

**Friends of Old Beijing Project**  
**2008 Annual Evaluation Report on the Status of Protection of Beijing's Old City**

**1. Foreword:**

In order to better mobilize the public to participate in the protection of Beijing's Old City, and in order to help the administrative authorities strengthen measures taken to protect the Old City, in September of 2006 the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center initiated its "Friends of Old Beijing" project. What this project involves is, firstly, the organizing and training of volunteers to carry out surveys on the status of Beijing's Old City; secondly, the CHP uses these data, along with information collected through other research activities, to compile its annual report. This annual report will be released on China's "Cultural Heritage Day" each year to the public and submitted to Beijing's Municipal Party Committee, Municipal Government, Municipal People's Congress and the Municipal PPCC. After being publicized and submitted to the authorities, CHP's 2007 annual report received positive feedback from the public and the attention of professional organizations. This year, CHP is pleased to see that some of the problems raised in the 2007 report are starting to be addressed, and that media attention on as well as public participation in cultural protection activities have both improved.

In preparation for the 2008 annual report, CHP organized and trained 140 volunteers, of which the vast majority was a mix of young Beijing residents, including students, professionals, public servants and non-profit organization workers. Before starting the surveying, all the volunteers received around 10 hours of training in many aspects of our work, including cultural heritage protection rules and legislation as well as lessons in history and culture. They were then divided into 10 groups to carry out independent surveys on 10 selected areas. The information gathered through the survey was up to date and close to life. When analyzing this information to compile the CHP's Evaluation Report, many volunteers also made valuable contributions. Aside from the efforts of these 140 Volunteers, CHP also received help from organizations such as McKinsey and NPP.

The Evaluation Report is based on field research and reflects the highest level of goodwill and credibility. It is produced to assist the government to improve the measures taken to protect Beijing's Old City. While volunteers played the biggest role in compiling the Evaluation Report, the CHP assumes all legal responsibility for the content and implications of the project as a whole. Also, CHP wishes to extend its sincere gratitude to those who made the most outstanding contributions to the report, they include, but are not limited to, Zhang Pei, Yu Meng, Feng Peifei, Zhang Jinqi, Dong Hao, Wei Bo, Chen Zhe, Guo Ran, Si Lian, Liu Feng, Zhang Weiyi, Jin Xing, Zhang Mingyu and Song Ying. -

**2. Overview of the status of problems raised in the 2007 Annual Report:**

Of the problems brought to light in the 2007 Report on the status of conservation in the Old

City, for the most part they have not yet been solved. First of all, the information available to the public on historic cultural architecture and their preservation statuses is still very limited. While the frequency of relevant information posted on the websites of the Beijing Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage and the Dongcheng, Xicheng, Xuanwu and Chongwen District Governments has improved somewhat, public availability of information is still a far cry from what is necessary in order to facilitate the public's active participation in cultural preservation. In order to effectively solve this problem, the public needs to take the initiative in claiming the rights recently given to them by the "Regulations on Releasing Government Information" brought into effect on May 1st, 2008.

Concerning the misuse and inappropriate management of historic buildings, any expectation to meet short term deadlines for change or improvement are simply unrealistic. Media sources have repeatedly reported the great efforts coming from the Beijing Municipal Government as well as the Central Government towards this end. We believe the government is doing its best to fulfill its duty and solve this problem, and at the same time trying its hardest to improve the frightful safety conditions of historic buildings. With the upcoming Olympics, it is clear that the government's painstaking preparations have also led to the elimination of fire hazards to many old buildings – another positive side effect of the Games. In renovating and repairing these old buildings, the "Standards for Preservation of Historic Sites" are still not being met, resulting in the loss of the historic and aesthetic value of historic architecture. With a shallow understanding of the concept of "New Beijing, New Olympics", and the limited time to properly prepare for the Games, renovations and repairs not in accordance with the Standards for Historic Sites have seen an increase in number. But this trend of renovating, extending or modifying historic buildings for other uses is a problem that has not gotten the full attention of the government. In Beijing today, more and more people are using historic buildings as offices, restaurants, art galleries and other commercial spaces, while modification of and addition to the buildings are commonplace. The level of importance the government attaches to the protection of more modern-era architecture has seen a significant rise. Many buildings from the modern era have already been designated as "important", and in the ongoing "Third General Survey of Cultural Relics", the government has made modern architecture a new focus. However, the government should follow up this progress by making clearer the purpose of its list of "important modern architecture" and measures applicable to their protection.

Of the many preserved cultural heritage sites throughout the world, Beijing's Imperial City is one of those with the richest cultural roots. But the boundaries of the Imperial City still have not been defined, with a large number of the public still confusing the Forbidden City with the Imperial City. Looking at the zoning of 11 land usages laid out by the "Beijing Imperial City Protection Planning" legislation, the encroachment of commercialization on historic areas has become even more evident, and areas used by government organizations have also clearly been expanded. Buildings such as the six-story apartments on the north side of Zhishanmen Street continue to have a serious impact on the traditional appearance of the Imperial City, and still have not been marked for demolition. Retaining the broad, flat and open skyline of the traditional Imperial City is one of the central objectives in its protection. Due to the construction of high-rise

complexes by some power organizations, grouped together in parts of the Imperial City, the traditional open form has already suffered a great deal aesthetically.

The status of other Protected Historic Areas, further highlights the importance of the designation of protection areas and the publications of protection plans by the Beijing Municipal Government. Without these basic steps, the consequences would be unimaginable. At the same time, we believe that the requirements laid out in the government's plans have still not received the respect that they should. Even though these plans are fully supported by the force of the law, the lack of awareness amongst the responsible authorities is certainly worrying, while the contemptuous attitudes of some influential figures towards this legislation are truly outrageous. Protection based on "microcirculation", with individual courtyards as the basic units, has not been properly applied. The results of many hutong reservation projects so far have often been to distort and ruin the fabric of what a hutong is. In order to preserve the aesthetics of the protected areas and the authenticity of cultural heritage, it is essential that the maintenance and the renovation of buildings comply with the "six-category" rules. Yet the reality of protection work is that the standards for the six categories are largely ignored. The processes of updating old houses and protecting historic culture have become confused in the minds of many. The government has invested vast amounts of funding into a dedicated hutong courtyard house renovation program, which has been an important step for the preservation of Beijing's historic culture in the Old City, as well as an important measure to improve the lives of Beijing residents. But lacking adequate training and management, a number of these projects simply carried out the demolition of historic buildings and constructing new ones in this place. By doing so, the historic value of such areas is completely lost, and cannot be retrieved. With the approval of the city's planning authorities, as well as district governments, but in violation of the Historic Cultural Heritage Protection laws, serious damage is still being inflicted on the traditional architecture and aesthetic of Protected Areas by large scale construction projects. The public exposed and criticized such practice, yet the authorities simply took no notice of what they see.

While the "Beijing City Center Control Detailed Planning" has significant value on the state and process of preservation for the whole Old City, it is still not openly available for public viewing. We hope that with the help of the "Regulations on Releasing Government Information" this problem can be solved for the future. In "control zones" around heritage sites and in Old City areas outside the Protected Historic Areas, buildings that disrupt and destroy the traditional styles of the Old City have continued to increase. Within the Second Ring Road, more and more high-rise buildings continue to appear. The project to create green belts along the east and west sides of the Old City has made clear progress, but the design remains unsystematic and confused.

Looking at work towards preserving the traditional lifestyles of Old Beijing, it remains the weakest aspect of preservation work today. Temple fairs and traditional theatres are still a long way from playing the role of traditional cultural activity centers for communities in the Old City. The government has not introduced any effective measures to promote lifestyle-related preservation work. Traditional businesses, headed by historical brand names, began to receive the interest of the commerce supervision authorities, but in the end failed to receive any specific

support or protective measures from the government. The Government's perspective of traditional business simply cannot escape the world of economics, showing no progress from the past. Today hutongs face a large threat from being overrun by the effects of consumer culture, with facilities such as bars and coffee shops springing up as a result of government policies giving way to unregulated market forces. Lacking connections with the original residents of these affected historic places, the government's efforts to preserve the intangible culture of traditional lifestyles are not impressive.

### **3. The Volunteer-led Hutong Surveys:**

In 2008, volunteers with CHP's Friends of Old Beijing project followed through a detailed survey of hutongs within Beijing's Old City, covering 491 hutongs within the Protected Areas, and 537 hutongs outside of Protected Historic Culture Areas. The surveys involved dividing the volunteers into small groups, each targeting a different area of the city, meeting on weekends to carry out an analysis of the hutongs, as well as initiating discussions and interviews with local residents. All information collected would then be entered into CHP's consolidated records for the project, with 1028 pages of information being collected overall.

In the surveys conducted on hutongs within Historic Cultural Heritage Protected Areas, the following information was recorded:

- Basic information: name of the hutong, geographical location, what period the hutong was created, how buildings on both sides of the hutong are being used, the date of the survey, and the participating volunteers' names.
- Preservation Information: breadth of the hutong (including widest and narrowest points of the alley), whether or not the hutong has a plaque describing its history., the number of courtyards along the hutong, the state of traffic within the hutong (including the flow of motor vehicles, number of parked cars, and restrictions on parking), state of landscaping, state of municipal facilities, state of public bathrooms (including quantity as well as sanitary conditions), number of consumer facilities such as restaurants and bars, the state of buildings on each side (including materials and coloration of the buildings from the outside, state of roof and any renovations, whether height restriction are violated, whether consistency is broken and whether there are illegal structures), and finally, the preservation status of buildings of cultural value within the hutong.
- When interviewing local residents: Basic information of interviewee (gender, age, profession, how long they have lived in the hutong, and so on), furthermore, they would be asked about how they feel about the hutong – whether they are satisfied with the lifestyle, what hopes they have for improvement, whether they are willing to be relocated to allow redevelopment , and what advice they have regarding preservation and protection of the buildings.
- Finally, pictures of the area would be taken.

To summarize some significant information gathered on hutongs within Protected Areas:

- Hutongs where the majority of buildings down both sides were residential came to

318 (constituting 69% of those surveyed); hutongs where businesses had taken up the majority of the street came up to 29 (6%), while hutongs with a reasonable ratio of residences to commercial buildings totaled 116 streets (25%).

- Only 15 hutongs had plaques presenting their histories. (3%).
- Hutongs with heavy motor vehicle traffic came to 65 (13%), while hutongs with a relatively low traffic flow came to 264 (54%), and hutongs with virtually no motor vehicle traffic came to 143 (29%).
- Hutongs with occasional parked cars numbered 76 (15%), those with parked cars down one side numbered 113 (23%), those with cars down both sides of the street numbered 155 (32%), and those without any space for parking came to 105 (21%).
- Also, 132 of the hutongs (27%) had one-way restrictions for motor vehicle traffic.
- Hutongs without any greenery whatsoever numbered 142 (29%), those with scattered greenery numbered 229 (47%), while those with dense greenery came to 97 (20%).
- Hutongs with a high concentration of high-end restaurants and bars constituted 20 streets (4%), while those with such establishments, but in fewer numbers, came to 73 Hutongs (15%).
- Hutongs that have suffered severe erosion of their traditional appearance, as a result of inappropriate external styling of the buildings, came to 73 (15%). Hutongs with their traditional appearance only slightly affected in this way came to 151 (31%).
- Hutongs whose traditional appearance has been severely eroded by the styles of roofs came to 75 (15%), while those that are slightly affected came to 223 (45%).
- Those hutongs whose traditional appearance has been severely eroded by the styles of doors and windows came to 117 (24%), while those that are slightly affected came to 241 (49%).
- Hutongs with mostly grey brick walls came to 88 (18%), hutongs where most walls had been painted grey came to 308 (63%), and hutongs with a majority of red brick walls came to 45 (9%).
- Hutongs with a large number of 3-story and taller buildings which exceed the height limit came to 59 (12%), those with tall buildings, but in smaller quantities, came to 157 (32%).
- Hutongs with a serious problem of illegal structures came to 83 (17%), and hutongs where there were a few illegal structures came to 168 (34%).
- Residents willing to be interviewed (53% male, 47% female, 59% retired, 4% students, 22% with formal employment, 15% without formal employment) and who were very satisfied with their living environments came to 33%, those that clearly were unsatisfied came to 38% and those who were content came to 29%; without considering economic factors, those that hoped the hutongs could be refurbished true to their historic style and nature accounted for 72% of interviewees, while those would object to such refurbishment came to 10%. Those willing to let the hutong be demolished came to 32%, while those not willing to let their homes be demolished amounted to 45%, and those hesitant to decide came to 23%.

In the surveys conducted on hutongs outside Historic Cultural Heritage Protected Areas, the

following information was recorded:

- Basic information: name of the hutong, geographical location, types of buildings on both sides (single-story, six-story or lower, large buildings, new residential compounds), any heritage buildings, whether the hutong only survives in name, the date of the survey, and the participating volunteers' names.
- Preservation information: average width of the hutong, the number of courtyards along the hutong, the state of traffic within the hutong (including the volume of motor vehicle traffic, number of parked cars, and restrictions on parking), state of landscaping, state of municipal facilities, state of public lavatories (including number as well as sanitary conditions), number of consumer facilities such as restaurants and bars, the state of buildings on each side (including materials and coloration of the buildings from the outside, state of roof and any renovations, whether height restriction are violated, whether consistency is broken and whether there are illegal structures), and finally, whether any large scale demolition or construction was underway.
- When interviewing local residents: Basic information of interviewee (gender, age, profession, how long they have lived in the hutong, etc), furthermore, they would be asked about how they feel about the hutong – whether they are satisfied with the lifestyle, what hopes they have for improvement, whether they are willing to be relocated to allow redevelopment, and whether they would like their neighborhood be named a Historical Protected Area.
- Information related to the value of the hutong and its buildings uncovered by the volunteer: the historical period of the formation of the hutong, historical evidence, buildings which warrant protective measures, etc.
- Finally, pictures of the area would be taken.

To summarize some basic information gathered on hutongs surveyed outside Protected Areas:

- Hutongs where the width of the street exceeded 18 meters, where 70% of buildings exceeded 6 stories, or where 70% of courtyards had been or were being demolished are for the purpose of the survey considered hutongs “in name only”. Overall, 201 hutongs (37%) of those surveyed outside the Protected Areas were such hutongs “in name only”. Of all hutongs considered “in name only”, 15% had streets over 18 meters wide, 35% were over 70% six or more story buildings, and 50% were over 70% demolished, or in the process of being demolished.
- All other information pertains to those actual hutongs, and does not include “in name only” hutongs. Of these actual hutongs surveyed, 22% had a street width under 3 meters, 38% were 3-5 meters, 31% were 5-7 meters, 6% were 7-9 meters, and 2% were over 9 meters in width.
- 27% of the hutongs completely lacked any greenery whatsoever, 57% had some greenery, and 16% had large amounts of bushes and trees.
- Hutongs with most walls made of traditional-style grey bricks came to 24%, those with mostly painted grey walls came to 53%, while those mostly using red bricks came to 13%.

- Those with a significant number of building of more than three stories came to 18%, while those with buildings exceeding the height limit, but in smaller quantities, came to 29%.
- Hutongs with factors such as altered windows and doors severely detracting from the traditional aesthetic came to 26%, while those suffering less severe impact from said factors came to 50%.
- Those hutongs with large number of appropriately styled roofs severely impacting their aesthetic came to 15%, while those suffering less severe an influence came to 46%.
- In the opinions of volunteers, those with a fair degree of preservation made up 45% of the hutongs, while those with severe damage to their original aesthetic came to 33%, those with a vibrant community culture came to 5%, while those where owners did not live in their houses and the communities were desolate came to 4%.

Of the residents willing to be interviewed (53% male, 47% female, 49% older, 42% middle aged, 9% younger; those living in the hutong since before 1949 making up 7%, 1949-69 coming to 45%, 1970-1999 coming to 38%, and from 2000 to present day making up 10%), those that were very satisfied with their lifestyle made up 37% (3% younger people, 12% middle aged, 22% older), while those that were clearly not satisfied came to 30% (1% young people, 17% middle aged, 12% older); and those generally content with their lifestyle came to 33% (4% young people, 13% middle aged, 15% older); those that did not mind their hutong being demolished came to 22%, while those that hoped their hutong would not be demolished came to 55%, and those that could not decide made up 23% of the interviewees. Those that hoped their hutong would be designated as a Historic Cultural Protected Area came to 49%, while those that were opposed made up 16%, and those that have no strong opinion came to 35%.

#### **4. International Invitation Exhibition on the Conceptual Design of Xisibeixinjie**

In the late summer of 2007, an officially held exhibition here in Beijing attracted the interest of many people. This was the “International Invitational Exhibition on the Conceptual Design of Xisi Xinbeijie”, officially known as “Old Beijing: Regeneration Strategies”. The exhibition was organized and coordinated by an investment company in partnership with the Housing and Land Management Office of the Xicheng District Government. The research component for the exhibition was completed through the combined efforts of AMO/Rem Koolhaas, Harvard Design School, and Italy’s ASA. The specific block-by-block design planning component of the exhibition was carried out by a number of domestic and foreign architecture firms including France’s ODBC, Italy’s Studiao Archea, Japan’s ABW and NAP, England’s Plasma Studio, Spain’s Nred Architects, and China’s Studio Pei-Zhu, MADA Ban. The Foreword to the Exhibition, written by a famous architect and designer, gives a good account of the objective of the event:

“The regeneration of historical streets has become a trend in recent years. Many famous avant-garde architects have, in designing new flagship stores in historical districts for top brand names, often applied new design concepts. These are successful cases of historical districts’ regeneration and revitalization. Up to now, Beijing’s Old City has not found a successful pattern of regeneration. So the purpose of this exhibition is to explore and experiment with all kinds of

possibilities. What's new about this exhibition is that it is not simply about architectural design or district planning in conventional sense. The area to be regenerated is divided into 9 blocks from the north to south by hutongs, and conceptual signs would be done with the "Xinbeijie" as the core. Designs from 9 architects will eventually constitute our vision for the regeneration of Xisi Xinbeijie, while at the same time each design will represent an approach to old area revitalization.

The exhibition covered eight hutongs of Xisi Xinbeijie, located in the northwestern corner of Beijing's Old City area. It is one of the first 25 protected historical and cultural areas identified by the Beijing government. With the support of the municipal government, the Beijing City Planning Commission, alongside the Beijing Urban Planning and Design Institute developed a detailed preservation plan for these eight hutongs, which was approved for implementation in 2002 by the municipal government.

According to the Preservation Plan, the land in the Protected Area is mostly occupied by residential buildings and educational institutions. The land along Xisi Xeidajie Avenue and Zhaodengyu Street is mainly used for commercial functions. In terms of residents, the majority are blue collar workers, the unemployed and retirees. The majority of the courtyard houses in the areas were built in late Qing Dynasty or in the early days of the Republic of China. Though old and damaged to some extent, the main structure of these buildings remains in good shape. Over the last few decades, many temporary structures have been erected inside the courtyards. These added structures, accounting for half of the total floor space of all houses, not only impair the beauty of the courtyards but also make them a less comfortable place to live in. More than one third of these courtyards now accommodate many more people than appropriate. The infrastructure in this area is also poor. The preservation plan points out that the majority of buildings in this area are traditional style courtyard houses, which constitute a large portion of the ever decreasing number of fully intact courtyard houses within Beijing's Old City. As such, courtyard houses and the hutongs are the most important aspects of the Preservation Plan.

In order to best protect the historical and cultural aspects of the eight hutongs in the area, the Preservation Plan clearly emphasizes the important role of keeping the hutong's role as a residential area while reducing the population density. It also stipulates that coordinated renovations and improvements to all the different categories of buildings (cultural relics, protected, can be improved, must be preserved, can be modernized, and can be renovated) should be made, keeping them all in cohesion with the traditional styles. Public facilities should be updated, including making electricity the major source of energy, but there should be no addition or expansion of roads. The CHP believes the measures outlined in the Preservation Plan are appropriate for these eight protected hutongs, and conforms with the practice of China's historical areas protection, and if the property rights of local residents can be further clarified, in five to ten years, this area will definitely become one of the most valuable part of the city, a model for all future preservation projects. This area would also be an ideal location for the Museum of Beijing Traditional Lifestyle to be founded

According to the Preservation Plan, the preservation process would last many years, during

which the government needs to give continuous financial support and developers cannot conduct large scale relocation or redevelopment. Local officials will be unable to make any notable achievements on such a project during their short term in office, and unlike other fast-paced development projects, such a preservation project will not be able to generate large profits – all factors which might make leaders anxious. The project could also cause some degree of anxiety for those real estate developers who have established good relationships with the local government. Overall, many reasons led to our conclusions, and the “Xisibeijie International Invitational Conceptual Design Exhibition” only served to further support the conclusions we had already come to.

What the exhibition has left us is a sumptuous and fashionable impression, which makes us concerned about the historical value of the protected area. Whilst the organizers of the exhibition required designs to be consistent with a hutong-style neighborhood, within a 6-meter height restriction, implementing the final project concepts would result in the total elimination of the area’s hutong structure, replacing them with top commercial brand-name shops. By letting such projects happen, old Beijing’s courtyard houses, and the hutongs they constitute, will completely disappear, along with even the residents. Designing such avant-garde neighborhoods has not anything in common with the preservation of Beijing’s historical cultural heritage. Sumptuous and fashionable designs may be allowed in hutongs, but they shall not impair the authenticity of traditional courtyard houses or bring damage to the Protected Areas’ traditional flavor..

To further analyze the exhibition and its implications, the CHP invited Wang Jun, journalist and author for *Cheng Ji (The Story of a City)*, “Old Beijing: Regeneration Strategies” curator Mr. Shi Jian, and other interested specialists and architects to a seminar. Mr. Shi began by providing additional information of the Exhibition, showing many concerns for Old Beijing’s current state of preservation, and future problems that could arise in this field. He also stressed the need for achieving practical results in protecting the Old City, as well as the fact that the Exhibition had already gained permission to not only go on display in Beijing Library, which is under the administration of the Ministry of Culture, but also in such places as the City Planning Bureau’s City Planning Exhibition Center. Wang Jun then vehemently criticized the guiding principle of the Exhibition, saying that if any of the designs submitted were implemented, it would result in the large scale destruction of the Old City. Many others also expressed their bafflement, as Mr. Shi was regarded as a earnest scholar. His recent book “Bringing Back the Hometown Charm”, exploring examples of preservation and cultural protection in Japan’s historical neighborhoods, was well worth studying. Furthermore, Mr. Shi’s project to record the destruction of Beijing’s Meishijie Street in the Dashilan area, shows his true feelings and attitude towards the Old City. But somehow he became the curator of the “Regeneration Strategies” exhibition. During the seminar, many people also pointed out that if the designs submitted for the Exhibition were followed through, this would be against the laws on preservation and planning, and thus fundamentally illegal. How the exhibition gained the permission and support of the authorities continues to puzzle many people, not to mention the fact that it was held on the premises of a government agency.

Due to timely calls to stop the project, fortunately none of the blueprints submitted for the Exhibition resulted in actual construction projects. Afterwards, the Harvard Design School sent representatives to discuss with us the problems and difficulties about preservation and the Exhibition. What is really surprising, though, is that of the top-end architecture studios working with the government and participating in the design exhibition, none of them had the faintest inkling of the Cultural Protection Laws, which were passed many years ago, and are directly related to their projects. In fact, any attempt by architects to construct modern fashionable and sumptuous designs is most damaging to historical areas, far more than this exhibition in and of itself. A prevalent trend in this regard is when the housing management authorities of the government or major real estate companies bring in well-known foreign architecture firms to carry out government-supported development projects, they do it in the name of “protecting, preserving and revitalizing the Old City”. Often in these situations, the government, planning authorities, or government-invited specialists are either not involved or not doing their jobs. This is another reason to merit the concern of many people like Mr. Shi, who are worrying about the Old City’s preservation. In essence, the exhibition simply reflects what can only be called a lack of confidence in traditional Chinese culture, a lack of confidence in Beijing’s efforts and capacities in preserving its Old City, and ignorance of the already existing laws and plans for cultural preservation and protection.

#### **5. “The South Tian An Men (Qian Men) Project”:**

The blueprints created as a result of the exhibition were never used, but a similar project, the “South Tian’anmen (Qianmen) Project” is currently getting closer and closer to becoming a reality. The government and the developer are turning blind eye to the criticism from public as well as media.

All of our information on this project comes from the legal document published on the official website of SOHO China Ltd. ([www.sohochina-ir.com/eng/ir/circulars/pro070921.pdf](http://www.sohochina-ir.com/eng/ir/circulars/pro070921.pdf)). As this project is located in Xianyukou , a Protected Area under the 2002 cultural protection plan, The CHP approached Mr. Pan Shiyi and Mme. Zhang Xin, founders of SOHO with advice and recommendations on preventing damage to the historical value of this district, while avoiding investors suffering financially.

Since the developer has promised investors that the project is legal, we brought to Mr. Pan's and Mme. Zhang's attention the “Protection Plans for 25 Historic Cultural District in Beijing’s Old City” approved by the municipal government in 2002. In this piece of legislation, the Beijing Municipal Government stresses the need to preserve the individual character of each protected historical district, with the rules and limits that need to be followed in the protected areas and controlled areas. The standards and requirements for preservation and renovation are essential guidelines to be observed. Regarding the problems of implementing these plans, it also outlines what requirements should be followed for appropriate solutions. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, 2002, the Beijing government made public its decision to implement the plan for the preservation of 25 historical and cultural areas in Beijing, which requires that the preservation plan of the 25

historical areas in Beijing to be implemented faithfully. The plan, effective since May 1, 2005, shall only be modified by Government of Beijing after soliciting feedbacks from the general public and obtaining endorsement of experts. But up to now, no modifications have been made.

The CHP made it very clear to Mr. Pan and Mme. Zhang that the Qianmen project is located in the west part of Xianyukou, a protected area. According to the protection plan, the preservation guidelines for this particular area are as following:

- Follow all Protection Laws in maintaining the continuity of the Protected Area's organic cultural fabric, and traditional style. The renovation shall be done step by step with courtyard as the basic unit.

- In the core Protected Areas, buildings can be used for business, tourism, cultural, and residential purposes. The area outside the protected zone is under construction-control, and can be only used for residence.

- Buildings in the Protected Areas are divided into six categories: for level 1 and level 2 protection, must-be-preserved, can-be-improved, can-be-modernized, and those street-side buildings to be renovated. Any renovation or improvement work in the Protected Area, and on the buildings subject to level 1 and level 2 protection must comply with the *Rules on the Protection and Improvement of Buildings in the Old City Area* issued by the municipal government in 2003. And other buildings shall also follow the requirements on color and height.

- The fundamental principals for road planning in the Protected Area is three-fold, i.e. not disrupting the overall traditional style of the community, ensuring convenience and accessibility, and making it easy for potential infrastructure upgrade and modernization.

We emphasized to Mr. Pan and Mme. Zhang that this information is only a summary of the Protection Plan. The detailed requirements for the protection of Xianyukou area and the planning map, together with other legal documents are available in many publications for their further study.

Since we heard no feedback from Mr. Pan and Mme. Zhang, the CHP published the above information on the internet, in a bid to assist the government in promoting the laws and regulations. We also got in touch with the media to bring public attention onto this pressing issue. In response to strong media attention and criticism, the developer concerned argued that the project had received government approval all the way, while government simply said that the Protection Plans for was invalidated, and the protection principles contained in the plan was also long out of date.

Xianyukou is a historical area that has gone through the Ming, Qing, Republican and modern eras but managed to keep its historical layout and features. It remains a truly unique component to the fabric of the city. Bearing so much history, it has become an important part of the dialogue between the new and the old, and provides an invaluable source of information as to

Beijing's historical background and lifestyle. In the Protection Plan, Xianyukou was sensibly designated as a business, recreational, and residential area featuring traditional business, guild houses, entertainment and homes. Should the protection plan be carried out faithfully Xianyukou would definitely become a most valuable historical area in Beijing in the long run. However, the government illegally approved the plan submitted by a developer without social responsibility, and the construction is now in progress. The historical and cultural value of this area is disappearing, and will be gone for good.

## **6. "Repairing and Restoring 44 Hutongs and 1474 Courtyards":**

In 2008, in its work report "Speed up the advance of social development, in order to improve peoples' livelihoods", the Beijing Municipal Government announced that it would "incorporate the protection of the Old City's aesthetics with the improving the living environment of the residents by repairing and restoring 44 hutongs and 1474 courtyards". Making plans to both solve the living difficulties of residents in the Old City, while repairing and restoring its aesthetics is a huge strategic decision for the City Government, and pilot projects were already started in 2007. The Government hopes that through a process of "government leadership, fiscal investment, resident willingness, specialist instruction, and public supervision", it will be able to successfully implement the repair and restoration of the hutongs, the improvement of the living environment and the reduction of population concentration in order to achieve four goals. These goals are: 1) Bring and end to the five kinds of hazardous buildings within the Old City. 2) Through repair and restoration of building in the Historic Protection Areas, eliminate hazards and improve living conditions, while preserving the cultural heritage in the important streets, buildings, and surrounding areas. 3) Improve and municipal facilities while regenerating key areas. 4) Reduce the Old City's population, giving priority to solving housing issues of low-income families. To achieve these goals, the Municipal Government is providing one billion yuan, has annulled the "Standards for Repairing Historic Buildings in Beijing's Old City", while publishing the "Technical Guidelines for the Protection and Repair of Historic Buildings in Beijing's Old City", which was to be implemented by the district governments, with advice and supervision from the Beijing Municipal Construction Committee, the Beijing Municipal Planning Commission and the Beijing Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage.

This is indeed a great project, and government agencies, many local residents, and not many cultural heritage experts have spoken highly of this plan. We at CHP think that any protection plan for the Old City needs to incorporate a complete plan for alleviating the shortage of housing for local residents. In the spirit of public service, an inevitable requirement is that the government provides funding for such projects. Updated technical standards are also key to the launch of this large-scale project. At the same time, we also believe in the actual implementation of the project, restoration methodology is seriously absent, and "specialist instruction" and "public supervision" lack practical channels. Through the course of this project, there is a great likelihood that the housing issues that residents of the Old City face can be alleviated. However, the goal of protecting historical heritage will be extremely difficult to meet, and any traditional features that can be spoken of would lack historical flavor.

From the perspective of cultural heritage protection, this project has the following issues that need to be addressed:

- Firstly, the number of hutongs targeted is simply too large. While we have been unable to find out the location of every one of the 44 hutongs and 1474 courtyards, therefore unable to assess the specific value of these areas, we do know that every hutong and every courtyard has its unique history and beauty. Trying to achieve so much in only one year, this project can only sacrifice the unique historic value of each hutong and courtyard for the sake of modernizing. In the hutongs we surveyed, those courtyards undergoing renovation were often restricted with deadlines as short as 100 days.

- The process of repair and renovation had been the victim of simplification, resulting in a style more akin to demolition and rebuilding. The authority of supervising the actual execution of the project has been vested in the staff who are posted at sub-district governments by the district housing and land management centers. In the courtyards that we surveyed, construction was being done by hired migrant workers, organized by the aforementioned government staff. They would first demolish some of the houses in the courtyard, and then build new single-story houses with sloped roofs in their place. Furthermore, in order to cut costs, where bricks should have been used for walls, often the initial brick appearance turned out to be brick-like tiles stuck onto a concrete wall. The removed components of the old buildings were also quickly cleared away with construction waste.

- Before construction started, evaluation of the areas' cultural heritage was not sufficient, and specialist guidance and public supervision of the project were also largely lacking. In fact, of the specialists we interviewed, including Old City protection specialists invited into the project by the Municipal Government, none of them fully understood how the cultural heritage evaluation component of the project was carried out before the renovation work. When we interviewed workers on the project's construction sites, none of them had heard of the "Technical Guidelines for the Protection and Repair of Historic Buildings in Beijing's Old City". A small number of the on-site government staff knew of a set of "guidelines", but admitted they had never had the time to read them. When asked about the guidance and expertise of specialists in repairing and restoring hutongs, the government staff were also at a loss, simply saying such small-scale projects did not need such specialist help.

Compared to large scale development projects, and compared to constructing vulgar, towering high-rises, such a project, aimed at protecting the traditional image of the Old City, and seeking to solve the housing problems of residents, certainly has great political and social significance. The widely reported praise for this project from respected figures like Xie Chensheng and Xu Pingfang were most likely given on this basis. Considering that proper protection of Beijing's Old City requires not only stopping large scale destruction of cultural heritage but also maintaining the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage, and that the government has declared its intention to carry out the work of protecting the Old City while improving living conditions over the long term, CHP has the following recommendations:

- Adjust the focus of the project, as well as its implementation structure. The present

emphasis of the project is to alleviate the hardships of living in the Old City by improving facilities and living conditions, and its main implementation is through the Municipal Construction Committee, district Housing and Land Management Centers, and their sub-district branches. An inevitable result of this system is that the necessary focus in planning the protection of the Old City's traditional appearance, and in properly planning an effective implementation of the project with this in mind, has been largely lacking or weak. Once living conditions and facilities have been sufficiently improved, the project's focus should immediately be brought around to protection of the areas' cultural heritage. Furthermore, cultural heritage authorities at the municipal and district level need to significantly strengthen their role in achieving these goals.

- Surveys and evaluations of hutongs and courtyards should be continuously carried out, in accordance with the guidelines and methods of analysis found in the "Protection Plan for 25 Historical and Cultural Areas in Beijing's Old City". Also, any planning for protecting the Old City's appearance, or attempts to raise living standards in hutongs, needs to keep this legislation as its foundation. In cultural preservation today, this legislation has so far proven to be the most scientific, most practical, and most valuable body of research on the topic. The methods that were used to research and evaluate the 25 historical areas should be reapplied by the authorities to other historic areas not yet included in the legislation. A process of thorough survey and evaluations of hutongs and courtyards, followed by the passing of legislation on protection plans. In the future, plans for protecting the Old City's traditional aesthetics will be developed over a long time, incorporating improvements to living standards, using a method of steady progress as opposed to rushed, extreme changes. The "Technical Guidelines for the Protection and Repair of Historical Buildings in Beijing's Old City" should also undergo further revisions and improvements under the framework of "Regulations for the Protection of Beijing's Famous Historical City" and "Protection Planning for Beijing's Famous Historical City".

- A system for training and licensing building crews and project supervisors should be established. According to media reports, building projects would undergo acceptance inspections by the government and experts after their completion. However, this method is inherently flawed, as once a project has been finished, any value in the demolished houses would be gone. These projects are unlike most building projects in that they carry the objective of protecting cultural heritage, where staff should be provided with cultural protection-related instructions. Project supervisors should continuously supervise and evaluate the progress and effects of construction, to ensure that any damaging actions are prevented or limited, rather than simply discovered after the fact.

- Discount loans should be provided to include privately owned courtyard houses in the government's repair and renovation project. There are many privately owned courtyard houses in the Old City that retain much historical value, but under the current project they are not eligible for financial support. They also need to be incorporated into any plan to protect the Old City's traditional aesthetic while improve living conditions of the residents. Those

commercial banks in which the municipal government has stakes should create a “Beijing Old City Courtyard House Renovation Discount Small Loans” policy, where any Beijing *hukou* holder living in a courtyard house could apply for loans to renovate their homes, using the property to be renovated as collateral and benefit from government interest subsidy. With Beijing’s steadily growing economy, and the continual increase in value of hutong courtyard houses, the ability of such loan takers to repay will be assured.

- By spreading knowledge of traditional renovation skills, as well as of relevant laws, resident families can directly participate in the renovation process. Over the course of our surveys, we discovered that many residents would be happy to participate in a proper restoration of their house, reflecting their love for the old city they are a part of, and are so close to. By systematically spreading knowledge to the public about courtyard houses and traditional restoration methods, while guaranteeing the residents' right to participate in the restoration, the meaningfulness and quality of a restoration project can both be increased significantly. Local residents protecting and restoring their own homes should become the highest level of cultural heritage protection.

- To improve the system, the “specialist guidance and public supervision” components need to be properly guaranteed. In order to properly protect the Old City’s traditional aesthetic, while improving living conditions, formidable professional knowledge is required, as well as an adjustment of interest on all sides, and unobstructed guidance from specialists, with supervision from the public. The municipal government invited many professionals to be Old City Protection Advisors, but their rights, responsibilities and method of work were not announced, and lacked clarity. If the mechanism of “specialist guidance” and “public supervision” are not made public knowledge, then any planning for protecting the Old City, or efforts to renovate it and raise living standards simply cannot achieve its ideal ends.

## **7. Conclusion**

The authority of laws and planning policies for the protection of the Old City has been established in the period between June 2007 and June 2008, while between different levels and different arms of the government an effective mechanism to implement and supervise any cultural protection projects have simply not been formed. Protection of the Old City was not supported by economic and financial incentive policies, and while the awareness of officials and professionals of cultural protection has increased somewhat, it is still nowhere near sufficient to meet the realistic requirements to achieve improvements in cultural protection. Awareness amidst the public on protection of the Old City has seen a large increase, but effective organizations and leadership are still largely lacking. Also the one-sided pursuit of speed and efficiency in the development of the city is still pervasive, with key leaders of the Chongwen District Government, as well as many others, possessing extremely poor legal or cultural heritage awareness. Another one of the greatest obstacles to protection work in the Old City is the government's worry about the compensation that it would have to pay if approved building projects were cancelled. To overcome these main

obstacles, firstly the government needs to strengthen its internal coordination; secondly, there needs to be widespread public supervision; and thirdly, the courts and law enforcement agencies need to properly enforce the laws enacted. Finally and most importantly, the public should be mobilized to uphold the authority of the law.

After the Olympic Games, Beijing will enter a new phase of implementing “The scientific concept of development”. CHP will continue to actively organize and lead the public in raising awareness of protection of the Old City, and fully utilize the positive forces in the current political system to encourage reform and to improve governance and economic policy concerning the protection of the Old City. The publication of the “Regulations for the Protection of Historical Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages”, and “Regulations on Government Information Publication” have also provided many new channels to mobilize the public to actively maintain and uphold the laws concerning the protection of the Old City. We have reason to believe that the future of protection in Beijing’s Old City will see great improvements.

Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center

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