unprecedented speed and scale of China's urban growth, Western observers have certainly noted the problem [1], but none has yet begun the mammoth task of situating current Chinese experience within a global history of modern urbanization and its intersection with the evolution of urban planning [2]. This article attempts a small part of this task by examining how Beijing's official planning treated the problem of city-scale preservation as the historic centre entered its current period of drastic morphological change. The language and regulatory tools with which Beijing's planners have defined the city's heritage, envisioned urban space and managed its appearance serve as the subject for this analysis. Noting the extent to which this language and these tools reflect the influence of certain visual aesthetic traditions to the exclusion of others, the analysis suggests how preservation policy may be related to functions of the state and notions of the

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public realm. While state functions and the public realm are more explicitly a subject of architectural and urbanistic debate in the West than they are in China, this article argues that they are appropriate to China, inasmuch as the formation of modern urban design and preservation practice in China is fundamentally connected to the global history of urban design and preservation theories and practices. The article therefore first outlines relevant features of this history, before turning to the origins of city-scale preservation policy towards Beijing. These origins had roots both in non-Chinese experience as well as historical 'indigenous' practices and political demands of the moment and the place. The significance of this particular mix of influences only became evident, however, under the pressures of sudden large-scale development in the city centre during the 1990s. The historical outline with which this article begins, therefore, is tailored specifically to help make sense of the peculiarities and vicissitudes of Beijing's preservation policy over the last fifteen years.

Visuality and the public realm as issues in twentieth-century urbanism

The rapid transformation of Beijing's historic centre dates from April 1991, when the city's mayor, Chen Xitong, launched the 'Old and Dilapidated (or Hazardous) Housing Renewal' (*weijiu fang gaizao*) programme. Despite years of planning, Chinese urban designers and preservationists were unprepared for the demands that the actual dynamics of implementation would put on them. Under the hurried and unpredictable conditions of rapid urbanization, it is understandable that city builders usually borrow as much from previous generations' aesthetics and design techniques as they create anew. The result is usually an incomplete vision, aesthetically compromised and ripe with contradictions to be addressed by subsequent visionaries. In a crucial historic example, Haussmann relied heavily on eighteenth-century designs in his nineteenth-century embellishment of Paris, with his emphasis on the creation of spectacular public spaces lined by ornamental façades and privileged private dwellings [3]. Following the emergence of a nationalistic attachment of symbolic political value to monumental architecture in the French Revolution, Haussmann integrated the selective preservation of monumental architecture with the redeveloped street system, treating the whole as an artistic ensemble, but often leaving behind his façades a crowded ecology of tenements largely untouched.

Early twentieth-century Modernists reacted against this historicizing and classist approach [4] and envisioned radically new cities in place of the old. In stark contrast with the nineteenth-century city builders, Modernists proposed to recreate the city from the inside out, effectively starting with minimum standards of space, light and air for each dwelling. Historic monuments would remain, but public space would no longer be enclosed by building façades and instead would be defined by its adaptation to increasingly differentiated functions, especially different modes and speeds of movement. The ever-changing position of the eye – not only along the ground but also up into the air – was a prime determinant of the new visual aesthetic [5]. Modernist functionalist rhetoric, which was belied by the strong symbolic and emotional articulation of the projects they actually built, nevertheless became most broadly realized in the utilitarian banality of the majority of mid-twentieth-century urban construction [6]. In reaction again, the Postmodern movement turned its attention back to ornament and the façade, and its scenographic role in the definition of public spaces,

often as part of an explicitly nostalgic impulse to recover a lost public realm [7]. During this period, too, the heritage movement broadened its focus and increased its tools to an unprecedented level, in some cases adopting entire cities as objects for preservation [8]. A new vision emerged of the city as properly a self-conscious ‘collage’ of distinct public spaces (‘places’) that celebrates its own historical assembly and incremental evolution and that rejects any totalizing normative formula [9].

However, even as the Postmodern celebration of history and diversity took expression in the revived visual articulation of public spaces, critics have argued that the actual publicness of these spaces has been compromised by commercial interests, social exclusivity and the persistence of the state’s function as police even as it abandons its welfare function [10]. Indeed, some have pointed out that the very pre-Modernist embellishments of public space that have recently been the subject of preservation and nostalgic celebration were themselves often expressions of political culture that would not meet today’s demands for inclusive and spontaneous democracy in the public sphere or realm [11]. Furthermore, visual aesthetics and ‘visuality’ – ‘sight as a social fact’ – were not just expressive of this political culture but also instrumental to it [12].

Probably the most cited illustration of the governmental role of visuality is Michel Foucault’s interpretation of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, which has been linked both to Hausmannian and City Beautiful embellishments of public space [13]. In this interpretation, public space, via panopticism, becomes an instrument of state-driven normalization and the imposition of public order. The eye of the state, whether from above or from the centre, sees each subject even as no subject can see any other and, in seeing, the state individualizes, records and ultimately disciplines the subject. In reviewing the problem of the public realm and visuality in twentieth-century building and preservation, George Baird contrasts panopticism to Hannah Arendt’s notion of ‘the space of appearance’ [14]. Rather than consisting of a unidirectional governmental visuality, Arendt’s public realm is a space of multi-directional visuality between citizens engaging in democratic action. Citizens are actors, not subjects, and they can see each other. The state as such fades from view, being nothing more than the sum of agreements between citizens and the spaces in which those agreements are made.

The modern roots of city-scale preservation in China

How does the development of Beijing’s city-scale preservation policy relate to this dialectic? There are two fundamental considerations that underlie the narrative that follows below. First, as in the West, visions of urban change predated their large-scale implementation by at least a generation and, in many cases, by more than half a century [15]. Secondly, relative to the West, China’s intellectual discourse on modernity was delayed, historically compressed and self-conscious in national and cultural terms [16]. In the West, an awareness of modernity unfolded in a dialectical fashion as described above, in the course of cyclical upturns and downturns in the rate of urban reconstruction, and without reference to other modernities ‘outside’ the Western cultural sphere. Thinkers and practitioners in China (both Chinese and non-Chinese alike), on the other hand, consciously compared China to the West, and developed modern architectural and urbanistic visions of change with explicit reference to non-Chinese accomplishments [17].

The preservationist reaction to these visions very quickly set a tone that has dominated Chinese discourse on the significance of urban heritage to this day. But this reaction, too, stemmed from a comparative perspective on China's architectural identity [18]. It was also expressed largely in terms that emerged from the West, especially with respect to the definition of heritage as a collection of monuments. In Beijing, structures such as the city walls and gates, memorial arches (*pailou*) and the Forbidden City itself, became discrete objects worthy of preservation to those who cared. More remarkable was that the form of the city itself as an integral whole also became such an object.

Liang Sicheng, the American Beaux Arts-trained founder of Tsinghua University's School of Architecture, and China's first modern architectural historian, was particularly influential in establishing the terms of preservationist discourse and carrying it over into the Communist Party-led era. In 1949 Liang, along with Chen Zhanxiang, a British-trained urban designer, established a rationale and a plan to preserve Beijing's entire Old City. The plan's merits and the reasons for the government's decision to reject it, continue to be debated today [19]. However, the cosmopolitan experience – the outsider's view – of Beijing's mid-twentieth century preservation advocates has left a crucial imprint on the language they used to define the city's heritage value, and on the terms of the ongoing debate.

Liang and his wife and partner Lin Huiyin, in writing their frequently cited essay, 'Beijing: an unparalleled masterpiece of city planning', referred to the city as 'a planned whole' [*yi ge ju you jihuaxing de zhengti*] and 'a work of art' [*yishu jiezuo*] and included an exquisite sketch that from high in the air emphasized the city's integrity as a planned entity (Fig. 1)

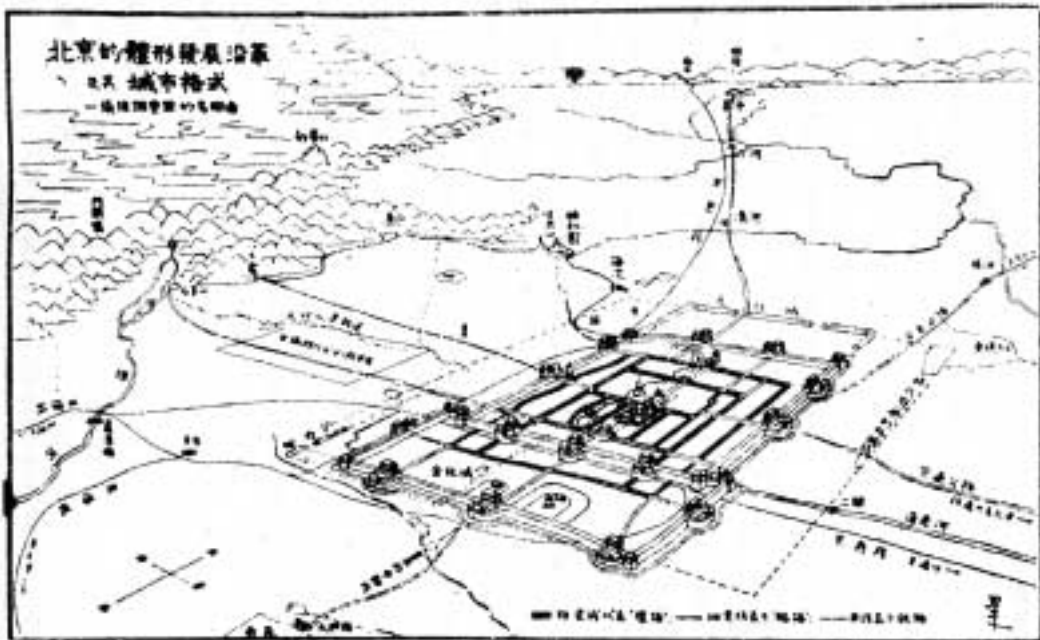


Figure 1. Bird's-eye sketch of Beijing by Liang Sicheng. Source: Sicheng Liang, op. cit. [20], p. 55.

[20]. Wu Liangyong, the Tsinghua professor of architecture and urban planning who studied under Eliel Saarinen at Cranbrook in the 1940s and who has carried on much of the advocacy work and intellectual tradition established by Liang Sicheng, refers to Liang's description in his own argument for Beijing's integral preservation. He also quotes similar language from non-Chinese observers, including Steen Eiler Rasmussen, Edmund Bacon, Henry Churchill and Osvald Siren, who between 1920 to 1960 praised the orderliness, composition, clarity and symmetry of Beijing's urban design – a picturesqueness based in unity [21].

The scale and holism of Liang's and Chen's preservationist vision was ahead of its time. However, it was unsupported by any professional, legal or administrative institutions and it was out of step with the will of the new revolutionary leadership, which in 1949 had already decided to locate its most important agencies inside the Old City [22]. The ensuing debates about how to implement this decision were played out between Liang and Chen on one side, who favoured preservation of the Old City as a distinct entity, and Hua Lanhong (Léon Hoa), who favoured integration of the Old City within an expanded metropolis. Both sides represented cosmopolitan (*yang pai*) perspectives, and both Liang and Hua had received Beaux-Arts educations. Liang had studied under Paul Cret at the University of Pennsylvania and returned to China to teach and conduct historical research in 1928 [23]. Hua had studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, but, like another prominent Pennsylvania Beaux-Arts-educated Chinese architect, Yang Tingbao, he had become enamoured of Modernism. When Hua returned to China in 1951 and took part in the planning of Beijing in 1952–3, his vision for the city involved the demolition of roughly half of the city walls and the restructuring of the street grid to include diagonal avenues that breached the Old City and converged in Baroque/Haussmannian fashion on gate towers and other landmarks – a formal approach quite alien to imperial capital city planning in China [24]. He also proposed that the capital's administrative functions be distributed throughout the Old City, in the style of Paris, and that, as in Paris too, Beijing's old imperial axis be extended.

The opposing scheme by Liang's younger partner Chen Zhanxiang concentrated the administrative functions within the Old City but otherwise retained its spatial structure. Both schemes accepted a Soviet-influenced master plan for the expansion of the city in the form of a series of concentric ring roads and street grids radiating in a roughly octagonal shape out from the historic centre. Chen and his team quickly found themselves isolated in their desire to preserve the city walls intact, however, because the political leadership considered this a 'class sentiment' (*jieji ganqing*) that was inadequately revolutionary [25]. Ironically, despite their disagreement on this point, both Hua and Chen were accused during the Anti-Rightist campaign four years later (1957) of conspiring against the Party, and they both suffered even more during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) for having 'foreign' as well as counter-revolutionary ideas [26].

The Party shared Hua's vision in principle, but gave it a Stalinist architectural expression. They embarked on a major symbolic reformation of the city's space to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, mainly through the expansion of Tiananmen Square, the extension and widening of Chang An Avenue, and the construction of iconic new monumental buildings (Fig. 2) [27]. Over a longer period, the walls, gates and moat were nearly all destroyed and replaced by an underground rail transit line and wide surface ring road. Even so, the material destruction of the historic fabric of Beijing and most

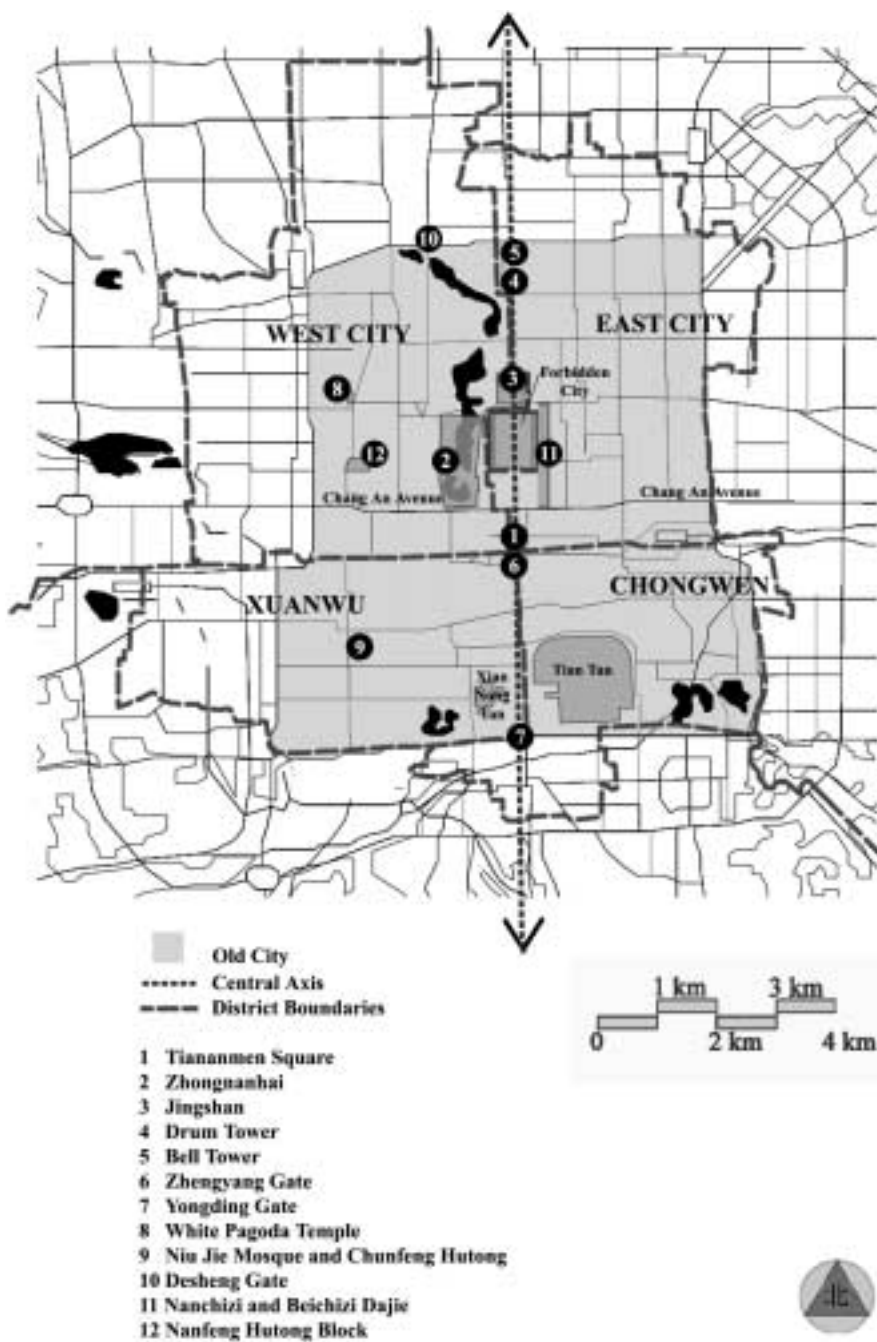


Figure 2. General map of Beijing's Old City, showing sites mentioned in this article (map drawn by Katherine J. Idziorek).

other Chinese cities has been greatest under Deng Xiaoping's regime of market-orientated economic reform. Unlike the city's monuments demolished to make way for modern infrastructure, or appropriated by government agencies and factories, the mass of common housing in Beijing's Old City did not see a radical change in physical structure until the 1990s (Figs 3, 4 and 5) [28]. In Chinese cities under Mao Zedong, nearly all new development took place on the initiative of individual work units (*danwei*) – the productive and service entities on which the planned economy was based. Approval to implement projects was based more on the proposing work unit's influence within the overall bureaucratic system of resource allocation, than on the projects' conformity with an urban spatial plan. The absence of a market in urban land, moreover, made the cost of clearing built-up land in the city centre prohibitive compared with that of developing suburban greenfield sites.

When Deng initiated the market-orientated Reform and Opening policy, therefore, the thinking was not to reduce the level of urban planning that determined the form that cities would take; rather, it was to rationalize both urban planning and economic decision-making, in the name of modernization instead of class struggle. As a part of this new orientation, historic preservation would become professionalized as well. From the beginning of the Reform, the debate about the cultural value of the historic urban environment progressed quickly, for it was during this period that most of the language and regulatory tools for limiting development in Old City centres were forged. Significantly, the initial impetus was in response to the vandalism and neglect suffered by historic structures during the Cultural Revolution, not in anticipation of the thorough-going, market-orientated redevelopment that would gather speed over the next twenty years [29].

The definition, management and monumentalization of Beijing's visual character

The period since 1980 in China corresponds both to the current era of marketization and also to an era of revived legislation and professionalization of urban planning [30]. With the increase in urban development during the 1990s, the agencies and professionals entrusted with urban planning have found themselves dealing with all manner of spatial planning challenges, from basic infrastructural improvement, the site planning of housing and commercial areas and standards for housing units, to the restructuring of land use and the determination of population densities. Urban design, as the function of planning specifically to do with the aesthetic and social qualities of the (spatial) public realm, has a rather indeterminate place in China's array of planning activities [31]. In the wake of a revolution that eradicated most notions of private property, the public realm itself is poorly defined. Many of the public goods that have been made a governmental responsibility in Western capitalist or democratic socialist societies are in China given to development agencies whose interest is neither clearly public nor clearly private [32].

Where the public realm consists of a societal interest in architectural heritage, however, the government has taken relatively clear responsibility for its definition and protection, though this responsibility is often articulated more vigorously at the central, or national level than at the local level. Historic and cultural preservation is the mission of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, which is under the Ministry of Culture. This is a distinctly separate branch of the government from that which oversees urban planning, the

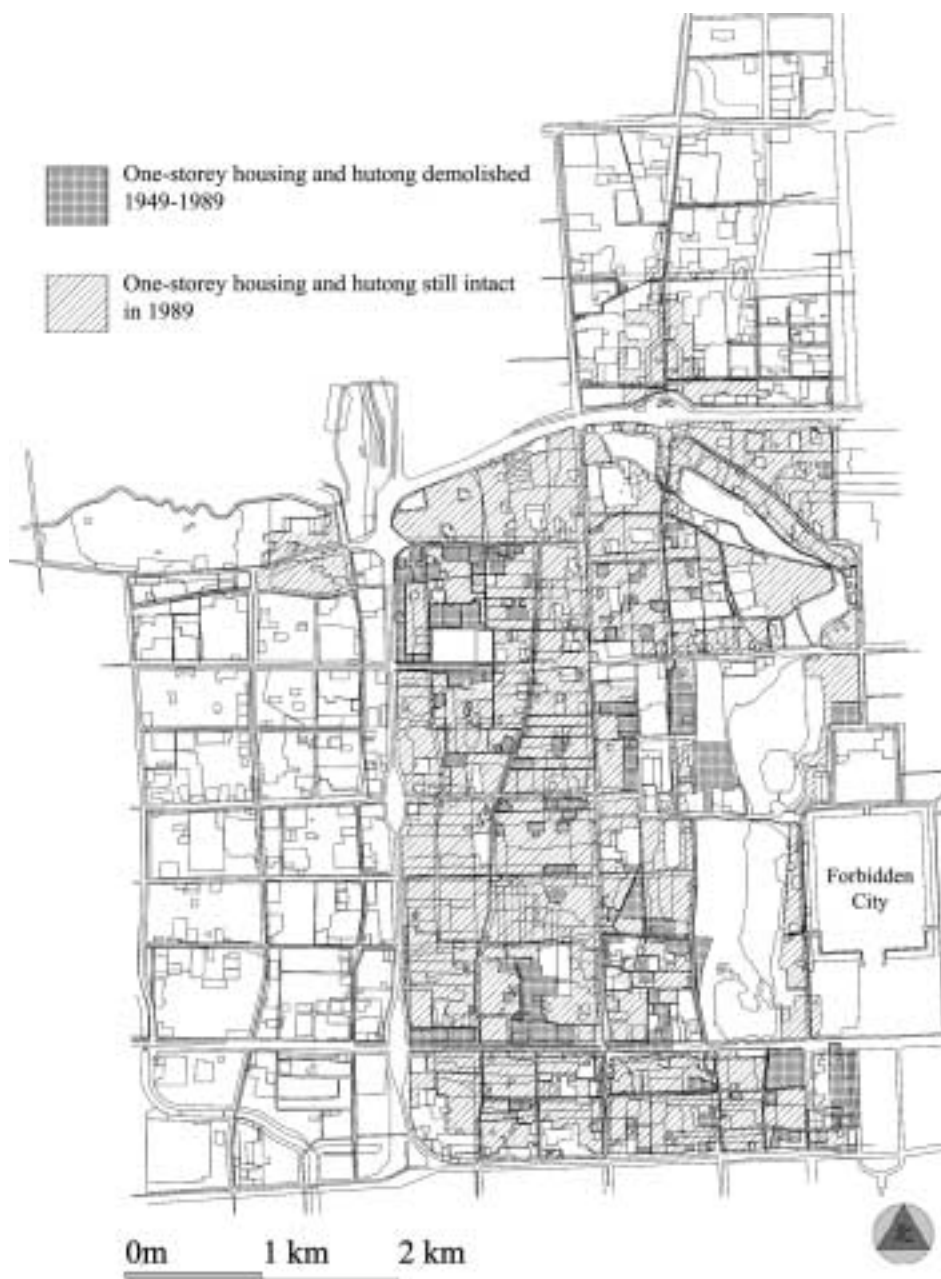


Figure 3. Map of Beijing's West City District, showing extent of one-storey housing and lanes (*hutong*) demolished since 1948 and areas still intact in 1989 (from a survey conducted by the author and members of a planning team directed by Professor Lü Junhua for the Beijing West City District Planning Bureau; map drawn by Katherine J. Idziorek).

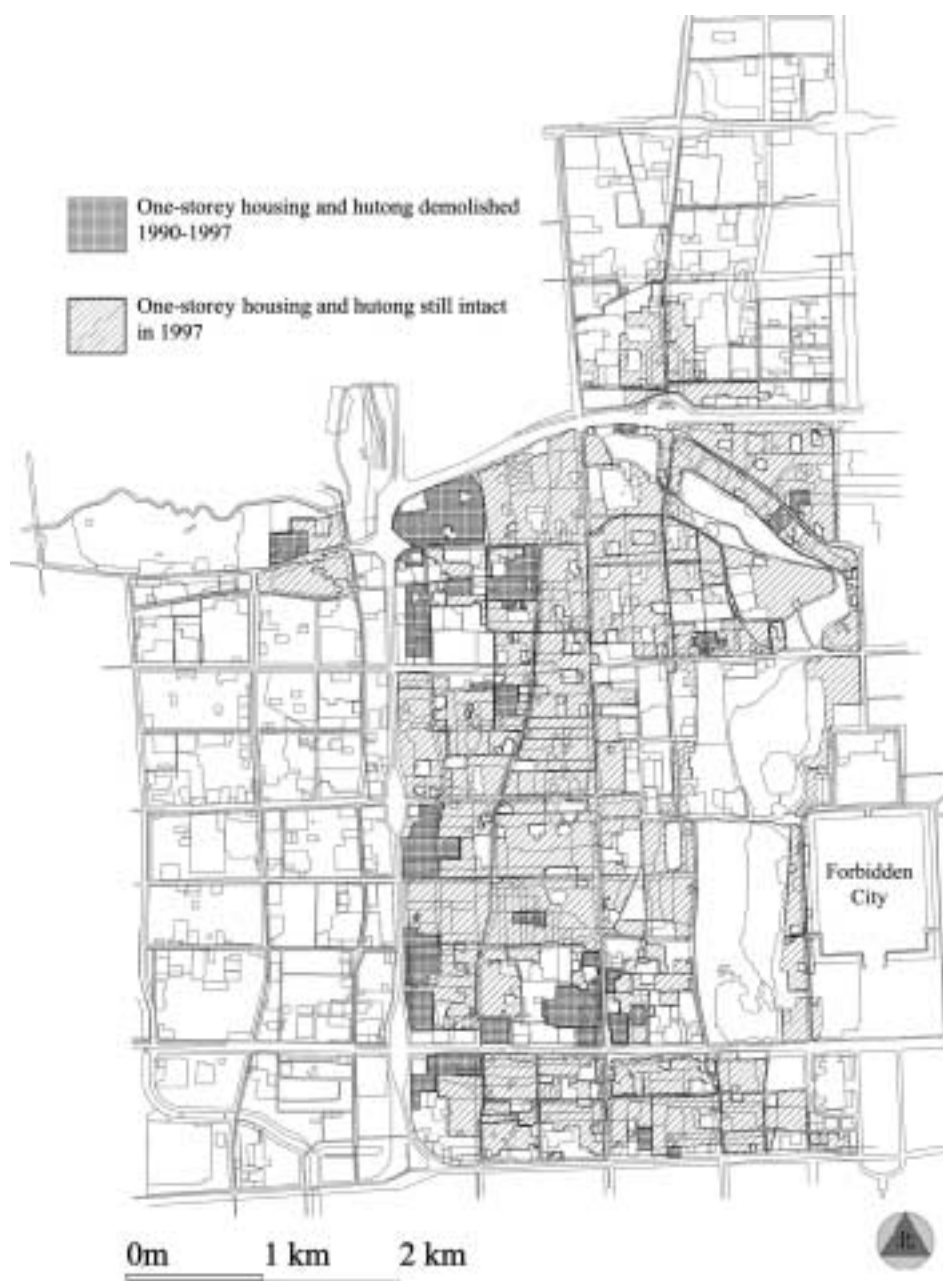


Figure 4. Map of Beijing's West City District, showing extent of one-storey housing and lanes (*hutong*) demolished since 1989 and areas still intact in 1996 (from a survey conducted by the author and members of a planning team directed by Professor Lü Junhua for the Beijing West City District Planning Bureau; map drawn by Katherine J. Idziorek).

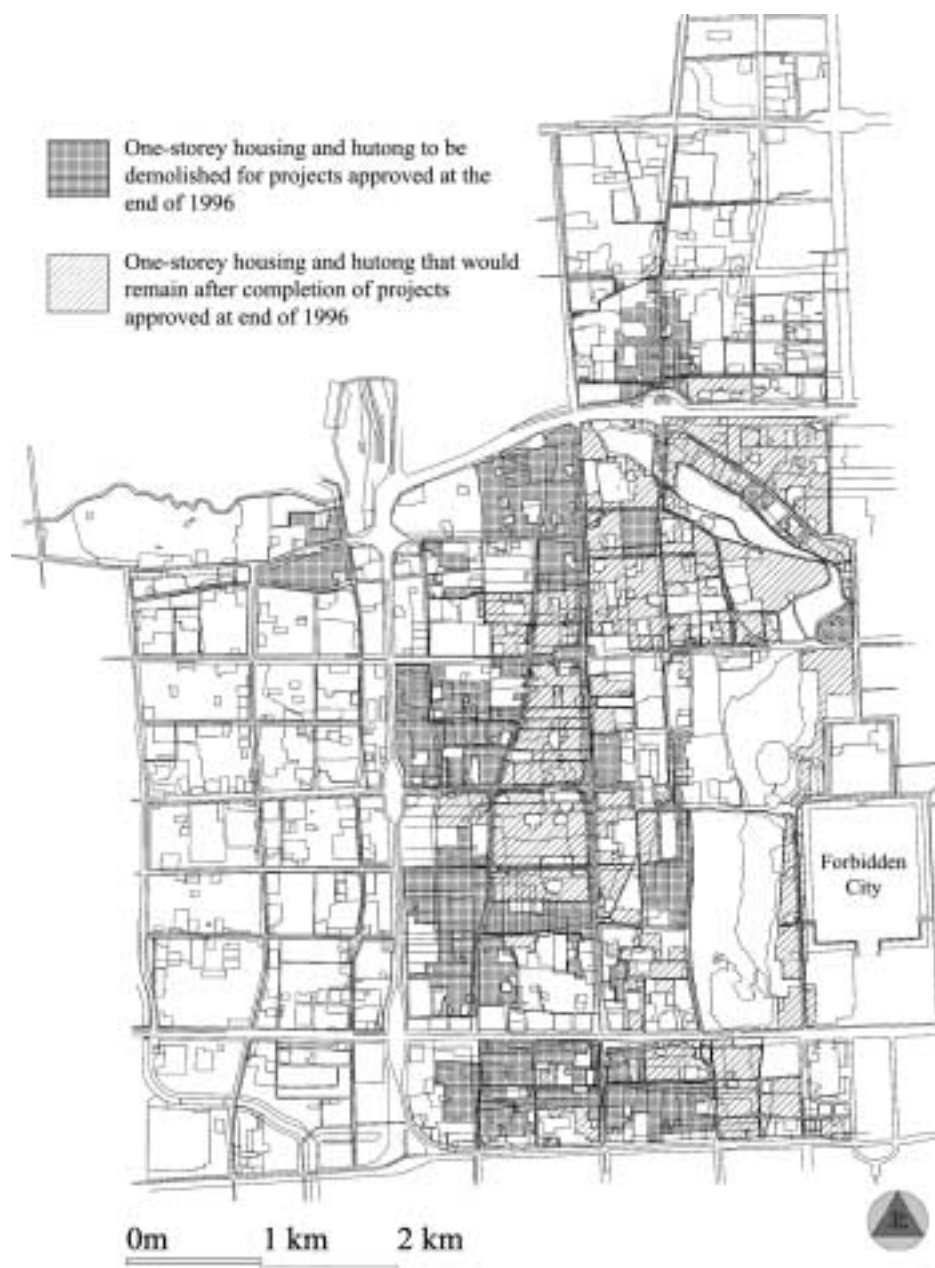


Figure 5. Map of Beijing's West City District, showing areas of one-storey housing and lanes (*hutong*) approved for demolition in 1996 (from a survey conducted by the author and members of a planning team directed by Professor Lü Junhua for the Beijing West City District Planning Bureau; map drawn by Katherine J. Idziorek).

Ministry of Construction. Each of these branches of government consists of a hierarchy from the municipal level up to the provincial and central levels, which inhibits lateral co-ordination. Co-ordination is inhibited further by the fact that urban planning is carried out chiefly at the local level. Municipal governments have enjoyed increasing fiscal autonomy since the early 1980s and have used it to pursue economic development, often at the expense of more centrally formulated priorities, such as the conservation of agricultural land and the preservation of heritage [33].

Urban planning and design has therefore evolved in a particularly localized and *ad hoc* fashion, despite efforts by the central government to impose standards. The most important reform-era legislation governing the preservation of heritage predated the key national urban planning policy by two years, and predated the national urban planning enabling legislation by eight years [34]. In this context, historic preservation policy may be taken effectively as a kind of proxy for urban design policy, at least in those cities that have officially recognized historic environments, but city-scale considerations are much less articulated than those for individual sites. For example, the edition of Beijing's master plan (*zongti guihua*) that was in effect for most of the recent period of radical growth (the 1991–2010 edition; the 2004–2020 update was ratified by the State Council on January 27, 2005) did not mention 'urban design' in its main index, and dealt with the subject primarily in a subsection of the section on historic preservation, and even then in a cursory way. More detailed articulations of official planning policy, such as the sub-municipal district zoning plans (*fenqu guihua*) and 'detailed development control plans' (*kongzhixing xiangxi guihua*), were no more explicit in their laying out of urban design principles or guidelines, while they were quite explicit in the kinds of protection they gave to historic monuments.

Preservation sites, districts and height restrictions

By 1990, historic preservation in Beijing was conceived as involving three scales of regulation: (1) individual sites; (2) whole streets or districts; and (3) the Old City as a whole. As early as 1957, the municipal government had adopted the first lot of individual monuments for protection [35]. By 1984, two more lots were added to the list, raising the total number of national- and municipal-level protected sites throughout Beijing municipality from 78 to a total of 35 national-level sites, 174 municipal-level sites [36]. Moreover, since 1984, an entirely new level of protection at the district and county level was established and the 1993 revision of the Master Plan listed 777 sites at this level. By the year 2000 this lowest level of protection was extended to a total of 854 sites [37]. The 1982 national preservation legislation expanded the influence of historic site designation by calling for the added protective measure of 'drawing certain construction control zones in the vicinity of the preservation site' for the purposes of ensuring that the environmental character of the monument is not damaged [38]. Beijing acted on this legislation in 1987 [39] and, in the hands of the Municipal Planning Institute, which drew up the control zones for all national and municipal level sites, these construction control zones (*jianshe kongzhi didai*) have taken the form chiefly of green belts and fire access ways, with the added stipulation that new buildings within the zones be limited in height and stylistically in harmony with the historic architecture. No definition of 'style' or 'harmony' was provided, however.

In practice, the use of construction control zones to regulate development around protected sites had the effect of monumentalizing those sites, even when the sites were designated for preservation simply on the basis of their quality as typical examples of classic vernacular courtyard (*siheyuan*) housing [40]. Since most development projects in the 1990s took the form of large-scale neighbourhood renewal, Beijing's planners saw them as an opportunity to treat protected sites as 'pearls' of traditional architecture that could be integrated into the neighbourhoods' new site plan in a relatively seamless fashion. Most developers, eager to maximize floor area wherever possible, interpreted the construction control zones around protected buildings as an opportunity to meet required green space standards by filling the zone with planting instead of unprofitable new low-rise contextual architecture; they would then be free to build the rest of the project site out to maximum density. The result of this policy has been dubbed sardonically the *penjing* (*bonsai* or 'potted landscape') effect, because it visually disconnects individual works of historic architecture from their context, surrounding them with a miniature park, which is in turn surrounded by much higher buildings.

Above the scale of the individual historic site and its immediate surroundings was another category of preservationist regulation: the designation of specific areas of the Old City as Historic Cultural Preservation Districts (*lishi wenhua baohu qu*) or, in the case of streets, 'Characteristic Streetscapes' (*fengmao jie*). In 1986, the State Council adopted for the first time the concept that whole streets or districts could be protected for historic or cultural reasons [41]. In Beijing, twenty-five named but spatially undefined areas were then incorporated into the next Master Plan revision in 1990. It was not until 1999 that the municipal government approved actual boundaries and detailed plans for the preservation districts and, by then, one of them had already been demolished, though the government maintained the number of twenty-five by designating another area to replace it on the list [42]. As of 2004, the Municipal Government published a new plan with an additional fifteen areas as preservation districts, five of them in the Old City and the rest in the suburban districts and outlying counties of Beijing's extended municipality [43]. However, none of these refinements and enlargements of the historic district concept were made soon enough to influence Beijing's rapid development in the 1990s. And because the district concept went beyond the scale of the monument, it came under the purview of the Ministry of Construction, not the State Administration of Cultural Heritage.

The third and largest scale of preservation-related regulation in place in 1990 consisted of two policies that applied to the entire Old City: (1) the designation of Beijing as a 'Famous Historic and Cultural City' (*Lishi Wenhua Ming Cheng*); and (2) a system of building height limit zones that extended throughout the Old City. Proponents of the 'Famous Historic and Cultural City' designation date the concept back to Liang Sicheng's holistic description of the historic architectural significance of Beijing and other Chinese cities in the 1940s and 1950s [44]. The term 'Famous Historic and Cultural City' itself, however, originated in the early 1980s in the Ministry of Construction among planners concerned about the impact of rapid urbanization on historic cityscapes and eager to promote city-scale preservation among local governments [45].

Beijing and a number of other Chinese cities were given this designation in 1982. The concept is similar to the World Heritage City, and actually predates it by almost a decade. It carries prestige and underlines the importance of heritage, but was not integrated with

development planning or regulation until the revision of the city's Master Plan in 1993. Height limit zones in Beijing's Old City were enabled by the 1985 Regulation on Building Heights in Planned Urban Areas and the 1987 Land-Use and Height Control Planning Measures for the Old City of Beijing, and are described in some depth in Sit and Wu [46]. The entire Old City was divided into zones that restricted buildings to various heights, from 6 m around the Forbidden City and other central areas and in Preservation Districts, up to 45 m at the east and west edges of the Old City and along Chang An Avenue and other major streets in the southern part of the Old City (Fig. 6).

If the Old City were built out to maximum allowed heights, the effect would be an enlarged version of the *penjing* metaphor used to describe the treatment of individual preservation sites – i.e. Beijing would be shaped like a bowl, with the Forbidden City at its lowest and most central point. As it has actually happened, the bowl shape is more or less intact, but the rim is closer to the Forbidden City than leading preservation planners would have liked [47]. Where redevelopment has occurred, most of the height limits have been broken, often by buildings more than twice as high as officially allowed (Fig. 7).

The 1991–2010 Master Plan

In 1993 the Beijing government undertook a new edition of the municipal Master Plan. The plan addressed preservation and urban design in a section entitled 'Preservation Planning of the Famous Historical and Cultural City of Beijing'. The provisions in this section were motivated in part by the concern that restricting building heights and protecting individual monuments and even districts would not be enough to protect the built-environmental identity of historic Beijing as a whole. Yet, from the outset, the policy was unclear and contradictory:

In 1983, when they approved in principle the *Urban Construction Master Plan Scheme for Beijing*, the Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council said: 'Beijing is our country's capital as well as a famous historic and cultural city. Beijing's planning and construction shall reflect the Chinese nation's culture and history, its revolutionary tradition, and the unique visual character of the capital of a socialist country. Valuable sites of revolutionary history, [other] historical and cultural relics, old architecture and significant architectural vestiges shall be carefully protected. In their surrounding areas, the bulk and style of new architecture must be in harmony with them. The old city shall be gradually redeveloped on the basis of complete parcels' [48].

The last statement in this passage is especially self-contradictory; the term 'complete parcels' (*cheng pian*) expresses the government's concern that developments should be planned at a large scale rather than proceed on an *ad hoc* basis according to the will of individual units. As it turned out, planning at a large scale coincided with construction at a large scale, which conflicts with the goal of 'gradual' (*zhubu*) redevelopment.

Planners and officials typically referred to the city's identity or character in distinctly visual terms as 'the ancient capital's visual character' (*gudu fengmao*) or more simply as 'traditional' or 'unique' visual character (*chuantong* or *du te fengmao*) [49]. The Master Plan defined Beijing's *chuantong fengmao* as having the following characteristics: (1) being

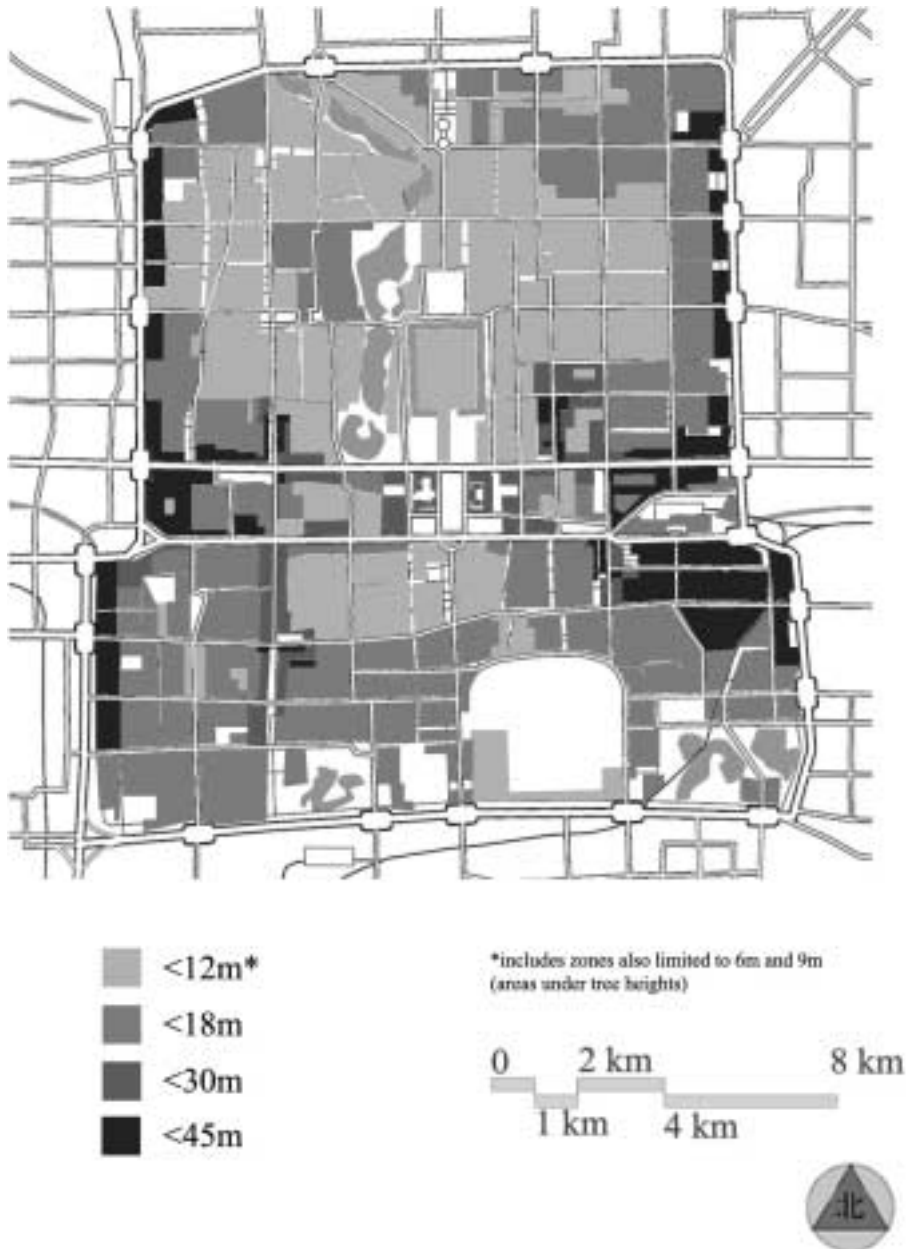


Figure 6. Height limits in the Old City as described in the 1993 edition of the *Beijing Municipal Master Plan, 1991–2010* (map drawn by Katherine J. Idziorek).



Figure 7. Areas where buildings exceeded the master plan height limits in the Old City of Beijing, as of February 2002 (based on Beijing Municipal City Planning Commission, op. cit. [43]; comparison made with 1993 edition of the *Beijing Municipal Master Plan, 1991–2010*, and map drawn by Katherine J. Idziorek).

centred on the Forbidden City and a strictly symmetrical and richly varied central axis, along which are arrayed the city's most important historic monuments of the dynastic era; (2) having in contrast to the strict symmetry of this axial layout a system of lakes and parks to the west of the axis, forming all together a complementary hard and soft landscape of red walls, yellow tiles, green trees and blue water; (3) having a chessboard-like network of streets throughout the city, with gate towers, *pailou*, temple altars, pavilions and pagodas making a rich collection of focal points; (4) having an orderly but modulated skyline of controlling high points (*kongzhi dian*) – Jingshan, Drum and Bell Towers, Zhengyang Gate and Yongding Gate – centred on the Imperial Palace and set off by an expanse of one-storey vernacular courtyard houses, all surrounded by the city wall and gates; (5) being coloured in the main by grey walls and green trees, punctuated by the golden yellow tiles of the Imperial Palace and the green and blue tiles of the princely palaces and temples.

Based on this definition of Beijing's *fengmao*, the Master Plan stipulated that the following elements be preserved: (1) the central axis; (2) the image in plan of the Ming and Qing walled city (which was compared to the shape of the Chinese character 'tu'); (3) the system of waterways; (4) the grid framework of roads and lanes; (5) the traditional colouring of the city; (6) the horizontal profile of the city and its openness to the sky (*pinghuan kaikuo*); (7) important view corridors (*jingguan xian*); (8) important axial focal points and their silhouettes (*jiedao duijing*); (9) old and valuable trees [50]. The text frequently referred to Beijing's historic low, grey, common housing and dominant greenery 'setting off' by contrast (*hongtuo* or *chentuo*) the higher, brighter roofs of its monumental buildings. The text also stipulated that the city's central axis be 'developed' as well as preserved, by extending it out into the southern and northern suburbs; the axis has been made a major organizing feature for the city's 2008 Olympic Games facilities.

Although this section of the 1993 revision of the Master Plan was entitled 'Integral Preservation and Urban Design', it provided no guidelines for the appearance of new buildings, or their relation to each other or to public space. The only implied guidance for the design of individual projects was the vague suggestion that each new development should mimic the treatment of monuments by being itself set off from its context, surrounded with greenery and open space. Given the Master Plan's other requirements for road widening and deep setbacks for new construction, the lack of integration of new structures was almost a foregone conclusion. To satisfy the Master Plan's stipulation that 'the grid framework of roads and lanes' be preserved, it was considered enough to maintain the location of the main avenues. The Master Plan's transport section required the widening of nearly all street rights-of-way to relieve congestion, but gave no consideration to the impact of such widening on either the Old City's historic cityscape or its land-use pattern.

Throughout the text of the 1993 Master Plan's preservation and urban design section, there is a sense that the city's preservation-worthy identity was largely determined in the abstract, in two-dimensional plan, or from a few selected high points. The rather military language used to describe these high points – 'commanding heights' (*zhi gao dian*) – tends to strengthen the impression that Beijing's visual character should be considered an expression of state power rather than of everyday life; something to be appreciated from on high, rather than on the ground, in the street. The only exceptions to this were the stipulations not to allow new buildings to destroy the silhouettes of certain architectural focal points as viewed along major streets, or to intrude into certain view corridors, mainly along streets

that afford views of the Western Hills. The only specific view corridor mentioned for protection, however, was the view from the small arched Yinding Bridge across Houhai lake toward the distant Western Hills (Fig. 7). The view itself has a name—the Yinding Guanshan—and has a centuries-old history in literary descriptions of Beijing's landscape as the best place in Beijing to view mountains over water [51]. Indeed, it is a classic example of the picturesque Chinese garden technique of the 'borrowed view' (*jiejing*) being employed on an urban scale. This remained the case even after the white tower of the Jishuitan Hospital built in the mid-1980s had risen above the trees behind Houhai and intruded into the view.

The only specific preservation- and design-orientated regulation or strategy in the plan was building height control. These height control zones, however, were so broadly defined that they were impossible to enforce and were the subject of the most heated debate in planning meetings. Long after the Municipal Planning Bureau began approving heights of up to 80 m for specific, well-connected office and hotel developments within the Old City, the Capital Planning Commission insisted on an absolute height limit of 18 m – generally six storeys – across the entire Old City in order to protect its traditional low, horizontal profile [52]. The blanket 18 m height limit was an unwritten policy stricter than that required by the master plan, and reflected the desperation of the Commission members faced with the Bureau's failure to enforce the more nuanced zoning of the master plan. Even this blanket height limit was a compromise with pro-development factions in the government. As it was, exceptions were made for the areas near the former city wall gates, which could be built up to 45 m, and even this height limit has been routinely bypassed, as at the West City District's Financial Street (*Jinrong Jie*) project [53].

A truly protective height limit would have to be maintained at four storeys in order to keep buildings below the trees, but since six-storey buildings were the most economical to construct, developers consistently pressed to be allowed to build that high at least [54]. In fact, even six-storey buildings are higher than all but about seven or eight of the Old City's many historic structures. The blanket height limit thus neither protected the Old City's historic skyline, nor gave planning authorities much room to negotiate lower heights in particular areas where they were really necessary.

Beijing's preservationists and planners have criticized the proliferation of high-rises in Beijing's historic centre since the mid-1980s. Dong Guangqi, Vice Director Emeritus of the Municipal Planning Institute, kept a mural on his office wall of enlarged photocopies pasted together showing the panoramic view over the Forbidden City as seen from the summit of Jing Shan – the highest point in Beijing's Old City and the geographical centre of the Ming dynasty Inner City. He drew in by hand each new multi-storey building, like a large black hulk, as it was added to the skyline [55]. High-rise development in Beijing's Old City, while clearly a violation of the city's visual character as defined in the Master Plan, nevertheless became the logical outcome of the market-orientated development policies of the 1990s, especially given the Communist Party's decision in the early 1950s to locate its headquarters in the centre of the Old City. The choice of Tiananmen Square as the focus of popular political gathering, and of Zhongnanhai as the Communist Party's centre of power, is well known as one of the clearest expressions of the continuity of Beijing's historic geometrical and geographical identity [56]. However, this choice has become truly threatening to Beijing's historic visual character only now, ironically as a result of the emergence of a

commercial land market and the decentralization of most development decision-making power to the district level of government [57].

Nothing reveals this irony more clearly than the fact that, as recently as 1992, one could stand at the top of the steps of the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and History and look north-west across Tiananmen Square, Zhongnanhai and the neighbourhoods beyond and see almost nothing except greenery in the foreground and the Western Hills in the distance (Fig. 7). No significant structure was visible above the line of trees, except for the twenty-two-storey Bank of China tower at Fucheng Gate completed in 1988 – an exception that reflects the power of the state's financial monopoly at the time. By 2002, however, a broad swath of shopping and office buildings between eight and twenty storeys high along Xidan blocked the view, and further away the 'Financial Street' (*Jinrong Jie*) development exceeds the height even of the 'old' Bank of China.

Neighbourhood redevelopment in the shadow of monuments

The development dynamics that challenged height restrictions in the Old City of Beijing in the 1990s are best understood at the level of individual redevelopment projects. Where these projects involved a neighbourhood with a protected historic building, their design approach tended to echo the overarching picturesque emphasis of the Master Plan's preservation policy. The effect was to monumentalize the historic site, clearing the area around it of other existing buildings; often in exchange for raising building heights elsewhere in the vicinity; and also often at the expense of the historic, cultural or social qualities of the neighbourhood itself. In the redevelopment plan approved by the Municipal Government in 1996 for the neighbourhood of the White Pagoda Temple, for example, 'accentuating the [Temple's] historic image' and 'remaking the district's backward urban image' were treated as complementary goals [58]. Preservation was defined in purely visual terms with respect to the monument, such as the maintenance of sight lines and building heights, and these only for views from the main streets. The existing environment around the monument was dismissed as a 'mass of rundown one-storey houses' that have 'swamped' the White Pagoda and blocked the 'display of the ancient cultural capital's proper image'.

The Chunfeng Hutong redevelopment in the Niu Jie Hui (Moslem) neighbourhood in Beijing's Xuanwu District was another instance of clearance around a historic site – the Niu Jie Mosque – though in this case the minority ethnic identity of the neighbourhood was monumentalized together with the protected building. The neighbourhood was also one of the original twenty-five designated historic preservation districts that succumbed to redevelopment before its boundaries could even be determined. The Chunfeng Hutong project, begun in 1990 and completed by 1996, kept the original community in place. The Xuanwu District government, whose mayor was one of the Hui community members himself, had a group of old courtyard houses just behind the Niu Jie Mosque demolished and replaced with new four- and six-storey apartment buildings, which were rented back to the original residents, 77% of whom were of Hui ethnicity.

The perceived need to give the district a facelift for the benefit of visitors and tourists to the Mosque was as strong a public justification of the project as was the need to improve the living conditions of the residents [59]. The project architect applied green-trimmed

'Islamic-style' façades to the buildings in order to 'highlight the ethnic character' (*tuchu minzu tese*) of the district, even though traditional Hui housing in Beijing was architecturally indistinguishable from the majority ethnic Han housing in Beijing [60].

Chunfeng Hutong's special status as a Hui neighbourhood derived in part from the fame and preservation designation of its nearby mosque, in part from the identity of its local leadership and in part from national and international ethnic politics. Without these factors, the presence of a monument might actually become a threat to a minority ethnic community. This was almost the case in the redevelopment of another neighbourhood with a Hui community in the *faubourg*-like settlement (*guanxiang*) outside the Desheng Gate (Desheng Men Wai, or 'De-Wai'). This district, too, contained one of the city's older Hui communities, centred on a small mosque that dated from at least the beginning of the Qing dynasty (300 years ago). The community is not as large as at Niu Jie and the mosque not as old, as large or as well known, but perhaps more important is its relatively weak political and social status deriving from its marginal '*faubourien*' history [61]. The neighbourhood lies just outside the Desheng Gate arrow tower and moat – the last remnant of the old Ming wall on the north side of the city, and now a municipal-level preservation site (Fig. 8).

The redevelopment of De-Wai was driven by the plan for a new limited-access high speed traffic artery through the site connecting the third ring road in the north with the second ring road just south of the arrow tower (Fig. 9). This new road replaced the old main street, which had only a 20 m right-of-way, and circled the arrow tower on both sides, effectively making it a traffic island and a focal point for drivers approaching the city at high speed from the north. Visual 'protection' of the tower took the form of height restrictions on



Figure 8. Photograph of dilapidated housing in the De-Wai *guanxiang*, with the Desheng Gate arrow tower behind, 1992. Area demolished and replaced by expressway, 2002. Copyright the author.



Figure 9. Photograph of billboard advertising new development in De-Wai, 2002. Copyright the author.

buildings within a certain distance of the tower and the sightline along the road leading to it, but these regulations proved unnecessary given the extremely wide right-of-way required by the new road. On the land left over between the tower and road, the city built an expansive plaza. Despite a number of proposals to scale down the road and keep the mosque with its surrounding shops intact, initial plans in the early 1990s were to destroy the mosque and relocate the community. Unlike their counterparts in Xuanwu District and Niu Jie, the West City district officials in charge of the redevelopment did not see any cultural or historic value in the existence of the Hui community outside Desheng Gate [62]. Both District and Municipal planners treated the project site only as a grand symbolic and symmetric approach to the northern gate of the Old City. By the end of the decade, official action did save the mosque, but for reasons of ethnic and religious policy, not heritage preservation [63].

The extent to which the preservation of a monument comes at the expense of its surrounding community depends partly on the monument's power as a symbol of a larger municipal or national identity. In the Niu Jie and De-Wai cases described above, monumental preservation was combined with or pitted against ethnic minority communities of varying levels of marginalization. Perhaps the most dramatic instance of another balance of this equation is the margin between the Forbidden City and its own moat. Since the demise of the Qing dynasty, the Forbidden City's margins increasingly became a part of Beijing's

daily life, and not just in touristic terms. By the 1990s, while tour groups from around the world pulsed through the Wu Men and Shenwu Men to see the essence of an Imperial environment inside the walls, just around the corners of those gates the less frenetic pace of neighbourhood life suddenly prevailed: schoolchildren jogged in formation; a morning market strung out its carts of vegetables along the esplanade of the moat, groups of elderly residents practiced *taiji* under the trees; barbers set up their chairs and gossiped with customers in the sunshine at the base of the wall. These activities were drawn to the margin of the Forbidden City because the environment there was eminently suitable for residents of overcrowded neighbourhoods nearby. Elsewhere along the base of the walls there were the ramshackle self-built houses of Palace Museum employees who had no other place to live.

By 1997 the government had accumulated enough resources to intervene in this situation. Topping the list of projects to be completed by 1999, according to the then-current Five-Year Plan for Development of Cultural Relics in Beijing, was the relocation of the households between the wall and the moat, and the 'restoration of the Imperial Palace moat to the historical appearance and beauty it possessed in the reign of Qianlong', when the margin was occupied by guards' barracks [64]. Despite its impact on everyday life, the removal of housing from the narrow space between the walls and the moat of the Forbidden City was consistent with the typical preservation practice of restoring a site to a historic state considered to be its most representative period.

The neighbourhoods along the outer edge of the moat proved to be more problematic. There, in the narrow space between the moat and the next streets running parallel to the moat (Nan-Bei Chang Jie on the west, and Nan-Bei Chizi Dajie on the east), the 1993 municipal Master Plan called for green space, in keeping with the principle of setting monuments off from other buildings, even though historically this space had always been built upon and was currently occupied by housing, and the streets that paralleled the moat were listed among the twenty-five historic preservation districts as 'characteristic streets' in the Master Plan.

Through the 1990s, professionals, academics and authorities continued to raise alternative visions for the outer margin of the Forbidden City moat. These included clearing the area for an open park and building a uniform façade along the street opposite, 'like the Rue de Rivoli' facing the Tuileries gardens; demolishing all the existing housing, replanting the land, and building new structures that adopted varying degrees of literalness in interpreting Beijing's 'traditional style;' and restoring or replacing each house on its existing or slightly reconfigured plot [65]. Given that Nan-Bei Chang Jie and Nan-Bei Chizi Dajie were both 'characteristic streets', one of the sharpest debates focused on their width and planting, which according to the Master Plan's road requirements would have to be changed. The plan that was finally implemented in 2002–3 for Nan Chizi Dajie did not call for a public park along the moat and preserved the street width. However, the old housing was completely replaced, largely with new luxury courtyard housing built in a 'Qing dynasty style' [66].

What has been the fate of neighbourhoods in the Old City that do not lie within the preservation districts or contain protected historic sites? Other than the overall height limits, a list of protected trees and vague requirements to respect the traditional colouring of the Old City, these neighbourhoods are being redeveloped with no integration of urban design and preservation goals. Most of these neighbourhood redevelopment projects were quite large in the 1990s, averaging around 14 hectares within the Old City [67]. In reviewing project designs, project planners and planning officials relied only on standard site planning

guidelines that had been developed for large greenfield housing estates (*xiao qu*) which had served primarily as work unit compounds. These standards were concerned only with the internal layout of projects, not what occurs on their edges or how they relate to an existing built environment. Most projects received initial approval only on the basis of site plans and massing models; perspectives and street sections were rarely required.

The network of small *hutong* was not considered worthy of preservation in its own right and was sacrificed to make way for more automobile-friendly and internally-orientated circulation systems. This was the case even when parts of this network served as important morphological evidence of the city's historic spatial development. One example is the unusual block of north-south *hutong* centring on Nanfeng Hutong in the West City District which was replaced by a new housing *xiao qu* (Fig. 10). This block was unique in Beijing (most *hutong* run east-west) and was famously presented in a major Chinese urban architectural history textbook of the time [68]. Not only was it a significant variation on Beijing's

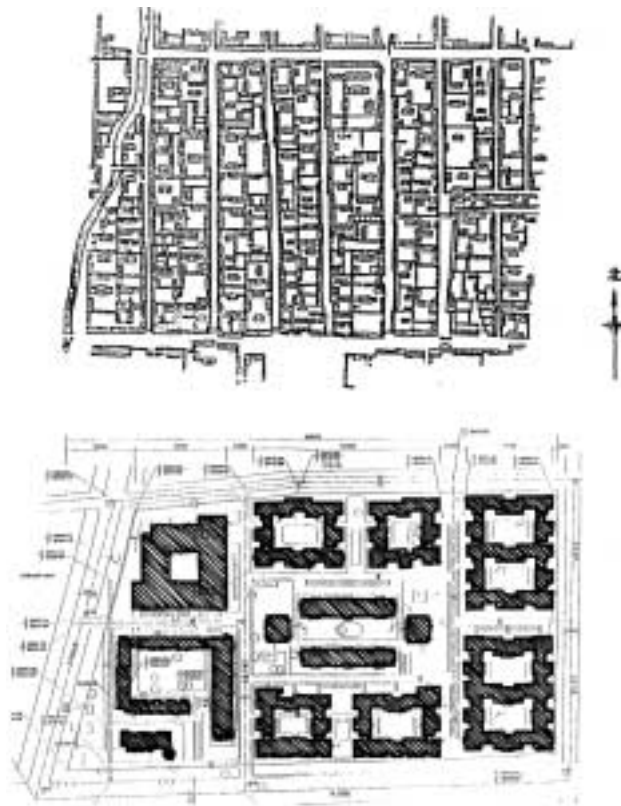


Figure 10. (Top) The block of north-south *hutong* around Nanfeng Hutong in south-east Feng Sheng Subdistrict as shown in the *Qianlong Jingcheng Quantu*; and (bottom) the approved redevelopment plan of the redevelopment housing project on this site (source: West City District Urban Planning Bureau).

morphological theme in terms of the street layout, but it served as a marker of a change in the city's hydrology between the Yuan and Ming dynasties [69]. The housing estate that replaced it was squeezed between widened roads on its periphery and composed of apartment blocks that mimicked the courtyard form at a much larger scale, but left no trace of the original environment. Official preservation policy was so focused on an idea of what constituted Beijing's 'classic' overall historical geography, that it failed to appreciate important local variations.

A blindness to the experience of walking, biking and socializing on the street was another corollary of a preservation policy that tended to view the city from on high. A well-planted *hutong* remains a tunnel of shade and a potential public amenity even when the houses lining it have been demolished. While municipal policy decreed that large trees throughout Beijing's Old City should be preserved, this policy was driven both by the value of mature trees themselves and by the height of the trees relative to the buildings, not by their function as elements of a characteristic public space (compare Figs 11 and 12). Some key planning officials independently argued that the 'atmosphere' (*qifen*) of the *hutong* was indeed more important a subject for preservation than the courtyard houses that lined them, at least in those areas of the city that were not designated as preservation districts [70]. However, the official definition of heritage neither recognized the historic value of the *hutong* network in its own right, nor its functional urban design value, despite supportive morphological arguments by important academics such as Wu Liangyong [71] and environmental-behavioural research by others [72], as well as myriad historical, literary and photographic celebrations.

Preservation planning responses to a decade of redevelopment

Redevelopment in the Old City of Beijing reached a peak of destructiveness in 2001. In that year alone, more households were relocated as a result of housing demolition than during all the previous five years put together, and the amount of old and hazardous housing floor area demolished was about one-quarter that of the total amount demolished throughout the 1990s [73]. At the same time, the municipal government shifted its preservation policy focus to the twenty-five historic preservation districts, defining their boundaries and producing detailed plans, as mentioned above. The research involved in producing plans for these districts included historical materials; meticulous building-by-building and household-by-household surveys of construction and architectural quality, population density, property ownership, and social activity; and recommendations for access and infrastructure improvements and for disposition of buildings and planting. The surveys were published together with the plans in a beautifully bound and printed volume, with significant portions translated into English [74]. Two years later the government produced a second volume that was much broader in scope [75]. Chiefly, it updated the master plan's provisions for the entire Old City, and included a detailed plan for the Imperial City, a formerly walled enclave that encloses the Forbidden City. The number of individual historic sites and construction control zones increased, and the plan proposed to increase the number of preservation districts, including the Imperial City, so that the total land area that would be regulated by these provisions within the Old City accounted for 2617 hectares or 42% of the Old City's



Figure 11. Nanfeng Hutong with housing demolished, but with all trees intact, 1995. Copyright the author.

total area [76]. Within this area, no large-scale, clearance-style redevelopment is supposed to occur, but based on the approach used already in Nanchizi Dajie, and continuing demolitions, the policy is still unclear [77].

With respect to the Old City as a whole – the preservation of the water system, the central axis, the shape of the city in plan, etc. – the 2004 plan largely repeats the language of the 1991–2010 Master Plan, but it supplements this language with a review of the problems encountered during the 1990s, including the loss of ‘urban fabric as a whole’ [78]. Two sections offer significantly new language: ‘Conservation of the Checkerboard Road System and the Hutong Fabric’ and ‘Control of Building Height in the Old City’ [79]. With respect



Figure 12. Site of Nanfeng Hutong with new housing under construction, 1997. While the largest trees are protected carefully, the linear public space they helped to define, together with the smaller street trees, has disappeared. Copyright the author.

to the road system, the new plan reduces the width of a number of planned rights-of-way in the Old City, gives priority to public transport and calls for traffic reduction measures.

The section on building heights criticizes the proliferation of high-rises:

At present, the high-rise complex in the inner side of the Second Ring Road has blurred the wall contour of the old city. Without the boundary, the old city would face the risk of being annihilated. So it is imperative to control the architectural height within the city wall contour [80].

The plan includes no specific strategies to reverse this trend other than to ‘follow the detailed development control plan’, which has already failed to prevent routine violations of

the Old City's building height restrictions. In another section, it does mention that old and dilapidated housing redevelopment should be integrated better with preservation goals, citing a municipal directive to that effect from 2001 [81]. However, neither the 2004 plan nor the 2001 directive does much more than exhort district-level development officials and developers themselves to follow existing policy.

The 'integral' picturesque definition of Beijing's urban identity as a problem of the public realm

How do the accomplishments and failures of Beijing's city-scale preservation policy suggest China's position relative to a global history of planning ideas? Unlike the waves of redevelopment that swept Western cities during the second half of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, the redevelopment of Beijing in the 1990s was preceded by the legal and regulatory establishment of a hierarchy of historic preservation concepts. The difficulties of putting these concepts into practice are certainly due in large part to the actual weakness of planning tools generally in China, especially in the face of local 'growth coalitions' that themselves share many features with both Western mid-twentieth-century urban redevelopment forces, as well as rapid growth in cities of the developing world [82]. The bureaucratic separation of cultural policy making from development regulation is also not unusual. All of these difficulties certainly rendered some aspects of Beijing's preservation policy quite irrelevant.

One fact peculiar to Beijing and other Chinese cities, however, is that the emergence of technical preservation planning in the early 1980s was in large part a reaction against the nationwide anti-historical violence of the Cultural Revolution. After twenty-some years' hiatus in professional discourse on urban design and preservation, it was natural that the old debates of the late 1940s and early 1950s would resurface. Regardless of their emphasis on Modernism (as championed by Yang Tingbao and Hua Lanhong) or historicism (as pushed by Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhanxiang), these debates were framed primarily in terms of large-scale state projects. In the 1980s, renewed contact with Western planning professionals and academics strengthened the hand of preservationists against grand schemes to utterly re-make the city, but no one anticipated the 1990s emergence of market forces acting on a project-by-project basis through secret coalitions of investors and devolved local government powers [83]. These coalitions produced projects on a scale similar to earlier modernist visions, but without the overall co-ordination that was assumed in the planning system (including preservation policy).

To the extent that an official definition of Beijing's architectural heritage was able to influence the shape of Beijing's development, it is worthwhile looking at the aesthetic dimensions of this definition. To a certain extent, the aesthetics of preservation policy in Beijing may lie behind some of the policy's failures. One feature of preservation policy in Beijing that clearly has influenced development, or at least gone hand-in-hand with it, is the picturesque treatment of individual monuments as objects to be viewed distinct from their surrounding environment, and spatially isolated from it. This treatment is not unique to China by any means. There are parallels between the rhetoric of the planning for the White Pagoda Temple, for example, and that for Boston's North End in 1960. As Jane Jacobs wrote, 'Boston – or at least

the custodians of its tradition – are ashamed that at present tourists and school children may be distracted by the irrelevant North End while taking in the meaning of American freedom' [84]. In 1960 Boston, as in 1997 Beijing, 'the first stage of such a cataclysm[ic investment] is already being prepared in plan, in the form of a scheme for massive clearance around historic buildings'. The dismissal by District and Municipal officials of the Hui community in De-Wai is also reminiscent of conflicts between official heritage policy and ethnic minority identity in planning for the preservation of monuments in the USA [85].

The drastic isolation of the Desheng Gate arrow tower by highway interchanges is a particularly dramatic instance of the marriage of spectacle and speed in the treatment of monuments that M. Christine Boyer identified in Haussmann's work, particularly his treatment of the Place de l'Etoile [86]. Nineteenth-century Parisian redevelopment was especially characterized by the demolition and sanitization of the space around monuments, Notre Dame and the Ile de la Cité perhaps being the most famous examples. Planners and designers in Beijing have consciously referred to the aesthetic of nineteenth-century Paris, as, for example, in the suggestion made to treat the streets facing the Forbidden City like the Rue de Rivoli mentioned above, or in arguments in favour of large-scale redevelopment and against preserving the Old City intact [87].

Another aspect of the picturesque aesthetic that has suffused preservation policy in Beijing – and been used to argue in favour of preserving the entire Old City – is the notion of the city as 'a work of art' or 'an artistic urban sculpture' [88]. There were self-conscious parallels here, too, with Paris, which after the 1960s prohibited high-rises from the historic centre [89]. This totalizing 'integral' vision has proven much harder to implement than the policy for individual monuments. Unlike the Chinese classical scholars' and emperors' gardens that inspired the original development of a picturesque aesthetic in eighteenth-century Europe, cities in an era of market-orientated development are the negotiated product of multiple competing interests. Moreover, the typical urban morphological unit of this development, the twentieth-century Socialist *existenzminimum* housing compound, or *xiao qu*, would seem to be quite at odds with the prevailing definition of Beijing's historic character. Wu Liangyong has argued especially strenuously against the replacement of the courtyard form by parallel rows of apartment blocks [90].

In fact, however, there is nothing inherent in the morphology of the *xiao qu* that conflicts with the Master Plan's definition of Beijing's traditional visual character. Tree canopy, traditional colouring, undulating roof lines – all can be accommodated in the design of multi-storey walk-up apartment compounds *xiao qu*. The Master Plan says nothing about the features that make Beijing's historic courtyard-and-*hutong* morphology urbanistically different from the *xiao qu*: its nearly uniform single-storeyed height and close relationship to the ground, and the very intimate scale of the open spaces created by the walls and buildings.

Indeed, despite these differences, there is something akin between the modern Chinese housing estate and the traditional agglomeration of *siheyuan* courtyard houses that made up Beijing's historic fabric. Both types depend on gates and walls or fences rather than façades to create realms of privacy. In both *siheyuan* and *xiao qu*, 'privacy' and even 'autonomy' themselves are relative terms. They are functions of a hierarchical continuum of spatial access rather than of an absolute symbolic or legal distinction between private and public, as expressed in European traditions by the façade. Both the *siheyuan* and the *xiao qu* are inter-

nally orientated, even as they represent and depend on larger collectives; they both comprise a cellular structuring of the urban landscape. And both are fundamentally responsive to the most canonical of Modernism's urban imperatives: light and air.

In the conclusion to his book on Beijing's pre-modern form, Zhu Jianfei summarizes the city's historic 'Architecture of horizon' thus:

Space and objects are externally dispersed and internally dissected, with walls and other forms of boundary fragmenting them intensively. Human subjects are drawn to a dense world of practices and experiences, on a trajectory that forever relativizes their positions, politically, socially, aesthetically, existentially. A universal design and composition then organize the infinitesimal spaces systematically and extensively. A total construction of Beijing as a geography-city-architecture is formalized. In it one sees a persistent use of large, total and strategic dispositions and their underlying dynamism in the pursuit of authoritarianism and cosmological ethics ... The immersive-dispersive composition, spreading humble and vast on the land surface, corresponds to the infinite line of the horizon, between the earth and heaven [91].

Zhu's description in effect elaborates on the most elusive element of Beijing's visual character as codified in the Master Plan: its 'horizontalness and openness to the sky' (*pinghuan kaikuo*) – and he links it to a political system that eschews absolute public-private distinctions, in favour of 'relativizing' each subject's position in a social and spatial order. There is a remarkable correspondence between this description and the qualities of the prevailing modern urban residential typology of Socialist-era Beijing. Significantly, both Zhu Jianfei and David Bray use Foucault's discussion of 'panopticism' to explain the governmental meaning of imperial Beijing and the work unit compound or *xiao qu* [92]. The application of panopticism to describe the governmental function of Chinese urban space parallels a debate among historians and social scientists about whether civil society or a 'public sphere' exists or ever existed in China [93].

If the existence of a public sphere in Chinese history is open to question, then so might the existence of a public realm (defined for this purpose as the spatial corollary of the public sphere). Or, to put it in the *visual* terms of the opposition between Foucault's panopticism and Arendt's space of appearance, one might ask whether urban planning in China has ever explicitly supported an Arendtian space. Certainly, panopticism, or the all-seeing 'authoritarian eye' and the 'view from above', has been attributed to the building both of imperial and Socialist Beijing, and to cities elsewhere in Asia. Tim Bunnell in particular has noticed the 'view from above' as characteristic of such planning in Malaysia, though he did not refer specifically to panopticism [94]. Indeed, there are striking similarities between the design of the Petronas Towers and the Kuala Lumpur City Centre, and the design of the new Lujiazui financial centre in Shanghai's Pudong district [95]. What may be remarkable about Beijing's case, even in comparison with other Chinese cities, is that the panoptic picturesque extends to its *preservation* policy, as distinct from new project planning and design.

Conclusion

So where has the policy of 'integral preservation and urban design' fallen short in the process of development? Perhaps, most obviously, the policy continues simply to say too

little about new construction in those parts of the Old City that are being redeveloped wholesale. However, it is also hampered by its purely visual conceptualization of the city's historic character – a visual conceptualization, moreover, whose standpoint is quite removed from the lived spaces of the city. The picturesque ‘metalanguage’ of Beijing's preservation policy (to adopt a term as Françoise Choay used it) does not acknowledge the social and political dimensions of Beijing's spatial structure [96]. Specifically, the policy has failed to take into account the emergence of the market. This failure is reflected in the policy's struggle against the proliferation of high-rise structures, shopping malls and other building types. These new types not only violate Beijing's *pinghuan kaikuo* historic character, they also express new forms of semi-autonomy in the actions of local officials and well-connected investors. In describing the gap between ‘Urban Planning and Urban Reality Under Chinese Economic Reform’, Michael Leaf observes that ‘much of the regulatory power of planning is now being subverted by abuses of power arising from the overlap of public and private interests at local levels’ and he argues for a ‘clarification of the line demarcating public and private [interests]’ [97].

Such a public–private clarification in the realm of policy and administration might beneficially also take place in urban space. In order to accommodate reform-driven redevelopment, a truly integral preservation and urban design policy might have had to compromise on overall building heights, and focus its attention much more explicitly on the qualities of a freshly relevant but poorly defined subset of urban space: the public realm. To be sure, the view from Jingshan and from the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City is an important element of the public realm in Beijing. However, like the Yinding Guanshan, there are many other views that may be worthy of protection, including many that do not carry the stamp of state control. The space of the street, or views from multiple public gathering places may be defined and regulated. There may also be spaces whose preservation value may be defined not at all in terms of *what* can be seen, but in terms of *who* can be seen, i.e. what kind of social activities they support, whether they be informal economic activities unrelated to state investments, or non-state communal activities like those of the mosque in De-Wai. An example of such a space of appearance becoming an object of preservation might be Seattle's Pike Place Market, where chain franchises are forbidden and shoppers are invited to ‘meet the producer’.

To the extent that this more diversely defined public realm includes a city-wide system of spaces – for example, the *hutong* or even the major streets with their characteristic tree planting – then the preservation of these spaces might have successfully ‘integrated’ the divergent effects of different development projects across the Old City, which increasingly take the form of large enclosed residential compounds or commercial complexes. This alternative interpretation of integration would have focused on a set of experiences of the city as moving through it and living in it on a daily basis, rather than as viewing it from above.

However, unlike the ‘everyday public spaces’ that Margaret Crawford celebrates in Los Angeles, which can be recognized only as being part of the public realm once the boundaries of public space and private life are blurred, efforts to preserve the spaces of everyday life in Beijing must begin with the recognition that private life (communal as well as individual) has its own spaces, while other spaces are distinctly public. To apply Hannah Arendt's notion of the public realm, the preservation of the city would have to recognize spaces where its citizens appear as they are, related to each other directly through action and speech, rather

than through their position *vis-à-vis* the state. But this would preserve a very different Beijing from the one that Zhu Jianfei and the majority of architectural historians throughout the world have described.

Notes and references

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 19. Jun Wang, *Cheng Ji (Tale of a City)*. Beijing: Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 2003; Liangyong Wu, *Rehabilitating the Old City of Beijing: A Project in the Ju'er Hutong Neighbourhood*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999, pp. 16–23; Lin Zhu, *Liang Sicheng, Lin Huiyin Yu Wo [Liang Sicheng, Lin Huiyin and Me]*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2004.
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 21. Liangyong Wu, op. cit. [19], pp. 6–10. A. M. Tung, op. cit. [1], p. 146. Anthony Tung quotes a French Naval officer at the conclusion of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 who also marvelled at the 'unity' of the Forbidden City's design in comparison with European capitals (Jun Wang, op. cit. [19], pp. 20–2). In an interview in 1999, I. M. Pei also used the language of Beijing's unity in arguing that the city should have preserved its walls and, like Paris, restricted new tall buildings to the outside: 'The most outstanding feature of Beijing's old city is precisely that it is a complete, planned whole (*yi ge wanzheng de you jihua de zhengti*), and therefore, [its] preservation must take this wholeness as the starting point' (Jun Wang, op. cit. [19], p. 85).
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24. Ibid., p. 114. The debate between Hua Lanhong and Chen Zhanxiang, as well as their personal backgrounds and the larger history of Beijing’s planning after the founding of the People’s Republic, is described at length in Jun Wang’s book, which reprints the drawings of their contrasting schemes from *Jian Guo yilai de Beijing Chengshi Jianshe* [*The Urban Construction of Beijing Since the Founding of the Country*] (1986).
25. Ibid., pp. 216–20.
26. Xinmin Hua, Beijing Hongxing Hutong 53 Hao He 55 Hao Bei Qiangzhi Chaichu Qianhou [before and after the Forced Demolition of Beijing Hongxing Hutong Number 53 and 55] (written by Hua Xinmin, February 14, 2005), www.people.com.cn, 2005, available at <http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=993&typeid=107&openfile=1> (accessed 5 May 2006); Chu Cai, Hua Lanhong Su Beijing Shi Gui Wei Yi an Ben Yue 5 Ri Shangwu Jiu Shi Zai Di Er Zhongji Fa Yuan Kai [the Case of Hua Lanhong V. Beijing Planning Commission Opens at 9:00am on the 5th of This Month in the Second Intermediate Court] (submitted by Hua Xinmin, January 2, 2006, 21:13:35) boxun.com, 2006, cited 5 May 2006; available from <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/china/2006/01/200601022354.shtml>. Hua Lanhong returned to France during the Cultural Revolution, but the irony of his career continues today. His daughter Hua Xinmin settled in Beijing and in the late 1990s became an outspoken advocate of courtyard house preservation in the old city. They are currently suing the Beijing Municipal Planning Commission for an improper taking and demolition of their own property – a courtyard house Hua Lanhong’s father (himself an eminent engineer) purchased and began to transform in 1914. It was to this house that Hua Lanhong brought his family to live in Beijing in 1951 (Renzi Hou, *The Transformation of the Old City of Beijing, China: A Concrete Manifestation of New China’s Cultural Reconstruction*, in Michael P. Conzen (ed.) *World Patterns of Modern Urban Change: Essays in Honor of Chauncy D. Harris*. Chicago: University of Chicago Dept. of Geography, 1986, pp. 217–39).
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28. Figures 3, 4 and 5 show the results of a survey conducted by a Tsinghua University planning team for the West City District Planning Bureau between 1995 and 1997. The West City District occupies the north-west quadrant of Beijing’s old city. Approximately 173 hectares of one-storey housing and *hutongs* were demolished there between 1949 and 1989, leaving about 1000 hectares left intact (though often dilapidated and filled in). From 1990 to 1997, an additional 134 hectares were cleared, equal to 77% of all the area cleared during the previous forty years. Another 434 hectares were slated for clearance to make way for projects that were approved at the end of 1996, leaving only 426 hectares intact for the future. Some of the area planned for clearance after 1996 was later protected in the 2004 plan for additional preservation districts. However, other areas of the West City that were not planned for clearance in 1996 have since been demolished.
29. The Chinese term that is translated as ‘preservation’ in this article, *baohu*, more literally means ‘protection’. This seems to be one reflection of the reaction to the violent onslaughts of the Cultural Revolution on historic architecture. In Taiwan, a word much closer in literal meaning to ‘preservation’, *baocun*, is used in place of *baohu*.

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44. Yisan Ruan, Jinghui Wang and Lin Wang, *Lishi Wenhua Mingcheng Baohu Lilun Yu Guihua* [Theory and Planning of the Preservation of Famous Historic and Cultural Cities]. Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 1999, pp. 14–15; Jinghui Wang, Preservation of Historic Heritage in China, op. cit. [41].
45. Interview with Jinghui Wang, Professor and Senior Planner, Chinese Academy of Urban Planning and Design. Seattle, WA, 1 November 2002.
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48. ‘1983 nian, zhonggong zhongyang, guowuyuan yuanze pizhun *Beijing chengshi jianshe zongti guihua fang’an* shi tichu: “Beijing shi woguo de shoudu, you shi lishi wenhua mingcheng. Beijing de guihua he jianshe, yao fanyingchu zhonghua minzu de lishi wenhua, geming chuantong he shehui zhuyi guojia shoudu de du te fengmao. Dui zhengui de geming shiji, lishi wenwu, gu jianzhu he juyou zhongyao yi de gu jianzhu yizhi, yao tuoshan baohu. Zai qi zhouwei diqu nei, jianzhuwu de tiliang, fengge bixu yu zhixiang xietiao. Yao zhubu de, chengpian de gaizao Beijing jiucheng”. Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning and Design, op. cit. [36], p. 48.
49. Guangqi Dong, *Beijing Guihua Zhanlue Sikao* [Reflections on Beijing’s Planning Strategies]. Beijing: China Architecture and Building Press, 1998, pp. 84–148, especially pp. 92–4 and 113–4. ‘*Fengmao*’ is translated usually as ‘style and features’, but it could also mean ‘characteristic appearance’ or ‘image.’ It is also a normatively positive term, compared with *mianmao* (‘appearance’ or ‘appearance on its face’), or *yuanmao* (*yuanyou de mianmao* – ‘original appearance’) which are both more precise and normatively neutral. Whichever way ‘*fengmao*’ is translated, it has a very visual connotation, as distinct from the more general word *tese* (‘character’), which was also used but less frequently. The word *fengmao* appears throughout the section of the Master Plan dealing with the preservation of the *lishi wenhua mingcheng*, usually in the form of *chuantong fengmao* (‘traditional image’), although sometimes it is replaced by the less visual word *chuantong tese* (‘traditional character’).
50. Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning and Design op. cit. [36], pp. 51–6.
51. ‘West City District Gazetteer’ Editorial Committee, *Beijing Shi Xicheng Qu Dimingzhi* [Beijing City West City District Gazetteer]. Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1992, p. 292. The Yinding Guanshan was but one of ‘Eight Views of Yanjing’ (*Yanjing Bajing*) identified by the Emperor Qianlong in 1752. As an expression, however, the ‘Eight Views’ far predates Qianlong’s list; it has been interpreted various ways since at least the twelfth century AD. *Beijing Baikequanshu* [Encyclopedia of Beijing]. Beijing: Aolinpike Chubanshe [Olympic Publishing House], p. 470.
52. West City District Detailed Control Plan progress meeting, Beijing Municipal Planning Institute, 28 November 1996. The Capital Planning Commission was an oversight body of policy-making planners, while the Municipal Planning Bureau was responsible for enforcement and project-by-project approval. These agencies have since been merged.
53. Jasper Goldman, From Hutong to Hi-Rise: Explaining the Transformation of Old Beijing, 1990–2002. Masters thesis, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003, pp. 61–82.
54. The economy of six-storey buildings is itself the product of an arbitrary standard in Beijing that requires any building higher than six storeys to have elevators. Standards in Guangzhou and other cities allowed walk-up buildings as high as nine storeys.

55. For more detail on the design and approval of specific commercial projects that broke the official height limits, see Chapter Four, 'The Malling of Wangfujing', in Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004.
56. Renzhi Hou, op. cit. [26]; Marwyn Samuels and Carmelita Samuels, Beijing and the Power of Place in Modern China, in J. A. Agnew and J. S. Duncan (eds) *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 202–27; Zixuan Zhu and Reginald Kwok, Beijing: The Expression of National Political Ideology, in Won Bae Kim *et al.* (eds) *Culture and the City in East Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 125–50; Hung Wu, Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monuments. *Representations* 35 (1991) 84–117.
57. Yu Zhou, Beijing and the Development of Dual Central Business Districts. *Geographical Review* 88, 3 (1998) 429. Yu Zhou describes the impact of the East City, Chaoyang and West City district governments' competition for high-end office development, despite the Master Plan's specification that such development should be concentrated in Chaoyang District.
58. Gongwei Wang, Beijing Xi'erhuan Baitasi Diqu Jiucheng Gaizao Guihua Saomiao [Scan of the Old City Redevelopment Plan for the White Pagoda Temple Area Along Beijing's West Second Ring Road]. *Beijing Fandichan [Beijing Real Estate]* (1997) 24–5.
59. Lizhu Dong, Chunfeng Hutong Weifang Gaizao Qu Guihua Sheji Jianjie [a Brief Introduction to the Planning and Design of Chun Feng Hutong Dilapidated Housing Redevelopment District]. *Beijing Guihua Jianshe [Beijing City Planning and Construction Review]* 1 (1992) 34–6. Interview with Xiao Jian, Director of the Xuanwu District Niu Jie Housing Management Office, 7 April 1994.
60. *Ibid.*; Zheng Lian, Housing Renewal in Beijing: Observation and Analysis. Masters thesis, Montreal: McGill University, 1995, p. 50; Wei Dong, An Ethnic Housing in Transition: Chinese Muslim Housing Architecture in the Framework of Resource Management and Identity of Place. Doctoral dissertation, Trondheim, Norway: Norwegian Institute of Technology, 1995, p. 58. This tradition in fact originated in the Ming dynasty as the result of a law that expressly forbade Islamic ethnic groups from building 'foreign style buildings'. The mosque itself is a Ming structure, although earlier mosques had occupied its site since 1000 years ago. *Beijing Baikequanshu [Encyclopedia of Beijing]*, p. 315.
61. Junhua Lü, Beijing's Old and Dilapidated Housing Renewal (Part I). *China City Planning Review* 9, 3 (1993) 27–35.
62. Interview with Yan Yuying, Relocation Director for the West City District Old and Dilapidated Housing Renewal Office, 18 December 1994. Both the developer and student designers, however, proposed to keep the mosque and its community in place. Tsinghua University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Beijing Urban Design Studio, *Longfusi Market, Deshengmenwai, Xiangshan* [Beijing and Cambridge, MA]: Tsinghua University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992; Interview with Xu Jingyun, Chief Architect, Beijing Shi Zhuzhai Jianshe Zong Gongsi [Beijing Municipal General Housing Construction Company], Beijing, 22 July 1993.
63. Dabei Zhang, Shi Qu Lingdao Dao De-Wai Qingzhensi Shigong Xianchang Jiancha Gongzuo [Municipal and District Leaders Conduct an on-Site Inspection of the Construction of De-Wai Mosque] [Internet news service]. Beijing Huarong, 2005, available from <http://www.bjhr.com.cn/news/displaynewscentre1.asp?ArticleID=668> (accessed 22 May 2006).
64. Beijing Municipal Government Capital Administrative Document No. 58, Beijing Wenwu Shiye Fazhan Wu Nian Guihua, 1995–1999 [Beijing Cultural Relics Development Five-Year Plan, 1995–1999], 1995.
65. Tsinghua University School of Architecture Department of City Planning and Design and Trondheim University Norwegian Institute of Technology Faculty of Architecture, *Some Tentative Schemes for the Preservation of a Historic Urban Landscape: The Nanchizi Renewal Project*.

- Beijing, 1995. The reference to the Rue de Rivoli was made in discussion about Beichizi Dajie among architectural faculty at Tsinghua University in April 1993.
66. J. Goldman, *op. cit.* [53]; Bai Chen, Jin Siheyuan Xian Dei Shua Ka: You Chu You Wei You 'Shuang Qi' Nanchizi Lao Zhuhu Zuo Huiqian (to Enter the Siheyuan, First Swipe Your Card: Old Nanchizi Residents Return to Kitchens, Bathrooms, Gas Cooking and Heating.), *Beijing Qingnian Bao* [*Beijing Youth Daily*], 1 September 2003. For a detailed discussion of how 'Qing style' has been interpreted in the development of new luxury courtyard houses, and what alternative designs for contextual neighbourhood redevelopment have been proposed, see D. Abramson, *op. cit.* [40].
 67. Junhua Lü, *op. cit.* [61].
 68. Tongji University Urban Planning Research Lab, *Zhongguo Chengshi Jianshe Shi* [*History of Chinese Urban Construction*]. Beijing: Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe [China Architecture and Building Press], 1985, p. 80. The attention in this book is justified because the block illustrated how well the courtyard house typology could be adapted to suit a north-south-orientated grid as well as an east-west-orientated one. What is odd is that the image is often confused with the classic condition itself, as has happened even in this textbook. For another example, see Jun Wang, *op. cit.* [19], p. 17.
 69. Compare maps on pp. 27–8 and 31–2 in Renzhi Hou, *Beijing Lishi Ditu Ji* [*Historical Atlas of Beijing*]. Beijing, 1988.
 70. Guangqi Dong, Chao Yang Men Nei Neighborhood Redevelopment Project Meeting, with Dong Guangqi, Vice Director of the Beijing Municipal Institute of Urban Planning and Design; Xu Jingyun, Chief Architect of the Beijing Municipal General Housing Construction Company; and Professor Lü Junhua's Design Team at Tsinghua University. Beijing, 7 October 1992 argued for the preservation of *hutong* character (as distinct from the preservation of *siheyuan*) as early as 1992. In helping to draft the West City District Detailed Regulatory Plan in 1997, the author proposed a plan for the preservation of a network of *hutong* in areas that were to be otherwise redeveloped. The plan called for a more selective application of height limits, so that high buildings could be allowed officially in locations where they would not impinge on the experience of being in the *hutong*. District officials rejected this proposal; apart from the technical difficulties of reconciling it with such priorities as the favouring of automobile access and the prevailing infrastructure provision practices (which generally involved each utility laying its lines without co-ordination between them), they also simply did not recognize the functional and symbolic value of the *hutong* as a viable spatial system in its own right.
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