Annex 2: The Case of Beijing Gulou Area

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1. Introduction: The Transformation of Beijing City

In China, today, if we put “nostalgia” in Chinese searching engine Baidu.com, we would be amazed by the associative words with it: youths, born in 1990s, memories 20 years ago, etc. It is amazing to see that a term usually used by the elders is now most frequently mentioned by the youths. This is a mirror for the whole society. That is, a fastin developing country, which is witnessing rapid changes day by day, has been a venue of nostalgic feelings. Even people born in the 1980s like myself can hardly return to the places of our childhood. For myself, the courtyard I lived as a child and the elementary school where I spent six years have both been dismantled, replaced by modern buildings. In our 30s, we have already been talking about the “good old memories.”

This is the uniqueness of the Beijing case. In comparison to other cities where the most active preservationists are composed of by elites or professionals in their middle ages, Beijing’s volunteers for historic preservation are much younger. It makes sense when we consider the remarkable uncertainties in such as society full of changes and transformations. There have been a number of plans that aim at maintaining certain paths to the city’s development. However, by creating a set of paths, the plans have also generated paradoxes for the paths.

In fact, even the plans themselves are representations of the uncertainties. Over the last six decades, Beijing has had a number of urban planning approaches, which themselves are full of contrasting principles. The past and memories were first seen as was olds, then seen as valuable treasures. 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 (Hsin 2010; Leaf 1995; Wu 1997). The traditional areas in Beijing composed of hutongs

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1 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).
alleys) and *siheyuan* (courtyard houses) are highly valued as historic, economic, and cultural areas, but these became the subjects of controversy during development that potentially jeopardizes 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). However, over the past 15 years since 2000, the pace of destruction of the hutongs and neighborhoods have even speeded up.

Therefore, this case study attempts to explore the meanings given by the people involved in the paradox. Along the process of the changing and preservation for the historic city, how could we understand the different motives for different groups of stakeholders, which drove them to take contrasting approaches? What are the in-depth economic, social and cultural mechanisms behind the ostensible claims by different groups? How can we understand the efforts of different groups, such as the government agencies, expert-driven projects, and local voices? Historic Urban Landscape is a concept that gives a possibility to understand and preserve not only physical fabrics but also spiritual meanings of historic centers. How different stakeholders make sense of the space transformation and life change? And how HUL could be introduced and improved with these voices?

By close reading of the people, we try to understand more about the society. Will the 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’s missing in the initiatives?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The RHUL and its Chinese counterpart

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 the 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’ (RHUL 2011). 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’ (article 9, RHUL 2011). The innovative perspective of this 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.

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’ (HCPD, lishi wenhua baohu qu), which include built environments and human factors, had already taken an integrated approach. All parties involved in cultural heritage issues, from officials to ordinary citizens, used this tool to defend, impose, or negotiate their positions.

In fact, the HUL and the HCPD are oriented towards the same logic: both tangible and intangible elements within a particular area of rich history and culture should be preserved in an integral manner. However, in spite of their perfection in texts, they remain pure rhetoric, without any concrete guidelines as to how the ‘social and cultural practices and values’ should be preserved. Especially there is legitimate criticism of HUL for its weak impact 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. 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 presents a narrow opportunity to claim their rights to the city (Harvey 2008) and/or the heritage in their neighbourhood (Evans 2014) or villages (Svensson 2006).

What we are mostly concerned here is how the initiatives, both the Chinese HCPD or the HUL are being implemented. Why, with these set of ideas being promoted consecutively, Beijing is still losing its historic fabrics over the past decades. What makes them so difficult to practice? Are we missing something that constitute the principal part of the concepts? We hypothesize that one missing point may lie in the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity.

2.2 Introduction to Collective Memory

To solve the abovementioned limit, we need to introduce other concepts. One crucial dimension of heritage as related to diversity and identity is collective memory, first explored in 1950 by Maurice Halbwachs. 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

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2 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 Tabacco Pouch Street) was designated in 2010.
group’s territory and architecture. Urban studies and the history of nationalism have revisited Halbwach’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 who 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 patrimonialization (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.

Last but not least, by introducing collective memory, we should note that the practice of HUL should not be a simple consideration of social diversity, not be a simple inclusion of diverse voices from the stakeholders. Instead, we should go further, to explore the social patterns and dynamics that generate the needs and voices of the stakeholders. In other words, we are not decoding their memories, but to understand the memories with a sociological lens, which reflect on the mechanisms by which the memories are created and transmitted.

3. The Case

3.1 The Gulou Area and the Restoration Project

The Gulou area, namely 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.3 Because of their spatial

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

⁴ 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.
In 2010 a development project was proposed for this protection zone. In January, during the annual ‘two meetings’, official media released the message about the ‘Beijing Time Cultural City’ development project, the intent of which was to spend five billion RMB 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. 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.

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 – with 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).

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5 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.

6 CHP has its official website at http://en.bjchp.org/.
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. 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 44,000 RMB, about half the market rate, plus an economic apartment in Shaoyaogju neighbourhood. 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 170,000 RMB, an obvious incentive for quick relocation.

The Restoration Plan, spaces within the red line are supposed to be “cleaned off.”

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 2 and half months, which included the Chinese New Year. The Chinese New Year is a seven-day break, when all business are quiet and people could do nothing. Active preservationists quickly

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7 Shaoyaogju 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 being considered, such as in suburban areas.
responded – as CHP had to the previous project\(^8\) – but local outrage was more striking this time around with many 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 people their time is up. Angry residents have had shouting and shoving matches with them. Many say they will fight to stay’ (Rabinovitch 2013).

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 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.

### 3.2 The Method

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.

We collected data from the three groups: officials, preservationists, and the locals. We planned to conduct interviews with all three groups. However, neither officials nor the chief designers of the project – the Boston International Design Group, accepted the request for interviews. As a result, we analyze the official discourses by reading policy documents and media reports closely. To investigate details of BIDG, we examine their previous projects and public reception of the projects.

Our analyses of the preservationists and the locals are all based on in-depth interviews and media reports. 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 2015 and 2016. More than 30 local residents were interviewed with questions about their attitudes towards the project and living conditions. In addition, we also interviewed other stakeholders such as a bar owner.

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. Three full transcripts of interviews are attached in appendix.

### 4. Three Discourses

\(^8\) CHP has not intervened in the second restoration project.
4.1 The official discourse

The government

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\(^9\), resulted in a plan for underground car parks around the area. Professor Greco was, however, restrained about 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.

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

“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 thousand square meters to 4 thousand square meters. ... [The project] will reference to 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. 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.

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9 Claudio Greco teaches at the Università degli Studi di Roma ‘Tor Vergata’ and has engaged in collaborations in China since the 1990s
According to the authority, the courtyards built after the historic map ‘encroached’ as illegal constructions. Because of this the area suffered 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 designer**

Another stakeholder to be discussed is the design agency for the project – Boston International Design Group. We tried to contact the designers, but we received no response. However, as we explored the company and analyzed their background and previous projects, we found that the company had been so infamous in China for their intervention in historic communities.

For example, in Ningbo, a historic and cultural famous city designated by Ministry of Housing and Construction, the neighborhood of Yuehu area used to be a historic district with a number of residences of famous figures. However, with BIDG’s design, these places have been transformed into a commercial area, with all local residents being relocated. The project is widely criticized as it destroyed the historic fabrics of the community. However, according to an interview of BIDG’s founder, they brought something new into the community:

“Before we were invited to take control of the project, many designing groups such as Southeast University and Zhejiang Garden Designing Institute have developed many rounds of designs. However, all the designs stayed in a stage that we call ‘conservation in situ’. We are asked by departments of city planning to add something new. We aimed to switch the angle of conservation, for not only conserving it, but also transforming the historic district” (He 2009).

Despite the controversy in other cities, BIDG is still invited to design the Gulou restoration project. Unsurprisingly, their plan has received much stronger suspicion among preservationists. Even the criticisms went further, not only on its design, but on the credibility of the company itself.
A report by Global Times stated that BIDG has a notorious reputation among planners. It also reported an announcement by the American Planning Association that the company was registered in the US, but none of its staff is a certified planner there. The report went further by quoting APA’s announcement that the company is speculative (Yang 2012).

It is common now in China that Chinese design firms often use foreign-sounding names to make it up as international companies. While being registered overseas, most of its business is done in China. As a weibo by Yin Zhi, vice director of School of Architecture at Tsinghua University revealed, BIDG is a company purely run by Chinese, with a “western” name to make it look good.

According to BIDG’s official website, “Boston International Design Group (BIDG) was founded by Junfu Zhu and Easley Hamner in Cambridge Massachusetts in 2004.” “Our design projects around the world have gone beyond the geographic and cultural boundaries, and are based on values and interest, which mainly include respecting local history and culture to a large extent. We make substantial contribution to local urban environment through planning and designing; customers will get excellent design based on their needs and expectations through our cooperation” (BIDG 2017). Ironically, among the projects listed on the website, the Gulou project has been deleted.

4.2 The preservationist discourse

**CHP and Gulou Preservation Team**

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 multi-disciplinary, 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\textsuperscript{10} – 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 through their common interests or opinions about the project via Weibo and created the team’s own Weibo account.\textsuperscript{11} 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. And using map, the team tracked the progress of the removal of courtyards.

\textsuperscript{10} A more formal title of the team is the Watching Team for Bell and Drum Tower Area.

\textsuperscript{11} \url{http://weibo.com/u/3229147557?is_all=1}
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 judgment. 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, 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

12 The interview text was published in March 2013 by the student-run magazine UIBELIFE at the University of International Business and Economics.
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 their unpublished report, 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.

**Diverse Motives of the Preservation Team**

A very interesting factor that needs to mention is the diverse backgrounds and motives of the preservationist team. Although protecting the site was a common aim for the team members, each of them had seen the work in different ways. We have acquired four in-depth interviews with four team members, including the founder – wepon. According to the interviews, they held different perspectives towards the site and the preservation action.

For Wepon, the main goal was to record. He wanted more people to know the event. As he stated, he knew it was impossible to stop the project, but it was important for the general public to realize that the messages sent by the government was misleading to a large extent. The history about the site, according to him, should be accurately presented.

“We wished to consider the needs of local residents, as we understood more about the community. Although it was hard to change the situation, we hoped that all residents should know, at least get hold of relevant real information. They should know how much the house is worth, or what costs they should pay if they move. They should not move without knowing the real situation. One of the reasons that we made records was that most of the information given by developers was not true. So we need to present the true facts to all. Commercial development is not bad. The truth is that what developers said, done and planned are totally different. Experts can easily find out what was wrong. This is unacceptable, legally and professionally. So we need to stand out and reveal the facts.”

CQ, a graduate student in UK, was conducting his dissertation research in Beijing. He joined the team because of the research. His topic is about the formation of political Tiananmen square. He thought the Gulou square might provide some useful information for his understanding of Tiananmen square. What interested him was the way local residents

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13 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.
indirectly asked each other about the amount of compensation. However, he said, there was no collective action to oppose the project, because the locals thought that any collective action would be labeled as “anti-revolutionary” by the government.

RT is the most “calm” one in the group. She saw the event mostly from an academic perspective. She joined the team for she wanted to offer a little help. She keeps observing many similar events. She is passionate about the preservation of heritage. But her passions were centrally shaped by her academic vision. For the Gulou case, she was passionate about the protection of the courtyards. But she did not get fully engaged in persuading locals to oppose the project.

ZX is perhaps the most active one and the extremist in the group. She studied gardening in college, but was motivated to protect heritage in this case. She tried to persuade the locals that the project was illegal and unfair. And she was the most sensitive one for the government’s response. She saw online criticisms to the team “five-maos,” a group of government-organized online gomers receiving fifty cents RMB for posting one pro-government message. And she thought her act was just for justice.

“I was really depressed when hammered by the government. 50 cents to hire someone to rail against me. It was the hardest time for me. I was really sad. That’s also one of the reasons driving me to go aboard. Everyday when I went to the Bell and Drum Tower I was like a thief, an underground party member. I had so many friends who supported me. The whole team made me happiest so far. For many times I was determined to work hard towards a certain goal. The team helped me understand further why I became a designer: how to be a designer, how to find the originality. I should not serve any interest group, but rather play a role to weigh A against B. I would not be able to stand against the internet diatribe. Wu Shuli helped us, saying that we were here to protect the ancient buildings. "We did not let you move”. He even helped us take photos. But Wu Shuli did not want to move when it was time to relocate. His son wanted to move because he wanted a house of his. But the neighborhood committee and relocation company told the residents not to believe us. The neighborhood committee said that their houses would be ruined if there was a fire in the hutong (alley). They came to protect, not to persuade to demolish the houses. But this was different from what we talked to them, or even on the internet. We thought it is the residents’ right to decide whether to move or not. Protection of ancient buildings has nothing to do with relocation. We protect the building itself. The building may be used for other purposes if residents move out. But the residents thought relocation and dismantlement of houses are the same. The government also stated that residents can stay after protection. You see, many concepts have been mixed and confused.”

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.

4.3 The local discourse

From the start, local residents’ attitudes towards the project were divided. Some people objected to the acquisition and relocation, and 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 a better living condition!’ (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!” Another old lady said:

“I think the question is not relocation, what my concern is demolition. We should try to improve the living conditions, within national or private budget. Make reasonable planning. Right? Keep the original townscape. I think Old Beijing Culture and Chinese culture have the same roots. It's like a big tree, growing here from a young tree. If you are lost and cannot find the way out, look for this tree, 'opposite to the tree', the tree will tell you the direction.”
Most residents complained about poor living conditions. Garbage and transportation are two major aspects to complain:

“For example, there is a small hutong with piles of garbage around it. Everybody dumping rubbish, why not take some actions, clear it up, whether government or residents, spend some money, turn it into a beautiful garden hutong! You cannot ask people to stop throwing away rubbish. The garbage need a place before cleared away. So how you plant, create a 'hutong culture'? Find a hiding spot. This hiding spot is only another dumping place for the garbage. This is not a solution. We need to clear away the rubbish. That's all. The same with transportation. It's reasonable that there's one electric car or electro-tricycle in every household. They are our 'vehicles' to get around in the city, more convenient than four-wheel cars. I am afraid of attending a meeting, you know why? Because of the parking problem. I went to the place where the meeting was held, but was told that the parking lot was for internal use only. Other people had no right to park. So it's really difficult for me to park. I left my car at my working place and take metro to run around. Why should I buy the car?”

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 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 lable 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. It was the mass tourism boom and the in-flow of non-Beijing people (waidiren) that turned the area into the current chaotic place of today. 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).

However, if we go deeper, we would find that practical reasons prevail over the rhetoric of memory. Behind the claims of collective memories, there are economic drives.

Before we move to discuss the locals responses to the economic compensation, it is worth mentioning an interview with a bar owner, who used to open a famous live pub, which was dismantled during the project. He holds a somewhat neutral viewpoint on the local residents’ requests. As he said, it was fundamentally the demand for money that constituted the core issue of the negotiation between locals and the government.

“In my opinion, it is just a matter of negotiation, whether compensation is in place, whether the houses for residents to relocate are well-arranged. Things like this. I didn’t notice any other big conflicts. Residents who live here may not feel comfortable because there’s no toilet, and it’s very cold in winter. Besides, the wall is not warm either. The house property right is not certain. So they will not spend much for it. They didn’t live comfortably here. Some people prefer relocation because they will get a large compensation as much as several million yuan. They can live an affluent life with the compensation. They become rich people, a better condition than before, when a whole family have to live in a small house of merely 20 square meters. So
A more practical reason for many residents’ refusal of the offer of relocation was the unsatisfactory rate of compensation. The rate – 44,000 per square metre – 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
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.

In other words, memory serves as a weapon for personal claims. But as the bar owner observed, few people would choose to stay just because of memory:

“I think very few people would stay for personal emotions that they have lived here for entire life. Maybe he/she lives in a house left by his/her past spouse. He/she would like to stay, not willing to leave the past ones. I know some people are like this, but very few. Most people will give full considerations to balance the interests and gains. It’s not bad if you move to a new environment. Many residents in hutong have moved to other places since they cannot earn as much as they expect. Many vacant houses in the hutong are for rental now. Where do they come from? They are left by the owners, who move elsewhere with better living conditions. But they are still the owners. It’s natural that they don’t want to live because of inconvenience.”

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 authority did. To a large extent, HUL was created to preserve community life, but the real 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.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The place now

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 behavioral codes such as gambling and superstitious activities, fighting, lying on the ground, playing soccer, walking dogs, etc. And most inhabitants said it had been better than before. As one said, “there used to be so many shops and commercial atmosphere. Now it’s all back to normal life.”

The Gulou square now, back to normal life.

We have tried to contact and interview the residents relocated to Shaoyaoju neighborhood. There are three buildings particularly allocated for these Gulou residents, who, neighbors in the past, were mostly removed and relocated during the same time. We expected to have similar interviews as we conducted with those staying in Gulou area. However, surprisingly, the relocated residents refused to accept our interviews. They are even reluctant to talk about the event.
This was very shocking to us, as we anticipated that they had a lot to express as their old neighbors. We attempted to talk to the residents around the resting area between the new buildings. Even we tried to knock doors to invite them to talk. However, all people are reluctant to speak up. Most responses were like:

“it’s meaningless to talk now, everything has passed.” “What do you want to hear from me? The new life has been settled down. Nothing more to talk about.”

The responses may be interpreted in terms of the feeling of uncertainty. As we interviewed the locals who are staying in Gulou, most complains are about unpredictable changes of policies. The trust of government has been downgraded to a very low degree. “The government has always changing its policies. Yesterday they said yes, perhaps tomorrow they would say no. As ordinary people, the only thing we can do is to wait. Wait the final call.”

In fact, in a country with full of rapid changes and transformations, as well as fluctuation of political environments, to search for certainty seems an ultimate goal for many people in their lives, for both spiritual and practical reasons. As in a time when life and future is so unpredictable, a sense of certainty is more important than any other needs. This is perhaps the most distinctive character of the Beijing case. And after all uncertainties disappeared and life has finally settled down, the willing to speak up will disappear accordingly.

**Potential and Limits of HUL**

The case study of Gulou shows the shaping of collective memory over the last decade in which radical change occurred, matching evolved urban policies and regulation 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 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.

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 commoners. 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. 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 case 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 and the official levels: the former relying on so-called universal standards of protection based on international urban heritage expertise (UNESCO, Whitrap, Icomos, 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.) 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).

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

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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 distort the concept, and breathing space for urban heritage experts who recommend the implementation of this recent approach toward 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 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.

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