

# 北 Chapter 1 京



# Chapter One

## Preservation vs. Demolition

### “Transformation” of Old Beijing

Thirteen peasants from a poverty-stricken area in Sichuan Province, southwest China, were hard at work in an old Beijing compound on September 24, 1998. Large chunks of timber fell as they kept hacking the roof of a building in the compound with their picks and before long, the building collapsed in a cloud of dust. Then the wall was under attack, groaning amid the sound of hacking and shoveling.

A part of the compound, known as *Yuedong Xinguan*, or the “New Guangdong Guild Hall,” was being demolished to make room for the building of a thoroughfare. Ironically, the wanton destruction was carried out allegedly to “move” the building for “relocation” in the same compound for “preservation in its entirety”!

Gone was the ancient New Guangdong Guild Hall, where two key figures of contemporary Chinese history, Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), did things vital to the Chinese nation. Kang Youwei was a key figure in the first intellectual movement of modern China. Sun Yat-sun is remembered by Chinese everywhere as their country’s modern founder.

The New Guangdong Guild Hall was a “cultural heritage site” under the protection of the Xuanwu District Government of Beijing Municipality. As such, the site should have been carefully surveyed and videotaped if any structure in it had to be relocated, and serial numbers should have been given to the components of the structure, including every brick and tile, so that at the new site the rebuilt structure would be the same as the original. Moreover, everything must be done under guidance provided by experts from the cultural heritage authorities.

“Is there any expert available to provide you with guidance?” I asked the head of the team, who identified himself as “Old Wang.”

“Some people came and looked around,” the man replied. “They pointed here and there and told us this and that should be kept. Then we started working.”

Walking around, I found beyond the debris, there were a few wooden boards with decorative designs carved on them. "They want these things," Old Wang told me. "They also asked us to keep some stone plates inlaid on the wall. There are words inscribed on them."

"What's to be done with the bricks, tiles and timber salvaged from the demolition?"

"We just sell them."

"That's a lot of money, isn't that?"

"No. Nobody would buy those old bricks. Wooden things are difficult to sell. Tiles are dirt cheap."

"Old Wang," I asked, "do you know anything about Kang Youwei and his reformist movement?"

The guy was completely in the dark, his eyes looking into the blank.

"Have you ever heard of Sun Yat-sen?"

"Yes, I know the name. Does this old compound have anything to do with him?"

I had got to know this big-eyed, sunburned Old Wang six days before, on September 18, when he led his men into the New Guangdong Guild Hall on order of the urban construction authorities. But they were asked to stop when they had just removed the tiles on the roof of a building. It turned out that somebody had protested and that in response, the urban construction authorities had decided to negotiate with the cultural heritage authorities for an agreement.

After a few days of fuss, Old Wang finally secured the contract on this "demolition-for-relocation" job. "It is eight years since I came to Beijing and I have demolished numerous old buildings like this," he told me. "Just a couple of months ago I demolished an old temple near the Imperial Directorate of Education (*Guozijian*). It is a large temple, very large. But I didn't care. We will demolish anything so long as we are paid for it — even the Forbidden City!"

The telephone rang. "Sorry, a truck is coming and somebody wants to buy these things," Wang said, pointing at the debris.



New Guangdong Guild Hall before demolition,  
(photo by Wang Jun, September 18, 1998).

The New Guangdong Guild Hall — No. 11, Nanhengjie Street, Xuanwu District, Beijing — was once the residence of Wang Chongjian, a key cabinet minister under Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722) of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), and his son Wang Xi. Earlier, it had belonged to Yan Song (1480–1567), a most treacherous, most corrupt court minister of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The compound was renovated in the late 1800s by merchants from Guangdong Province to become their meeting place.



Kang Youwei

A century ago, the Chinese empire, having suffered one humiliating defeat after another in wars launched by imperialist powers against it, was often compared to a “piece of meat to be cut into pieces on a chopping block.” Britain had secured control of areas along the Yangtze River that snakes across the breadth of China; Germany, of Shandong Province in east China; and Tsarist Russia, of Manchuria in the northeast. Britain and France had been struggling with each other for influence in China’s southern provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi and Yunnan. Under the *Treaty of Shimonoseki* signed in April 1895 after the First Sino-Japanese War fought in the previous year, China was forced to cede Taiwan to Japan which had already made the southeastern Fujian Province its sphere of influence. It is against such a historical background that a group of enlightened Chinese scholars headed by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao (1873–1929), father of Liang Sicheng, launched the “One Hundred-Day Reform” which, though short-lived, turned out to be China’s first large-scale campaign for cultural awakening.

On April 12, 1898, some 200 reform-minded scholars gathered in the compound of the New Guangdong Guild Hall. “All of us Chinese, 400 million strong, are now living in a building threatening to collapse. We are now on board a boat about to capsize on the stormy sea. We are just like birds confined in a cage, and we are just like prisoners in a jail,” Kang Youwei told the gathering, shouting at the top of his voice. “We are treated not as human beings, but as beasts of burden, as dogs and sheep, as slaves exploited and bullied by others at will. Never has China been so humiliated throughout its history of 20 successive dynasties. Moreover, the influence of the Sage’s Doctrine (Confucianism — Tr.) is waning and our nation has been reduced to the verge of extinction. At the sight of all this, our pains, so piercing, so great, are beyond description.” These words moved many in the audience to tears.

The same day, in the same compound, a national reformist organization called the "Society for Protection of China" (*Bao Guo Hui*) was founded. Kang Youwei was author of the group's founding declaration, which reads: "We have gathered to set up this organization, the Society for Protection of China, resolved to save China at a time when it is losing increasingly large tracts of its territory, when it is being deprived of its sovereignty, and when our people's livelihood is becoming increasingly harsh."

The Society for Protection of China was the largest and also the most influential among a dozen or so Beijing-based reformist organizations founded earlier or later. Emperor Guangxu (1871–1908) backed the reformists headed by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. On June 11, 1898, two months after the founding of the Society for Protection of China, an imperial decree was issued, calling for reforms ranging from developing industry, streamlining the government, strengthening the armed services, promoting local self-government and opening what was to become Beijing University, the most prestigious seat of higher learning up to then. The emperor, however, was just a figurehead, a "plaything," so to speak, in the hands of Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908), the "fire-spitting dragon lady" as she was sometimes called in the West. On September 21, 103 days after the imperial decree was issued, the empress dowager staged a *coup d'état* and annulled what was to be dubbed as the "One Hundred-Day Reformist Movement." On September 28, six leading reformists were executed at Caishikou, a business street in what is now Xuanwu District of Beijing Municipality. Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, however, had fled the country.

The Qing, China's last imperial dynasty, was overthrown in the 1911 Revolution, and China became a republic. But the country continued to be politically chaotic, with the north and south of the country under control of different warlords. In the summer of 1912, Sun Yat-sen, eager to help consolidate the newly founded republic, arrived in Beijing. The New Guangdong Guild Hall turned out to be a hive of activity on September 11 when Sun Yat-sen, a native of Guangdong Province, showed up at a meeting organized by his countrymen to welcome him. Sun Yat-sen took the floor after Liang Shiyi, a financier who doubled as a politician, opened the gathering. He spoke on his plans for China's modernization, including designating the Hainan Island a province, attracting foreign investment and building a network of railways.



Sun Yat-sen

All the plans mapped out by Sun Yat-sun have now been materialized, but the place where he made public the plans is gone.

There used to be two courtyards in the compound of the New Guangdong Guild Hall, the east courtyard and the west courtyard. The east courtyard was the main courtyard, where the Society for Protection of China was founded in 1898 and Sun Yat-sen spoke in 1912. Nevertheless, it was none other than the east courtyard that was to be "removed" by the construction authorities for "relocation" to the north side of the west courtyard. The construction authorities argued that the main structure in the courtyard, and the structures flanking it were too dilapidated for repairs and that the theater and garden were no longer existent. Yes, they said, preservation of the compound was technically possible but would be too costly.

Yet many experts were vehemently opposed to the "demolition-for-relocation" plan. The compound, they argued, was largely preserved and it wouldn't be difficult to have the theater and the garden rebuilt. Moreover, there had been cases of having roads rerouted to ensure protection of important cultural and historical sites. On September 21, 1998, 100 years after the One Hundred-Day Reformist Movement, four most prominent experts appealed to the Beijing Municipal authorities in a last-ditch struggle to save the New Guangdong Guild Hall. They were Luo Zhewen, president of China Cultural Heritage Society; Yu Weichao, former curator of the Museum of Chinese History; Zheng Xiaoxie, vice-chairman of the Experts' Committee of the State Committee for Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage Sites; and Xie Chensheng, former advisor to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. "At this historical moment, the centenary of the 1898 reformist movement," they wrote, "an important site of the movement, the New Guangdong Guild Hall, is to be partially torn down allegedly for relocation. The site is now in imminent peril, a fact unacceptable to anyone conscious of our history, a fact that everyone detests! We are appealing to the proper authorities to change the construction plan and be cautious with history, so that this site, a mirror of the tremendous changes that have taken place in China, can be preserved." "In recent years," they continued, "to facilitate construction, numerous cultural heritage sites have been 'relocated' for 'protection,' and such sites have invariably ended up in total destruction. This issue deserves the utmost attention of the entire society. A prudent approach must be taken toward removing and relocating structures of historical and cultural value. Removal of such structures must be subject to strict examination and approval (by the proper authorities) in accordance with law. Professional procedures for protection must be followed when such structures have to be demolished for relocation."

Wang Canzhi, a research fellow at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, also did his best to have the New Guangdong Guild Hall preserved. On April 23, 1998, the Culture and History Committee of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the highest local consulting body, met for a briefing by the urban construction authorities on what they were to do with the New Guangdong Guild Hall. "What you are going to do is totally unacceptable," he told officials present at the meeting. "My heart aches when you say this and that will have to be demolished. How can a site of cultural value exist with this or that part of it missing? The New Guangdong Guild Hall witnessed some events of great importance in history. It is where Kang Youwei spoke and founded the Society for Protection of China, but it will no longer be there! Places in Beijing where Sun Yat-sen made his presence are few, and his speech in the New Guangdong Guild Hall was of great historical importance. What a pity if the New Guangdong Guild Hall disappears! Can you reroute the road so that the compound will be preserved, like what has been done in construction of Ping'an Avenue? I have to stress that demolition of an ancient structure, supposedly to have it rebuilt elsewhere, is definitely the worst possible policy. Cultural heritage sites must remain where they have always been — forever!"

Despite all the appeals and protests, the New Guangdong Guild Hall was doomed.

The New Guangdong Guild Hall had been used by a middle school. Before it was demolished, Wei Tao, a teacher, would rush forward to tell any visitor what was to happen to it. "Is it true that there will be no way of having the site kept? The Society for Protection of China and the 1898 reformist movement are written down into textbooks of history. How can I explain to my students why it will have to disappear?"

Time: November 23, 2000.

Place: 75, Dongtangzi Hutong, Dongcheng District, Beijing, former residence of Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), a leading liberal educator of the early 20th-century China.

"Is this courtyard really worth preserving?" a man, who identified himself as an urban construction official, asked the author in a loud voice. "Yes, it had a little something to do with Cai Yu-



Cai Yuanpei



Former residence of Cai Yuanpei after repairs

anpei — so what? Look, can it be called a site of cultural heritage?"

I looked around, and found that in the courtyard several buildings on one side of the *hutong* — alley — were already roofless, largely demolished. The roofs of some other buildings had big holes dug through, and the

walls were also broken. Outside, on either side of the gate, the same Chinese character *chai*, meaning "to be torn down," was brushed on the walls. Ironically, the sign reading "Former residence of Cai Yuanpei, a cultural heritage site under protection of Dongcheng District" was still there, inlaid on the wall beside the gate of the courtyard.

Hu Jincai, the last resident in the courtyard, showed me round. "This is not an ordinary courtyard," he said, heaving a long sigh. "Cai Yuanpei lived here when he was president of Beijing University, during the May Fourth Movement (of 1919). From here student protesters staged a demonstration to seek science and democracy."

"Cai Yuanpei held a very high position but he led a simple life," Hu Jincai continued. "True, this is an ordinary courtyard. Simply because it is ordinary, the courtyard testifies to Cai Yuanpei's great personality!"

In 1892, Cai Yuanpei won the title *jinshi*, meaning "metropolitan graduate," after emerging victor in the highest-level imperial examination for civil service. He became a sympathizer of the reformist movement after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). In 1902, he founded the China Education Society in Shanghai. Later that year he founded the Society of Patriotism, an organization devoted to the ongoing revolution that aimed to overturn the Qing Dynasty. Then he went to France for study. He returned home after the 1911 Revolution, and was appointed minister of education by the Nanjing-based Provisional Government of the Republic of China. As president of Beijing University from 1917 to 1926, he advanced the principle of "freedom of thinking and all-inclusiveness" for higher education, which has inspired Chinese educators of all generations until now.

On May 2, 1919, Cai Yuanpei learned that the Beijing-based Chinese government was to sign the *Versailles Treaty* that concluded World War I, under which Germany's territorial rights in China were not to be returned

to the Chinese, but were instead to be turned over to the Japanese, even though China was a victorious nation in the War. Immediately afterward, he informed student representatives of Beijing University of what the government was to do. On the afternoon of May 4, some 3,000 students of Beijing University and other schools gathered at Tiananmen (the Gate of Heavenly Peace) in the heart of Beijing for a rally of protest. Outraged, the students then marched to the residence of Cao Rulin (1877–1966), the vice-minister of foreign affairs and a most notorious pro-Japanese politician, at Zhaojialou and set it ablaze. On May 8, Cai Yuanpei was forced by the warlord-controlled government to resign for his role in what was to be known as the “May Fourth Movement” — the very first intellectual revolution in China. It was a socio-political movement directed toward national independence, emancipation of the individual’s mind and rebuilding of society and culture.

Now, some 80 years after the May Fourth Movement, this courtyard, once the residence of Cai Yuanpei, was still there, facing the Red Building of Beijing University in the west and Zhaojialou in the east through Zhaotangzi Hutong, serving as material evidence to an event that turned a new page in the Chinese history.

But, all of a sudden, a developer set about building a business plaza in this central Beijing area. By the time I visited the area, old housing buildings round Cai Yuanpei’s former residence had already been torn down and the residence itself was being demolished. Fortunately, the Beijing Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage intervened before it was too late. It turned out that the plan for “relocating” the courtyard had no approval from the authorities. To the dismay of the developer, the Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage issued an order demanding that the courtyard be preserved in its entirety, at the original site.

This time, appeals of experts, headed by Professor Hou Renzhi of Beijing University, worked. Repairs of Cai Yuanpei’s former residence began on November 24, 2000. When I went there a second time on December 5, the structures on the side of the *hutong* had been restored and workers had also got rid of the Chinese characters *chai* (to be demolished) on the walls flanking the gate. Nevertheless, destruction remained evident: the door and windows of the south-facing building in the backyard were missing and its roof was broken. Moreover, a huge hole had been dug through the wall of the backyard.

On May 2, 2002, Cai Sui’ang, son, and Cai Yingduo, daughter, of Cai Yuanpei came to see their father’s former residence at Dongtangzi Hutong. They were in Beijing for the opening of the Memorial Museum of the New

Cultural Movement and the Museum of the History of Beijing University. A guy from a certain company emerged from the courtyard and using rude language, he asked them to leave. The Cai brother and sister came again the following day, and again they were denied entry. The only thing they were able to do in commemoration of their father was to have a picture taken in front of his courtyard.

In June 2000, the Beijing Municipal Government decided to earmark 330 million yuan for repairs of cultural and historical sites in areas under its jurisdiction. This represented the biggest effort it had ever made for protection of such sites since the People's Republic was founded in 1949. In November, the Beijing Municipal Government designated 25 areas of cultural and historical value for protection, including *Shichahai* (the inner city's lake district), *Guozijian* and *Dashila* (one of the oldest pedestrian shopping districts in Beijing), which together account for 17 percent of "old Beijing," the once walled capital city of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Plus sites previously designated for protection and their surrounding areas where construction is under control, 37 percent of old Beijing's total area would, in theory, be under protection.<sup>1</sup>

But, in December of the same year, the municipal authorities made public a plan for demolition of residential buildings classified as too old and dilapidated for repair. The plan was to be fulfilled, by and large, in five years. To be precise, such buildings on 164 tracts, with a combined floor space of 9.34 million square meters, were to be torn down. That means more areas in old Beijing — areas not under protection — would be "transformed." As a result, old Beijing has



Jizhao Hutong to be razed, with the Chinese character *chai* (demolition) brushed on the walls (A drawing by Beijing painter Kuang Han in March 2003)

<sup>1</sup> Fifteen more areas are designated for protection under the *Plan for Protection of Beijing as a City of Cultural and Historical Importance* published by the Beijing Municipal Government in September 2002, bringing to 40 the total number of protected areas. Of these 40 areas, 30 are in the once walled old Beijing, which together occupy 1,278 hectares or 21 percent of the old Beijing's total area. Plus sites previously designated for protection and their surrounding areas where construction is under control, 2,617 hectares or 42 percent of old Beijing's total area are, in theory, to be protected.

since then resounded with the roaring of bulldozers, and *hutongs* and *siheyuans* — walled courtyards in traditional style — have been systematically razed.

Before the plan was published, Professor Wu Liangyong of Qinghua University, who doubles as academician of both the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, commented:

*Urban construction in ancient China is characterized by an integration of urban planning with urban designing, architectural designing with gardening. This is globally unique. No precedence is found among the best-designed ancient cities in both the East and West, and old Beijing definitely stands out as the best among them. It is indeed no exaggeration to describe old Beijing as the best example, the "gem," of ancient city planning across the world.*

...

*Protection of old Beijing vs. its development is bound to remain for a long time as a thorny issue. Development is the main aspect of this contradiction in so far as the entire Beijing Municipality — 16,800 square kilometers in area — is concerned. Nevertheless, protection should be stressed when planning is done for the redevelopment of old Beijing ... Unfortunately, the limit on the height of the new buildings in old Beijing, which was imposed in the 1980s in response to concerns the late Premier Zhou Enlai had shown and also on the basis of past experiences in exercising control over construction there, is completely ignored. The open space in old Beijing, which is centered on the Forbidden City and Imperial City, feature a gentle terrain. It is being threatened, and so are the areas along Beijing's north-south axis, on either side of which there are the best ancient structures in the capital city. In these places, the built space ratio is exceedingly high, and this has resulted in blocked visions and deteriorating living conditions. Traffic is becoming increasingly congested there and the environmental quality is deteriorating. Those newly-built high-rise buildings and overpasses seem to have made Beijing look "modern," but the fact is that these epitomize an ongoing change of Beijing from the best-planned, best designed city into a "second-hand city."*

*... In the old city of Beijing, virtually all structures of cultural value have been demolished and numerous ancient trees have been felled to make room for construction projects that are meant for maximum profits from exploitation of the limited land space, and gone are so many sites of historical interest. Beijing's value as a world-renowned cultural and historical city has been ignored and, as a result, the city is being used merely as a construction site. Does that differ from tearing invaluable ancient paintings into pieces for use as raw material for production of*

*paper pulp, or smashing bronze vessels thousands of years old into bits of scrap metal? It seems that Beijing still has some resemblance of an ancient capital because some of the key structures in old Beijing, for example Shichahai, the Drum Tower on the north end of the city's north-south axis, and Guozijian, etc., are still there. The fact, however, is that old Beijing as we are able to see right now is something destined to be buried in oblivion because plans to "transform" it have been or are being approved and structures not really too dilapidated for repairs are also being demolished. If no resolute measures are taken to set things right, protection of old Beijing would be utterly impossible. Once destroyed, old Beijing can never be restored.<sup>2</sup>*

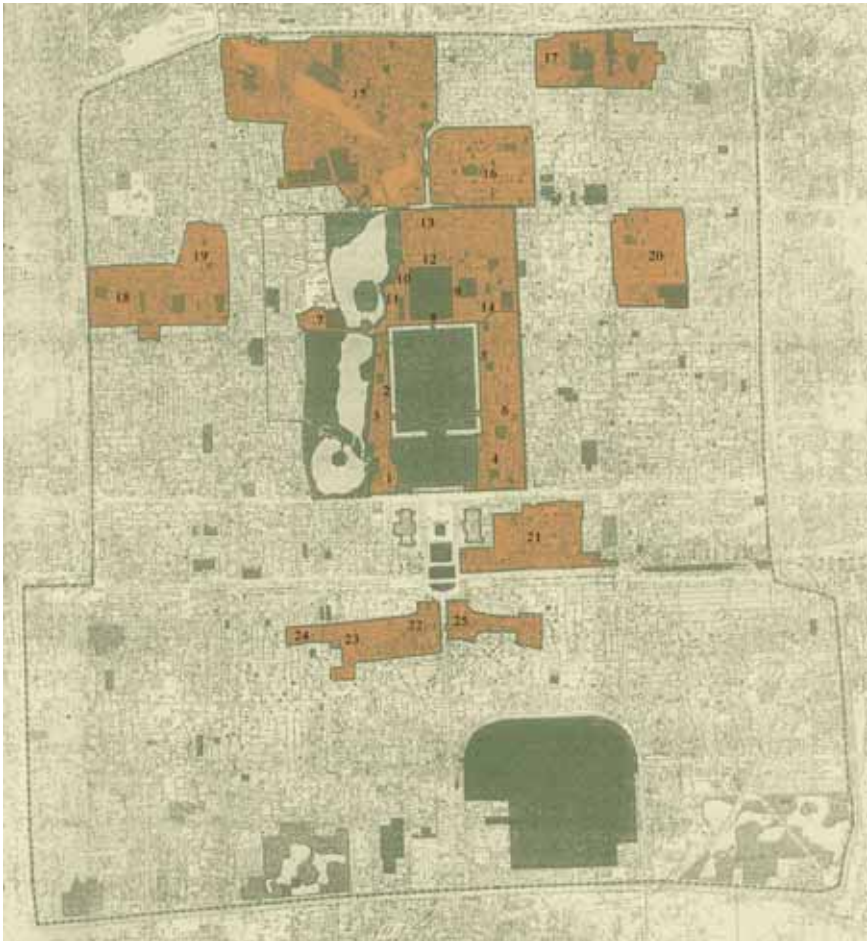
On October 11, 2001, some 100 experts in various disciplines of study attended a meeting in Langfang City, Hebei Province, for assessing the results of a major research project to plan the development of the envisaged "Greater Beijing" that encompasses both the urban and rural areas in Beijing and Tianjin municipalities and northern Hebei Province. The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Construction.

Professor Wu Liangyong, then 79 years old, spoke at the meeting in his capacity as head of the research team. He noted that in the current era of economic globalization, development of global-caliber metropolises is a choice of strategic importance for a country or region in striving for development. "Greater Beijing," he said, should be a global-caliber metropolitan region, which is to be developed by taking full advantage of the influence of Beijing as the capital of China, a growing world power, by providing it with the most essential conditions for participation in global politics and cultural activities and for international exchange. "Greater Beijing," he noted, should also be good enough to help the entire country gain the upper hand in international competition.

Meanwhile, he insisted, plans for "Greater Beijing" should at the same time be designed to alleviate the pressure on Beijing in its development. As indicated by the research, among cities similar in size in 12 countries, the use of land in Beijing, calculated on a per capita basis, is definitely the most intensive. Central Beijing has a population averaging 14,694 per square kilometer, far exceeding 8,811 per square kilometer for New York, 4,554 for London and 8,071 for Paris. For a long time, Wu Liangyong said, Beijing has directed its urban planning toward "transformation" of old Beijing, resulting in excessive concentration of the city's urban functions there. This state of affairs has not only made protection of cultural heritage sites there difficult,

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<sup>2</sup> Wu Liangyong: *Comments on Detailed Plans for Controlled Development of Old Beijing*, from *Academic Notes of Wu Liangyong on Cultural Matters*, 1st edition, China Youth Publishing House, February 2002.



The 25 areas in old Beijing to be protected for historical, cultural value (April 1999)

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Nanchangjie Street     | 10. Jingshanxijie Street  | 18. Fuchengmennei Avenue              |
| 2. Beichangjie Street     | 11. Zhishanmenjie Street  | 19. Xisi North Alleys (No. 1–No. 8)   |
| 3. Xihuamen Area          | 12. Jingshanhoujie Street | 20. Dongsì North Alleys (No. 3–No. 8) |
| 4. Nanchizi Area          | 13. Di'anmennei Avenue    | 21. Dongjiaominxiang Area             |
| 5. Beichizi Area          | 14. Wusi (May 4) Street   | 22. Dashila Area                      |
| 6. Donghuamen Area        | 15. Shichahai Area        | 23. Dongliulichang Area               |
| 7. Wenjinjie Street       | 16. Nanluoguxiang         | 24. Xiliulichang Area                 |
| 8. Jingshanqianjie Street | 17. Guozijian Area        | 25. Xianyukou Area                    |
| 9. Jingshandongjie Street |                           |                                       |

if not impossible, but has also given rise to a host of other problems, most notably traffic congestion and environmental pollution.

Efforts must be made without delay to decentralize Beijing's urban functions in a well-organized way and the same holds true for Tianjin and



A diagrammatic sketch showing the spatial development of the envisaged "Greater Beijing," drawn by the Greater Beijing Planning Group

(Source: *Study of the Planning for Urban and Rural Development of Greater Beijing Encompassing Beijing, Tianjin and North Hebei*, 2001)

northern Hebei cities, Wu Liangyong insisted. It is a must to change the state of affairs in which the core cities have too great a concentration of urban functions. Cities in "Greater Beijing" must be "regrouped." There is the need to let Beijing and Tianjin serve as the "dual-core" of the region, the "axis" of the region, and the cities of Tangshan and Baoding, as its "flanks," with a view to decentralizing their urban functions and restructuring the region's economic establishment. Meanwhile, Wu Liangyong said, medium-sized cities should be developed to increase the density of cities in the region. For common prosperity, "city groups" should be formed in such a way as to allow all cities in the "Greater Beijing" metropolitan sphere to bring into full play their respective advantages while capable of supplementing one another's needs.

Cases of regional planning to facilitate development of super-large cities are not exceptional in the world. After World War II, the so-called "Greater London" and "Greater Paris" were planned in an effort to improve the cities' development. As expected, decentralization of the cities' urban functions has made it possible for the cities to embark on a road of sound, orderly development.

Far back in 1950, architects Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhanxiang already called for doing what London and Paris had then been aimed at, hoping that this would help Beijing achieve a sustainable development. Their attempt, however, was doomed for political reasons. Their attempt and its failure constitute the theme of this book.

Today, half a century after the dream of Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhanxiang was shattered, Wu Liangyong was defying all difficulties to revive and realize it. But Beijing right now is no longer a well-preserved ancient capital as it was half a century ago.

During the meeting, a reporter put this question to Wu Liangyong: “Are you sure that plans for ‘Greater Beijing’ will succeed? In 50 years from now, will such plans be marked the way Liang Sicheng is being remembered?”

“Let history answer this question,” he replied, in a loud voice.

## Demolition vs. Preservation

Statistics show that back in 1949, Beijing had more than 7,000 *hutongs*, long or short. By the 1980s, only about 3,900 had survived. As “transformation” of old Beijing gathers momentum, some 600 have disappeared annually in the most recent years.<sup>3</sup>

Members of the Chinese intelligentsia hold diametrically antagonistic views on the fate of *hutongs*, on what should be done with those narrow lanes and alleys seen by many as a most salient cultural feature of this ancient capital.

In an article titled *Siheyuan Courtyards and Flush Toilets*, writer Liu Xinwu expresses sympathy toward people living in old walled courtyards flanking *hutongs*. “If you place yourself in the position of those residents in *siheyuan* courtyards that are hidden deep in *hutongs*,” he writes, “those who have to use communal toilets outside even late in winter nights when the north wind is howling, you’ll know how eager they want to leave for a better life.”

Another writer, Li Guowen, asserts that those walled courtyards can produce a “fairly negative mental effect” on residents living in them. He has the following to say in an article titled *Looking beyond the Siheyuan*: “Self-enclosure is the most striking feature of the *siheyuan*... If the Chinese fail to free themselves from the kind of mentality generated in them by those



Here is the residence of Zhao Zichen (1888–1979), a most reputed Chinese theologian, and his daughter Zhao Luorui (1912–1988), a Beijing University professor of English literature, in a painting by French artist Charles Chauderlot. This typical *siheyuan* courtyard (No. 22, Meishuguan Houjie Street) was demolished on October 26, 2000.

3 Six Hundred Hutongs Disappear Every Year; Map of Beijing Renewed Each Passing Month, *Beijing Evening News*, Page 4, October 19, 2001.

walled courtyards, I'm afraid it would be difficult for them to make big progress and achievements."

Writer Chen Jiangong is reputed for his stories filled with a "Beijing flavor." Nevertheless, he goes so far as to be joyous over the demolition of *hutongs* along with those *siheyuan* courtyards hidden in them. "Life goes on exactly like that," he writes in an article titled *Demolition*. "If the character *chai* (to be torn down) is not seen on the walls flanking the narrow lanes and alleys called *hutong*, and if there are no bulldozers roaring into those narrow lanes and alleys, the Capital Financial Street, now rising to the west of the Xidan area, would have simply been non-existent. Residents living in *hutongs* will never be freed from the kind of sufferings they have had to endure for so long, the kind of life characterized by packed living spaces and absence of modern conveniences."

Writer Wang Shuo seems to be a strongest supporter for demolition of *hutongs*. "I wouldn't feel sorry even if all the *hutongs* are razed," he says in *The Hutong, the Disgusting*. "My family used to live in the shadow of Chaoyangmen Gate, in a place popularly known as *Chaoyangmen Chenggen'er*. There were dilapidated *siheyuan* courtyards all over the area, hidden in a web of winding, dilapidated *hutongs*. None of the *siheyuan* courtyards there had any resemblance of those chosen to 'showcase' Beijing's architectural tradition, those pictured to show foreigners how a typical *siheyuan* courtyard looks like. As far as I remember, residents in the area were mostly in rags and look famished... Living in such a place, how can one feel happy?"



Jing'er Hutong about to be demolished. Note the Chinese character *chai* (to be demolished) on the wall, (photo by Wang Jun, November 23, 2000)

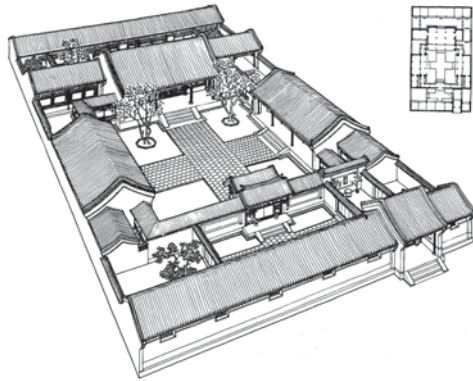
Equally strong, however, is the call for preserving the *siheyuan* courtyards and *hutongs* in Beijing.

The late writer, translator and journalist Xiao Qian (1910–1999) said he was heartbroken at the sight of the demolished *hutongs*. “Those narrow lanes and alleys, or *hutongs*,” he noted in *Old Beijing and its Hutongs*, “are civil structures left over from the middle ancient times... I have

seen quite a lot of lanes and alleys like our *hutongs* in ancient foreign cities such as London and Munich... These are always improved through repairs and people hate to see them got rid of... If only fewer *hutongs* are demolished! If only more of them are preserved!”

As writer Feng Jikai sees it, preservation of *hutongs* and *siheyuan* courtyards in Beijing amounts to preservation of the local culture. “Among historical remains found in a city, relics and culture represent two different concepts,” he told a meeting of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China’s highest consulting body, in March 2000. “Cultural heritage sites and relics are classic humanistic creations, of which imperial and religious structures are the most outstanding representatives. The local culture, however, is represented mostly by residential structures. In residential structures we find a trove of historical and cultural ‘gems,’ the ‘flesh and blood’ of history, things that embody the kind of spirit that makes the city different or even unique. Take for example Beijing. The ‘soul’ of the city is not to be found in the Temple of Heaven (*Tian Tan*) or the Forbidden City. It is epitomized by the *hutongs* and *siheyuan* courtyards. In China, cultural relics are protected, but (local) cultures are not. Residential structures can be demolished at will because they are not seen as cultural relics that deserve protection. The problem is getting increasingly serious, to the extent that even residential structures designated for protection can be torn down at will.”

Writer Shu Yi, son of Lao She (1899–1966), a most prominent contemporary Chinese writer, is a “hard-line protectionist.” In an article titled *Save and Protect Beijing’s Hutongs and Siheyuan Courtyards*, he says: “Business and administrative office towers are mushrooming as developers are



Bird's-eye plan of a typical siheyuan  
(Source: *History of Ancient Chinese Architecture*, 1994)



Wu Liangyong (left) and Ieoh Ming Pei,  
(photo by Wang Jun, April 30, 2002)

invading central Beijing, allegedly for ‘transforming’ those dilapidated residential structures left over from the past. Whole *hutongs* and *siheyuan* courtyards on whole tracts of land are being eliminated in a massive drive of destruction. With eyes wide open, startled Beijing citizens, Chinese from elsewhere and even expatriates are asking the same question: Can this city still be called ‘Beijing?’”

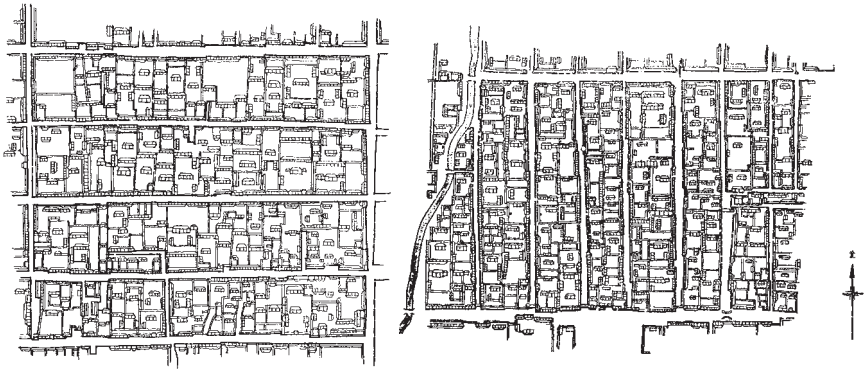
Ieoh Ming Pei, an American Chinese who has a global reputation as an architect, was obviously worried when he spoke with the author in September 1999 and June 2001. During both interviews with the author he urged Beijing to learn from Paris its experience in preserving its old part by developing a new urban area outside it.

**Author:** Some experts call on Beijing to follow the example of Paris in developing la Defence and to have new structures built outside old Beijing. What’s your comment?

**Pei:** This is the best, in fact the most desirable way of preserving old Beijing while improving it. High structures must be built outside the city. *Siheyuan* courtyards must be preserved — I mean whole tracts of them must be preserved. It won’t do to limit the protection effort to singling out one princely mansion here and another there for protection. *Siheyuan* courtyards are not only Beijing’s representative structures. They are a part of the Chinese culture.

**Author:** Your view is identical with that of Professor Liang Sicheng. To ensure preservation of old Beijing in its entirety, some 50 years ago Professor Liang Sicheng called for having a new administration center built outside old Beijing, which should be home to those high-rise buildings now towering along Chang’an Avenue.

**Pei:** Mr. Liang’s view was definitely correct. The city walls shouldn’t have been torn down. To have all those high-rise buildings built outside old Beijing and let old Beijing keep its original character — that should have been the best method, the most ideal method, for Beijing’s redevelopment, and that’s what has been done to Paris. I was unable to discuss the matter with Mr. Liang because I was not in Beijing at the time. I met with him in 1947 or 1948 when he was



Yuan Dynasty streets and lanes as presented in *Map of Beijing under Emperor Qianlong* (partial),  
(Source: *History of Ancient Chinese Architecture*, 1994)

advisor of architecture to the United Nations. He asked me to go back to China to help him. I was unable to go back for I could not obtain a passport (of New China).

In 1950, Beijing lost a good opportunity for (sustainable) development. The government rejected the call of Liang Sicheng and others for developing a new Beijing while preserving the old. Instead, it made transformation of old Beijing the orientation of the city's redevelopment. Then the walls surrounding old Beijing were demolished, replaced by a ring road. As a result, control was lost over the city's expansion and the continuity of the city's history was broken. This was definitely wrong. Were the walls still there, Beijing wouldn't have become what it is today.

**Author:** Would you comment on Beijing's urban construction, and do you have any ideas to contribute to it?

**Pei:** Beijing is the oldest and also the largest among the surviving ancient cities across the world. It represents the quintessence of the centuries-old Chinese art of urban construction. This ancient city has suffered some damage but its overall shape is still there, with large tracts of *hutongs* and *siheyuan* courtyards adding beauty to those temples and palaces. Some international friends have advised the Beijing Municipal Government to properly protect old Beijing and apply to the UNESCO to have old Beijing with the Imperial City as center enshrined in the List of World Cultural Heritage Sites. It is obvious that despite the damage it has suffered, old Beijing still deserves protection. Old Beijing is a well-planned, well-designed whole, which is in fact its most salient feature. It should be protected in its entirety.



A bird's-eye view of the streets, *hutongs* and *siheyuan* courtyards in the Xianyukou and Dashila area, (photo by Song Lianfeng, October 4, 1999)



A bird's-eye-view of the Sun-Facing Gate (*Zhengyangmen* or *Qianmen*) and its surrounding areas in the early Republican period (by courtesy of the Library of Qinghua University School of Architecture)

Beijing was once reputed across the world for a unsurpassed beauty. Unfortunately, many of its beautiful things have disappeared. Many of them have been torn down and those that have survived the destruction are now overshadowed by newly-built structures that are ugly-looking. The city's old skyline is gone. There is the need to take the Forbidden City as the center in Beijing's urban planning. Round this center, zones should be delimited to ensure control over the heights of construction projects. Construction projects in the central zone should be low in height. Higher buildings may be allowed beyond the central zone, in areas from the Second Ring Road to the Third Ring Road, where structures may be higher and higher as they spread farther and farther away from old Beijing. High-rise buildings should be located beyond the old city — that's what Paris has done for a new, orderly outlook.<sup>4</sup>

Some experts, however, fail to understand the significance of the “learning-from-Paris” call made by experts like Ieoh Ming Pei. Instead, they stand for learning from Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891), who performed a series of “major operations” on Paris after he was appointed by Napoleon III to the post of prefect of the Seine *département* of France in 1853.

In an article titled *My Views on Beijing's Urban Outlook* published in the June 2000 issue of *Beijing Urban Planning and Construction* journal, Professor Wu Huanjia of Qinghua University said: “Whatever you call it, an ‘outstanding creation’ or something else that ‘epitomizes the fine traditions of ancient cities,’ it is, after all, deplorable that for well over 200 years from the 17th century on, the city of Beijing made no progress and remained what it had always been. We deeply regret that contemporary Chinese economy and society were stagnant as the country was conservative



A bird's-eye-view of Beijing's Imperial City,  
(photo by Song Lianfeng, September 28, 1999)

4 Wang Jun: *Let Beijing's Magnificent Skyline be Restored — An Interview with Ieoh Ming Pei*, Xinhua News Agency, December 17, 2002.

and backward. The same is true to the development of our cities which, too, is regrettable... The shape of Beijing as an ancient capital has gone by and large, and it has assumed a new look. Because of this, an all-round preservation of the city's original shape and outlook is now impossible... Some people are worried, saying that if this state of affairs continues, sooner or later Beijing will be turned into something like Hong Kong or Singapore. I think this view is a bit too simplistic... Regarding the ancient structures in Beijing and the city's original shape, the only correct policy should be one of redeveloping what remains useful while discarding what has become useless."

Professor Wu Huanjia cited what Geoges Eugène Haussmann did to Paris to justify his argument:

*For a long time after Paris was made the capital of France toward the end of the 9th century, the city had nothing but a web of narrow, winding streets plus clusters of single-story wooden structures. It was not until Renaissance did work begin to give the city a new look. From the 17th century on, French kings invariably devoted themselves to the transformation of Paris. Many old, dilapidated residential buildings were torn down and replaced by multi-storey structures built with stones and bricks. Hand-in-hand were construction of new roads and squares. Old city walls were largely demolished under Louis XIV (1643–1715), and a round-the-city ring road was built on the ruins of the walls. Also during this period, Avenue des Champs Elysees and what is now Place Charles de Gaulle that features the Arc de Triomphe began taking shape. By the 19th century, large numbers of five- and six-storey buildings had mushroomed to accommodate a rapidly increasing population resulting from a growth*

*of the capitalist economy. Also, omnibus services and gas lamps had appeared in the city. Sweeping transformation of Paris was carried out under Napoleon III (r. 1852–1870) by Geoges Eugène Haussmann. The remaining city walls were demolished to make room for a new ring road. Wide, straight boulevards and tree-lined streets were built in medieval Paris, along with parks, gardens and residential estates. The prefect of the Seine département of France also supervised over the construction of the Opéra National de Paris. Thanks to the transformation, Paris came to be recognized as the most advanced, most beautiful city in the world.*



Cover of the May 27, 2000 issue of *Le Figaro*

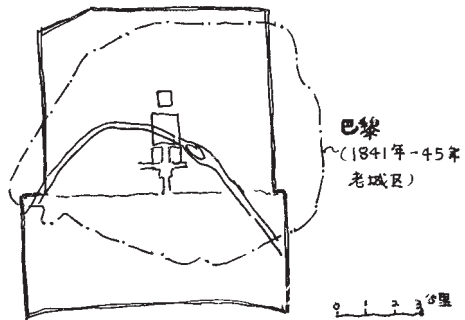
Just one month before the article was published, the May 27, 2002 issue of *le Figaro* magazine ran a cover story that asked sternly: *Hausmann: Is that You Who Destroyed Paris?* The article was authored by Alexandre Gady, a young historian on the Committee for Conservation of Old Paris. Look, a hundred years after Hausmann died, Parisians are condemning him for “massacre” of the medieval Paris! Challenging Georges Valance, an expert in urbanism who called Hausmann a “giant” in his book *L’affaire Hausmann*, Gady described the same man as an “incompetent planner” and held him responsible for the destruction of the French capital’s cultural heritage.

It is worthwhile to note that even Georges Valance had to admit that people of Hausmann’s time had no idea of the need to protect historical and cultural heritage. No one denies that Hausmann did bring about some positive changes to Paris. Today, when the human race is becoming increasingly keen to cultural conservation, more and more people have sided with Alexandre Gady in criticizing Hausmann for breaking the historical and cultural continuity of Paris.

On August 16, 2002, Liu Thai Ker, a prominent urban planner and chairman of the National Arts Council Singapore, talked to the author on Hausmann’s transformation of Paris. He was in the Chinese capital for a symposium on the development of the Beijing Central Business District (CBD).

**Author:** Some scholars stand for transforming Beijing the way Hausmann transformed Paris. What’s your opinion on the idea?

**Liu Thai Ker:** I am totally against this idea. A few centuries ago, urban development had to proceed at a much slower pace than now. Therefore, there was no talk about preservation of old buildings and streets. Today, once bulldozers start working whole tracts of built space in a city could be razed in the twinkling of an eye. This is a new problem facing cities in the contemporary world, a problem not really very old. Even Paris has had its development re-planned. The change of Paris into what it looks now has been a prolonged process. Look beyond Avenue des Champs Elysees.



Here is a diagrammatic sketch of old Beijing in comparison with old Paris 1841–1845. Old Paris is slightly smaller than old Beijing in area but is better preserved (Source: Comments on Beijing’s City Planning by Wu Liangyong, 1979)

Near the city's axis you can still find many Gothic structures. Likewise, there are still some old buildings in and around (the once walled) old Beijing; that's why I am calling for effort to ensure that the old and the new in Beijing continue to exist side by side, to make the old and new an integral whole. Let's see Lyon. In that fantastically beautiful city, you'll see old things still there, including even things left over from the Roman Empire period. Why is it that Beijing couldn't be a city like Lyon?

**Author:** But *siheyuan* courtyards are seen by some people as not worthy of protection, as they are too old for preservation.

**Liu:** Those old courtyards are, as a matter of fact, what people outside China are most interested in. *Siheyuan* courtyards are seen by some as unsuitable for use simply because they are not fixed with modern conveniences. The fact is that *siheyuan* courtyards can't be better in so far as the living environment is concerned. The living environment provided by *siheyuan* courtyards is especially good in spring and autumn when they are bathed in sunshine. *Siheyuan* courtyards suit Beijing's weather conditions most perfectly, testifying to the wisdom of the ancestors of the Chinese. Doubtlessly, such courtyards deserve preservation.

**Author:** There are also people who insist that *siheyuan* courtyards should be torn down because they are already *dazayuan* — dilapidated courtyards packed with too many households.

**Liu:** You need to do your best to preserve *siheyuan* courtyards as a whole, though some individual courtyards are too dilapidated for repairs and therefore have to be demolished. There are many ways to preserve them. One is to demolish a *siheyuan* courtyard and then restore it, in such a way as to ensure that the rebuilt courtyard looks exactly the same as the original. You can also do major repairs to an old courtyard, making sure that its vital components are painstakingly preserved so that these can be returned to where they should be when the repairs are done. Where there is will, there is a way. What is crucial is whether you have the will (to preserve *siheyuan* courtyards). Another aspect of the protection effort concerns money. Where to get the money needed for it? May I ask this question: Do you really treasure your history? If you do, I think money shouldn't be too big a problem.

**Author:** People who call for demolishing *hutongs* say these lanes and alleys are so narrow that it is impossible to have public utilities installed there. What is your comment on such an assertion?

**Liu:** That is basically a technical problem, to be exact. But it is not purely technical because again, the will counts. Yes, some *siheyuan*

courtyards have to be demolished to make room for facilities vital for people's life such as parking lots and transformer stations. Nevertheless, I'm sure the problem can be resolved. Not long ago, in Suzhou, I saw some revamped old structures. Everything there was well done. I think Beijing can do an equally good job so long as it has the will.

On September 1, 2002, Zhang Kaiji, a most reputed Chinese architect, aired his views at a symposium held by the Culture and History Committee of the Beijing Municipal CPPCC Committee on transformation and protection of old Beijing. The 88-year-old architect said:

*I have been to many cities, and I count Paris and Beijing as among the best. Paris is well-preserved, but I cannot bear the sight of Beijing. In an interview with me, a woman correspondent of the Italian newspaper l'Unita called Beijing a "poor imitation of Hong Kong." It is indeed deplorable that this globally renowned cultural and historical city is now seen as inferior to Hong Kong!*

*The value of Beijing stems from its city walls and skyline. It's a pity that virtually all the city walls have been torn down. The Oriental Plaza<sup>5</sup> is too large and it is detrimental to the cultural environment of the Forbidden City. Its building is a mistake that could have been forestalled.*

*A few high-rise buildings were once built in Paris, but people were vehemently opposed to construction of such buildings. In the end, la Defence was made home to high-rise buildings. In contrast, Beijing has been so indifferent toward its ancient structures!*



*Siheyuan courtyards with trees inside (photo by Wang Jun, October 2002)*

5 The Oriental Plaza, which was initially built in 1999, lies in between the Wangfujing Business District and Dongdan Business Street, at the north side of East Chang'an Avenue. Seen as overshadowing the Forbidden City just a few blocks away in the west, it is one of the most controversial construction projects undertaken in Beijing in recent years.

*Construction of high-rise buildings must be brought under control — this is vital to Beijing. Do those high-rise buildings and glass screen walls mean modernization? It's naïve to think that way!*

At an academic symposium held in Beijing on June 29, 2002, Kenneth Yeang of Malaysia, a globally renowned architect specializing in designing of ecologically friendly structures, cited *siheyuan* courtyards in Beijing in support of his theory. He classified residential structures into the following three categories: those capable of ensuring comfort to the dweller without having to use energy or mechanical means; those partially dependent on use of energy or mechanical means to provide comfort to the dweller; and those totally dependent on use of energy and mechanical means for the purpose. Those of the first category, *siheyuan* courtyards in Beijing for example, are the best, and the worst are those of the last category. "Look," Yeang told the gathering, "by integrating designing of the structures in a courtyard in light of the local ecological conditions, you'll build something that is warm in winter and cool in summer even though not much energy is used."

"That," he continued, "is what I have worked persistently to achieve."

Asked to comment on the demolition of *siheyuan* courtyards, Yeang replied bluntly: "Rebuild those that have been demolished."

### **"Will our Capital City be Moved to another Place?"**

On August 7, 2002, a 23-member delegation from the Coordination Commission of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) arrived in Beijing for study of the city's preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games.

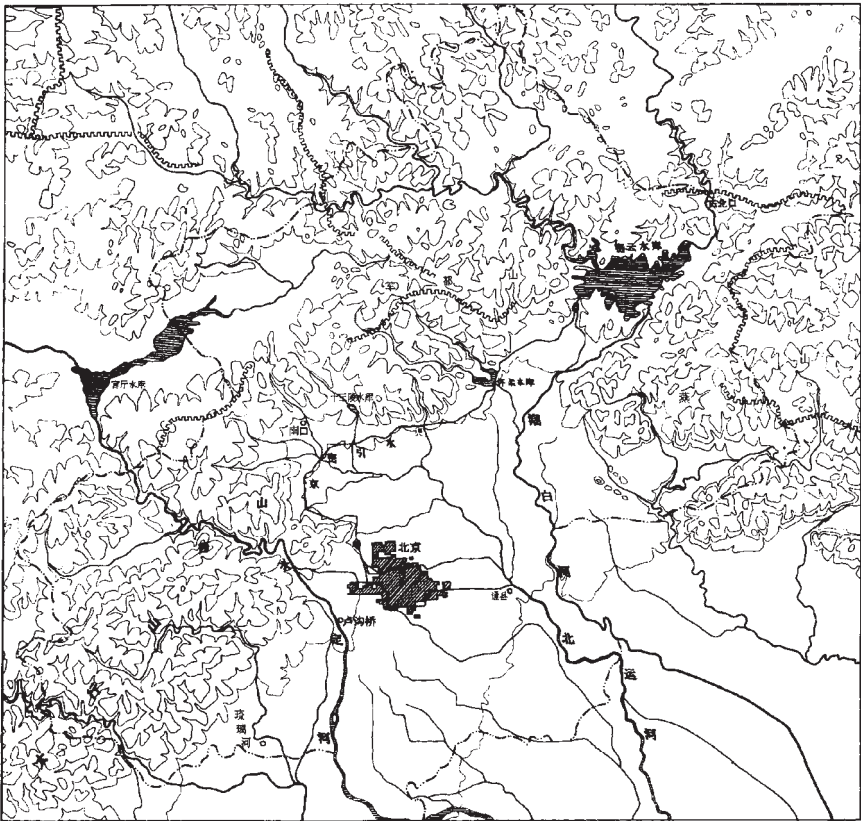
It was a day of clear, blue sky after rain. "We are happy to see the gorgeous blue sky of Beijing. It would be a blessing to keep it that way for the opening of the Olympic Games in 2008," François Carrard, the IOC Coordination Commission's director-general, told the press shortly after alighting the plane, hinting that environmental problems would be vital for China's first-ever Olympics.

Two days afterward, Chairman Hein Verbruggen of the IOC Coordination Commission spoke on Beijing's traffic conditions. He said he was "surprised" to find that each and every year, the city had 250,000 more cars running on its streets. "That would be a big challenge to traffic during the Games," he said.

Comments from these IOC officials testify to a deplorable fact that traffic congestions and environmental pollution are most serious problems facing Beijing.

For decades, urban Beijing has kept expanding. Old Beijing, the once walled part of what is now Beijing Municipality, is designated the center of the city's expansion, around which newly urbanized areas spread out, in a way popularly dubbed as *tandabing* — the “making of a pancake.” As time goes by, this “pancake,” so to speak, has grown larger and larger and heavier and heavier, compelling experts to warn against a possible “bursting” of the city.

Beijing is now gasping under traffic and environmental pressures. The city right now has about two million cars, fewer than many other large cities in the world, but it is becoming increasingly notorious for traffic congestions. Old Beijing, now lying within the Second Ring Road built on the demolished city walls, was a vast expanse of green in the 1960s. Now, looking down from atop the Jingshan Hill, the commanding height



A topographic map of Beijing  
(Source: *Collected Works of Hou Renzhi*, 1998)

of central Beijing, you'll find that the same area has turned into a sea of tall, concrete buildings with green patches seen only occasionally.

What is broadly referred to as *shiqu*, or "urban Beijing," now comprises the "central cluster (of built spaces)" with old Beijing as its core and ten "fringe clusters" on the city's former suburbs, including Beiyuan (the North Imperial Hunting Ground, 13 kilometers from Tiananmen), Nanyuan (the South Imperial Hunting Ground, 11.5 kilometers from Tiananmen), as well as the Shijingshan and Dingfuzhuang areas, which are 17 kilometers and 16 kilometers from Tiananmen. The central clusters and fringe clusters are separated by green belts and the entire urban Beijing is serviced by ring roads one within another. To put it another way, old Beijing now serves as the city's sole urban center, around which urban Beijing spreads out in all directions. Due to this pattern of development, urban Beijing has expanded 4.9 times in area since the early 1950s, and its population has increased nearly four times.



Beijing's expansion as shown by this map  
(Source: *Atlas of Beijing*, 1994)

- 1. Second Ring Road built on the demolished city walls
- 2. Third Ring Road
- 3. Fourth Ring Road
- 4. Fifth Ring Road

As the sole urban center of the city, old Beijing has had to play the impossible role of being the business, administrative and tourist center of the entire metropolis. As a result, high-rise buildings have kept mushrooming there. By the 1980s, traffic congestions had become unbearable, compelling the authorities to build ring roads one within another around old Beijing. Building of the second, third and fourth ring roads has been completed and the fifth and sixth are being built.<sup>6</sup>

Even with these ring roads in service, there is still no significant improvement in Beijing's traffic. According to 2001 statistics provided by Beijing's traffic police, serious congestions are frequent occurrences at 99 of the city's 400 main road crossings. In theory, in an hour, 19 buses should be able to pass through Zhongguancun Street on the No. 332 bus route. In rush hours, however, only nine are able to inch through. It takes a bus on the No. 300 route an average of 160 minutes to run end-to-end along the Third Ring Road, 40 minutes longer than planned.

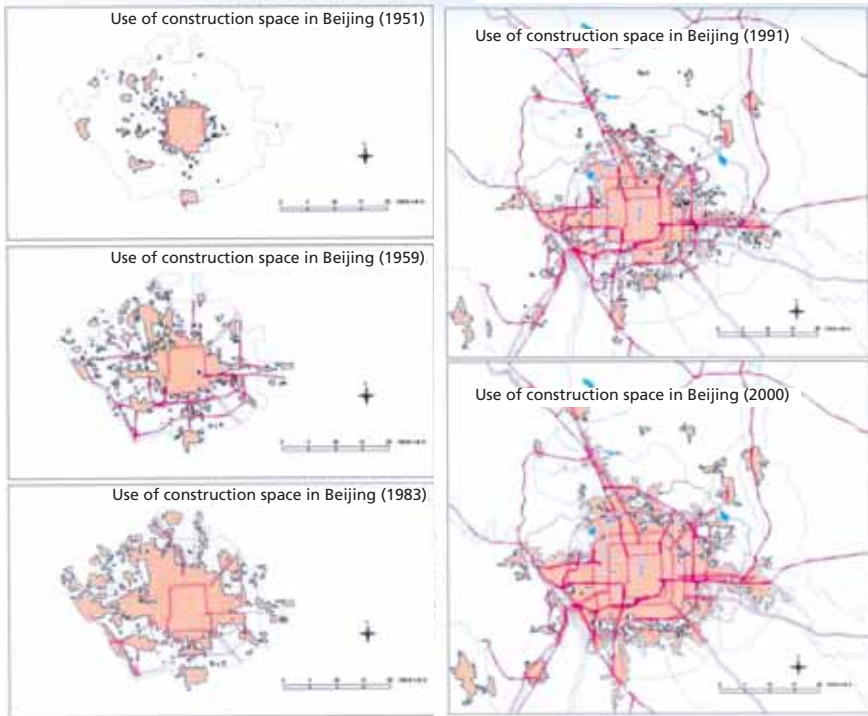
Traffic congestions are blamed for the deteriorating quality of central Beijing's environment. Atmospheric pollution is the top environmental problem facing Beijing. According to some studies, car emission is now more than 60 percent responsible for the atmospheric pollution in areas within the Third Ring Road, while a decade ago, at the end of the 1980s, the corresponding figure was around 30 percent. Other sources of pollution, such as coal-burning stoves and boilers, are also to blame, but it is beyond doubt that cars, now rapidly increasing in numbers, are the major culprit. Due to an endless, increasingly intensified development, central Beijing is now dotted with new structures high enough to render normal airflows hardly possible, resulting in increased density of pollutants in the air.<sup>7</sup>

More than half of Beijing's business companies and traffic concentrate in old Beijing, once the walled capital city of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Despite that, development of old Beijing continues to accelerate for commercial purpose. While going all-out to expand and modernize the Wangfujing Business District, the Dongcheng District Government vows to develop the area under its jurisdiction into Beijing's "core area" while sweating to complete the development of the so-called "Beijing Central Commerce District". In Xicheng District, work is under full swing to develop the Beijing Financial Street, the local version of the "Wall Street." Also in Xicheng District, the Xidan Business District is being expanded to eventually

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6 Beijing's Fifth Ring Road was opened to traffic in October 2003. The Sixth was partially opened to traffic before the Beijing Olympic Games in August 2008 — Tr.

7 Wang Jun and Liu Jiang: *On the Building of a New Beijing by Changing the City's Construction Plans*, No. 14 issue, *Outlook* weekly, April 1, 2002.



Urban Beijing's expansion since the 1950s

(Source: *Study of the Planning for Urban and Rural Development of Greater Beijing Encompassing Beijing, Tianjin and North Hebei*, 2001)

cover 1.5 million square meters. In Chongwen District, old structures on a vast area beyond the already demolished Chongwenmen Gate are being torn down to make room for business plazas, supermarkets, department stores, malls and hotels. In Xuanwu District, workers are racing against time to develop a business area with the ancient Caishikou Street as center. Everywhere in the city, whole tracts of land are being “cleaned” amid the roaring of bulldozers, and gone are those *hutongs* and *siheyuan* courtyards, replaced by high-rise structures supposedly “highlighting” achievements of Beijing’s modernization drive. The endless construction drive to increase central Beijing’s “focusing effect” has brought about an increasingly great pressure upon the city in terms of population densities, employment, traffic and environment.

Decentralization of the population in old Beijing has always been a major task the Municipal Government tries to fulfill through expansion of the city. The task is duly stressed in the *Beijing Urban Master Plan (1991–2010)*, an overall blueprint worked out by the Beijing Municipal Government for

the city's development, which won approval of the State Council, China's central government, in 1993. According to the plan, new residential areas and satellite towns shall be built to accommodate families moved out of old Beijing, from the "central cluster" of urban Beijing. Nevertheless, the planned targets have proved to be far from being realistic. As Beijing's urban functions are concentrated in old Beijing, government officials find it difficult to persuade people living there to leave. Moreover, old Beijing has become increasingly attractive to developers as the policy puts the stress on "transforming" instead of preserving it. The population densities of old Beijing have constantly grown while new buildings keep rising there.

Hand-in-hand with "transformation" of old Beijing goes construction of residential estates in suburban Beijing, a job that has been largely thrown into disarray.

The so-called "fringe clusters" are meant mainly to provide living spaces. Meanwhile, most jobs, as always, have remained in the "central cluster" where the most important urban functions of the capital city — administrative, business, commercial, cultural, educational, etc — are performed. Meanwhile, satellite towns even further away from the "central cluster" have been or are being constructed, in places like Liangxiang (29 kilometers from Tiananmen), Daxing (29 kilometers from Tiananmen) and Changping (37 kilometers from Tiananmen) to accommodate people who moved out of the "central cluster."

The municipal authorities are building a residential area called Wangjing lying nine kilometers from Tiananmen, which is expected to be home to somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 people. Also being built is the Huilongguan residential area 19 kilometers from Tiananmen for up to 300,000 residents. Both are large enough to be full-fledged cities in terms of population, but few jobs are available there and day after day, residents have to spend long hours in chokingly jammed buses and subway cars commuting between their homes and old Beijing where they are employed.

This state of affairs, in turn, discourages people living in the "central cluster" to move out. With few jobs available, neither "fringe clusters" nor satellite towns can in any way be attractive to the working masses. Here is the dilemma: redevelopment of the "central cluster" impedes development of suburban Beijing, and *vice versa*.

Studies show that this "pancake-making" way of expansion can hardly continue as open spaces available in urban Beijing have kept dwindling. According to government plans, urban Beijing should be limited to 1,040 square kilometers in area. A relatively appropriate way of using the space is to designate 614 square kilometers for construction while reserving the rest,



Now let's hear what Wu Liangyong says on the two graphics showing how construction space is related to a city's environment.

On the upper graphic, he says:

Dust screens are frequently seen in the core areas of some large cities in the West, where there is too great a concentration of high-rise buildings. Dust and smoke resulting from activities in a city invariably rise. The flow of air will become stagnant when meeting with cold air over the city's core area, forming a convective current or "dust screen" that aggravates the so-called "heat island effect" and dissipates only when there is strong wind or rain. (Source of information: Science America)

Wu Liangyong has the following to say on the lower graphic:

Let's assume that those low buildings in old Beijing are preserved along with the green spots and water surfaces there while all the high buildings are located outside, within an appropriate distance from old Beijing. Then we will have a "horizontal" Beijing. This way of doing things will not only enhance the city's aesthetic value, but will also cut the average height of buildings in central Beijing and the population densities there. Meanwhile, the green area in central Beijing will increase. To some extent, the damage done by urban activities to the environment can be repaired and the "dust screen" effect can be avoided or alleviated. To sum up, Beijing, the core of the envisaged Greater Beijing, will be congenial for living.

become even more acute in the years to come.

Beijing also suffers an increasingly acute shortage of land resources. Arable land now averages 0.1 hectare for each member of Beijing's rural population, down from the 0.23 hectare per capita in 1952. Furthermore, ecological and traffic problems, as well as problems with energy supply, are also impeding Beijing's development.<sup>8</sup>

What merits even greater attention, however, is the fact that of the 1,040 square kilometers designated for urban Beijing, 490.1 square kilometers had, by 1999, been used for construction. Moreover, Beijing's urban popula-

426 square kilometers, for greening to ensure that the city will be congenial to live in. The population of urban Beijing should be limited to 6.45 million. If the limit is overstepped, experts have warned, Beijing will suffer an even more acute shortage of resources.

The shortage of water is already keenly felt. Beijing is one of the thirstiest cities across China. Water resources available in areas under the jurisdiction of Beijing Municipality average 342 cubic meters for each member of the local population, far less than the national average of 2,517 cubic meters. The amount of exploitable water resources in the area is calculated at 4.2–4.5 billion cubic meters per year, breaking down into 2.2 billion cubic meters of surface water and 2–2.5 billion cubic meters of underground water. Depression cones are now found beneath areas around urban Beijing, the result of excess exploitation of underground water over the decades, suggesting that the shortage is likely to

8 Wang Dong: *On the Planning and Construction of Beijing's Satellite Towns*, in *Collected Papers Submitted to the Academic Symposium on Beijing's Development Through to 2049*, compiled by the Beijing Urban Planning Society, September–October of 2000.

tion had grown to 6.112 million, close to the planned limit of 6.45 million. To sum up, urban Beijing can no longer be expanded without restraint.

The municipal authorities have adopted a series of technical measures to address the ever-growing environmental and traffic problems, busying themselves with building new roads and flyovers while trying to bring the emission of pollutants under control. Some technical problems may become less serious as a result, but such measures can in no way bring about a fundamental resolution to those problems that are threatening to ruin Beijing's effort for a sustainable development.

Tokyo serves as a typical example of trying to resolve its problems by taking technical measures. The city is reputed for a highly efficient mass transit system, a result of huge public spending. Despite that, many other vital problems are still there, forcing the Japanese to discuss the possibility of moving their capital city elsewhere.

Tokyo and Beijing are roughly of the same size in terms of population, and the cities are also identical in pattern, both featuring a "core area" surrounded by ring roads one within another. Back in the 1940s, there were plans to build a complete system of green spots and a ring-shaped green belt round urban Tokyo. These, 1–5 kilometers thick and 180 square kilometers in combined area, would be located 10 to 15 kilometers beyond central Tokyo. After World War II, such plans were shelved and meanwhile, urban Tokyo rapidly spread out into its suburban areas. The city's population increased by an average of 300,000 people each year during the 1950s and by the 1960s, had exceeded 10 million. Tokyo's urban construction plans were revised again and again, pushing the planned green spots and belts farther and farther away from central Tokyo. By 1968, the area of planned green belt had been cut to some 90 square kilometers. In the 1980s, plans were made for building a "green buffer zone" 50–60 kilometers away from central Tokyo.

Interestingly, the way Tokyo expands is dubbed as "making of *konomiyaki*," a kind of pizza-like pancake. Traffic congestions once plagued Tokyo which, like Beijing, features a high concentration of urban functions in its core area. This compelled the government to spend huge sums of money improving the city's traffic infrastructure. As a result, Tokyo is now serviced by a highly developed mass transit system, a network of subways and urban rail lines that covers the entire city while linking central Tokyo to all cities in the Tokyo metropolitan sphere. Public transport has become the primary choice of Tokyoites when they venture out of their homes. It accounts for 70 percent of the travels recorded daily in the 23 districts of metropolitan Tokyo, topping any other city in the world, and the figure is even higher —

90.6 percent — for the core area of Tokyo. Wherever you are in the city, there is a subway station within 500 meters at the most.

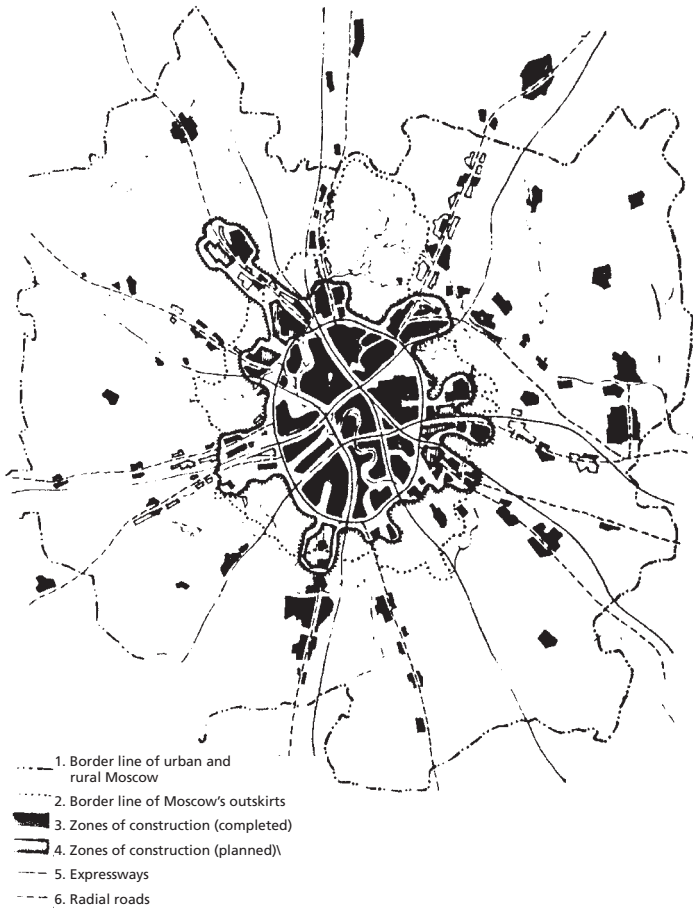
Meanwhile, Tokyo subways enjoy the dubious distinction of being among the world's most crowded. Moreover, atmospheric and noise pollution caused by traffic remains serious, prompting the general public to call central Tokyo the "hell of the working masses." The authorities have come to realize that the policy of using technical means to solve traffic problems and increase the city's space for development has been driven to the extreme and consequently, the possibility of "moving the administration center out of central Tokyo" is being discussed.

Beijing is facing the same problems as Tokyo as both cities have identical development patterns.

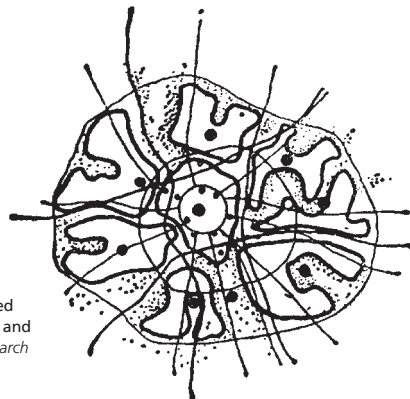
- Green space has kept on dwindling. According to its 1959 plans, urban Beijing should be surrounded by a green belt zone some 300 square kilometers in area. By 1982, the planned area of the zone had been cut to 260 square kilometers. It continued dwindling, to a mere 244 square kilometers by 1992. Even within what remained of the planned green zone, non-built spaces were no more than 160 square kilometers. For other major cities in the world, green and built spaces normally assume a ratio of 1:2. Beijing, however, is far from being able to meet that ratio.
- Urban Beijing has been rapidly expanding. By 1993, just two years after the State Council approved the *Beijing Urban Master Plan (1991–2010)*, Beijing's core area had expanded to 288.07 square kilometers, meeting the planned target 15 years ahead of schedule. The area's population had grown to 5.27 million, 820,000 more than what was planned for 2010.
- The municipal authorities have tried hard to use technical methods to solve the city's traffic and environmental problems, but the results are far from being satisfactory as Beijing's urban functions are getting increasingly concentrated in central Beijing.

Problems facing Beijing, taken as a whole, are not so serious like those facing Tokyo, but such problems are bound to become worse. Here is the question: Is Beijing finding itself in an impasse like Tokyo?

The way Beijing has expanded is based on blueprints for the expansion of Moscow. It was decided in the mid-1950s under the guidance of advisors from the former Soviet Union. When those Soviet advisors were in Beijing guiding local officials and experts in mapping out plans for the city's



A sketch map of Moscow  
 (Source: *The Development of Beijing Seen from the Population Movements of Large Cities in the World* by Bai Demao, 1985)



A diagrammatic sketch of Moscow's urban planning after readjustment. Under the new plans, Moscow shall be divided into eight residential districts with a city-level urban center and a population of 1 million for each (From *A Collection of Research Papers on Beijing's Urban Planning*, 1996)

development, problems were already emerging from Moscow's expansion in all directions with the *Kremlin* as the center. Since the 1960s, new plans have been made to address traffic and other problems affecting the life of the local residents, calling for developing diverse urban centers while extending the wedge-shaped green belt linking the suburban forests into central Moscow. Ironically, Beijing has stuck to the Moscow-style urban development pattern until today.

On February 22, 2000, the *Economic Reference News* devoted a whole page to an article titled *Will Our Capital City be Moved to another Place?* "Beijing is bursting while its cultural quintessence is being wiped out," Fang Ke and Zhang Yan, young urban planners, wrote. "The on-going massive demolition in old Beijing, supposedly to make room for new roads, can in no way ease the increasingly serious traffic congestions, but will instead aggravate the problems caused by concentration of the city's urban functions there." They compared this state of affairs to the making of flour dough by hand: "Water is added when there is too much flour and flour is added because there is too much water — a vicious cycle that goes on and on."

"The Japanese are considering whether to move their overcrowded capital to another place," Fang and Zhang wrote. "If the way old Beijing expands cannot be changed — remember: traffic congestions frequently occur even on the 100 meter-wide Chang'an Avenue — it won't be impossible for us to have to move our capital elsewhere." The article continued, "Over the decades, the municipal governments that have run the city in succession all have tried to accomplish 'big' things within their terms of service while counting on the central government for support and assistance in resolving the city's problems. That explains why none of them has worked in real earnest to study matters of strategic importance to Beijing's development in the future. Beijing's urban construction planning has always been directed toward the city's immediate needs for economic expansion, with the focus invariably placed on the redevelopment of old Beijing. As a result, opportunities have been lost one after another for a proper resolution to the conflict between preservation and modernization of old Beijing."

The article recalled what happened half a century ago to Beijing's city planning. Back in the early 1950s, Fang and Zhang wrote, many things were waiting to be done in Beijing that had been designated capital of New China just a couple of years before. Among these, the most urgent was to decide where Beijing's "core area," or the envisaged central administration district of New China's government should be located. On this matter there were two diametrically opposed views. One called for using old Beijing as the administration district of the central government. According to its

exponents, old Beijing had always been the capital of China and logically, should be home to the central government of New China. Opponents, who were headed by Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhanxiang, stood for building a new administration center in the Gongzhufen area on the city's western suburbs so that old Beijing would be preserved in its entirety. "Under the influence of the prevalent ideology," Fang and Zhang wrote, "old Beijing was seen as 'heritage of feudalism,' as something that must be 'revolutionized' and 'transformed.' And before long, the debate, which was academic in nature, was made a political issue and the view calling for preserving old Beijing was rejected."

"Today," they continued, "people can't help marveling the foresight and sagacity of Liang Sicheng at the sight of what has happened to the city by basing the administration center in old Beijing. Here is the glaring fact: in just about 40 years, urban Beijing has spread out to the Fourth Ring Road. Urban Beijing of today is six or seven times as large as old Beijing even with those satellite towns not counted. It means that over the decades, six or seven new cities as large as old Beijing have been built. Diverse, new urban centers would have sprung up outside old Beijing had the capital city's development been appropriately planned. It is now clear that Liang Sicheng's view concerned not only the selection of a site for the new Chinese government. It crystallized a sound, strategic thinking on the development of Beijing."

Here is the circle drawn by history: Beijing's urban development has ended up where it began.