

# The understanding of Beijing Cultural Spaces

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*“The enduring competitive advantages in a global economy lie increasingly in local things.”<sup>1</sup>*

With the progress of globalization, urban culture becomes increasingly important. Beijing has a long history and rich cultural resources. But the space vectors of her cultural resources are being invaded in the process of urban growth. In the end of 2011, the municipal government decided to “turn Beijing into a city of prestigious cultural center of national demonstration and promotion and international significance.”<sup>2</sup> Building such a “Culture-enriched Beijing” pose an urgent quest to reexamine and analyze the current status of the city’s urban cultural space against the background of the new era.

## 1. Identification of Beijing’s Current Urban Cultural Space

*“A nation’s cultural renaissance starts with a summary of its legacy.”<sup>3</sup>*

Beijing’s long history and rich cultural resources laid a solid foundation for her cultural construction. An empirical study of the current status of her urban cultural space is the basis and prerequisite for further analysis. This article will discuss the current status of Beijing’s urban cultural space from her historical cultural space and contemporary-modern urban cultural space in a time sequence.

### 1.1 Historical Cultural Space

Before the establishment of People’s Republic of China, Beijing’s historical cultural resources can be divided into ancient time (before the opium war in 1840) and modern time(1980 – 1949).

#### 1.1.1 Ancient Time

Beijing’s history as a city can be traced back to more than 3,000 years ago. Many of the surviving ancient cultural resources have high historic and artistic value. Because of their large quantity, this article selects national key cultural relics protection units for discussion, and classifies Beijing’s existing ancient cultural space resources into three types: religious culture, ancient city culture, and the royal culture.

Beijing’s existing historic cultural relics from before the Yuan Dynasty are mainly of religious culture in the forms of temples, pagodas, pedestals, and scripture tablets, etc. The cultural relics from the Ming and the Qing dynasties are more abundant, including considerable amount of relics of old city culture and royal culture, as well as those of religious culture. During the Ming and the Qing dynasties, the city of Beijing was extended on the foundation of the capital of the Yuan, which involved reconstructions of the enclosures, the imperial city and palace, and the royal altar. The result was a “masterpiece of city planning”<sup>4</sup> in ancient China, and unique cultural and spiritual legacies for today. Apart from the national key cultural relics protection units, today’s traditional alleys and historic blocks are also important components of the old city culture.

### 1.1.2 Modern Time

From 1840 to 1949, China was first invaded by the western powers, and then plunged into decades of civil war after the establishment of the government of Republic China. During this period, city constructions stagnated, but cultural types became more abundant. Their influence on Beijing's present-day civilization is no longer limited to physical space. Certain folk custom and living styles continue to this day. So the studies of this period should not be limited to the national key cultural relics protection units.

The disintegration of the feudal system led to the decline of the royal culture. After the period of the Republic China, the royal properties were turned into museums and public parks such as the Palace Museum, Zhongshan Park, and Xiannongtan Temple, etc. Some cloisters have carried on the temple fair culture till today. The cultural resources survived the period of Republic China include office buildings, former residences of celebrities, traditional brand shops, and theaters, etc. They mainly concentrate within the Second Ring Road. War memorials are distributed mainly in the center and the west of the city, around the Fragrance Hills, and in Lugou Bridge district to the southwest of the city.

### 1.1.3 Spatial Characteristics of Historical Cultural Spaces

Through spatial integration of ancient and modern cultural resources, we can see that before the founding of the state, Beijing's historic cultural resources concentrated mainly at the former city location in the Ming and the Qing dynasties, located inside today's Second Ring Road and in the northwest part of the city. There were three types of architectures: royal property, religious buildings, and those of the republic of China. Their spatial sequence symbolized the feudal hierarchy and strict rituals in that historical period. Their ideological origin reflected the essence of traditional culture. (Figure 1)

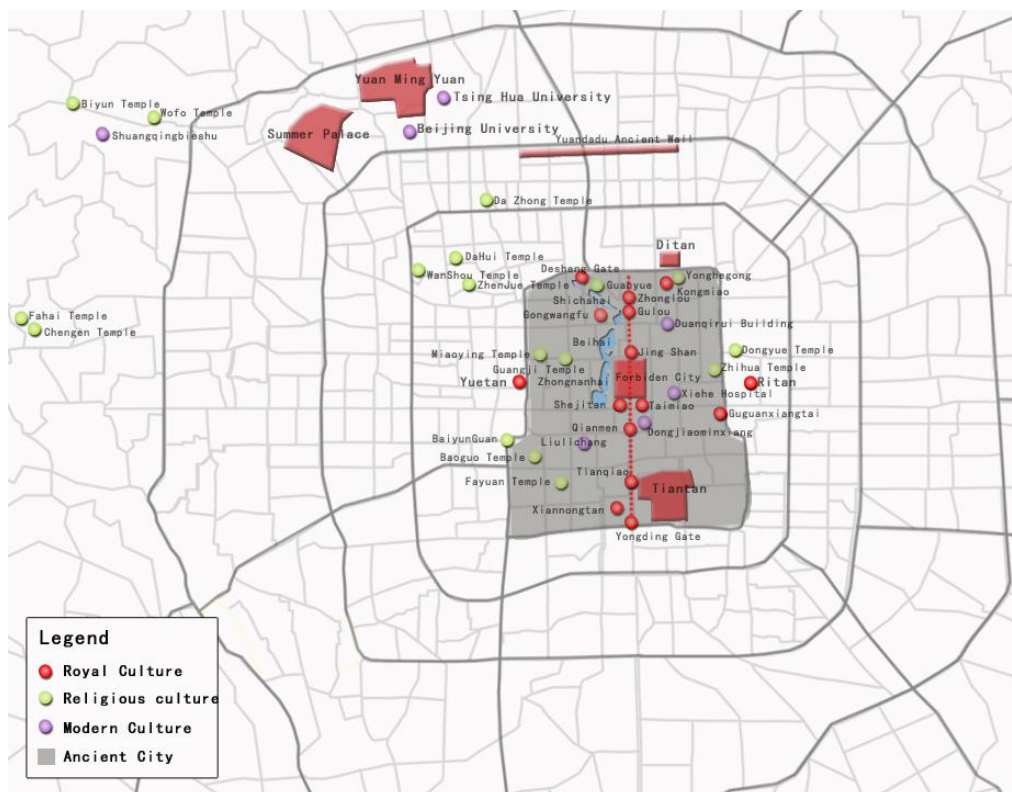


Figure 1 The Distribution of Beijing's historical cultural resources (self-made)

## 1.2 Contemporary and Present-Day Urban Cultural Space

### 1.2.1 Contemporary Time

In the early days of the People's Republic of China, Beijing's urban construction followed the policy of "turning consumer cities into producer cities", and focused on the development of industries, especially heavy industries<sup>5</sup>. Cultural development lagged behind. During the first Five-Year Plan period, Beijing went through large-scale urban development. Space designs for streets were explored and different styles of space models were developed. Before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, Beijing's overall urban spatial structure was readjusted with urban construction. The ramparts began to be removed. The Changan Avenue was transformed. During the 1950s and 1960s, a group of large public buildings were erected at key sites in the city. They included some cultural facilities of far-reaching significance such as the Top Ten construction, the Capital Theater, the National Art Gallery, and the Museum of Natural History. These cultural facilities mainly concentrated in the inner city areas along the Changan Avenue. At the same time, in the north of the city, the district of culture and education, represented by eight colleges, began to take shape.

Following China's reform and opening-up, Beijing saw another surge in urban construction. A group of important cultural facilities like the National Library and the China International Exhibition Center were built up. Until 1990s, the government had emphasized public interest and basic cultural needs in cultural facilities construction. At that time, the government was the primary investor and constructor in the field of culture<sup>6</sup>. By the end of 1980s, the opening and successful operation of Grand View Garden and Tianqiaole Tea Garden symbolized the beginning of autonomous development in Beijing's culture industry<sup>7</sup>. After the reform and opening-up, the cultural facilities tended to spread out from the old city toward later developed urban areas, and the differences between the northern and the southern districts started to appear.

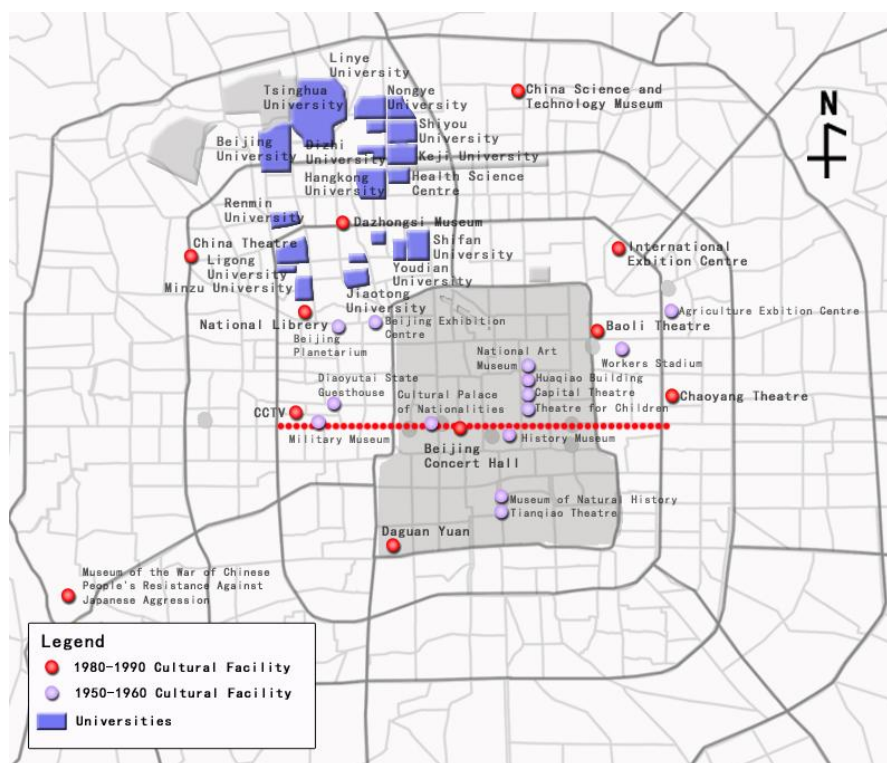


Figure 2 The Distribution of Beijing's urban cultural space after the founding of the state – early 1990s (self-made)

## 1.2.2 Present-Day Time

With the progress of reform and opening-up and urban development, Beijing's industry-oriented developmental pattern faces many problems. Industry structure adjustment is imperative. Besides, the comprehensive function of culture, especially its potential in economy, becomes increasingly clear. The government begins to reexamine the construction in the field of culture. Cultural facilities such as China Central Television and China Millennium Monument etc. have been built in this period. In their space layout, some large facilities (such as exhibition centers and gymnasiums, etc.) are located further north with the city's development and big events (such as the Asian Games). Meanwhile, cultural streets of special features begin to emerge. The launch of the Olympic project in 2003 upgraded the overall level of Beijing's urban construction. The Olympics Park has become a new urban cultural center.

In 2005, the government decided to vigorously develop cultural creative industry. Centers of cultural creative industry began to pop up around the city. Some old factory buildings have been transformed into such centers, represented by the "798 Art District", a gradually formed autonomous center since 2001. Other centers latterly rising to importance include CBD International Media Cultural Creative Industry Park in Chaoyang District and Digital Entertainment Industry Park in Shijingshan District, etc. in 2009, the State Department gave permission to construct the first National Autonomous Innovation Demonstration District in Zhongguancun. (Figure 3)

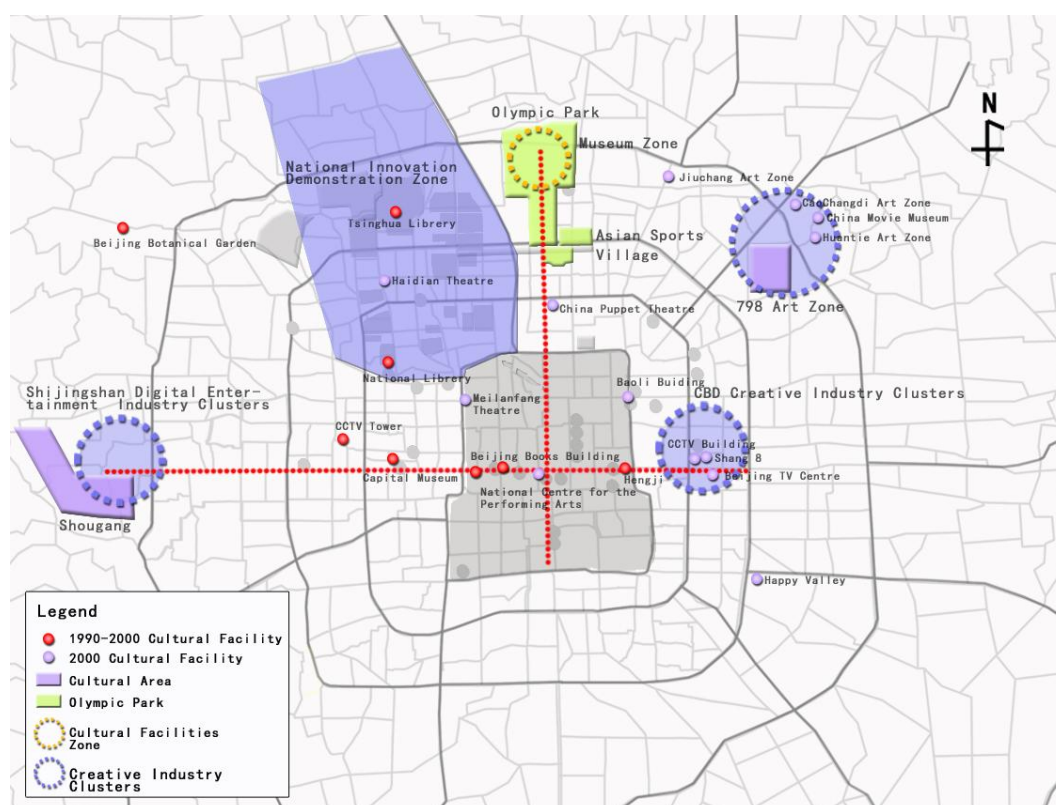


Figure 3 The Distribution of Beijing's urban cultural space after 1990 (self-made)

## 1.2.3 Contemporary and Present-Day Urban Cultural Spaces Characteristics

On the whole, after the founding of the state, Beijing's urban cultural resources noticeably concentrated in the north part of the city. Apart from the "horizontal line" along the Changan Avenue (from Shijingshan to CBD) and the "vertical line" that extends the historic city axis (to



the Olympics Park), Zhongguancun and the Science and Educational Film District in the northwest, as well as the “798 Art District” in the northeast, are also main urban cultural spaces. Comparing the overall space structure with the traditional society, Beijing is facing different developmental scenarios in modernization construction. On the one hand, industrialization has freed productivity, followed by large-scale urban reconstruction and unavoidable destruction of historic culture; one the other hand, as an important part of urban economy and urban feature development, cultural creative industry has greatly helped recent urban industry upgrade and urban space development.

### 1.3 Summary of Current Beijing Urban Cultural Space

By the time period, Beijing’s urban cultural resources can be divided into four categories. They are ancient time, modern time, contemporary time, and present-day time. By the characteristics of their content, they can be further divided into twelve sub-categories. They are religious culture, old city culture, royal culture, culture of Republic of China, folk culture, revolutionary culture, industry heritage culture, modern characteristic culture, populace leisure culture, culture and arts, Olympic culture, and culture and education. And they have different space vectors (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of Current Beijing Urban Cultural Space

Time	Cultural Resources Types	Existing Artifacts	Locations
<b>Ancient Time</b>	Religious Culture	Religious sites Temples	The old city area The northwest part of city
	Ancient City Culture	Rampart ruins, Traditional allies And blocks	The old city area
	Royal Culture	Imperial Gardens Imperial tombs	The old city area The northwest part of city
<b>Modern Time</b>	Culture of Republic of China	Office buildings, former residences of celebrities, traditional brand shops	The old city area
	Folk Culture	Theaters Temple fair	The south part of old city
	Revolutionary Culture	Memorial places	The old city area The northwest part of city Lugou Bridge
<b>Contemporary Time</b>	Industrial Heritage Culture	Factory buildings Industrial areas	Chaoyang District Shijingshan District
	Modern Characteristic Culture	The Top Ten Construction of the 1950s Characteristic Streets	Changan Avenue Sanlihe Dongsi
<b>Present-day Time</b>	Populace Leisure Culture	Shopping streets Food streets Bar streets Leisure parks	Not concentrated. More in north and east than in south and west
	Contemporary culture And Arts	Art galleries Art academies Art districts	In centers
		Theaters, museums	Traditional theaters concentrate in Dashanlan

		district, Qianmen
Olympic Culture	Olympic stadiums, gyms, parks	Concentrate around Olympic park
Cultural Education	Universities	Haidian District

Cultural resources of different types from different time periods reflect different aspects of Beijing's urban cultural ideology. In general, historical cultural resources from the ancient and modern times are the most typical and representative urban cultural space of Beijing. They are also the unique characteristics of Beijing as a world-renowned ancient capital city. This kind of cultural resources should not only be kept in books and stories. They should be combined into today's city life. The artifacts can be properly utilized as long as strict protection measures are in place. The urban cultural resources artifacts after the modern civilization have more varieties. Many of them are still in use today, and they have certain effect on today's urban life. This kind of space should be valued in urban construction. The construction of cultural space will help realize urban cultural renaissance.

## 2. Analysis of Beijing's Current urban cultural space

*"World-famous cities are able to affect their nations' history because they can always represent their nations and their cultures, and pass on most of them down to their future generations."*<sup>8</sup>

Based on the study of the development and distribution of Beijing's urban cultural space during ancient, modern, contemporary, and present-day periods, this article will analyze Beijing's current urban cultural space in two areas: advantages and achievement, and problems and insufficiency.

### 2.1 Advantages and Achievement

#### 2.1.1 Advantages in Resources

A glorious long history and splendid urban culture give Beijing very rich cultural resources. Combining the information from the lists of Cultural Relics Protection Units, Conservation Districts of Historic Sites, Historical and Cultural Cities, relics and protected residences in census registrations, as well as other sources of classification of historical and present-day cultural resources, Beijing's urban cultural resources can be summarize into three levels: sites, areas, and districts (Table 2). "Sites" are the cultural resources in the forms of single construction or historic relic, including historic cultural heritages, Cultural Relics Protection Units of all administrative levels, and outstanding historic constructions from modern and contemporary time periods. Contemporary and present-day urban cultural resources are cultural facilities of various types managed by all administrative levels. "Areas" are mainly historic culture conservation districts, underground cultural relics burial grounds, and cultural creative industry centers. "Districts" are whole old cities.

Table 2 classification and Current Situation of Beijing's Urban Cultural Resources

Levels	Categories	Artifacts
<b>Sites</b>	World Cultural Heritage	6 World Cultural Heritage: the Palace Museum, the Great Wall, Zhoukoudian Peking Man site, the Temple of Heave, the Summer Palace, the Ming Tombs
	Cultural Relics Protection Units of all	98 key national protected cultural relics, 357 municipal-level protected cultural relics

administrative levels	
Cultural facilities of various types managed by all administrative levels	89 commercial performance venues, 25 public libraries, 1 mass art hall, 317 cultural stations
Others	Cultural relics in census registrations, protected residences, outstanding historic constructions from modern and contemporary time periods
<b>Areas</b>	Conservation districts of historic culture
	There are 43 in total, 33 of them are inside the old city, and 10 are outside.  The first group, 25 (declared in 1990) include South chizi Street, South Luogu Lane, etc.  The second group, 15 (designated by “Beijing Historical and Cultural City Conservation Planning” in 2002) 5 of them are inside the old city, and 5 are outside.  The third group, 3 (added in 2004) Xintaicang, Dongsinan, Nannaoshikou. Most construction control areas of conservation districts were also expanded.
	Underground cultural relics
	36 underground cultural relics burial grounds,
	Cultural creative industry centers
	30 Cultural industry centers
<b>Districts</b>	Historic cultural cities
	Include the whole old city and historic cultural resources

### 2.1.2 Industrial and Personnel Advantages

As the nation’s political and cultural center, Beijing has good foundation for cultural creative industry and human resource advantage. There are 89 universities, 281 scientific research institutes, and nearly 700,000 research personnel<sup>9</sup>. Nationwide, Beijing has 42% of publishing houses, 35% of newspapers and periodicals, 60% of film and audiovisual industries, and 54.5% of TV show episodes production<sup>10</sup>. From 2001 to 2010, the added value of cultural industry in Beijing continued to growth, from ¥250,000,000 in 2001 to ¥2,070,000,000 in 2010, increased by more than seven times in 10 years. (Figure 4)

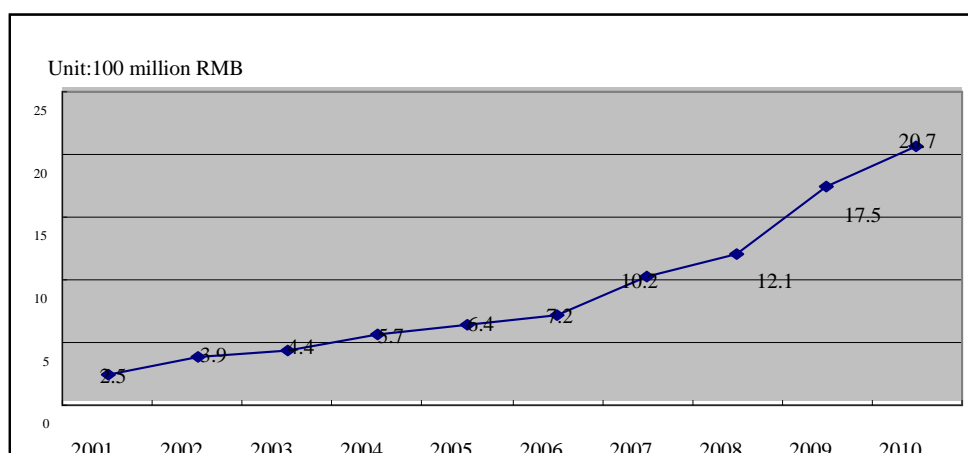


Figure 4 The added value of Beijing's cultural Industry 2001 -2010

Figure courtesy: <http://www.bjwh.gov.cn/>

Table 3 compares the development of cultural creative industry among Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen in 2010. Compared with Shanghai and Shenzhen, Beijing's added value of cultural industry and its percentage in regional GDP are the highest. According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, Beijing's total number and types of cultural creative industries, total transaction volume of cultural artifacts and artwork, total episodes of TV show production, total film production and office boxes all ranked first in the country. The employment in creative industry in Beijing is well above that of other interior provinces and cities. In many cultural creative industries such as professional and technical services, software, and press and publication, etc, Beijing has clear advantages over other regions, as shown in Figure 5.

Table 3 Comparison of cultural creative industry growth among Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen

Economic indicator	Beijing	Shanghai	Shenzhen
Regional GDP (100 million yuan)	14113.6	17166.0	9581.5
Regional added value of the tertiary industry (100 million yuan)	10600.8	9833.5	5051.7
The percentage of the tertiary industry in regional GDP (%)	75.1	57.3	52.7
The added value of cultural creative industry (100 million yuan)	1697.7	973.6	637.23
The percentage of the added value of cultural creative industry in regional GDP (%)	12.0	5.7	6.7
The percentage of the added value of cultural industry in the tertiary industry (%)	16.0	9.9	12.6
The percentage of the added value of cultural industry over the previous year (%)	13.8	10.5	22.9

Data courtesy: sorted out from statistic yearbook of Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen

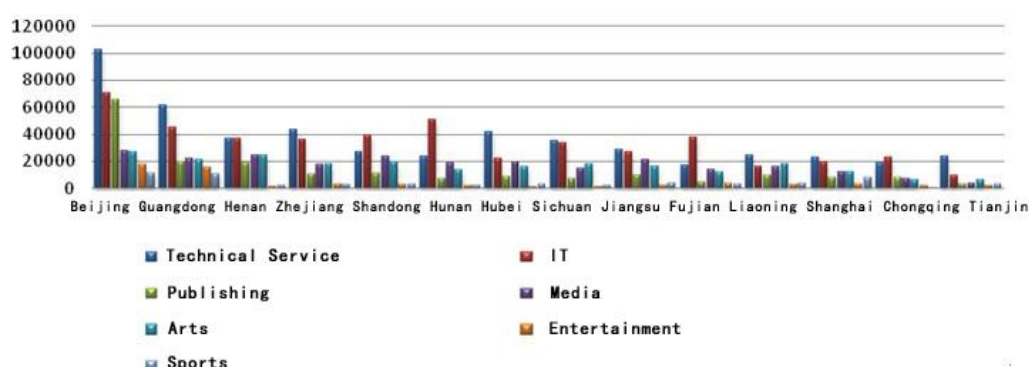


Figure 5 Employment in creative industries (partial) in some regions of China, 2009

Figure courtesy: Song Yang(2010) "The Special Structure of Beijing Creative Industry", Tsinghua University

### 2.1.3 Current Policy Advantages

In 2008, Beijing successfully hosted Olympic Games. The development of "Culture-enriched Olympics" and "Culture-enriched Beijing" achieved remarkable results. More and more efforts were put in conservation of historic cultural heritages<sup>11</sup>. The average annual increase of the added value of cultural creative industry reached 20.3% and became a new highlight in economic social development. In the planning outline of "The twelfth 5-year plan", "Culture-enriched Beijing" is number one in development strategy. Currently, "Culture-enriched



Beijing” is the core content of Beijing’s urban development. In the chapter “The Charm of Cultural Highlight” of “The Twelfth Five-Year Plan Outline for Beijing National Economic and Social Development”, the author advocates “turn Beijing into a center of cultural innovation, operation, trade and experience with international influence”, and proposed “to integrate and upgrade 30 municipal-level cultural creative industry centers, .....to improve their cohesion and enhance their exemplary role, and to form a pattern supported by multi element and characteristic development.” The “Construction Plan for The Development of Culture-enriched Beijing during the Twelfth Five-Year Plan” released in August 2011 put forward an action plan for Beijing’s urban development from 2011 to 2015.

In December 2011, in order to carry out “CPC Central Committee’s Decision on Some Major Issues in Deepening the Reform of Cultural System to Promote Vigorous Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture”, the municipal government issued “Beijing’s Proposal to Speed Up the Construction of a Capital City of Advanced Socialist Culture with Chinese Characteristics”, and articulated the development goal as “turning the capital city into a prestigious cultural center of national demonstration and promotion and international significance”, specified in eight aspects including “developed cultural creative industry”, “highlighted charm of urban culture”, and “enhanced cultural international influence”.

Clearly, culture is the most important strategy in Beijing’s current urban development. Beijing enjoys policy advantages in urban culture development and cultural space construction.

## 2.2 Problems and Insufficiency

### 2.2.1 Cultural Space Protection

Although the history and culture consecration system is increasingly improved, Beijing is still losing her cultural features. On the one hand, as the capital city of China, Beijing’s central areas are clustered with many municipal agencies of administration, culture, economy, traffic, sports, tour, etc. Most are in the old city area, causing damage to historic and cultural resources during decades of construction after the founding of the state, and putting tremendous pressure on conservation of old Beijing’s low-level and small-scale style. On the other hand, for many reasons such as historical, economic and traffic development, Beijing’s overall old city protection was not effectively implemented. Many historic and cultural resources are still being invaded (Figure 6). Some historic cultural space already in the list for protection are still being destroyed or “dismantled for maintenance”. (Figure 7)



Figure 6 FuWang Royal palace, the main building is now occupied by the Institute of History of Natural Science

Corresponding to the occupation and demolition of cultural space, there is a reconstruction fever for fake antiques and false relics. The transform of Qianmen Street is a typical example. While genuine relics were pulled down, fake ones were built up based only on photos before maintenance standards were issued. The products were some sight spots for tourism development in the name of consecration. The spirit of Beijing was lost in the process.

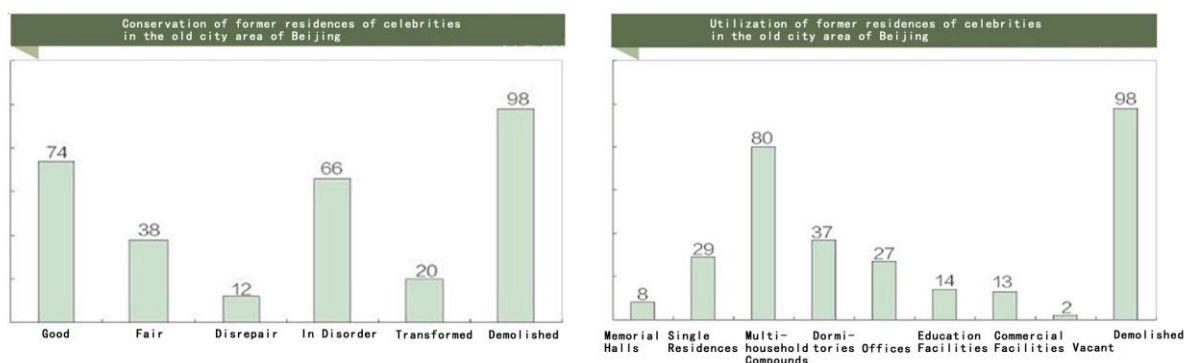


Figure 7 conservation and utilization of former residences of celebrities in the old city area of Beijing  
Figure courtesy: the report of conservation and utilization of former residences of celebrities in the old city area of Beijing(2005)

### **“Genuine Relics” and “Fake Antiques”**

*Sixty years ago, Beijing’s gate towers and ramparts were torn down to reduce traffic jams.” Lin Huiyin predicted, “Today you are dismantle real antiques. One day you will regret and want to rebuild. But then you can only build fake antiques.”*

*Today, the fake antiques have become a common trend. Yongdin gate tower and former residences of celebrities have been rebuilt. Three turrets along Beijing’s center axis will be rebuilt in 2012 to restore the old city appearance. In September 2011, Premier Wen Jiabao warned. “Since the founding of the state, We should have learned a good lesson: dismantled the genuine and you build the fake. Great quantity of real heritage has been destroyed, and then lots of money is spent to build fake stuff.”*

----“Southern Weekend”, 2/9/2012

## **2.2.2 Cultural Space Identification**

While it is regretful to have genuine relics demolished, let’s not forget that historic landmark buildings are only a part of Beijing’s cultural space. Identification of cultural space should not limit to” former residences of celebrities” and “tangible cultural heritage”, or the 33 Conservation districts of historic culture. Apart from sites and districts of relics, ruins and conservations, there are great number of residential buildings inside Beijing’s old city area. They play a very important role in keeping the city’s historic style and overall urban characteristics. Apart from conventional “historic culture” and “industrial heritage”, there are other types of urban space with special cultural value as well, waiting to be recognized and explored. Take the example of Baiwanzhuang Subdistrict. It was known as “the No. 1 residential district of the new capital” in the 1950s. But its cultural value is known only to a few experts (Figure 8). In 2011, Baiwanzhuang Subdistrict was declared as dilapidate and faced demolition.

### **Baiwanzhuang Subdistrict**

The subdistrict, designed by master architect Zhang Kaiji, is a combination of Chinese and Russian Styles. The construction started in 1953 in the then west suburb of Beijing and completed in 1956. With buildings of red brick walls and sloping roofs, large green areas and playgrounds, quiet surroundings and even distance for sunlight, It became a model for residential area construction for decades.

---- Beijing Daily 8/27/2011

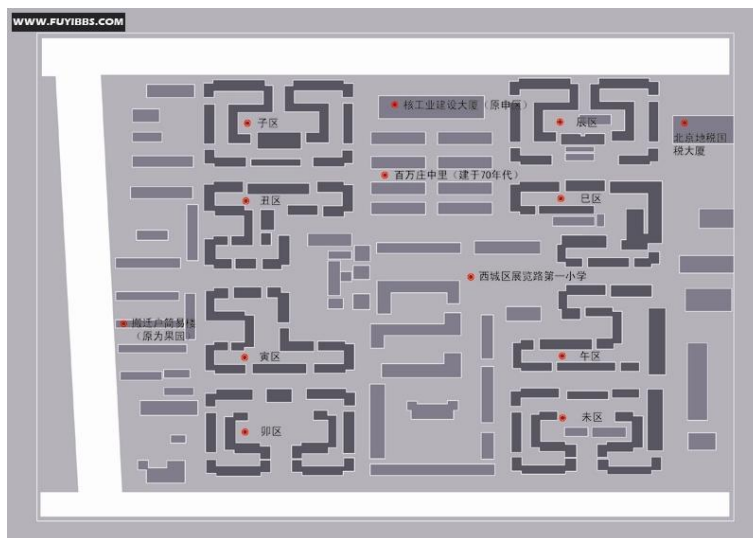


Figure 8 Floor map of Baiwanzhuang subdistrict of Beijing

Figure courtesy: <http://www.fuyibbs.com/viewthread.php?tid=44658>

### 2.2.3 Application of Cultural Space

Since 1980, “reconstruction of old and dilapidated buildings” has played a big role in the destruction of Beijing’s old city and cultural space is. In practice, most areas in the old city are overcrowded and the housing conditions are worrisome. It cannot fully reflect Beijing’s true features and living conditions, nor can it really be a stimulus or economic resource in urban development. The grimmest issue facing Beijing’s urban cultural space development is how to effectively utilize various cultural resources, including historic cultural resources, and adapt their rich connotation and ideology to current urban life.

While a great part of cultural space is not fully utilized, some other part is overused. Take South Luogu Lane for example, after “Jiaodaokou Street Community Development plan (2006-2020)” and “South Luogu Lane Protection and Development Plan (2006-2020)” were drawn in 2006, the focus of the plans shifted to promoting and guiding industrial development in South Luogu Lane area. A developmental pattern was introduced to use cultural creative industry to finance commerce. Since then, South Luogu Lane has gradually become one of the best-known characteristic historical streets. While the volume of its visitors continues to increase, the commercial form in South Luogu Lane has gradually transformed from a popular market of creative products to a shopping area of specialty stores and expensive galleries and bars. This kind of “cultural space” has become the nickname of consumption and fashion. The ideology of cultural space is replaced by the “cultural symbol” of the new age.

### 3. Conclusion

Besides history and literature, Current urban culture should also have spaces as its vectors. Spaces that embody Beijing’s urban culture can be acknowledged as Beijing’s urban cultural spaces. They collectively reflect Beijing’s history, society and characteristics. These spaces should be protected and properly utilized in the process of urban development.

As a city of rich cultural resources, Beijing is facing a double challenge of cultural space protection and construction. With analysis of Beijing’s current urban cultural space, this article concludes that the construction of urban cultural space should start from the reality of current urban lives, and base on appropriate protection, recognition and utilization, and

create opportunities for cultural innovation with cultural resources. As to the goal of protecting Beijing's historic cultural resources, emphasis should be placed on a shift from protection to exploration for their inner value, and proper ways of their renewal and reuse. For thousands of years, historic heritage and rich culture from different ages made up Beijing's cultural resources with great potential for conservation and development. Integration and utilization of these resources will promote the formation and development of Beijing's cultural areas and realize the development goal of "Culture-enriched Beijing".

#### Endnotes

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