

## The Death and the Life of Beijing

—the History, Present Situation and Strategy of Urban Planning in Beijing

### LA SURVIE ET LA MORT DE LA VILLE DE PÉKIN

—L'HISTOIRE DE L'URBANISATION DE PÉKIN, L'ÉTAT ACTUEL ET L'ANALYSE DES PROBLÈMES

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**Abstract:** the article focus to analysis the problems in the urban planning in Beijing via the planning history, including the protection of places interests, the traffic problems in the centre city and satellite town. Combine some cases of other countries to propose method to solve the present problem.

**Key words:** Beijing; Urban planning; Historical and cultural relic; Traffic problems; Satellite town; Organic evacuation

**Résumé** L'article tente d'analyser les problèmes de la planification urbaine de la ville Pékin, y compris la protection des vestiges culturel dans les vieux quartiers, le transport aggravant au centre-ville, la déconnection entre les zones satellite et ville et des problèmes de circulation qui en découlent, à travers l'histoire de l'urbanisation de la ville de Pékin. L'auteur a proposé des solutions en étudiant les cas de l'urbanisation dans d'autres pays.

**Mots clés:** Pékin; Planification urbaine; Centre-ville; Vestiges historiques et culturels; Pression de transport; Satellite; Évacuation

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Since the establishment of The People's Republic of China, Beijing chooses using the older city as the center and new city besieged the older city which like “booth bread” model. At the past, that is economical and fast model, but the time has provided this is a wrong decision, nowadays, there are lots of problems in the urban planning. The city is over-saturation and over-loaded with the serious traffic jam. What is worse, the Old Town begin to drown in the forest of modern buildings such situation is countless.

## 1. THE URBAN PLANNING OF BEIJING DURING THE EARLY DAYS OF THE NATION

In February 1950, Sicheng Liang and Zhanxiang Chen had proposed that build the new center between the new town and the old town and analysis the difficulties and disadvantages in the process including the high density population, changes of the appearances and the traffic jams in the “The Proposal of Position for The Centre District of Government Affairs”. Now these analysis and hypnosis has become true. In the proposal's blue print, it has showed the “three separate functional area”<sup>3</sup> as the cultural center in the old town, the political center in the west part and the business center in the south. But under the effect of the Soviet Union's expert and other economical factors, the government leader finally choose the build the new political center based on the new town.

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<sup>3</sup> WANG Jun. (2003). *The City Stories* (1 ed), 96.

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## 2. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF URBAN PLANNING IN BEIJING

### 2.1 The Protection of Historical and Cultural Relic

“In the early days Beijing has 7,000 alleys but in 80’s there is only 3,900 remain, the alley begin to disappear at 600/year”<sup>4</sup>. In order to setting up commercial, administrative buildings, opening urban roads and residential areas, Beijing’s city walls, alleys and courtyard houses are large stretches of destroyed, disappeared over the centuries has also Beijing’s cultural and spiritual wealth accumulation. Instead, the symbol of modernization, rapid economic development of modern architecture has appear in Beijing. Beijing once the gem of urban planning in the perspective of Sicheng Liang has epilited by the people chased for profit. Today, people’s cultural awareness has been awakened; Beijing will lose his original life without the historical and cultural relic. Unlike Beijing, La D éfense CBD in Paris since 1958 is a new area which has broke away from the old district. This district is a typical modern style, a vivid and attractive area. Its design and construction is implemented in phases, leaving room for future urban development. After 40 years of development, La D éfense CBD has played an important role in Europe and the world. Old town has separated with the La D éfense CBD; it has maintained the original texture and historical context. Paris has showed its modernization and a deep characteristic formed its own unique urban competitiveness and urban style.

### 2.2 The Traffic Problem in the Central Area

China’s urban planning on drawing a large extent, the Soviet Union urban development norms and experiences, such as Beijing’s “one-center + ring line”<sup>5</sup> urban form, in some big cities in the Soviet Union had a similar instance, such as Moscow.

Since 1960, to solve this model reveals shortcomings in the actions of Moscow gradually being put on the agenda, from 1985 to 1990, a more complete master plan was proposed, based on a single central structure of the overall plan structure into a multi-center, Moscow is divided into eight planning zones, each planning district 60 to 100 million people, divided into smaller planning area. Arranged in a number of cities from the rural hinterland to the cities of fresh air into the green channel of the wedge-shaped city center and separate each planning district that enable the city has a good ecological environment. Meanwhile Tokyo which has the same population with Beijing is a “single center + ring line” model and it use technical method to solve the problem.

Rapid development in Tokyo after World War II, the city gradually engulfed the suburban and urban green belt but could not alleviate the urban traffic problem, then the government begin to develop the underground. Nowadays, the Tokyo’ underground is full of subways and easily accessible with the commercial and financial sites a forming a “metro subway chain”, but the essence is still crowded Tokyo. If looking at GDP, the level of Tokyo as an economic-class international city in the 2004 rankings, ranked first in the world’s major cities. On the other hand, according to some Korea relevant department, the happiness index study in Soul, New York, Toronto, London, Paris, Milan, Berlin, Tokyo, Beijing and Stockholm, Tokyo and Beijing only got 69 and 67.8marks ranking No.8 and No. 9.<sup>6</sup> In order worlds the strategy in Tokyo does not works well and that will be a warning to Beijing. In order to alleviating the tremendous pressure in center area, Beijing has been building the city loop, hoping the loop will share the traffic pressure on Beijing transport. The amount of money Beijing has contributed in the transportation is 4.3% of GDP in ninth five-year plan period and in “Ten five-Year” period the investment is expected to 5.15% of GDP<sup>7</sup> which is rare in the world. At September 12, 2009, with the last piece of the West Sixth Ring Road, six-ring opened to traffic which has a total length of 187.6 kilometers and in August 2005, seventh ring road also has commenced.

### 2.3 Satellite Town=Bedding Town

For the same purpose, the construction of satellite towns is poplar in Beijing and shunyi, tongzhou and yizhuang is also viewed as core satellite in Beijing. This led the drive to the outskirts of the transfer of real estate, which subsequence a growing number of residential suburbanization, such as Huilongguan community in Changping. “They have been equivalent to the size of a city, but their main function is only to live”, which formed a main residence but the lack of industrial functions.

From the surface such community has attracted resident from the central area and alleviate the pressure. Actually, as the economic bus lines and supporting facilities are inadequate, resulting in some projects cost performance is not satisfied; yet another reason is lacing large-scale development both within the supporting community, or the community

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<sup>4</sup> 600 alleys disappear, map changing in every 2 months(2001), Beijing Evening News, <http://www.sina.com.cn>

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<sup>5</sup> WANG Jun. (2003). *The City Stories* (1 ed), 32.

<sup>6</sup> The happiness index in 10 cities, <http://house.gxsky.com/others/xingfu/xf5.html>

<sup>7</sup> The problem of New Beijing, (2006), Outlook, <http://www.far2000.com/information/article/20080307/030H005R008.html>

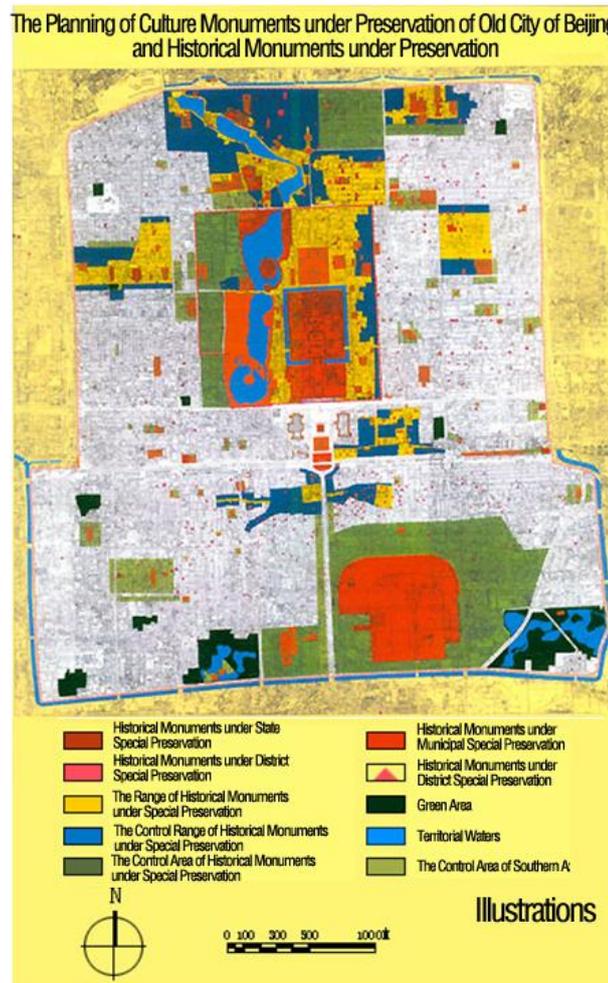
surrounding the hospital, School (college), entertainment, supermarkets, shopping malls and other public infrastructure cannot be compared with the central city. In addition the most important point is the small-scale of the bedding city will limit its and strong dependence on the mother city, while increasing the traffic pressure between the city center, so it is difficult to really spread and control the size of urban population. Most of people still work in the central city when during the rush hour; a large number of people would take public transport or private car between residential area and down town area. That will add the traffic pressure, spare the leisure time and reduce the happiness index.

### 3. STRATEGY

The Academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering Liangyong Wu states: “We must change only from a central city to the surrounding radiation pattern should be along the transport axis, in the appropriate development zone layout ‘grapes’ style of urban corridor, take full account of the city’s capacity and the balance of housing and employment, the only way to solve the problem.”

#### 3.1 The Protection of Historical City

Beijing Municipal Planning Commission has organized 12 intuitions to compile “the Plan to Protect the Historical and Cultural Heritage of Beijing in 25 areas”. Old City of Beijing 25 historical and cultural protected areas carried out a detailed survey of the status quo, evaluation and classification of Planning. Even with a clear plan, Beijing is still a lot of protection unit has been destroyed, for example no.222 at xiheyuan street in Xuanwu district has been destroyed in July, 2007<sup>8</sup>.



At present we know how to protect the places but the problem is do or not to do. This involves the departments of communication and control problems. The tragedy at 222 yard is cap between Municipal Committee and Cultural Relics Bureau. Government policy in the work must be timely release of relevant information to communicate with the

<sup>8</sup> Lots of quadrangle under protection has been demolished (2007),  
[http://www.china.com.cn/culture/txt/2007-07/14/content\\_8524949.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/culture/txt/2007-07/14/content_8524949.htm)

departments concerned, and timely information feedback, in order to better promote the protection of the implementation and enforcement. Furthermore, we should improve the public and relevant departments of the historical and cultural awareness of the importance in protected areas.

Protecting work is not restricting in a certain range we need to create an organic historic cultural system including the building, the culture and the participation of people. As a result we should combine the protection relic and the real life for example as the Nanluoguxiang containing both historical and modern factors.

### **3.2 The Organic Evacuation of Municipal and Business Area**

From the experiences in La Défense CBD, Moscow and Tokyo, simply improved the Beijing traffic problem is not enough. We should learn from the E.Saarinen's organic evacuation theory and change Beijing single center model are now gradually transformed into a multi-center mode. So that now crowded Second Ring Third Ring Road commercial district, residential areas and other cities in the periphery to the evacuation, and thus spread the traffic pressure on urban centers.

Avoiding the satellite city becomes the "bedding city", we should make it become a whole city and especially the employment function should distribute in the city. In order to really solve the population density in urban centers, the problem of excessive traffic pressure.

In addition, moving the modern style building from the old town will protect the texture of the city and form the special characteristic of the city.

Forbidden City now is under the pressure of high-rise buildings in the city, the overweening despot in Ming&Qing Dynasties has gradually been erased. A city without its own texture, as plain as plain water, therefore, control the number of modern architecture, form, elevation, height of the old city of Beijing is an urgent need to implement and may be a means to revive it.

### **3.3 Solve the Traffic Problem**

The traffic problem is inevitable in Beijing, each city to a certain stage of development, per capita car ownership will exceed the amount the city can carry, which is a product of economic development, which is the traffic cannot be solved. If building more highways, urban main roads, secondary roads or widening the road, it will only increase the number of cars provided another possible.

Today the environment becomes worse and worse the low-carbon and the environmental friendly is always the hot topic. Compared to developed country awareness of environmental protection in China is scare. To establish a sustainable development of the modern city, it is necessary to change people's habits and the original concept for example using the public transportation instead of the private car. But at this stage, this goal still requires further refinement to make it more suitable for China, more likely to be accepted by the public to be implemented, as it is now the odd and even number lines to take this mandatory system, in a just kind of let some extent, more family just purchased a private car, so to improve the traffic situation on the issue, and guide the implementation of policies is particularly critical.

The most obvious disadvantage of Beijing public transportation is low-comfortable and efficiency. That makes more people prefer to take the private car which will become a vicious circle. If we want change the current situation we must improve the public transportation for example complete the subway, enhancing the comfortable and management.

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