

Hybridity, Isolation and Conflict in Urban Renewal: A Case Study of Chuanbanhutong in Beijing during Relocating Non-Capital Functions

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Abstract

Beijing, the capital of China, began to relocate non-capital functions from 2015. In order to control excessive urban growth, people from all walks of life inevitably participated in this new round of urban renewal movement in their daily life. This article conducts a diachronic observation taking Chuanbanhutong area as a typical example. By inspecting the hybrid urban form, the social isolation of people, and the conflict between governance and daily life, it is concluded that urban governance may inject new elements into the urban environment, conflicting implicitly with existing daily life. Isolation in space and society, on one hand acts as a buffer and preserves parts of daily life, on the other hand, it allows the urban form and urban spirit preserved at different times to coexist. Between different times, the preserved urban form heavily influences the spirit of the place where daily life exists through space and social discipline. Hybridity in Beijing is created by the superimposition of urban forms and spirit in different eras, and this hybridity is being reconstructed during relocating non-capital function, which is a process that has been repeated during every round of urban renewal.

Introduction

In the process of reform and opening up in China, the urbanization rate had increased from 20% in 1982 to 56.1% in 2015, and the total urban population had exceeded the total rural population. As a frontier city in China's urbanization, Beijing's urbanization rate reached 86.5% and the population reached 21.75 million in 2015. The rapid urbanization process had

accumulated many urban problems. In order to build a world-class harmonious and livable capital, and to secure political centers, cultural centers, international communication centers and national innovation centers, the central government decided to relocate non-capital functions, aiming to adjust its economic structure and spatial structure and hoping to control the population below 23 million by 2020. ^[1] Urban space had become the focus of government governance.

Hybridity means mixing, also known as heterozygosity, hybridization, originally a biological vocabulary. H.K.Bhabha introduced the term hybridity into cultural analysis, which meant that when different cultures encountered, it was not a simple addition of different cultures, but a continuous, unfinished blending process. Wang Ning ^[2] had definition of the hybrid city "there had no large-scale traditional urban texture, no historical cultural relics, and no adaptation to modern living infrastructure. They were the result of symbiosis between traditional urban forms and modern urbanization in conflict". Hybridity in this paper referred to the urban characteristics that Beijing had formed by superimposing and blending something in various historical periods.

After researching the phenomenon "severe crackdown on opening walls and holes", Liu ^[3] and his group had pointed out that urban governance should respect spontaneous renewal within communities. During the period of relocating non-capital function (2015-present), we selected a hybrid urban area called Chuanbanhutong in the old city of Beijing. The area was as large as urban community, it was an isosceles triangle with a base of 300 meters and a waist of 360 meters and it was a typical hybridity of functions, building types and

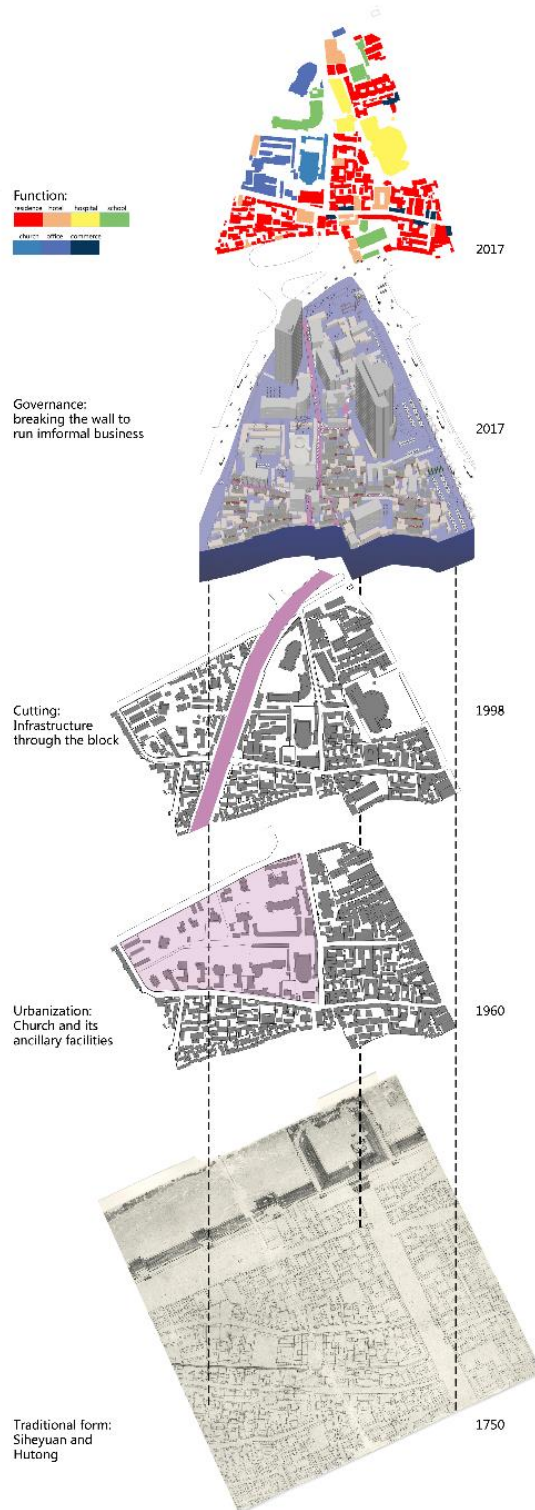


Figure 1. Historical dimension: The hybrid building environment (Source: Drawn by author)

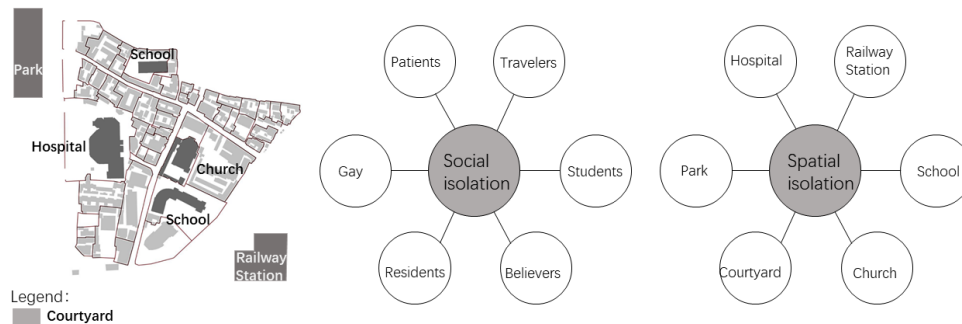


Figure 2. Isolation and connection: Wall vs. Street (Source: Drawn by author)

urban form, there are two processes: the first one is ‘deterritorialization’, the management system of the city will be resolved when the state of the city is under appropriate pressure; the other is ‘reterritorialization’, the process of new power expansion after the disintegration. The alternation of these two processes is the turning point of the old city state and the turning point of the new city state. [4] Overall, in the urban environment, there are buildings with different volumes, styles, types and functions. The three urban spirits are inherited in urban forms and finally merged into a hybrid city.

The isolation in space and society

The spatial pattern formed by the inertia of history had an impact on daily life. In the early years after the founding of new China, people were organized by formal work called Danwei. It was an isolated element in the city [5]. In the courtyard space, there was usually a sense of security and kindness, while in the social traffic environment, it was a non-safe area, and the space of work and residence in the city were all inwardly- oriented courtyards. Every courtyard in such a city could be regarded as an island, and it was only connected by the line of work and residence. Then the isolation formed by the space was created. In this case, the influential public space was important, and this was where the crowd came into communication.

There were many influential public spaces near the Chuanbanhutong area, such as railway station, hospital, park, church and school and five different types of people gathered near the area: local residents, students, patients, gay groups, and believers. Those people met in the influential public spaces and the streets which

connected them. 1) Railway station & Flow of people: The Beijing Railway Station was like a water pump, flowing out people all the time. Because the near space more related than the distant one, the area was always crowded with people from the railway station. This feature was the basis of hybridity of crowd. 2) Hospital & Patient: Tongren Hospital was the most famous in ophthalmology and otolaryngology in China, there were many patients seeking medical consultations from other provinces. Seeking medical treatment offsite was usually an intractable disease and people were very sensitive to the price of living services, and at the same time, they would feel weak when entering an unfamiliar environment. After investigation, the local community did not have a service channel for such people. Local residents had some resistance to the “illness” of this group of people. Due to the lack of humanistic care for the medical community in the surrounding environment, this group of people was even more vulnerable. 3) Park & Gay: Dongdan Park was found at 1956, which was a free park for people. It was first used as a gay base in 1990s. After the 2008 Olympic Games, gay bathroom was ordered to close, this park has become a gathering place in Beijing and even the whole country. Chuanbanhutong was the closest living area to Dongdan Park. Through interviews, we found that the community was a rejection and isolation for the gay community. Just as an innkeeper said, “I will be at the door for 24 hours, and I will not let those people come in. These people’s stays belong to the security category.” 4) Church & Believer: The church had family groups and ministries event, but most of the church’s activities were carried out in the church, which



Figure 3. Informal daily life (Source: Shot by author)



Figure 4. Governance and daily life: Implicit conflict (Source: Shot by author)

had less impact on the community. Because the church organization was supervised by the government, it was cautious about intervening in society for missionary work. 5) School & Students: The Dongjiaominxiang Primary School and Peking Academy High School were high-quality schools in Beijing and they attracted good students and strong parents. There were a youth activity center and other cultural and educational facilities in the area and students were the main user of the area. Through the investigation of the schooling path, it was found that the surrounding road lacks commercial services specifically for primary school students. The lane lacked safety because of the mixed traffic. 6) Street & Residents: residents of the region were proud of living there, feeling pity that historical and cultural buildings were gradually demolished. Residents were active on the flats of the park, while gay groups were active in the rockery area. The two did not interact in the same space. when the church was organizing large-scale events, some residents would complain about traffic congestion in the lane (Figure 2)

It could be seen that the different social people in the space was actually isolated from each other. The social relationship of the patient group was weak, and the activity spaces were also limited to the near round. The surrounding park was a separation between residents and homosexuals. Church activities were confined to the interior of the church. The daily life of the residents was inside the courtyard and the school activities mainly occurred in the courtyard of the campus. Although existing in the same physical space, different people were separated in the social dimension. According to Foucault's ring prison theory, due to the existence of a central monitoring point, each individual was monitored by "gaze". Zhu's research found that power runs in Beijing's traditional space similar to the Foucault's theory. ^[6]

Walls and distances create isolation and spatial depth, and intensify the power. It can be seen that the courtyard pattern formed by history still plays the role of isolation and discipline in contemporary daily life practice. And Danwei Unit inherits and develop this feature. It is especially important that the open space near the venue and the lane and shops become the point of contact with the crowd. Isolation is generally regarded as an impediment to vitality and diverse urbanity. But in Beijing, isolation is

good or bad remains to be discussed. In this urban renewal movement, the government's regulation of the urban environment and the flexible response of the people provide a perspective for rethink isolation.

Implicit conflicts between governance and daily life

Residents used the materials at hand to build living space, such as canopy, foyer, clothes hanger, etc. Those "tinkers" could use all the materials and space in a reasonable way. Someone transformed traditional courtyard and the ground floor into shops to obtain benefits. The phenomenon of "opening the walls and doors to run business" was actually the self-issuance of the market economy. People dried clothes, grew potted plants on the street in a convenient way, and sometimes restaurant's tables were moved onto the street carefully so as not to create blockage.

In order to relocate non-capital function in 2017, the government wanted to create a high quality of urban environment and aim to control the population by relocating the industry. It demolished the illegal construction, restored the original appearance along the street, and cleaned the street to tidy. Taking the restaurant and service industry as an example, the slogan "severe crackdown on opening walls and holes" represented the focus of the work of the district governments. After this governance movement, most of the shop facades of the Chuanbanhutong were changed to traditional styles. The door of the restaurant was changed to the small door and the traditional high window, and the signboard of the store was removed. The merchant's response was to place the menu or signboard on the window and standing at the door to attract customers, but the restaurant would close in a future time because of the scarcity of customers (Figure 3). Besides, some of the spontaneous additions, i.e. informal renewal action, to improve the living environment were not admitted by the government and were also erased down during the governance. Compared to urban governance movement, the government had low wills and standard to responsible for the renovation of the courtyard. Generally, if the house was not leaked or collapsed, and it would not be repaired. Due to the existence of such outdated policies, it was difficult to urge the residents' own funds for the renovation (Figure 4).

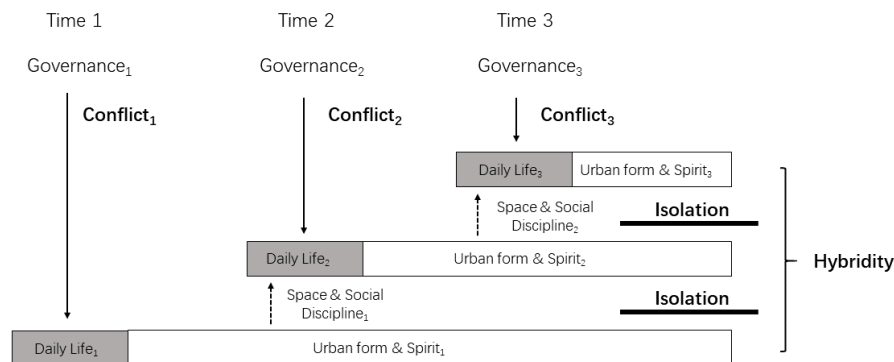


Figure 5. Hybridity, isolation, and conflict in urban renewal (Source: Drawn by author)

The local government was more concerned about the street environment than courtyard. As a result, the façade along streets got tidier, while the condition inside courtyards declined. Interestingly, the courtyard walls not only blocked the sight between the inside and outside of courtyards, but also distinguished between the government's different attitudes.

Residents will customize their habitats informally in daily life according to the existing spatial and social environment. Implicit conflicts will arise when government use its power to change the stage into a formal one. The government could suppress the conflict through space isolation, and the people could temporarily evade supervision through the isolation, so the society form a tacit agreement. After the relaxation of supervision, the traces left behind has become a new urban spirit.

Discussion and Conclusion

Beijing is a superimposed city of urban forms and spirit generated in different historical eras. The spirit in an era can be inherited in latter times through the inertia and discipline traditional urban form. Isolation of space and society created by walls and distances may intensify the power of governance, act as a buffer for implicit conflicts, and preserve heterogeneity in urban forms. Implicit conflicts would arise when government use its power to change the habitats informally adjusted in daily life. The society forms a tacit agreement for residents to temporarily evade supervision through isolation of courtyard walls.

Each era has its own spirit enforced by urban governance, conflicting implicitly with existing daily life. Eventually, the urban environment is changed, generating new urban form and spirit. However, isolation in space and society, as a shelter for informal activities against governance, acts as a buffer and preserves parts of daily life. Moreover, the existence of isolation allows the urban form and urban spirit preserved in different times to coexist, maintaining their special characteristics without being homogenized. Between different times, the preserved urban space heavily influences the spirit of place where daily life exists through space and social discipline. Finally, hybridity is created by the superimposition of urban forms and spirit in different eras. Through this mechanism of urban renewal, Beijing can have many urban spirits that do not conflict with each other, and together Beijing takes on a contemporary hybrid characteristic. It is a manifestation of inclusiveness to some extent. (Figure 5)

Endnotes

1. Beijing Municipal People's Government, Beijing City Master Plan (2016-2035), (Beijing, 2017).
2. Wang N, "Hybrid Town", Community Design, no.3, (2014):38-44.
3. Liu X, Z Y, J Z, Z W, L J, "Humanistic City—A Study of Common Economic Streets", Architecture & Culture, no.8, (2017):201-204.
4. Peter G Rowe, "On Shaping the Space of Time in Urban Circumstances", Urban Design, no.1, (2014):30.

5. Pierre-Alain C, Michele B, Filippo D. P, "Beijing Danwei: for a Dialogic Urbanism", *Urban Design*, no.1, (2014):54.
6. Zhu J F, "Bentham, Foucault, Hanfei, Ming-Qing Beijing Power and Space in a Cross-cultural Perspective", *Time+Architecture*, no.2, (2003):104-109.