CHAPTER 15

Resistance to Places of Collective Memories: A Rapid Transformation Landscape in Beijing

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Introduction

I first visited the Bell and Drum towers neighbourhood, commonly designated as Gulou, during my fieldwork in Beijing between 1995 and 2000. During the 2010s, I returned to this area regularly, always struck by the contrast of the ordinariness of the lifestyle of the local working-class community in their dilapidated houses and the proximity of the Forbidden City. Since I started my visits, Gulou has undergone a gentrification process, with an important commodification of buildings transformed into bars, cafes, restaurants, designer boutiques and so on.

Gulou's transformation process is a classic example of a historic city's core zone. Its marginal position within the historical and cultural districts in the early 1990s resulted in poor maintenance of the urban heritage yet preserved a rich social community life. The municipal authorities have adopted various political strategies. In the late 1990s and early 2000s they transformed the southern part of the central axis (from the Yongding Gate to the Forbidden City), focusing on

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Qianmen and Dashilan. After that they intended to develop Gulou's northern part, up to the Summer Olympic Games site. The aftermath of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games saw several district transformation projects that, as in the case of the London Olympics (Lindsay 2011, 2014), provoked resistance from local communities, such as the Cultural Heritage Protection Center, civic associations and residential groups. Some 50 years after a conflict that opposed preservationists and modernists, the Maoist plan—strongly influenced by Soviet experts—opted for the transformation of Beijing into a modern, socialist capital city, largely overriding tradition (Sit 1995). Issues surrounding the conservation of city and historical districts were already at the heart of such reflections.

Urban Heritage in China

China has submitted propositions to the World Heritage List–an inventory of sites related to the Convention concerning the protection of the World of Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972)– ever since it became a state member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1985. It has maintained a strong interest in themes developed by the international organization. The heritage issue is not new in China (Zhang 2003), but the coutnry's participation in the international agency implies an adjustment to different measures. This is most notable in its active participation in several programmes launched by UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and its hosting of three education and research institutes on world heritage for the Asia-Pacific region (World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspice of UNESCO, WHITR-AP, in Beijing, Shanghai and Suzhou), specifically to progressively submit successful propositions for heritage lists related to natural, cultural and mixed properties or intangible cultural practices (Bodolec 2014; Gruber 2007; Shepherd and Yu 2013). At the national level, with the help of academic institutions that work on concrete cases studies from a preservation technique or planning perspective, regulations have successively been implemented that protect buildings considered of value in rural or urban contexts.

The first heritage law, passed in 1957, concerns historic buildings. It was followed in 1982 by a law to protect cultural heritage that specified the selection criteria for representative cities of Chinese cultural identity. The notion of visual characteristic (*fengmao*) is articulated as standing against frenetic urban development that is destroying historical heritage. In the 1980s, traditional neighbourhoods entered into the category of properties to be preserved. In 1985, Beijing was proclaimed 'Renowned Historic and Cultural City' (Abramson 2001). Between 1990 and 2000, the municipality of Beijing designated 25 historic and cultural districts to be preserved, representing a fifth of the old city (Shin 2010; Zhang 2013a). Among them, two were designated 'traditional one-storey courtyard housing preservation districts': Nanluoguxiang in the East

City and Xisi Bei in the West City. The label 'construction control zone' was quickly introduced to protect neighbourhoods around outstanding properties, allowing an extension of the preservation zone (Abramson 2007). The renovation of Ju'er Hutong neighbourhood responded to this compromise, interpreting it as a way to preserve the *spirit* of the building (chessboard grid; *siheyuan*) while at the same time renovating and modernizing its interior to raise living standards (Wu 1999; Zhang and Fang 2003). In 2000, the municipal authorities completed the definition of this label by prohibiting the development of high buildings that severely transform tangible heritage in historical and cultural zones. So far there is no national funding for cultural heritage in China; projects of renovation or transformation depend on the economic conditions of each region as well as on political will. Additional regulations will gradually clarify the procedures of protection and labelling in the country. In 2003, for example, the 'Renowned Historic and Cultural City' label also came to include the protection of towns, and historical and cultural villages (Kaiping *diaolou* in the Pearl River Delta or Fujian *tulou* villages) (Yan 2015), and it was later extended to streets (Guozidian, Yandaixie and Nanluoguxiang Streets in Beijing) (Abramson 2014). To summarize, measures are scaled, allowing plasticity in the protection approach based on the political and economic contexts.

Traditional Neighbourhoods and the Historic Urban Landscape

In Beijing, the traditional district is considered to be, and presented as, a typical microcosm to preserve; a showcase to promote for ideological and economic reasons (Broudehoux 2004). However, the municipal will to preserve such neighbourhoods stands in conflict with progressive transformations of the city encouraged to enable pharaonic urban projects that bring an international visibility and recognition to Beijing. Architectural icons such as the Rem Koolhaas CCTV headquarters, the Paul Andrieu Beijing National Grand Theater, the Herzog & de Meuron Bird Nest of the Summer Olympics 2008 and soon the Winter Olympics 2022 are examples of such projects (Campanella 2008; Ren 2011). There is a special awareness of the values that heritage conveys, not only technically or politically (representing a time, a knowledge or an ideology), but also culturally and socially (the urban fabric reflecting the composition of society, a particular way of life, traditions of a community and so on).

This awareness is not unique to China; it is relayed through the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003), which was principally initiated by East Asian countries (Japan and South Korea). This new international instrument promotes cultural traditions and social practices that are representative of various groups. It places communities at the centre of the process, encouraging them to participate in decisions (Andris and Graezer Bideau 2014). In the case of Beijing neighbourhoods, the preservation of communities living in the *hutongs* is as primordial as the grid on a chessboard. The UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban

Landscape (RHUL; UNESCO 2011) complemented existing heritage devices between the tangible and the intangible, while also attempting to quell the growing tension between urban development and the protection of property. Its holistic definition embraces a set (or historic centre) in both its physical/geographical and intangible/identity dimensions. Considered to be a non-homogeneous dynamic process, this definition is both attractive to, and programmatic for, various stakeholders. The HUL remains a recommendation that loses its 'clout' through its desire to encompass everything, to be 'all things to all men'. Moreover, it is interpreted differently within the various cultural, economic and political contexts in which it is supposed to operate.

How then must representative elements of heritage be selected for preservation? What criteria must be considered? Who are the actors involved? What role does collective memory play in the selection of buildings? Which role does the transmission of collective memory play in the urban context? How does urban transformation change the practices of ordinary residents and their memory of places?

Urban Change During the Mao Era

Urban change, incorporating all the topics raised above, was already under way during the Mao era. Indeed, the neighbourhoods around the Forbidden City were significantly altered by the modernization of the capital in the late 1950s (Gaubatz 1995). The implementation of the 1958 masterplan that transformed the traditional structure inherited from previous dynasties destroyed part of the walls and main gates of the imperial city and built broad avenues (including Chang'an) and ring roads whose axis changed the symbolic north–south of the capital structure. It exploited loopholes in traditional districts in order to impose the construction of new public buildings—the famous ten large buildings marking the tenth anniversary of the People's Republic of China—and large spaces, some with a clear political purpose, such as Tiananmen Place (Wu 2005). Mao also sought to establish more industry in Beijing in order to balance the production of primary sector forces (countryside) with secondary and tertiary (city). To this end, some old neighbourhoods were partially transformed to accommodate work units (*danwei*), 'micro-cities' within the city that reduced the distance between work and home (Bray 2005). These spatial structures include all necessary facilities for people to live together for their whole lives: scholastic and political education; medical care; catering; shops; leisure and sport; public space; retirement; and so on. Various types of *danwei* were implemented in the city, all comprising modern housing with higher standards of living than in traditional neighbourhoods. There were major industries in the east and the south, universities in the north and the military in the old neighbourhoods of the Eight Banners around the Forbidden City.

Courtyard houses (*siheyuan*), originally inhabited by a single family, became mixed houses (*dazayuan*) or social housing in which several families lived with shared facilities (usually bathroom and kitchen). These spatial structures were uncomfortable, usually rented and poorly maintained, resulting in the gradual

deterioration of the building. This modification of the residents' profile nevertheless enabled the maintenance of a mixed population in traditional neighbourhoods and made these residential areas popular. They became places where local communities carried on a particular way of life, shared collective memory and lived in proximity—an important factor in how a social organization perpetuates itself.

The ten years of turmoil during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) left their mark on the Beijing cityscape. Many buildings were damaged or destroyed by the Red Guards, who regarded them as marks of the old regime, symbols of feudalism or traces of old customs to be banned at all costs. Among these, particular ire was reserved for temples, ancestral halls, royal houses or those of senior officials, targeted both because of their outer shell (built architecture) and because of the lifestyles associated with them.

Urban Change During the Deng Era

The era of reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping impacted 'top down' urban policy. Along with the opening up of the country and the encouragement of private initiatives, China saw the emergence of a multitude of decision-makers entering the urban landscape (Hsing 2010). The profile of Chinese cities was disrupted and the urban fabric—so far largely maintained—underwent radical change. These changes included boulevards, the 'disneyfication' of neighbourhoods, the construction of high-rise buildings and so on, with former residents being relocated (Leaf 1995). Like other Chinese cities, Beijing entered an era of demolition, renovation and unprecedented transformation.

The system of social housing operated by the state since 1949 was gradually abandoned in favour of a real-estate market that is both sprawling and dizzying. Its growth rate meets the demands of the new middle class, now firmly installed in large cities, the upper classes, who consume excess goods and property, and the migrant communities, who can only afford to live in dilapidated neighbourhoods. Land speculation is rampant and is accompanied by a policy of expropriation that affects popular or historical districts, usually located in the centre of the city (Wu 1997). Thus housing, previously considered a public good, has become a commodity. Various reforms regulating urban housing were introduced in the late 1980s to control the development of Chinese cities.[1] These established two distinct real-estate markets: an affordable one for the middle and lower classes and a luxury one for the wealthy. These legislative changes and political decisions still have consequences for the social structure of these urban neighbourhoods.

Unlike in the Mao era, it is not necessarily the type of *hukou* (household registration) that determines the place of residence and allows community management by structuring local government. This local organization, which implies a community based on neighbourly relations, widely structures a homogeneous lifestyle where residents share many collective areas such as public spaces (streets, squares, bathrooms or kitchens), which become an extension of

their private space. Purchasing power and consumption tendencies are now significant factors for spatial reorganization and have a major consequence: greater social segregation. For example, the appearance of gated communities constitutes a kind of new *danwei* administered by private companies—gentrified neighbourhoods accessible only to privileged classes (Pow 2007; Tomba 2008). Social housing, which reflected a certain type of social order, is no longer the regime's priority. Local authorities must find a way of funding the maintenance or transformation of their housing stock. Selling apartments to private investors is one such way, overcoming budget deficits caused by renovations. Lucrative real-estate transactions that often ignore existing buildings, sometimes of historic or cultural value, also bring substantial income. These often overlook the needs or desires of residents whose families might have lived there for generations.

Increasing land speculation and evictions in Beijing have led the authorities to establish new Regulations on the Management of Urban Building Removal in Beijing in 1998 and 2001 to preserve old or dilapidated buildings and protect inhabitants after relocation, as well as recognize the legitimacy of financial compensation. The decree also authorizes the demolition of old neighbourhoods and the expulsion of their residents in order to modernize an area, allowing the construction of large-scale buildings and a profitable operation for investors. This is particularly pertinent for traditional neighbourhoods in the centre of the city with high real-estate value. These areas, however, also contain major heritage reference sites (temples, royal houses, towers, gates and walls), as well as more ordinary, everyday heritage traces (courtyard houses, streets, shops and restaurants) that are required to maintain a spatial organic structure with a mixed social organization. It is this balance that produces the visual atmosphere (*fengmao*) particularly emphasized by urban planners and local authorities.

Experiments have been tried in several neighbourhoods. The rejuvenation of the Qianmen neighbourhood (Ren 2009) in the making of 'New Beijing' for the 2008 Olympics Games is a good example of how a government project legitimized itself by combining modern elements and new architectural icons to transform a residential area into a commercial district for Chinese tourists and local consumers, the preservation of selected old buildings and the reduction of population density (Broudehoux 2009; Meyer 2008). Meeting a pattern widely documented in 'urban anthropology' (Prato and Pardo 2013), this illustrates a new need for consumption in the capital city, with traditional alleys and their immediate surroundings transformed into a kind of 'theme park' for visitors. In some cases the construction of 'fake hutongs' brings new economic function to an area that had previously been mostly residential. But the gentrification process can effectively exclude local inhabitants culturally, socially and financially as they can no longer afford to live in such areas (Siu 2007). Residents in Dashilan tried to resist the appropriation of housing by the municipal authorities (Evans 2014; Ou 2008). Having lost the landmarks of their community life in the new 'old' setting, former residents were offered financial compensation to relocate to other neighbourhoods (Gu 2001).

Neighbourhoods located on the Beijing central axis are particularly sensitive zones; their transformation might damage the Chinese authorities' project to eventually submit them to UNESCO for World Heritage accreditation. To summarize, the strong awareness of the need to protect heritage at the local and national level sometimes clashes with the fragmentation of urban policy (Felli 2005). The implementation of the various regulations, orchestrated by multiple agents operating at the national, municipal and local levels, produces heterogeneous, sometimes inconsistent, situations. Few traditional neighbourhoods were really preserved, others were redeveloped into areas of two-storey buildings with 'historic' roofs or iconic buildings redeveloped for the Imperial City's designation on the UNESCO World Heritage list (Zhang 2008, 198).[2] Others were simply demolished and their inhabitants relocated.

Gulou Neighbourhood: A Preserved Area in a Rapid Transformation Landscape?

Located in the north part of the Forbidden City, Shichahai is also part of the Beijing central axis. Composed of temples, historical royal mansions and a grid of ordinary, relatively well-maintained courtyards around a large natural lake, Shichahai is one of the 25 historical and cultural neighbourhoods of the capital city. Considered to be an organic living tradition for generations, some parts of the area have already been transformed to create a commercial hub of bars and restaurants that is reached from the main boulevards using three-wheelers. Changes to the area have impacted the everyday life of the inhabitants. The walls of the alleyways have been superficially renovated but the housing is still in poor condition. Land prices have nevertheless increased and residents await opportunities to move out. Meanwhile, they complain about the noisy bars, the drunken customers, and the congestion of cars and taxis in the narrow streets, all of which prevents them from enjoying the peaceful alleys of the past (Zhang 2013a, b) (Fig. 15.1).

The Bell and Drum towers lie in the eastern part of Shichahai. This neighbourhood is still quite well preserved. It is other areas that have been targeted for change, such as the *hutongs* mentioned above and bar streets in Shichahai (Gu and Ryan 2008; Yang and Bian 2016) or the hutongs' area in Nanluoguxiang, which was transformed into a tourist and commercial zone with restaurants, bars, shops and ceramics (Shin 2010). The two towers were built during the Yuan dynasty in 1272. They stand 100 metres apart and are important memorial landmarks of the city. They signal space (the northern edge of the Forbidden City and icon for the central axis of the northern part of the city) and time (the morning bell and evening drum signalled the opening and closing of the city's gates) for the entire population. Small shops surrounded them, adding a commercial centre to the residential one that is still present today. Since the 1980s, old Beijing people have moved out of the traditional neighbourhood as their *danwei* offered them modern, better housing. They usually rented their native home to fresh migrants looking for work, thus

Fig. 15.1 The Bell Tower viewed from Yandaixie Cultural Street, September 2015. © F. Graezer Bideau

the migrants became the new local residents. In the 1990s they were joined by another wave of migrants who came looking for work in the transforming Beijing. More recently, as traditional districts have turned into historical and cultural neighbourhoods, craftsmen, students and expatriates, as well as small entrepreneurs in tourist and commercial businesses, have settled there (Fig. 15.2).

This mixed community is living 'cheek by jowl' in a sometimes overlapping collage. Its members have access to various standards of living and patterns of consumption according to their age, gender, ethnic group, family status and professional activity. Their lives have different rhythms and commuting patterns, some live in the neighbourhood, some commute to work. For those who live there, neighbourly relations are central as they enjoy proximity and mutual help—access to goods in food stores, transformation works with the alleys or *siheyuan*, childcare and so forth. They also share common interests and practices, such as recreational activities—dancing; taijichuan; playing chess, cards and mahjong, looking after birds in cages, studying local history and so on. Participant observations conducted in September 2014 and 2015 and interviews carried out in the district between December 2015 and February 2016 highlight a feeling of collective memory that maintains the residents' attachment to this place.[3] A female resident of college age remarked:

Fig. 15.2 Everyday community life on the Bell and Drum Towers square, September 2014. © F. Graezer Bideau

> You know, my grandpa was born here. My dad was born here. And I was born here. This means so much for our family and for a lot of other families. We define ourselves by saying that we are *laobeijing* [indigenous Beijingers]. Your life would be meaningless without living in this place. Now we have to move far away, where, in the past, is not Beijing. Our children and their children will no longer be *laobeijing*! So it's not about moving out of Gulou, but about moving out of ourselves!

In his seminal work, Maurice Halbwachs (1950) demonstrates the importance of collective memory for a community's identification with the material configuration of their neighbourhood. Attachment to a spatial context provides a sense of stability and continuity, which is central to any evolving community. The dynamic process of expressing collective memory within the community mostly references the past—a specific moment or practice embedded in a particular place or site—better to enable a telling, or understanding, of the present. As Andrea Huyssen (2003) notes, people construct a sense of the past that informs us about the multiple voices arising from local communities and authorities. These heterogeneous expressions, ranging from dominant to subaltern positions, construct an urban memory coherent with the city landscape. Attachment to place as a memory or identity can be disturbed when brutal change occurs within the neighbourhood.

In historical and cultural districts where there has been demolition of the built environment and/or eviction and displacement of the local community, individual or collective resistance to these traumatic transformations is observed. These resistances take various forms—perhaps narratives or practices (Scott 1990)—and need to adapt to the continuously changing legal requirements that dictate the transformation of the city shape. They usually constitute everyday practices of informality (de Certeau 1990) expressed in political, economic, cultural and emotional terms, which stand in opposition to prescribed and orthodox practices and values. Urban heritage is a good framework with which to observe and analyse the use and appropriation of sites by the different stakeholders involved in the management and preservation of cultural heritage. This is even more pertinent with challenges and limits that the new recommendation on historical urban landscape brings to the local and national arenas (Bandarin and van Oers 2012). In Beijing, where issues of local identity and city appropriation are especially relevant, analyses of spatial justice (Soja 2009) can explore the organization of space that reflects social and political relations between various agents of the community as well as interactions between local communities and authorities (Fig. 15.3).

Gulou's location on the north part of Beijing's central axis is a sensitive area. From an official perspective, the management of the urban development may

Fig. 15.3 Demolition of the Bell and Drum towers square, September 2014. © F. Graezer Bideau

either improve or damage the concrete and visual perception of this symbolic axis. This became all the more important with the submission of the Beijing Central Axis (including Beihai) to the World Heritage List in 2013 and the award of the Winter Olympic Games to Beijing in 2022. The authorities, therefore, are paying careful attention to the transformation of this area. They do not want the kind of controversy they experienced during the 2000s with the south part of the central axis around Qianmen. Nevertheless, they may take into account the memorial references mobilized by local communities in their urban landscape and their strategy to be recognized as the legal inhabitants claiming the right to the city (Harvey 2008), the right of belonging to this place (Zhang 2013a) or the right to form a homeowners' movement (Merle 2014). Indeed, recent studies have highlighted the production of internal hierarchies constitutive of the process of patrimonialization (Herzfeld 2004; Smith 2006) or placemaking (Feuchtwang 2004), where reference to collective memories causes rivalry and controversy (Connerton 2009). In studying the making of heritage sites, Michael Di Giovine (2009), among others (Bendix et al. 2012; Graezer and Kilani 2012; Svensson 2006; Wang 2012), elucidates the paradoxes of preservation concerning the territory inhabited and people's plural attachments by highlighting the prioritization of certain expertise over local knowledge and how within it local ownership is rhetorically replaced by universal ownership.

The 2010 and 2012 Gulou Projects

In 2010 the Bell and Drum towers neighbourhood was part of a transformation project led by the local authorities (Chongwen District) of the municipality of Beijing. The plan was to reconstruct the area on the basis of a Qing dynasty urban map, which would have involved the destruction of numerous *siheyuans* and *hutongs* in the vicinity. The government advanced various arguments including the upgrading of living standards in the neighbourhood while keeping its historical appearance. To make the necessary changes, many residents would be relocated to better housing in modern buildings on the outskirts of the inner city and awarded financial compensation. Like many other Beijing traditional neighbourhoods, Gulou has many informal buildings 'that serve a wide range of functions, from being the resident's extended living spaces, kitchens and storages areas, to providing space for vital economic activities such as retailing, restaurants or small workshops' (Zhang 1997, 85). These are not officially recognized by the city administration. Labelled as 'temporary or illegal construction', they are often occupied by illegal residents (officially called a 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*)): rural migrants looking for work in towns. These people, who are not officially registered in their place of residence—that is, with a rural *hukou* in a city—will not have access to the same compensation package as legal inhabitants.

To avoid the demolition of the cultural and historical landscape as well as the dismantling of the mixed community, many voices were raised in protest against the implementation of the 'Beijing Time Cultural City'. As Jiang Yue noted in

a *China Radio International* article on 20 April 2010, this municipal project, encompassing 12.5 hectares with a budget of RMB5 billion, proposed the building of a museum complex to celebrate the traditional cultural time—tellingly, this complex would include a conference centre, an underground shopping mall and parking lots. The reinstigation of the tradition of 'morning bell, evening drum' was even proposed. Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection (CHP) was the most active resistance to this costly plan to transform the area. A non-governmental organization (NGO) engaged in historical preservation, CHP set up a website with regular updated information and organized public debate, initiating and maintaining general awareness that the new official project should avoid a repetition of the earlier Dashilan transformation. The website (http://en.bjchp.org/?page_id=2597) gives a voice to local residents, offers updated information about the ongoing project and suggests alternatives to it. A few months after this was initiated, the local municipality abandoned the project. There is still much speculation as to the real purpose of the project and the reasons behind its abandonment. The ethnographic evidence would suggest three possible explanations: the strong power of the preservationist voices; the cost-benefit impact of the transformation; the administrative transition that followed the merging of the two formerly separated Dongcheng and Chongwen districts into a new unified municipal authority (that is, the new Dongchen district). Possibly, but most likely it was a mixture of all three (Fig. 15.4).

Fig. 15.4 The Drum tower during the renovation project, September 2014. © F. Graezer Bideau

In 2012 the local authorities proposed a new Gulou renovation project: the 'Bell and Tower Square Restoration Project'. This was less ambitious than the last. Still based on a Qing dynasty map, it concentrated on the historical square between the two towers. Only courtyards without historical value and 'informal constructions' were to be demolished, to fit with a conception of the square that principally references a nostalgic visual connection to the area. Once again the local authorities proposed the relocation of residents, offering a compensation rate for their house, a new house in Shaoyaoju neighbourhood and a financial incentive for a quick decision to relocate, in order to launch the transformation project as soon as possible (Graezer and Yan Forthcoming). The tight framework envisaged by the authorities provoked an upsurge of resistance among residents. As Simon Rabinovitch notes in a *Financial Times* article on 26 April 2013, 'Police officers have been knocking on doors on a daily basis to remind people their time is up. Angry residents have had shouting and shoving matches with them. Many say they will fight to stay.' Despite local communities criticizing the absence of any upgrading of housing for decades, they are still very much attached to their neighbourhood and appreciate the quality of life, which will vanish once they are relocated to high-rise buildings.

Local Stakeholders' Narrative and Commitments

Gulou has become a battlefield in which three groups of stakeholders each claim to play a major role. Interestingly, both their narratives and their actions towards the preservation of Gulou neighbourhood turn on cultural heritage or urban landscape, although these key words are rarely mentioned. Official discourses use urban policy general terms: environment improvement, preservation, authenticity or cultural zone. Heritage activists debate government statements using academic approaches and propose alternatives, while the local population expresses its concern on practical, basic issues such as housing conditions, the deterioration of street life and the hope of a rise in everyday living standards.

The Dongcheng authorities base their transformation project on the plethora of regulations aimed at the protection of Beijing's traditional side, such as the General Plan for the Preservation of the Imperial City of Beijing in 2002 and the Humanism Olympic Cultural Heritage Protection Plan, enacted in 2003. They legitimize their lucrative project using the appealing term of memory—the traditional public square between two historic landmarks of the inner city—and the reinstigation of the 'morning bell and evening drum' tradition. They wish to enhance the visual connection to the surrounding environment by restoring an 'authentic' atmosphere that conforms to their perception of the past that they want to promote. Their conception of 'environment improvement' implies the demolition of illegal constructions with no historic value. The destruction of 66 courtyards will, in their eyes, upgrade living conditions in the area, improve the safety of local communities, highlight the 2010 renovation of the historical Bell and Drum towers and their vicinity, and maintain the 'urban landscape capital' within the district, all of which will bring sufficient

income through cultural and tourist activities. As the restoration project relies on the official language commonly used of 'historic district' largely practiced throughout China, there is greater insistence by the government on valuable tangible heritage than intangible cultural heritage. In its view, the preservation priority should be buildings, a policy easier to practice with the help of experts in architecture and urban planning. The idea of including local communities is still not entirely integrated into the conceptual and practical framework, and it implies conflict and resistance that is time-consuming for the economic development of the city.

Cultural heritage preservationist discourse is less homogeneous than the official discourse. The two use different approaches, ranging from strictly academic to practical salvation, in order to protect historical and cultural neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, they do have a common proactive use of communication to better promote transformation projects using media coverage. This is particularly true for the CHP, whose members committed themselves early to the protection of the Bell and Drum towers case. They took a stand against the Dongcheng project in 2010, publishing articles on the CHP website and organizing public debates within local communities about their right to resist the Gulou transformation and the collateral damage of relocation. They proposed an alternative development plan, published in a public letter entitled 'A Better Future for Gulou—CHP's Views on the Planned Redevelopment', available on line (CHP 2010).[4] Their governmental counterstatements insisted on the necessity of involving local communities in the decision-making process in their neighbourhood to maintain not only 'authentic' representation of the old Beijing built environment but also the current population in situ for an urban fabric that is coherent and lively. CHP then questioned the need to enrich Gulou's existing commercial and retails areas, which will only bring more tourists, invading the residents' privacy. The NGO also questioned which historical period the new project should comply with (Qianlong as one of the longest reigns in Chinese history: 1735–1796) and the need to implement a sustainable project for future generations. Its alternative plan was to use the same investment to rejuvenate the surrounding courtyards and to rezone the commercial areas outside the neighbourhood with the objective of avoiding a 'disneyfied'—or 'fake historical'—neighbourhood.

There was another perservationist group engaged in the protection of the Bell and Drum towers square in 2012: the Gulou Preservationaist Team or Watching for Bell and Drum Tower area. This was an interdisciplinary team that first shared their opinions on the local redevelopment through Weibo miniblog and then decided to document the process of demolition and relocation. They eventually launched research on the history of local courtyards and created an interactive webGIS platform–a combination of the web technology and the geographical information system–allowing public participation. Their historical focus allowed them to oppose the demolition of the 66 courtyards around the square, arguing that the shape and size of the square has been almost unaltered since the Qing dynasty, thus contradicting the historical

arguments of the official project. Lastly, they stressed the indivisible link between tangible and intangible heritage, built environment and inhabitants that forms the heart of traditional neighbourhoods. Separating these will result in the loss of memonic patterns within the area for local inhabitants and the destruction of its urban fabric. Cultural heritage preservationist discourse is quite closed to the underlying principles of the 2011 RHUL. Its reflections and practices converge to the core values of the UNESCO recommendation, a holistic preservation that includes tangible and intangible heritage and its inscription from a sustainable perspective in terms of human factors.

The local discourse is divided between inhabitants who want to stay in Gulou, with the hope of getting improved living standards, and those seeking financial compensation and a move to high-rise buildings on the outskirts of Beijing. Despite heterogeneity, all arguments are rooted in memory rhetoric. Most of them evoke nostalgia about the neighbourhood's 'golden age', when they used to live in a clean and homogenous environment (meaning before the settlement of non-Beijing people (*waidiren*) and mass tourism). The contrast between the remembered and idealized past and the chaotic present is often central to their complaints. During an interview, an old male resident said:

> President Xi Jinping used to be my neighbour, you know? Same age with me, same community. In the past, every child played together, no matter who you were, from high-class or low-class. Who cares! Everyone was equal! Now is different. You look at him and look at me. You see the difference? No you don't see it. It's not the difference between him and me. It's the difference between his kids and my kids. They never get a chance to play together. My kids are either playing with *waidiren,* or they even have nowhere to play!

The compensation rate offered by the local authorities was considered unsatisfactory by many residents, another frequent complaint. It was less than half of the amount proposed in other parts of the city (RMB100,000 versus RMB40,000). Again bringing to mind events in London (Lindsay 2014), they were also sceptical about the redevelopment works that local authorities might undertake to improve the area's environment and infrastructure. In a *Global Times* article on 7 September 2010, Li Shuang spoke of a 70-year-old resident 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.

Urban development and heritage issues have seen many changes in recent years, to maintain the confidence of inhabitants concerning their future. They feel cornered and insecure, and they focus on the *waidiren* who are 'uncivilized' and bring trouble to the community through their position outside the

collective memory, their illegal status within the local society and their 'informal constructions' that disfigure the historic urban landscape. 'They make money by telling lies!' one said. 'The peddlers sell expensive dirty foods; and the three-wheeler drivers just make up faked stories about Beijing's history for the tourists.' Another middle-aged male resident commented:

> If you want to come to Beijing, do education! I know many *waidiren* working in Beijing, they gained degree in college and work to make the country better. We welcome that kind of *waidiren*. If you don't have education and just want to make money from us and even make us living in a worse situation, go back!

Local discourses turn on memory and territory, and balance between tradition (old way of life) and modernity (comfort and consumption revolution) as well as constructing boundaries between 'them and us'—a classic theme in 'urban anthropology' (Prato and Pardo 2013; Pardo and Prato 2012). In today's unstable context, the so-called natives of the neighbourhood (*bendiren*) ascribe their threatened security to the outsiders, who become convenient scapegoats. To them, the mnemonic patterns are broken in everyday practice that brings life and breadth to the neighbourhood, rather than through its urban landscape. The RHUL aims to preserve community life within its built environment by keeping strong physical and emotional links between the organization of space and the social structure of the neighbourhood. Although its objectives are benevolent, they remain pure concepts to the community's everyday experience; they deal in practical issues and raise their voices to be heard.

Conclusion: Collective Memory in the Historical Urban Landscape

The modernization of the Beijing urban landscape has involved various processes ranging from urban planning to intangible cultural heritage. Changes at the turn of the twentieth century reflect national and international concerns by investigating a framework that combines urban development and heritage preservation. Examples of neighbourhoods such as Gulou, Qianmen and Nanluoguxiang show how the Chinese authorities have entered into a selective process that defines the historical built environment and its representation in a flexible way in order to respond as well as possible to the rapid transformation of the urban or rural landscape in a challenging market-oriented economy. Since the 2000s, the objective of the preservationist movement was to raise awareness of the inextricable links between tangible and intangible heritage. In its approach, coherent and lively urban fabric is bound to its territory and architecture and both need to be preserved. Local communities are attached to their neighbourhood's landmarks that embody their collective memory, which could be displayed in multiple layers and take shape in several dimensions. In Gulou, residents don't raise a united voice to express their intentions.

In reality, they are riddled with tensions and negotiations over the representations of their 'historic and cultural neighbourhood' and the different strategies they pursue in order to maximize their benefit in the current transformation process. Cheng Anqi and Zhang Zixuan, in a *China Daily* article on 29 March 2013, quote a 77-year-old resident: 'They [local authorities] want it to be a commercial tourism district but we want to save it!' Residents feel proud of the revalorization of the Bell and Drum towers area, but they also fear losing it as it was lived, practised and embodied for generations.

The 2011 UNESCO RHUL still needs to be proved as a new holistic device. The main question related to our case study is to what extent it can be applied in the Chinese context. Its plasticity allows a combination of saving the built environment and preserving community lifestyles. The RHUL also encourages better integration of the local community in any decision-making process, raising awareness and interest in redevelopment projects. Instead of simply placing a decision in front of residents, the participation encouraged by public debates or interactive media is a way to express local knowledge that will complement expertise from both preservationists and authorities. In Gulou, the empowerment of inhabitants through being allowed to express their opinions exarcerbated underlying tensions between *bendiren* and *waidiren*. Instead of uniting inhabitants around the shaping and reshaping of their collective memory that may have deep impacts on the neighbourhood's social life and the area's conservation, the transformation process is widening divisions between them.

Notes

1. These reforms on land property (1988), on land property rental (1990), on urban housing systems (1994) and on private property for housing (2004 and 2007) resulted progressively in the distinction between the land ownership and the right to use the land, and in the opportunities for land tenancy to rent, buy or mortgage for 65 years.
2. The Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Beijing and Shenyang was listed in 1987 and extended in 2004 with Shenyang.
3. Several field studies were conducted in collaboration with Chinese and Western colleagues between September 2014 and February 2016. About 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with local residents on issues of memory and territory. Interview questions were about discourses and practices on their experiences and attachments to the neighbourhood, their perceptions on successive renovation projects and change of housing conditions.
4. See http://en.bjchp.org/?p=2385

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