PROJECT MUSE®

Historic Urban Landscape in Beijing: The Gulou Project and

Its Contested Memories
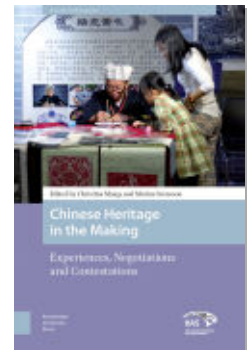
Published by

➡ For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66493

4   Historic Urban Landscape in Beijing

The Gulou Project and Its Contested Memories[1]

Florence Graezer Bideau and Haiming Yan

Abstract
The chapter scrutinizes public reactions to two successive projects (2010 and 2012) that seek to transform the urban fabric of Gulou, a neighbourhood in Beijing. By discussing collective memory (through lived and embodied experience of heritage and the community's attachments to the place), it provides insights into the complex and evolving relationship between official, professional and local narratives and the memories of its inhabitants. The study analyses the role and power of different actors involved in the urban redevelopment and heritage management of the neighbourhood. Its conclusion sheds light on local heritage categories and on the asymmetry between relocation and preservation issues.

Keywords: heritage, collective memory, recommendation of historic urban landscape, Gulou neighbourhood, urban transformation, preservation, resistances

Beijing's urban fabric and its current transformation

In February 1950, four months after Mao Zedong announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China, two architectural approaches were competing for the transformation of the capital city of New China. Architectural idealism aimed to preserve the old city intact within its walls while political pragmatism, based on a Soviet model, aimed to transform the old city by implementing industrial and administrative zones (Sit 1995). Tradition gave way to modernity. Less than 50 years later, the new master plan for the development of Beijing (1991-2010) reversed the trend with a strong emphasis on the aesthetics, or visual atmosphere (*fengmao*), of the city, taking account of its ancient and traditional character (Abramson 2001, 2007; Gaubatz 1995). Changing the scope of preservation from individual buildings to an entire district had a real impact on urban heritage. The fragmented politics of urban planning and property speculation during the Reform Era had severely affected China's built environment (Hsing 2012; Leaf 1995; Wu 1997).[2] The traditional areas in Beijing composed of *hutongs* (alleys) and *siheyuan* (courtyard houses) are highly valued as historic, economic, and cultural areas, but these became the subjects of controversy during developments that potentially jeopardize cultural heritage (Felli 2005).

   The disappearance of half of the 7000 hutongs in less than 50 years (or 24 per cent of the old city) has raised awareness of the protection of cultural heritage at both local and national levels. In the year 2000, to meet this challenge the Municipality of Beijing designated 25 historic preservation districts. These consisted of traditional neighbourhoods considered to be a microcosm of the broader city unit plan with its historic structural elements (walls, doors, lanes, hutongs, official buildings, temples) and immaterial culture (mixed population, ways of living, social and cultural practices). The Shichahai area is typical of such a historic and cultural neighbourhood. It has over '40 historic monuments (including temples and royal mansions), the largest natural lake in the city, and a large historic residential area with relatively well-maintained courtyard houses' (Zhang 2008: 200).[3] For generations many have viewed the area's rich legacy of historic buildings

---

2   The rehabilitation of Ju'er hutong (Wu 1999) – a governmental project of the rehabilitation of dilapidated housing in the inner city – which attempted to improve the housing conditions of its inhabitants when the market mechanism was introduced in Beijing, gives us an interesting insight into the management of urban development in the 1990s (Yang and Fang 2003).
3   In 1992 Shichahai was labelled 'Historical and Cultural Scenic District' by the municipal government of Beijing.

as an organic living tradition. It includes the Bell and Drum Towers, and the chessboard grid of traditional courtyards 'with public life spilling into the hutong alleyways and private life hidden behind brick walls in the courtyard houses' (Ouroussoff 2008). The native families of Beijing have gradually been replaced by migrants from other provinces, both old and new, as well as workers, small entrepreneurs (shop owners, restaurant or café managers), craftsmen, students, and expatriates. Shichahai is typical of an area where tangible and intangible heritage meet and where local inhabitants and communities make a living from their neighbourhood and contribute to its urban development. Their claim for the recognition of their right to belong to their place of residence and to not be displaced has become a crucial issue (Broudehoux 2004; Merle 2014; Siu 2007; Zhang 2013).

Fifty years on, the preservation of the old city is once again at stake. Will the government's plans, initiatives, and projects finally better integrate the historic monuments with their surroundings, their social and cultural environment? More plans and initiatives have been implemented to protect the urban fabric, yet they seem only to worsen it. How can we understand the paradox? What is missing in the initiatives? How can we understand the efforts of different groups, such as the government agencies, expert-driven projects, and local voices? Concepts such as historic urban landscapes (HUL) and collective memory are useful analytical tools to address these questions.

HUL and collective memory

Over the past decade, heritage management has become key to sustainable urban development. At the international level, reflection on the renewal of urban conservation approaches culminated in the 2011 UNESCO 'Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape' (RHUL). UNESCO defines HUL as 'the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of "historic centre" or "ensemble" to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting' (UNESCO 2011: Article 8). To define the scope of its definition more closely, the following is added: 'This wider context includes notably the site's topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, its built environment, both historic and contemporary, its infrastructures above and below ground, its open spaces and gardens, its land use patterns and spatial organization, perceptions and visual relationships, as well as all other elements of the urban structure. It also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions

of heritage as related to diversity and identity' (UNESCO 2011: Article 9). The innovative perspective of RHUL lies in its 'holistic approach', which seeks to transcend the opposition of conservation and development, nature and culture, tangible and intangible, and the protection of antiquity and creation of the new (cf. UNESCO 1972, 2003).

This concept seems to be all-encompassing, one that addresses all tangible and intangible elements. Yet it remains pure rhetoric, without any concrete guidelines as to how the 'social and cultural practices and values' should be preserved. There is legitimate criticism of the weak impact of UNESCO recommendations on national laws and practices, largely because it is subject to local political, economic, environmental, cultural, and social issues, as well as legal and administrative constraints.

This is especially true of cities such as Beijing (as well as cities such as Datong and Tianjin discussed in this volume). In historical areas, where responsibility for protecting heritage lies with the municipal level, but without financial resources, one collateral effect of protection is the profit generated through commodification within the selected zone. In Beijing and elsewhere, conservation practices that were supposedly designed to preserve cultural diversity and enhance links between the tangible context and inhabitants have often been criticized for increasing social and spatial fragmentation (Abramson 2001; Bandarin and Van Oers 2012; Shin 2010). For local communities involved in such processes, this criticism presents an opportunity to claim their rights to the city (Harvey 2008) and/or the heritage in their neighbourhood (Evans 2014) or villages (Svensson 2006).

Beijing's initiative for historic districts predates the RHUL. Why is it so difficult to practise this approach? All of the recommendations appear consistent with the city's initiative, with one exception: 'the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity'. This highlights the main limitation of the RHUL: it is too broad and addresses too much to be holistically implemented. Thus any partial understanding and adoption of the recommendations can lead to biased practice with regard to the preservation of the historical urban landscape.

One crucial dimension of heritage as related to diversity and identity is collective memory, first explored by Maurice Halbwachs (1950). He asserted a dynamic role for collective memory in the process of the identification of a social group and its mechanism of spatialization in the group's territory and architecture. Urban studies and the history of nationalism have revisited Halbwachs's ideas on collective memories, insisting that his dynamic processes refer to the past to better describe the present. How people construct a sense of the past is a major issue within social and cultural history

(Huyssen 2003), shedding light on urban memory that reflects various strata in society and the local communities that construct the city landscape.

Social representations of collective memories produced both by inhabitants and the local agencies involved in urban planning management and preservation are diverse, contested, and conflicting. Local resistance to rapid transformation can be tracked either through its narratives or practices (Scott 1990). It is mostly expressed in or defined by ordinary, everyday practices (De Certeau 1990) applied in spaces of various dimensions, from physical to emotional, political to economic, or social to cultural. They involve a diverse population of different social classes, genders, ages, and ethnicities, and are defined according to their feelings of belonging to the area.

An alternative microhistory of these urban territories or ethnographies of heritage and territorial place-making (Bendix et al. 2012; Feuchtwang 2004; Graezer Bideau and Kilani 2012; Wang 2012; Yan 2015) strengthens a wide range of discourses, privileging some social actors while simultaneously disengaging others from the use of heritage. Over the past decade many scholars have highlighted the production of internal hierarchies as constitutive of the process of heritagization (Di Giovine 2009; Herzfeld 2004; Smith 2006) where different collective memories cause rivalry and controversy (Connerton 2009). In the case of Gulou, highlighting local group strategies for preserving links and practices of memory will reveal both the gap and tensions between local inhabitants' needs – mainly popular classes, illegal migrants, and elderly natives – in their everyday lives and the new, government-defined, functions of the area (a tourist and commercial zone). It will also show the potential and limits of heritage activism in an urban landscape.

The area and the project

The Bell and Drum Towers (*Zhonglou* and *Gulou*) are located at the north end of the central axis of Beijing's old city. Built in 1420, the two towers are 2.1 kilometres away from the north gate of the Forbidden City, serving as both a physical and cultural marker for the capital. Physically, they showed the north border of the gated city. Culturally, they were time-keeping buildings: They announced the time day by day and centrally shaped and maintained Beijing residents' rhythm of life.[4] Because of their spatial and temporal

---

4   A classical Chinese saying refers to the functions of the two towers – morning bell, evening drum.

characteristics, the two towers gradually became a central hub and public space within the city. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Drum Tower and its vicinity had evolved into a commercial centre as well. This commercial prosperity was still evident in 2012, when small shops, restaurants for local foods, coffee shops, and bars were around the square, with a big local market at the northeast of the Bell Tower. This area, then, is a multilayered representation of the city's cultural memory over time: spatial icon, temporal marker, and social and commercial livelihoods. In 2002, it was designated as one of Beijing's historical and cultural protection zones.[5]

In 2010 a development project was proposed for this protection zone. In January, during the annual Two Meetings,[6] official media released the message about the 'Beijing Time Cultural City' development project, the intent of which was to spend RMB 5 billion (about US$61 million) to renovate an area consisting of 12.5 hectares centred on the Drum and Bell Towers. According to the reports, the project would enlarge the square between the two towers by widening the streets, in order to improve the residents' quality of life. A seemingly more compelling purpose was to create within the area a historic-centred place of time-telling celebration. A conference centre, an underground complex with a museum, and shops and car parks were planned, and the government even proposed to resume the 'morning bell, evening drum' tradition (Jiang, 2010).

The ambitious project was soon widely criticized. The voice of opposition came from the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center (CHP), an NGO engaged in historic preservation.[7] According to CHP, the project would result in massive relocations and the demolition of cultural properties. CHP saw the new underground museum as a useless investment, saying: '[s]imply improving the quality of the museum exhibitions inside the Drum and Bell Towers can encourage a deeper level of appreciation and understanding' (CHP 2010). CHP even planned to organize a public meeting for debates, which was cancelled by the police at the last minute.

---

5   In 2002, the Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning and Design (BICP) proposed to launch surveys to identify the existing *siheyuan* of the old city. Standards for recognition of the protected courtyards with licensed cards were the following: 'The present condition is well, the layout is basically sound, the building style is still existing, it forms a scale, it has reserved value.' See http://www.bjghy.com.cn.

6   In March each year, China holds its National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Commonly called *Lianghui* (Two Meetings), it constitutes the perfect moment for announcements of new proposals and projects.

7   CHP has its official website at http://en.bjchp.org/.

Towards the middle of 2010, the 'Beijing Time Cultural City' project went quiet. It is not clear how much influence CHP and other preservationists had over this suspension, but the reason given was administrative transition. In July, the municipal government of Beijing merged Dongcheng – where the Gulou area is located – and Chongwen Districts into a new Dongcheng District. Grand projects proposed by the previous government, like the Gulou project, were halted and to be reconsidered by the new government (Yang 2010).

The idea of 'restoration' for Gulou never disappeared, however. In 2012, the government restarted the proposal with a less ambitious plan entitled 'Bell and Drum Tower Square Restoration Project'. The new project would restore the original historical square based on a map drawn in the Qianlong reign of the Qing dynasty (1735-1796). Courtyards and structures deemed inconsistent with the map were to be demolished to restore the traditional landscape. As a result, the plan called for the expropriation of 66 courtyard dwellings and 136 households (Wei and Guo 2012) which were considered 'without historical value', a total of 4700 square metres. The compensation rate was RMB 44,000 per square (US$5400 in 2012), plus an affordable apartment in Shaoyaogju neighbourhood.[8] The deadline to claim the apartment was 24 February 2013. If the agreement was signed by 2 February, each household could receive an extra 'award' of up to RMB 170,000 (US$20,700), an obvious incentive for quick relocation. Although the compensation rate seems high, it was in fact about only half the market price in the area as it is located in the very centre of the historic district. Given this, the residents felt it to be unfair as they speculated on the rate their counterparts in nearby neighbourhoods could receive.

This new restoration project encountered even wider and stronger resistance than the previous one. This was partly because it was an action plan rather than a concept, and partly because of the extremely short period between announcement and implementation – only two and half months, which included the Chinese New Year. Active preservationists quickly responded – as CHP had to the previous project[9] – but local outrage was more striking this time around with many residents refusing to move. As Simon Rabinovitch recorded, only a handful had left with the deadline closing in: 'Police officers have been knocking on doors on a daily basis to remind

8   Shaoyaoju is located between the third and fourth ring avenues, to the northeast of the Gulou area. It is still seen as part of the city unlike many relocation places outside the fifth avenue seen as suburban areas.
9   CHP has not intervened in the second restoration project.

Figure 4.1   Demolition of dilapidated houses in front of the Drum Tower

Photograph by Florence Graezer Bideau and Haiming Yan

people their time is up. Angry residents have had shouting and shoving matches with them. Many say they will fight to stay' (Rabinovitch 2013).

In spite of all the controversies during the case, the project has progressed since 2013. Almost all courtyards designated by the plan have been evicted and residents have been relocated. The square has been 'cleaned'. There is a new wall built along the eviction line. In the past, the square was used as a parking space. Now it is a public square for people to enjoy recreational activities. A notice board was erected named 'Bell and Drum Towers Square Management Rules', listing several forbidden behavioural codes such as gambling and superstitious activities, fighting, lying on the ground, playing soccer, walking dogs, etc. And most inhabitants said: 'It is now better than before.' As one said, 'There used to be so many shops and a commercial atmosphere. Now it's all back to normal life.'

The Gulou area has become a battlefield in which three major groups of stakeholders fight over sharply different claims. The government discourse primarily revolves around key, but blurring, terms such as restoration, authenticity, environment improvement, cultural and art zones, etc. Preservationists, on the other hand, question each government statement

Figure 4.2   The square after restoration is a public space for locals

Photograph by Florence Graezer Bideau and Haiming Yan

with a counter-statement. The most complex group is the local inhabitants, inside and outside of the eviction area. The concept of 'cultural heritage', or 'historic urban landscape', seems to be too far removed from their discourses. Instead, their claims and voices are concerned with practical issues, living conditions, traffic, environment, etc. Revealingly, the struggle has become the mechanism by which collective memories are created, shaped, and reproduced. How should we understand the three groups' discourses? And how do the narrative claims of local inhabitants reflect the social fabrics of historic urban landscape in China? To address these questions, we have conducted field research in the Gulou area and collected data from official discourses by reading policy documents and media reports closely. Preservationists' claims are analysed using interviews and NGOs' and voluntary groups' website posts. To fully investigate locals' opinions and practices of the project, we conducted ethnographic observations and interviews between late 2015 and early 2016. More than 30 local residents were interviewed with questions about their attitudes towards the project and living conditions. Memory was a central topic in the interview questions. The answers show how locals use memory to make sense of the project

and everyday life. Simply put, the study is framed with a sociological lens on different mnemonic practices in relation to the restoration project as well as to the implementation of HUL.

The contested memories

The official discourse

The Gulou project is not *ad hoc*; it has been under consideration for over a decade. As the then mayor of Dongcheng District, Yang Yiwen, told the *Beijing Times* in January 2010, the motive for a large project was somewhat forced by a sense of inferiority compared to other districts: 'Other districts have many big projects. We are envious, but we don't have the space' (Sexton 2010). An underground plaza seemed a reasonable alternative. In 2006 and 2007, a six-month workshop, led by Italian architect Claudio Greco,[10] resulted in a plan for underground car parks around the area. Professor Greco was, however, opposed to relocation or new buildings (Sexton 2010).

The *raison d'être* for a large project and the acquisition of land for the project was simple: asset generation 'through land sales, rent and business taxation', something the existing scattering of shops, bars, restaurants, and 'unhistoric' buildings did not offer. This is a place within the historic centre of the city that has great potential for revenue production. As Professor Greco mentions in his report, there is a contrast between the extreme poverty of the residents and extremely high land prices. By acquiring the land and courtyards at a low price and then selling it at a much higher rate to developers, the government would generate considerable income. Furthermore, the place also has a symbolic importance to the authorities, as it is seen as an essential component of the 'north-south axis' of Beijing, a metaphor of political power. Thus it has been strongly pushed for nomination as World Heritage. Simply put, the place is valued for both economic and political reasons.

However, this income generation scheme, as well as political rhetoric, while widely recognized, was not to be made public. Instead, the authority adopted the appealing idea of memory as the central, and legitimate, concept.

---

10   Claudio Greco teaches at the Università degli Studi di Roma 'Tor Vergata' and has engaged in collaborations in China since the 1990s.

The 'morning bell and evening drum' around the Bell and Drum Towers is one of the most unforgettable memories of old Beijing. Due to historical transformation and urban development, its surrounding environment and historical landscape have been largely destroyed, with the square shrinking from more than 14,000 square meters to 4,000 square meters. [...] [The project] will be based on maps of the Qing and early PRC to restore the square, and maintain the natural and multilayered fabrics and landscape. The restored space will be used for public culture services. (Qi 2012)

This account portrays an image espousing the authenticity of the neighbourhood; an official narrative derived from memory. The memory of 'morning bell and evening drum' encapsulated in this statement is to be shared and remembered by current and future generations. The authority sees historical landscape, similar to memory, as something to be restored. The re-expansion of the square by removing 'unhistoric' buildings is therefore the only approach to the revitalization of both the memory and the landscape (albeit on a different scale the same logic underlined Geng Yanbo's ambitious plans for Datong as discussed by Cui in this volume). However, the nexus between the memory (the saying) and the landscape (the square) is ambivalent. If the time-telling function of the towers is integral to urban memory, it should be the sound and the behavioural pattern regulated by the sound that constitutes the memory, not the square.

According to the authority, the courtyards built after the historic map 'encroached' as illegal constructions. Because of this the area suffered from extreme population density, poorly maintained houses and infrastructure, and unregulated constructions. The government is primarily concerned with the safety of inhabitants and cultural heritage; thus, the stated aims of the project are the improvement of living conditions for local inhabitants, the safety of cultural heritage sites, and the maintenance of the landscape of the old capital. In other words, the 66 courtyards to be demolished are not regarded as cultural heritage and are seen as having no historical value.

It is somewhat surprising that, despite the constant use of terms such as historic landscape, cultural landscape, urban landscape, etc., the officials we interviewed seemed unfamiliar with the concept of HUL. None of them ever used the full concept – historic urban landscape – while referring to the restoration project. The most commonly used term was 'historic districts', the official expression that has been used for over a decade. It is obvious

that the interpretation of 'landscape' for them was different from that of the HUL. Within the typically Chinese way of interpreting a universal concept with their existing conceptual and practical frameworks, the dimension of memory is missing.

The preservationist discourse

During the two phases of the project – 2010 and 2012 – cultural heritage preservationists' resistance took two different forms. The first was led primarily by CHP, an NGO striving to utilize the opportunity to broaden public debates about heritage rights and to provide an alternative plan called a rejuvenation project. The second was more like an attempt to salvage the project as it went from the conceptual to practical phase, in which a less organized, more multidisciplinary, team was formed to conduct a last-chance survey of the soon-to-be-dismantled courtyards.

CHP published a series of articles on its website concerning its objection to the project. One article widely circulated was a public letter, 'A Better Future for Gulou – CHP's Views on the Planned Redevelopment' (CHP 2010), which was posted online after the authorities cancelled a public meeting. In this article, CHP echo the government proposal's missions: to maintain the authentic representation of traditional Old Beijing, and improve the rights and livelihoods of the local residents. Taking a somewhat neutral stance, the article acknowledges that commercial and retail areas are intruding upon local inhabitants' privacy and need to be rezoned. However, according to CHP, any project that intends to realize those missions should be carefully framed in the historical context, and should be sustainable for future generations. It goes on to criticize the planned relocations and demolition as something 'crude' that would eventually lead to a triple failure: destruction of cultural heritage; destruction of social fabrics; and destruction of commercial potential. CHP made an alternative proposal: The Drum and Bell Towers rejuvenation project. This proposed that instead of demolition and relocation, the same funds be used to renovate rundown housing and rezone the commercial area, in order to avoid a 'pseudo-historical' neighbourhood.

In 2012, a less formally organized team – the Gulou Preservation Team[11] – was formed to object to the second phase of the project. Although the projects were only two years apart, between 2010 and 2012, Weibo – or mini-blog in China – had boomed. Despite not necessarily knowing each other offline, the Gulou Preservation Team members found each other

11   A more formal title of the team is the Watching Team for the Bell and Drum Tower Area.

through their common interests or opinions about the project via Weibo and created the team's own Weibo account.[12] An urban designer, whose Weibo account was named Wepon, organized more than ten people who joined the team. Their disciplines ranged from architecture, urban planning, and landscape, to sociology and mass media. In the beginning the team's major purpose was to record the process of demolition and relocation. As the project went on, however, they started to conduct more systematic studies on the history of the courtyards. The team created an interactive Internet platform, webGIS website, to call for public participation. On the website, everyone could add comments about particular courtyards.

Where CHP has taken a macro view, the Gulou Preservation Team took a relatively micro view of the area, recording each courtyard and exploring historical messages, even for a single structure. What they most objected to was the government's claim about the historical value of the 66 to-be-dismantled courtyards. From a scholarly perspective, the team attempted to negate the government's value judgement. They compared the current layout of the square with an old picture taken in the early 1900s, for example, and found that some courtyards had existed for over a century, which was inconsistent with the government's claim. Using their various survey results with local residents and historians, they argued that the square had existed more or less unaltered since the Qing dynasty. They were, therefore, able to cast doubt upon the government's plan.

The team's central concern was that the specifics of the plan were mostly unclear. Nothing was released to the public about the details of the project. As expressed in an interview,[13] Wepon stated that even the government was self-contradictory; a number of recently renovated or added houses and structures were funded and guided by the District Bureau of Housing Management, yet according to the notice these were illegal constructions: 'Actually there was no standard. Any building they want to demolish would be marked as illegal.' In other words, it was not the project plan that ignited the team's outrage; rather it was the 'no plan' that frustrated them.

Regarding the impact of the project on the social fabric and local inhabitants, where CHP focused on rights and civic participation, the Gulou Preservation Team stressed the inseparable link between the physical environment and the intangible factors of a living neighbourhood. In

12   http://weibo.com/u/3229147557?is_all=1.
13   The interview text was published in March 2013 by the student-run magazine *UIBELIFE* at the University of International Business and Economics.

their unpublished report,[14] they claim that local residents and the dwellings had become an indivisible part of regional tradition. Though never using the term 'memory', the report lays out four major impacts: psychological, cultural, emotional, and lifestyle. All revolve around the concept of memory. Change of daily routine, loss of hutong spirit, feelings of alienation, drastically downgraded education and healthcare were highlighted as key terms among the accounts. In other words, according to the team, the project would eventually result in the loss of the mnemonic patterns and fabrics for both the physical environment and the inhabitants.

Just as memory was hardly mentioned by the preservationists, HUL did not appear as a term in their accounts. International terms are used to legitimize their acts, nonetheless, such as the World Heritage Convention. The term 'historic urban landscape' was never used in any formal accounts, in the media or in their report. This does not mean that they ignore the term, however. On the contrary, what they aimed to achieve was exactly the goals of HUL: The physical environment conserved with intangible elements and the respect for and realization of the community's rights to its own past. In this sense, the preservationists have fully adopted the spirit of HUL in their practices.

The local discourse

From the start, local residents' attitudes towards the project were divided. Some people objected to the acquisition and relocation, while others looked forward to it. As we carefully examined these accounts, however, we found that claims from both supporters and opponents were profoundly rooted in the rhetoric of memory.

The desire to stay may derive from a strong emotional attachment. A female student, whose grandfather was born in the area, expressed hurt feelings about the demolition: 'We love the hutong. As a cultural pattern it should be preserved. Destroy it and rebuild a fake one? What we want is just better living conditions!' (Jiao 2013). An owner of a famous local restaurant just outside the eviction line was sympathetic to his old neighbours and long-time customers: 'They've been born and living here for generations; they enjoy being in the community; and they share memories. Once left, everything is gonna be cut off!'

14   The Gulou Preservation Team drafted the report but never formally published it. Furthermore, they attempted to publish articles in formal media in addition to the mini-blog, which also failed because of censorship.

Figure 4.3   Sociability within the Bell and Drum Tower Square

Photograph by Florence Graezer Bideau and Haiming Yan

Most residents complained about poor living conditions. Their fight to stay, however, was not to retain the current conditions, but to restore the physical settings back to the 'good old days' deeply anchored in their memories. According to them, the area used to be a lively and clean neighbourhood. In the past, people living there mostly had the same demographic background: working in *danwei* (working unit), having a *hukou* (residential permit to live and have social welfare in Beijing), and feeling privileged and belongingness to the community. It was a homogeneous community. Then, in contrast to the homogeneous past they remember, it was the mass tourism boom and the in-flow of non-Beijing people (*waidiren*, a label given by residents to those without residential permit) that turned the area into the current chaotic place of today. The *hukou* system has had a strict institutional design that not only excludes *waidiren* physically, but also socially and culturally from the locals. As Wu (2012) finds, they are excluded from community activities and only live as 'economic sojourners'. The locals clearly draw a boundary between themselves and the *waidiren*. According to our interviews, the longer the resident had lived in the neighbourhood, the more they complained about the contrast between the past and present,

and the stronger the hatred they expressed towards *waidiren*. An old man who had lived in the hutongs for over 60 years consistently complained about *waidiren* during his interview:

> You see those three-wheelers? Guess how many of them are Beijingers? None! They come here to earn money, bring all the family here. They park the three-wheeler wherever they want. In the past, a truck could easily drive through. Now even the duck-cart gets struck by the junks.

Even in the early stages of the protest when CHP tried to organize the public meeting, they collected complaints from local residents. Conflicts often seemingly arose from a contrast between the present and a remembered past:

> I have lived my whole life on Gulou Dongdajie, and while I loved it when I was small I hate it now. Before, every summer I would love to sit in the cool shade of the trees on the side of the road, or skip rope with my friends. Just look at it now! I almost never go outside, people and cars are everywhere. You try living such a noisy, anxious life. The wonderful past that I remember no longer exists. (CHP 2010)

A more practical reason for many residents' refusal of the offer of relocation was the unsatisfactory rate of compensation. Many local residents in Beijing's historic centre are nowadays waiting for relocation, because of their high expectation of compensation, perhaps the only way for them to 'get rich'. Therefore, as previously mentioned, the rate at 44,000 per square metre, half the market price, was thought by many to be unacceptably low. In an online forum, one resident demanded, 'What we want is reasonable compensation!' Another added, 'Some neighbourhoods start at 100,000, we start at 40,000?' In the forum, some tried to categorize the residents, claiming that those who had accepted the offer had other apartments in the city and those who had refused had nowhere else to live. 'At the current compensation rate, nobody [of the latter] would move out. Nobody is stupid.' The author concluded, 'Neighbours, let's keep calm and wait. If you rush for a deal, it must be a bad deal.'

Their strategy can be seen to be common in recent relocations. Compensation is expected to rise if there is an agreement between the owners and the government. Although the government always offers an early-move 'award', in most cases those who move later receive higher compensation. Each deal is different from the next, confidentially agreed between the

government and the owner. As the Gulou Preservation Team recorded in their unpublished interview sheet, locals desired relocation because mass tourism had destroyed their peaceful lives. However, they chose to stay, refusing the offer of compensation, simply because it was unsatisfactory. In another case, an old local lady expressed the same feeling: 'I am an old Party member, living here for 60 years. Indeed I have emotional attachment to here. But as long as the compensation is reasonable, we would respond to the call of the Party' (Jiao 2013).

It should be noted that many residents were willing to move out, mainly due to the bad living conditions. On another level, it was their mistrust of the government that compelled them to move. Environmental and infrastructure improvement seemed to be more rational than simple demolition, but most residents simply did not believe that the government would realize the plan in the near future. 'Too many changes over the years!' an old man complained. 'There is always policy changes and nobody really knows what's gonna happen.' As our interviews revealed, there is extreme hatred towards the government as well as hatred of commercialization. The residents, whether accepting or refusing relocation, were generally frustrated by what has occurred in the last decade, namely mass tourism and the government's lack of control over it. With this kind of disbelief, moving out seemed a reasonable choice. A 78-year-old resident living with his wife in a 20-square-metre room said in the *Global Times*: 'We want demolition and a move to a better place. We've been waiting for the official notice of demolition' (Li 2010).

Some residents, whose courtyards were outside the eviction line, were not satisfied with the no-move situation; they are still waiting for the supposed second wave of relocation. However, government policy vacillation has made them more dissatisfied A 70-year-old resident was explicitly envious of his previous neighbours:

Since 2009, there have been rumours about our relocation. Then halted because two districts merged. Then came a new mayor. And we still wait for the notice! Some people moved out. But most stay and still are waiting. The government is just so unpredictable! So much *huangxier* [ungrounded rumours]. They say something today and forget it tomorrow. That's always the case, for many years.

This shows the ambiguity of nostalgia. Contrary to our assumption that nostalgic feelings would drive the locals to stay, we observed that by expressing nostalgic attachment to the neighbourhood, many residents were

actually legitimizing their willingness to move. Emotional attachment does not transform into an act of attachment. This mirrors what Berliner called 'multiple nostalgias' (2012), in which diverse actors of nostalgia are engaged in, based on particular social, cultural and in this case primarily economic contexts. There are multiple layers of nostalgia. And those that could easily be overturned by economic compensation may not be seen as nostalgic as other forms of nostalgia. In other words, nostalgic expressions in this case are shaped by the contrast between past and present, and are used for the pursuit of a better future.

Animosity towards *waidiren* has risen remarkably alongside commercialization. Almost every local resident complained about the incivility of *waidiren* and the troubles they have brought to the community. They are characterized as being as evil as the government: profit driven, indifferent to community life, responsible for the downgraded environment, etc. Local people feel that their once peaceful and harmonious community has been disrupted by the *waidiren*: 'They make money by telling lies!' one said. 'The peddlers sell expensive dirty foods and the three-wheeler drivers just make up fake stories about Beijing's history for the tourists.'

It is revealing that, despite the seemingly contradictory opinions about relocation, those who fight to stay and those who wish to move share the same underlying force – dissatisfaction about the destruction of their memory. They cherish the past, compared to the chaotic present. Those who intend to stay are the optimists; the past can be restored and memory reshaped. Those that strive to move are pessimistic. The broken mnemonic fabrics have also yielded a stronger sense of insecurity amongst the residents. Some choose to stay with the hope of regaining security, but more people choose to move, seeking another kind of stability.

Interestingly, even the core memory of the place – morning bell, evening drum – is characterized in totally contradictory ways by the government and the residents. A certain number of residents explained their willingness to move by pointing to the unbearable noise generated by the re-enactment performance of 'morning bell, evening drum'. At the Drum Tower, a drum is banged seven times a day for the tourists, causing unwanted noise for the neighbourhood. The sounds used to serve residents in the past, but now the community challenges the authenticity of the ritual. They perceive it as fake sounds with no authentic connection to their actual living contexts. This is paradoxical. The official memory of the area in text is the sound, yet the re-enactment of it has broken the memories for its present inhabitants. This reveals the fundamental nature of collective memory; it is always malleable, selective, and contested.

HUL is also malleable. The use of the term 'historic urban landscape' among local residents is different from that used in official and preservationist discourses. They do not seem to care much about the term 'landscape'. They did not even attempt to explain it, let alone to misinterpret it as the authorities did. To a large extent, HUL was created to preserve community life, but local people seem uninterested in having their life defined or decided by a pure concept. The concept is well practised in their acts, but yet remains unspoken.

Conclusion: Collective memories and voices from a battlefield

The case study of Gulou shows the shaping of collective memory over the last decade in which radical changes occurred, matching evolving urban policies and regulations of historic and cultural districts. Memory is constituted by and constitutive of Gulou, and the stakeholders involved in the area have differentiated agency to raise or impose their voices. The historic urban landscape is an international Western concept that promotes an idea of the preservation of parts of a city by including local inhabitants who keep the area alive and dynamic. Simply put, the official discourse misinterprets HUL by stressing the physical environment defined by historic district, the preservationist discourse adopts HUL by allowing more room for its implementation in the Chinese context, and the local discourse simply ignores any formal concept by focusing on practices. Overall, HUL is malleable. It is local experiences and practices that determine its applicability in particular contexts, especially in places and culture that have already established certain strategies for historic urban preservation.

This holistic perspective needs to integrate local memories, not only as stories for remembering or promoting the historic background of a place, but also as part of its entire reflection or constitution. The negotiation and contestation around memories and places in each case study highlight multiple (mis)understandings of the HUL concept. Interpretations of such recommendations are numerous because the definition is broad and its implementation is not strict or binding, as it needs to be adapted to each political and economic context.

Almost a decade before the HUL formulation, Chinese urban conservation experts proposed the implementation of a new heritage category intended to protect urban areas and to deal with threats of urban sprawl and property capital. These 'historic and cultural preservation districts' (*lishi wenhua baohu qu*), which include built environments and human

factors, had already taken an integrated approach.[15] All parties involved in cultural heritage issues, from officials to ordinary citizens, used this tool to defend, impose, or negotiate their positions. The aforementioned elaborated discourses on the urban heritage preservation express what is at stake in the Gulou case study. They also reveal different layers of commitment and action. In defending urban and heritage policies, the governmental discourse relies upon a selected vision of the past that highlights a conventional aesthetic of the old city (Drum and Bell Towers, chessboard grid layout of streets with large traditional courtyards breathing life into the social and commercial neighbourhood) mixing together the elite and the common people. Their renovation projects focus on the historical monuments of the area, with the extension of a built environment composed of ordinary housing, in order to avoid disfigured landscapes. The preservationist discourse is more disputed and trenchant. The proactive position makes this heterogeneous group of stakeholders organize public debate and propose alternatives for the protection of the neighbourhood and its livelihood. By using social media, technology, and archives, these groups of activists were able to contest official propositions for the area and, based on scientific arguments, suggest better ways to care for current everyday life and alternative forms of memories that matter to its inhabitants (on the role of social media in heritage debates, see also Cui and Svensson in this volume). As previously described, the local discourse is more blurred. Gulou's inhabitants want to preserve their community life, even referring nostalgically to a certain authenticity, but they struggle to see past financial opportunity. Although members of this community are diverse in terms of age, education, social class, and *hukou*, their arguments try to balance financial motivation and standard of living with attachments to the present living environment and personal or community memory.

The modernization of the historic urban landscape has involved contested processes that go beyond the antagonistic and stereotypical positions of the powerful state destroying part of the old city and the powerless reactions of local communities suffering the consequences of such brutal urban change. Although these generalizations contain an element of truth, the examples in this chapter also offer narratives of a certain level of constructive local resistance. We observed two levels of negotiations or contestations among these groups of stakeholders. First, tension between the preservationist

---

15   As another approach, in 2009 China started to designate Historic and Cultural Famous Streets. *Guozijian jie* (the name of the Imperial College) was among the first ten designations in 2009; *Yandaixie Street* (Sweet Tobacco Pouch Street) was designated in 2010.

and the official levels: The former relying on so-called universal standards of protection based on international urban heritage expertise (UNESCO, the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region [WHITRAP], the International Council on Monuments and Sites [ICOMOS], the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property [ICCROM], etc.) and the latter implementing municipal/local standards based on national expertise (Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Planning, Beijing Municipal Policy Research Bureau, etc.)[16] highlighting Chinese characteristics. Second, a tension between the local population and heritage expertise claimed by certain preservationists and official stakeholders: Gulou inhabitants struggled to be heard on the matter of maintaining their current and ordinary social and cultural livelihood against the preservation of a nostalgic neighbourhood as a shrine (*mise sous cloche*) or the promotion of the city for historic and cultural tourism (Shin 2010). Similarly, Tam's chapter on the contestations surrounding the preservation of a temple in Beijing and Cui's chapter discussing contestations in Datong, reveal the complex views on heritage and divergent power among officials, private companies, preservationists and the general public, that help us move away from a simple understanding of a powerful state vis-à-vis a homogenous and repressed subaltern. The local resistance against a project of transformation of historical urban landscape is more complex than a simple issue of preservation. In our case, the local population is benefiting from the transformation in order to develop a resistance which ultimately relies more on the benefit of a relocation than on an interest in preserving an urban heritage.

The recommendation of historic urban landscape has already been studied extensively since its formulation in 2011. As a Western concept, it was been adapted following debates around its eventual implementation in the East. It is not a convention that UNESCO members need to ratify or undertake to comply with obligations, so the RHUL provides some additional flexibility and freedom to develop the concept, and breathing space for urban heritage experts who recommend the implementation of this recent approach towards built environment and local communities in a local setting. Its plasticity is still an advantage for all stakeholders involved in historic and cultural preservation districts as

---

16   For instance: Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Planning, *Conservation Planning of 25 Historic Areas in Beijing's Old City* (Beijing: Yangshan Publishing House, 2002); Beijing Municipal Policy Research Bureau, *Study on Housing Renovation in Historic Preservation Districts in the Old City of Beijing* (Beijing: Beijing Municipality, 2004).

they can instrumentalize it according to their positions and projects. Any transformation of Beijing's old fabric needs to take into account the physical and social structures of these neighbourhoods, which maintain a sense of community, strengthen organic community life (residents, emotions, traditional architecture, economy, culture, administration, public services) and stimulate the local economy, including local tourism (Gu and Ryan 2008), which serves to keep local populations in the area and make it thrive.

References

Abramson, D. (2001). 'Beijing's Preservation Policy and the Fate of the Siheyuan', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 13 (1): 7-22.

Abramson, D. (2007). 'The Aesthetics of City-Scale Preservation Policy in Beijing', *Planning Perspectives*, 22 (2): 129-166.

Bandarín, F., and R. van Oers (2012). *The Historic Urban Landscape: Managing Heritage in an Urban Century* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell).

Bendix, R., A. Eggert and A. Peselmann (eds) (2012). *Heritage Regimes and the State* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen).

Berliner, D. (2012). 'Multiple Nostalgias: The Fabric of Heritage in Luang Prabang (Lao PDR)', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18: 769-786.

Broudehoux, A.-M. (2004). *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing* (London: Routledge).

CHP (2010). 'A Better Future for Gulou – CHP's Views on the Planned Redevelopment', Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center, 4 May, http://en.bjchp.org/?p=2385.

Connerton, P. (2009). *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

De Certeau, M. (1990). *L'invention du quotidien* (Paris: Gallimard).

Di Giovine, M. (2009). *The Heritage-scape: UNESCO, World Heritage, and Tourism* (Lanham: Lexington Books).

Evans, H. (2014). 'Neglect of a Neighbourhood: Oral Accounts of Life in "Old Beijing" since the Eve of the People's Republic', *Urban History*, 41 (4): 868-704.

Felli, R. (2005). 'Le patrimoine à Pékin, entre destruction et détournement: les effets d'une gouvernance urbaine entrepreneuriale', *Geographica Helvetica*, 60 (4): 275-283.

Feuchtwang, S. (ed.) (2004). *Making Place: State Projects, Globalisation and Local Responses in China* (London: University College London Press).

Gaubatz, P. (1995). 'Changing Beijing', *Geographical Review*, 85: 79-98.

Graezer Bideau, F., and M. Kilani (2012). 'Multiculturalism, Cosmopolitanism and Making Heritage in Malaysia: A View from the Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 18 (6): 605-623.

Gu, H., and C. Ryan (2008). 'Place Attachment, Identity and Community Impacts of Tourism – The Case of a Beijing Hutong', *Tourism Management*, 29: 637-647.

Halbwachs, M. (1950). *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Albin Michel).

Harvey, D. (2008). 'The Right to the City', *New Left Review*, 53 (Sept.-Oct.): 23-40.

Herzfeld, M. (2004). *The Body Impolitic. Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Hsing Y.-T. (2012). *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Huyssen, A. (2003). *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press).

Jiang, Y. (2010). 'Beijing Xin Gulou Bizou Lao Hutong?' [New Drum Tower forces original Hutong people out?], *China Radio International*, 20 April, gb.cri.cn/27 824/2010/04/20/5005s2823948.htm.

Jiao, W. (2013). 'Zhonggulou Guangchang Chaiqian Yinfa Huaijiu Chao' [Demolition of Bell and Drum Tower Square triggers nostalgia], *China Culture Daily*, 25 January.

Leaf, M. (1995). 'Inner City Redevelopment in China: Implications for the City of Beijing', *Cities*, 12 (3): 149-162.

Li, S. (2010). 'Drum Tower Plan Shelved', *Global Times*, 7 September.

Merle, A. (2014). 'Homeowners of Beijing, Unite! The Construction of a Collective Mobilization', *China Perspectives*, 2: 7-15.

Ouroussoff, N. (2008). 'Lost in the New Beijing: The Old Neighborhood', *New York Times*, 27 July.

Qi, M. (2012). 'Zhonggulou Guangchang Huifu Zhengzhi Xiangmu Qidong' [Bell and Drum Tower Square restoration and renovation project launched], *Beijing Daily*, 14 December.

Rabinovitch, S. (2013). 'Structural Revolution', *Financial Times*, 26 April, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/eb0384c0-a812-11e2-b031-00144feabdc0.html#slide010.4000/gc.1427.

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Sexton, J. (2010). '"Untouchable" Area of Old Beijing under Threat' *China.org.cn*, 13 May, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2010-05/13/content_20033631.htm.

Shin, H.B. (2010). 'Urban Conservation and Revalorisation of Dilapidated Historic Quarters: The Case of Nanluoguxiang in Beijing', *Cities*, 27: S43-S54.

Sit, V.F. (1995). *Beijing: The Nature and Planning of a Chinese Capital City* (New York: John Wiley and Sons).

Siu, E. (2007). 'Grounding Displacement: Uncivil Urban Spaces in Postreform South China', *American Ethnologist*, 34 (2): 329-350.

Smith, L. (2006). *Use of Heritage* (London: Routledge).

Svensson, M. (2006). 'In the Ancestor's Shadow: Cultural Heritage Contestation in Chinese Villages', Working Paper 16, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University.

UNESCO (1972). 'Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural, Natural Heritage', http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001140/114044f.pdf.

UNESCO (2003). 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage', http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001543/154391eo.pdf.

UNESCO (2011). 'Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape', http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002110/211094e.pdf.

Wang, S.-Y. (2012). 'From a Living City to a World Heritage City: Authorised Heritage Conservation and Development and Its Impacts on the Local Community', *International Development Planning Review*, 34 (1): 1-17.

Wei, M., and C. Guo (2012). 'Zhonggulou Zhoubian 66 Yuanluo Jiangbei Zhengfu Zhengshou' [Sixty-six courtyards around the Bell and Drum Towers to be appropriated by the government], *Beijing News*, 14 December 2012.

Wu, F. (1997). 'Urban Restructuring in China's Emerging Market Economy: Toward a Framework for Analysis', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 21 (4): 640-663.

Wu, F. (2012). 'Neighborhood Attachment, Social Participation, and Willingness to Stay in China's Low-Income Communities', *Urban Affairs Review*, 48 (4): 547-570.

Wu, L. (1999). *Rehabilitating the Old City of Beijing: A Project in the Ju'Er Hutong Neighbourhood* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press).

Yan, H. (2015). 'World Heritage as Discourse: Knowledge, Discipline and Dissonance in Fujian Tulou Sites', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 21 (1): 65-80.

Yang, X. (2010). 'Beijing Zhonggulou Shijian Wenhuacheng guihua yin Dongxicheng hebing geqian' [The plans for Time Cultural City in the Bell and Drum Towers has been cancelled due to merge of the Dongcheng and Xicheng districts], *Beijing Youth Daily*, 7 September 2010.

Zhang, K. (2013). 'Who Is Relocating Whom in the Renovation of Shanghai's Old City?' *China Perspectives*, 1: 29-39.

Zhang, Y. (2008). 'Steering towards Growth: Symbolic Urban Preservation in Beijing, 1990-2005', *Town Planning Review*, 79 (2-3): 511-554.

Zhang, Y., and K. Fang (2003). 'Politics of Housing Redevelopment in China: The Rise and Fall of the Ju'er Hutong Project in Inner-city Beijing', *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 18: 75-87.

About the authors

Florence Graezer Bideau, Institute for Area and Global Studies, College of Humanities, Swiss Federal Institute for Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland

Haiming Yan, China World Cultural Heritage Center, Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, Beijing, China