# Renew the Hutong Area? Renew Memory!

-- Renovating a Hutong Area

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#### SITUATION

Hutongs are to Beijing what the canals are to Venice; they are the soul and the root of the city.

From the 13th century, when Beijing was first appointed as the capital city of China during the Yuan Dynasty, hutongs came into being and grew with this city, witnessing the development and transformation of the city. Hutongs constitute the unique urban fabric within the old Beijing city, generating an unparalleled urban landscape and holding an important place in the collective cultural consciousness. The sihuyuan that enclose hutong is not only the most traditional vernacular residence form. but also expresses classical value and life organization pattern of Chinese people. Surrounded by walls, hutongs ensure the classical intimacy of family life within a dense environment.



Figure1: Aerial view image of current Hutong situation (Source: Photo by Ning Wang)

From their origins to today, hutongs evolved according to changing demands over time. However, facing the further acceleration of globalization and urban development, many dilapidated hutongs and siheyuans were torn down and replaced with the new modern skyscrapers. As a unique urban fabric and an indispensable element of urban memory, what methods might address the disappearing hutongs and siheyuans? Could we find new opportunities and new challenges for hutongs? Apart from brutal tearing down and reconstruction, what else can we do to meet the contemporary and future requirements as well as maintaining the historical heritage context? Could we integrate the past, present and future through redeveloping hutong areas?

#### TOPIC

# **Renovating a Hutong Area**

Make the traditional historical hutong area to sustainably meet the modern and future needs.

**GOALS** 

Demonstrate speculative design strategies to preserve the historical hutong area of Beijing, while introducing new architectural functions and providing more vitality, in order to combine the past with the present and the future.

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# What is a Hutong?

Starting from the Yuan Dynasty(1271–1368), in order to facilitate administration and form an efficient transportation system, the emperor designed and used the grid-like urban fabric. In this urban fabric, the roads are divided into different sizes and levels, and the smallest ones with a width of about 30ft that crisscross the city like veins are called hutongs, linking each family and each siheyuan. Generally, each two hutongs are separated by 250ft, about the width of a normal siheyuan. The overall layout of the Imperial City of Beijing remaines intact until now, in the central of Beijing city, the majority of hutongs are oriented east-west and most main streets are oriented in a north-south direction.

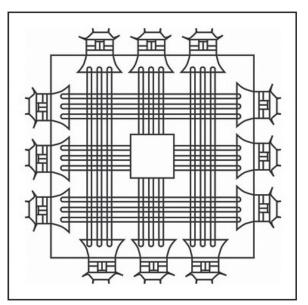


Figure 2: The Urban Plan (Source: Kao Gong Ji)

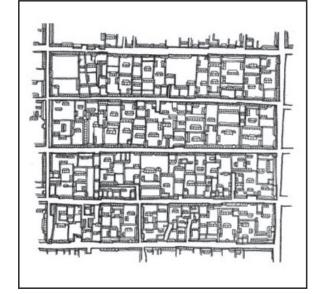


Figure 3: The District Plan (Source: Yuwei Wang, Persistence of the Collective Urban Model in Beijing)

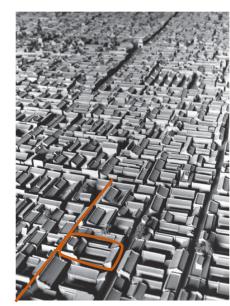


Figure 4: The Urban Fabric (Source: Yuwei Wang, Persistence of the Collective Urban Model in Beijing)

# Figure 5: The Siheyuan Layout (Souce: made by author) Sanheyuan 1-yard Sihuyuan 2-yard Sihuyuan 3-yard Sihuyuan 4-yard Sihuyuan 4-yard Sihuyuan Figure 7: Siheyuan Layouts. Orange tones are added by author in order to clarify the location and size of courtyard. The size and quantity of siheyuans would vary according to the wealth of the family, nevertheless the basic principles of spatial arrangement and distribution remanced the same

A siheyuan is a traditional Chinese quadrangular or courtyard house with a central rectangular courtyard surrounded by single story houses on all sides and partial exterior walls.

Siheyuan survived through 3000 years of history since the Zhou Dynasty. Employed most extensively and perfected during the Yuan Dynasty(1271–1368), before the end of Qing Dynasty(1636-1921), each siheyuan only accommodated a single family. In the feudal period, the social status and wealth of a family determined the size and quantity of courtyards; nevertheless the basic principles of spatial arrangement and distribution remained the same. However, at the end of the Qing Dynasty, almost all the single-family siheyuan were occupied by multiple families. Because of the population explosion, the war and strife, the central courtyard was gradually encroached upon as much as possible in order to achieve maximum housing occupancy, including sheds built as kitchens, storage or even bedrooms. This chaotic mutli-family courtyard is named "Dazayuan". By the end of the 1970s, about two-third of Beijing's 8.5 million people resided in hutong neighborhoods(Guo & Klein, 2005). Since, the Beijing government decided to remove such illegal siheyuan and replace them with modern apartments. More than 200,000 families were relocated and their siheyuans were demolished. At 2005, fewer than 25% of Beijing's 13.82 million people still live in the hutong area(Guo & Klein, 2005).

# Figure 6 : The structure of Siheyuan (Souce: made by author)

# A Foundational Living Arrangement in a Siheyuan

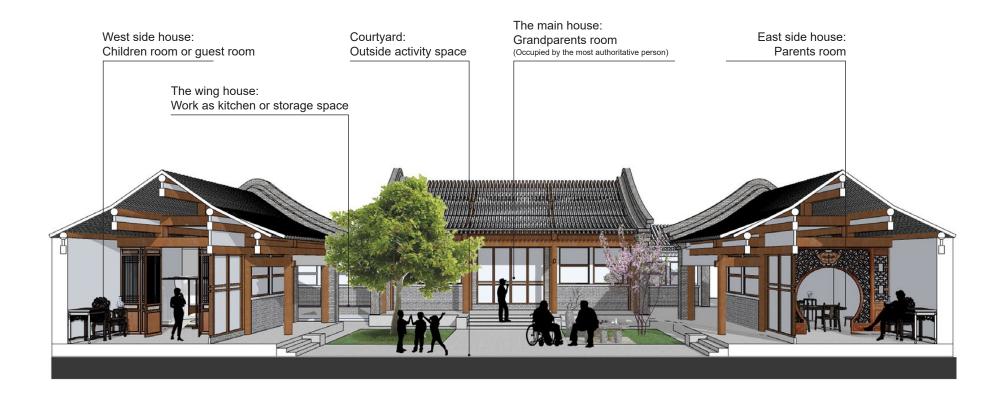
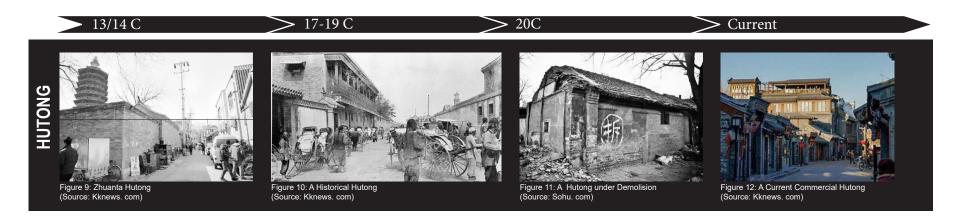


Figure 8: The diagram of sihuyuan living condition (Source: made by author)

This figure shows a single-family siheyuan. Typically, the siheyuan is oriented in a north-south direction with the gate located in the southeast corner of the courtyard. Each side house includes a complete set of functional spaces, including living space, guest space and office space. These three spaces are separated by wood screens or doors. The original idea behind this organization was to allow an extended family to live together, but also to have separate spaces. But at the same time, this form of organization also provides the basis for later multi-family siheyuan.

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# History of the Hutong



The oldest surviving was built in the Yuan Dynasty. There are 384 time. In the 15C, expanded by Ming Dynasty, there were 1,236 hutong.

The overall layout of the Imperial hutong, Zhuanta hutong, city of Beijing was further developed. As more and more hutongs were added on the hutongs built during this original basis, hutongs become narrower and shorter.

By the 1920s, the number of hutongs had increased to 3,200. However, after the foundation of People's Republic of China in 1949, Beijing bagan to expand and modernize as the capital city. During this an overarching agenda phase, hutong and siheyuan designed to preserve the began to disappear.

In recent years, the government and designers have begun to pay attention to the restoration of the hutong and siheyuan. Beijing's New Master Plan proposed city's historical and cultural heritage.

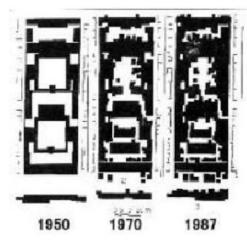


Figure 13: The Historical Changes of Siheyuan in Beijing (Source: Beijing Municipal Planning Commission)

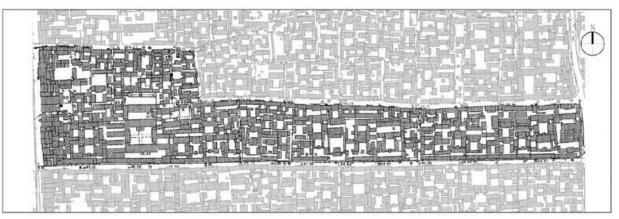


Figure 14: Block network of Dongsi Street at 1950s (Source: Beijing Municipal Planning Commission)

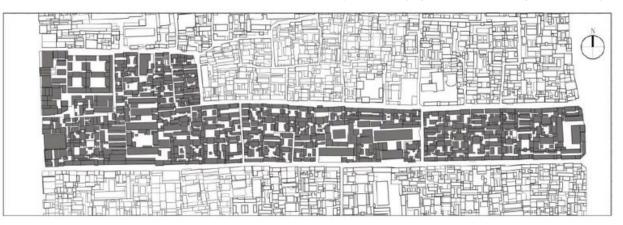


Figure 15: Block network of Dongsi Street at 2016 (Source: Beijing Municipal Planning Commission)

In recent decades, because of the population exploration, almost all the single-family siheyuan were occupied by multiple families, the central courtyard was gradually encroached as much as possible in order to achieve maximum housing occupancy. Due to the rapid urbanization demand, hutong becomes more and more smaller, the original layout of the siheyuan and the urban fabric become chaotic.

#### **Current Situation**





Figure 16: Hutong under Demolition (Source: Sina News, 2012)

Figure 17: Hutong under Reconstruction (Source: Sina News, 2012)

However, due to the rapid urbanization demand, this precious vernacular architecture and residential form gradually lost its vitality in the past few decades. Regrettably, some of the abandoned hutongs were brutally pushed and rebuilt into modern skyscrapers, but there are still some hutongs that have been maintained till now. What future do they face? Is there any other way to save these inherent living modes that are disappearing, and at the same time, to save the lost and submerged traditional culture and history of the city, besides completely tore them down for reconstruction?

#### QUESTION

Taking the white pagoda hutong neighborhood of Beijing as an example, combining Brandi's theory and Wang's urban memory framework, how might one reimagine and update the hutong area to enhance its urban memory and pass on its history and culture?

- 1. As an unique urban fabric and an indispensable element of urban memory, what methods can address the disappearing hutongs and siheyuans?
- 2. Could we find any new opportunities and new challenges for hutongs?
- 3. Apart from tearing down and reconstruction, what else can we do to meet the contemporary and future needs while maintaining historical heritage contexts? Could we integrate the past, present, and future through redeveloping hutong areas?
- 4. How can architecture be used to reflect or strengthen the inheritance of traditional culture and history? Can we do something to balance the value of the past, present, and the future?
- 5. In the renovation project of historical buildings, should old buildings be restored and the original memory of traditional culture be maintained, or should new cultural elements be integrated?
- 6. How can a design ensure comfortable living environments for residents and create better travel experiences for tourists?

# What is Urban Memory?

"One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locus of the collective memory. This relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes the city's predominant image, both of architecture and of landscape, and as certain artifacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge."

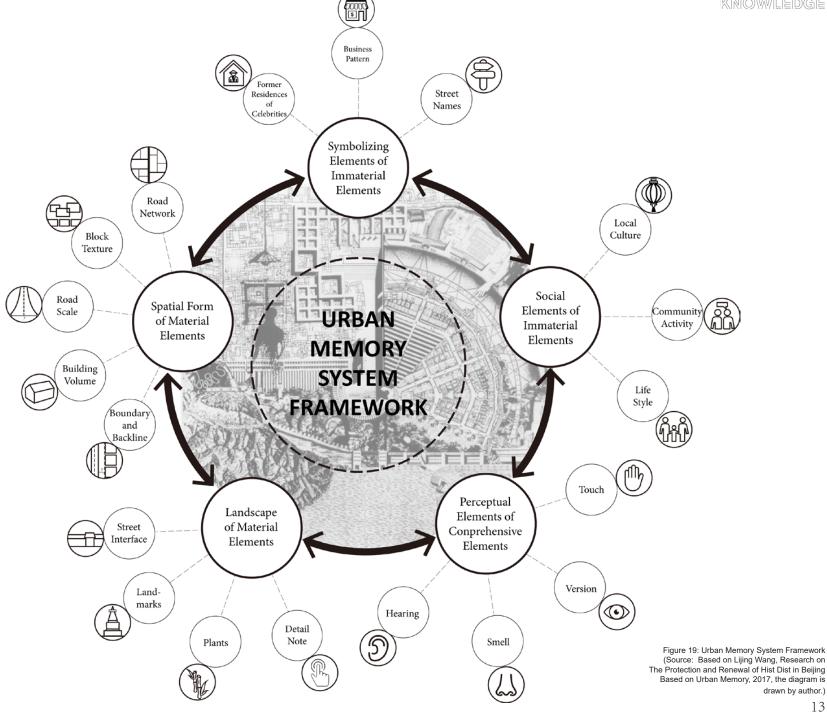
-- Rossí, A, (1966), The architecture of the city.

Siheyuan and hutong, traditional residential forms and urban fabric, have witnessed and inherited the development and transformation of Beijing. However, what is the specific method of the passing on the history and culture contained in them? How are these traditional customs and culture handed down that are not recorded in history books? The answer is the memory of people, the collective memory of generation after generation. These collective memories transcend individual memories and are essentially a kind of historical inheritance.

Aldo argued that the city is a place of collective memory, intertwined with history and personal records. When the memory is triggered by some city fragments, the past history is presented with the personal memory. Moreover, urban memory is the soul of the city; it is this kind of collective memory that is constituted by individuals' experiences within places and through their history, social, and urban space environment. Urban memories of a place allow us distinguish one city from others.

So what exactly are the urban fragments that trigger collective memory to pass on history and culture? Figure 9 illustrates an Urban Memory System Framework proposed by Limin Wang. Through analyzing and modifying her system, I tried to find valuable urban fragments scattered in the hutongs.

For example, when walking in this area, people could see the red wall of temple and white pagoda, gray tiles of siheyuans, the traditional doors and windows form and curved stone with the marks of time. All of these pieces form our memories of this hutong area.



KINOWILEDGIE CASE STUDY

## Cesare Brandi's Theory of Restoration

#### Critical Restoration / Conservation Restoration

"Restoration consists of the methodological moment in which the work of art is recognised, in its physical being, and in its dual aesthetic and historical nature, in view of its transmission to the future."

-- Cesare Brandi, Theory of Restoration

Two principles of Restoration:

- 1. "Only the material form of the work of art is restored."
- 2. "Restoration should aim to re-establish the potential oneness of the work of art, as long as this is possible without committing artistic or historical forgery, and without erasing every trace of the passage through time of the work of art."

Brandi arques that restoration project need to preserve the historical work of art from two perspective, the aesthetic and historical nature. The restoration project also should respect the every trace of the passage through time of the work and in view of its transmission to the future. This means that for the hutong restoration project, we should consider and formulate strategies from both aesthetic and historical perspectives. From the aesthetic point of view, the original urban fabric, architectural structure, architectural materials and original color pattern should be maintained. From the perspective of history, it should be combined with the urban memory system to protect and maintain every architectural details and life pattern that can inherit the history and bear the memory of the city. While preserving and inheriting history and culture, we also need to take into account the transmission to the future. Through the renovation of the historic hutong area, trying to use the architecture to integrate the past, present and future.

#### Querini Stampalia Foundation









Figure 20: The Entrance of Querini Stampalia Foundation Fig Figure 22: The Garden Detail of Querini Stampalia Foundation

e 21: The Quay Space of Querini Stampalia Foundation igure 23: The Portego of Querini Stampalia Foundation (Source: Archivibe com)

Scarpa took advantage of the ubiquitous bridge elements in Venice, replacing the original main entrance gate with side Windows, allowing people to enter the building through the bridge instead of directly from the boat. When you come to the quay space, which is the original entrance of the building, you will see the metal grated doors and water could enter the building through the door. There, the steps down are also cleverly designed -- each step leads in a different direction as one steps down. Stepping into the building from the steps brings up some physical memories, perhaps reminiscent of stepping into a gondola. Through the exhibition hall, when people enter the garden, they will hear the sound of water dripping, so the ear will first tell them where to look, then will follow the flow of water, follow the path of the garden, until the water flows into a disc and disappears into a dry well. Once again, this basin of water, like a drainage lake, is an allusion to the floating state of Venice, a special state.

To Scarpa, the joints and connections between elements "are points every builder takes an interest in and always has, but the solutions are different in different periods."

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CASIE STUIDY

#### Micro Yuan'er

" The preservation of hutongs cannot only respect the traditions of hundreds of years ago while igonoring the history of recent decades."

- Zhang, Ke. the architect of Micro Yuan'er

The main idea of this project is the co-living: children and the elderly, aborigines and outsiders, registered house and unregistered house, they all coexist under the big locust tree.

The courtyard of the "Micro Yuan'er" project is a typical "Dazayuan" that once housed a dozen families. Over the past 50 or 60 years, every family has added a kitchen shed to their yard -- these unregistered additions make for very interesting social networks and spatial attributes. In previous urban renewal projects, these spontaneous additions were eliminated as remnants of urban development.

"Micro Yuan'er" takes the current site characteristics as the starting point, preserves the original architectural structure, takes the volume added spontaneously by the residents as the reference, and redesigns, repairs and reuses the informal added structures in this courtyard on the premise of respecting the spatial characteristics of the courtyard."Micro Yuan'er" not only enriches the hutong's daily life, but also preserves the original courtyard structure and maintains the original urban memory elements. This kind of life pattern and historical memory of the siheyuan can be inherited and preserved and become a valuable urban form.



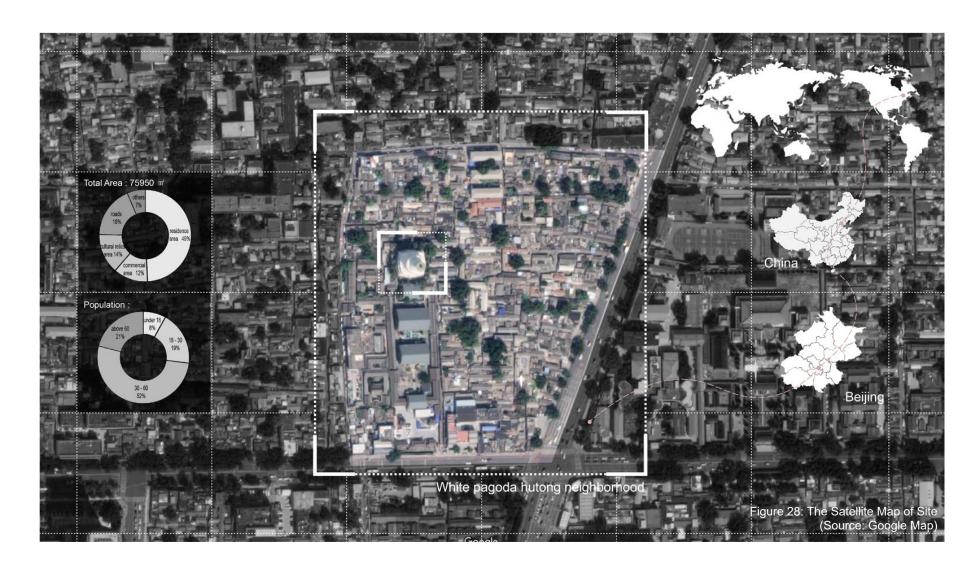






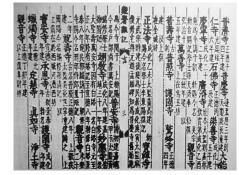
Figure 24: The siheyuan situation aftere design Figure 25: The siheyuan situation before design Figure 26: Children Play Around the Tree Figure 27: The Interior Space Image of Micro Yuan'er (Source: Archdaily.com)

Site Analysis Site History OUTCOIMIES OUTCOIMIES



White pagoda hutong area is a typical hutong district in Beijing, surrounding the white pagoda which is more than 700 years old. Originally, it was a royal temple. Later, with the development of the society, temples went to the folk. This neighborhood became a residential area. And because of the ancient temple, the hutongs here have not been demolished.





In 1270, the emperor ordered the construction of Wan 'an Temple, an imperial temple with the white pagoda as its center, which covered an area of about 160,000 square meters. However, in 1368, a lightning fire destroyed the temple; only the white pagoda survived. The Miaoying Temple rebuilt in the Ming Dynasty, in 1457, was covers an area of nearly 20,000 square meters.





In the Qing Dynasty (1616- In 1961, the temple However, because of the 1912), temples went from being was to be protected as urbanization and population exclusive to the royal family to a historical landmark. explosion, the Hutong the folk. During the 19C, a market Because of this, the area aroung the Miaoying spontaneously formed in the development of the Temple become more and temple's forecourt, this was one surrounding hutongs more chaotic and become of the largest markets in Beijing. has been restricted, dilapidated. People would come here at the and they have not been beginning of each month to buy demolished or rebuilt. and sell things and have fun.





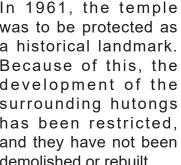






Figure 29: The History of Site Neighborhood (Source: Network)

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# The Urban Memory in Hutong Area

"The man who knows by heart how Zora is made, if he is unable to sleep at night, can imagine he is walking along the streets and he remembers the order by which the copper clock follows the barber's striped awning, then the fountain with the nine jets, the astronomer's glass tower. the melon vendor's kiosk..."

-- Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

As Italo Calvino describes in his *Invisible Cities*, people's memories of the city come from the combination of historical fragments. There are countless historical pieces carrying urban memories scattered in hutongs. Undoubtedly, these historical fragments are the elements of heritage which should be protected and maintained.

In order to further analyze the specific situation of hutongs area, the white pagoda hutong area was chosen as my site. The site is located at the western side of the downtown Beijing, surrounding the white pagoda which is more than 700 years old. This temple and pagoda becomes fundamental elements of the collective memory of this area. In addition to the temple and the white pagoda, this hutong area contains many fragments of urban memory. For example, when walking in this area, people could hear the wind bells from the white pagoda, see the red walls of the temple, gray tiles of siheyuans, the traditional doors, windows form, and curved stone with the marks of time. All of these pieces form our memories of this hutong area.



































# New Challenges -- Current Needs in Hutong Area

Because this area has witnessed a long history, and because of the rapid development of the city, it is beginning to fail to meet the needs of people's modern life. Many of the old siheyuans became dilapidated and lacking modern infrastructures. Due to the needs of modern life and the popularity of motor vehicles, cars parked throughout hutongs impede the traffic flow in this area. The original urban fabric has gradually disappeared as people have added illegal buildings to courtyards and hutongs in the past decades. An analysis of the current situation of the white pagoda hutong area in Beijing, reveals some current needs of the inhabitants, visitors, and vendors in this area which need to be met through any renovation project.

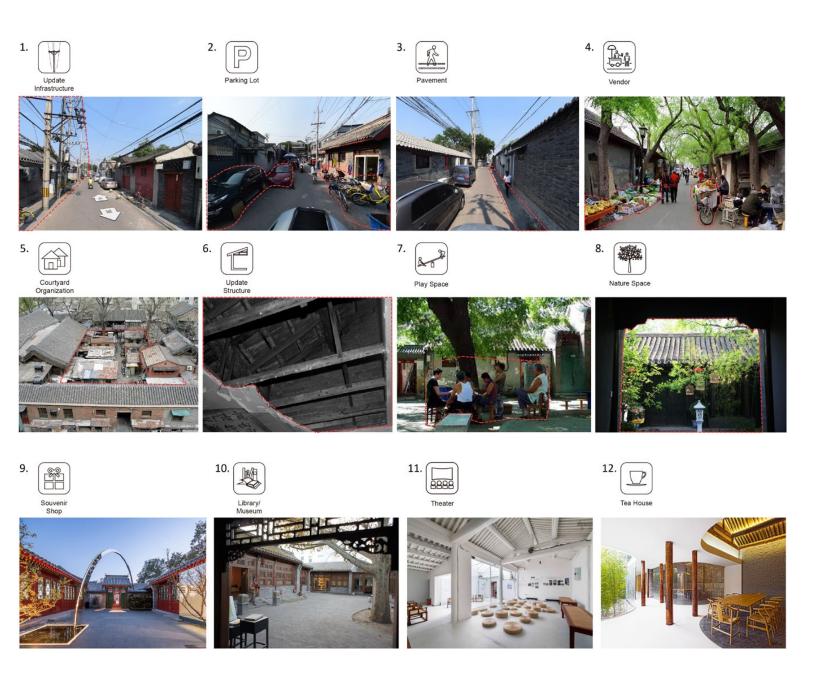


Figure 31: Current needs of hutong area

OUTCOIMIES

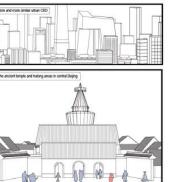
#### Outcomes

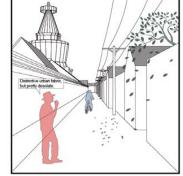
After analyzing the urban memory elements and current needs, I start to reimagine several spatial tests from two perspectives, visitors and local residences, since they are the main users of this neighborhood. For tourists, , there are four spatial tests in a hutong nearby the temple, including the commercial hutong project, the open project, the theater project and the roof platform project. For residences, there are three spatial tests, including the parking project, the residential hutong and the micro community project. Each spatial test trying to explore a specific potential which could update the hutong area as well as enhance the urban memory and meet the current needs of people.



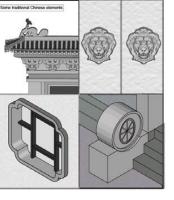
#### A visitor - Xiao Ming's story

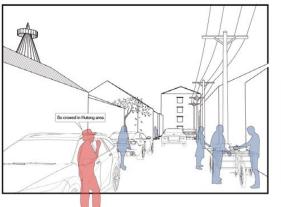
Ming traveled here in 2015 with deep interest in Beijing's traditional hutongs. There he visited the White Pagoda Temple. He saw the white pagoda with red walls, the hutongs formed by mottled walls, the unique gate blocks and so on. But it seemed a little lost, and there was no one, no one to tell him what story was behind these interesting architectural details. He went back, carrying with his memories of this hutong area. In 2025, by chance, he came to Beijing on a business trip. After work, he walked into the white pagoda hutong again. The same red walls and white pagoda, the same narrow hutongs and the same layout of siheyuans awakened his memories of the past. Seems the same but there is a difference, he found the place changed and became more energetic. In the originally lonely alley, he walked into a siheyuan which became a small theater, showing the story of what had happened here. After watching the show, he climbed the stairs to the roof terrace and looked out into the distance. He could see the roof of surrounding siheyuans and the white pagoda in the distance. This trip finally gave him a complete understanding of Beijing Hutong and white pagoda Hutong. He was deeply impressed.





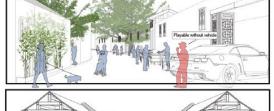


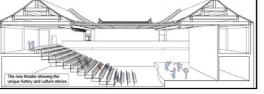


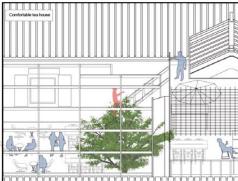


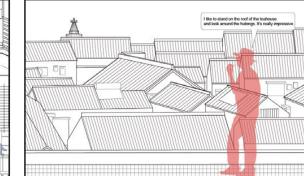












OUTCOMIES

The Commercial Hutong

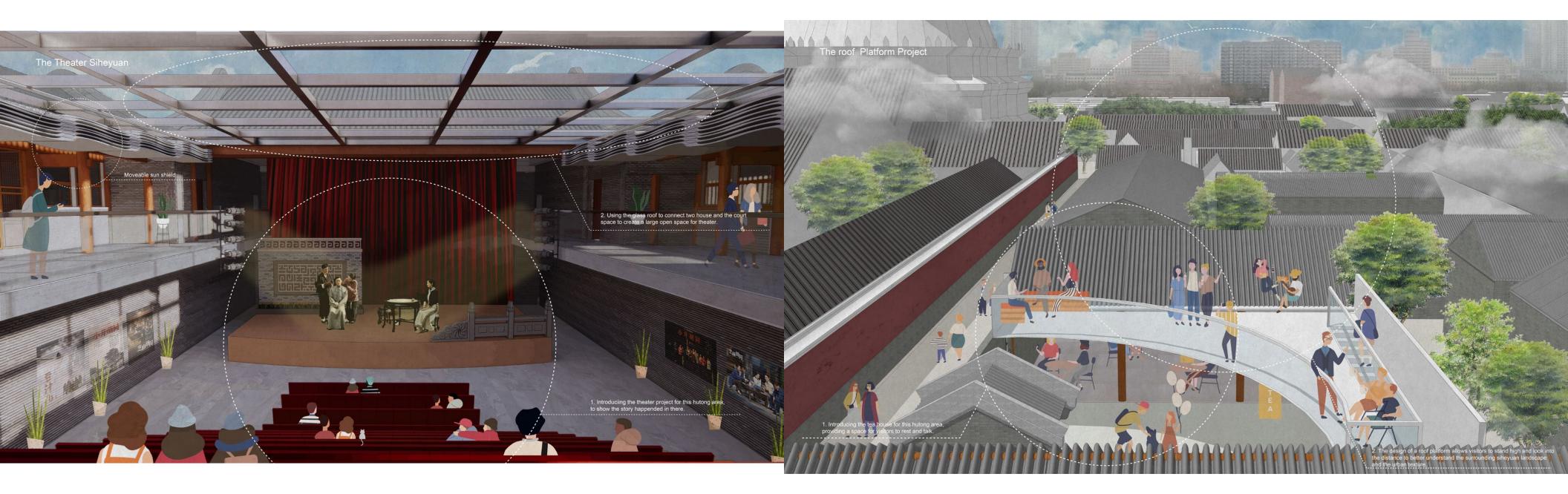
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The Open Project

Outcomies



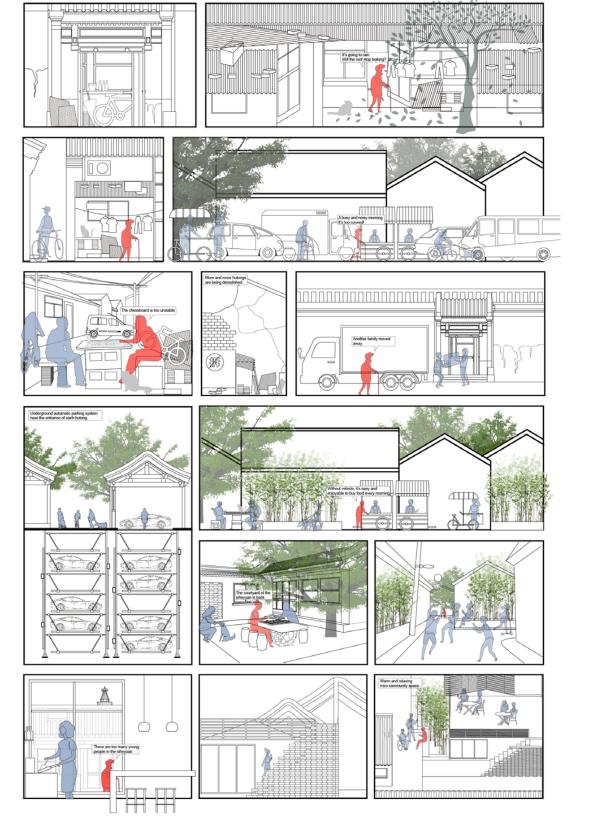




### Storyboard 2 -- Aunt Wang

A residence - Aunt Wang's story

The second story comes from Aunt Wang, A resident of this siheyuan for over 60 years. Before, her house was a bit rundown and occasionally it leaked. Everyday She need to go through really crowded hutongs. And because the poor infrastructure, her neighbors moved out one by one. Now, things have changed. With the underground parking system designed near the entrance of each hutong, there are no cars in hutongs and it become more comfortable with more activity space and green space. The siheyuan has become a micro-community, with many young people moving in again. They cook together in the shared kitchen and chatting together in the courtyard. Hutongs and Siheyuans are still the original appearance in her memory, but they seem to have completely changed.





The Micro Community Project





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#### List of Illustrations:

Figure 1: Aerial view image of current Hutong situation

"Folding Courtyard by ARCHSTUDIO", Mooool, accessed at 22 Mar 2021. Retrieved from https://mooool.com/en/folding-courtyard-by-archstudio.html

Figure 2: The Urban Plan, source from Kao Gong Ji.

Figure 3: The District Plan

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Yuwei Wang, "Persistence of the Collective Urban Model in Beijing," AAPC, August 13, 2012. Retrieved from http://projectivecities.aaschool.ac.uk/portfolio/yuweiwang-beijing-collective/

Figure 5: The Siheyuan Layout, made by author.

Figure 6: The structure of Siheyuan, made by author

Figure 7: Sihevuan Lavouts

The original map is created by Yuwei Yang in "Persistence of the Collective Urban Model in Beijing", the figure of Courtyard house: spatial orders and power hierarchy. Orange tones are added by author in order to clarify the location and size of courtyard.

Figure 8: The diagram of sihuyuan living condition, made by author.

Figure 9: Zhuanta Hutong

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Figure 12: A Current Commercial Hutong "北京最值得去的十大胡同—— 烟袋斜街",每日头条,杏花天,July 04, 2017, Retrieved from https://kknews.cc/travel/gq22n9l.html

Figure 13: The Historical Changes of Siheyuan in Beijing. Source from Beijing Municipal Planning Commission, retrieved from http://ghzrzyw.beijing.gov.cn/

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Figure 16: Hutong under Demolition Source from Sina News, retrieved from https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2019-09-20/doc-iicezueu7145434.shtml

Figure 17: Hutong under Reconstruction

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Figure 18: The diagram of audiences, made by author

Figure 19: Urban Memory System Framework

Source: Based on Lijing Wang, Research on The Protection and Renewal of Hist Dist in Beijing Based on Urban Memory, 2017, the diagram is drawn by author.

Figure 20: The Entrance of Querini Stampalia Foundation

Rory Stott. "Spotlight: Carlo Scarpa" 02 Jun 2019. ArchDaily. Accessed 9 May 2021. <a href="https://www.archdaily.com/638534/spotlight-carlo-scarpa">https://www.archdaily.com/638534/spotlight-carlo-scarpa</a> ISSN 0719-8884

Figure 21: The Quay Space of Querini Stampalia Foundation

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Figure 22: The Garden Detail of Querini Stampalia Foundation

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Figure 24: The siheyuan situation aftere design

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Figure 28: The Satellite Map of Site, Source: Google Map

Figure 30: The History of Site Neighborhood

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