

Qingqing Yang

Space Modernization and Social Interaction

A Comparative Study of Living
Space in Beijing



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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS



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Foreword: Qingqing and Mr. Yang, a Social Anthropology

Readers of this beautifully written book will find a fascinating and sensitive portrayal of contemporary Beijing as seen through the eyes of a number of its individual inhabitants, and also the concepts by which they endeavour to make sense of their lives and the projects they set themselves.

Qingqing Yang moves into a traditional courtyard near the ancient centre of Beijing in order to undertake a period of ethnographic fieldwork. She has lived in Beijing before, but this is not her home town or environment, and she will be living amongst strangers. She is there to collect data for her doctoral thesis in social anthropology; she is enrolled in the PhD programme at the University of St Andrews in Scotland—that country’s ancient seat of learning.

In order for her to be satisfied that her (only) daughter will be safe during the year or more of her fieldwork—of ‘participant observation’—Qingqing’s mother moves into the courtyard with Qingqing; they share a small set of rooms along one of the courtyard sides. The showering and toileting facilities are shared with their courtyard neighbours: it is a traditional ‘hutong’ arrangement.

The neighbour who first comes to make acquaintance of Qingqing and her mother is Mr Yang: ‘Yang Baojun’, as he would call himself with his surname preceding his personal name. He is roughly the same age as Qingqing’s mother, and he takes it as auspicious that they all share the same family name. Must they not all be related, at some remove, he urges. Being unemployed and a ‘house husband’—dependent on his wife Yinming’s income—Mr Yang becomes a regular interlocutor, not only taking it upon himself to help Qingqing and her mother settle in but also insisting that they become part of his ‘family’ as it were, sharing food and meals, news and worries with him, his wife and their son, Huzi. The walls separating the hutong inhabitants are too thin, anyway, for much to remain secret, especially in the way of familial quarrels.

Mr Yang explains that he is ‘an indigenous Beijinger’, born and raised in the hutong. This distinguishes him, in his own eyes, from the rural dwellers beyond Beijing: they are ‘soiled’—a term that for Mr Yang refers to both a type of living and a type of person. China is to be seen as composed of different kinds of people,

we are led to understand, and natives of Beijing, such as Mr Yang, have developed a natural and habitual link to its environment: it is here that they feel at home, it is here that they *are* home. Being a Beijinger is a nature, an identity, a right and a source of pride: Mr Yang will be proud to explain to Qingqing and her mother what this properly entails and what it does not....

A number of things make this book rather special. Qingqing Yang shows herself to be a consummate fieldworker. She interacts easily with the people she meets—her research subjects, or ‘informants’—so that they soon become friends: they open up to Qingqing in acceptance of the person she shows herself to be. The ethnography written up in this book is excellent, Qingqing’s integrity leading her to be able to foster relations of mutual openness with a number of research subjects. They are willing to share with her the particularities of their everyday Beijing lives.

While Chinese herself, and acquainted already with Beijing (and of course linguistically fluent), Qingqing Yang also has the vital anthropological skill to make things strange to herself. So, in the process of explaining ‘Chinese-ness’ or ‘Beijing-ness’, or better still ‘Mr Yang-ness’—and so on—to *herself*, she also explains it to *us*, her readers. We are introduced to aspects of her field study as she introduces them to herself.

More than a captivating narrative style, however, having us know Beijing and a number of its inhabitants *through* her experience and her particular interactions with particular other people—first and foremost with Mr Yang—Qingqing provides us with a perfect example of the unique and significant knowledge that social anthropology can offer, namely the knowledge of a social and cultural milieu *as it is individually experienced*, first by the anthropologist herself or himself and then by the individuals with whom the anthropologist comes into contact. Unique and special to anthropological fieldwork, to ethnographic participant observation, is a knowledge of the way in which individuals personally animate the cultural forms—the words and objects and environmental domicile and daily practices—that they share with the members of their families and communities and wider societies. We learn that this is how Mr Yang understands and lives the concept of being ‘soiled’ (for instance), as Qingqing learns of it through her conversations and engagements with him. There is nothing abstract, impersonal or generalised here: this is an understanding of ‘the social’ and ‘the cultural’ as individually, momentarily and personally lived. Qingqing Yang allows us to appreciate how ‘the Beijing hutong’ as a cultural form and a social space is animated by Mr Yang’s individually intentioned inhabitation of it. This is paradigmatic of what social anthropology can and should offer.

Soon after meeting Qingqing and her mother, Mr Yang announces to Qingqing: ‘I am an indigenous Beijinger and I know each corner of the inner city. To experience the culture of the inner city, we’d better use a bicycle. Only in this way, we can stop where we want. Let me know when you want to visit’. Soon Qingqing takes Mr Yang up on his invitation, and they are cycling together round the city, beyond the areas of traditional hutongs. And there is much to see, for the Chinese government has decreed that, as a domiciliary norm, traditional courtyard living will be superseded by high-rise apartment blocks. Some hutong areas will be retained for

the purposes of heritage and tourism, but many will be demolished and their former inhabitants moved into new areas of modern apartments—as befits a modern state.

Mr Yang's sisters all now live in high-rise blocks. Perhaps there is a convenience to this, a moving forward with the times, but Mr Yang considers that it is not for him: 'I feel more comfortable to stay in the yard, because it is more like my place'. When he visits his sisters, he goes on, he 'cannot stay long': 'The high-rise apartments are supposed to be much cleaner than my house, but I feel more at ease and can act at my will in my shabby room. On the other hand, when I stay in the high-rise building for a long time, I physically feel fidgety and have trouble to breathe'.

The wider context of social and economic change in Beijing is also part of Qingqing Yang's study. But again, it is not a change as 'evidenced' in statistics and graphs or even in maps. It is change as it is lived and effected by Mr Yang and his sisters and the other high-rise apartment residents amongst whom Qingqing and her mother also live for a time.

There is a satisfying balance in Qingqing Yang's narrative: between *her* sense of self and those of her interlocutors; between Mr Yang and other individuals to whom we are soon introduced—Mrs Li, Mrs Liu, Wang Rao, Mr Cao and others; between life in the hutong and life in the high-rise apartment; between traditional or conventional Chinese concepts—'soiled', 'differentiated familiarity', 'harmoniousness', 'old things' and others—and how these are brought to life in individual moments of being. Above all, there is a balance between a sense that here are human beings with whom the reader comes to feel a strong commonality and sympathy and a sense that here are *local lives* unique in their individual conditions. Qingqing Yang manages to retain this latter strangeness and particularity—she describes Mr Yang and others 'trembling in another's fulfilment', and she describes to the reader how her local acquaintances 'enter the solemnity'—at the same time as we come to know and trust Qingqing as our human guide and we recognise the familiar human capabilities and liabilities to which her narrative bears witness.

Finally, then, Qingqing Yang's text delivers social anthropology's 'cosmopolitan' promise: it zigzags between the local and individual on the one hand and the global and universally human on the other so as to encompass both. Our human condition—our 'ontology'—is at one and the same time local and global: we are members of one and the same species (our 'cosmos'), and we lead lives of unique individual embodiment (our 'polis'). Qingqing Yang offers the reader an exemplary case study of the way in which humanity expresses itself in individuality. 'Space Modernization and Social Interaction' provides fitting testimony to the particularity—the idiosyncrasy and the preciousness—of common human lives.

Dramatis Personae: The Main Characters Met in the Book

Mr Yang was born in 1958; his full name is Yang Baojun. He lives in No.7 X Street and was my next-door neighbour during my 10-month stay in the hutong, between August 2010 and May 2011. Mr Yang is unemployed and stays home doing housework. He is an indigenous Beijinger born and raised in hutong. There are three members in his family: his wife, Yinming, his son, Huzi, and himself.

Yinming, Mr Yang's wife, works as an accountant in a private company. She came to Beijing with her parents when she was around 10 years old. Upon marrying Mr Yang, she lived with Mr Yang's parents in the same house until they both died. She is the family breadwinner, hoping to sustain the whole family through her hard work (both domestic and external).

Xiaojun is 43 years old. His full name is Li Chengjun, but neighbours usually call him by his nickname, Xiaojun. I came to address him as 'Jun shu'; Shu means 'uncle' in Chinese, so this is a respectful way to call someone who is of an older generation. He is Yaoyao's father. His main job is to take care of Yaoyao and his wife. So he spends most of his time at home doing housework. He used to run a business himself.

Sun Hong is Xiaojun's wife. She works at the local Public Transportation Bureau. She is 43 years old. Xiaojun and Sun Hong lived in the courtyard adjacent to mine. She is the breadwinner for the whole family, as Xiaojun has not taken any jobs in recent years. She came to Beijing with her parents, living in a high-rise apartment with them before she got married. After her marriage to Xiaojun, she moved to the hutong.

Yaoyao, whose full name is Li Yaoyao, is 13 years old, the daughter of Xiaojun and Sun Hong. She studied at a junior high school during the time of my fieldwork. She is a very obedient student and easily becomes shy with strangers. She told me that she hated her English teacher and that this had reduced her interest in learning English. She was to become my first English student and also a good friend.

Mr Cao is an indigenous local Beijinger. He is in his early 60s. Mr Cao lives in a single-family courtyard somewhere near Di An Men. He bought back his courtyard from the government in the 1990s. Gradually, he has refurbished the courtyard by

installing modern facilities like a bathroom and flushing toilets. He sometimes rents out rooms in his courtyard to foreign tourists, and each room comes with an attached bathroom.

Wang Rao, also a local Beijinger, lives in a single-family courtyard. His grandfather ran a silk exporting business, and he grew up in a wealthy and distinguished family in a hutong in the Qianmen area. He lives in the independent courtyard now with his son and a grandchild but finds himself faced with the situation of possibly being expelled by the government and forced to relocate.

Mrs Li is a high-rise apartment dweller and also my nextdoor neighbour in the high-rise compound which I moved into in May 2010. Her husband has died, and she is living with her son in this apartment. She is 56 years old. At the moment, she is working in a state-owned company.

Xu Lao used to live in a hutong courtyard but 10 years ago moved to a high-rise apartment outside the inner city. He has not married and lives by himself. His family name is Xu. In order to show respect to him (he is in his 60s), one puts the character Lao after his family name (Lao literally means 'aged' and hence 'experienced', 'honoured').

Mrs Liu is our landlady in the courtyard in hutong. Her husband died of cancer a few years ago. She is currently living with her daughter in another courtyard house near where we live. She is older than my mother, so she was always called 'older sister' Liu by my mother.

Acknowledgements

This book is based on my PhD thesis conducted at the University of St Andrews. It would not have been possible for me to finish this book without the generous help and support of those wonderful people in my life to whom I would like to give many thanks and a particular mention here.

I can never overstate my gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Nigel Rapport. I have been deeply indebted to him since the very beginning of my study. This thesis would not have been possible without his kindness, patience and profound advice and of course his unsurpassed knowledge of urban anthropology. He is a wonderful supervisor, the best ever in my life; meanwhile, he is also like a loving and caring father to me.

Here, please allow me to include a brief ethnography talking about my first arrival at St Andrews in a way to explain who my supervisor is. Before I came to St Andrews, I had a few email exchanges with Prof. Nigel Rapport, and he mentioned in one of his emails that he could come and pick me up from the airport. I was absolutely shocked by his kindness, and I thought in my heart, 'what a nice man!' Our first meeting in his office was unforgettable. I arrived half an hour earlier than our appointed time, because I was afraid of getting lost, so I started moving about an hour ahead of our meeting time. When I got there, his door was half open with some music coming out. I knocked at his door and he said: 'Come in' with a very powerful voice. I asked: 'Hello, are you Prof. Nigel Rapport?' Here comes the dramatic part, because to the best of my knowledge of pronunciation, the word 'Nigel' should be pronounced as [NigI], and this was how I called him for the first time. I meant no offence here and it was all because of my unfamiliarity. I remember he said: 'Yes'. Then I started to talk to him: 'I am Qingqing.....'. After a few days, I met our postgraduate convener, Dr Mark Harris, and now our Head of Department. He said to me: 'You must be Qingqing and your supervisor is Nigel right?' At that moment, I realised that I had made a big mistake and mispronounced his name, which could be a big offence in my culture. But he didn't point out my mistake directly, as a way to save my 'face'. Even if my voice sounded calm, he probably could tell that I was a bit nervous, by using his anthropological sensitivity, and so he wanted to put me

at ease by not saying anything. ‘How thoughtful he is’, this sentence lingered in my mind. Especially when I discovered the word pronounced [nɪɡl] has a negative meaning later on, I felt really bad about myself. But he never mentioned this awkward situation or clarified it to me.

After the chat in his office, he took me out and showed me around the campus, telling me the story about the ‘PH’ outside the quad, explaining to me how to use the library facilities. It was such an honour for me to have my professor guide me around the campus. And this made my housemate really jealous. My professor even put his coat on me when he saw me trembling in the Scottish wind. One detail worth mentioning here is that every time we went through the door, he opened it and held it for me. This British gentleness is definitely something extraordinary that I had never experienced before. Later, he took me to the university accommodation office and asked the officer on my behalf if there was something they could offer me. Amazingly, we were told that there was a spare room in Fife Park, which suited my needs. There are many such stories that I can tell. And these stories will stay forever in my mind.

For my academic research, with his guidance, enthusiasm, inspiration as well as his academic experience, he greatly helped to make urban study an interesting research area and encouraged me to keep on going, all of which was extremely invaluable. It was truly a privilege for me to work with Prof. Nigel Rapport.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of those who attended the pre-fieldwork and post-fieldwork writing-up seminar with me. They are Nandini Sen, Philip Kao, Moisés Lino e Silva, Jan Grill, Christopher Hewlett, Fiona Hukula, Shuhua Chen, Máire Ní Mhórdha, Anthony Pickles, Daniela Castellanos, Alexandra McWhinnie, Karolina Kuberska, Anna Gustaffson, Susan Eldred, Katarzyna Bylow-Antkowiak and Vahe S. Boyajian. I am thankful for the academic discussions or arguments with me, which made me learn quicker and stimulated me to go further. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Tristan Platt and Prof. Nigel Rapport who ran the writing-up seminar successfully by providing the participants with a good opportunity to develop writing-up skills and discuss the difficulties they met during the writing-up process. I would like to give a particular mention to my office mate Linda Scott. She is a hilarious lady and brings happiness and laughter to our office every time she comes in. Also I am thankful for her generosity and kindness in giving me guidance, whenever I have been in need, on tutoring the undergraduates.

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My greatest debt so far is to my informants living in the hutong and the high-rise compound in Beijing. It would be impossible for me to finish this thesis without their incredible generosity and kindness.

I also want to take this opportunity to say the biggest thank you to my parents, for always treating me as if I was little. It is time for me to take care of them indeed. My parents brought me up with their generous and loving nature in a way which makes me want to love back the people around me.

I owe a thank you to my friends back in China and elsewhere for their infinite support and encouragement throughout the whole process of writing of this book; some of these have already been named.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to express my gratitude to my funding bodies. I received a scholarship from St Andrews Centre for Cosmopolitan Studies. I had also been granted a scholarship to cover my living costs by China Scholarship Council while I was in the UK doing my research and writing up. In the meantime, the University of St Andrews together with the British Government awarded me the Overseas Research Scholarship (ORSAS) to support my PhD study. I also received funding from the Sheana and Pierre Rollin Scholarship in my writing-up year. After I finished my PhD thesis, the Minzu University of China financially assisted me to get the thesis published as a book. Without all of this financial support, I wouldn't be able to finish this book. I am grateful.

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Chapter 1

Preparing for the Fieldwork

1.1 Initial Questions

This study concerns space in the contemporary city of Beijing: how space is humanly built and transformed, classified and differentiated and most importantly how space is perceived and experienced. Specifically, the study focuses on inhabitants of traditional Chinese courtyards or “Hutong¹”. The Chinese government is in the process of rehousing Hutong residents in new high-rise apartment developments; also the inhabitants are currently experiencing the changing living situation of having their living space developed for tourism.

How do traditional Hutong dwellers feel about the change and make sense of their very different living environments? How are their understandings of self and identity affected by an enforced relocation or unexpected exposure to the public? What are their interpretations of traditional proprieties, as these are engendered by particular relationships with physical and social spaces?

This research project will employ primarily the ethnographic technique of participant observation in order to secure a finely textured, detailed and micro-social account of local experience. However, the study also speaks to geographical concerns and those of international relations and history. The study will contextualise micro-social insights within macro-social structures of Chinese nationalism, urbanism and modernism.

¹This means lane or bystreet, with traditional courtyards flanking on both sides. This is a traditional residential form built within the Old City or Inner City in Beijing, where most of the indigenous Beijingers dwell. Most of those houses in the courtyard in Hutong are very old and shabby, now with no modern facilities like bathrooms or toilets built in. Different from the modern compound, they don't have security doors or CCTV to ensure the residents feel safe.

1.2 Why Hutong?

The aim of my project has been to understand how Hutong residents' ideas about living space have been changed by both internal and external factors, meaning additional affiliated functions and governmental city planning.

I first became interested in this topic when, as a student at university, I joined a photography group to take pictures of those traditional living places for Beijing residents, namely, Hutongs. These are a traditional feature of Chinese architecture, best described as a bystreet or a lane with private courtyard dwellings, *siheyuan*, flanking the lane. The majority of this photography team consisted of local Beijingers and most of them were born and grew up in Hutongs. Thereafter, I had the chance to learn lots of stories of Hutong life, and I eventually became focused upon this seemingly mysterious architecture of rich connotations, the typical representative of traditional urban China.

But now, with land in Beijing becoming much more valuable due to a dramatically increasing size of population, there is a rising demand for living space. Therefore, the Chinese government has decided to replace some of the Hutongs with wide modern roads and to keep and refashion the remainder of the Hutongs by installing some modern facilities, like natural gas pipes for kitchens and bathrooms. The place I conducted the field research, Chongwen District of Beijing, is one of the best examples of a Hutong still existing in its traditional form.

1.3 Fieldwork Methods

I conducted my fieldwork in Beijing between July 2009 and September 2010: 14 months in total. I spent 10 months from July 2009 to May 2010 living in a Hutong called X Street.² Then I moved into a high-rise apartment outside the inner city, called Suojiafen Compound, for a further 4 months.

My family lives in a capital city called Taiyuan in Shanxi province. They are all dwelling in the high-rise apartment. I am the only child in the family because of the 'one-child policy', and naturally, they are concerned for my well-being and eager to support my educational attainment. During my 14 months' fieldwork, my mother was sent by my father to accompany me, because he felt it was not safe to let me stay alone in a seemingly 'unsecured' Hutong courtyard. It proved that my father made the right decision, not because the fieldwork site was not safe enough for me to stay, but because my mother's company really helped me a lot with my field research. She worked perfectly as an anthropologist's assistant by helping me build up and develop social contacts with my informants more quickly, collecting information which is only open to the same age group, from my informants. Of course,

²For ethical reasons, I masked the name of the street.

she also took great care of me during my field research. So in the main body of my book, when I use the term ‘we’ or ‘us’, it means my mother and me.

I also took the role of being an English teacher to the local young children of school age, as a way to open up more opportunities to get to know them and their families.

In the meantime, I also had two informants who were not living in my fieldwork site but contributed much to my research findings. They were either introduced to me by my aunt or her husband. My aunt is a second-generation migrant to Beijing. Her father originally came from Shanxi province and went to Beijing to work and finally settled there when he was 15 years old. My aunt or her husband found some of their colleagues who might be good informants for my study, so they introduced them to me. Xulao is one of them. He is a colleague of my aunt, and they have been working together for 16 years in a row. He used to live in a traditional courtyard in a Hutong located in the inner city, but now he lives in a high-rise apartment somewhere outside Yongding Gate.³ He likes to collect the Laowujian (meaning ‘old things’), and he proudly showed me some of his collection when we met. Another informant, Mr. Cao, was introduced to me by my aunt’s husband. He owns an independent courtyard, which he bought back from the government in the 1990s. He redeveloped the whole yard by installing some modern facilities, and he has since rented out some of the rooms to Westerners wishing to experience ‘traditional courtyard life’.

During my fieldwork time in the Hutong area, I chose No. 7 X Street as my main fieldwork site, because it is located in the inner city and accommodates indigenous residents. It is what is designated as ‘a multifamily shared courtyard’ as will be elaborated upon later. Since living in the Hutong courtyard has become a fashion statement, some wealthy people who are not authentically local to the area have recently wished to purchase whole yards and move in themselves. They do not, however, have a good understanding of the local culture and do not make the most of their life in the Hutong courtyard area. I tried to avoid becoming involved in this type of fashion-conscious courtyard.

In order to secure a complete ethnography, I also taught English to young people as a way to collect information from younger generations. Through the assignments they had been asked to hand in, I could tell their view of living in this traditional Hutong by what they had written down.

1.4 Theoretical Origins

1.4.1 *Anthropology of China*

Looking back on the Western scholars who have done anthropological research in China, including William Skinner (his Chinese name is 施坚雅), Mayfair Yang, Maurice Freedman, Stephan Feuchtwang (his Chinese name is 王思福), Christie

³One of the gates on the inner city border

Avenarius and so on, reveals that most of them have taken rural China as their fieldwork site. Skinner, one of the earliest Westerners conducting fieldwork in China, closely focussed on the rural market. His well-known works include *Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China* (Skinner 2001), *Rural Peasant Organization in Rural China* (Skinner 1951) and *Chinese Peasants and Closed Community – An Open and Shut Case* (Skinner 1971). Mayfair Yang has done most of her research in the countryside of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, returning regularly every 1 or 2 years, from where she generated her work on ‘Guanxi’ (social relationships): *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Yang 1994), and which has recently been translated into simple Chinese as *Re-Enchanting Modernity: Sovereignty, Ritual Economy, and Indigenous Civil Order in Coastal China*⁴; also *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Yang 2008); and *Cultural Politics in a Global Age: Uncertainty, Solidarity and Innovation* (Yang 2007). Stephan Feuchtwang has concentrated his interest in Meifa village in Fujian Province, from where he has written up the article ‘Curves and the Urbanisation of Meifa Village’ (Feuchtwang 2004: 163–179). An alumnus of the Social Anthropology Department at the University of St. Andrews, Anouska Komlosy, has conducted her PhD research among the Dai ethnic minority in Xishuangbanna (Komlosy 2002). But again her main concern is the rural village. Maurice Freedman, again, has done much research about the Chinese, concentrating on kinship. But his focus has been on the Chinese in other regions or countries outside mainland China, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia (Freedman 1979). For political reasons, before 1979, mainland China was not open to European and American study. Those who were interested in knowing about mainland China had to content themselves with extrapolating from the outskirts of China, such as Taiwan and Hong Kong—but life there has actually been very different from the mainland.

In actuality, Beijing and the other major cities have experienced tremendous changes over recent decades which distinguish them radically from rural areas. Moreover, while the urban population only constituted some 41.76 % of the total Chinese population in 2004, the total of Chinese urban residents has doubled in the past 20 years.⁵ This continual influx of rural people into urban area, as well as the migrant workers coming from other cities, has shifted the balance between town and city, such that rural China can no longer be seen as generally representative of modern China, especially under the rapid economical development which this vast country is currently experiencing. Unavoidably, this trend is also followed by a series of social phenomena, which have become sharper than ever before. In this book I have decided to take the challenge to analyse one of these urban phenomena and bring it to a ‘Western’ anthropological audience.

⁴In progress http://www.religion.ucsb.edu/?page_id=701

⁵National Bureau of Statistics of China <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2005/indexch.htm>

1.4.2 *Anthropology of Space*

As the main theme of this dissertation is space, the concept of space will be discussed and introduced here as being of primary importance. One big name, moreover, that I have found impossible to avoid is Henri Lefebvre. The main theoretical frame of the book derives from Lefebvre, the French philosopher, sociologist and anthropologist. His way of defining space inspired me: in his book *The Production of Space* (1991), I found a way to analyse the spaces within traditional Hutong and contemporary high-rise compounds alike that seemed most apposite to me.

Henri Lefebvre will appear at various points in this book. I introduce his work here and explain his main conceptualisation, so useful to my research.

The Production of Space suggests an understanding of space along three dimensions. Lefebvre distinguishes space in the book in the following way:

...first, the physical-nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental, including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly, the social. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination.... (Lefebvre 1991: 11–12)

Other commentators have also elaborated upon Lefebvre's 'trialectic' or three-part differentiation of space in significant ways. Deal and Beal (2004), for instance, interpret Lefebvre's understanding in this way:

Lefebvre reads space primarily from a Marxist perspective. He is interested in transcending a bipartite view of space as physical form-perceived space and mental construct-conceived space. To this end, Lefebvre proposes a three-tiered analysis of space, one which adds a dimension that he refers to as lived space. (Deal and Beal 2004: 95)

It is obvious enough to see from the above description that Deal and Beal themselves favour conceiving of space as physical form, perceived space and socially constructed space—as they reinterpret what Lefebvre has described. And I concur. *We are afforded a view of space as it might be individually experienced.* The three terms reflect how an individual might inhabit a space both socially and temporally: firstly one becomes familiar with space as physical existent, and then one builds up a relationship with this physical object, and thirdly one develops social relations around this physical space.

Edward Soja, an American geographer whom I also see as a philosopher, has taken up Lefebvre's trialectics in a rather different way, in his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places* (Soja 1996). Distinct from Deal and Beal, however, Soja offers three terms that he feels are more general and unbiased. Still basing himself on Lefebvre's tripartite scheme, Soja talks of 'Firstspace', 'Secondspace' and 'Thirdspace'. According to Soja, Firstspace (that is physical space) and Secondspace (that is mental space) together combine to compose Thirdspace, which is the social space that Lefebvre described. It is not possible to discuss or study the Thirdspace separately from the Firstspace and Secondspace, Soja insists (1996: 62).

Soja thus gives special prominence to the concept of Thirdspace: 'It is both a space that is distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or First and Second) and a transcending composite of all spaces (Thirdspace as Aleph)' (Soja 1996: 62). He reads Lefebvre as:

to fuse (objective) physical and (subjective) mental space into social space through a critique of what he called a 'double illusion.' This powerful attack on reductionism in spatial thinking is a vital part of the thirding process, working to break down the rigid object-subject binarism that has defined and confined the spatial imagination for centuries social space takes on two different qualities. It serves both as a separable field, distinguishable from physical and mental space, and/also as an approximation for an all-encompassing mode of spatial thinking. (Soja 1996: 52)

However, distinct from how both Deal and Beal and Soja understand Lefebvorean trialectics, I would see the relationship among the three dimensions of space as a whole in which one dwells within another. There is no question as to which composes which: all of them overlap with one another. Sometimes it is the social space (or Thirdspace) which builds upon the physical space (or Firstspace), but on some occasions it is the space perceived by the dwellers (or Secondspace) which cultivates another new physical space and then on top of this develops the new social space. This I will hope to demonstrate in the ethnography that follows.

This argument is still in line with Soja's understanding of space, nevertheless:

Space is simultaneously objective and subjective, material and metaphorical, a medium and outcome of social life; actively both an immediate milieu and an originating presupposition, empirical and theorizable, instrumental, strategic, essential. (Soja 1996: 45)

If space generally is both subject and object, then the three dimensions of space all have this characteristic.

A major outcome of my employing Lefebvre here is that I feel I will verify his trialectics and show how the three dimensions of space interact with each other. I demonstrate in this book how spaces in Beijing have been perceived, experienced and transformed by the people dwelling within them. My special focus is on living space. By comparing the two residential forms, traditional courtyard in Hutong and high-rise apartment compound, I explore how each of the three dimensions of space has been built and how each further participates in the construction of other spaces: an initial physical space will influence the other two dimensions but also the converse in an ongoing trialectic.

Besides Lefebvre, anthropological literature is, as Herzfeld (2006: 128) notes, 'rich with analyses of space and place'. Notable among this work are Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) focus on the ways and extents to which locality is to be envisaged as the basis of ethnographic research; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga's (2003) work on the embodied and gendered semiotics of architectonic arrangements; and Feld and Basso's (1996) writing on the cultural salience of 'placedness'. Herzfeld (ibid.) suggests that our anthropological preoccupation flows logically from the sense that 'social structures are mapped onto physical space, and that cultural values channel the attribution to them of many kinds of significance'.

However, Herzfeld also goes on to note that: 'Very little has been written about the *interpretation of physical locations considered to be "out of place"*'; and 'Even

less attention has been paid to the *liability of that locatedness*, the ways in which the boundaries of place itself are subject to ‘a conceptual quicksand or earthquake, disturbing the logic of terra firma’ (Herzfeld 2006: 129; my emphases).

The missing focus that Herzfeld points out is exactly what I want to study as the ‘first level’ in my research—how physical relocation can be said to affect inhabitants’ conceptualisations of living space. Most the local Beijingers are settled inside the second traffic ring in Beijing. But what if they are forced into displacement, ‘out of place’? How do they feel about it? How do they know it? In the tantalising words of one of my erstwhile informants’ argument, we get the glimmerings of an answer: ‘We do not want to lose this social identity as indigenous Beijingers by moving out from the inner city’.

Referring to the construction of city space, such as my fieldwork site is currently experiencing, Robert Park famously wrote: ‘The city grows by expansion, but it gets its character by the selection and segregation of its population, so that every individual finds, eventually either the place where he can, or the place where he must, live’ (Park 1952: 79). It seems to me that the whole city can be likened to a big centrifuge, running at high speed, with all manner of unexpected things being thrown to the edge. The Hutong dwellers and dwellings are seemingly part of such unsuitable stuff and in the process of being marginalised. How people are facing this situation becomes one of my major interests in this book.

When talking about space, it is not possible to avoid another scholar, Tim Ingold, who has argued ‘against space’. He wrote: ‘Space is nothing, and because it is nothing it cannot truly be inhabited at all’ (Ingold 2011: 145). My response to this argument is ‘yes’ and ‘no’. If we look at the concept of space itself from an architectural or physical level, it is true that space is empty, abstract and intangible, because it hasn’t been ‘humanised’. But space is dynamic, it will not stay still as it originally is, it will start to be affected by social activities and movements. Once this process starts, it is as if the ‘dead space’ comes to life or a black and white picture has been coloured. Space itself is not ‘nothing’ any more. What transforms space from nothing to something, and eventually makes it permanent, is what Lefebvre described as abstract space and social space, which entails the social activities and emotions within a certain physical space. The ethnography I present below will even show how physical space can be abandoned while the emotions attached to this space are still alive and influential. The physicality of the space is already empty, while the outgrowths related to it, the social and abstract level of space, are still there living independently and being influential in people’s everyday lives. In sum, and *contra* Ingold, the physical level of space as a **matrix** is not empty at all and deserves to be valued—and named and studied.

1.5 Chapter Links: Outcomes

My drawing out of the different levels or dimensions of space in Beijing begins with an explication of the frustrated situation that Hutong dwellers are currently faced with. I also pose the questions: ‘What does a “traditional city” mean? And how

should a city be preserved so as to keep its ancient “spirit”? These concerns pave the way for the rest of the discussion.

Next, I move to describe the traditional residential courtyard in Hutong areas and how it is formed in two different ways: *siheyuan* and *dazayuan*. To show how inhabitants ‘harmonise’ themselves with their physical and social surroundings in different ways, I explore the so-called ‘soiled’ feature of residents’ lives in the Hutong and the social rules of ‘face’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘politeness’. This is my second chapter. I will show how these personal features of residents’ lives and the social norms are the fundamental materials from which the second and third levels of space are formed: ‘abstract space’ and ‘social space’.

By contrast, in the third chapter, I mainly focus on describing the differences between the two residential forms, traditional courtyard and modern high-rise apartment, and how the second and third levels of space are differently experienced and built up.

The research can be seen as proceeding in a macro-to-micro direction, and in Chaps. 4 and 5, I focus on ‘old things’ and ‘language’, which are both closely attached to Hutong dwellers and high-rise apartment inhabitants everyday lives. This is to further explore and examine how residents perceive the trialectic space, and then transform space in their very own way. This discussion also employs the concept of ‘time’ to help better understand space in a longitudinal dimension. I also introduce a distinction between ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’, as different ways in which residents blend themselves within a community. I explore the different implications of properly and carefully implementing ‘high culture’ as against ‘low culture’.

The previous findings and discussions lead into the sixth chapter, which has a special focus on the texture of space. By juxtaposing the two different residential forms, I unveil two different types of spatial texture: ‘soft’ and ‘bendy’ are the features of Hutong spaces, while ‘hard’ and ‘nonstretchable’ are typical characteristics of space in the high-rise compound.

Lastly, in the seventh chapter, I explore how different spatial textures have been constructed and why space might be constructed in this way. I employ the concept of ‘overlapped space’. In the Hutong community, there are more incidents of overlapped space, where space functions in multiple ways, and people perceive it in various ways. Thus, the space in Hutong is ‘thick’ and has a rubberlike texture. In contrast, as physical, abstract and social levels of space are far more purpose specific or specialised in the high-rise compound compared to the Hutong, overlapped space is less common there, and this leads in the apartments to a ‘loose’, ‘fragile’, ‘nonstretchable’ spatial texture.

By studying the two different residential forms, I conclude that the greater the urbanisation of a residential area, the more specialised the usage of space will become. In a conclusion I return to the main terms and arguments that the book as a whole has deployed.

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Chapter 2

‘Trembling in Another’s Fulfilment’: The Space of the Hutong and Its Significance to Mr. Yang

This chapter title might look strange, but I find no better way to reveal the situation that the Hutong residents are currently facing. To show the struggle which Hutong dwellers’ currently face, I decided to use this title for the first chapter. And this is also my main purpose of the chapter. Opposite the block where I was living in the Hutong area of Beijing, I found lots of walls were labelled by official planners with the following character ‘Chai’, which means to be demolished, removed or dismantled. This is a typical Chinese symbol with the white Chinese character of Chai (拆) in the centre surrounded by a white circle to show imminent demolition, as is shown on the wall in the picture above. What this symbol means to the Hutong resident can be clearly read from my informants’ responses: ‘Where shall we go if they demolish these yards? We have been here for many generations. How can they let us go in such an easy way? Firstly, we cannot afford to buy another apartment with the modest compensation; secondly, it is even hard for us to believe that we are being expelled or will have been expelled from houses inherited from our forefathers’. An informant of mine, Ms. Lin, tried to make their situation more clear and understandable to me by giving me a metaphor in the following way: ‘It is like owning an old album for a very long time; you put all your happy and unhappy emotional memories into it, but suddenly one day, someone comes to you and tells you, “I would like to buy this album from you for a non-negotiable price, because I want to have it and will put it to another use”. How ridiculous!’ But what is the point for the state or the local state government to conduct this process of displacement? One quick and strong answer might be, ‘the local state is urbanised in China’s great urban transformation’ (Hsing 2009: 10). To be more specific, ‘as land rents become one of the most important sources of local revenue and capital accumulation, local state leaders identify themselves as city promoters and devote themselves to boosting the property value. Property prices are used to measure the success of urban development, and are openly

referenced by local leaders as a primary political mandate. Mayors¹ don suits and embark on road shows to promote real-estate projects in their cities, and compete with one another to hire advertising gurus for help in developing “urban strategic development plans” aimed at improving the image of their cities and boosting property values. City marketing and property value boosting are performed at both the ideological and political levels. High-profile urban project and property values are viewed as indicators of modernization, which in turn measure the political achievement of local state leaders’ (Hsing 2009: 9).



On the other hand, some house owners, most of whom have got houses in the inner city and somewhere else which has better conditions than their house located in this demolition site, are much more willing to hear the news of demolition, because they could get a large amount of money as compensation. Meanwhile, there is no need for them to worry about where to live. My landlady Mrs. Liu is one of these people. Mrs. Liu stays with her daughter, and her husband died many years ago. She has three houses sitting in different places in Beijing. One is located in a courtyard inside the second traffic ring in the city centre, which we were renting, and she inherited this house from her husband. One is located around the southwest of Beijing outside the sixth ring, which she is also renting out to others. Mrs. Liu told me she bought this high-rise apartment on her own. The other one is that which she is currently living in. This is even smaller than the one we rented. She told me the reason she stayed in the smallest one is because the surrounding area is under the process of demolition. If she doesn’t stay there, she will not get as much compensation as the others. Because the rebuilding committee would assume she has at least one other house in another place if they saw the house was empty or occupied by a tenant, she needs to stay within the house and wait as if she has nowhere else to stay. Also she told me, ‘This is a sensitive time, during which everyone is fighting for his or her own benefits. I should be there in person to get enough information about what is going on and take proper action to maximise my benefit. Everyone is like that’.

What is worth mentioning here is that Mrs. Liu is not an indigenous Beijinger and she migrated from a nearby province—Hebei.

¹ Mayors in all the cities in China are elected through the People’s Congress, which is supposed to represent the majority common benefit.

2.1 Emotional Link with Land

To understand more thoroughly about how frustrated the Hutong residents are, who face or will be facing the displacement, it is better to know Chinese people's relationship with land and soil, which, I would say, is intimate.

The most distinguished social scientist in China, Fei Xiaotong has given a clear picture of the foundation of Chinese society which has been described in his most well-known book called *From the Soil: The foundations of Chinese Society*. 'Chinese society is fundamentally rural. I say that it is fundamentally rural because its foundation is rural. Several variations have arisen from this foundation; but even so, these variations retain their rural character' (Fei 1992: 37). The reason that China has been labelled as rural in Fei's book owes to China's large proportion of agricultural land and population. In situations where peasants move to the city from the countryside where they were once majority citizens, they are now looked down upon as minorities. This has also been mentioned in Fei's work: 'We often say that country people are figuratively as well as literally "soiled" (tuqi). Although this label may seem disrespectful, the character meaning "soil" (tu) is appropriately used here' (Fei 1992: 37). Fei first published his argument in 1947, which is 63 years ago. But what he described is still a truth, even now. I cannot forget it was on 3 August 2009 I moved into No.7 Xinfu East Street, when we, which means my mother and I, started our first long deep conversation with my next-door neighbour, Mr. Yang. We were cleaning the kitchen and trying to use the steel frame in the courtyard to make a dinner table. After a while, Mr. Yang came out from his house.

Mr. Yang said: 'Hello, is everything settled?'

My mother replied: 'Yes pretty much'.

'What is your family name?'² Mr. Yang asked.

'Zhao. I must be older than you. What do you think? I was born in 1953. How about you?'³ my mother replied.

'Yes, I am three years younger than you. I was born in 1956. So I will call you Zhao Jie (which means Elder Sister Zhao), and you can call me Yang Di',⁴ Mr. Yang replied.

² Usually, in Chinese culture it is not very polite to ask the first name of the person you talk to, who might be older than you.

³ It is not rude to ask people's age in this situation, because knowing the age is the only way to find out how to address each other.

⁴ This term means Younger Brother Yang. In China, it is more respectful to ask people's family name instead of first name, when they are becoming acquainted especially on their first meeting. The family name indicates which family you come from, which is more general and less private compared with the first name. I got to know Mr. Yang's first name 3 months after I settled here, because I didn't want to offend him by asking his first name directly. The chance I got to know his family name was when I was asking his telephone number, he wrote me down the number followed by his full name. For someone who is older, it is a courteous way to address him or her elder sister or brother, as the way, which shows the respect and intimacy to the elder party. Only if someone looks obviously younger, or of a similar age, for example, classmates, then that will be fine to ask what is your name. In Chinese culture, name in most cases refers to full name.

'Wow! My daughter's family name is the same as yours'.

'Yo⁵! What a coincidence!' Mr. Yang was also surprised.

'So may I call you Uncle Yang⁶?' I asked.

'Certainly yes. Maybe we were family members a long time ago (laughing)'.

I also replied with a smile and nodded: 'It could be. How long have you been staying here?'

Mr. Yang replied to me with a smile on his face: 'I was born and raised up here, and I've lived here for 53 years. My son was also born here. Where are you from?'

My mother replied, 'We are from Taiyuan, Shanxi province. It takes three hours by train to come to Beijing'.

'I know Taiyuan. I have been there thirty years ago. I remember the train station, which is very nice. I am sure it is still there, right?'

'Yes, of course'.

What surprised me was what Mr. Yang said next: 'Taiyuan is a big city, the capital of Shanxi, if my memory is right. To tell you the truth, when you came here to look around the house and meet the landlady, I already figured out that you two are not common persons. You must come from a big place. I can tell from the way you dress, the manner you talk, your skin colour and also your outlook that you must come from a big city. I have very sharp eyes to identify people's background. I cannot be wrong. On the contrary, as you probably already noticed, people coming from rural area are always "土 Tu (Soil) 头 Tou (head) 土 Tu (Soil) 脑 Nao (Brain)".

Here 'tutoutunao' is a metaphor to show the typical image of rural people in China interacting with soil on the land for many generations and being rooted in the soil not only with their feet and legs but also their head and brain, as if smell of the soil spread upward, which makes them look a bit dull. Mr. Yang's reply is a verification of what Fei has described.

When my mother heard about Mr. Yang's reasoning, she replied with a shake of the head and said: 'No, Taiyuan is not as big as Beijing. We don't feel we have any big difference with people coming from another place'.⁷

After hearing this reply, Mr. Yang said: 'No, no, how can that be the same? Of course, it is not the same. I am not flattering you but the difference is very obvious. Look at these people from rural places, they are very Tuqi (土气 soiled). When they go into the big city, they look like flies without heads (没头苍蝇 refers to people who don't know where to go because of lack of knowledge. This expression also reveals an annoyed attitude towards rural people). They can't find the way, don't know how to use the Underground, have no idea how to operate the elevator and finally lose themselves among the skyscrapers. All their behaviours combined with

⁵This is an exclamation term in oral Beijing dialect, used to express the feeling of unexpected good surprise.

⁶When someone is called uncle, brother or sister, it doesn't necessarily mean they have kinship, again as this is a polite way to show your respect to the other party.

⁷This statement is not a rude response of disagreement to the partner you talk to. In most cases, if someone gives you a positive comment, it is better to reply back with a negative response, as a way to show you're modest. Otherwise, you will be judged as an arrogant person.

their tanned face colour, which is the result of long-term exposure to the sunshine, reflect their Tuqi (Soiled) feature that differentiates them from the city dwellers. In my case, as for me, I will also feel a bit lost, when I first come to a new place, but I have experienced a lot in metropolitan areas; therefore, I can use my transferrable knowledge to work out everything'. From the way Mr. Yang describes his view of rural people, it seems he cannot stand the 'soiled' countryman. He even gave me an example to show to what extent the rural people have been 'soiled': 'When I was sent to the countryside to do labour during the Cultural Revolution, there was someone driving a car to the village I worked at. The villagers saw this vehicle and were all surprised by the moving "small house". They gave the car a new name, "mobile house". How funny! I then explained to them how it works. This is due to their lack of living experience in the city', Mr. Yang told me.

Though what Mr. Yang said was trying to show how the peasants he met were 'soiled', this doesn't prove that he hasn't been 'soiled' at all himself. I see this not because I feel I am able to know him almost better than he knows himself; instead, I look at him in a different way from how he sees himself. On a sunny afternoon, 9 days after he delivered the 'soiled' concept to me (I remember it was half past three, when most of the inhabitants woke up from their mid-noon nap), Mr. Yang was standing outside the courtyard, just looking at people passing around and saying hello to these passers-by, whether man playing chess on the street corner, or children chasing after each other, for example. I went to Mr. Yang and started to talk to him. When I asked if he enjoyed living in the courtyard or the high-rise—as living in high-rise is a major modern trend—he replied to me:

'Of course, I feel more comfortable to stay in the yard, because it is more like my place. All my sisters are now living in the high-rise. When I visit them, I cannot stay long in their place. Also, there are specific rules you need to obey around the high-rise. For instance, you should take off your shoes and put on sandals when you go in; if someone smokes, they should not flick ash onto the ground. But you can flick ash anytime anywhere on the ground as you wish, when you come to my place in the Hutong. The high-rise apartments are supposed to be much cleaner than my house, but I feel more at ease and can act at my will in my shabby room. On the other hand, when I stay in the high-rise building for a long time, I physically feel fidgety and have trouble to breathe'.

After hearing Mr. Yang's statement, I felt that his description was a bit surprising; it made me want to inquire further, because I myself have never experienced this physical discomfort by shifting from courtyard to high-rise. So I asked him: 'What makes you feel like that? Is there any specific reason?' Mr. Yang's reply brings out another new concept to me. He said:

'Because the structure of the high-rise building lifts the residents' dwelling ground up to mid-air, people cannot reach Diqi (地气, means spiritual energy from the land); therefore, these physical reactions come out'.

'But what is Diqi?' I asked.

'Good question', Mr. Yang said, 'This is a concept coming from traditional Chinese medicine. If you sit on the train for a long time, you should walk around on the platform when it stops for a while. If you take the ship to somewhere far away,

you need to have a walk on some major quay. Similarly, you should go down to the ground to connect yourself with Diqi if you have stayed in the high-rise for a long time. In the theory of Chinese traditional medicine, a healthy person should balance his inside body by absorbing Tiandijinghua (天地精华), which means the essence or spirit of heaven and earth. In other words, a person should keep a balance of yin and yang (阴阳平衡) by properly connecting himself with nature including land, air, sunshine, etc. Diqi belongs to yin.⁸ If you live above the ground for a long time, you will lack yin, and yang will automatically outweigh yin, so the balance will be broken. Is that clear enough to you?

'Of course, yes', I said.

What's more interesting is that when I tried to Google the concept of Diqi online, I found an article called 'Connect with Diqi'⁹ published on the website of the Communist Party of China (<http://cpc.people.com.cn>) which encourages all Communist Party members to connect with Diqi to keep them balanced. Here Diqi refers to the public or the people, who are seen as the grounds of the Communist Party. But this could still reveal how the concept Diqi is rooted in the minds of Chinese individuals.

Once when I took a bus somewhere, I heard the driver say to a passenger in a strong Beijing accent: 'I have felt annoyed to be disconnected with Diqi after I moved to the high-rise'. That is why Fei emphasises again the 'soiled' feature in his work, and this argument becomes the foundation of his future research. 'The Chinese are really inseparable from the soil. To be sure, out of this soil has grown a glorious history, but it is a history that was naturally limited by what could be taken from the soil...only those who make a living from the soil can understand the value of soil. City dwellers scorn country people for their closeness to the land; they treat them as if they were truly "soiled". But to country people, the soil is the root of their lives...' (Fei 1992: 38).

Even though Fei grew up in a non-rural family, he described his experiences in his book: 'When I went abroad for the first time, my nanny slipped something wrapped in red paper into the bottom of my suitcase. Later, she told me in private that if I had trouble getting accustomed to my new home and if I were too homesick, I should make some soup from the stuff wrapped in the red paper. In the package was dirt that she had scraped from her stove. I remember seeing a similar custom in a movie called *A Song to Remember*, which took place in Poland, an Eastern European agricultural country. It made me realise even more what an important role the earth plays and should play in a civilization like ours' (Fei 1992: 38).

⁸Yin and yang are the major concepts of Chinese traditional medicine and also of Fengshui. Yang stands for masculine, man, warm, hot, dry and parched; and on the opposite side, yin stands for feminine, woman, cold, cool, wet, sombre and shady. The characteristics of yin and yang could also be told from the characters in Chinese, which are 阴 (yin) and 阳 (yang). Apart from the similar left side, the right side shows the difference clearly, because the right-hand side of yin contains the character for moon (月), while Yang contains the sun character (日).

⁹From <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/10992531.html>

However, what Mr. Yang claimed to me seems to go against Fei's argument, in drawing a distinction between the rural and city people. Fei described the Chinese culture as if it was homogenous, while according to my informant Mr. Yang, the clear us-them division went along the lines of the rural-urban lifestyle or state of mind. But Mr. Yang probably has not realised that his everyday habits are also inseparable from the soil and a peasant mentality—as revealed by his comments on *Diqi*—even though he doesn't do any farming.

Besides his physical needs of connecting with soil properly, Mr. Yang's everyday life is also closely related to peasants and the countryside and is typically soiled. Traditionally, one of the major channels to sell goods was *yaohe*¹⁰ (hawk) while walking along the Hutong, and this hawking was heard by the courtyard dwellers. If they had a need, they would come out and look at what the retailers had. But this traditional way of selling has become less and less common, because more and more courtyards have disappeared and, as a result, the dwellers moved into the high-rise, where the sound of *yaohe* is not able to reach. But still some of the farmers living in the outskirts will go into the Hutong in the city and bring their farm products to sell. Mr. Yang really enjoys buying goods from itinerant salesmen because they are always fresher and cheaper than he gets from the market. One of the major reasons could possibly be that the retailer saves on both costs and the tax by selling in this mode, so the price could be lower than normal.

2.2 Emotional Links with the Items Grow Up from the Land Within One's Living Area

Mr. Yang's connection with land or soil, as reflected by his uncomfortable feelings at separation from the soil or land for a while, means not only a *physical* attachment but also an *emotional* one. I would argue that Mr. Yang's story and life experiences, as well as his perceptions, are attached to particular physical sites built in the inner city of Beijing and also to the people who were born and grew up with him in these sites. In other words, Mr. Yang shows an attachment to what might be described as both abstract space¹¹ and social space.¹²

The peasants are really fond of their land because the farmland provides for all their living needs, like vegetables, fruit, wheat, etc. The peasants undertake the whole agricultural process from seeding to irrigating to fertilising and through to

¹⁰It is written as 吆喝 in Chinese. Similar meaning to 'hawk'. The retailers walk through different Hutong and hawk to tell the potential customers living in Hutong what they are selling and how good the quality is. How and what the hawk is like a commercial advertisement. The content, the inflection and the volume together make this hawk a piece of art. And now the hawk of Beijing Hutong have been recognised as one of the intangible culture heritages of China.

¹¹Abstract space refers to the second level of space as defined by Lefebvre (1991: 11). He also refers to it as the 'mental level'.

¹²Social space refers to the Lefebvre's 'social level' (1991: 11).

harvest. They interweave their expectation and their efforts together with their whole memories of each plant's distinct growing periods. Generally speaking, it is the produce grown up from the land which builds up the intimacy between the peasant and the land. Mr. Yang's role to the land is equivalent to that of a peasant. He does expect harvest from the land he lives in, and in order to get the harvest, he makes his efforts accordingly and engages in seeding, irrigating and fertilizing. For instance, he built up a small kitchen in the public area of the courtyard, opposite his house for cooking, and also a shed to place his coal in winter with bricks and tarpaulin, which is similar to the seeding. If the windy season is coming, he reinforces the roof with bricks, which resembles the fertilising or irrigating stage under some special conditions. He even brought up his son in the house where he is living in a similar way to seeding, and in expecting him to grow up healthily by taking care of him by all means, it could be said he fertilises his son like a farmer does. Also his friendship with other people was built up on the land. He maintained and developed this through different ways. The visible (like the shed he built opposite his main house) and invisible (like the social relationship with other neighbours) items above the land were more or less like the fruit or vegetables growing from the farmland. Mr. Yang inputs his effort and expects outcomes from the land in different seasons.

Every time he cooked something special and which he is good at, for instance, beef dumpling, he brought it to my mother and me. This was one of his ways to maintain and develop our friendship, food exchanging. I remember one day, we woke up on a cold morning. My mother and I were trying to open the window to get in some fresh air from outside, but as the temperature was too low, the window had frozen and stuck. We tried to push it hard, hitting it with a hammer, while making a lot of noise, but it still didn't work. When the noise was heard by Mr. Yang, he came to our house and asked what was happening. On learning of our problem, he went back home and came back in a few minutes bringing his screwdriver and another hammer with him and got the window opened in a minute. He was so warm-hearted to us, which I consider is the best fertiliser to our friendship.

When Mr. Yang heard that I was interested to know the traditional Beijing culture, he was very pleased to tell me that I came to the right person. He seemed to be proud of his roots and considered the fact that he was born in Beijing to be distinctive and giving him the true insider's insight. He said: 'I am an indigenous Beijinger and I know each corner of the inner city. To experience the culture of the inner city, we'd better use a bicycle. Only in this way, we can stop where we want. Let me know when you want to visit'.

I said, 'Excellent! I will be free tomorrow. Will it work for you?'

Mr. Yang said happily, 'Sure, I will tell your aunt¹³ to have lunch at the cafeteria in her Danwei¹⁴ (单位 means working unit or the institution one is working for).

¹³Because I call him uncle, therefore his wife should be called aunt. This way of address is to show the respect and intimacy to Mr. Yang and his wife.

¹⁴Danwei can be referred to as a special work unit in Chinese culture. It originated from Soviet inspiration, and its function could be the Maoist state monitoring the loyalty of employees to the Communist Party, but in a much more tender way. Therefore, Danwei is not merely the unit that enables the employee to get their payment to lead their life but also will provide their employee with some benefits, for example, Fuli Fen Fang, which means beneficial house. Through Fuli

So we will have enough time for visiting. Ask your mum to see if she would like to come with us'. While saying this, Mr. Yang walked in front of my room door and called my mum: 'Zhao Jie, Qingqing would like me to show her around the historic site of inner Beijing, would you like to come with us? Will you be comfortable about her safety when she is with me?' My mother said: 'I have nothing to worry about to let her go with you'. It is customary to inquire about my safety, because of our different gender. By expressing his concerns and by inviting my mother to accompany us, he also made it clear that he did not have any romantic interest in me.

'Great! Have you visited inner Beijing before? If you haven't, we can go together. We have two bicycles, and I could borrow another one from Xiaojun, who is just living in the courtyard in front of us. Don't worry about the traffic. Also I will tell my wife to have lunch in the cafeteria in her Danwei, so I will not need to come back to prepare her lunch, and we could have enough time. We don't need any map. The whole map is in my mind. Sometimes I loiter alone with my bicycle, lots of fun'.

'Ok, that will be nice. I am sorry for the inconvenience it brings to you', my mother appreciated Mr. Yang's hospitality.

The next day, in the early morning, we met up in the courtyard at 9.00 a.m.

'Ok, the bicycle is ready. Xiaojun went to the Zaoshi with his bicycle (早市 means the early market) earlier than usual, so he could bring back the bicycle for us to use. I will pull down the seat for Qingqing to ride, because I used to ride this one, and the seat is a bit high for her I suppose', Mr. Yang said to us with a satisfied smile on his face.

'You are so kind. You should not forget your Uncle Yang, even when we are not staying here any longer', my mother said to me.

'Of course, I won't. Shall we go?' I asked.

'Yes, let's go. Firstly, we will go through X Street until we reach the entrance on the other side of the street, then we turn left and head towards west. There you can see the Carrefour supermarket, and we will keep on going along Guangqumennei Street. As long as we see the Ciqikou Tube station, we will turn north and keep on going until we see the signpost of Dongjiaominxiang'. When I was about to take out my notebook to write down what Mr. Yang told me, he laughed at me: 'This route does not need to be written down in a notebook, for me, it is all here (he pointed to his head). There are many ways to go there. Only if you stay here for a long time, you will know the different routes to a certain place. Look, on our right-hand side is the Wumei supermarket, and if you go through the lane beside it, you will then reach the bathroom that we normally use. This supermarket is near the place where we live, but it is not a very big one, and the variety of goods is very limited. If I need

Fenfang, you can have a house or apartment from your Danwei without paying for it. Also Xiaji Fuli, which means summer benefit, a compensation usually given for working in the hot season, normally including towels, soft drink, green tea, watermelon or sugar, etc., that could reduce the body temperature. In the winter, employees will get Kao Huo Fei, means warm-up fire fee, to allow them to buy some coal to keep the room warm. Meanwhile, Danwei also intervene in their employee's everyday life, for instance, if the employee needs to get an introducing letter in order to get married at a registry office. The same letter is needed for a divorce as for a marriage. Some old TV shows indicate that when a couple quarrelled, one side might say to other side: 'I will go and report this to your leader'.

salt or some simple stuff, I will go there for a quick buy. But if you want to get loads of stuff and don't want to bother with going to many different places, I would recommend you Carrefour in Fangzhuang or Guangqumen. To get there, you can take bus Number 8, which will take you to Guangqumen Carrefour supermarket, and Number 60 from Beijing Amusement Park stop which is the starting point, from where you are guaranteed a seat'.

'Good to know', I said.

'If you stay longer you will know everything. It just takes some time. Don't worry. Any time you need a guide, just let me know. I was born and raised here'. 'Look', Mr. Yang pointed to a courtyard that we just passed, 'that is a typical courtyard, but now it is used as an office building by a company. If we keep on cycling along the previous street, you will see the Chongwenmen Market which was set up in 1976 and has been in use for 34 years. This is the oldest market, which is still functioning in Beijing. We are nearly there. Bicycle is the best way of transportation to travel within the inner city. If you drive a car, then you cannot stop wherever you want. The same happens when you use public transportation. So bicycle is my favourite way to travel. Sometimes when I have nothing to do and my wife and my son are both at work, I will travel on my own riding my bicycle. It is just as helpful when I am shopping at the market: the bicycle can be used as a carrier for heavy goods while I walk through different stalls and also a transportation tool to take me and my stuff back home easily'.

'I agree. Bicycle is like our legs and feet', I said, nodding my head.

'Exactly! China has long been seen as a bicycle-dominant country', Mr. Yang said.

After a short while, we arrived in Dongjiaominxiang Street, as the signpost jumped into our sight.



This is an area where all the different foreign embassies used to be located in the Qing Dynasty including some foreign banks and Western churches.

Mr. Yang told me: 'This Hutong is the longest surviving one standing in Beijing. During the Cultural Revolution, the name of the street changed into Anti-imperialism Road to show the citizens' loyalty to the Communist Party'.

'That's interesting! Do you think that was necessary?' I asked.

'No, I don't see the point, why they bother to change the name when the substance of this street is still virtually the same. The whole Cultural Revolution was a total disaster, but it is also sad to me that certain factors stimulated all the citizens to get so enthusiastic and fond of Mao, from whom the craze came. Everyone was thinking in the same way and stepping in the same direction. Later on, after the Communist Party announced that the Cultural Revolution was a mistake, the name of the road was changed back. Thereafter, citizens gradually stopped following blindly. This is a very peaceful and beautiful street with a lot of Western-style architecture, the St. Michael's Church, Yokohama Specie Bank, etc. (pointing to the buildings along the street). The Western architecture structure is really sturdy. Even though it has been standing for many years, it still looks very nice. Look at the style. It is so different from ours. What a wonderful road, with the trees flanking on both sides and forming the arch of shade for the passers-by in the hot summer! If I have to go anywhere in the hot summer, I will try to go through Dongjiaominxiang if possible to stay out of the heat for a short while', Mr. Yang said.

'This is what we say: "One generation plants the trees in whose shade another generation rests"', I replied.

'That is true. Passing this street, we will reach the Western Returned Students' Association, which is located on a royal courtyard. This is what I want to show you, a real courtyard, known as siheyuan. The one we are living in is just a common yard which is far behind this one. But I am afraid they don't allow us to get in. You can take some pictures outside. It will not be a problem, because we are now heading somewhere more exciting, the Forbidden City, the most impressive yard. We will keep on going along Nanheyuan Street, and we will pass Nanchizi Street, then we turn left; you will see the east gate of Forbidden City named Donghuamen. Have you been to the Forbidden City before?'

'Yes, I travelled here about 5 times when I was doing my bachelor's and master's degrees in Beijing between 2002 and 2008. In most cases, I showed my friends who were round coming from other places to Beijing for sightseeing'.

'So you already know the name of the river', Mr. Yang pointed to the river surrounded the Forbidden City and asked me.

'Hmm, I can't really remember what its name is exactly. I always call it City Guard River or Moat'.

'Yes, the function of the river is to protect the Forbidden City and keep it from attack, but it actually has a name: it is traditionally known as Tongzi River'.

Mr. Yang is a very good tourist guide. Here Tongzi (筒子) means tube. 'The Tongzi River is a canal; therefore, it goes very straight like a tube. That is why it received this name Tongzi River in the Qing Dynasty'.

'I see. Would you like me to take a picture in front of the river?' I asked.

'I come here very often. It's not necessary to take one this time. The main reason I am here is to show you around', Mr. Yang said.

But I could read the potential meaning from his word which is that he didn't want to bring us any trouble, not really that he didn't want to take a photo. So I insisted asking him to stand beside the river, and he finally agreed. Even on the way as he walked to the river, he kept on saying what a trouble it was, and that I didn't have to take pictures; in this way, he expressed his 'unwillingness', but in the picture, I can see his nice smile. In Chinese culture, it is customary to be outgoing and friendly and not expect an immediate reciprocal return. Since Mr. Yang perceived taking his picture as a favour to him, he may have felt embarrassed that we were doing him a favour, when it was his social obligation to serve as my guide.

On our way back, we were planning to buy a train ticket back to my hometown, but I had no idea where to go, because we could not book train tickets online beforehand, so we needed to go either to the train station or the train ticket agent. In most cases, we decide to go to the agent, though we need to spend another 50p booking charge, but the queue is normally shorter than at the station. Another major reason is that the railway companies want to cultivate the relation with the agents and thus introduce measures to protect the agents' benefit: the train stations only release the tickets 3 days ahead of departing, while the agents get the tickets 10 days ahead. The problem is that all the agents are located quite randomly. I could not find their exact location online or anywhere else. So finding the nearest ticket agent is completely based on local knowledge. I told Mr. Yang about my concern and he said: 'That is easy, along this road, you will find one, which is next to the sports equipment store. So you don't bother going a roundabout way'.

The way that Mr. Yang describes how to get to somewhere is based on what he has experienced, which he has gained through his sight, hearing and body, instead of the map. Therefore, when he gave me directions on how to get somewhere, he uses the landmark he is familiar with together with the direction guide, like turn left, or right, go towards north or east. He never mentions getting onto a certain road, unless it is a big main road that he could use as a landmark.

To live in Beijing sometimes you have to gain some local knowledge, especially through someone who could help you to gain the knowledge. For instance, when I first moved to the courtyard, we did not have bathroom, and when I wanted to take a shower, I didn't know where to go. Without Mr. Yang's help, I would bring my shampoo and lotions, walking through street to street and trying to see if I was lucky enough to find one randomly. But when I told Mr. Yang my concerns, he walked my mother and me to the public shower room. Actually there were two shower rooms at the place he showed us. He again used his local knowledge to tell us that 'the small one is 90P per person each time, while the larger one is £1 each, but it has a larger space inside and is much cleaner than the smaller one; therefore, I highly recommend you this one'. (At the time he told me this, I suddenly recalled the memory of buying a watermelon from a peasant who brought a whole truck of watermelons from the countryside to the city. When I was about to choose the melon, he told me the other one is much sweeter than the one I chose.)

What Mr. Yang's descriptions reveal is that his whole sense of landscape is based on personal living experience rather than technology. He has linked his life with these sites. In my case, I was left with no choice but to trust in my map. The way I looked at these sites was more mechanical. If some parts of the site we visited changed, I wouldn't be able to notice, but Mr. Yang would. He could always tell me how this changed place looked like before, what the relevant story was to this sight. All this information Mr. Yang provided to me, even in our era of information overload, could not be found on the Internet. His contact with the physical environment surrounding him is all based on personal interaction. He experienced the life of physical objects. What's more, his personal emotional life interlocks with the physical space expanding outside his own house, which can be seen as a centre of ripples: the level of intensity of his emotional life links with the physical space and gradually decreases from the centre to the periphery.

2.3 Differentiated Familiarity (Chaxu Familiarity)

In 1984, Fei (1992) formulated the concept of *chaxugeju*, which can be translated as *differential mode of association* (Fei 1992: 19), to describe social relationships. *Cha* means 'difference' or 'dissimilarity', *Xu* means 'order' or 'sequence', and *geju* means 'patterns' or 'framework' (Fei 1992: 14). In order to help us understand this concept thoroughly, he gave the following metaphor: 'social relationship in China possesses a self-centred quality. Like the ripples formed from a stone thrown into a lake, each circle spreading out from the centre becomes more distant and at the same time more insignificant. With this pattern, we are faced with the basic characteristic of Chinese social structure, or what the Confucian school has called *Renlun*¹⁵ (*human relationships*). What is *lun*? To me, insofar as it is used to describe Chinese social relationships, the term itself signifies the ripple-like effect created from circles of relationship that spread out from the self, and this produces a pattern of discrete circles. In the ancient text *shiming* (means interpretation of names) *lun* is defined as "the order existing in ripples of water"' (Fei 1992: 65). But the water ripple image that Fei has proposed to describe the Chinese social structure not only takes effect among individuals but also embodies the intimate relationship between the individual and physical space, which Lefebvre described as the 'mental, including logical and formal abstractions' (Lefebvre 1991: 11). I would like to call this 'abstract space'. What makes the difference is that the centre of the ripple is not the individual himself, but rather, it is the physical object, which is highly related with the individual, and is in most cases their house. In Mr. Yang's case, the centre is not Mr. Yang himself, but is 'first door, No. 7 X Street'. And his intimate relationship with the physical space decreases gradually as he goes further from the centre which is his house.

¹⁵Ren (人) refers to people, human being.

On the day Mr. Yang showed me around Beijing, we went to Houhai which is 10.5 km away from where we lived, and I asked if he knew where there was a public bathroom. He told me: 'Let's ask someone living here'. Back in the area around X Street, he could easily locate the train ticket selling point that we were looking for. The closer the focus is upon Mr. Yang's activity area, the more clearly intimate his connection is with his space. When someone comes to knock on his door, especially when he hears some unfamiliar steps approaching the door, he shouts from inside and asks: 'Who is it?' and meanwhile, he holds the absolute power of decision to let the person wait or come in straight away. His brick-built house is like a container of his own personal life and also serves as a territory definer of his rights, which is like the centre of the ripples. Within this area, every item is under his control, and everything is running at his will. This idea has also been embedded into his wife's mind, who is also the owner of the house where they are currently living. Thus, under some circumstances, the two dominant centres will have a fight, where both of them have a strong sense that they should play the leading role. Thus, they quarrel sometimes. Because Mr. Yang and I were next-door neighbours and the wall is not thick enough to be soundproof in most cases, I could hear they are quarrelling, as I sat in my room. Mostly the row will last no longer than 15 minutes. However, I remember one of the shrillest fights which happened during my stay lasted about 1 hour, and I could even hear when he slapped his wife in the face. At the time, his son was trying to intervene between them and mediate. As a neighbour, we are supposed to come to their house and try to comfort both sides and mediate the issues. But my mother and I felt that it might make the couple embarrassed by our being present during their quarrel. But the next day, Mr. Yang came into our room and brought us some hot water. My mother asked him to sit a while for a cup of tea, and then we started to talk about what happened the previous night.

'You quarrelled with Di Mei (弟妹)¹⁶ last night?' my mother asked.

'Did you hear that? I bet you must have done, unless you were out, because the wall between us is pretty thin. Even when your mobile phone rings, I can hear it from my room. I told my wife that all my entire face has been lost because of quarrelling with her. At the beginning Zhao Jie and Qingqing thought that I was such a knowledgeable and good person. This quarrelling completely ruined the good impression that I made to Zhao Jie and Qingqing. That is not good', Mr. Yang said with an embarrassed smile.

'Don't worry about that. We will always keep your great characteristics in our mind. So what happened to you last night? Anything serious?' my mother asked.¹⁷

'Actually there is no big deal, only some trivial things. Yesterday evening, when we finished dinner, I was about to wash the dishes, because my wife always feels the cold in her hands, and I didn't want to let her touch cold water. But she insisted that she wanted to wash up. So I no longer refused and let her do it. But after she washed

¹⁶Because my mother referred to Mr. Yang as Brother Yang, his wife is supposed to be younger sister-in-law, which in Chinese is Di Mei.

¹⁷As I am a younger generation compared with Mr. Yang, I am not supposed to inquire into his domestic affair.

up, the whole floor was wet. I got a bit angry, so I started to blame her and question why she did not listen to me. She tried to fight back. And we finally ended up quarrelling. She is a person who doesn't know how to do the right thing at the right time. When I get angry, whatever she does seems to try to drive me even angrier', Mr. Yang complained.

'Relax', my mother said, 'When I heard through the wall that you were arguing about something, I really struggled to decide whether I should come over to stop you or not. If I went to you, maybe you would feel that you were losing face, and would be angrier. But if I didn't go, I was a bit anxious that you two might reach an unpleasant end and hurt each other. A couple should try to meet each other half way. The whole family will not get peace if you both return tit for tat. Running a family is very much like dancing, one party steps forward, the other should step back, only in this way, the whole family will be in a harmonious atmosphere. Your wife will be the only person who can accompany you until you are very old. Try to treasure what she has done for you. According to what you explained, I believe Di Mei (弟妹, means brother's wife) might have thought you were busy preparing for dinner, and she felt it would be courteous to wash up the dishes and let you have a proper rest. Don't misunderstand her. Your temper is also like a fire, which is not good for your health', my mother said.

'I see what you mean. If you went into our place, I would not say anything anymore. I would give you a face.¹⁸ I know she meant to care for me. But her temper is really not good either. I will try to step back next time anyway. Sorry to make you laugh at us. My good image has been completely ruined in this way (laughing). This is not good. OK, I will listen to Zhao Jie and follow your teaching', Mr. Yang replied with a smile while nodding his head to show his agreement, as if he was very sincere about it.

Through the quarrelling issue between him and his wife, it is self-evident that Mr. Yang thoroughly shows his connection with the third level of space, which I would like to define as 'social space' that Lefebvre described in the following ways:

Thirdly, the social, in other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopia. (Lefebvre 1991: 11)

Mr. Yang never owed any apologies to us, because quarrelling with his wife is something domestic, which has nothing to do with any outsiders like me and my mother. But he did more than he was expected to do. This is a sign to show Mr. Yang had already put us emotionally within his social space.

Another example is connected with the hot water service we received. During the wintertime, from November to February, all of the family will set up a stove to keep the room warm by using coal as the fuel. Because it is to be kept on burning for 24 h, most families will also use it to boil hot water or cook meals to make the energy

¹⁸In China, a person's 'face' (known as mianzi 面子) is built up by other's comments and behaviours towards the person. Kwang Kuo-Hwang (1987) described mianzi as an 'indigenous concept in Chinese culture' (Kuo-Kwang: 947). Mianzi can directly impact on prestige and consequently have an influence on a person's social network, which will also lead to favour. If a person is always diu mianzi (loses face), others might not want to approach him or her.

efficiently used. As for my mother and me, we didn't have any knowledge about how to manage the coal stove, we were a bit worried about carbon monoxide poisoning, so we decided to use the electric heater. So when the winter was coming, most families were beginning to set up stoves by this time; however, my mother and I started to use an electric heater. When we had dinner with Mr. Yang and Jun Shu together, we talked about how to keep warm in the winter. When they got to know we were using an electric heater, Jun Shu¹⁹ said to us: 'Since you have been using the electric heater, I will bring you hot water every day from now on, so you can save money. Electricity bills are not cheap here'. Jun Shu, together with his family, dwells in another courtyard beside us. At the time I moved in, I saw him standing in Hutong with longer hair, which is not a normal hairstyle among men. At that time I was thinking maybe he is an artist. Later, when we became familiar with each other, and I mentioned my first impression of him, he could not help laughing and said: 'I am now jobless. But if you broaden the definition of art, and count cooking as a part of it, then I am doing something related with art. I cook my wife and daughter three meals every day'. His daughter, Yaoyao, was my student, and I helped her with her English learning. She didn't do very well in her English studies at school. Because Yaoyao told me that she felt her teacher was rubbish and sometimes gave her students wrong information, which only at the end of the class she realised was wrong. Being her English teacher made her family become also very close to us. Jun Shu's family was also very close to Mr. Yang before we moved in, as Jun Shu and Mr. Yang used to work in the same company. Right after Jun Shu expressed his willingness to bring us hot water every day, Mr. Yang said: 'That should be no problem at all to me either. We two families will be your hot water supply source. I cannot guarantee any other things, but for the hot water, we can supply you as much as you need'. Hearing that, my mother and I felt really warm inside our hearts.

After they set up their stove, they amazingly brought us hot water twice every day throughout the whole winter. This also became a link between our three families. In the morning, Mr. Yang got up very early around 5.30 a.m., but we couldn't be as early as he was. He told us later: 'Your curtain is a sign to me: when I see your curtain is open from outside, I know you must be up already, and I will put the kettle onto the stove to warm up the water for you'. Sometimes, Mr. Yang and Jun Shu brought hot water to us at the same time, and we did not have enough containers to hold it all, so one of them had to take the water back. Sometimes they met each other on their way bringing the water to us. One of them would urge the other to take the water back and said: 'I will give it. You can save it for yourself'. On some occasions, we went outside, and they brought hot water to us, without knowing whether we were at home or not, so they had to stand outside for a long time knocking at the door. This happened to Jun Shu quite often, because he lived in the courtyard in

¹⁹Jun shu is the name I call him. His name is Li Chengjun. Other neighbours all call him Xiaojun as a nickname, therefore my mother followed. Mr. Yang's son, who is in the same generation as me, calls him Jun Shu, so I followed his way. Jun is his given name, shu means uncle. Here we do not use family name followed by the title 'uncle'. Because Li Chengjun is much younger than Mr. Yang, everyone just calls him by his name. Therefore, Jun is like a label of him and that is why we called him Jun Shu.

front of ours and it was less easy for him or his wife to know whether we were in or not. Therefore, later on when we had a dinner gathering, he ‘complained’ to us about it: ‘I knocked on your door for a very long time, but no one replied to me. What’s the problem with you? (spoken with a cheeky smile)’. My mother said: ‘Sorry, we must have been out at that time. If we were in, how would we dare to refuse the warm sender coming in’. The term ‘warm sender’ is the name my mother and I gave to those who bring us hot water, because we feel their warm heart is a big contrast with the extremely cold weather.

‘Ok, let me continue’, Jun Shu said, ‘As there was no response, I went back upset, and after a while, I let Sun Hong²⁰ come to knock on your door again, still silent as before. So we came back and forth with a broken heart’ (putting his hand on his chest). We all could not help laughing after hearing this.

‘I hereby formally apologise for what happened to you’, I replied, ‘Please accept my apology and this is my way to say sorry’ (picking up a chunk of meat with chopsticks I put this into his bowl). This action made the situation even more funny.

Seeing I stood up, Jun Shu stood up too, and now told me: ‘Sit down Qingqing. Listen to me, you do not owe me any apology. I just want to let you know that I treat you as my daughter, my relative. You dedicated almost all your free time to help with my daughter’s English. Your great kindness is as weighty as a mountain. I will not forget this great help for the rest of my life. So never say thank you or sorry to me from now on’.

Through the process of giving and benefits, the social space, although intangible, can be seen in this example to be something that is built up and that influences everyone concerned in a visible way. What Mr. Yang and Jun Shu tried to do was to pull me from the edge to the near centre of their social relation ripples. By doing this, they could also push themselves from the edge of my social ripples to the centre. This is also the reason I was trying to help Jun Shu daughter with her English study. We believe that we could both benefit from placing each other in the centre of our relation ripples by mutual caring. People’s social networks with their friends can be seen to be another kind of outcome from their relations to the physical space they regard as home.

2.4 Emotional Integration with the Social Network

At 11 o’clock in the morning, my next-door neighbour Mr. Yang went back from Zaoshi (morning market), which is an outdoor market that sells everything for daily needs. The major reasons for this market’s rising popularity, so that almost every residential area has at least one morning market within walking distance, are that firstly the fruit or vegetables they sell are fresh, and secondly the price is relatively low. The sellers are the peasants living in the outskirts of Beijing who have their own farmland or orchard. Every morning they bring these freshly picked fruits or vegetables and take them to their spot at morning market with their tractor.

²⁰Sun Hong is Jun Shu wife.

Customers find these goods are much nicer than those they bought from other markets. Also, almost all the products are sourced locally; therefore, the 'producer to consumer' mode guarantees the cheap price. As Zaoshi (morning market) has become a must-go place for more and more housewives, other vendors or shops have also come into Zaoshi (morning market), for example, butcher shops, clothes shops, toy shops, shoes repair, etc., to meet multiple needs. Normally the Zaoshi (morning market) runs from 6 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., so only those who do not need to go to work in the day time can go there to shop. That is why I was surprised when I saw Mr. Yang coming back with four plastic bags of fresh goods in his hand, because I assumed he should be at work at that time. Actually, he used to work in a heavy manufacturing industrial factory as a fitter, which was seen as a very good job at that time, because it is a skillful job. And the worker's social status was relatively high during Maoist time when the heavy industry was highly encouraged and supported by the government. Physical workers were seen as 'elder brothers'.²¹ But after reforms in 1979, the state-owned enterprises became bankrupt, due to out-of-date technology, poor managing ability and corruption. This situation became worse in the 1990s. Mr. Yang was laid off at that time. Later on, he found a job in a bar and worked there as a security guard for about a year. After the bar closed down, he came back home and became a full-time househusband. The major income of his family started coming from his wife who was working as an accountant and his son who was working in the bus company as a conductor. When I saw him parking his bicycle outside the yard, I went up to him and tried to help carrying his stuff.

'Are you back from Zaoshi (morning market), Uncle Yang?'

'Yes, I just came back from there. Have you had your breakfast, Qingqing? If you haven't, I've got some Youtiao (油条, can be understood as fried fritter) and Doufu Nao (豆腐脑, soybean curd with gravy). I have a fixed place to buy Youtiao and Doufu Nao, because that place sells the most delicious ones in this area',²² Uncle Yang answered me.

I said, 'Yes, I have already had breakfast. Thank you for asking'.

'Really? Are you sure? You are very welcome to take some. No need to feel embarrassed. We all belong to Family Yang. Don't think of yourself as an outsider'.

I said: 'Thank you, Uncle Yang. What will you do today?'

'My everyday life is in a regular routine: wake up at around 5.00 a.m., and then Liuwan²³ for about one and a half hours, then I go to morning market to buy some food.

²¹ During and after the Cultural Revolution, the working class had been highly esteemed because their living relied on their own labour. That is why they were called elder brother.

²² To ask someone if they have had their meal or not is a typical Chinese way of greeting and people get used to start their conversation by asking: 'Have you eaten?' But this question does not necessarily mean that the person who asked you wants to invite you for a meal. Even though, he or she said: 'if you haven't, would you like to have some with me?' It is a Chinese modest way to say: 'yes, I have already had'. Or 'I have already prepared everything to cook the meal'. Or 'I have already cooked a lot'. This is similar to British way of greeting, which is talking about weather when two people meet each other. But this does not necessarily mean the person asked you want to do something together with you in this weather.

²³ This means walk around in the morning before breakfast or in the evening after meal.

After that, I come back to have a cup of tea and then take breakfast. At around 11.00 a.m., I start cooking lunch for me and my wife. After lunch, most Beijingers habitually take a noon nap, so do I. The afternoon is my personal leisure time; I can go and play chess, visit friends, talk to neighbours, do anything I want. My wife normally finishes her work at 5.00 p.m., so I need to get the dinner ready for her. But my son usually gets off his work very late at around 8.30 pm. He is a bus ticket seller', He continued telling me, 'I have a very good chess partner, who is just living around the corner. He is also an indigenous Beijinger and knows a lot of Beijing folks. I am sure you will meet him very soon, because he always comes to me and forces me to play chess with him, even when I have other things I'm busy with. Next time if he comes to meet me, I will introduce him to you. He is tall with nearsighted glasses. I sometimes play chess with him during my leisure time in the afternoon'. Mr. Yang seemed really proud of knowing someone else who is also an indigenous Beijinger like himself, because he felt that he knows someone who might be helpful to my research.

'Also I like wrestling which is one of my other favourite sports not only for watching but also to participate in. Other sports like football or basketball, I like to watch but I don't play. A guy whose family name is Shan, who is younger than me, followed me and called me his wrestling teacher. Because he found I was more interesting and helpful than his teacher to learn from, so he dropped out and started to learn from me. He comes to meet me very often. So we can do some wrestling tutorials on the grass. After practising we cook and have a meal together. Because we both like alcohol and wrestling; only when you drink with someone who has the same hobbies as you will both sides feel they have more words to say to each other. I am sure you know the Chinese saying, "Jiu Feng Zhi Ji Qian Bei Shao (酒逢知己千杯少)²⁴." He used to live and work at around Jian Guo Men.²⁵ But now he has moved to a new apartment at Tiantongyuan'.

I said, 'That's nice! Who else do you meet up with often?'

'Well, I used to stay with my parents in this house, but they both passed away in recent years. But my wife's parents who are now aged need some help from me, so I visit them every weekend to help them with washing clothes, cleaning the house, paying bills and so on. Sometimes, I even need to accompany them to see a doctor. As you know my wife is working every day, so it is my responsibility to take care of my father-in-law', said Mr. Yang.

'Yes, I can completely understand you', I replied, 'Where do they live? Is it near here?'

Mr. Yang said, 'Yes, they live at Wangfujing (王府井), not far from here. I normally go there by bicycle, which takes no more than 20 minutes. My father has a younger brother, and I go to visit him on special occasions, like Chinese Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Day, on behalf of my aged father, though my father has passed away, but I still go to visit my uncle. He is living at Niu Street (牛街). My elder sister sometimes

²⁴This proverb means 'A thousands glasses of wine are not too much if you drink with your bosom friend'.

²⁵Jianguomen is located on the southeast of second traffic ring, just 15 minutes from my fieldwork site by bicycle.

comes to visit me, because I used to stay with our parents to take care of them. At that time my sister came to visit us very often, brought us some half-cooked food, took my parents to the hospital or helped us to clean the house. Even after my parents both passed away, they still come and visit me if she is available’, Mr. Yang told me.

‘Is she the lady who came here to visit you when you were out, so she left the meat she brought for you to us?’ I asked.

‘Yes, that is her. Because my son loves meat, and her Danwei dispenses her a lot. So she brought us some to share. She is a teacher at Huiwen Middle school, just 5 minutes walk from here. She lives around Hongqiao Pearl Market’.

‘That is also quite near here. Do you go to visit her?’

Mr. Yang said: ‘Very often, especially after my parents died, I have more free time, so I can go and visit her any time’.

In sum, if I have figured out Mr. Yang’s social network area correctly, it will be as in the map below. No matter how physically far they are from Mr. Yang’s place, these people are nevertheless emotionally close to Mr. Yang.



As is shown on the map, Mr. Yang’s major social contacts dwell inside Beijing’s second urban ring, besides his student Shan, who is far away from the centre and outside the fifth ring. But the hotel Shan works for is right on second ring, and he used to live around there.



The above map is a zoomed-in image of Mr. Yang’s inner city contacts.

2.5 What the City Is and Will Be

In 2004, the Beijing government issued *Beijing City Planning 2004–2010*. In this planning guide, they explained the Guidelines for the Building-up and Development of the City for 2004–2020. In this guide, Beijing is defined as: ‘The capital of People’s Republic of China, the centre of politics and culture, as well as an ancient historic capital and a modern city’.

Generally, the city planning committee oversees that the City of Beijing is ‘built towards a trend that integrates the traditional look with the modern city. The cultural and historic spirituality should be preserved strictly in the inner part (means inner city here)’.²⁶

Chongwen²⁷ District, where I conducted the first half of my fieldwork, is described as ‘centre of physical exercise (PE), business, historic tourism and entertainment’.²⁸ The reason they define Chongwen District as PE centre is because it is the location of General Administration of Sports of China; therefore, it has lots of playgrounds and sports shops. Furthermore the hospital offers the best injury therapy in the district. In 2009, the Qianmen business street was rebuilt and introduced many Western stores, for example, Zara, H&M, Swatch, Nike, New Balance, Citizen, McDonalds, KFC or Häagen-Dazs. Originally, the major stores along this street were all traditional and historical stores, for example, Wangmazi (王麻子),²⁹ Wuyutai Tea Shop (吴裕泰),³⁰ Donglaishun (东来顺)³¹ and Tianfuhao (天福号),³² and all of them are local Beijing brands.

To see how the government would like the city to be in the coming future, the Beijing City Planning also gives a clue. Concerning the rebuilding of the inner city, the guidelines indicate: ‘We should further strengthen the protection of the inner city, and formulate the protection planning. We should put more effort into planning the inner city, and take as our main task the preservation of the traditional special patterns and features of the inner city’. It also includes these clauses:

²⁶ Cited from ‘Beijing City Planning 2004–2020’, clause 53: the preservation and development of Axes of the Beijing City.

²⁷ During the time I stayed in the Hutong, the inner city of Beijing was composed of four districts, which are West District, East District located on the upper half, while Chongwen District and Xuanwu District resident are in the lower half. On 1 July 2010, Chongwen and Xuanwu were integrated with East District and West District accordingly. In this way, the inner city of Beijing includes only East District and West District.

²⁸ Cited from ‘Beijing City Planning 2004–2020’, clause 57: The Function of Eight Districts.

²⁹ The most famous scissors brand throughout China. Their technology of making scissors has become inherent cultural heritage of China. First founded in 1675 during the Qing Dynasty.

³⁰ This teashop has been running since 1887 and registered as a company in 1997. Now Wuyutai is the leading teashop in China.

³¹ This is a restaurant of Beijing hotpot. This Islamic restaurant was set up in 1905 and developed over more than a hundred years.

³² This shop is famous for selling ready-cooked meat. It was set up 270 years ago.

‘(5) Preserving the traditional skeleton of the chessboard-shaped roads, and the layout of the original streets and Hutong; (6) Keeping the traditional architecture pattern which is “Hutong—courtyards”; (7) Strictly limiting the height of buildings according to area location to keep the special status as open and wide as before; (8) Protecting the major landscape line and scenic focal point of the street. Architectures with landscape and scenic focal points should strictly follow the city plan’s instructions on the buildings, including height, volume, and pattern. Strictly prohibit the building-up of architectures which are in disharmony with the protected style; (9) Preserving the characteristic colours and patterns of the buildings in the inner city. Maintain the style of gray residential places in contrast with the royal palace with golden tiles and red walls’.³³

The above document clauses show how the government wants to positively protect the traditional architecture and the historic style of the inner city. However, the following indicates how the government wants to deal with the original residents who have been living in the inner city for many generations:

‘We should actively relocate the residents in the inner city. We should also take all the factors into consideration like, demographic structure, the improvement and sustainment of social net-works, boosting the quality of life of the dwellers in the inner city’.³⁴

According to the plan, residents dwelling in inner city will be relocated elsewhere, which means they will be separated from the physical spaces, the ‘soil’, linked with their memory, and they will break the social networks they have built up. But what really makes residents tremble is the government’s misunderstanding of the concept of the ‘traditional city’. According to the clause, this term doesn’t refer to the residents inside it, for whom the city formulates their sense of abstract and social space, rather the government document refers to the architecture style and buildings alone.

2.6 Bricks and Stones or Mentality and Emotion?

From the regulation above we can clearly see that the government would like to preserve the traditional and historic look of the architecture form of the inner city in Beijing, as a way of keeping Beijing a typical ancient-looking inner city. Apparently, according to the clauses above, what they will do to achieve this is to keep or refurbish the buildings, roads and houses, and during this process residents inside it will be expelled. What the local residents in the inner city have been forced to dump is their soiled feature which they received from their forefathers, the physical need of *Diqi* to maintain the balance of their inside body they are used to, and the intimacy they took years to build up and develop, which is structured in a differentiated mode.

³³ Cited from ‘Beijing City Planning 2004–2020’, clause 61: Inner city protecting as a whole.

³⁴ Cited from ‘Beijing City Planning 2004–2020’, clause 61: the Protection and Revival of Inner City.

So there is a contradiction there. The inhabitants within this physical area, who appreciate and adapt themselves to life patterns within this special physical space, have integrated their life with the physical and social surroundings since their childhood and care more about relationships built within this living area. And this relationship can be seen in terms of abstract space and social space. The officials pay more attention to the physical space alone, which might result in separating the soul of that space—the people—from the physical architecture. Even though it is difficult to prove and demonstrate that the real spirit of the ancient-looking inner city is its people, and only those deeply involved in local people's everyday life will realise and appreciate the value of the abstract and social space to them, this is the best guarantee of maintaining an ancient and historic city as it should be carefully preserved and protected.

Lefebvre contributed here by providing a good perspective to look at space: space is not just about the physical, but also integrated with mentality and emotion. Once a space has been destroyed, it is not merely a matter of these bricks and stones; instead, tearing apart the dwellers and their dwelling spot has a great impact on the inhabitants' physical and emotional needs.

In the following chapter, I will provide more details about the life within Hutong and show the readers a contextual picture of Hutong space.

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Chapter 3

'Peace in the Noise': Harmony, Face and Reciprocity in Hutong Spaces

3.1 What Is 'Siheyuan'?

A 'courtyard' is written in Chinese as the character siheyuan (四合院). Si (四) means 'four', which stands for four sides of the siheyuan. He (合) means 'coming together'. Yuan (院) refers to 'a yard'. If we try to put all these meaning together, we will see siheyuan literally means a four-sided closed yard. The following picture shows a bird's-eye view of a siheyuan, and we can clearly see the courtyard's four-sided, closed structure.



Picture taken by Mr. Liu Yangfei

This typical residential form separates the life inside from the outside. Thus, many of my informants describe the atmosphere of a siheyuan as *Wai Dong Nei Jing*

(外动内静), which means 'dynamic outside and quiet inside'. However, this residential form has developed into two different types, single-family-occupied and multifamily-occupied. The single-family-occupied siheyuan usually accommodates those who are well-distinguished and wealthy people. Those people who live in the multifamily-occupied courtyard, which is also called 'dazayuan' and literally means 'big mixed-up courtyard', are usually in relatively lower social classes, but these consist of the majority of courtyard dwellers. The two forms of courtyard explained above are located within Hutong, which could be understood as a lane or bystreet. Therefore, here, 'Hutong' serves as a boundary or mediated area. Inside the Hutong there exists a kind of 'living pace', while outside is the busy traffic or the office buildings, which engender a much faster moving pace. Those two contrasted areas have been well protected and separated by Hutong.

The traditional courtyard not only consists of a specific physicality, like bricks and architectural design, but also of the social rules built on top of the physical space. Of these social rules, two concepts have major functions within the courtyards: 'face' and reciprocity.

According to Hong Kong sociologist David Yau-fai Ho the concept of face is 'of course, Chinese in origin, and the term is a literal translation of the Chinese "lien" and "mien-tzu" (cf. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary [1944]; Webster's Dictionary [1958])' (Ho 1976: 867). Also:

[Face is] clarified and distinguished from other closely related constructs: authority, standards of behaviour, personality, status, dignity, honor, and prestige. The claim to face may rest on the basis of status, whether ascribed or achieved, and on personal or nonpersonal factors; it may also vary according to the group with which a person is interacting. Basic differences are found between the processes involved in gaining versus losing face. While it is not a necessity for one to strive to gain face, losing face is a serious matter which will, in varying degrees, affect one's ability to function effectively in society. (Ho 1976: 867)

Ho finally defined face as:

the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him. In terms of two interacting parties, face is the reciprocated compliance, respect, and/or deference that each party expects from, and extends to, the other party. (Ho 1976: 883)

Goffman, meanwhile, has defined face in a more situational way that also speaks to the Chinese situation: 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes' (Goffman 1955: 213). There is an old Chinese saying: 'A human being lives on their face, while a tree lives on its skin' (人活一张脸, 树活一张皮). At the common sense level, this implies that all the pipes within the skin of a tree function to transfer the nutrition created by photosynthesis from the leaves down to the basal root. This process constantly makes the tree live. If

the ‘skin’ or bark of the tree has been removed, the tree will die immediately. Knowing this fact, Chinese people have considered the face of a human being to be similar to the skin of the tree. From this old saying, we can clearly see how important the human face is seen to be in this context.

Face can be partly built up by the person himself or herself, for example, by getting As in exams, winning a Nobel Prize and earning the respect of others or doing something very extraordinary; also face might be given by others (give face, 给面子) by their estimation of good character or great achievement, also by following other persons’ orders, etc. According to the social status of the person who wants to give and also the person who will be given face, we can say that the way of giving face will vary.

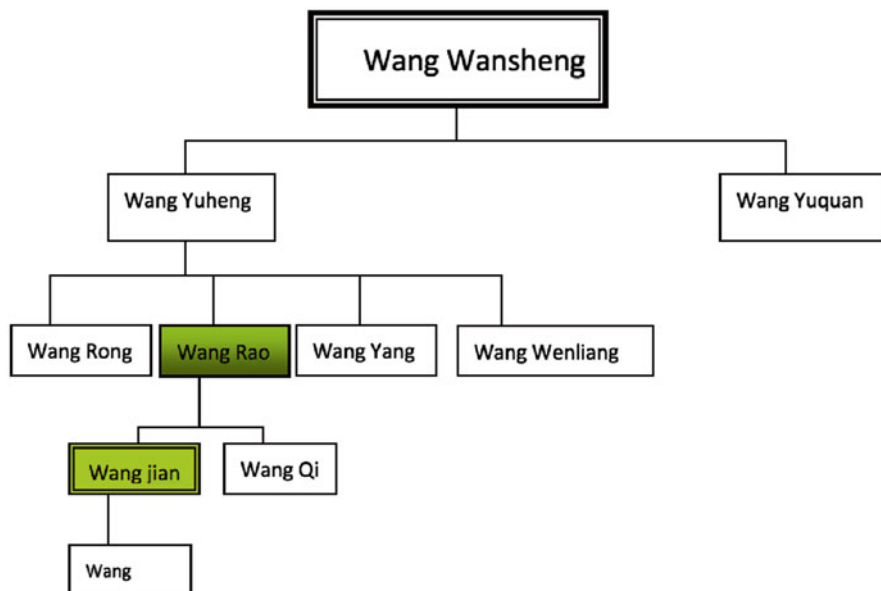
Face could also be seen in terms of people’s reciprocity with one another. It is an intangible gift to others. Within the Hutong community, the concept of face and that of reciprocity have come together in a special way. Here I would like to adopt a definition of reciprocity from Gunnthorsdottir, which is: ‘voluntarily repaying a trusting move at a later point in time, although defaulting on such repayment is in the short-term self-interest of the reciprocator’ (Gunnthorsdottir and Smith 2002: 50). This repayment doesn’t need to be an exact material exchange. As Marshall observes: ‘A popular tendency to view reciprocity as balance, as unconditional one-for-one exchange. Considered as a material transfer, reciprocity is not that at all. Indeed it is precisely through scrutiny of departures from balanced exchange that one glimpses the interplay between reciprocity, social relations and material circumstance’ (Sahlins 1972: 190).

To know how to give face to others based on the principle of reciprocity is the skill of blending oneself within the community. For instance, sometimes to practise reciprocity is to take or accept the help, the food offered by another party instead of offering something. It looks like the one who offers a material object should be the one waiting for a repayment, because he loses something and should be compensated, but actually it is the opposite way. Because accepting the offer is a way for the receiver to give ‘face’, which is much appreciated and more precious than the exchanged material item.

3.2 Life in an Independent Courtyard

Some Hutong areas have only siheyuan located in them, while some have mixed up siheyuan and dazayuan courtyards. My informant Mr. Wang Jian, the fourth generation in his family, according to his father’s memory, lives in Qianmen area where there is a mix of siheyuan and dazayuan. Mr. Wang Jian is now working in a stationery company and living together with his father Mr. Wang Rao.

The following chart is the family tree of Wang’s family. On the top is Rao’s grandfather, who used to run an export business, and also he is the person who managed his family business at its peak. The green box with ‘Wang Rao’ is the senior gentleman I talked to. The other green box is his son, Wang Jian.



'Oh my son is coming back from his work'. After I talked to Wang Rao for a while, his son Wang Jian came back and Rao walked towards the gate and I followed. Jian looked to be in his forties.

'Hello, my name is Qingqing. I was talking to your father about how life is in courtyard. It's nice to meet you', I greeted his coming back.

Rao's son gave me a big welcome: 'Welcome to our yard. Please have a seat in the room and we can talk more. Come on in'.

'Thank you'. I followed him to the living room, and there he began our conversation by introducing himself and asking my background: 'My name is Wang Jian.¹ I am working in a stationery company. Are you a student or a journalist?'

I replied: 'I am a university student. My dissertation is about life in Hutongs. So I walk around and talk to indigenous Beijingers to see how their life is inside Hutong. And I understand this area is about to be demolished. That's why I came here to find out how people feel about moving out from this area. When I passed your father, he was sitting outside the courtyard and enjoying the sunshine. So I started to talk to him. And he kindly invited me to have a look at your courtyard'.

'I see. Actually we didn't live in this yard before. We used to live on the east part of this area, for many years, but the Hutong there have been pulled down. We were given the choice to move to the high-rise, but my parents had got used to living in

¹ Here, Wang is his surname. Jian is his first name. The Chinese way of introducing oneself is to put the surname first and first name second. For people who meet each other for the first time, they will give their full name if they are in the same generation. For me Jian is much older than me. So I experienced difficulty when choosing a proper way to call him. So I tried to avoid to calling him directly.

the courtyard. My father knows this area very well. He is more than familiar with each stone, every turn, all of the bricks. To put it another way, he knows exactly how his feet will feel, when he places his feet on a certain spot in the ground here’.

He has been bodily integrated with the physical area and ground, we might say, or ‘soiled’ as explained in the previous chapter. Jian continued, ‘So he never fears wondering around this area. Also, most of the famous hospitals are located in the city centre around this area. My parents are in the age of having different health problems emerging. If they are in any emergency situation and we are living far away from the hospital, then the result is scary for us to imagine. Also my father needs to visit his doctor regularly, who he has become friends with after many years. I guess he could even find the surgery with his eyes closed (laughs out loud). He is now still able to get there on his own even though he is in his late seventies. This saves me a great amount of time to take him to the hospital and wait in the queue. The funny thing is that he does not dislike going to hospital, and he feels it is a normal thing to do. My father’s relationship with his doctor is more like a friendship. The most important thing is that this doctor thoroughly knows my father’s status of health. All this has happened, because of the accumulation of time. This is invaluable’.

All that Jian said emphasised his father’s familiarity with this area both geographically and socially. His father was integrated into his surroundings both physically and socially. More broadly, we might say that a physical space serves as a carrier or holder from which foundation there is the possibility of creating and developing another level of space. To familiarise oneself with a certain area, one can rely on tools such as maps or signposts or other people who are more familiar with this area. After being in a certain place many times in person, however, we don’t need these tools any more. We don’t need to locate the starting point and destination, then work out the best way to get to somewhere according to the map. We don’t need to argue with someone who has never been to this place before about the best route to go. Interestingly for someone who has been staying in a place for many years, they don’t even need the physical landmark and they even forget the name of a certain road, all they know is it is ‘there’. When they are asked how to get to a certain place, they will describe the route by using some landmark instead of mentioning the name of the street, such as, ‘Go straight along the road and turn right at the second traffic light, then you will see a hospital’. The route to a certain place comes out naturally and automatically and is bodily experienced; it seems the route becomes a habit of the body. Even when these physical surroundings have been moved, the image of this area is still in the mind firmly. Not only the physical route but also the personal feeling of going along the way to a destination is deeply embedded within oneself. All of the sureness enables Jian’s father, Rao, to have a stable and harmonious life.

To maintain their pace and style of life as before, Jian put in a lot of effort: ‘After I heard the previous area we stayed in would be demolished, I spent quite a long time doing research on where we would move to around this area. I wanted to find a place which will not be demolished in the future, so we will not be bothered by moving from one place to another again and again, as my father is old and he could

not afford to keep on moving and adapt to a new environment. This is about 6 years ago. I found this particular area had been labelled as a historically protected one, so I assumed it would be preserved and would not be demolished; thus, I decided to purchase this yard and enabled my aged parents a happy life in their later years. But who knows what the government is planning; recently, they have decided to dismantle the area where we live now in the near future. This means we have to move out and look for a new place again. This is ridiculous. I am still young, and it will not be a problem for me to pack and unpack, but my aged parents don't feel the same way as I do. As my father probably has already explained you, he only wants to live in courtyard in this area rather than elsewhere. The independent yard like this is not very easy to find now, because most of the courtyards now are turned into multifamily-occupied ones. Therefore it is a bit tough for us. We just cannot understand why this happens. Dismantling this area is against how they have defined this area initially as a cultural preservation area. We will wait and see how they compensate us', He said in perplexity.

'I can completely understand your feelings', I said.

'Living in the courtyard independently was supposed to be peaceful and easy before, but now the demolishing news makes everyone here uneasy. Who knows where we shall go. Look at our yard, even though it is not that big, during the process of my son's growing up, he could yell and chase at his will. If we were living in the high-rise apartment at the time when he was in his childhood, there wouldn't be any space like this for him to have fun. Well let's wait and see'.

Being middle aged, Jian has concern both for his parents and his child. If either side were not well, he would be responsible for it. That is why his father is not as frustrated as he is.

When I first got to know this family, it was on a sunny afternoon in the winter; Mr. Wang Rao was sitting outside his courtyard and watching the pedestrians passing by. When I stopped in front of him and was about to talk to him, he jumped in ahead of me: 'What are you doing here? I am sure you are not staying here'. He was asking me with a confused face. After I explained my purpose of turning up here, he started to talk to me about his family history in a very straightforward way and I didn't even ask about it. Rao said, 'As far as I can remember, since my grandfather's generation we lived in this area. My grandfather ran an export silk business when I was young. Our family business almost covered the whole Asian area and mainly focused on Korea. According to my memory, doing business took most of his time. He was always with a serious face and seemed never smile to us. On the other hand my grandfather was well distinguished around the area where we lived. Everyone bowed and greeted him when he passed in the street. The same as other rich and distinguished families at that time, my grandfather had more than four wives. I can't even remember the exact number. This is illegal now, but in feudalism society, males were allowed to be engaged and get married with more than one wife. Most people who wanted to boost their family size at that time would marry more wives and have more descendants. So the size of the family will thereafter grow in

geometric series. There was no better way than this to show the wealth of the family as the more members, the more prosperous the family’.

The reason that people thought in that way possibly is because of a traditional concept, *Rendingxingwang* (人丁兴旺). ‘Ren’ means people, and ‘ding’ specially refers to male who is expected to be a labour force for the family when he grows up. ‘Xingwang’ indicates the meaning of flourish or lush. This phrase is a very positive comment of a family, because it deciphers the promising and thriving future of the family.

Rao continued saying: ‘At that time, we owned about 14 courtyards, in this area. But when the Cultural Revolution happened, all the houses have been ‘*shehui zhuyi gaizao*’.² The rest of the 13 yards were taken away by the government. Therefore only one yard has been left for us to stay. I really enjoyed living in the *siheyuan*, because I was born and brought up in these surroundings and have already got used to it. My memory of the past has become embedded into the air, the bricks, the grass, the trees and everywhere. Can you imagine how long I have been staying here?’ Rao asked.

‘I have no clue, honestly. I don’t even know how old you are’, I replied.

‘You can’t tell how old am I? Have a guess’, Rao said.

‘Seventy years old?’ I responded with a question.

The gentle man replied with a laugh and said: ‘How can that be? I am seventy-nine years old. So I have been living here for almost eighty years. I’ve spent my whole life here’.

‘Such a long time. Do you stay with your children?’ I asked.

‘I live here with my wife and one of my sons. He also grew up in this area. You are very welcome to have a look at the yard inside. Our yard is a typical local residential place. Here you are very likely to get a sense of how the residential place of the common people looks and how they feel when living inside by placing yourself in the midst. My son will be back from his work soon. Maybe you can also have a talk with him and see how he feels about living in the yard, I mean, if you want, we can talk inside while waiting for him’, Rao replied.

This really thrilled me. ‘I’d love to. Thank you’.

Then I started my courtyard tour.

‘Come on, I will show you. This is the gate of our yard’, Rao pointed to a black iron gate.

‘Yes, but in my impression, the gates of the yards should be wooden, shouldn’t they?’ I asked curiously.

‘You are right. When we purchased this courtyard, it was installed with a wooden gate, which was very old and has already become very shabby. So we replaced it with this new iron door, as not many shops sell wooden ones now. We painted it black because this colour is in accord with the style of the yard. Follow

²This phrase has been mentioned in the Introduction (Chap. 1) which means housing being transferred by socialism.

me and have a look inside. Our current courtyard is not as gorgeous as the government officer's or as the rich merchant's, but more like a normal citizen's living place. Our previous yard, I mean the one my grandfather purchased, is much bigger than this. My whole big family has been split up and separated since my father's generation, some of them moved to other places. In my generation, only my cousin and I adhere to our original birthplace. Now that we have our own small families, we live independently in different yards. Ever since I was young, we have come through many difficulties including the Cultural Revolution during the time we've lived here. However, I still feel when I enter the Hutong, I am home. When I close the door of the courtyard, I am separated from the chaos outside and live on my own', he said.

Rao continued introducing this yard to me, 'This is the room where I stay with my wife. It is usually called Zhengfang (正房), which means the principle room or main room. The room next to Zhengfang is for my son and his wife. On the opposite side of my son's room is my grandson's room, who is now studying at primary school. Here is the shower room and toilet. We built it 3 years ago, which really saves us a lot of time going outside for shower. As you may know, the public shower room might become really crowded on the weekend or some special occasion, for example, before Chinese New Year. As we are getting old, going to a public shower room brings us more trouble than ever before. It is better for us to avoid the crowd considering safety reasons. Right in the middle of the yard there we used to have a big black urn, because I like goldfish. The most ideal dwelling place for goldfish is the black jar outside. In recent years, most people like to place the goldfish in a transparent tank, which is easier for us to enjoy the beauty of the fish. Some people even like to decorate the fish tank with leaves or stones, in order to achieve a visual aesthetic. But these plastic artificial leaves may injure the goldfish's fin or skin. Also goldfish like black instead of light. But there is a contradiction that nowadays most citizens dwell in the high-rise apartments; they have no such place like the yard to place the jar. As you can imagine it is very strange to have the black jar sitting in the middle of the room as the traditional jar looks cumbersome. People would rather buy the glass fish tank as a substitute, but that really is not what the goldfish likes', Rao continued explaining.

'Where is the urn now? I don't see where it is', I asked.

'It has now been removed from the middle of the yard because after my grandson born, he always bumped against the jar or threw stones into the jar. So I removed it. Haha. Believe it or not, even though I removed the jar, every time I pass the middle of the yard, I will feel that I am touching or bumping into the urn, as if it is still there. This is a long-term habit. But removing the urn is the only choice, because the grandson was the focus of the whole family at that moment. You can imagine the black jar used to sit here', Rao pointed to the middle of the yard, 'so I can see it very well through the window when I sit inside. On rainy days, the raindrops would fall down to the jar forming ripples, and the golden-coloured fish with beautiful fins enjoyed the flickering massage from nature'.

'What an enjoyable life! It is new to me. I don't know about what goldfish like or dislike. Good to know', I said.

Rao again emphasised: 'Yes, whatever species you breed, you should explicitly know about what they fancy, and then accordingly you could provide them a proper living environment'.

'You are absolutely right', I replied.

In Wang Rao's eyes, this area he lives in is full of the memory of the past for his big and rich family, and his ease and joy in his current yard. These memories do not just involve himself and his courtyard in but also his neighbours. The glory of his family history is in the past and this fact has only been passed on orally from generation to generation, person to person in the surrounding area, so Rao could still be respected as his father or even his grandfather used to be. As his family history has become a widely known fact, he could not even stand anyone like me not knowing the fact. That is why when we started talking he got straight to the point. Therefore, the sense of himself that he gleaned from his neighbours, together with his personal feeling regarding himself, constructed the social space in which he lived, and this has brought him a deep sense of belonging. Also living in the similar residential place as his grandfather did, he found to be a way to maintain his self-esteem. It seems to tell others: 'We are in fact the same as before. I still live in the siheyuan while most of you are all in dazayuan. I can still stay in Zhengfang (main house) in my siheyuan and seize the most honoured position in the whole yard'.

Living in this particular area is the only way to guarantee his social status. In other words, here he could be someone he wants to be. If he moves out of this area, he will be a completely new individual without any splendid family background known by others living around him. He would not be treated as he is now, since orally convincing strangers what his grandfather has done would be meaningless if he moved out from this area. He feels harmony living in this area, partly because he has grown used to all the physical surroundings including the buildings and human beings, which he has already bodily integrated with; but more importantly those surroundings emotionally provide what he needs. The emotional demand has been fulfilled partly due to the structure of physical architecture of siheyuan which he is currently living in, as well as the social surrounding: the way his neighbours or other dwellers (who haven't talked to him but have heard of him) judge and treat makes him feel himself a unique specialty among other residents. Other residents' recognition of him is like another level of space, which is beyond the physical buildings but based on those physical surroundings. All of these adaptations make an individual like Rao get along well with the circumstances within and outside the siheyuan harmoniously.

3.3 The Concept of 'Home'

Another informant of mine, Mr. Cao is also a single-courtyard owner. His yard is even bigger than Rao's. Below is a picture to show what the whole yard looks like.



In the front yard there are ten rooms, and the back yard houses another three rooms. Cao explained to me that which room you stay in reflects your status in your family. The oldest usually stay in the Zhengfang (正房) which are usually sitting in the north and facing the south. This is the best location among other rooms in the courtyard, because China is located in the northern hemisphere where sunshine always comes from the south. The wind comes from north Siberia in winter, while in the summer, it mostly comes from South Pacific Ocean. So building the gate towards the south could allow wind to come through in the hot summer while blocking the cold wind by the back wall and also the annex in the back yard. Thus, they could be in harmony with nature. Giving the best room for aged parents is the most common way to allocate rooms. On one hand, it demonstrates the high status of the old in the family; on the other hand it is a way to show the filial respect of the children. As can be also seen from the picture, Cao has different kinds of plants in his yard. The taller bush is pomegranate. Because the pomegranate fruit is composed of a large amount of seeds, which are symbolic of descendents, pomegranate is a symbol of having much posterity and is a kind of commonly planted bush for families in the courtyard. Beside the pomegranate is a persimmon, which is pronounced similar to Shi (事). There is a Chinese dialect which spells it as Shi Shi Ru Yi (事事如意), which means everything is at your will. So persimmon is also a plant that stands for good fortune. That is why residents like to grow them in their courtyard. Looking at the upper-right corner in the picture, we will find a bamboo rocking chair. Cao told us: 'One of the advantages of living within the courtyards is that you can decorate it in whatever way you like. Look at these green plants, they make me

feel close to nature comfortably. Also these plants help clean the air within the courtyard. You know how dirty the air is outside. The constant flow of cars and the construction sites, those activities bring the dust all over the Hutong. In the autumn, the fruit of pomegranate trees comes out with a red colour, as a contrast with the green leaves. The whole yard has been decorated beautifully. In the summer, sitting on the rocking chair and enjoying the peace and ease is my favourite thing', Cao told me with gladness.

'How did it look before?' I asked with curiosity.

'Before we took it back from the government, it used to be a Dazayuan, with more than ten households dwelling here. The public area, like here where we are standing with these plants growing', Cao circled the area where we stood, 'was full of wastes, very dirty and disordered. You can imagine, if every family cleaned out a cupboard, there'd be a terrible mess. Not to mention each family will have more than one piece. After taking back the yard, I felt I had an obligation to modify it back to how it used to be. So I replaced the wastes in the middle of the courtyard with different kinds of plants. Here we have tall plants like the trees. Over there to the entrance of the courtyard I grew ever-flowering rose and morning glory. Step by step, it becomes more like a sound place to stay. My other relatives living abroad who come back to visit me are all surprised by how the courtyard looks now. I personally want to try my best to make them feel this is their home. However, problems came once they began to get settled here. We do not have bathroom and toilet within the courtyard. So they had to go to the public one, which seemed very odd to them. They 'complained' about that to me when they were about to leave. So right after they left, I installed a toilet and bathroom within almost each room. This new modification really helps, and I can directly benefit from it. I don't have to queue for using the toilet in the cold winter. My overseas relatives are extremely happy to stay longer on their second time back. Therefore, we should not always deny new fangled stuff; sometimes absorbing the modern things can be a good idea, which will enable us a more easy and comfortable life. Sometimes, there are contradictions. For instance, if I want to enlarge the total space of my yard, I can also build a second floor on top of all these rooms. In this way, the total area will be doubled. By renting out these extra rooms, I could make a lot of money, as the location of my house is very central. But consequently the image of a typical siheyuan would be completely destroyed, because the harmonic relationship between nature and the courtyard would no longer exist. Moreover, building an extra level above could also be a threat to my neighbour's privacy. Anyone living in the second upper level could clearly see what my neighbours are doing in their courtyard. So I'd rather keep it like this, even though I will lose money by doing this. I think it worthwhile'.

When I asked what home meant to him, he told me: 'I was busy with working everyday in the company. And the courtyard represented my home, which is a place for resting and relaxing. This is not merely a place for me to sleep or for me to go after work. I can feel the wall of the courtyard is like a border to separate the outside restlessness and chaos from the inside ease and comfort. For example, the way of dressing for people living in Hutong differs from the ones who work in the office building. We are more easy and casual. We can wear pyjamas and shorts within this

area, even outside the courtyard. Also the language used in the courtyard and in other places is different. We use more slang or dialects in our everyday conversation instead of some flattering words or posh words. That is what makes the courtyard different from other residential forms. Siheyuan is a place that is relatively isolated and independent from outside. All the inside scene is decorated and decided at your will. This is absolutely YOUR place. This I guess will be the most distinct difference from the high-rise or dazayuan. But the current embarrassing situation is the rich people do not have a keen eye for the beauty of siheyuan and long-term sight for siheyuan development, while one who is discerning does not have the money to achieve his will'.

'You have certainly given it deep thought. On the other hand', I asked, 'by living in a siheyuan which is relatively independent, do you still feel intimacy with your neighbours? How often do you talk to each other?'

'It depends. Some of the neighbours moved in very recent years. They are new here and we haven't had much chance to talk to each other; thus, we haven't yet built up the long-term intimacy. Some other neighbours have a friendship spanning for generations with us. Back to the question you asked about influence on intimacy in different residential forms: compared with dazayuan which have many households dwelling within, we are more independent from our neighbours; but still we are very close to each other in some ways, especially with those living here for many years. We will share food if we cook something special. Also we will sit outside of the yard and talk to each other every day. If one of the members in my family gets married, I will definitely send them an invitation. My next-door neighbours, as you go out from the yard when you leave, you will see they are on the left side of us, they are very nice fellows. As you might have noticed, more and more families have their own vehicles in recent years, and so parking becomes a problem in the Hutong. Unlike the high-rise apartments, built up with both underground and upper ground garages, also guest parking, Hutong come without any parking design. Interestingly they have the special stone for getting on and off the horse and also the masonry to tie the horse. Because in ancient times our ancestor could hardly imagine we would have motorised vehicles. Most of the unmodified Hutong are very narrow and could not allow traffic to get in. Only some big families who had a horse dwelled in a wider Hutong. Therefore, the design of Hutong is also a reflection of the traffic characteristic in a certain period. In fact the stone for helping get on the horse varies from family to family which makes each courtyard unique. In modern times, we do not use horse as a transportation tool anymore; thus the utility function of these stones has faded but the cultural significance of them has turned out to be more permanent. In later years, after the horse, the stage was given to the bicycle, which is still very popular now within each family. The problem of placing the bicycle is not crucial, for the number of in-use bicycles is not that big, so we can place or even squeeze it into our room. In very recent years, cars have become increasingly popular in each family; therefore the problem of parking has been brought up to the table for discussion. Luckily our neighbours are all very generous and won't haggle over the outer space of their courtyard. Mostly, we park on the opposite side of the courtyards or adjacent to the courtyard. But if more than one car

comes, it will be a problem. So I have to let my guests park in front of my neighbour's "place", even it is not an official parking place, but it seems there is a potential rule that the space opposite the courtyards belongs to the owner of the courtyard. You probably know that if you park in an official car park, you will need to pay a certain fee; but parking in Hutong is free of charge, because it is ridiculous to pay when you are using your own space'.

From what Cao has described above, it seems the outside public space is an area which is able to be opened to other neighbours for sharing, because of the closeness within the neighbourhood. This is also a way to show generosity to next-door neighbours.

Cao made an additional comment on his impression of local Beijing residents: 'Most of the indigenous Beijingers, who are very unassuming and friendly to others, will not care about the small profit. To us keeping face and harmony within the neighbourhood is more important, as we have known each other through many generations. It would be a shame if we ceased the friendship with the neighbourhood from our generation'.

This feeling of home, which extends from one's actual house to the courtyard and to the Hutong, can also be found easily in the shared courtyard, as will be seen from what I describe later on.

From what Mr. Cao described, we can see his practice of 'harmonising himself' both within and outside the courtyard. Within the courtyard, he has tried to build up a comfortable, easy living environment for his family and other relatives who might come back to visit them by installing some modern facilities. This can be seen as a physical building up. Also he brought in those good-meaning plants to create a propitious omen to make the dwelling mentally enjoyable. He is building up his own kingdoms in his very own way. Outside the siheyuan is also part of his own kingdom, and he should behave like a diplomat based on those potential rules as a way to get along well with others.

The above amounts to a kind of diplomatic technique that Mr. Cao employs, building up his home space to be in harmony with both his physical, social surroundings, as well as himself.

The discussion concerning public space and how its varied character derives from one's relations to one's neighbours will be continued below, as we turn to focus on the multifamily-occupied courtyards called Dazayuan.

3.4 Mingled Reciprocation at Dazayuan

The current situation is that there are far fewer siheyuan than before, and most of the siheyuan have been changed into Dazayuan (大杂院) as I explained in the Introduction. Therefore, the interior tranquillity has faded away gradually as the total number of siheyuan has declined. The courtyard I stayed in for fieldwork is a Dazayuan, where there are more social scenes and more social interactions happening among the residents. Here, therefore, we will be able to see more about the rules

of 'articulation' that people employ with nonfamily members. Also, one special feature of a shared courtyard is private space could turn into a public space without asking the owner's permission. People outside and inside this 'private space' just tacitly approve it, and it just happens all very informally. Private space on the one hand refers to one's own territory; on the other hand, it also refers to one's private or domestic issues.

As the story of Mr. Cao indicates in the previous section, space, to an individual, can be seen as having three levels: firstly, the *physical*, which focuses on the space associated with the physical surroundings and individuals; secondly, *social*, which places stress on the space between one individual and others within a certain physical space; and thirdly, *intrapersonal* or *emotional*, meaning the inside space within the individual body. Of course these three levels are usually tangled together. The following is an example to show how these three individual levels of space interact with one another.

I've talked about Mr. Yang's quarrelling with his wife in the previous chapter, and I want to talk a bit more about how this fight was calmed down and finally the two became reconciled. On the day they quarrelled, our front courtyard neighbour Jun Shu found out when he came to Mr. Yang's house to watch TV. He has a TV in his place, but most of the families living in the courtyard have only one single room to stay, Jun Shu included. At the time after dinner, his daughter who is 15 years old and now studying in junior school needs to finish her homework. If he stays at home and watches TV, she will be distracted. So he comes to Mr. Yang's place to watch TV and have a chat with Mr. Yang's family on a regular basis. In spring or summer when it is not too cold to stay outside, he spends most of his night-time outside the courtyard and plays Chinese chess with other neighbours living in other yards. His wife Sun Hong walks around with Mr. Yang's wife every night after dinner, which the Beijingers call Liuwan.³ When Sun Hong was trying to get Mr. Yang's wife to Liuwan, she eventually found that the two were quarrelling but not so acutely at that moment. So she came in and talked to the two separately. In the mean time she called her husband Jun Shu to come to Mr. Yang's house to comfort them. By this chance, Mr. Yang's wife could release her pent up emotion. This was what Sun Hong and Jun Shu told us during the weekend gathering of that week. It had become a ritual that every weekend, we three families would sit together and have a lunch or dinner or a lunch-dinner joint. In the weekend after their quarrelling, we sat at the table and talked about this quarrel again. Jun Shu said, 'when I firstly came over to Yang Ge's place and heard they were speaking to each other with a loud and unpleasant voice, I thought they probably had some disagreement. I decided to leave them alone and thought they should be fine after arguing with each other for a while. Then

³Liuwan is more like a walking exercise for the local Beijingers. Some people do that in the morning, as a morning fresh wake-up exercise. Some of them, especially women, do it at night after dinner to avoid putting on weight. The place they walk around could be anywhere, the street, the nearest park or square. The duration also varies from half an hour or two hours from person to person. Sometimes, they walk around alone, like Mr. Yang, while sometimes they go with other person, for instance, Mr. Yang's wife and Sun Hong. Apparently, on their way walking around, they will talk.

later Sun Hong came over to their place and found out they were fighting with each other. Then she gave me a call and then I knew this was not something small and insignificant'. Mr. Yang said (pointing to his wife): 'She has a foul temper. If she let me speak a few words, then after a while I would stop, but she kept on irritating me by answering back'.

After hearing this, Sun Hong started to mediate: 'Dajie⁴ (this is what Sun Hong call Mr. Yang's wife) gave consideration to you. You should know her good intention. Only someone who is your real relative will treat you in this way; if you are a stranger on the road, who cares about you? As you may know Dajie is in her menopause: at this age, it will be courteous if her family members take good care of her and understand her emotional changes, because sometimes it's not under her control. If she doesn't pass her menopausal period properly, there will be some bad root for the future. So please try to put yourself in her shoes and think more of her'.

Mr. Yang's wife heard this and it seems she found someone to speak on her behalf. She said: 'He beat me with a very heavy hand, and he made me feel pain still until today. Such a heavy hand!' In this way, she showed how inconsiderate her husband is.

Right after the complaint, my mother said: 'This is definitely your fault Yang Di, I have to say. How can you slap Di Mei who has been with you for so many years and cares about you so much. This is really hurtful to her. Think about how she took care of your ill parents as well. I bet she is the person in the world who cares for you the most'. (Mr. Yang's parents have all passed on.)

'Yes, you are right, Zhao Jie. You are saying the right thing. I will listen to your teaching. I have learnt a lesson that I will never ever do that again. On that day, I had drunk a little alcohol and my mind was a little bit out of my control. I know it is very bad to get drunk and slap Di Mei'.

Here, referring to his wife, Mr. Yang didn't use 'my wife' or 'Yinming' (name of Mr. Yang's wife), but he used 'Di Mei' which is the word that my mother usually uses to refer to her. Di Mei is an intimate way of expression referring to a younger brother's wife. By using this term, Mr. Yang wanted to show my mother's intimacy to his wife, by way of which, it is more natural that my mother should stand on his wife's side. His wife and he are in a unit, if my mother is close to his wife than that also means we—my mother and I—are close to his family including his wife, his son and himself. As a matter of fact, to step into this domestic problem at all is already a good way to demonstrate the intimacy between us.

It seemed at that moment all the comments on their quarrelling issue pointed to Mr. Yang's misbehaviour towards his wife. Mr. Yang was the person who carried the whole burden of their quarrelling. That is why he was trying to find himself some pretext.

At this time, Jun Shu noticed that and he was trying to balance the situation by saying: 'I believe Yang Ge (means Big Brother Yang) did not seriously mean to cause Dajie pain. This is just a way that men express their unhappy feelings. Imagine

⁴Means elder sister. Because Mr. Yang's wife is elder than Sun Hong, so it is a courteous and intimate way to call her.

how Yang Ge almost takes all the housework in the family including all of the heavy labour work, so he is less sensitive to how heavy he slapped Dajie. He may even think he just patted her at that moment. Try to look at the contribution he has made to the whole family. Huzi (Mr. Yang's son) is very healthy. Dajie can go to her work every day without worrying about taking care of the family members and all the housework. This is not an easy job to do'.

Mr. Yang nodded his head and said 'Yes, that is right. I've been strong since I was young. This is a result of all the heavy labour work I have done in my childhood. I really cannot feel how heavy it is when I put my hands on her, especially when I am too angry to think about it'. It seems he finally found an excuse for his discourteous behaviours.

Jun Shu, his wife Sun Hong and my mother on this occasion served in the role of mediators. But also they demonstrated a kind of division of labour which hadn't been discussed or agreed on beforehand. It seems as if the differential responsibilities came into effect naturally and automatically based on their social roles in this social network. My mother is the eldest one, so she has the right to criticise on Mr. Yang straightforwardly without making him feel embarrassed. Because listening to the elder people's guidance or criticism on the one hand shows the respect from the younger to the elder, on the other hand it is also a sign of showing his understanding of the elder's caring. Jun Shu and his wife Sun Hong are 3 years younger than Mr. Yang. So, Sun Hong's way of convincing Mr. Yang that he was not behaving gently to his wife when they were quarrelling is more diplomatic. The main strategy she used was emphasising the good potential of Mr. Yang's wife and how much his wife cares about him to make Mr. Yang realise it is his fault. She even mentioned Mr. Yang's wife is in her menopause and this will cause bad temper to exculpate her. Giving Mr. Yang a step to earn his face back by finding him an excuse of lacking gentleness is how Jun Shu tried to turn around the situation. My mother's straight criticism of Mr. Yang and Sun Hong's round way of criticism helped Mr. Yang's wife to release her unhappiness and also let Mr. Yang know from the heart that he really should not be so rude to his wife. Jun Shu's explanation rescued Mr. Yang from an awkward situation, which also helped to avoid him getting angry because all the bullets were shooting to him at that moment. The balance of criticism and understanding is a practical technique and also plays a crucial role in solving the domestic problem.

During the process of mediating the quarrelling and the follow-up mediation, we outsiders, Xiaojun's family and my mother, just got into Mr. Yang's house without his invitation by knocking at his door. It is not possible for Mr. Yang to refuse to open the door. It is not a polite way to respond. And Mr. Yang knew clearly what we came for. Then in the weekend gathering, we tackled the issue of fighting initially and of course with a good intention of smoothing everything over. Apparently, Mr. Yang and his wife didn't mind it at all. In this situation, the private space automatically opens up to the public who come to mediate the domestic fight.

As members of the younger generation, Huzi, Yaoyao and I kept silent and sat aside to listen to their conversation or have the food on the table, as it is really an

offence if we get involved in a battle and comment on what they are talking about on any side, even if there is no gun smoke. We should pretend as if this conversation is none of our business. In fact, we have been ignored in this right or wrong debate. We can listen even though we are not supposed to. But we are using the same space and there is no other place we could go and stay, so there is no way to separate us from hearing their talk. Of course Mr. Yang was worried about losing his honour in front of our younger generation, because he has been exposed to the criticism from most of the people on the table until one of our young generation, Yaoyao, picked up a piece of pork with her chopsticks and put it into Mr. Yang's bowl, then saying to him: 'Dada,⁵ please have some meat'.

This is a way to show caring and respect to the person you are bringing food to. When people gather together for a meal, the most hospitable way of treating someone is to fill the table with different dishes and pick the food from the plates to the guest's bowl to keep it full. Anyone who wants anything on the table can go straight to the dish they would like and picks it up with the chopsticks. Each person sitting around the table will have a small bowl in front of them to place the food they have picked. This bowl is the place where a person can receive respect and thanks from others sitting around the table. Because this gives others a good chance to serve one person by filling his bowl full. To pick up a piece of meat for Mr. Yang, Yaoyao showed her respect to her Dada and helped him to gain some face in this awkward situation.

Normally, nobody actually refuses to take the food others pick for him or her, even if he or she doesn't like it. To politely say: 'Oh, that is enough, thank you' is a common way to reply to this.⁶ In this situation the bowl is very much like a hand receiving a gift. Hence, in order to thank me for teaching her English and helping her improve her performance in her exam, Yaoyao also picked up food from each plate on the table for me. She was trying to give me face on all possible occasions, and while what she gave back to me as a gift was very different from the original one I circulated to her, still this can be seen as reciprocation.⁷ Of course, to propose a toast to someone could also cause the same effect but in a more straightforward way, but it is wise for a little girl, who is not supposed to drink alcohol to bring food to the bowl of whom she wants to show her respect. Here, the food serving is the way to give 'face' by receiving food from others which can be seen as a gift to the recipient. Face as a gift is intangible, untouchable; therefore, a carrier is needed to incarnate it. Here, having food in the bowl is a sign of having face. On this occasion, Yaoyao gave Mr. Yang face to compensate what he lost in the argument.

⁵This is the way that local Beijingers use to call a male who is older than his father. Da (大) means elder here.

⁶This is similar to Mauss's description of gift receiving: "The obligation to accept is no less constraining. One has no right to refuse a gift" (Mauss 1990: 41).

⁷"Gifts circulate, as we have seen in Melanesia and Polynesia, with the certainty that they will be reciprocated. Their 'surety' lies in the quality of the thing given, which is itself that surety" (Mauss 1990: 35).

In short, a harmonious community doesn't only refer to a physical environment but also emphasises its emotional or sensorial part, where a harmonious system of exchange has taken effect. This doesn't mean the community does not have any conflict at all, which is impossible; but having an effective mechanism to solve the *contretemps* is a typical characteristic of Hutong community which doesn't only rely on the residents but also the physical structure of the Hutong.

As can be seen from the picture showed at the beginning of this chapter, several households may share the courtyard and also public facilities, such as bathroom, toilet, etc. One is reminded of Bourdieu's conclusion:

Space is constructed in such a way that the closer the agents, groups or institutions which are situated within this space, the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer, (...) people who are close together in social space tending to find themselves, by choice or by necessity, close to one another in geographic space. Nevertheless, people who are very distant from each other in social space can encounter one another and interact, if only briefly and intermittently in physical space. (Bourdieu 1989: 16)

All the public space allows the residents inside more chance to talk to others and develop a deeper relationship with others. So the way that Hutong have been built provides more chance for dwellers to build up intimacy with other dwellers. Only if they build up an intimate relationship with another family, they will then place their trust in the members of this family. This is how the domestic problems are exposed to the outsiders. It seems they find no better way to solve this problem, other than getting the third party involved. And luckily their neighbours who are supposed to be the coordinators feel the same way that they have the obligation to help with quenching the domestic conflict. Only those neighbours who are physically and spiritually close to the problematic family will come and help out. Because firstly, their neighbour can hear the happening of conflict, secondly they believe their neighbour can hear the sound of quarrel, and thirdly they believe their neighbour's presence could ease the tension, as the main focus will shift onto the 'visitor' instead of their domestic conflict issue, and also as mentioned in the first section it gives the visitor a face. This is obviously true, as most Chinese people try to avoid admitting they are wrong directly, because by admitting, they can lose their face even if they admit they are wrong inside their hearts. But it is just hard for them to admit in person, verbally. That is why the third party has been imported. By admitting their mistake to the third party, it is also a roundabout way to make an apology to their wife or husband, because they are in the same small room (as there is no other place to stay), and for sure the other party could hear the confession. Moreover, the confession party trusts the third party that the lost face through admitting fault will get resolved in a roundabout way and he or she will not be put into an embarrassing situation. This is how a good 'mediator' is supposed to be. Here the third party serves as a cushion to absorb all the shocks. The role of cushioning sometimes works within a team. As a Chinese saying puts it: 'There should be someone who plays the red face, and someone to play the black face'. The two-coloured face idea derives from Beijing opera in which all the actors or actresses have to paint their face into different colours according to the role they play. Red face stands for the

character which is neutral and always plays the peacemaker, while black face stands for the role of strictness or severity.

In Mr. Yang's case, my mother was the black face, because she blamed Mr. Yang straightly, and she is the only person who could play this role among us. Jun Shu and Sun Hong were both the red faces, as they did a great job mediating. The 'black face' made Mr. Yang's wife feel much better because she finally found someone who could speak on her behalf and stand strongly against Mr. Yang; also hearing Mr. Yang's confession that he was doing wrong was a consolation to her. But this is not enough: a harmonious and good end is a happy ending for everyone. So Sun Hong tried to emphasise how much Mr. Yang's wife cared about him from a wife's perspective to show how important he is in his family. As compensation, Jun Shu was trying to find some excuse for Mr. Yang's improper behaviour to release him from guilty judgments. All of these efforts made the mediation end successfully. A sign of this was Mr. Yang placing a request with his wife. He asked her: 'Please could you bring me another bottle of beer from the outer room?' His wife happily brought it back without saying a word and topped up his beer, then faced us and said: 'Alcohol is his favourite. He cannot live without it. He is a drunkard'. At this time Mr. Yang was not unhappy at all: on the contrary he replied with a smile, because he knew his wife was just saying that. I would like to describe this practice of implementing a demand but then taking the face back by saying something to the disregard of the order giver as a 'compensation effect'. Through the process of order and reciprocal (but disrespectful) implementation, both sides have taken what they need without losing 'face'. Here face (面子) represents social status, honour or respect.

As another example, when I told Mr. Yang that my friend Colin, from Queens University of Belfast, together with two of his students currently studying at University of Minzu, would come to visit me and ask me to show them around my fieldwork location, Mr. Yang told me: 'Please all come to Uncle Yang's house and have a cup of tea. You know you are always more than welcome'. Taking his invitation is a way of showing my respect to him and gives him face in a round-about way. Because having someone who studies abroad, like me, bringing her foreign friend as a guest to his house is special to him and makes him stand out among others, as he has something others don't have. I could imagine if I were the shopkeeper living next to the courtyard, met a beggar on the street and asked him to come to the courtyard where Mr. Yang stayed, he would look at me in a strange way rather than inviting me inside. When my friend who was Chinese came to visit me, Mr. Yang didn't even say a word to her, not to mention inviting us to his place.

The discussion above has focused on how to give face. While if someone wants to lose face for some reasons, behaving against the rules of 'how to give face' is fine. But judgment of losing or giving face varies from situation to situation and also person to person. For instance, when we three families, my mother and I, Mr. Yang's family and Jun Shu's family, sat together for dinner, sometimes Jun Shu would speak loudly to his wife to show his bossy manner. To Jun Shu, he thinks this shows

his unchallengeable status in his family, which helps him build up his face. But to me, I think he loses face by doing this, because he doesn't know how to respect others in public.

To mediate the contradiction happening in everyday Hutong life in a proper way, the coordinator should make them both concede, but also give both parties enough face in a technical way as a repayment for their stepping back. The compensation effect is one of the most important social techniques. In physics, we need to find a stable point of reference to define if an object is moving or still. If two objects move at the same speed and towards the same direction, both of them are stationary in comparison with each other. Similarly, in Mr. Yang's case, if both he and his wife have been praised or blamed, neither of them will feel they have been given face. But if one party goes back, and another stays still, then the other party will feel he or she has been given face. Knowing and applying this knowledge of physics onto the 'face given and lost' is the key to mediation. That is why my mother blamed Mr. Yang at the very beginning, which is like a compensation for Mr. Yang's wife having been slapped by him.

3.5 A Harmonised Way of Life

From the above description, in sum, we can see that both in siheyuan and dazayuan, residents have their own way to balance their life by harmonising with the physical environment around them and obviously, the social environment as well. The harmony that Rao feels from having his feet move over the familiar ground of his courtyard is equivalent to the harmony achieved in the shared Hutong by knowing the rules of face and of reciprocity and mediation. They not only enjoy the life within the courtyard, but also they appreciate the development of the courtyard through interacting with the physical and emotional subjects within and outside. Each development of a mechanical strategy also builds upon these common senses among others. So the feeling of peace and settlement by dwelling somewhere comes partly from the familiarity of the physical surroundings, the fitting of oneself to the physical space, but the intuitive feeling within the person also matters. And this feeling is not only brought about by the physical space but also the social space, which is built up by the individuals dwelling within it. If the Hutong, courtyard, walls and bricks partition the inhabitants, then the social behavioural rule restricts or shapes how inhabitants behave towards others and themselves as well. If the physical space has a relatively stable existence, then the social space is more dynamic, more individually based and scenario based and therefore needing a long-term process to become familiarised and to be practised well by the dwellers living within. To harmonise oneself with a certain space is all about dealing with the relationship between an individual, physical surroundings, social space and oneself.

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Chapter 4

‘Enter the Solemnity’: Social Space in the High-Rise Apartment

Outside the inner city of Beijing, outside the second traffic ring, most of the residential places are built up in the form of high-rise apartments. A friend of mine, who is a photographer from England, after seeing these high-rise apartments, told me: ‘I feel like each of the windows in the high-rise is like a small TV screen. The owner of that room is playing his own life story behind the screen, and the whole building is like a multiscreen television’. That is extremely true. The TV programmes differ from window to window. They never interfere with each other. One’s story has nothing to do with the one living next to him. All their stories are isolated from one another, even though they are physically close to each other. This way of life is different from Hutong in many ways. If I were to use the same metaphor, I would describe Hutong life in this way: a TV series playing with almost a hundred characters involving one big screen. All of the households form one screen, and each of these families plays different roles in the story. If the life in Hutong is played on a big widescreen TV, then life in the high-rise is like in a multiwindow screen TV. The audience is also different in each case. The multiwindow TV is usually displayed in a public space so that every passer-by will be able to watch it. Usually, the actor or actress has no idea who their audiences are: it could be those living in the same compound, and it could be some random people just passing their building. The way that the actors or actresses decorate their windows could reflect how their personality is, which could be easily read by the audience.

If the high-rise compound is a free TV channel, then the single-screen TV is like a private show: it only opens to a small audience, and the actor or actress always knows who they are. The composition of the audience is usually regular and fixed. They are the residents living nearby. For those who are not living roundabout, it is not easy for them to become one of the audience of the show, because it takes more effort for the audience to see the screen. They need to turn into Hutong from the main street and walk into the courtyard to be able to see. Usually, when they walk into the actor’s life, they will be checked by being asked: ‘Who are you? Who are you looking for?’ Even should they manage to get in, they could only get a small fragment of the show

instead of the full version. Only those expected members of the audience, living nearby, would have the luxury to watch the whole performance.

4.1 On First Moving In

On 19 May 2010, after staying within Hutong for 10 months, I moved from Hutong to a high-rise with my mother. This high-rise apartment is located in between the second and third traffic rings, northwest. A friend of mine who owns a car helped me to move my stuff. In the afternoon I moved in with lots of things to bring up to the top floor in the apartment where I stayed. I was feeling a bit sad, because no one cares who is moving in. Even though I had already said goodbye to my Hutong neighbours, I still felt we were so close and I didn't want to leave this area. Looking at the messy room, stuffed with the packed bags that my neighbours Mr. Yang, Yin Ming and Sun Hong helped me to put into the car, I seriously started missing them. When I opened the window, I could not hear the conversation on the street, because I was so far away from the ground. Only the screaming of cars or harsh sounds made by the car brakes could reach my hearing. I couldn't even see clearly people walking on the ground from my window. Standing high on the top floor enabled me to have a bird's-eye view of the nearby construction site with reinforced steel bars and cement, or maybe the air up there was slightly fresher than the ground, but I paid for these 'benefits' with disconnection from the micro society, which is detailed and human. I had one neighbour on the floor where I lived, but we were separated by four doors, as each family is secured by a wooden door and a security door with a glass peephole fitted with a fisheye lens to allow a wider field of view from the inside and little to no visibility from the outside. Sitting on the unmade bed, I began feeling empty inside my heart. Partly because the room I stayed in was bigger than the one in Hutong, also as it was situated on the top floor, the sixth floor, I felt I was far away from human society, or maybe because I could hear no other sounds from my neighbours. When I stayed in the Hutong, I could hear the sound of the telephone ringing, the noise of locking bicycles, the greeting from one resident to another, the street hawking and the laughing from a group talking. All of these lively sounds had suddenly disappeared. All I could hear clearly was my breath. Quietness enabled me to have absolute privacy, but paradoxically, it aroused the feeling of fear. I remember when I first moved to Hutong area, I found our door was just a thin wooden door secured by a door latch. Anyone could break into it very easily if they wanted to. I noticed some of the courtyards in the Hutong where I stayed had a door for the whole yard, but the one I dwelled in didn't. So I explained to Mr. Yang my worry, and he said to me: 'In this area, no crime has ever happened before, since I've lived here. Don't worry. If you meet any emergency situation you just simply knock on your wall adjacent to mine, I will then hear you from my room and come around to help out'. In the high-rise building, there is not such a connection among neighbours; all the residents can rely on is the technical, CCTV, security door, security guard and steel door but just not on their neighbours. This was different to when I moved into the Hutong. Now nobody living nearby knew that I was moving in. It

seemed like people around were saying to me, 'Who cares?' But in Hutong, on the day I moved in, even though I didn't have too much conversation with my neighbours, I still knew that they knew they would have a new neighbour and they prepared to get along with me. Also, I felt right after I moved in I had the chance to learn who they were. I could hear them cooking in the kitchen, talking to other neighbours and having conversation with their son or daughter. After I moved into the high-rise apartment, I realised the importance of a social context.

4.2 Loose Compound

After settling down, I couldn't wait to walk around the area where I was staying. There are six high-rise buildings located in that compound. All of them have six floors, and on each floor dwell two households. All these high-rise buildings share the same entrance channel, which is paved by cement. In the middle of the compound is an unwanted sofa, cloth covered and dark green coloured, and this is the only place that the residents in this area can sit down and have a chat with others. Beside that is another piece of discarded furniture, a wooden table with two drawers. The painted colour has almost come off, but you could still tell from the very little remaining colour in the corner, it is a brown one. The rest of the yard is a free car park. Not only the dwellers in this compound can get their car parked free, but also outside cars are allowed to come in free of charge. This compound was built in the early 1990s, so an underground car park was not constructed. In some modern high-rise compounds, the car park is monitored by CCTV and also an electronic system to calculate the parking time and charge the driver accordingly. Every car entering the compound will be charged according to the time the car parked. In most of the very new compounds, residents will be allowed to buy a parking space, while outsiders can only be charged by the hour. The residents trust in the electronic technology to monitor and control the danger factor or hazard to the compound rather than individual residents.

Looking from outside the high-rise apartment compound, at first glance this compound has some similarities with the courtyard structurally: four sides enclose the yard, and all the dwellers share one entrance. Besides these similarities, the differences are obvious. Houses in the Hutong are attached to the ground, while most of the houses in this high-rise compound are in mid-air. Also unlike the traditional courtyard, all of these high-rise apartments are scattered in the big yard evenly, with some open space in between buildings. The first impression I got when I entered the high-rise apartment compound was of independence. All buildings are independent from one another. All households are independent from one another. It is like a box of uncooked rice, even though they are in the same container, they have no interaction with each other. Rather they tend to be more conservative to protect their personal information by not talking about themselves, as they are physically close enough for others to know their condition easily. While the relationship among dwellers in the Hutong is more like a box of rice porridge, independent but with some communal stage which makes them stick to each other.



At the entrance, there is a waste-recycling point run by a private individual as the picture shown above. He is not living in this compound. Every morning at 9 o'clock, he parks his van on a space that he circled with bricks the night before in order to secure his spot. Then the nearby residents will bring their waste there to trade back for some small amount of money. For instance, each Coke bottle will equal 2p. Each kilogram of newspaper or books is 7p. If some big items are to be sold, then the seller will need to bargain with the buyer. Basically this waste recycler accepts all kinds of waste. He occupies the pavement throughout the day, which can be problematic. It is not that bad in the morning, because not too many waste items come at that time. The situation becomes worse in the afternoon when more and more people bring the waste there. At that time, almost half of the pavement side is occupied by the scales, his big van and these wastes he has collected. The major source of his waste comes from the grocery shop and the hotel as well as the restaurant nearby, as they have massive quantities of left over hardboard every day. Except on rainy days, this outdoor waste recycling runs every day from around 9 o'clock in the morning to sunset in winter, and in summer he hangs around a bit later until 9 o'clock because many residents are outside to Liuwan,¹ so he can also do some business. The restaurants nearby turn on neon lights outside: on one hand to decorate their restaurant, on the other hand to enable their customers to park in the right place. The recycling point can take advantage of the light and continue working. Also in the summer, it will be cooler outside than inside, so most people prefer to go out after dinner in summer time. After packing up all the waste of the day, he secures his place with bricks, in case some car parked there and occupied his business spot. Even though this waste-recycling runner is not living within this compound and occupies half of the entrance channel, nobody accuses him of doing his business by seizing the public channel and bringing inconvenience for the residents or for spoiling the outlook

¹Walk around. See Chap. 3.

of the compound. When I first moved in, I did not like it since every time I came back home, I would be faced by a large amount of waste in front of me. This I found quite annoying, and I wondered how the residents could allow the unpleasant situation to keep going on. Instead of asking the residents, I decided to settle down first and then find out for myself.

Generally speaking, the major reason is that the residents don't care about the public space. Because the entrance channel is been used by hundreds of residents, and nobody feels it is their responsibility to argue with the owner of the recycling point for the mutual benefit. No one considers this communal entrance is part of their own living space. One day when I passed the entrance channel, one of the residents coming out from Gate 3 walked through with a tissue in her hand. When she reached the recycling point, she turned her head left and threw the unwanted tissue from her hand to the gathered discarded material in the recycling point. This action made me feel strongly that this lady didn't take this area as her own space.

This feeling became much stronger as I stayed in the compound longer.

4.3 Life Within the Building

Physically, each household shares one wall, which in my case was the wall in the kitchen, with their neighbour living on the same floor. I could hear my neighbour speaking and making noise when she cooked, and I believe for my neighbour it was the same. Apart from that, my neighbour and I had no other chance to have an interaction.

After I had moved in for 2 weeks, my neighbour started to renovate her house. During this process her door was always open because she needed to move out the unwanted furniture and move in the floor tiles, paint materials and other tools. By this chance, I got to know my next-door neighbour more. Because otherwise I really felt impolite and discourteous to knock on their door if they were not expecting me: in fact, I would suspect they would see me as rude under this circumstance where individual privacy has been highly emphasised. As the telephone and mobile phone have become widely used, most people dwelling in the high-rise buildings are supposed to make an appointment before coming to visit someone's house. We become more and more independent when placed in a high-density constrained space, and our privacy becomes more highly valued, and the private protection becomes a more serious issue than ever before. During the 4 months I stayed in this high-rise building, I saw nobody knocking at another's door. And nobody knocked at my door either. The only two exceptional occasions were when I ordered a delivery of food and when an expected parcel arrived. I was desperately thinking of a proper way to begin a conversation with my neighbour, and came out with no answer. I was worried about that at the beginning. I tried to get in and out from my house more frequently to see if we could bump into each other. Because we were living on the top floor and shared with nobody the stairs leading down to the next floor, I could begin a conversation with my neighbour in a natural way by introducing myself as

a newly moving in resident. Then I could ask about any place for shopping or buying groceries. That was my perfect plan, but unfortunately this didn't work out. Until, 2 weeks later, in the early morning, when I heard a big noise coming from the direction of the door and a woman's voice speaking: 'Just leave it in the corner of the aisle for a while and we can get them down altogether'. Then after that, a noise seemingly of something hitting the wall sounded. I had a look at the clock it was 7:35 in the morning on 2nd June. After writing down the time, I opened the secure door of my room and came out, asking: 'What is happening?' This lady saw me coming out and walked to me: 'I am so sorry for the noise we made. We are trying to move out the furniture from inside to another place, and the car I found is only available in the early morning. Because after eight o'clock, there will be a traffic jam. So I am trying to get it done before that. Again I am sorry for the noise we made'.

Without even introducing our names to each other, she apologised for what she did. I then replied: 'I can completely understand that. Not a problem. I moved in two weeks ago. We will be neighbours. How long you have been here?' I asked.

'I have stayed here more than thirty years. This is a house that used to belong to the father of my son.'² By the way, I have a desk which I don't need any more, if you'd like to have it, you can just take it. Do you want to have a look inside?'

'Are you sure? You keep it. Why don't you need it?' I was speaking while coming into her house. It was a computer desk. Even though I didn't have any desk computer, I still said: 'If you don't need it any more, I will be happy to take it. Thank you very much'. I accepted her first gift: I wanted to build up a connection with her by applying the reciprocity technique that I had learnt from Hutong dwellers. By taking her desk, I would need to give her a proper thank at some later point as a repayment. What I had in my mind was that I could get myself involved in her house refurbishing work and then I could have more chance to know her. So she helped me to move this table to where I lived. I said to her: 'Thank you for your kindness, I will first leave it in the balcony and then find another place to fit it in'. I guessed she would not be disappointed by my not starting to use this desk right away. 'If you need any help, feel free to let me know. I will stay at home today', I said to my neighbour.

'There will not be any heavy work needing to be done', she answered, 'The rest of the work will be given to the construction team. Even if I have any heavy work needing help with, how I can ask you, a slim girl to come?' She couldn't help laughing and I also chuckled. She said, 'I will have to go, they are waiting downstairs. I will come back again later this afternoon. See you later'.

In the afternoon, when she came back again, together with the construction team at around 5 o'clock, I was waiting for her coming. Because in the morning, my mother went to Zaoshi for fresh vegetable shopping, she missed the chance to talk

²Instead of saying: "This is my husband's house", this lady used a roundabout way to express herself. In the generation where most people were born around 1950 or before, they are always trying to avoid the word, husband or wife, which is more private. Meanwhile, "father/son" are more public terms.

to this lady. But I let her know I had talked to our next-door neighbour that morning. When hearing she came back and was speaking loudly outside, we both planned to go out to talk to her. But it is strange to go out and do nothing. It is fine to bump into each other randomly and say hello, but it will be awkward to open your door just to say hello to your neighbours. One should have his own life to concentrate on, not focus on someone else. No one would like to be focused on by others all the time. If one keeps an eye on another, this will be an offence. Chinese people don't like to be singled out.

So my mother and I had to find some excuse. Therefore, we finally decided to take the garbage out and bump into each other. I looked through the peephole to make sure our neighbour was outside when we opened the door. Once we saw she was coming out from her house, we opened the door. I initially spoke to her: 'You have started to work again'.

She replied with a reluctant tone, 'Yes, I have to. As a mother, I am supposed to do something for my son'. I felt a bit strange since ordinarily all these heavy renovation works would be done by the man in the family instead of a woman. I guessed there must be some reason behind that, which she would be embarrassed to tell me, a younger generation. So I introduced my mother to her, as they were of a similar age, 'This is my mother, she is here to accompany me. You two have a chat first, and I will bring the garbage downstairs'. When I came back, my mother and this lady were still talking. I stood by for a short while and noticed her facial expression seemed to tell me that she had some concerns. I guessed she must be talking about some sensitive topic with my mother, which I was not supposed to hear, so I went away back to my room to let them have a chat under no pressure. I can completely understand this, because knowing one's age group is the first step and the foundation of behaving politely. The age difference among the people involved in a conversation defines how they address each other and which questions are not supposed to be asked. To be a polite person could also mean knowing when to show up and when to disappear. In this situation, if this lady is talking with my mother about something private, then I am not supposed to be present. Otherwise, it will be a challenge to her higher status, which is not polite.

After about 40 minutes, my mother came back, and this lady left as well. From what my mother told me, I got to know that this lady's family name was Li. She was then in her 54th year. Six years beforehand, her husband died because of illness. She felt the whole world had collapsed during that time. It took her a long time to face the reality, and she realised she needed to prop up the whole family on her own; meanwhile, she didn't want others to sympathise with her for her bereavement. She didn't even let any other neighbours know about this issue until the funeral had finished. As a brave person, she needed to face more reality problems, for instance, taking care of the son and earning the tuition fee for him to finish his university study, which costs 550 pounds per year; and also she needed to look after her parents, as well as her mother-in-law sometimes. She felt she had the responsibility to do so, since her husband had already passed on, and she was quite sure that her husband would like her to be a good daughter-in-law. Therefore, she decided to pluck up her courage to take good care of the whole family. Now she is accompanied

by her son who is 25 years old and is already engaged. The reason she renovated this house is for her son who is about to get married and they plan to take this house as their marriage room. She felt she would almost have finished all her tasks as a mother after her son got married. She is a very typical Chinese mother, as she considers it is her responsibility to take care of her child who was brought into the world by her, no matter how difficult it is. I am so glad she shared her experience with my mother who is of a similar age.

In this high-rise building, each household is actually surrounded by more families than in the Hutong: because in the Hutong one household can only be adjacent to another horizontally, whereas in the high-rise apartment, a household can also connect with other households vertically up and down. In the high-rise apartment, residents have been surrounded by more dwellers, but the interaction between them is far less. Only if I made the chance could I talk to my neighbour, otherwise, there will never be a chance for me to interact with them naturally. While in the courtyard even a requiring of seasoning for cooking can be heard and responded to by neighbours, on the other hand, the death news of a certain member is not known by other neighbours in the high-rise building. In this way, I feel that even though the high-rise compound may look similar to the courtyard from outside, compact and closed on four sides, sharing the entrance channel, yet the inside is completely opposite, lacking interaction, with very little information exchanging.

In the afternoon, I saw a group of residents sitting on the sofa and talking happily. I came down and started to talk to them by asking where the nearest supermarket was. After talking a short while, a lady went off to prepare dinner. Then I asked another lady sitting next to her: 'In which room does she live?' The answer I got was, 'Hmmm, I know she lives in this building', she pointed to the flat opposite us, 'but I have no idea which house she is in. I guess she is on the fourth floor, isn't she?' This lady turned her head to another person next to her to confirm but received the reply of a head shaking. She continued to explain to me: 'As we seldom go inside each other's room for a visit, we have no idea at all where most people live, but at least we all know they are in this compound (chuckling). If we happen to have something to tell each other, we will come here; however, this is very rare. But then in the afternoon and after dinner time, there is always someone sitting here, talking to others. You will definitely have a chance to find the person you want to talk to'.

Returning to what Lefebvre describes, space can be differentiated into three levels: physical space, abstract space and social space. The physical space, referring to the high-rise buildings and the compound in this context, is similar to that of the Hutong. While the abstract space used to describe the relationship between the dwellers and the physical space is different. Residents in Hutong consider the physical bricks and walls as a way to define the layout of the inner space, while the residents in the high-rise apartment tend to use it as a way to protect their safety. Regarding the social space, which describes the relationship between the residents and a certain physical space, this also differentiates the high-rise apartment from the Hutong. The reason for the difference can be found from the following perspectives.

Firstly, the physical structure inside. When the building was first built up, and the residents moved in, most of them didn't know each other well, but physically they were close to each other. One could even go across through the window to another next-door neighbour. If a stranger came very close to a person, the first reaction of the person would be to protect himself, because of the awareness of danger in getting close physically with a group of unknown people. Thus, I felt at the beginning that they were trying to hide their personal information from me.

After dinner time, there will always be a group of people sitting on the sofa in the middle of the compound, talking about anything randomly. On 22nd May, when I had finished my dinner, I came downstairs to them. On my way walking towards them, most of them had noticed that I was new there and they lifted up their heads and glanced at me. Then they turned back their heads and continued talking, even though I was looking at them with a smile on my face. This reaction towards a stranger is extremely different from that of the residents in Hutong. When I got into Hutong for the first time to check the room I was renting, everyone stared at me and saw where I was going. After I found the courtyard I was supposed to move into, Mr. Yang who lived closest to the entrance of the courtyard asked me which household I was looking for. In this way, I felt living in Hutong was safer than in the high-rise apartment because everyone serves like security guards for the whole compound. The area in which we stayed was secured humanly. No technical security door or CCTV was in operation, but all of the safe feelings come from and rely on each of the members living in this compound.

When I stopped in front of the talking group, they lifted up their heads and looked at me again. I then had the chance to talk to them: 'I have just moved in and have no knowledge at all of the area around. Where do people living in this compound normally go to *maicai*³?' One lady who looked in her fifties, sitting on one side of the sofa looked at me and kindly told me the choice I had: 'There is a big *Zaoshi*⁴ towards the south. If you keep on from here to the entrance, then turn right; keeping on walking for 10 minutes, then you will find the market on your left-hand side, which is named *Taipinghu* market. This market is closed at 1 o'clock every day. But as a *Zaoshi*, the vegetables, fruit and seafood they sell are generally much fresher than at any other market. If you are unable to go to the *Taipinghu*, you can go to the north market. Start from the entrance of the compound, then turn left. Keep on walking until you reach a small intersection. Keep on walking along the road and don't make any turning. You will see there is a big road market. Along the two sides of the road, there are many street vendors and small rooms where you can buy all kinds of ready-made food or vegetables and fruit, but usually the vegetables you get from there are not as fresh as from the *Zaoshi*, though the prices are the same or even higher there, especially when you get there in the afternoon. Another alternative is

³This is a local language. Even though it means go and buy vegetables literally, it really also indicates the meaning of buying everyday food, including vegetables, fruit, seafood, etc., anything they can get from the market. Saying 'maicai' is a symbolic way to refer to buying something for daily needs, including vegetables.

⁴Means morning market.

that you can go to the supermarket to shop for your everyday needs. There is one very close to where we are. Look at the big mall there, named Fenglanguoji'. This lady pointed back to a white building, 'There is a supermarket on the ground floor. Also you can go to another one which is a bit far away from here, but the good thing is the supermarket runs a bus to get around between the supermarket and the nearby compound, which is for free. In front of our building, there is a stop. The bus runs every 20 minutes. You can take the bus to get to that supermarket called Wumei, and come back. Especially when you carry a lot of stuff, it is convenient. The best time to go to these two supermarkets is after dinner time, because they will start to give big discounts on the fresh products like fruit and vegetables, which in most cases are on offer, 'buy one get two free'. In this case the price will be cheaper than at the Zaoshi or the market'.

I then said: 'Oh, thank you. You really know a lot'.

She chuckled and said: 'These are real first-hand life experiences'.

'Yes, of course they are', I replied, and then I asked her, 'By the way, how would you like me to call you?'

When she heard my question, this lady seemed to be stuck and to feel a bit awkward, but luckily I still got her to reply to me, 'My family name is Jin'.

'Ok, I will call you Auntie Jin', I smiled to her and said. She seemed also to want to get some of my personal information to balance what she 'lost' or to test if I was worth trusting. 'You said you just moved in, and where do you live?' she asked me.

'I stay on the top floor of this building', I pointed to the building I was living in, '19th May is the day I moved in, very recently'. I was trying to give as much information as I could to make her feel I was willing to open myself up to her. Still I could tell that the reluctant reaction of the lady I talked to was due to my requirement of personal information—her name.

This embarrassing situation reminds me of how I got to know Mr. Yang's name, when I came over to his place for tea and meanwhile also discussed the traditional culture of Beijing which Mr. Yang was very much interested in likewise. Since I already knew his family name was Yang, I asked how other friends called him. He told me: 'My name is Baojun. And my family name is Yang'. While he was telling me his name, he also tried to write the character on his hand patiently to show me the writing, because many words are pronounced in the same way, but the writing and meaning are completely different in Chinese. Mr. Yang gave me the impression that he really wanted me to get his name in a correct way. Unlike Mr. Yang, this lady Jin apparently wanted to get over my question as quickly as possible, and made it as unclear as she could. In this way, she felt she could protect her privacy. These were similar situations, in which two strangers were just about to get to know each other, dealing with the same person, which is me; but the reactions from the informant housed in the high-density modern compound and lower high-density traditional residential place to the same question were completely different. The way that the high-rise apartment has been built distinguishes the interactional behaviour of its residents from that of those people living in the traditional courtyard. Also, since different kinds of people have become residents in each place, this has led to different ways of communicating.

The high-rise apartment doesn't contain too much space for shared usage, and the main design purpose is to protect the privacy of each household and create for the residents a convenient living environment. So security doors, CCTV, security guards, private bathrooms, etc., have been employed and installed.

As mentioned, in the high-rise building, each floor has room for two households, occupying identically sized areas, and with the same layout for each room. My apartment was around 45 square metres; for two households it will be 90 square metres. Counting the area in the corridor and stairway, in all, each floor is roughly 100 square metres. As I mentioned too, each building has six floors, and each floor has two apartments, so that there will be twelve apartments in all in each building. If I calculate the household density by using 100 square meters as the unit, every 100 square metres contains two households. Coming back to the courtyard in which I dwelled for the first part of my field research, each yard houses five apartments. All the apartments measure about 16 square metres each; multiplied by five, the whole residential place in each courtyard is 80 square metres. Including the public area in the courtyard and the shelter that each household pitches opposite their room, the occupied area of the yard is also around 100 square metres, containing 5 households, each of whom occupy greater space than those living in the high-rise apartment.

If we look at the other side of these figures, in the high-rise apartment, the average number of family members is three, who occupy 45 square metres (around 5 square metres of each family goes to the stairwell), so each person has around 15 square metres. Meanwhile in the courtyard, each family also has three members on average, but they live in a 16 square metre house. Per capita, they have only about 5.4 square metres for each person.

If we see a household as a whole, in the high-rise apartment, each of them takes 45 square metres, while in the Hutong courtyard they have only 16 square metres. Within the 45 square metres, people living in the high-rise apartment have got enough space for their everyday activities within this area, such as cooking, going to use the toilet or taking a shower. By contrast, if we look at the residents in Hutong courtyard, they can't meet all of their everyday demands within their housing area. So they somehow try to broaden their living area, which means that their activity area extends beyond the boundary of their house. For a deeper understanding, if we imagine the house area for each household is a circle and all the family members are standing in the centre of the circle, then assuming that they want to reach their neighbour who is also standing in the centre of their living circle, it will take more effort for people living in the high-rise apartment than in the Hutong courtyard, even though they are surrounded by more neighbours than in the courtyard. This is because firstly, the radius of the living circle for people dwelling in the high-rise is larger than in the courtyard; secondly, there are fewer overlapping areas in high-rise than in the courtyard.

Another factor is that the constitution of the inhabitants in these two residential forms is different. The high-rise apartment is a newly developed residential form, which started being built in the late 1980s and got popular in the late 1990s. Unlike the courtyard compound, there hasn't elapsed a long enough time period for the

residents living in the high-rise apartment to develop an intimate relationship with neighbours. These high-rise compounds have been built, because of the increasing population due to the migration from smaller towns and villages to the big cities. Housing has become a problem. Obviously the high-rise compound could make the land more efficiently used and accommodate more inhabitants in each unit. Therefore, most of the high-rise dwellers at that time were the migrants, who were not born in Beijing and didn't have too much physical or emotional attachment with the land of Beijing. As first-generation migrants, they lived carefully in the land they were not familiar with, and dealt with those coming from all over the country. One of the best ways to keep safe and secure was not talking about themselves in front of the public.

My informant, Mr. Feng, who is a first-generation migrant living in the high-rise apartment, has emigrated from Shanxi province. He was actually my grandfather's brother-in-law. My grandfather was running a business and travelled in between Beijing and Shanxi. He brought Mr. Feng to Beijing. My great uncle Mr. Feng told me: 'When I first came to Beijing, I thought I must stay there. I didn't want to go back to Shanxi again doing all that heavy farm work. I had to stay there, so that my next generation could become a citizen in the capital. Everyone had a fantasy about the capital at that time. In our mind it was a wonderful place and the centre of the whole nation. Then I started to learn to be an accountant. As I had learnt to read at school, I quickly picked it up and then got a job in the "Second Flour Factory". I was happy that I could sit in the office and didn't need to work under the sun with the soil and land, which is dirty and heavy. I tried my best to be a good employee and gain respect from others who were local'.

'It must be hard, isn't it so?' I asked.

'Yes, I don't want to be looked down upon by others. Then when our factory built up the high-rise buildings for employees to live in, I got one apartment. Not everyone could have this opportunity to purchase these apartments. The senior employee will have the priority to take it'.

'How do you get along with your neighbours?' I further asked.

'It is easy to get along, because we were all colleagues and we knew each other before we moved in. So we will greet each other when we meet, but I will try to avoid going into deep conversation to avoid troubles or word wars. There are also some people living in the other units who are not working in my company. But I seldom speak to them'.

The above example illustrates what I mean by different inhabitants' constitution.

4.4 Lack of Public Space for Interacting

As I have explained, in the courtyard, dwellers share many different public facilities, for instance, toilets, bathrooms and spaces for playing chess. Using any of these facilities affords the residents a good chance to interact with other residents. Every morning when I went to the squat toilet, there was always a long queue there.

During the waiting time, people group up and chat. Even if they didn't know me, they would assume that I was living around the area, because a random visitor would not use the toilet in the early morning. Inside the toilet room there are four squat pans sitting in a row. The other toilet at the other end of the Hutong has nine squat spots all located in a big room with a big window and clothes hooks on the wall. As there is no individual room or board separating each user from other, four or nine people will be using the toilet in view of each other. The bottom of each squat pan is connected all together like a channel leading the entire disposal to the drain on one side. But in the winter when the temperature drops below zero, the pipe will be frozen and the water will have trouble to pump out to wash away the disposals, as this public toilet is in an open area without gate and heating to keep warm. The temperature inside is almost the same as outside. At that moment, it is not only the cold but the disgusting smell that is really annoying. But even though the public toilet is such an uncomfortable place to go, residents around this area still have to come and use it. The most embarrassing situation for me was always the beginning of a conversation when I was using the toilet. Even the people who are in the process of answering nature's call still keep on talking to each other, because the structure of the public toilet allows this. Anyway, everyone can see everyone else while they are using these facilities. But of course the genders are kept separate.

Another example is the Chinese chessboard playing corner. Outside the courtyard in the corner of Hutong, there is a chessboard. This is a man's game. On summer afternoons when the sunshine is not that strong, most of the male residents will gather together around that area. When the two players start to play, others will stand by and watch how they are getting on. When each round finishes, they will talk and comment on the performance of players together. This game will keep on going until it is too dark to see the chessmen clearly. During the process of playing and watching, even two strangers will start to talk naturally. They even asked me, the only female present, to play in a round. The area outside the grocery store is also one of the spots where people like to gather together. Because the shop owner is always standing outside the store, anyone wanting to have a random chat will come to her. So this area is always occupied by a crowd with people who want to chat.

In contrast, however, the high-rise compound has only one fixed spot for residents in this area to gather together, which is the broken sofa. In such an open area, anyone could join in no matter their gender or age, and there are no specialised purposes, for example, gossip or chess playing, which is different from the Hutong area. This will be a barrier for people to carry on deep conversation, and consequently, I believe it will be difficult to build up intimacy.

One day in the morning after breakfast, I came downstairs close to the sofa and stood listening to the conversation. The way people started their conversation was very straightforward, without any greeting. One person in black said to another next to her: 'The weather today is nice, isn't it?'

'Yes, but according to the weather forecast, there will be a stream of cold air coming soon in the near future, so the temperature will drop down'.

'Really, that is strange, because this season should be the warmest time of the year'.

At that moment, another resident came towards where they sat. 'Are you back from Zaoshi?' the one in black asked.

'Yes, my son wants to have ribs for lunch, so I had to buy him some. I feel that ribs sold in Zaoshi are fresher than in the supermarket, isn't that true?'

'Yes, I feel the same way. How much is it for each one?'

'The one I got is about 13.5 rmb (about £1.20). The backbone is cheaper than this. On the way to Zaoshi, someone is distributing shopping bags for free. You may want to go and grab one. It looks like this, very handy; when you finish using it, you can fold it like this. As a means of advertising, they give it for free. If you would like to have one, don't hesitate to go now, because it is based on the principle of first come, first served'.

'All right, let's go and have a look there', the lady in black said to the others. (Later I found out through others that her family name was Wang.)

'Hurry'.

I didn't go with that person and decided to stay there to get involved in the conversation. All of the crowd sitting there were middle aged, say around 45–70 years old, who were probably retired or working as housewives at home.

The other people in the group were still keeping on talking, 'the woman living in that building told us that her dog is ill. I wonder if her dog is getting better now, as I didn't see her coming down recently'.

'I have no idea. I didn't see her either. What kind of dog does she have?'

'If my memory is right, it is a Chow Chow'.

About pets, I thought this was a good chance to get involved in their conversation, I asked: 'How old is it?'

Everyone looked at me, because there was a new sound coming out which they were not familiar with.

'I have no idea. How old is it?' this lady turned to someone sitting on her left side.

'That I don't know'. After her reply, there was a short while of quietness. Then another lady started to lead the topic in another direction, 'Have you watched the TV show last night?' she spoke to us. Later, another man came down to join this group of people: 'Have you all eaten?' Others responded to him, 'Yes, I have', the previous topic was being jumped over, 'Have you read the news that income of retired employees will be increased?'

All the things they had talked about were very daily matters, but I felt it was difficult to get involved, because questions like how much the egg was per kilogram or where the best place was to buy ribs were beyond my knowledge. I didn't have such practical information to share with them. Nevertheless, these discussions will not go very deep as every time a new resident comes and joins in will bring another new topic, and their topic shifts from everyday groceries to gossip.

But after sitting longer with them, I found a break into their conversation was actually not a difficult thing. Because even though I had no knowledge to contribute to the area they were talking about, I could always interact with them by showing my agreement to them, saying, 'That is a really good one' or 'That is very interesting', in a polite way, something like that. And also, because of the large capacity of the high-rise apartment, every conversation will stop and will involve new people

joining in, so the depth of the conversation will go back to the beginning level. Each of them has so many individuals right there for them to interact with, but none of them could get close to others in this superficial conversation.

4.5 A Fresh Stream in the Compound

Besides the middle-aged and senior citizens living in this compound since 1990 when the compound was first built, there are also a large number of young residents who are not the indigenous locals, but migrants from other places all over China. They rent the house from the landlord and live in this area temporarily, for this area is the traffic hub and easy to get to where they work. But as the renting cost might vary from place to place or time to time, once they find somewhere with a good bargain they will move out. This is how the residents there understood my presence in the beginning, because I didn't want to risk telling them my main purpose there. Unlike the residents in Hutong, they feel they have nothing special and shouldn't become a research focus. When they had been asked about how they felt living there, they replied to me: 'Nothing special. It is a normal way of living'.

The new stream in the community is the floating population in this compound. They also never consider this is home; it is merely a house to stay. So they never try to blend themselves into this compound. They leave their house in the early morning at around 8 o'clock, and come back at around 19 o'clock. They spend most of their daytime at work, and the house they rent is like a B&B hotel where they can sleep and have breakfast. In most cases, they have lunch and dinner outside in a restaurant. They seldom cook meals during weekdays, maybe sometimes on the weekend. Because the house renting fee is very high in Beijing, most people share the house with others. The place where I stayed came with two bedrooms and a kitchen and bathroom. I shared the house with another guy. During my stay, I occupied the larger bedroom with my mother and he stayed in the smaller one. He was a 27-year-old guy who was working in a movie cut company. His name was Yong, coming from Shanxi province; after he finished his bachelor's degree in Tianjing, he came to Beijing to look for a job, as bigger cities are supposed to have better opportunities. He told me: 'The company I am working for doesn't have much work to do at the moment'. So strangely he stayed in his room all day long throughout the first 2 weeks after I moved in. He woke up at around 10 o'clock every morning; after using the bathroom, he went back to his room again, sitting in front of the computer watching videos or playing games. At noon, he ordered take away food from the nearby restaurant and still kept on staying in his room; only if he needed to use the bathroom would he come out from his room. In the evening, he usually went out for dinner and walked around which normally took 40 minutes. Then he came back and kept on locking himself inside. After the first 2 weeks, seemingly his company started getting busy, and he would wake up at 9:45 o'clock and quickly get ready for work leaving at 9:55 o'clock. At the busiest time, he came back at around

22:00 o'clock. Then the next day began with the same routine. He never talked to other residents living in this building, even if they bumped into each other in the corridor.

Later, after 3 months, he found somewhere which was cheaper to rent than this apartment and moved away. Then, a girl who was born in 1988 moved in. Her hometown was Harbin province, and she graduated from Beijing Wuzi College. After graduating, she started working in Beijing instead of going back to her hometown. When I asked her how often she went back home, she told me: 'Normally I only go back home during the Chinese Spring Festival if everything is all right back in my hometown'. When asked how she found this place, she told me: 'From the Internet. In the beginning some of my colleagues sent me some information, but I still kept on searching online by myself'.

'Have you made some friends since you moved in?' I asked.

'Well, I leave in the early morning and come back at night. I have no chance to make friends in our compound. Even when it is the weekend, I will need to do some shopping, clothes washing, meeting friends and socialising, to catch a break from work. I guess most of the residents here of my age have a similar lifestyle to mine. Also, it is not easy to meet someone. Even should I come across someone of my age living in this compound, it is weird to start talking with them, isn't it? We all have our individual lives, why bother disturbing others? You are the only residents I know here (chuckling)'. It seems the local professionals have got their own lives to be busy with and have no time to care about or become interested in others' lives. Being busy or pretending to be busy is a normal status, as if he or she is an important person to society.

As the houses in this less modern compound are getting much older, and residents are always seeking for larger living space if they are capable to afford it, some of the original residents have moved out and rented out their house like my landlord. This trend allows for more new dwellers moving in. This new stream to the community is like fresh air, somehow diluting the intimacy of the whole compound, making it a solemn, serious or less joyous society. As the portion of original dwellers has become less and less, the new residents moving in become the domain of this compound, which is not interested in socialising with other members. Because of lack of acquaintance, everyone has less trust in others and is trying to keep their personal information private as much as possible.

This is like the air that blows uncooked rice away.

Chapter 5

‘Things Have Been Socialised’: The Variable Allocations of Value in the City

Igor Kopytoff (1986) writes that:

Out of the total range of things available in a society, only some of them are considered appropriate for marking as commodities. Moreover, the same thing may be treated as a commodity at one time and not at another. And finally the same thing may, at the same time be seen as a commodity by one person and as something else by another. Such shifts and differences in whether and when a thing is a commodity reveal a moral economy that stands behind the objective economy of visible transactions (Kopytoff 1986: 64).

Similar to the features of a commodity, the usability of a thing, in other words, the use-value of a thing, can also vary from situation to situation, person to person. The commodity value of something can be seen most clearly during the process of exchange, and during this process, the thing is used as an exchange tool to make business benefit. People maintain its role the same: to make profit by reselling it. In contrast, use-value emphasises the utility feature of something, which is more user related: people keep it to use it. In this chapter I explore instances, both in the hutong and the high-rise apartments, in which the value of things is variable and dependent on context.

5.1 The Value of Laowujian (‘Old Things’) to Mr. Yang

My previous next-door neighbour in the hutong, Mr. Yang, had a copper teapot. Copper teapots were widely used in former times (before 1911), but now, most of the teapots in use are made from ceramics. While living next door to Mr. Yang, and being his neighbour for 10 months, I never saw him take out his copper teapot to make tea for us. Instead, his white china teapot was used every time to make tea after meals or during our visits to his place. The only special occasion he took out his copper teapot to serve tea was when I brought with me a friend from Queen’s University of Belfast, who was teaching anthropology and English in Minzu University

in Beijing during that time. The friend had expressed an interest in seeing my fieldwork site, and this occurred one day after I had moved out from the hutong. So I told Mr. Yang I would be back very soon to visit him again along with a friend from the UK. He said to me: 'You must come to my place and stay a while to have a chat'. I agreed to bring my friends to visit him.

This friend is the one I mentioned in the previous chapter whose name is Colin. He came together with two of his students who were planning to study anthropology in the UK. He told me this was his first time to visit these traditional courtyards in Beijing, even though this was not his first time to visit Beijing. On the afternoon in which I went back to my hutong fieldwork site, my neighbour living in the furthest house to the gate was sitting outside her room. So I first came and greeted her and introduced Colin and the other two students to her. Because her grandson used to learn English from me, I asked how his English learning was getting on. And this conversation was heard by Mr. Yang. He went out and said to me: 'You are back, Qingqing! It is hot outside. So please come on in, sit a while and take a break'.

'Thank you. Hopefully we are not bothering you too much', I said.

'What you are saying? Of course not. Not at all'. Mr. Yang replied, while waving his hand as a way to say disagreement. After I had briefly introduced everyone, he said to me, 'I have already put on the kettle, and we will have some tea. Just a minute, I will go to the kitchen and be back very soon'. Later, he came in with a plastic bag in his hand. Because Mr. Yang did not speak English, he turned to me and said: 'I have bought some popsicles for you all; please tell them they are very welcome to have some'. After explaining to me, he also faced Colin and showed him the popsicles. At the same time he spoke to the other two students in Chinese: 'Have some please. It is so hot outside. Have some to get cool'.

'Thank you very much. That is really kind of you. We don't want to bring you too much inconvenience. Just sit down and we can have a chat', one of Colin's students said to Mr. Yang.

'That is no problem at all. You continue your chatting, I will be right back', Mr. Yang responded with a smile.

After about 5 min, Mr. Yang came back and brought a copper teapot in his hand. Then he took out some tea cups from the cupboard and headed towards me: 'Translate this to them (referring to Colin and the students). "Have some green tea. This is good for health. Green tea is a good thing for people in the hot season, because it can help to get rid of *Huo*".¹ Translate what I said to him Qingqing. He might not know about this'.

'Sure, I will. By the way, thank you for all your offerings. I am sure they are really appreciated as well', I replied to Mr. Yang and then translated what he offered to Colin.

After I translated what Mr. Yang told them, the three guests responded to Mr. Yang immediately in a very satisfying way. Colin as a representative, said to Mr. Yang: 'That is very kind of you. I would love to have some tea please'. Then I

¹This is another Chinese term used to express the concept of Yang (阳). Because in summer, the weather is very hot. The temperature can reach 39° in the hottest season in Beijing. So there is too much heat inside the body which is bad for health. Since green tea belongs to Yin, this will balance the heat inside the body and make people feel better.

translated into Chinese for him. Mr. Yang seemed very happy for them to accept his offering and lift the copper teapot to pour the tea out to the cup. During this time Colin looked amazed by the copper teapot and said to Mr. Yang: 'The teapot looks very pretty, very stylish. Is it a special one? How old is it?'

'Yes, it is very special, inherited from my great grandfather. Isn't it beautiful? This is made by copper instead of bronze. It is still shining brightly even now after a few decades. In the past time (he means before his grandparents' generation), most families were using copper teapots. This is a Laowujian,² which means an object with a long history. At present, not many families have this', Mr. Yang replied with a satisfied smile on his face. He seemed very proud of this copper teapot he owned: 'Look at the body of the teapot, very shiny. I take it out only on some special occasions. This teapot has more than a hundred-year history'. Colin as an experienced anthropologist showed his great interest in this teapot by asking: 'Where did you get it?' Mr. Yang said: 'As I mentioned, this came down from my grandfather; he told me he bought it in a copper shop where you could buy all kinds of copper things. But now it is very difficult to find these shops: almost all have disappeared. If you want to buy this old copper stuff, you will have to go to the Panjiayuan antique market'.³ Knowing the specialty of this copper teapot, Colin raised another request: he asked if he could take a picture of this copper teapot. Mr. Yang nearly burst out laughing after hearing that. He said: 'Of course you can'. The meaning behind this laughing is firstly, he was happy with Colin's request; secondly, this was a very funny requirement, as not a lot of Chinese people would feel a copper teapot is something special enough to take a picture of. So I took out my camera and made a snap. Mr. Yang looked at the picture and said: 'This is a very nice one'. In this way, Mr. Yang felt he gained face, because he owned something with an 'old' specialty, and none of us owned such a thing.

On this occasion, the teapot's use-value was not an important feature anymore, and no one would care how much Mr. Yang bought it for. It is the uniqueness and scarcity that makes it special and valued, rather than the use-value; it can be used to trade for gaining another thing, which doesn't necessarily need to be real, as in this occasion where 'face' was traded. But the functioning of this feature will vary from person to person, situation to situation.

²Literally it means old things, which are on their way to becoming antiques, but not yet as valued as an antique. These old things could be anything related with personal life, for instance, an old TV, sewing machine, handkerchief, enamel cup, etc. Most owners keep these for their personal interest and as a memorial of their past life in a certain region. As it gradually becomes a fashion statement, more and more people take this as their personal hobby, and of course there will be someone expecting the value to increase and to make money. In some parts of the community in Beijing, they have built up local exchange markets.

³This is one of the most famous antique markets in all China, not far from where we live. It was built in 1992, and 62 % of the sellers from other provinces in China bring their own antiques or aged objects here to sell. It has claimed to be the hottest fold antique market on its website, even Hilary Clinton, ex-president of Greece Costas Simitis, and other Western political heads have visited. The categories of antique here vary from big furniture to small paintings or decorations. Some of them are fake, while some of them are real. All of the objects are sold by individuals without forms of proof.

5.2 Gaining Face Through a Thing's Physical Existence

In the case of another informant of mine, Mr. Cao, whose courtyard does not look very aged as he has renovated it in recent years, what he emphasised was not 'old' features, but what happened in this yard: it was this that added value to his courtyard.

He explained to me: 'My family is a little special; we have relatives distributed in five different countries. They bring back a lot of new concepts, which makes my courtyard different from others. For instance, I have installed six bathrooms throughout the whole yard, and also the Wi-Fi covers every single room in my yard. This makes a traditional yard modernised. The influence of a foreign culture is also revealed in the following way: The guardian of my nephew (his brother's son) in the USA is from Taiwan. His son is an undergraduate at Harvard University who was born there. Later he came to China and kept on learning Chinese in Peking University, while he was also thinking about his dissertation. Before he came to Beijing, he had got some funding for conducting research on leader election process in the countryside of North China. After doing a pilot study there, he found it was not what he was really interested in. Then he decided to conduct his research upon the changing process of political-economics textbooks in high schools. Because his Chinese was not very good, we invited a lecturer from No.4 middle school⁴ and professors in politics at Beijing Normal University to give him some guidance. They were sitting right in this yard for a discussion. Then he graduated with this dissertation. After graduation, he decided to join the Marine Corps. I told him, "Jiajia, if you join the Marine Corps with two year's living experience and this dissertation conducted in Beijing, you should tell your fellows how you feel". He said to me, "Of course I will. I will tell them all of these interesting stories I experienced here and let them know how splendid life is here in Beijing".

From above, we can see how Mr. Cao's strategy of emphasising the social value of this courtyard is of making a statement on how people with spectacular experiences take advantage of his courtyard. This strategy is different from what Mr. Yang did, but the common point is to draw out the uniqueness of a certain place. Even so, what Mr. Cao described might cause the effect he expected, yet to another listener, it may fail to do so.

5.3 Make a Life with Old Things

The special emotion attached to Laowujian is like an extension of the old times in the courtyard for those who moved from the courtyard in hutong to the high-rise apartment. For instance, one of my informants, Xulao,⁵ who used to live in the

⁴A top three middle high school in Beijing.

⁵This man's family name is Xu. In order to show our respect to him, we put the character Lao after it, which means aged literally, to show our respect to him, as the word old stands for experienced and honoured, which is a respectful form of addressing someone.

courtyard before 1990 and then moved to the high-rise apartment, has a great interest in collecting many different kinds of old-fashioned things, which, as I mentioned, in the dialect of Beijing is called ‘Laowujian’. Xulao is nearly 70 years old. He has lived alone throughout his life without getting married.

Xulao was first introduced to me by my aunt, and they had been colleagues for 20 years. My aunt’s house is located within the second traffic ring in the inner city in the high-rise apartment. As my aunt was ill at the time, we had first agreed to meet, and it was not convenient for her to bring me to Xulao’s place. So she asked my uncle to drive Xulao to her place for us to meet up. I remember it was in the afternoon of late July 2010, the hottest season in Beijing. It was incredibly hot outside, more than 30°. We agreed to meet at a specific time. I came slightly earlier than estimated, because it is not polite to let someone you are in need of wait for you. Once I arrived, my uncle went away to pick up Xulao. When they arrived, my aunt briefly introduced us to each other. After a short greeting to each other, Xulao said to my aunt: ‘I told you that you don’t need to pick me up. I can find it myself. That shouldn’t be a problem for me. I am very familiar with the inner city’. Actually he was not then living in the inner city. He was outside Yongding Gate, which is on the south second ring. My uncle wiped off his sweat and replied: ‘It’s ok. How can we let you get here by yourself in such hot weather, not to mention you are carrying so many things to show Qingqing’.

‘It is my pleasure’, Xulao replied politely, ‘I really have something to show you’. He then took out his stuff from a red bag he brought. The first one he showed me was a booklet. ‘Look, this is Beijing Traditional Herb Medicine Booklet. The reason I kept this item is that it is full of the characteristics of that period. This booklet was published during the Cultural Revolution. Look at the top of the front page. Here it says ‘Long Live Chairman Mao’. This is a very typical slogan on every publication as a way to show our admiration and loyalty to Chairman Mao and the Communist Party. So this is really special and full of the marks of that time. This is why I would like to collect it. Several years ago, someone came to me and said they wanted to buy it from me. They were in the process of founding a Folk Museum and needed some exhibits. I refused. I said to them: “It is impossible for me to sell it to you. I kept it, because it is my love. I can donate it to you if you are really in need of this item when your museum has been founded”. All of these collections are purely for my personal interest, very amateurish. Some of this stuff has been passed down from my grandparents, but most of them are bought from a market near Huguosi (护国寺) called Gu wan shi chang (Aged Stuff Market). The things I like to collect vary. But actually my major interest is in bank cheques and food stamps. I collect them in this photo album’, He took out another folder from the bag and opened it, ‘Look at this cheque for transfer issued by the People’s Bank of China on 17 November 1969: there is a red stamp on top of the cheque which says “Yao Dou si pi xiu”(要斗私批修)⁶ inscribed by Mao Zedong. The next one is a cash cheque also

⁶This phrase was a typical rhetorical slogan during the Cultural Revolution, which meant to call everyone to fight against all selfish thoughts and strongly oppose all the ideas that were trying to amend Marxism and Maoism.

issued by the People's Bank of China. Similarly, there is a red stamp on the top, which is different from the previous one, but also a rhetorical slogan during the Cultural Revolution. It says "Political Work is the Lifeblood of All Economic Work", as Mao Zedong said. You may also notice the name of "Beneficiary Party" on the round stamp with a star in the middle is "Revolution Committee of No.139 Middle School". This reflects the zeitgeist of that time, I mean the Revolution Committee. I am sure your parents will know it very well. During the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao was trying to remove all the capitalism elements from Chinese society by launching a revolution from every grassroots organisation. One of the major ways was to set up this Revolution Committee'.

'May I ask where you got these cheques?' I was confused.

'It is a little bit complicated. These documents have been kept by the bank, and at a certain time, the bank would have sent these wastes to the paper mill. Before they were blended, some of the workers realised these papers might be valuable to someone else. So they kept them secretly and categorised them and then brought them to the market to sell. So I had the chance to buy them. Just several days ago, I got a cheque from a certain bank in Barcelona which was issued hundreds of years ago'.

'So you also collect foreign bank cheques. If you like, I could give you a cheque issued by a bank in Britain'. I said and hoped he would be interested in them, so I could offer him something as a way of reciprocity to repay his kindness.

Xulao replied me with a smile and asked: 'In which year were these cheques issued?'

'I am afraid I only have the current one in circulation, taken from my cheque book'. Having said that though, I realised the only criteria for Xulao to decide whether he would like to keep it or not is whether this item has the feature of being 'old' or not.

'Thank you indeed. But what I am really interested in is the "old" stuff. It must be *old*. Otherwise, it will not interest me at all. It is interesting to track changes through this old stuff. Have a look at these calendar cards. Each front side has a story or a tourist sight. Look at this one. It is the image of the bridge near the front gate of Beihai Park. By contrasting it with the current one, you can see the changes as time passes by. If you keep on collecting the calendar cards of the same image over a differing time period, then you will see the changing track clearly which interests me a lot. This is another interesting one. On the back side of this calendar card, the image of Hongxiaobing⁷ has been printed, which is full of political characteristics. Then we turn over and have a look at the front; you will see it was released in 1975.⁸ The calendar cards released in the same period also include these ones, a political slogan or Chairman Mao's hometown printed. Later after the year of 1976,

⁷The phrase Hongxiaobing is a word created during the social movement time in China of the Cultural Revolution. Literally it means little red guards, who played the role of attacking 'Four Olds', which stand for old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas. To eradicate the 'Four Olds', they attacked historic sites, museums and what's more, people.

⁸In the year of 1975, China was under the Cultural Revolution.

the image on the calendar card is less politically related, for example, this one, a bunch of flowers in the year of 1977, or that one, an architectural building. So you can see, the calendar is not fraught with political overtones, as documented by the Cultural Revolution passing by through this little card. This is the calendar card. In this photo album, I put all the tickets, including subway tickets, cafeteria tickets, swimming tickets, movie tickets and bus tickets, and so on. This is even more interesting: an entrance ticket for using the toilet in the subway station. I bought it for the purpose of collection; I didn't actually use it. Now we can use the toilet free of charge, but in that year, we needed to pay to use it. See, these are the subway tickets. The price of the subway ticket for one-way travel has risen from 0.1 RMB in around the 1970s, 0.5 RMB to 1 RMB and then 2 RMB, 3 RMB, with which we can go anywhere by making any connection. Until the light rail was built up in 2003, the total cost of going out by metro went up to 5 RMB for a light railway and underground combined ticket. In 2006, the paper tickets went out of the history stage and were replaced by the plastic tickets. In 2007, except for the airport line, the total cost of using the subway for one way travel was 2 RMB, but this change could not be reflected through the ticket, because the paper ticket with the price printed on doesn't exist anymore. If we compare this ticket to Shanghai's subway tickets, you will find out that Shanghai has already started to print commercials on one side of the ticket. To watch a movie at Dahua Cinema used to cost 0.25 RMB, but has now become 50 RMB. Now you see the contrast'.

'It is interesting indeed', I replied with agreement, 'By the way, what is this stone? Is there anything special about it?' I pointed to a cyan-coloured stone plaque with three characters on it.

He smiled and took it out from the bag, 'this is a plaque for a retailer shop running during Xuantong period⁹ according to the information. It has been damaged a little on the edge, but this will not influence its value in a large way. I should get a proper case for this stone. On the front of the plaque, it tells the name of this retail shop which is Deyujing (德與景). This is written in traditional Chinese characters instead of the simplified characters. Also you can tell the written order follows the way of ancient times from this plaque, which is from right to left. Look at the fine sculpture. How beautiful it is. The information on the back tells during which time this retail shop opened. For this one, you can see, it opened in the Xuantong period as indicated by the characters on the back. This one is called Beitianyi (北天義). Slightly different from the previous one, it indicates the opening time on the right side of the plaque, which says Zhonghuaminguo¹⁰ (中華民國). The two holes on the top are for nailing the plaque on the gate. I should get this plaque a Jinhe¹¹ to place it', Xulao introduced his treasures to me with great interest.

⁹Refers to the period reigned by the last emperor, Aixinjueluo Puyi, from 1909 to 1912 in the Qing Dynasty.

¹⁰Zhonghuaminguo also known as the Republic of China was founded in 1912 right after the Qing dynasty. This is the beginning of modern society.

¹¹This is a special case coated with brocade inside. It has been designed exclusively for storing some valued items.



'That is a good idea. I kind of feel this stuff could only make sense to a small group of people', I said to Xulao.

'Yes, that is very true: To me they are very precious, while maybe to another person this is junk. But you have to admit that these items are special, some even unique in the world. It is really up to us how we judge them. All of this stuff I show you is my personal collection and not many people have it. One person may like it, while someone else won't know what it means to them; especially the young generation, they couldn't see the value of these Laowujian. But for me I like tracing the past time and feeling the changing process of the whole society through every little detailed aspect such as these Laowujian I have'.

By taking advantage of its function in reflecting the past and tracing change, which other new products don't enable one to do, Laowujian reveals its social or temporal value. This value will be firstly recognised by the owner of this item, and what's more, this value will increase if the audience can understand or agree similarly with the owner.

5.4 Language and Ways of Expression as 'Old'

To broaden this argument, value is not only embedded in physical objects but also some immaterial objects, for instance, old-fashioned dialects.

Mr. Yang, an indigenous local person whose roots are in the inner city and whose ancestors never lived in other places outside the inner city, feels that some of the traditional dialects are not known by other residents even though they dwell in the inner city, because they are not rooted there. When I talked to him without any member from Jun Shu's family present, he clarified to me that: 'Xiaojun is not a local, his hometown is actually in Hebei province. Their roots are not in Beijing. His parents emigrated from Hebei to Beijing, then he was born here. Influenced by his parents, he is not a "true Beijinger". Therefore, some of our local dialect or sayings and manners are not understandable to him, even though he is speaking with a Beijing accent'. When we had lunch together on a winter Saturday with Jun Shu, Mr. Yang mentioned that he went to Qianmen area the previous day, a traditional business street, where there are quite a lot of century-old shops and bought a thing called Mianwo. Besides Mr. Yang's family members, both mine and Jun Shu's family were confused by this concept. And my mother asked: 'What is Mianwo?'

Mr. Yang laughed out loud and turned to Jun Shu, asking: 'Do you know what this concept means?'

Jun Shu shook his head and said: 'Really, I don't know about it'.

'Now you see, why I told you that not everyone living in Beijing, with an apartment in Beijing or a Beijing Hukou¹² know about these. These criteria are not sufficient to define whether a person is an indigenous Beijinger or not. These are too superficial. We should find out if their roots are here', Mr. Yang pointed to the land we stood on. This is Mr. Yang's point of view as opposed to my landlady, who is a migrant from a nearby province, Hebei to Beijing. On the day I viewed the house, she said to me: 'You are already a Beijinger, which is great'. She knew that I had a Beijing Hukou.

I replied to her with disagreement: 'I don't think I am a Beijinger'. After hearing this, she thought I was just trying to be modest and polite because to say someone is a Beijinger is a positive way of defining one's belonging, as every migrant worker living in Beijing desperately wants to have a Beijing Hukou, and it is very difficult to have one, so she disagreed: 'Of course you are. After living here for a few years, then you are a Beijinger. We are all Beijingers'. Apparently, she was very proud of being a Beijinger, and the standards she used to define a Beijinger are very different from Mr. Yang's. She sees having a local Hukou, and living in Beijing for a few years means to be a Beijinger. All these criteria have nothing to do with knowing the past or old times of Beijing which form Mr. Yang's main focus in defining a Beijinger.

Mr. Yang continued: 'Even Huzi¹³ who is much younger than many people living in this yard, he knows a lot about Beijing culture, because he has been influenced greatly by me since he was very little'.

What Mr. Yang said is very true. According to the residential system, I am a Beijinger technically, because my Hukou,¹⁴ my personal profile, is here in Beijing. So I have been seen as a Beijing citizen, even though I was born in Shanxi province. I have lived in Beijing for more than 7 years, but some of their typical language phrases are not used or even not understandable to me. I can understand most of them, but just don't feel that it is my own language. Partly because most of my friends around have had a similar experience to mine, that of coming from other areas in China and moving to Beijing for studying and staying here after graduation, we do not speak in this vocabulary and with this pronunciation and partly because of a more fundamental reason that we were not born and did not grow up in this language environment.

When I taught English to Yaoyao, we had much more chance to talk freely. So I got the chance to observe the phrases she used in everyday talk. She used the phrase

¹²This is like an identification of who you are and which area you belong to according to the residential system.

¹³This is Mr. Yang's only son, who is 20-years old and has been born and bred in Beijing. This name literally means tiger because he was born in the year of the tiger according to the zodiac of 12 animals.

¹⁴This is an administrative residential system to identify where a citizen belongs.

'Qie zhe ne' to express the meaning that 'a long time will be needed', while if I were about to express the same meaning, I would say 'shi jian hen chang'. The one Yaoyao used is a very local way of expression. The listener could figure out the meaning through the context, but it is not very easy to get the point if this phrase has been put in another way without context. But Yaoyao, a 15-year-old girl, did not feel the phrase she used was something she could be proud of. When I asked her what it meant, she explained to me in a modest way: 'this is a dialectical expression. Maybe I can put it in another way. It means something will not happen very soon. Is that clear?' Different from the way Mr. Yang explained, I could not tell that Yaoyao valued the phrase she employed in her talk. On the contrary, she was more practical to get the meaning across to her listener. In this case, Yaoyao didn't see the value of the local language and also didn't seem to try to make it valued by her listeners, because in her peer group, the major resource of her knowledge came from the Internet, TV or school, which integrate a diverse range of cultures. Insisting on using her own dialect would isolate her from other members in her peer group, so Yaoyao was trying to use the communal language database, instead of the strong Beijing accent and localised phrases. And in this case, the value of a certain language largely rests on the language user.

Even though the young generation doesn't seem to carry on the value, the senior or the middle-aged residents still value it as a nonmaterial culture which should be carried on and on.

Mr. Cao, who owns an independent courtyard, even mentioned to me that it is not an easy thing for the newly created words to get into hutong. He sees the form of linguistic expression within the hutong as being exclusive and serving as a wall to block foreign languages and to preserve the traditional ways.

Mr. Cao gave me an example: 'I was born in this courtyard. When I was very little, little kids always played in hutong with other fellows, because there was no traffic going through. If for any reason I hurt one of my playmates and they cried, they would run back home and tell their parents. The normal way to deal with this conflict between kids is that the parents bring their crying child, stand outside the yard and yell to the other parents, "Hi, will you still look after your son. He hurt my child". They would never knock on the door or mention the parents' names as a way to show respect. Then when my parents heard their complaining outside, they would bring me, get out and apologise for what I had done on behalf of me. Also, my parents would ask if the child had been injured or not. As parents of a "bad boy", they would bring some food to repay the "victim". This special way of communication has now become very rare. As you probably have already noticed from the current living conditions, that most of the yards are turned into dazayuan, so if you just stand outside and shout towards the inside of the yard, nobody would know who you mean to talk to. Not to mention in the high-rise apartment, where each gate of the household is guarded by two doors'.

Mr. Cao said this with a sign to show his sorrow. He felt sorrow because this way of communication and getting along with neighbours had gone away and would never return. He continued: 'But that is the trend of development for the whole society, nobody could stop it and change it. The only thing we can do is accept it as

a normal citizen. It is difficult to say whether this is a positive or a negative sign'. His emotions are tightly linked to his past experiences. For those who have no such experience during childhood, they couldn't thoroughly understand the emotion of tracing back. On the basis of Mr. Cao's opinion, only in siheyuan, this special residential form could, this way of communication and this wording, make sense. Only under this condition, the terms (which refer to the words hutong dwellers use in their everyday life and the manner they communicate with their neighbours) could be understood and valued. For those who have no such first-hand experience, they could not see, not to mention treasure, the traditional way of communication. This is similar to the commodified features of things, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The existence and function of these social values vary from person to person and circumstance to circumstance.

5.5 The Name of a Place as Having Value

I have discussed above the language that residents in the hutong use every day; however, as a traditional residential place, the names of different hutong are themselves a form of language, conveying the spirit of each hutong.

In 2006, I went to the hutong around the Qianmen area, and after talking to the local residents, I then learnt that many of the names had been changed as time passed by. For instance, one of the hutong used to be owned by a rich family whose family name was Jiang, so the hutong was named after this family's forename, Da Jiang Jia hutong (大蒋家胡同). But later on, in 1965 it changed into Da Jiang hutong (大江胡同). These two names have nearly the same pronunciation but different characters and of course refer to two different things. Da Jiang Jia means big family Jiang, while, Da Jiang in this phrase means wide river. Besides the pronunciation, these two phrases have nothing to do with each other semantically. This change is due to the reason that the family name Jiang is the same as Jiang Jieshi who was once the chairman of the Kuomintang, and during that time, the Communist Party beat down the Kuomintang and took over the whole nation, so Jiang was a sensitive word, and that is why they changed Jiang (蒋) into jiang (江) to make this name less politically sensitive.

When I came to visit Mr. Cao, he explained to me: 'Hutong is different from high-rise apartment which looks more industrial. The hutong still functions in an ordered way, but it is more humanised. This means of layout provides the chance to build up an intimate living space for the residents. It forms in a natural way. For example, this hutong we are currently in is named Youqizuo (油漆座), which means "paint place", because the residents living in this area during ancient times were the painting workers for the Royal Palace. The hutong in front of us is called Miliang Ku (米粮库), which used to be the storage for reserving the food supply for the royal family, as the name suggests. If you keep on walking toward the south, the hutong there is called Duanku (缎库, which means "storage of satin", and that is where the satin for the royal use was kept. I bet you have been to Dengshikou

before, if you have been in Beijing for 7 years, and that is the place where most of the shops for lights used to be grouped. All of these facilities served the Royal Palace during ancient times. These areas are called the "Foot of the Royal Palace" now. So you can see from the above examples, the names of hutong are generated from practical functions, which makes this area more alive and human. Once you tell others where you live, then your listener is able to see your occupation and even social status'.

'This is very fascinating', I said to Mr. Cao. And he continued telling me: 'Even if the original name has been changed, we still prefer to use the original one in our everyday conversation. Of course, if we need to put our address or mention this name in a formal context, we will use the official name instead'.

The names of hutong reflect the most obvious and dominant character of a certain area and also reveal the shared characteristics of the residents living within this region, their history and their memories.

5.6 The Contextual Value of 'Old Things'

In contrast to Mr. Yang, my neighbour Ms. Li, living in the high-rise building, holds a different attitude towards 'old stuff'. She told me when she moved out the furniture and other stuff from her house to get it ready for painting, 'The stuff will be much less after every moving from time to time, because some of the old things will be thrown away. These young people like you and my son will not keep this junk. If you put it in the room, it will be an eyesore for them. Not just you young generation, I feel the same way too', and she offered me to take some of her furniture, like a computer desk if I was in need of one. After she heard my thanks, she said: 'You are welcome. This is no problem at all. This old stuff is not worth anything. If I took it to the recycling point, they would not pay me much. If you happen to need it, just take it'.

To her, she wouldn't consider these old things were worth keeping. There was nothing amongst these old things that could make her feel proud. She didn't figure out the value of these Laowujian and could not make them valued by others either.

Here, I would like to give a name to this invisible value, that could make its owner feel satisfied to different degrees on various occasions, which could be called 'contextual value', dependent on time, place and who it is presented to, on social setting and personal attitude. Whether or not this object is valued by the owner or others depends not only on the use-value or actual value, but also on who owns it that could enable the magnification of the impact and demonstrate the value of this object, also the audience who the owner shows it to, and who will decide whether this value could be recognised or not, and if yes, how significant it is. This is what I call the temporary and situational character of this value. This value largely rests upon how the owner introduces and describes it, which might greatly influence the audience's attitude towards this object instead of the owner himself. As long as the

audience's interest varies from person to person, this social value of these Laowujian will change accordingly.

From the above examples, it can be seen that people living in the high-rise and traditional courtyards hold different points of view towards the social value of Laowujian.

5.7 How Old Things Are Dealt Within the Hutong and the High-Rise Apartment

In the previous chapter, I mentioned there was a recycling point at the entrance of the high-rise apartment compound, which everyone would pass by as they came in and out of the compound. This location of the recycling point made me very uncomfortable, but it was still there, and apparently the owner made a good amount of money by running such a recycling point; otherwise he would not have kept on working on this even in the thirty-five-degree summer heat or minus-fifteen-degree winter cold. Besides the restaurant, hotel and retailer shop in the nearby area bringing their package waste here, another major income for this owner was from the residents near this area; in most cases, they bring their old and unwanted stuff to trade for a small amount of money, such as furniture, cutlery, clothes, back issues, papers, bottles and cans: in all, basically everything they don't need.

In the hutong area where I stayed, there was no such recycling point around, as residents living in this area seldom sold their old stuff at a junk price. For the tradeable everyday garbage, like cans or bottles, if they want to get it recycled, each of these items will be paid for with about 0.5 penny each. For those who want to recycle this stuff, they need to bring it to another hutong which takes 8 minutes to walk to from where we stay. Alternatively, they will have to wait for the rag man's coming. There is no fixed time for them to come over, because of their feature of mobility. They normally go around different streets at different times. When they arrive, they shout to the residential area to let everyone know that they are there for collecting junk by giving a small compensation to the owner. When the sound has been heard by those who have something to trade, they will bring their stuff out on the street. Sometimes they will bargain with the collector for a better price. The most commonly sold stuffs are cans, bottles and hardboard which the residents have nothing to do with.

Compared with the hutong, the frequency of exchanging at the recycling point is higher in the high-rise compound, and likewise the variety of items exchanged is greater. Most people dwelling in the hutong area have the habit of collecting stuff rather than sending it out. For example, in the spring of 2010, the telecommunication company decided to replace all of the ageing telephone cables with new ones for safety and better service reasons. When these old telephone cables were removed from the poles, everyone went out and took some of the unwanted cable back. I remember it was in the afternoon, Mr. Yang knocked our door and asked: 'Zhao Jie,

the working staff of the telecommunication company are now replacing the old cables with new ones outside the courtyard. These discarded old ones still look all right. Would you like to take some?’

My mother answered: ‘Ok, I will have a look. What do you keep it for? Is there any reason?’

Mr. Yang looked a bit confused and didn’t understand why my mother asked in this way. He replied: ‘Well, you can use it for all different means. It is quite durable as it has the metal filaments inside and wrapped by the well-qualified plastic. For me, I would like to use it as the clothes line, or when you want to tie up something, this is a good material. Anyway, I think it is better to save some for the future. I’ve got a big bundle of it. If you need some, just go and take some quickly, because there are lots of people who want to keep it. I’m just giving you a reminder’.

‘Thank you very much for letting me know. I will go and get some later when I finish these tasks at hand’, my mother replied him with big thanks.

‘Ok, but you need to hurry, as many people want to have this. If you go too late, I am afraid there will be nothing left’, Mr. Yang said with anxiety. Later my mother went out and took back a small bundle of cables. I asked my mother what these were for. She said to me: ‘To be honest, I don’t know. But Mr. Yang came over and told me how useful this was. If I didn’t take any, I would feel myself impolite to him, because he came to me and explained me how valuable and useful this cable is’.

Different from the habit of hutong residents, the high-rise apartment dwellers tend to abolish the unwanted stuff rather than collecting or reserving.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, in the high-rise apartment, there is an old sofa in the middle of the compound where many residents could sit and have a chat with others. This sofa is a typical traditional one, full of the characteristics of the 1990s, cloth coated, relatively lower backrest, with the same length on the backrest as on the seat. After sitting under the sunshine and standing in the rain for several months, this sofa became too shabby to sit on, with the coated cloth broken down and the sponge inside coming out. In the late summer, this sofa was completely run out of use; therefore residents who wanted to sit outside needed to bring their own stool: No one felt this sofa was something precious and worth keeping, even.

5.8 Valuing the “Old”

The concept of being ‘old’ in the context of traditional Chinese culture is a positive word, which is almost equal to experienced, well respected and knowledgeable. As I explained in the previous chapters, traditionally, the word ‘old’ is frequently used before the family name to address a person who is older than the speakers themselves as a form of respect. This way of addressing a person is used amongst those of the same generation. For those who are in the younger generation, putting the word ‘old’ after the family name is a courteous way to address a senior person of an elder generation.

This positive acknowledgement of the word 'old' has expanded from an individual person to a physical existence and also to intangible objects, which the owner supposes are related with tradition, history and culture.¹⁵ 'Old' not only refers to the physical items like the copper teapot Mr. Yang owned; also it could mean intangible terms such as language. Therefore, different people recognise, appreciate and present the value of 'old' in different perspectives. Thus one item gains its contextual value through different contexts.

Those indigenous Beijingers who have long attachments to the past, and who are currently dwelling in hutong or recently moving out from hutong, have a special eye to discover the value of the 'old' and make use of this value in their everyday life, which is not based on its use-value but the value added by the feature of oldness, as these relics are a way of attaching oneself to the past, the old time. This past-related emotion will spread and expand to other instances. Unlike the history books or archives, these 'old' things represent a virtual existence of the past and having been used everyday bring a sense of present in the past. Even if it doesn't function as it used to, the owner would still keep it and affiliate other types of values onto it. This value is very personal and needs to be demonstrated skillfully to the right person. The value of old things can be seen well through the process of exchange, and what the owner or user of the old things trades to gain is face or social reputation from others in most cases.

However, those indigenous Beijingers living in the high-rise buildings, which are supposed to be modern, like to throw away what is 'old', including physical objects, customs, languages, etc., as a way to detach themselves from the past: they don't have a strong desire to relate to the past. New and modern is what they chase after. The pattern of addressing someone 'old + family name' has gradually decreased amongst the young generation and modern people.

So generally, those who don't have a strong attachment with the past would like to aim at the 'new', new buildings, new decorations, new life patterns and new ways of socialising. And this trend is demonstrated through the lives of social things.

Reference

- Kopytoff, I. (1986). The cultural biography of things: Commoditization as process. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵The word culture in the Chinese context is a positive word related with well educated, knowledgeable and respected.

Chapter 6

‘Out of Space, Out of Speech’: The Relationship Between Language and Space in the City

In general terms, living space can be divided into two different parts, inner and outer. The courtyard in the hutong and the high-rise buildings are two different general forms of outer living space to be found in my fieldwork site; the inner spaces of these architectural forms may vary from one place to another, independently of the general outward form. However, when I say internal space here, I mean the resident’s home space.

For instance, the outward physical space in Mr. Cao’s place in the hutong area is a very typical instance to show the social status and grade. When my aunt first took me to Mr. Cao’s place, a typical private courtyard, Mr. Cao asked my aunt’s husband and me to sit in the Shangzuo (upper seat). The upper seat normally consists of two chairs sitting on each side of a tea table, facing the main door of the living room. The most distinguished people amongst the guests and host deserve these seats.

Such spatial division does not only appear in the traditional courtyard. One is reminded of the division within the tent of the nomadic Mongolians, as described by Humphrey: “In practice, the system worked as follows. The floor area of the tent was divided into four sections, each of which was valued differently. The area from the door, which faced south, to the fireplace in the centre, was the junior or low-status half, called by the Mongols the ‘lower’ half. The area at the back of the tent behind the fire was the honorific ‘upper’ part, named the *xoimor*. This division was intercepted by that of the male, or ritually pure, half, which was to the left of the door as you entered, and the female, impure, or dirty section to the right of the door, up to the *xoimor*” (Humphrey 1974: 235).

Traditionally, the courtyards are built with the door facing the south, and the wealthy or distinguished family usually has a living room opposite the main door. So when their guests come through the main door, they will walk towards the living room, which has its gate facing south as well. A proper living room is usually set up with chairs and a tea desk. Usually at the top of the living room, facing the door is where the two Shangzuo are located. In between the two Shangzuo is the tea desk for the guests or host to put teacups. On either side lie another two chairs with one

table in between. The total number of chairs always comes to an even number, because it is supposed to be auspicious. Some extremely distinguished families even build two lanes leading all the way from the main door to the living room. As the gate is facing south, the lanes run south to north. In the Classic of Rites,¹ it describes how the host should walk on the east lane leading to the east-side seat, while the guest walks on the west lane leading to the west seat. Therefore, even in the courtyard with no lane built, the host should lead the most distinguished guest to the seat on the top west side, and then the host will sit on the top east. That is why the phrase, 'Zuo dong' (sit in the east) has been used as a way to say host.²

Here Mr. Cao would like to give my uncle and I the priority to sit and experience Shangzuo thus, he and my aunt sat beside each other next to the Shangzuo. Sitting at the top seat, which is the focus of the whole room, I could have a whole view of the entire room inside and outside.³ Also Shangzuo is relatively higher than other seats, which brings the superior feeling to the people sitting on it. Because what I said and how I behaved was very noticeable to everyone in this room, I was then more aware of my position and the words, phrases and manner I used in my talk. Always the people sitting at the Shangzuo are leading the whole conversation. My uncle sitting alongside me became much more dominant than he used to be, even though I am sure he clearly knew that Mr. Cao, my informant, should take the leading role for this conversation. My Uncle also gave very detailed answers to each of my questions, as if he didn't want to be ignored. From his behaviour I could strongly feel that sitting in the dominant position, but not being dominant in the whole conversation, is an awkward experience.

This example demonstrates that the layout of the room and the specific area of the room in which the speaker is placed will have an influence on the language used and the way people talk.

According to Wilhelm von Humboldt, 'Language is the formative organ of thoughts. Intellectual activity, entirely mental, entirely internal, and to some extent passing without trace, becomes through sounds, externalised in speech and perceptible to the senses. Thought and language are therefore one and inseparable from each other'.⁴ Based on this observation, and my own, I explore in this chapter the way in which not only the language we speak may have an influence on the way we think, but also how the space we live within may have an effect on the way we

¹This is one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon. This book mainly describes the social norms, ceremonial rites and governmental system of the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1050–256 BCE).

²Interestingly, Bourdieu also describes the importance of the direction east in the Berber House: 'the front of the main house, the one which shelters the head of the family and which contains a stable, is almost always turned towards the east, and the main door... is commonly called the door of the east (*thaburth thacherqith*) or else the door of the sheet, the door of the upper part or the great door' (Bourdieu 2003: 137).

³The room door is usually kept open, so sitting at the top seat allows the person sitting on it to see through the door to the courtyard.

⁴This saying is cited in Brian Skotko (1997), talking about Relationship Between Language and Thought from a Cross-Cultural Perspective, which can be found here <http://www.duke.edu/~pk10/language/ca.htm>

speak. My fieldwork in both the hutong and high-rise apartment in Beijing suggests to me that in both cases there is a strong connection.

In the first part of this chapter, I unfold this view with four scenarios that Mr. Yang brought me or described to me: the Houhai Park, dinner with two other families, TV time with Xiaojun every summer night, and free chat with Mr. Yang's family. These four separate scenarios happened at different times and were scenes seemingly distinct from each other, but coincidentally demonstrate how language the resident uses in their everyday life reflects their concept of space, how this space and language interact with each other under different circumstances and moreover, what conflict will happen if the language is not commensurate with the space. And in the second part of this chapter, as a comparison, I will explore the same questions for the residents in high rise by using scenarios of conversation in the communal area of Mrs. Li's house.

6.1 Houhai Park

When I mentioned to Mr. Yang, my neighbour in the courtyard, that I would like to learn more about traditional Beijing culture, he guided me and my mother to travel around Beijing. One of the places we visited was Houhai, which used to be a residential place, but nowadays most of the yards have been modified and commercialised into bars or restaurants, mingled with the local residents. This area is centred around a lake, which is very rare in the inner city of Beijing. Also this is the only lake area open to the public for free. The other lakes are located within a park where an admission fee will apply for visitors. On the way travelling to Houhai, I went into an antique shop to have a look, and Mr. Yang and my mother were waiting outside. When I got out, I saw Mr. Yang bow to an aged man and say: 'Ai you,⁵ what an honour to meet you. Long time no see. How are you?'

The aged man replied to Mr. Yang politely without bowing back: 'I am doing well. Thank you for asking. How about you? Is everything all right?'

'Yes, I am doing well. Thank you. I am taking my neighbour to visit here', Mr. Yang replied while bowing and scraping,⁶ 'They are my next door neighbours and are interested in seeing the traditional courtyard of Beijing, so I got them two bicycles and I'm taking them to look around this area. Bicycle is much better than any other way of transportation. We can stop anywhere we want and have a look. Isn't that true?'

'It is indeed the best way to visit inner city. I will let you keep on going'.

'Take good care. See you later', While saying this phrase, Mr. Yang put his hands together in a Zen gesture,⁷ bowed and nodded his head.

⁵This is a Chinese interjection to express surprising feelings in a positive way.

⁶This is a way to show humility from one to another who is senior.

⁷This is a very respectful way to say goodbye to a person that the speaker honours; in most cases, this way of saying goodbye means I wish you well and take care, because the Zen gesture is used for prayer.

After he departed, Mr. Yang turned to me and my mother and said: 'This is Beijing etiquette. You see how I showed my respect to the aged. I almost kneeled to him when bowing down. That is how I always emphasise Li,⁸ which is a very important part in Beijing culture. I used the word Nin (您) instead of ni (你) to refer to him.⁹ In the local culture even within the same generation we use Nin. This is a typical Beijing phrase, as the Beijingers really attach great importance to respecting others'.

'Oh I see. In my talk, I normally use ni instead of nin', I said.

'Do you know where this tradition comes from?' Mr. Yang asked me.

'I am eager to know. Could I ask you to explain?'

'Beijingers really care about their Mianzi.¹⁰ After the Qing Dynasty, the last dynasty in ancient Chinese history, which was ruled by the Man ethnic minority, the descendents of imperial Man were on the wane. But as part of the royal family, they still held their dignity even though their social status dropped down sharply after the collapse of Qing Dynasty. They still required respect from others, but as many of them had a close or far relationship with the royal family, so they showed their respect to each other mutually for they all needed this respect to gain Mianzi'.¹¹

From what Mr. Yang described, how much mianzi one person has gained is highly reliant on the other party. Also the given and taken deal should be mutually beneficial. In this case I mentioned above, the aged man gained mianzi because Mr. Yang as a younger generation showed great respect to him. And Mr. Yang gained face through behaving properly to meet the standard of Li as an indigenous Beijinger and also demonstrating to me what are good manners towards the aged generation. As the theme of the day travelling around the inner city was to show us the traditional Beijing culture physically and humanly, so what Mr. Yang said and how he behaved

⁸Li means a proper way of behaviour according to the seniority of different people. The term *Li* Mr. Yang talked about is the same as the *Li* mentioned in *Analects*, which were written by Confucius's pupils during the period 30 to 50 years after his death. The *Analects* were penned and compiled by Confucius's disciples and are meant to represent Confucius himself and his thoughts. The philosophy and moral value of China and other East Asian countries, like Japan and Korea, have been greatly influenced by *Analects*. The central idea taught in *Analects* is social and ritual propriety, which has been referred to as *Li* (礼), in both Mr. Yang's phrase and the *Analects*. This concept of *Li* functioned mainly to define what is a 'proper man'.

⁹Both Nin and Ni mean you in English, but Nin is a respectful way to speak, which the indigenous Beijingers use to refer to the senior to show the speaker's esteem for their listener.

¹⁰Known as 'face', which I explained in the previous chapter.

¹¹Mr. Yang's behaviour is exactly what Pride described: 'In the place of views that see human behaviours as very largely predictable, in terms of "rights and duties" associated with conventionally given status positions, there is the alternative that recognizes the crucial function of transactions between people, mediating between considerations of "valued" on one hand and institutionalized society on the other. Participants in any interaction enter reciprocally into "transactional bargains", in which they seek to match (by selectively expressing and playing down. Goffman calls this process "impression management") their respective statuses, such that for each participant "the valued gained... is greater or equal to the value lost"' (Pride 1971: 95). Who should play which role is decided by their status; Pride adds: "Their statuses should form the basis for their interaction" (Pride 1971: 96).

was highly in line with the positive aspect of so-called Beijing Culture. Mr. Yang's role status, at that moment, required of him to behave in this way.

When we finished travelling and went back home, Grandmother Chen¹² a 73-year-old lady living adjacent to our courtyard was standing under the tree opposite her courtyard. Mr. Yang started to greet to her while walking with his bicycle: 'Cool outside, isn't it?'

'Yes, it is too hot inside. Where are you back from?' Grandmother Chen asked.

'Zhao Jie and Qingqing wanted to have a look at a traditional Beijing view. So I took them to go around the Forbidden City, Houhai, Xidamochang hutong, Prince Gong's Mansion, Jingshan Mountain Park and some other places. We've just got back now'.

'That's wonderful'.

'It is indeed. You (here he used the respectful expression Nin) enjoy the cool outside. We have to go in and have a rest', Mr. Yang pointed to his house.

'Ok, you must feel tired. I will talk to you later', Grandmother Chen said.

'See you later', Mr. Yang waved his hand and replied.

During this short conversation, Mr. Yang used the respectful form once only which is Nin, and as I mentioned before, this phrase is also habitually used within the same generation amongst the indigenous Beijingers. What was noticeably obvious is that Mr. Yang did not use the body language he used to that aged man we met on the way when bowing to Grandmother Chen even though they were about the same age.

I spoke out my confusion to Mr. Yang about why he didn't bow to Grandmother Chen. He seemingly noticed that I realised the contradiction between what he told me and what he did to Grandmother Chen. He explained to me: 'Aww, yes because we are very close neighbours. So it is not necessary to perform in such a respectful way. That would be "ju li", which means etiquette observed with excessive strictness, and it is not necessary. For that gentleman, he is senior to me and also I haven't seen him for a long time. That is why I used the most respectful way to greet him'.

Besides this reason Mr. Yang used to explain himself, I suppose there is another reason which he didn't mention or maybe he didn't even realise: that he felt he finished his obligation to demonstrate the whole indigenous Beijing culture. It was time for him to take a breath. He would not be judged on whether his behaviour met the standard of a Beijinger, or at least not by my mother and me. Thus there was no need for him to follow Li so strictly anymore. But this is only a guess on my part. Because what Mr. Yang explained is also convincing. Once a person gets into an atmosphere which he is much more familiar with, for instance, his home, the language he uses to communicate will be less formal and more relaxed; which means the familiar scene weakens the function of the behavioural rule. This is partly due to the physical space, but also the abstract and social space—such as the person spoken to—will also have a great influence on the way people talk within a certain

¹²This is how I called her. Actually I don't know what her real name is, as asking someone's name, who is much older than me, is very impolite and is an offence. She is about in my grandparents' age group, and it is a polite way to address her by using the grandmother title instead of their name.

environment. When Mr. Yang talked to Xiaojun, our neighbour who always came and joined us for lunch or dinner at the weekend, Mr. Yang behaved less respectfully towards him than to my mother when we were having a meal together, even though the circumstances were commensurate.

6.2 Dinner with Two Families: Hotpot

One day, we were about to have hotpot at Mr. Yang's place. There were plenty of preparations to do, and each of us was in charge of a certain part under Mr. Yang's supervision. Sun Hong who was living next to the courtyard where Mr. Yang and I stayed, had the duty of washing and cleaning the prawns and vegetables; my mother was in charge of the cold dishes; Xiaojun, Sun Hong's husband, was responsible for cooking the hot dishes; Mr. Yang and his wife were preparing the base and dip for the hotpot. Kids, including me, were setting the table. During the whole process, Mr. Yang was the busiest person, because he was there to coordinate everything, and also as we were cooking in his place, he was the only person who knew where to find what we needed, like containers, seasonings and cutlery.

When my mother finished one dish and asked Mr. Yang where she could find the plates to hold the cooked food, Mr. Yang went to the cupboard and took them for my mother, then asked: 'are those ones ok for you? (he used the respect term *Nin*)'. He just got accustomed to using the respectful form '*Nin*' habitually to my mother. Simultaneously he behaved in a respectful way as he brought what my mother asked for to her and asked if it was what she needed. Contrariwise, I noticed that when Xiaojun asked for a big container to put the washed vegetables in, Mr. Yang told him: 'it is under the cupboard. There is a big transparent bowl. You can use that one'. Then Xiaojun went to take it by himself.

One way to read Mr. Yang's behaviour is that he knew my mother was older than anyone else in the room. So he felt he had the obligation to treat my mother with esteem by giving my mother a respectful reply. Even in the same physical space, it seemed my mother, as an elder, created a surrounding that enforced him to behave with proper respect. Even when he was talking to Xiaojun in causal words while my mother was still present, he could shift very quickly from one language style to the completely opposite way. For instance, during the time we had hotpot, Mr. Yang complained to Xiaojun about the grocery prices going up sharply¹³: 'The price of vegetables is fucking expensive recently. This is so ridiculous'.

¹³The reason Mr. Yang talked to Xiaojun instead of his wife is that Xiaojun and Mr. Yang are the ones who go to the market and buy everything the family needs, so they are more sensitive to price issues. Both Xiaojun and Mr. Yang have been laid out of work and stay at home doing housework.

‘Who can disagree? Damn it. The cucumber is two kuai¹⁴ per jin.¹⁵ Nearly twice as expensive compared with before’, Xiaojun replied with agreement.

‘You know how much the fucking pork is per Jin? 15 kuai! Holy crap!’ Mr. Yang added one more example with an unpleasant face.

My mother, who also bought everyday food supplies from the same market they went to, nodded her head and agreed: ‘Yes, the price has increased substantially in recent days, probably because the bad weather makes difficulties shipping this stuff here’.

‘Zhao Jie you (Nin) please have more food. Don’t put your chopstick down’. Here Mr. Yang spoke to my mother with a nice smile on his face and shifted his language style from a vulgar one to a respectful one within a few seconds.

Mr. Yang was a person influenced by Li deeply from his parents, aware and knowing well how he should behave properly under different circumstances. When the physical space stayed the same while the social space changed, as he was talking to different people, he adjusted his language style quickly and properly to match the expectations of Li. He himself didn’t even realise the significant difference between these two language styles, but as a listener I found he seemed like an unreal person in this circumstance by shifting his language so quickly from one style to another which was completely on the opposite side.

Another way to interpret why Mr. Yang treated my mother and Xiaojun in a different way is similar to the reason that he had used to explain why he behaved differently towards Grandmother Chen and the aged gentleman we met at Houhai, which is ‘the more familiar, the less one restricts oneself to Li’. This sounds quite reasonable in this instance, as Mr. Yang has known Xiaojun longer than he has known us. But after a few days, what Mr. Yang told my mother and me about his view on Xiaojun completely changed my mind.

6.3 TV Time with Xiaojun

Close neighbours like to share food with one another. If one cooks something delicious or special, we will bring it to our closest neighbours to let them have a try. After I had moved in for a week, I became more and more familiar with Mr. Yang’s family, but had not yet established a close relationship. In order to promote our understanding of each other and build up intimacy, Mr. Yang brought me stewed beef initially. As a way to say thank you, we cooked steamed chicken for him and his family. This dish exchange happened quite often until we left. One day, he shared with us the ribbonfish he cooked which was really tasty. The next day, my mother and I used the plates that Mr. Yang had used to present the ribbonfish to

¹⁴ Kuai is the oral form of Chinese yuan which is the basic unit of Chinese RMB. 1 kuai equals around 10p.

¹⁵ Jin is the measurement standard of all the weighed products in the market, such as loose vegetables, meat and fruit.

bring him a lotus root¹⁶ dish. As always, Mr. Yang treated us with great hospitality. He brought out his teapot and made us green tea, and he also took out sweets and sunflower seeds, which are common snacks in Chinese everyday life. My mother and I said to him: 'We will not stay long. Please don't take the trouble to treat us. We can just sit and talk for a short while. If you are always so intense, we will not dare to come over next time'.

Mr. Yang laughed and said: 'this is not complicated at all. It is my great honour to have you visit my place. To keep you continually coming to visit us, I should treat you very well. Otherwise you won't come next time. (chuckling) Please take a seat anywhere you like'.

'You must be kidding. How could we come here without paying a visit to you', I said.

'No, this is not kidding. It is my responsibility to offer a proper reception. (Laughing) Qingqing has now started to teach Yaoyao English lessons, right?' Mr. Yang asked about my English teaching to Yaoyao, who is Xiaojun's daughter. And this teaching work was introduced by Mr. Yang's wife.

'Yes, we have already started since two weeks ago', I said.

'How is she getting on? Her parents really input a lot to improve her study results you know'.

'I feel that she hasn't laid a solid foundation for English study. There are some basic things that she should have learnt before. But she doesn't know, for example some simple and basic grammar', I explained.

'Poor foundation. Her dad brought her to many after-school training courses, but it seems they haven't worked on her well. To avoid disturbing her study, the couple has given up watching TV at night. Sun Hong stays at home to read newspapers to give Yaoyao company while she is studying. Xiaojun goes out and stays here in my place almost every night until eleven o'clock when Yaoyao is about to finish her homework, because they can't talk at home which is quite boring', Mr. Yang explained.

After hearing that, my mother seemed to understand something and said, 'Oh, I see that is why Xiaojun comes to your house every night'.

'Who can deny it? I will tell you secretly. He stays here at least three and half hours, and will come back to his home at about eleven, sometimes even later', Mr. Yang said discontentedly, 'He migrated with his parents from Hebei province. He is not born here, so he doesn't know the Li of Beijing. Here is another example: he slept on the sofa here and held the TV remote control for a very long time. He didn't even realise that he was not at his house, that he was in another's place. I don't know what to say. He is really badly behaved. In all, he has no knowledge about Li. Sometimes we all feel very sleepy and want to go to bed, but he is still hanging round here. My wife and son need to get up early to work next morning, so they need to go to bed early. I don't know what to do with him. If this happened once or twice, that would be fine. But this is continuing to happen every day. I can't drive

¹⁶Lotus root is a popular vegetable in both north and west China.

away him by saying, “It is late for us to go to bed”, otherwise he will feel offended, and we cannot be friends anymore. But really he should realise that he is not in his place, he is in another’s *Fu Shang*.¹⁷ Mr. Yang spoke with a complaining tone.

I didn’t know what to reply to him or how to judge Xiaojun. It seemed all I could say was ‘oh, I see’.

What he told me completely changed my view on the relationship between Mr. Yang and Xiaojun. From the story he told me, I got to know the negative effect that is caused by inconsistency and discord of language and space. The verbal and non-verbal language Xiaojun used in Mr. Yang’s place is inappropriate and against the spirit of space when it is full of the sense of Li tradition. At this stage, I realised that I had underestimated the function of Li amongst this acquaintance society. In Mr. Yang’s opinion, even though they were very familiar with each other, even though they were very close friends, courtesy of Li shouldn’t be discarded.

When this conflict took place, Mr. Yang felt rather uncomfortable. He felt Xiaojun’s behaviour was improper to the physical space, quite beside the fact that Xiaojun also came to Mr. Yang’s place anytime he wanted without warning them beforehand and thus showing no respect for the physical space Mr. Yang owned. What’s more, Xiaojun’s behaviour was considered to be disrespectful to the abstract and social space as well. Because he felt Xiaojun shouldn’t take his place freely as if he was in his own place, which is against the rule of interaction within this domestic sphere. The way he controlled the remote controller of the TV and his attitude towards other physical objects showed that Xiaojun did not notice or did not want to notice the very late time which meant he should go back to his home; what’s more, Xiaojun took all the stuff belonging to Mr. Yang under his control without asking for Mr. Yang’s permission. And Mr. Yang saw Xiaojun’s behaviour as an offence to his territory, and he showed this by leaving Xiaojun and staying in the extension for an alcoholic drink. Even though this situation is what Mr. Yang didn’t want to see, he still held back his emotion and didn’t point it out directly. He treated Xiaojun according to his criteria in line with Li. This concept of Li is rooted in Mr. Yang’s mind deeply and spreads into each corner of Mr. Yang’s house. The origin of Li has been generated deeply from his family tradition, which Xiaojun wasn’t aware of, conducting himself according to his own everyday behaviour.

It is not that as a migrant Xiaojun didn’t pick up Li—otherwise he would have also come over to my place and stayed as late as he wanted. It was rather that Xiaojun felt close to Mr. Yang, and so felt he didn’t need to *Ju Li* at Mr. Yang’s place. So he relaxed the rule of Li based on his own understanding of Mr. Yang’s space.

¹⁷This is a word used in ancient China referring to the home courtyard of some well-distinguished person, usually royal related, fancy and glorious. Mr. Yang’s place really shouldn’t be called *Fu*, but he used the word here to draw out to our attention that his space should be respected.

6.4 A Casual Chat with Mr. Yang: How This Li-Based Space Has Been Created

Entering Mr. Yang's family home, a sense of Li was always thoroughly effected. Linguistically, every time my mother and I went to his place, we were treated in a very respectful way. Always, he used the word Nin to refer to my mother and sometimes even he used Nin to me, which I found absolutely overwhelming. Not only the way he talked to us made me feel so, but also the way he treated us. For instance, he brought tea or snacks to us with two of his hands holding it, which is a respectful way to bring something to a person who seems honoured or aged. When we had a meal together, he always brought the freshly served dishes to my mother and me first. He also kept on bringing food to my mother and me to keep the bowl in front of us full of food. All these details composed the Li-based atmosphere in his place. It seems Mr. Yang does not merely obey the Li principle, but he has already become part of Li. This spirit of Li has embedded itself deep into Mr. Yang and he is a live carrier of Li.

According to what Mr. Yang told me, his personality and character were greatly influenced by his parents. How strictly Mr. Yang follows the teaching of Li seems highly impacted by how his parents taught him. Mr. Yang said to me: 'My parents are very traditional indigenous Beijingers, because their mind is full of the conventional Li of Beijing. So is their grandson Huzi (his son) and I also well understand the concept of Li'.

What Mr. Yang's wife told me in the following story is a good proof of how Li has influenced this family socially: when the winter came, Mr. Yang and Xiaojun's family started to bring us boiled water as they were using charcoal fire to warm up the whole house while we were using the electric radiator, because neither of us knew how to operate it. To make the energy efficiently used, most families will put a metal kettle on top of the fire to get hot water, and this hot water can be used to wash the face and feet. They normally brought us the water in the morning for us to wash in the morning. We usually returned the kettle filled with tap water. Sometimes Mr. Yang or his wife would be at home and invited me or my mother or both together to stay a while. One day, after we brought back the kettle to Mr. Yang, my mother noticed that on top of the cabinet, there were two pictures, which looked very much like Mr. Yang. So my mother and I assumed they must be Mr. Yang's parents who had died years previously. But we could not confirm this yet, so my mother asked: 'Are the gentleman and the lady in the picture there your parents?'

Mr. Yang said: 'Yes, we three have a lot in common'.

Mr. Yang's wife added: 'He (pointing to Mr. Yang) is the same as his parents, exactly the same, not just how they look but also their personal character. Always talking about the Guiju¹⁸ and liking to stick to the old rules. For instance, they wouldn't allow me to have my meal with them together on the table. I had to wait

¹⁸ Here Gui (规) means rule, ju (距) means 'square' and this is always used to symbolise regulation, rule or custom. This is a synonym to Li.

until they all finished then I could have my own. Traditionally, they consider man is superior to woman, so my parents-in-law always shielded their son in every aspect of our daily life. If he helped me to do some housework, they would be unhappy, because they assumed the kitchen is not a place for a man to step into. In my family,¹⁹ we didn't have so many rules or norms to obey, and my parents never treated me differently. That is the environment I have grown up with. So in the first few weeks I began to stay with them, I was blamed a lot because of not knowing the 'Li'. The mind of his parents was indeed Laofengjian.²⁰ I was getting better little by little. Sometimes you don't even realise you are doing wrong, but his parents gave me an unpleasant face. Life was tough at that time. But I never complained about that. Anyway, they strictly stuck to the Li'.

The above-mentioned example is a proof that even in the closest relationship, kinship is bounded under the restriction of Li. The closeness within a family will not dilute the effect of Li. Li is built upon all the other relationships in normal everyday life and has precedence over other relationships in influencing the way Beijingers behave. The way of showing respect to obey Li is by using different levels and ways of respect to different people under different circumstances. The practice of Li is not followed to the extreme as in the original teachings. It has been socialised within the hutong area. In other words, the Li-oriented behaviour will be affected by other factors such as who you are interacting with, where you are interacting with this person and who the other members of the audience are. So knowing who you are talking to, when and where you are talking at is essential, as it is the pacing factor in behaving properly. The questions of Who-When-Where compose the social space, and knowing the social space you are social within is the key to behave in line with Li, since space in the hutong is highly specialised physically and socially. It is also necessary to know how to place Li at a proper degree, as a way to show closeness with one another. There is always a risk when displacing Li. Only if you know and your partner who you are dealing with knows that you are thoroughly familiarised with Li, then you will be able to dismiss Li. Otherwise, you will be judged as not knowing Li. Mr. Yang's complaint about Xiaojun is an example. It is a well-trained skill to shift from one Li mode to another when talking to different people in the same context, as did Mr. Yang.

From the above four scenarios, we can see that the concept of Li is a major dominant factor in influencing residents' social behaviour towards others. And the power of Li descends by way of oral and behavioural imitation between generations, and it will not be discarded or diluted by the kinship, not to mention any other less intimate relationship. These series of Li-related proper behaviours are

¹⁹ Mr. Yang's wife comes from Zhejiang Province in the south part of China.

²⁰ Literally means Old Feudal. But here in everyday talk, this term doesn't refer to the format of feudal society, but refers to the thoughts that the leaders of feudal society used to control or educate the citizen which mostly have generated from Confucianism. These thoughts include patriarchalism, limits to women, filial piety, as well as the three cardinal guides (ruler guides subject, father guides son and husband guides wife) and the five constant virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity) as specified in the feudal ethical code.

what the indigenous hutong residents are proud of because they are only known, conducted and appreciated amongst them. Those who don't understand these behavioural rules are considered less civilised. Especially those who are living in hutong space and claim themselves 'Beijingers' will be looked down upon by those who know it properly.

6.5 Strict Boundaries in Between Spaces

When I moved into the high-rise apartment, I found that the space had not been specialised as it was in the courtyard. The most frequently used terms the residents used every day to refer to space classification were 'home', 'louxia' (meaning the courtyard on the ground floor) and 'waibian' (meaning outside the compound they lived in). Contrariwise to the hutong courtyard, residents living in high-rise apartments usually vaguely explain where someone or something is. They never make it detailed or explicit, like mentioning the level of a particular building or room number. If some regular conversationalists were absent, it would be discussed where he or she had gone. Others might guess he or she might be at home, but they would never come up and check whether they were really at home or not, because they wouldn't know exactly where that was. Conversation amongst neighbours never happened at someone's home in high-rise apartment, because private space like someone's home is not supposed to open to anyone outside. There is never a chance for the mode of dialogue through an open window to happen. Unlike hutong, the boundaries of spaces within high-rise apartment could never change or weaken. If they want to find someone, the normal way is to wait for the person to turn up at the communal area usually around the sofa.

While in hutong, if someone wants to find me, they will pop in directly. If I happened not to be at home, what they will do in most cases is that they will go to my next-door neighbour's place to see if I am there or not, or ask my neighbour if they know about where I am going and when I will be back approximately.

For instance, I was out one day, while Jiashuai, a 13-year-old boy living on the corner of our hutong, came across an English problem when he tried to do his homework and needed help from me. Thus, he came to my place to knock at my door. Not hearing anyone answer the door, he turned into Mr. Yang's place and asked where I went. Mr. Yang told him that I had gone out to take a shower in the public shower room about 20 minutes ago and would be back approximately in half an hour. The reason he knew I was out for a shower is that he saw me and my mother pass by his window with a shower basket in my hand, so he asked us through his window: 'Are you going out for shower?' And I said yes to him.

In the high-rise buildings, the density of the indigenous people is much less than those in the courtyard. In fact it is less than half. So in some way, they have been greatly influenced by foreign culture, for instance, the language they use in their everyday chat demonstrates the respect of private space.

6.6 Space Classification

Compared with the courtyard, then, the high-rise apartment has fewer dimensions of space classification. Generally, the space within the high-rise building compound can be divided into three levels according to the level of privacy: first, the communal area outside the building but within the compound; then, the corridor inside the building; and then, the inside of residents' houses. The most sociable place is the communal area outside the building, next is the corridor and the least sociable place is the inside of a resident's house. I was invited inside a house only twice during the whole 4 months of my stay there. As for the corridor, in very few cases, residents come across each other there, but I never saw them start a conversation in the corridor, even though it is also a part of the public communal area. This is partly because of the limited space in the corridor; if two people start to talk in the middle of the corridor, other passers-by will have trouble to pass through, and also it is very unlikely to bump into someone in the corridor. And inside someone's home, it is very rare for a conversation amongst neighbours to happen there.

In the following I will explore the language use for residents dwelling in the high-rise apartment, mainly focusing on the communal area and home inside.

6.7 The Communal Area

The first time I went into the compound, I felt, due to the body language of its occupants, that it would not be an easy job to merge socially into the group. Because on the first time I came in, residents sitting in the middle of courtyard in the compound noticed me, but unlike the hutong residents, they just didn't give me any attention, and what they did to me was lifting their eyes and then continuing focused on their talk. It seems they were used to seeing strangers coming in and out.

After many times trying to be part of this conversation group, I felt I still was not that close to them, because they never invited me to their homes and all the things we talked about were some public topics. This was my feeling after moving in for 2 weeks. One of the major reasons was that we were talking in an open public space, which means everyone who was not included in the conversation was also able to hear and see what was going on. Therefore, talking in the communal area reduced the chance of sharing any secrets or personal issues. That is to say, the physical space that the residents talked within influenced the content of their conversation and also the way they talked.

Compared to conversation with Mr. Yang's family, I witnessed less bodily contact in this communal area. Regardless of the gender issue, when Mr. Yang's wife talked to me, she touched my hands and arms much more often. Sometimes she even held my mother's hand for a minute, when she wanted to express her strong agreement or express her great thankfulness.

Once, Mr. Yang's wife was annoyed by her younger brother's wife. She came over and talked to my mother about what happened in between her mother and her brother's wife: 'Zhao Jie do you remember I mentioned before that I have a brother who is working in Australia as a cook?'

'Yes, I remember that', my mother said.

'His wife is living in the same building as my mother. The house they occupy is also my parents' house. As my brother is working abroad and not able to come back to take care of their little son, my parents help them to bring him up both financially and socially. Therefore, she is supposed to take care of my parents when they need it, as they are so close to each other. But guess what? (She indignantly patted my mother's hand) When my mother felt ill, my father came over and asked her to accompany my mother to the hospital, but she said to my dad, "Why not ask your daughter to do so: I am busy with my work"', she stopped here and sighed, then she continued: 'My father was so disappointed after hearing this. She should appreciate my parents' help giving her support to bring her son up'. (She shook my mother's hands to express her anger.)

Then my mother gave her some comfort back: 'Ahhh, that is rude. But you can try to think it in this way, that she doesn't have any blood relationship with your parents, so she would of course treat your parents in a different way from her own parents. Try to talk to your Dad and let him know that he shouldn't care too much about it, as this is bad for his health. It is worthless for your father to be hurt just because your sister-in-law shows no filial respect to your parents. That is her badness. God has an eye on what she has done'.

'I am also so angry about that. And my younger brother could not control his wife, as he is far away from where we are. And even when he comes back, he will feel he owes something to his wife and son. So he would not say anything to blame her. We can do nothing to change this situation', Mr. Yang's wife sighed again and again. And my mother tried to pat her on her shoulder many times to comfort and calm her.

This bodily touching during a conversation would never happen in the communal area in high-rise compound, as this public open space is not the right place to express strong personal emotional feelings. The typical scenarios of a conversation in the communal area are three people sitting on the sofa, or sometimes, the residents bring their own small bench to sit on in an arc shape on the ground. Each of them keeps a certain distance from one another. Most of the topics they discuss are quite mild, like the price of the food, the weather, the pension, etc.

Once, when I went downstairs in the courtyard, I tried to join a conversation concerning the heavy burden that their grandchildren's generation was carrying:

'The pressure that the children have to face now is becoming much heavier than before', Grandmother Zhang²¹ said.

Grandmother Xin agreed with what Zhang said: 'That is true, my 7-year-old grandson needs to go to English class and violin class training on the weekend,

²¹ Here, because my informants would prefer to hide their names when I need to mention them, I use alias for them.

and in the meantime, he needs to finish his homework. What a poor thing. He is so little'.

Meifang couldn't help but say: 'It is not easy to bring up a child. It is not like what we have experienced. The classes they take are much more difficult than before even in the same grade'.

Grandmother Zhang: 'Yes, the kids now are much cleverer than before. The food they eat and the education environment they are in makes them more talented. Remember when we were bearing a child many years ago, we didn't take any kind of food supplement as they do now, such as folic acid. Also different from now, we didn't have any antenatal education run for us. So compared with the past, parents now have much more input before the child is born, not to mention after its birth'.

During the whole process of conversation, they were all sitting still separately, besides the eye contact they made to each other during talking.

Burling sees this non-verbal communication as 'paralinguistic' gestures and as having 'considerable iconicity' in Chinese culture for showing degrees of intimacy (Burling 1993: 31). The more frequently the bodies touch, the more intimate the conversationalists are. Apparently, the high-rise apartment residents have lower intimacy than dwellers in hutong due to the physical space that the residents use to speak within. In the high-rise apartment, conversation is always conducted in a public open space, and anyone is allowed to join in any time. So anyone who speaks is supposed to take others into account, which means a one-to-one conversation mode cannot work in this situation. And also more private topics should be avoided under this circumstance. So the talking can't go any deeper.

I tried once to talk about something personal about myself. I mentioned then that I had a quarrel with my mother that day. I felt very uncomfortable to talk about it at the beginning, but I still kept on going to see how the members in our conversation reacted to it. Through the whole process, they all seemed not to care that much. And they gave no clear response to my story, as if they didn't want to tackle that private issue to embarrass them and me.

6.8 Inside Mrs. Li's Apartment

Unlike in the hutong courtyard, most of the conversations in the high-rise area are not carried out inside someone's house as I mentioned before. Only on a few occasions I had the chance to visit someone's house and start to talk to them. A conversation with Mrs. Li was one of those cases.

Mrs. Li as I mentioned before was our next-door neighbour, and she gave some of her furniture to us before she started to refurbish her house. After she finished the refurbishing, she went back and tidied up the house. We came across her in the corridor, and she invited my mother and me to have a look inside her 'new' house.

'Hello again, are you back from somewhere?' Mrs. Li asked my mother and me.

'Yes, I went out to buy some groceries. Have you finished your refurbishing?' My mother replied.

'Yes, everything is done. All I need to do is clean and tidy it up a bit. Would you like to have a look inside? Come on in'.

I was standing by and coming in with my mother: 'Oh this is much nicer than before, pretty much like a completely new house', my mother commented.

'Yes, it makes a tremendous difference after the refurbishment. Everything could become nicer if you spend money on it'.

'That is true', chuckling, my mother replied.

'Here, I bought this ceramic tile with a cartoon image on in the bathroom because my son loves cartoons. Here is the kitchen, and opposite it is the bathroom, exactly the same layout as your house. The problem of the house is that the living room is quite small and the shape of it looks really weird in such a narrow rectangular shape'.

'I love the curtain, very stylish', my mother said.

'Hehe, I love it too. This blue is my favourite colour. It is a man's room, so I think blue should be all right. Look at the floor tiling. It is also new. It used to be a concrete floor. After I put on the beige floor tiles, the whole room has become much brighter', Mrs. Li seemed really proud and happy with her 'new' house.

'You must have put in a lot of effort into refurbishing the whole house on your own', my mother commented.

'Yes, from moving out, to finding a constructing team, then to buying materials and doing a final clean up, I could rely on no one but myself. My son has got his work to do, so he could not come and help me', Mrs. Li looked a little bit upset.

'Aunt, we will not hold you back from your cleaning work', I said to Mrs. Li and my mother.

'That is no problem at all. I will keep on tidying it up a bit', Mrs. Li said.

'Ok, ok that is true. We should go. If you need any help, let me know. You know you are very welcome. We neighbours should try to help each other', my mother told Mrs. Li.

'There isn't much work to do now. I should be able to manage it. Don't worry', Mrs. Li replied independently.

During the whole conversation, we were all standing while talking. In between my mother and Mrs. Li, they never mentioned each other's name. They just started straightforwardly to hit the point they wanted to bring up. Moreover, since the way to call a person could indicate the closeness in between them, neither wanted to start defining how intimate they were, because they worried about being different from what the other party expected. Meanwhile, in hutong Mr. Yang together with other neighbours both aimed to develop an intimate relationship with us. So they would pick up the close and respectful way to call us. Finally, there was no body contact during the whole conversation, even inside Mrs. Li's house, another big difference from what we experienced in the hutong.

In short, there seems to have been an intangible force that influenced 'everyday performance' of the residents living in the hutong community and high-rise apartment, which is what Pride described as 'high culture' as against 'low culture'

(Pride 2004: 97). The 'high culture' emphasises distance and power relationships, formality and ritual and the 'low culture' ethnicity, spontaneity, comradeship, intimacy, etc. (Pride 2004: 97).

The distinction between 'high culture' and 'low culture' can be further developed in the context of traditional courtyards as against high-rise apartments. The potential rule of 'everyday performance' taking place within these two different forms of residential space functions as a 'high culture', which encompasses individual speakers and derives from inherited common behavioural patterns. Once we get into this space, the high culture will start to apply its influence onto us.

For instance, when I got into the high-rise compound, a distanced, independent, modern and privacy-respected high culture started influencing me. Each resident was respected as an individual and was seen as a person to accompany them to kill time. When winter comes, it is too cold to stay outside, and then the communication will cease. Even though physically, my mother and I were living close to Mrs. Li, and stayed in a similar situation as when we talked to Mr. Yang outside our own house, we still didn't use the intimate way to address each other, and we did not use bodily touch when we talked to each other. Even when we received a valued gift from Mrs. Li, which was her furniture, we still remained linguistically and bodily far from each other. This is an effect of the high culture, and this is the pattern that everyone living within this compound takes to perform everyday. And this give-and-take exchange can be seen as a low culture generated and developed between us, which is on the basis of high culture in the high-rise compound. The high culture of high rise is different to that of the hutong, which is about sharing and connecting, rather than privacy sensitive or holding to past tradition like Li; each resident is respected as an extension of their own family members. Talking to their neighbour is like a compulsory activity to validate their day. Both my mother and Mr. Yang exchanged the agreement with each other that if they didn't chat for a while, they would feel they had missed something in the day they passed.

One good way to see clearly the difference of high culture in hutong and high-rise compound is through the different versions of privacy. In the hutong, privacy could be a matter of one family, but could also involve someone who is not a member of this family, like the next-door neighbours, or even someone who is living on the other courtyard, which looks like a form of 'group privacy'. So some of the most private conversations or deep communication could happen amongst neighbours and usually takes place inside someone's place. Contrariwise, in the high-rise compound, 'private' conversation entails only one family being involved. Other interactions with neighbours mostly happen outside their own place, which is nothing to do with privacy.

The high-culture functions like a cap, and the low culture, should be performed under it. The low culture as a subdivision should be in accord with the mainstream high culture. However, the low culture itself is also full of individualised unique character. The power of high culture in both residential forms should not be challenged by low culture.

6.9 “High Culture” vs “Low Culture”

In this chapter I have attempted to discuss how physical and social spaces have different impacts on the language that residents in the hutong courtyard and the high-rise apartments use. When I say ‘language’ here, I mean the vocabulary used, the way speech is phrased, the body language used and the context they speak within.

To look at this issue from another perspective, the language that the residents use could reflect their understanding of the space. However, the language they use is restricted by the high culture of their living space, and they could only develop their own low culture on the basis of the high culture. They could also resist the high culture, but in this case they would need to balance the degree of their challenge skillfully; otherwise it will lead to contradiction.

High culture and low culture in high-rise compound are stricter, simpler and easier to find out compared with hutong community as the space within high-rise compound is very strictly bounded. Influenced by the high culture, residents in the high-rise apartment are not keen to develop an intimate relationship with their neighbours as this is against the emphasis placed by high culture on privacy. Therefore, the language residents were using to socialise was much simpler and stabler than in hutong compound, and it was easy for the new interlocutors to join in without making mistakes: because high culture is all powerful here and low culture isn’t very active. In the hutong, residents are aiming to develop a close relationship with their neighbours and also expect more from their neighbours. Therefore, to blend well into this community, you need to measure your own language not against high cultural norms but low culture and a low culture that is rich and active.

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Chapter 7

‘Soft and Hard, Bendy and Fixed, Vase and Funnel’: The Experience and Conceptualization of Living Space in the City

According to Tilley, space is a situational context constructed by and for human action, and places are ‘centres of [...] human significance and emotional attachment’ (Tilley 1994: 15). Here, space is more likely to refer to the concept of ‘physical space’ as defined by Lefebvre, while place is more like the other two modalities of space, abstract space and social space, according to Lefebvre’s definition.

Space, certainly initially, is closely related to architectural procedures, during which the first level of space, abstract, is produced. But a space before it is perceived and personalised is not yet an ‘accomplished’ space. In this chapter my main focus will rest on how residents in hutong courtyards and high-rise apartments experience and conceptualise their living space; how the abstract and social spaces build upon the physical space and influence the social behaviour amongst dwellers living within the space; and how these dwellers make great significance by attaching their emotions to the space and so make it a ‘place’ (Gray 2003: 228). I shall also return to the question of how the ‘high culture’—here referring to the collective norms that residents in hutong courtyard and high-rise apartment unconsciously obey—has power over the ‘low culture’, referring to behavioural norms generated from the high culture but personalised in many different ways, in both hutong courtyards and high-rise apartments. Finally, I examine how newcomers who first move into these communities blend themselves skillfully into the ready-built ‘high cultures’ and ‘low cultures’ and carry out their everyday life harmoniously with the surroundings.

7.1 The Bamboo Curtain on the Door

Traditionally, local residents living in the hutong like to put a curtain on their doors in both summer and winter seasons. In the winter, the curtain on the door is used to keep the house warm by preventing the warm air inside from getting out and cold air from getting in. Usually the curtain is made by a cotton cloth cover with cotton filling,

a very similar material to a duvet. The door in the courtyard is made with planks of wood traditionally, and in between each wooden plank, some small apertures cannot be avoided. In winter the cold wind blows through very easily. That is why almost all the households living in hutong courtyard put on the cotton curtain outside the door during winter time. This curtain will normally be kept hanging until March or April when late Spring arrives.

In the summer season, the hutong dwellers will also put curtains on the door, but now the curtain is made of bamboo sticks. The length of each bamboo stick is the same as the width of the door, and the width is about 2 mm. All of the sticks are pushed together and then bound by some thread. One of the great features of the bamboo curtain is, when it has been put on the door, people sitting inside can see through, but the people from outside cannot see anything inside through it. Because the summer in Beijing is very hot, the highest temperature could reach 40 C; thus, many of the households will open their doors during day time to keep cool, but there might be some flies or mosquitoes or other unexpected insects that come in from the door. So they put this bamboo curtain on to block them. The bamboo curtain is always put on the outside of the door, so the passers-by cannot tell whether the main door is open or not; thus, it is difficult to tell if the host is home or not.

My next door neighbour Mr. Yang had such a bamboo door curtain, and he put it on in the middle of May. When I saw him put it on, I came and talked to him: 'How long have you been using this bamboo curtain?'

'Wow, I can't count, it must be many years. Because the quality of bamboo curtains is very good, they will not break easily unless some man-made damage occurs. So I just wash it after use every year, and then pack it and put it aside for next year. Will you put on the bamboo curtain for this summer?' Mr. Yang asked me.

'I probably will not. Because we have two doors that open in two different directions, it is not possible to put on any curtain', I said.

'I see. The outer door should not be there. Your landlady must have got that broken door from somewhere like the recycling point and taken it back to install it. I don't see why she is doing that. The outer door was not there originally', Mr. Yang chuckled.

I told Mr. Yang my concern: 'Yes, it is almost falling down, but we cannot remove it. Otherwise, we will be charged a certain fee as a fine for damaging the facilities in the room'.

'Haha, it was already rubbish before you moved in', Mr. Yang could not help laughing aloud.

'It is true, my mother also doesn't like it because it makes the house look really shabby'.

'Exactly. It is good if you can put on the bamboo curtain. We use it every summer and spring. It makes the room cool. Very nice indeed. And will prevent the bugs coming inside when you open the door', Mr. Yang listed the benefits of having a bamboo curtain.

Interestingly, Mr. Yang didn't mention another function of the bamboo curtain, which is protecting privacy. What Mr. Yang was always trying to do is to show the intimacy of our two households. For instance, Mr. Yang said, 'My home is your home. If you are hungry and don't want to bother cooking, just come to my place'.

Mentioning the protection of privacy in this context, implying he had something he didn't want to show other people including me, would, to Mr. Yang's logic, widen the distance between us. That is why he avoided mentioning this.

Twelve days after he installed the bamboo curtain on the door, my aunt came to visit us and brought us some daily groceries. In the beginning, my aunt had a problem finding where we lived, because when we gave her our postal address for her to find us, the most detailed information was the Courtyard Number.¹ Therefore when she arrived at the No. 7 X East street, she needed to find which house we were in by phone. Later after my aunt left; Mr. Yang met us in the courtyard and asked: 'Zhao Jie you had a guest visiting you, right?'

My mother replied: 'Yes, Qingqing's aunt came to visit us and brought us something she thought we might need'.

Mr. Yang nodded his head and said: 'Oh, oh, I see. I heard someone was speaking in a Beijing accent, which didn't sound like anyone living in this area, so I looked from inside and saw her stopped in front of your house. So I guessed she must be your guest'.

My mother replied to him with a smile: 'You are right!'

Mr. Yang continued, saying: 'How nice she is. She looks like a very kind person (It seemed Mr. Yang had already observed and judged my aunt back from his curtain when she passed by his door in a few seconds). Your aunt must be working in a governmental cadre from the way she dressed. Is that right?'

'Good guess. She is', I said to Mr. Yang.

Mr. Yang never avoided telling us his observations, because he didn't feel it was an offence to our privacy, just as he was always willing to tell us who came or would come to visit him and why he had been visited. It is the way he lived. He considered being visited by someone meant he was needed or welcomed by others, which helped him to gain face.

When our conversation finished, I assumed it was through the window that Mr. Yang saw and observed everything which happened outside his house. But I was wrong. One day, I went to Mr. Yang's place and returned a book he lent to me, which was about the Beijing traditional culture. He asked me to stay for a chat. When I was about to leave and standing next to the door, I suddenly noticed that I could see through the bamboo curtain. Everything outside could be clearly seen. I could not help but talk to Mr. Yang about this:

'Through the bamboo curtain, you can see outside very well. That is amazing', I said.

'Yes it is like that. We can see clearly outside, but nothing can be seen from outside. This is one of the features of bamboo curtains'.

¹The postal address in our courtyard didn't indicate the house number, because we didn't have a house number. All the letters coming to our courtyard will be put on Mr. Yang's outside window, and then he will deliver the letters to the target house, as we all know each other very well. There were one or two times when some letters from the UK which were written in English arrived and were put outside Mr. Yang's window. Later when I came back, Mr. Yang took these letters to me and asked if these letters were for me, because he guessed no one would have any overseas contact other than me.

This feature of the bamboo sheet reminds me of what Michel Foucault wrote about the 'panopticon':

Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an angular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly, to recognise immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions—to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide—it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protects. Visibility is a trap (Foucault 1991: 200).

Hence, the major effect of the Panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power (Foucault 1991: 201). Living inside hutong also made me feel the existence of this power that Foucault described, the power of being constantly supervised.

One day, Yaoyao had finished her English test and got a good mark after taking a few English lessons from me. Her dad Xiaojun went into our courtyard to bring us the hot water, so I got the chance to ask him: 'How was Yaoyao's English test? Did she get a good result?'

Xiaojun seemingly could not wait to tell me: 'Haha, let me tell you. On the day she got the exam paper, she went back home and put the paper on the table in a very confident way. Then I went to the table and had a look at her paper. Then I found a very striking red mark on top of the paper. Guess what, she got 93²! So far, it is the highest mark she has ever got in English'.

'Well done to her! She has made very good progress'. This conversation happened inside our courtyard, in the public area.

Xiaojun continued: 'The problem is that Yaoyao is very prone to getting too proud of herself: she stops going once she makes some progress. So you really need to spur her on, and make her keep on going'.

'I will try my best to help her. Don't worry', I said.

'I know you have tried your best. I am very grateful for what you have done for her. No matter what the final result is, I appreciate your kindness. Laziness is human nature. She is still young and it is difficult for her to get rid of it', Xiaojun kept on telling me.

'It is true. Everyone needs stimulation, even adults like me. You should not push her too much', I replied.

²The top mark is 150 and usually the mark she got was around 70. That is why her father was very happy with the result.

Xiaojun continued: ‘There have been a few times when I even cried because of her laziness in studying. I told her that I gave up my job and stayed at home especially for her, because I wanted to take proper care of her. Her grandmother is really unhappy about this, because the man is supposed to work outside and bring money back to maintain the family. I was saying this while crying and she probably was scared to cry, and said to me: “Dad, I will study hard from now on I promise”. Then she will work hard for a few weeks. Ok, I will need to go back home now and have a look at the food cooking on the stove. I will be back soon’.

‘Sure, of course. Talk to you later’, I said.

After about 15 minutes, Xiaojun came back with a cheeky smile on his face: ‘Guess what’, he came closer to me and said, ‘Yaoyao stood on the duvet to reach the window and listened to what we talked about, because our bed is under the window, and every morning I fold up the duvet and put it along the wall in which our window is inlaid. When I came back home, I found the folded duvet was collapsed which is a clear sign that she stood on it to reach the top of the window’.

What Yaoyao did was very similar to her being in the centre of a panopticon. We were all under her surveillance, and she could always catch us any time she wanted.

However, distinct to the Panopticon as described by Foucault, the central tower of the Panopticon can be multiplied in a hutong courtyard. In the mode Foucault described, there is only one central tower, but in the situation I was facing in hutong, it is a multi-centred panopticon. This time, it was Yaoyao’s home that formed the central tower. Xiaojun and I were the ‘cells’. There could also be some other residents in hutong listening to my conversation with Xiaojun that I hadn’t noticed, which means there potentially were other centres at the same time. That is to say, the central tower of the panopticon under the circumstances of hutong can be diverted from time to time on different occasions. The Panopticon Foucault described is a one-way communication since the people sitting in the central tower always have the advantage of knowing more about people living in the cell. The situation here is that in the hutong courtyard, anyone has the chance to become the central tower if they want, and this fluctuating centre makes two-way communication possible and normal.

Liangliang is a 15-year-old boy who knows well how to take advantage of the Panopticon mode in the hutong. He lives at the end of the courtyard. One day, Liangliang came out from his room and started to read English aloud in the courtyard on a Saturday morning. I heard his English reading when I stayed inside my room and thought what a hard-working boy he was, but I didn’t get out and respond to him. Later I heard his voice was much louder, and it seemed the voice was just outside my window. Then my mother said to me: ‘Maybe he wants you to give him some comments about his English. What he has done is to catch your eye’. Then I came outside to talk to him in English: ‘Hello. I found your English is really good’.

Then amazingly he started singing an English song, which made me burst out laughing. Then he started to talk to me: ‘Could you help me to correct my English? I would really appreciate it’.

I said to him: ‘It is my pleasure. I will happily help you’.

Clearly knowing this potential outcome and aware of my location ‘at the centre’, and aware too that I was more sensitive than others to English (actually no one in

our courtyard could understand English except me), Liangliang spoke English out loud and hoped to catch my attention. By doing this, he successfully kicked off our communication and got my help which is what he expected. So this is opposite to Foucault: here individuals can use the 'panopticon' effect to further their own plans.

The designer of a courtyard uses different ways to divide the space, for instance, building up the walls or doors. Likewise, the dwellers that move in later can put curtains on the windows and doors. Or again, some dwellers like to paste stickers on the windows to stop passers-by seeing through. All of these efforts are to try to protect the privacy of each household. But according to what I have noticed, all these efforts are in vain, because setting up a physical boundary in between private and public doesn't really stop the communication in between these two territories. It is true that these physical boundaries set apart the dwellers of each house. What they do inside the house is not known or seen by others. Compared with people standing outside their house, still, it seems obvious that in most cases the dwellers inside the house are in a dominant position, having more privacy than outside. Inside, dwellers can look through their window any time to observe what is happening outside their room, without being noticed, because they are hiding behind their 'bamboo curtain' which allows them to observe others without being noticed. So it is inevitable that people hiding in their room own relatively greater private spaces than people outside.

In other words, this can be seen as an asymmetric communication of information. But to look at it in another dimension, we will find these protections are invalid, because one's priority is always given by the other. If one is in a superior position, then there must be someone standing in an inferior position. Everyone equally has the chance to become the centre. Even though sound can't be stopped as effectively as sight, people inside their own rooms can always control the sound they make, as they know well that sound will go through the physical barriers.

Back to the example of my aunt's visit: Mr. Yang was standing in an advantageous position when he observed everything that happened outside. What kind of person came to visit us and how the person dressed, those things could be seen as our own privacy. But Mr. Yang got to know these even before us, as his house was closer to the entrance, and he noticed someone was coming in before we did. The cost of this advantageous position was paid for by me and the loss of my own privacy, even though I was staying inside my room which is supposed to be a private place. Maybe location is not sufficient to guarantee privacy.

7.2 A Transparent Community

Generally speaking, the space inside the hutong can be divided into two: public and private. No individual's life can be separated from the public area. This fact somehow weakens the function of these physical separations, as sight is stopped but not sound. But on the other hand, it is the way that the hutong and courtyard have been designed.

Everyone has to pass the hutong, when they want to go home, but they also cannot avoid passing the aisle where the rooms of residents are located, in the courtyard which leads to their own houses. Some of Mr. Yang's privacy could be noticed easily by us when it was exposed in the public space. For example, who was coming to visit him, how these visitors sounded, etc. Maybe knowing your neighbour has a visitor coming and learning how the visitor dressed and spoke, even what gift the visitor brought, all of these can't really be counted as something private, but there are some things that we don't really want others to see, even if they happen in the public area.

3 October 2009 was a traditional Chinese festival, Mid-Autumn Day, when most families will try to gather together on that day when the moon is nearest to a perfect sphere, which is seen as a symbol of reunion.³ Mid-Autumn Day is also a public holiday for the employee to go back home to reunite with relatives and gather together as a big family. As a tradition, everyone will have the traditional cake called moon cake on Mid-Autumn Day after dinner while enjoying the bright round moon, if it is not a cloudy evening. Knowing that my mother and I would go back to my hometown before Mid-Autumn Day, Mr. Yang went out in the early morning to the best local bakery shop called Dao Xiang Cun and bought us a box of moon cakes. When I was doing the yard cleaning, I saw him parking his bicycle outside the courtyard and carrying a box of moon cakes in his hand. Then I heard Xiaojun talking to Mr. Yang: 'Brother Yang, are you going out in the early morning?'

'Yes, I went out early', Mr. Yang gave a very short reply. It seemed he wanted to finish this conversation quickly and didn't want to continue any more. But Xiaojun seemed not realise that and kept on asking: 'Oh, you went to Dao Xiang Cun to buy the moon cake. It must be really delicious'.

'Oh, yes. You go on with what you are busy with. I will talk to you later'.

After saying that, Mr. Yang went into our yard without giving a chance to Xiaojun to say anything. Seeing I was doing the cleaning, I called him: 'Uncle Yang'. Instead of stopping and talking to me for a long while as before, he didn't even stop his walk to say a very quick 'Yes', as a response to my greeting. I wondered why Mr. Yang would mind if others saw him buy a moon cake box. And later in the afternoon, I found the answer, when Mr. Yang knocked at our door with that box of moon cake which he was carrying in his hand:

'Zhao Jie Qingqing are you in now?' I heard Mr. Yang's voice while my mother and I were having our noontime nap.

'Oh yes, wait a minute', My mother responded, 'We are having a nap. Just a moment'. Then we got up, tidied the bed and opened the door to let Mr. Yang come in. Mr. Yang began with a smile and said: 'You were sleeping. I am sorry to wake you up'.

'Don't worry, we were awake already and just lying on the bed. It is ok', I said.

'Hmmm, the Mid-Autumn Day is coming. I heard from my wife that you and Qingqing will go back to Taiyuan to enjoy a reunion with Qingqing's father and other family members. It is a shame that we cannot celebrate this festival with you.

³The word reunion in Chinese is 团圆 which sounds like Tuan Yuan. The character Yuan is the same pronunciation as round.

We will miss you. Here is a box of moon cakes for you and Qingqing's father. Please take my best wishes to him. It will be our great pleasure to meet him, if he has any chance to come to Beijing'. After saying this, Mr. Yang put the moon cake box in front of us.

'Oh you don't have to do that! Please take it back. You can give it to your other relatives... If you insist on leaving it with us, then I will have to take it as a sign that you treat us as acquaintances only',⁴ my mother fought not to accept Mr. Yang's gift.⁵

On his part, Mr. Yang was equally sure that he wanted to leave this special gift for us, so the two of them held the bag between them and pushed it back and forth. This lasted for about one and half minutes, because Mr. Yang was so firm to stick to his opinion and also he said: 'Stop doing this, it is not good to let other neighbours hear us'. So we finally kept the moon cake box with reluctance and put it in the cabinet.

I could understand why Mr. Yang didn't want Xiaojun to know what happened between us, because if he gave us a gift without preparing one for Xiaojun, then Xiaojun must feel that Mr. Yang treated us better than he treated them. This unbalanced feeling is not good for maintaining a neighbourhood relationship. Actually, it is not the case that Mr. Yang treated us better than his long-term neighbour, but rather, Mr. Yang treated Xiaojun and us in different ways at different times. When I got back from Mid-Autumn Day, Mr. Yang told us that Xiaojun brought a box of moon cakes to him and he also got some wine for Xiaojun's family. This is a gift exchange ritual between them.

Next day in the morning, Xiaojun came to our place to drop off Yaoyao's textbook that I had asked for to have a look at 3 days before. Then he saw the big moon cake box through the glass of the cabinet, because I saw him rest his eyes on it. I was sure he recognised it because he had seen it yesterday when Mr. Yang brought it back, and he had asked Mr. Yang about it, but Xiaojun didn't bring everything out into the open.

Even though Xiaojun was not present when the gift giving-and-taking process took place, he still had enough fragments for him to imagine what happened between Mr. Yang and us. It doesn't matter if the whole process happened inside or outside: Mr. Yang didn't want Xiaojun to know this story at all and tried his best to cover it up by not revealing anything to Xiaojun. Nevertheless, there was a way for Xiaojun to figure out what was going on. During the time I stayed in the courtyard, Mr. Yang and Xiaojun's families were the two most hospitable ones to us. It seems after knowing we received a gift from Mr. Yang, Xiaojun felt he had been left behind by Mr. Yang and there was a competition going on secretly.

⁴This term equally conveys the meaning of distance, unfamiliarity and strangeness, which is not a good sign for developing a good neighbourhood relationship.

⁵Instead of saying 'thank you' or 'it is really kind of you' and keeping the gift, Chinese people like to refuse the gift as a way of saying 'that's too generous of you'. It is not proper to accept everything people offer to you easily. You should perform this fighting of giving and taking struggle for a while. Eventually it is odd to take the gift back. So even though everyone knows the final result, the two parties will still need to perform this 'fighting'.

That night, Xiaojun's wife came to our place with a box of moon cakes and a bottle of wine. She came to my mother and said: 'Dajie (means elder sister, referring to my mother), this is for you and Dage (means elder brother, referring to my father). I know you will go back home on Mid-Autumn Day, this is our little gift for you all. The moon cake is baked by the restaurant which used to cook for the Emperor's family. While the white wine is a very traditional Beijing alcohol named Jing Wine.⁶ This is for Dage'.

When my mother tried to refuse Sun Hong's gifts in a similar way as when she dealt with Mr. Yang, Sun Hong put her index finger on her mouth and said: 'Be quiet, otherwise we will be heard which is not good'. Gifts are always delivered secretly, ideally only known by the sender and receiver.

When we saw Sun Hong off, my mother said: 'Mind the stair and thank you very much for this lovely gift'. Sun Hong waved her hands as a sign to say: 'You go back home'. But she didn't say anything verbally, as if she didn't want others to know that she had come. In fact, when we stood outside and saw off Sun Hong I looked into Mr. Yang's window, and I found that he was standing right beside the window with his back facing the outside to avoid eye contact, because he knew it would cause embarrassment.

To look at this in another way, both Mr. Yang and Xiaojun knew when and what we received as gifts even though we just stayed in our own territory surrounded by the wall, door and windows. Also, as gift senders, they also knew when and what the other party had brought to us. Therefore, information is completely transparent between neighbours and across the courtyard. So these physical items setting up the boundaries within the area we live in just make the physical space divided, but not virtually separate, and they protect one's own personal life well from others. But even though everyone knew the reality, they still wished to keep up the pretence and the hope of secrecy to show their reluctance of letting others know this, as if they don't want to cause offence to other neighbours. It is like when three people are together, and one gives another a gift in front of the third person and actively shows the second person how nice the gift is. It will be an offence to the third.

7.3 How Residents Individualise the Public Space

As described in the previous section, public space is a very important area, which allows the residents to communicate efficiently and effectively. We can see how they perceive these public areas by observing how they make use of public areas. But also of significance are the *views* of the residents towards these public areas.

On the side of the courtyard opposite each house, there are small rooms with a roof and a door. These are normally used as kitchens or storage rooms for the residents living in the main house. Those rooms were not there originally, but were built by the residents themselves. These sheds are of similar length to the main room,

⁶Jing is abbreviation of Beijing.

because no one was supposed to build their sheds across the boundary. In between the shed and their main room, there is the pavement, but the residents need to go across the pavement to get to their own kitchen. So this process has personalised the public area a bit, because normally the way from the main room to the kitchen belongs to the person who owns the house.

If I take my closest neighbour Mr. Yang as an example and see what he has put in the public area, we will be able to see how he has personalised the public area and made it an extension of his own home. Beside the window of Mr. Yang's living room, he put a dishwashing sponge, aloe plant, shoe brush, pencil, soap and shoes, and on the opposite side of his main room was his kitchen. Outside the kitchen there is a little shed, and that is where he puts his bed pan in the day time. In the kitchen entrance area, he puts the coal supply he needs in the winter, and in the summer he leaves his or his wife's bicycle there. Also, in between his kitchen and main room, he sets up two poles that go across the two roofs to hang the washed clothes, which I sometimes borrowed. He hangs everything on the two poles after washing including the undergarments, no matter if they are new or old. Those clothes are always located above people's heads when they pass by. In the beginning I felt awkward to pass my way under someone's underwear, but later I realised that nobody minded that. I gradually got used to this and didn't even look up when I passed by. What Mr. Yang has done is to personalise and privatise the public area around his living area.

It was not only Mr. Yang, but all the other neighbours in the courtyard I lived with who did similar things. For instance, Liangliang's grandmother floored the area around her house with a better quality tile to make it neater. Every time I stepped on it, I had a strong feeling that I was standing on her territory. I should mind my behaviour as long as I stood in front of her room.

It seems both Mr. Yang and Liangliang's grandmother clearly defined their own territory or physical space by putting private items in the public area or by decorating the public area in their own way so making it more like his or her own private space and stopping others from violating it. What I mean by 'violate' doesn't refer to occupying the physical space, but revolves around the second and third levels of space, which are abstract space and social space. Once the passer-by goes through a certain area belonging to a certain household, the passer-by could feel the spirit of the owner, including their attitude towards others, the way they carry out their life or the way they expect to communicate with the guests. For instance, Mr. Yang always keeps his door open even in the winter. His house is sitting next to the entrance of the courtyard, and he is in the role of coordinating within the whole yard; thus he feels he has the obligation to monitor what is going on in the courtyard. What really annoys him is when someone is shouting or speaking loudly outside his window, because he will be easily disturbed even if the person is not stepping inside his room, but just in the public area outside.

From the previous two sections, we can clearly see that the physical living space was well separated when it was first built. Later, the residents tried to separate the communal physical space by individualising it around their living area, which could be defined as an intermediate region. But if we take a look at the social space, we can see it is skillfully connected together (by application of the multi-centred

panopticon mode of behaviour). To sum up, we can see the physical space has been humanly separated, while the social space has been integrated together well as a way to enhance the central position of each household. Those intermediate regions which have been humanly built serve as a buffer zone perfectly to protect the residents' own rights who are dwelling right in the centre. Do the hutong dwellers *need* to protect their privacy in the public area? The answer is yes and no. The reason for 'yes' is what I have stated above: overexposing the private aspects of one's life might dilute the intimacy amongst neighbours on some occasions. For instance, when Mr. Yang treated us separately and he didn't want others to see, especially because he didn't want others feel that they were excluded. Regarding the answer 'no', it is the case that there are indeed some occasions that I would define as private but in which people seem not to mind publicity at all, for instance, Mr. Yang drying his underclothes in the public area.

There is no such explicit rule to define what aspects of private life may be exposed to public gaze, but the local residents know how to use the public area well enough to balance the exposure of privacy to the public as a way to build up intimacy. It seems there is a set of potential techniques which residents living in hutong employ in order to build up intimacy by skillfully displaying their private lives in public.

John Gray wrote: 'Dwelling refers to the creation of meaningful places that together form a surrounding world (Um-Welt)' (Gray 2003: 232). One of the ways that the hutong dwellers try to create meaningful places for their everyday life is through personalising the public space surrounding their house by displaying something private, as if the physical space were transparent.

7.4 Stretchable Space

'Ok, now you tell me how to spell the word delicious', I said to Yaoyao, a fifteen-year-old girl.

'Let me think about it. Hmm, is it d-i-l-i-c-e-r-s? No I must be wrong. Let me try to write it on the paper and see', Yaoyao replied to me.

This conversation took place at Yaoyao's home when I taught her English, with her mother present.

'Oh, it must be d-e-l-i-c-e-r-s', Yaoyao had another idea.

After hearing what Yaoyao said, her mother said to her: 'Yaoyao, don't guess. You should take it seriously. This is something you cannot guess. You should think about it carefully then speak it out'.

'I know. Be quiet. Don't speak to me, otherwise, I cannot think', Yaoyao replied to her mother impatiently.

To break this awkward situation, I said 'It is ok. Take your time and think it over'.

After a few seconds, Yaoyao spelled out the word correctly in her notebook.

'Well done. It is a difficult word isn't it?' I congratulated her.

'I remembered it well today at school, but I don't know why, I suddenly forgot it', Yaoyao said.

'Yaoyao, be good. Your sister (refers to me) is teaching you seriously. Don't frustrate your sister. It is not easy for your sister to find time to teach you. You should know how precious it is. I will go to Dama's place and bring her some hot water', Yaoyao's mother exhorted her.⁷

'I know, I know. Don't annoy me!' Yaoyao seemingly could not stand her mother.

After her mother left, she drew a deep sigh. I could not help laughing and asked: 'Relieved?'

'Of course', she said with a smile on her face.

This was the first time in my teaching her English that her parents had not been present. After a short while, she lifted her feet up onto the desk, now feeling very relaxed. Similar to the previous occasion, I asked her the spelling of a word: 'How do you spell "Wednesday"?'.

She said to me, 'That is a difficult question. What do you think?' I knew she was trying to tease me by asking back. It was also not an offence to me, because she was very close to me. That was why she felt relaxed. But I didn't see this was a good atmosphere for her study, so I tried to adjust the social space we built up by saying: 'Do you think I need to ask you, if I know?' She laughed when she heard this.

'Ok, kidding time is up. Let's get back to study', I said to her in a serious way. After this, she kept on breaking this dreary atmosphere many times, but I tried to pull her back every time to maintain the right social space for a better outcome of her English study.

This is in great contrast to my first meeting with Yaoyao. Before we started the lessons, I had a brief meeting with her to get to know her in order to work out a good plan to help her with her English. We met at my place, and she did not dare to come over by herself. So her mother brought her here and left her and me alone. I began our conversation by asking her name. She then told me: 'My name is Li Yanyao'. When she talked to me, she didn't even look at me. Instead, she looked straight ahead, seemingly too shy to look at me. Then later, I asked her: 'How do you find learning English?' She told me slowly: 'I don't like it. We have a really bad English teacher. Sometimes she doesn't realise she is teaching us wrong until the last minute of the class, or sometimes our classmates point out the mistake. It is not fun at all to sit in the English class'. When Yaoyao complained about her English teacher, she suddenly seemed much more open than in the beginning. Then I asked her whether it would be possible for her to have a short and simple English conversation with me. She refused as I expected. When I asked her, she didn't say 'no' to me directly; instead, she bowed her head to the table and shook her head. In the meantime, I noticed she blushed. I didn't want to push her anymore and said to her: 'Don't be shy. Let's put it aside'.

⁷As I explained before, it is a polite way to refer to someone by borrowing the kinship term, like uncle, sister, etc., under a Chinese cultural context. This is because the kinship term is a way to show intimacy like Shushu (meaning uncle) is used to call a male who is in the parents' generation and is younger than one's father, while Daye is used to call a male who is in the parents' generation and is older than one's father in Beijing. However, this way of address varies from area to area. What I have described above is the way people use in Beijing and the most part of Northern China.

Jiashuai, a 13-year-old boy who also learnt English with me, is another good example to show how people skillfully build up the social space at their will by properly interacting with individuals within a certain physical space. Jiashuai's mother runs a barbershop where my mother went to have her haircut. During the service time, Jiashuai's mother started to talk to my mother and asked: 'Are you new here?'

My mother said: 'Yes' and then went on to explain why she was there. As soon as Jiashuai's mother got to know that I was doing a PhD at a UK institution, she became excited and said to my mother: 'My son is not very good at English. He is now at junior school first year. I wonder if it is possible to ask your daughter to give him some help'.

My mother didn't confirm anything with her, instead she said: 'I think she will happily give him some help. But I will ask her first as soon as I go back home, and then I will let you know'.

'That would be great. As you know, English is a very important subject now at school, the same importance as Chinese and mathematics. Based on my observation, Jiashuai is a clever boy, but he is not very patient and sometimes really naughty. So he is always misspelling the words in exams. It also seems that he is not very much interested in English, because he doesn't like to memorise a lot of things, like vocabulary and grammar, which make this subject boring to him. If your daughter could help him to find the fun and importance by giving him some live example based on her life abroad, it will be extremely helpful I am sure', Jiashuai's mother made her point much clearer.

Later when my mother came back home and asked me if I would be willing to tutor him, I agreed and started my first meeting with Jiashuai very soon thereafter. He was a bit childish: that was my first impression. He liked to brag about himself in front of others, but he was speaking this with a low voice to show his modesty. When his mother told me in front of him that he was not good at English, he refused to accept that and said to me:

'Don't listen to her. You can ask her how good her English is'.

When she heard this, Jiashuai's mother said to him: 'I paid for you to study English well. What is the point to drag me in? I don't need it for my work, but can you guarantee you don't need it for your future job?' Jiashuai and his mother bickered back and forth.

What I learnt from this conversation was that Jiashuai really could not stand having his weakness exposed in front of others. When asked to have a conversation with me in English, he started to behave cheekily and refused to do it. One of the possible reasons I guess is he didn't want to lose face in front of his mother and me and another friend of his mother who was also present at that time.

On the next day, we started our first lessons. Knowing his personality, I gave him a lot more encouragement. The first lesson took place at his mother's barber shop, because it was quite late and there were no customers. During the one and a half hour lesson, his mother gave us company from the very beginning until we finished. Every time when Jiashuai was naughty, she broke in and warned him. After a few lessons, his mother thought we could work independently, so she sent us to another room to do the teach and study independently. Then Jiashuai changed totally into a

different study status. Similarly as when I asked Yaoyao, I questioned Jiashuai the same: 'How do you spell the word "equal"?'

He said: 'Let me think it over. Oh I got it. It spells e-q-u-e-l'. Then he lifted his head and looked at my face as if my facial expression could reveal the answer. Then he changed his mind: 'No, I changed my mind. It spells e-q-u-a-l'.

After I heard his answer, I could not help laughing out loud and asked: 'Did I write the answer on my face?'

He said: 'Yes! (giggling) Look, how clever I am. I can read the answer from your face. I am serious'.

To encourage him, I said: 'Yes, you are clever indeed'. Then, later, we talked about grammar, and I asked him: 'How do you say "I am studying English" in English?' He said to me: 'Hmm, let me think about it. I should use present tense to make this sentence. That should be "I am studying English?"'

'That is correct'.

'Look, I told you I am really clever. I am a smart person'. From then on, every time when he was not under his mother's supervision, he bragged about himself like that, even when he studied in my room, and my mother was present. As a teacher, I was supposed to be dominant, but in this situation, Jiashuai seemed always trying to take the leading role by keeping on telling me how big he was. Once his mother turned up, he suddenly became like a lamb.

It is not only the child, but also other adults who behave in a similar way.

The way people behave is a good indicator of the social space they interact within. These two examples above show that the social space within hutong is 'soft': bendy and stretchable. The space can be actively built and adjusted by the individual staying within it, which enables the space to become full of the signs of humanness. That is why I define one of the features of the space within hutong as soft.

In hutong courtyard, then, because of the limits on space, the physical sphere becomes more compacted, multifunctional, sometimes overlapping and humanly adjusted—or, so to say, bendy or stretchable. What is more important, the residents living within it are aware of this feature, and they actively make use of it. Even though the physical space stays the same, the social space is much more diverse and various because of the lively individuals developing it. The soft and stretchable features of the space enable the residents to have it more diversely reflect their inside needs and those which are not only within their own private space but also outside in the public space.

7.5 Solid Space

Contrariwise, in the high-rise buildings, the compound is much less 'soft', since space inside the high-rise compound is specialised; each area is more likely to be single functioned and hence less influenced by human beings. Therefore, I would like to say the space within the high-rise apartment is hard, solid and less stretchable.

In the high-rise apartment, there are not such intermediate regions existing to which residents could attach their sense of belonging, even though it is a public space.

This is because the only communal area, the open ground, is shared by too many residents and not attached to any of the residents' living area. The corridor is adjacent to the dwellers' house, but they cannot do anything there, because that is the only fire exit and should always be kept clear. The households sharing the same corridor don't even get the chance to clean the floor as I did in the courtyard, since a cleaner is sent to maintain the corridor every day. Thus, there is no chance for them to personalise or individualise the public space. The way that the physical space of the high-rise apartment is designed seems to have a decisive influence on the dwellers living within this space so that they can only individualise the space inside their door. Because these residents cannot physically extend themselves outside their door, instead they are also emotionally constrained within the housing area they have paid for. That's why I say that the space within the high-rise compound is 'hard'. The function of each area is fixed and non-negotiable. That is why I say it is less stretchable.

This is the case even should the residents have the will to make it more individualised, which can be read from my neighbour living across from us in the high-rise apartment. We were living on the top floor of the building. The corridor is only shared by two households. My room was right next to the stairs, and the other one was further away from the stairs, so she got more space in front of her house. And she left a shelf outside her room to put some out-of-date items there. Another case inside the buildings where I stayed on the third floor was that a family used to leave their mop in the corner outside their door. Those two cases were the only two I found inside the building where I stayed. Because each physical space is still relatively strict to maintain its original functions as it was first built, that is why I say the space within the high-rise apartment is less stretchable and bendy than that within the hutong courtyard.

These features of space, physical and social, build up the preponderance of high culture over low culture constructed by individuals living within the physical space. To use a metaphor to describe this high culture in the hutong, since it is difficult to get into a hutong courtyard but easy to build up intimacy with the locals once one gets in, one may compare it to a vase with a narrow neck, as below:



In the hutong courtyard, when I first entered with my camera and asked if I could take a picture of the living space, one of the residents sitting in front of their courtyard asked me: 'What are you doing here? Who are you?' After I introduced myself and explained my purpose, they further asked me: 'Why do you want to take a picture of our place? There is nothing worthy to be photographed here'. So I was not successful that first time.

Also, the vase is closed at the bottom, so once we get inside the vase, it is not easy to get out. This is also a good symbolic way to describe the relationship in the hutong: once the relationship has been built up in hutong, it is there to stay. For instance, after I left my fieldwork site, my mother also went back to my hometown, but our friendship with Mr. Yang still continued. When Mr. Yang's wife got some funny mobile phone text message, she sent it to my mother. On some special occasions, for instance, the Spring Festival or Mid-Autumn Day, Mr. Yang also gave my mother a call to send their best wishes. I will also call Mr. Yang from here in the UK to see how everything is getting on there.

Every time we are on phone, we have found there are many things to catch up on, and it seems our conversation need never ends. The most recent call I made to Mr. Yang's family was on the Mid-Autumn Day last year, 12 September 2011:

'Hello, hello there?' I said to the other end of the phone line.

'Yes. Hello. Can you hear me?' I reckoned it was Mr. Yang, but the connection in the beginning was not very good.

'Yes, I can hear you very well. How are you Mr. Yang? I am Qingqing', I was excited to hear Mr. Yang's voice.

'Oh, Qingqing! How nice! I am very well. How are you?' Mr. Yang asked.

'I am good. Happy Mid-Autumn Day to you, Auntie (his wife) and Huzi (his son)!' I replied.

'Thank you, we are all very well. How about you? Can you buy the moon cake there in the UK? Have you had it?' Mr. Yang shot a series of questions.

'Well, yes, we can buy it from the Chinese supermarket, but the problem is that we don't have a Chinese supermarket in our town. We need to go to another city to get it. So I just don't want to bother to go for a moon cake'.

'Oh, that is a shame. How is the moon there in the UK? Is it as round as here in Beijing?' Mr. Yang asked me and laughed at himself.

'Yes, I guess so, because we are watching the same moon from different angles, so there should not be too much difference', I giggled.

'Yes, you are right. Have you phoned your parents today?' Mr. Yang asked.

'I haven't yet. But I will give them a call after our conversation'.

'Your parents are also very well. I rang them a couple of days ago. Don't worry about them'.

'Yes, they should be fine'.

'Wait, I will call your auntie to talk with you', Mr. Yang said.

'Sure, that would be great', I replied.

'Hello, Qingqing. Is everything ok there?' Auntie asked me.

'Yes, everything is very well. Is your work busy recently? How about Huzi? Does he still get back home eight o' clock every day?'

‘Still the same as before. No big changes. He goes to work at 9 o’clock and gets back home at 5 pm day after day. How is your writing up going? When will you come back?’ she asked.

‘My writing up is going well. I will probably graduate next September, and then I will come back’. I replied.

‘That’s great! Oh, it must be very expensive for you to call us from abroad. Let’s make it short and finish quickly. It is ok, as long as we know you are well. That is fine. You take good care of yourself. We are all fine. Don’t miss us. Let’s say good-bye now. Have a good Mid-Autumn Day. Do you have any Chinese friends there who could accompany you today?’ She further asked me.

‘Yes, there are a few Chinese friends here. We will have dinner together. Don’t worry about me’, I said to Mr. Yang’s wife.

‘Sure, then I will hang up. Take care. Bye’, Mr. Yang’s wife said.

‘You too. Bye’. I then turned off the phone.

This is the conversation that happened when I had left my field for 1 year and 2 months.

By way of contrast, I would like to compare the special life status in the high-rise apartment compound to a funnel:



It is not difficult at all for the strangers to get into this community by starting a conversation with the residents, and they would not scrutinise you before they started to talk to you, but if you targeted at building up a close relationship with the locals, it would be far more difficult. It seems intimacy is a luxury in the high-rise compound. This became extremely noticeable when a stranger went into these two communities for the first time.

On the first time I entered the high-rise compound, as I have previously described more fully, the residents sitting down on the ground noticed I came in and lifted up their eyes to look at me up and down, and then they turned back their heads and returned to their conversation with other group members and said nothing to me, as if they didn’t care what I would do on their ground. Or maybe they didn’t really consider it as their ground.

Also if we look at the image of funnel, there is a hole on the bottom to allow the contents to pass by. The relationships in the high-rise building are also like that: the intimacy you build up through hard effort will pass by eventually after you’ve

moved out. We never seek to build up a long-term relationship with neighbours by keeping in touch, because the neighbour relationship does not imply that depth of attachment. When I thought about my neighbour in the high-rise building and wanted to give them a call, I noticed that I didn't even have their phone number, although the furniture given by my next door neighbour living in the high rise was still standing in the room I rented there.

That is why I liken relationships within the high-rise building to a funnel, which stands for the difficulty of building up intimacy and which is very easy to lose.

7.6 Meaning of Home

Returning to what I have described about the three levels of space, physical, abstract and social, the physical space has been defined and constructed by the designer or architect in both the high-rise apartment and hutong compound. If we look at the models of these two different kinds of residential form, they have some similarities, such as dwelling in a courtyard. On the other hand, the difference is also obvious. One is attached to the ground, the other—the high-rise apartment—is built on top of the ground, but will extend up to the sky. The courtyard is more personalised, while the high-rise apartment is more standardised. But there is far more to the discrepancy between these two spaces than these superficial distinctions.

If place is as Tilley emphasised (1994: 15), a situational context constructed by and for human action, consisting of places that serve as centres of human significance and emotional attachment, then from the residents' perspective in both the hutong and high-rise compound, the houses where they live definitely constitute a 'place' for the dwellers. But what makes these two residential spaces different is that residents within the hutong also take others' houses and public spaces as part of their own place, while in the high-rise compound, there is no connection between one house and another. In other words, in the high-rise compound, one's house is not a significant place to other people. Or, differently put, there is no place outside one's own house in the high-rise building. Residents in the high-rise compound view the public area within the compound the same way as other spaces outside the compound: physical, insignificant and isolated. Contrastingly, hutong residents expand their territory of home place from their own property to the outside, which together compose their actual home place. So when they say 'home place', they also include the neighbour's and public space within this compound they live, to which they have attached significance and emotion.

One final image: if I see the way that inhabitants in high-rise apartments attach their emotion to the compound as being like a fishing net, which visualises the fact that there is rarely an emotional connection between one's home as a site of emotional attachment and the home of other people, then linen clothing, which is interwoven, linked and connected, is the right material to describe the hutong.

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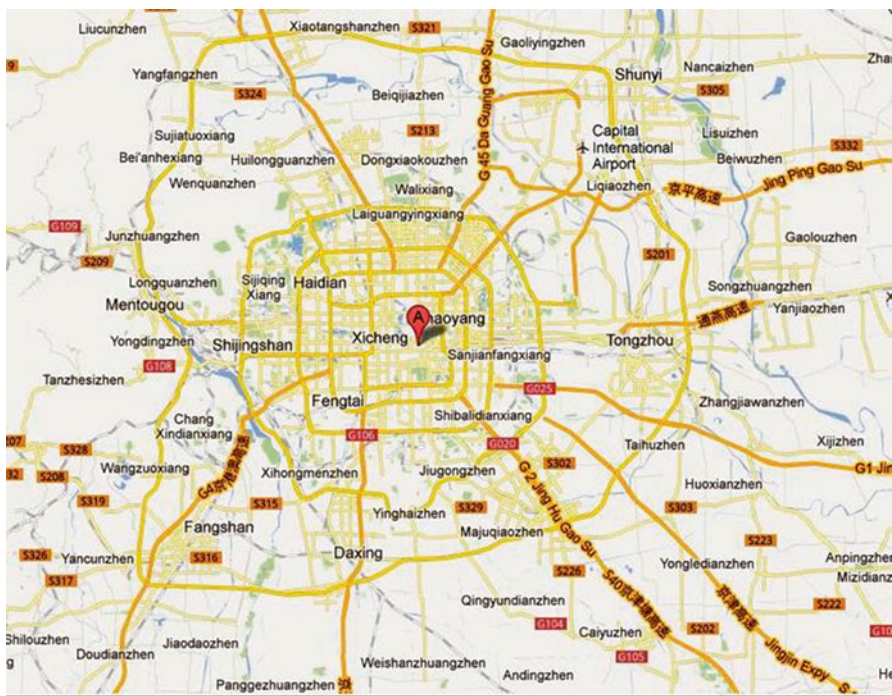
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Chapter 8

‘Urbanised by Specialised’: The Decrease in ‘Overlapping Space’ in the City

8.1 Specialised City

If we take a look at the map of Beijing, we will find the city has been clearly defined by the traffic rings. Originally, the size of the city was as big as the second traffic ring circle, which is right in the middle of the other ring circles. As the city expanded more and more, the third, fourth and fifth traffic rings were built up soon afterwards, and now we also have the sixth ring. These traffic rings not only serve as traffic connections; also, they are the way people use to describe the location roughly. What’s more, which traffic ring you dwell in reflects who you are socially.



Within the second ring dwell the indigenous Beijingers. On the top right side, in between the second and the fourth rings are situated most of the universities in Beijing, so that this zone has been seen as the college district. Next to this district is Zhongguan Cun where most of the IT industries are located. Below the college district is the military area and some newly built high-rise compounds. Spreading out from this area is where the migrant workers dwell, most of whom are unskilled labourers with a very low monthly income. In the east area of the third, fourth and fifth traffic rings is the CBD (Central Business District). On the northeast part of this area is located the Korean community where lots of Koreans dwell, and also many of the international companies are located there, for instance, Nestlé and Microsoft. It is within the second traffic ring where most of the indigenous people and traditional courtyards are located.

Local people label the area on the basis of the occupation of the dwellers. Local people have this saying: 'East is rich, west is honourable, north is poor and south is humble'. Because in the east part, most residents there are doing their own business, which is why this area has been labelled as rich. The west part, composed of descendants of the members of the royal family, is seen as honourable. In the north, most of the residents are lower middle-class people, who don't have very high social status, so this area is seen as poor. In the south, most of the residents are in lower occupations such as prostitution. That makes this area ignoble. So within the city, no matter whether in recent times or in the past, residents have stereotypes relating to the different areas of Beijing.

As the city has expanded more and more, more places have been labelled, and therefore, the function of this area has been specified within people's mind. People's understanding about a particular physical space in hutong, which we have seen to be less specialised than in the high-rise buildings, can be seen as a continuation of the past tradition. The general situation at present, however, as Tianshu elaborates in his chapter, 'Place attachment, communal memory, and the moral underpinnings of gentrification in post-reform Shanghai' (Pan 2011): 'The English speakers had taken over the inner ring of the city, the Mandarin speakers had moved into the middle ring. And the Shanghainese speakers could only find their niche in the outer right' (Pan 2011: 154). Tianshu also comments that:

While far from being an accurate depiction of empirical reality, the saying did indicate noticeable changes occurring in China's most cosmopolitan city: the gradual expansion of an international community (subsumed under the broad category of 'English speakers'), the increase of 'new Shanghainese,' the specially talented people from other regions who possessed the credentials to qualify for household registration status, and the marginalisation of those 'Shanghainese speakers,' unemployed workers, impoverished and displaced residents or evictees who could no longer afford to live in the gentrified neighborhoods in the city (Pan 2011: 155).

Beijing is following the example of Shanghai. Many of the indigenous Beijingers have relocated to the high rise outside the inner city since it is very expensive to live in the inner city. The inner city has been developed into a tourist place instead of a residential place. Those tourist businesses have been run by those who are not local, for example, running hutong tourism and opening the Hutong Inn. Several of my Western friends who have been to Beijing have mentioned to me that they really enjoyed their stay in the Hutong Inn. They ordered 'Great Leap Forward Brew' together with a 'Hutong Pizza', which brings the tourist a sense of participating in the past and traditional culture.

The most powerful cultural colonisation does not merely entail pulling down physical space and changing the name, because even though the physical existence has been dismantled, the memory attached to it, the abstract and the social space can still subsist there. Those people who have been involved in this past could still tell others who were not present. The most incisive cultural colonisation entails twisting or misusing fragments of the past and rooting it elsewhere—amongst those who haven't had any relation with the past and couldn't tell whether it is true or not.

When the local people talk about Old Beijing (老北京), it doesn't only mean a place, a name and a group of people, but rather it describes a type of culture, a past-related Beijing culture, sharing life in the hutong, as in the communist society.

To commemorate the past, many Beijingers who used to grow up in the Hutong but now are dwelling in the high rise set up the website (www.oldbeijing.net), so as to promote the architecture, food and culture of Beijing through the organising of photo shoots, dinners and other activities within the inner city. This could be seen as a way to resist the culture colonisers and strengthen the memory of the past.

8.2 Community-Based Compounds

Within hutong, space is much more intensive and compressed than in the high-rise building. This statement might seem to contradict the real situation, because apparently the high-rise buildings accommodate more people in each unit of land. On the physical space level, it is probably not true, but if we have a look at the abstract and social space, it is very much the case. So this argument has nothing to do with the physical space of either residential form, but means to describe the abstract and social space. Within the same dimension of certain physical spaces, there are more things attached in terms of both abstract and social space in Hutong than in high-rise buildings. And to an individual, abstract and social space both provide more significance for their everyday life.

At the entrance of hutong I lived for my fieldwork, there is a shop where people can buy something small, like beer, drinks, snacks, cigarettes or lighters. This shop is usually open until the shop owner wants to go to bed, which is normally around midnight in summer. The front area of the shop then becomes a public area where residents living around the shop like to gather together and chat.

At the end of August, the weather was still hot. Not long after I moved into this community, I joined their chat with a bottle of soda water in my hand. The group discussion focused on a piece of recent news, about an incident which happened in the courtyard where I lived.

Lao Fang said: 'Do you guys know Xiaozhang's wife is in hospital?'

I turned to Mr. Yang and asked: 'Who is Xiaozhang?'

Mr. Yang said: 'His trait is his Mimi Yan.¹ This is what he looks like. (Mr. Yang squinted his eyes to imitate how he looks.)'

After hearing this I laughed and nodded my head. They continued their conversation.

'While his wife was playing mah-jong with three other neighbours living in that courtyard (he pointed further), all of a sudden, she fell down on the table and was hemiplegic. They were all shocked and called the ambulance immediately. She has stayed in the hospital until now. Do any of you know how she is now?'

Jianming said: 'I have no idea, I don't know more than after she went to hospital, I haven't heard anything from her'.

Sun Hong added: 'I heard that she has been diagnosed as having had a cerebral haemorrhage. It must take a very long time to recover. She is so young. Only thirty-eight years old. How come?'

Lao Fang then said: 'I know, it is unbelievable. It must be because she stayed in one position and hadn't got any chance to stretch her body. Do any of you know how long she played for on that day?'

¹Mimi Yan means 'squinty eye', and this is a typical characteristic of a resident living in my courtyard. Mr. Yang sometimes later on referred him as Mimi Yan, in case I didn't know who he talked about, even if this is very rude. Of course he avoided mentioning this in public loudly.

Mr. Yang asked: 'I guess four or five hours. Isn't it long? Even for young kids, when they do their homework for two hours, they need to take a break. So I guess for adults, we really need more exercises, rather than staying in one position for such a long time. It can be difficult sometimes, because when you fully concentrate on one thing, it is very easy to ignore the fatigue that your physical body is experiencing. That is how this happened. But she is just so young. Normally strokes happen to people who are in their sixties or even older. She is only in her early forties. I am so sorry for her. And her husband has become very busy travelling in between the hospital and home since then. How pathetic. You never know what kind of bad thing will happen to a good man. This is fate'. It seems Mr. Yang is a bit fatalistic.

Lao Fang said: 'I heard that her sister will come to take care of her sometimes'.

'Yes, but she could not always rely on her sister. Her sister has her own family needing to be looked after. She's got her own life to live. A temporary help is possible, but not in the long term. Most of the difficulties they'll meet in the remainder of their lives will have to be overcome by themselves', Mr. Yang replied.

Lao Fang said: 'It is very true. Your own self is the only person you can rely on for anything at any time'.

The conversation continued, and the news that Xiaozhang's wife had got a brain haemorrhage spread over the compound.

Communication and news exchange had thus been effected in the corner of the shop within the community. Similarly, each of the functional areas within the community has got one major function, while there are also some minor functions, like information exchange, affiliated to it in a social way. These functions make the community one unit and transparent: everyone knows everything about everyone else. And they could also take advantage of this feature of the compound for their own benefit.²

Another early morning in October, I was standing at the end of the queue in front of the toilet. A middle-aged lady came and stood behind me. I turned back and gave her a smile. Then she started to talk to me: 'Which courtyard are you living in? I have never seen you before'.

I said: 'I live in No. 7 and just moved in a week ago'.

'Oh, you have only been here for a week. What do you do?' It seems she wanted to conduct an unstructured interview with me.

I told her frankly, 'I am doing a PhD in the UK, and my research focus is on life patterns within the hutong. Also, I teach English here as a way to earn a living'.

She seemed very surprised and said: 'Oh, you are an English teacher. Which institution are you working for?'

²Amster sees gossip as both a centripetal and centrifugal force and a critical component in the social life of any community (Amster 2004). It can be reinforcing of group values and norms. Gossip came to the forefront of my understandings of community life; the existence of gossip, and the disputes it illustrates and mediates, shows that a community is alive and well. According to Prof. Nigel Rapport (2003) 'gossip helps maintain group unity, morality and history' (Rapport 2003: 153).

I replied to her: 'New Oriental School'.³

'That is a very good one, isn't it? Then your English must be really good. Of course it is. What I am saying!'

'So so. There is always space there for me to improve more',⁴ I replied modestly.

She said, 'It should be very good, otherwise how could you get the degree from the university you study at? My son is in junior school, first year. They've just started an English course, which he has never had before. He finds it is a bit difficult to keep up with the pace of the lessons he participates in. I wonder if you could give him some guidance on how to learn English as a beginner', she looked at me with a face full of hope.

I proposed a plan, which I thought she would be happy with: 'Sure, I would love to. Maybe we could find a time to sit down and chat, and then I could find out what the problem is with him. Would that be all right?'

'Sure, that will be very helpful I am sure. Thank you very much in advance. Do you have a mobile phone number? I will let you know when would be a good time for you to meet up. He always has a lot of homework to do, and I need to check with him first', she tried to push it forward a bit more.

'I completely understand. I have been where he is'.

'It is your turn',⁵ she reminded me.

'Ok'. I said.

It is funny that during the time I dealt with my personal issues at the toilet, she was still talking to me and asking me about my educational background. So, reluctantly, I had to lift my head up and talk to her continuingly in this awkward situation.⁶

The public toilet, then, a place supposed to deal with personal issues, in this case functioned as an information exchange hub where people can seek for what they

³In order to build up a good reputation for English teaching and have more students in Hutong, I applied to be an English teacher at the New Oriental School, which is the most well-known English language testing and training school in China. As most of the English learners in China are exam oriented, based on this fact, I found being an English teacher at this school was a good way to show my qualification to help their children to get a good mark in the exam.

⁴You might be curious as to why I didn't prove how I was qualified to be an English teacher and sell myself to this lady since I wanted to have some students, and it was very likely that she would like to introduce her child to me for English lessons. But my other role, as a Chinese citizen, requires me to respect my own cultural rule which I have to always put first: that is, be modest and humble. It is not a good idea to demonstrate how good you are by straight speaking; instead it is wise to let people find out by themselves. The only problem is that it might take a long while. If I could find a third person to give a recommendation, that's also a good option. In this way, my mother helped me a lot to sell myself, which is ok under this cultural norm. People will take it as a mother's pride in her daughter instead of it being exaggerating or bragging.

⁵She meant my turn to use the toilet, as we were both queuing to use the toilet while we were chatting.

⁶Remember, unlike a normal toilet, the one we used in the compound had no individual doors for privacy—just partial low walls. This allowed me and my informants to have a face-to-face conversation while using the toilet.

need. It seems many different functions are mixed up in this compound, and it is not possible to find a certain physical space implementing only one function. This makes the hutong community a transparent one and provides the opportunity for dwellers within it to make the most of the community that lives within. This example shows how the residents add a social function on top of the physical utility of a space.

It seems living in the hutong community, you can never be alone by yourself in the day time. A sense of being attached is with you all the time, no matter whether you are taking a shower or using the bathroom. This is how the traditional way of living within the hutong works: the residents tend to connect up the physical and social aspects of the spaces they live in, which makes the compound community based.

8.3 The Way of Being Polite Within the Hutong Courtyard

The community-based compound has developed thanks to the way in which the hutong dwellers understand the concept of ‘politeness’. The word ‘polite’ according to the Oxford English Dictionary means: ‘of language, the arts, or other intellectual pursuits: refined, elegant, scholarly; exhibiting good or restrained taste; of a person, social group, etc.: refined; cultured, cultivated; (also) well-regulated. Now chiefly in *polite society, circles*, etc.; courteous, behaving in a manner that is respectful or considerate of others; well-mannered’. But what is supposed to be a courteous way of behaving? How to show the most respect to others? What is known as a well-mannered and well-regulated mode of behaviour? The answers to these questions may vary from one context to another, even within the same city.

Within hutong generally speaking, to be polite means to be open to others, always ensuring that others gain more about you and from you. There is no better way than this to show politeness towards the residents in Hutong. The stuff being given or taken could be anything, tangible or intangible: for instance, physical items like plates, books, food, water, information, including personal or impersonal and also space, private or non-private. The more open and generous you are, the more polite it is to others. If you are very concerned about your own benefit and calculating on everything including individual privacy, then you will be considered as ignoring others and closing yourself from building up an intimate relationship with others, which is completely the opposite of politeness in hutong. It is not difficult to imagine being polite within hutong could sometimes be harsh to yourself if you don’t hold a good balance.

On the second day we moved into hutong, the fuse was broken and the electricity was cut off. When we went to Mr. Yang’s place and asked if we could borrow some tool to fix it, Mr. Yang said to us: ‘No problem. Let me have a look for you. I have some fuses myself at home. There are plenty. Just give me a second’. After quickly collecting some tools and a fuse, Mr. Yang said: ‘Ok, let’s go over to your place and have a look. Don’t worry. It is not a big problem. It happens a lot. Maybe your fuse has been used for too many years. So it is easily broken’.

My mother said: 'Thanks a lot. We were just about to use the electric cooker to make lunch and then suddenly, it has been cut off. What good timing! There is nothing we could do about it'. Our ammeter was high up on the wall. Mr. Yang was a bit short to reach there. So he asked if it was ok for him to step on top of the table to reach the metre. Of course he was allowed. In about 5 minutes, after he went up and down twice, we found we were back with electricity again. Then he just simply said to us: 'It is done. You can now continue your lunch cooking'. We had not had a proper conversation with Mr. Yang before then. He did not even know our names. Both my mother and I were surprised at Mr. Yang's hospitality and generosity, because if we were in Mr. Yang's position, we probably would not come and help to install the fuse, instead just offering what he asked. This is how he demonstrated to me the way of being polite. This is just the beginning, or so to say the tip of the iceberg. One likes to give by any means available.

I remember one day, Mr. Yang and I were talking about 'Li', which means politeness in Chinese. He said: 'I find it is really annoying when someone comes and knocks at my door'.

I was surprised to hear that, because that is what I would do before I entered his and other people's house or office, and I consider this is a way to respect one's privacy. So I asked him, surprised: 'Why do you feel it annoys you?'

He said: 'It would be polite and cordial if they call my name outside the door, Yangzi⁷ or Yang ge⁸ then I would be able to recognise who it is, then I will give a response and let them in. The problem is knocking at another's door and making noise, but saying nothing. Right?' Mr. Yang wanted to confirm with me whether I agreed with what he said or not.

'I understand. You are right', I nodded my head.

From this case, we can see Mr. Yang preferred direct communication with people who want to visit him, instead of non-verbal or anonymous communication. He didn't want the door to be a barrier to cut off direct communication under this circumstance and would like to get as much information as possible from the other side before opening it: for example, which people have come to visit, because he could recognise them from their voice.

Later I found out that every good friend of his who comes to see him will call out his name loudly when they first step into the courtyard, and he will respond with a louder voice to them right after he hears, which will be different in winter and summer. In the winter it is 'I am on my way', when the door is closed, while in the summer, it is 'Come on in', when the door is open.

I remembered what Mr. Yang told me about what is supposed to be polite and tried to apply it in my everyday interaction with other neighbours. It was difficult in the beginning, because I was not used to speak loudly to enable people inside to hear me, which I thought was not courteous to other neighbours. Living in the high-rise

⁷This is Mr. Yang's nickname that other hutong fellows call him.

⁸This phrase means Brother Yang. Someone who is younger, like Xiaojun, will call him this.

building, it was never possible to arouse people's attention inside by shouting loudly outside their door. A common way to let people know you are outside their door is to knock at their door or ring the doorbell if they have one. This seems to be a more civilised way, but is also the way that Mr. Yang was opposed to.

When the winter came, Xiaojun and Mr. Yang's family started to bring hot water to me, and I noticed that everyone coming into my house would call either my mother or me loudly outside, which made me feel more comfortable to call them when I needed to go to their place.

Besides the fact that residents living in hutong prefer to gain more information about one another, they are also willing to share their own life with other neighbours—although there is, of course, a bottom line.

During the chatting time after a lunch nap or dinner, they will gather together and discuss what happened during the day, for example, what kind of weird person they met during their work, how their kids performed at school and how their grandmother recovered from illness. All the happy things they want to share, or the annoying things they want to complain about, will be brought into the conversation as long as they are comfortable with it. Through the conversation, they want to receive suggestions or comfort, to make them feel better. This is very much like a healing process to magnify happiness and minimise unhappiness.

The more of a gossip you are, the opener you are to other neighbours and the more polite you are. Breaking the boundary between individuals in a hutong by way of gossip and revealing what is private is, ironically, a way of being polite. The nature of gossip and politeness in hutong plus the multi-purposive use of space is a good way to connect individuals to the physical and social space within hutong. This is how the residents living in hutong spontaneously make hutong a community-based compound, and the dwellers within it automatically have a strong sense of belonging.

8.4 The Individually Based Compound

In contrast to the hutong courtyard, the high-rise compound is more individually based. Each resident is much more independent and less attached to the area they live in. This does not mean residents within high-rise apartments have a weaker sense of home; instead, their individual home has been well protected and emphasised. It is the way they use the space physically and socially that distinguishes them from the hutong residents.

Residents living in the high-rise compound have a strong sense of individuality. They tend to maintain their own self and are supposed to be respected as independent individuals. They see their house as their only territory in which they can be themselves. There is no one wearing pyjamas coming out from their house and going down to the ground floor of the compound, but as a contrast, wearing pyjamas going outside of the house is very common in hutong. This is a good way to see how

they understand the space outside their own house.⁹ Apparently, high-rise apartment residents tend to constrain their own space within their house, which is well protected by the security door, and when someone comes to knock at the door, they can check who is coming to visit behind the peep hole. It seems space outside the door belongs to everyone but also belongs to no one. Everyone sees it as a public space, for everyone to use, and they should not take use of it. As everyone holds the same opinion, no one wants to be the first one to include anything personal within this space. So it also belongs virtually to no one. Once they get out from their door, it is like they are getting up from backstage to front stage, in Goffman (1990)'s terms, and ready for the performance. They never take the space in the compound as part of their own place.

In the high-rise building compound where I lived for my fieldwork, space was more differentiated and specialised physically. For example, within the compound, in the car park area, a rubbish recycling point has been specially built. Some more modern compounds have installed gym equipment or small gardens for the dwellers to do exercise or entertaining. Also 24-h convenience shops and dry cleaner shop may be built within. These specified areas separate and divide people into different groups, reducing the chances for them to familiarise themselves with others living in the compound.

The space in the high-rise compound was differentiated by the architect and designers in the beginning and was meant to provide for everyone a safe, convenient and independent living space, because residents living within these modern compounds are supposed to live in a 'busy' life.

One example that I would like to draw on here is the different way of paying the electricity bill. In hutong, each courtyard has a notebook with the consumption record of each household in it. This notebook is like a communal possession for everyone living in the same courtyard. Each courtyard has a main ammeter, and each household has its own separate ammeter. At the end of each month, when the cost of the electricity bill is supposed to be paid, the five families would take turns to be in charge of the money collection for this past month on behalf of all of us. All they need to do is check the total ammeter and then knock at each door to check the sub-ammeter and then add them up to see if it matches the total ammeter. In most cases, the cost on the main ammeter is higher than the add up amount, which means each family will have to split the cost and fill up the gap. The person who is in charge of the month will do the maths and let each household know how much they should pay for that month. After collecting the money, the on-duty person that month will bring all the money to the bank and get it paid there. Sometimes there will be some leftover money, and this money will be included in the notebook and passed on to the next household who will be in charge of collection next month; usually it is the neighbour living next to them.

⁹This is very similar to what Christine Helliwell described for the Gerai people: 'Implicit in this outside/inside division is one between not "they, the community and "us, the household", but rather, one between "they the world outside" (of which we may also at a times be a part) and" us, the longhouse community' (Helliwell 1996: 135).

In the high-rise apartment, everything works out very differently. If we want to use electricity, we will need to have a prepaid electric card. You should fill the account with a certain amount of money; then you insert it into a card reader, which is like an ammeter for each household; then the total electricity you pay for will be taken by the card reader, and then you will be able to use the electricity. You don't need to have any communication with your neighbour about using the electricity.

If we take a look at this electric bill paying process in these two different types of living community, residents living in hutong need to knock at their neighbour's door and get into their house at least twice, once to check the metre and the other time to collect the money, sometimes even more often. Because if the first family gives a big note of money, and the duty person could not give the change, then he will leave it and come to the next family, until he gets enough change. Sometimes one family uses more or less electricity than normal, which might trigger another conversation as to why this happened. Meanwhile, in the high-rise building, how much you use and how you pay for your electricity are not cared about by other neighbours, because they never have a chance to know the figures. All the other bills besides electric are also the responsibility of each individual family. This way of bill paying is definitely more time efficient. For those who have open online banking, they can get everything done without getting out from their house. Literally, residents living in the high-rise building compound are not in need of their neighbours, that is to say they are more independent from their neighbours. They can live very well without the assistance of anyone from the compound.

From this example, we can clearly see that in the hutong compound, it is more community based, while in the high-rise building it is more individually based. In both hutong and the high-rise compound, they have public space for every individual to use, but unlike hutong compounds, high-rise apartments have no such public issues for all the residents to deal with, which is one of the ways to bind every individual together.

For the high-rise apartment dwellers, there is not such a spot they either want to or need to go to everyday, nor such a person they have to talk to everyday. When I asked my next-door neighbour Mrs Li, 'Do you have any one you are close to in the surrounding area and you would like to talk to everyday?' She said to me: 'No. Everyone has their own life to busy with, right? We shouldn't disturb others'.

She considered interacting with other residents as a way of disturbing them, which is very different from the hutong residents' view. Mr. Yang saw meeting and talking everyday to my mother and I as part of his life activity and essential to his day. Sometimes when we were talking to other neighbours and it was heard by Mr. Yang, he would come out from his place and join us. He probably didn't notice that he was expanding the abstract and social space beyond the physical space and making it bigger and bigger.

The terms, individually based and community based, are used here to describe the subdivision of abstract space and social space. From what I have described above, it is obvious that the hutong represents a community-based compound, while the high-rise apartment is more individually based. Within the individually based compound, residents develop less abstract and social space within a certain

physical space, compared with the community-based compound, as their main focus is themselves, while abstract space and social space are all about relating oneself to another.

8.5 Overlapping Space

Here I would like to introduce a concept based on the above discussion but clarifying and extending it: 'Overlapping Space'. As the name indicates, overlapping space is used to describe a space in which overlapping occurs. It is not merely *a type* of space; instead this concept places emphasis on the *usage* of space. The most important elements of this concept concern what is overlapped and how it overlaps—how many layers have been overlapped or what the layers consist of or how those different layers tangle with each other and function as a whole to influence the way of behaviour of those who dwell within a certain physical space. All of these aspects build up and eventually transform the texture of the space.

When I talk about the texture of space, I do not refer to the physical space, which is easily experienced by the individual residents within it visually and tactually. The space I am talking about here refers more to the abstract and social spaces built on top of the physical space, which is intangible. But still you can feel a real, animate texture built by residents after living here for a certain amount of time, even though it remains intangible. I shall expand on this concept below. The physical space is fixed, stable and vapid. It is not what anthropologists are interested in. Instead, the tension, the sphere and the feeling that the dwellers have when they are experiencing a certain physical space are the more interesting aspects to discuss. This is what I referred to in the previous paragraph—'texture of the space'. To weave a cloth, different lines need to get crossed and overlapped, and similarly, weaving up the texture of space also needs to have some overlapping. That is why I introduce the concept of overlapped space. So the elements of the overlapped space and the mechanism of how those elements tangle together will have a big impact on the outcome. It may build up or develop a new texture or modify the already existing texture.

Under different conditions, overlapping space can refer to different things. For one single piece of physical space, it can be used to describe the multifunctions applied to this particular physical space. For example, the corner shop in hutong we have discussed before is not only a place for food buying but also for information exchange. Another example is the chess playing spot. Outside the courtyard in the hutong, someone built a chessboard on top of a stone. In the summer time, Xiaojun and Mr. Yang, together with other neighbours living nearby (usually men), will come to play or watch until very late. Sometimes, the player is very much into it and almost forgets or doesn't want to go back home for dinner. So their wife will bring the dinner bowl to them to have their meal on the chess playing spot. In this situation, the chess playing spot is not just a place for a game but also a place for players to have dinner. And their wives will stay by and chat to each other about what they cooked for the family that night.

What I have discussed above is the ‘transverse’ or ‘horizontal’ dimension. Meanwhile, from the ‘longitudinal’ dimension, within a certain physical space, there are some functions that have transferred and overlapped as time has gone by. Time, then, invites a more subtle understanding of the concept of overlapping space. Every specific physical space has its own history as time goes by, whether long or short, plainer or more varied. Likewise, space could also come to be temporally overlapped. If we decide on a certain period of time and compare the two different types of residential form, hutong and high-rise apartment, we will clearly see that the function of a certain space within the hutong is much easier to be changed over time. In other words, it is more likely for the space within the hutong to implement different functions within a specific time period. There are more layers of overlapping space in the hutong.

For instance, the courtyard in which my informants dwelled used to be more spacious when it was first built, but as most of the residents felt the public area in the courtyard was part of their home and they had the right to use the yard, they started to build cottages as storage rooms or kitchens or temporary shower rooms in the summer. So the function of a certain physical public space has turned into a more individualised area. This is another way of overlapping in a certain physical space. Similarly, in the high-rise buildings, the ground space used to be a pedestrian pathway for the residents, but now as the demand for parking arose, it has turned into a car park. Accordingly, these pieces of physical space will have two different types of memories attached to them.

For both the horizontal and longitudinal dimensions, more overlapping has happened in the hutong than in the high-rise apartment. When I tried to compare similar scenes where overlapping space appeared in hutong to those in the high-rise apartment compound, I found there is rarely one good example. Let’s take one of the very commonly overlapping spaces, the corner shop, for example. There are some corner shops nearby the area where we lived in the high-rise apartment, but they were all built on the side of the road. Residents living around the area usually go and buy what they need, then leave straight away. Firstly, because this compound is so huge, that makes it very unlikely to meet acquaintances. Secondly, most people don’t even know the name of their neighbour living in the same building, not to mention starting a conversation. Thirdly, as these shops are located along the road, it is not very convenient to stand by and have a long conversation. Contrariwise, the corner shop in the hutong easily gains the additional function of social space and a kind of overlapping.

There is a good example in the high-rise compound to demonstrate how time changes the function of a certain space. As I described, in the high-rise compound I lived in, there was a big empty ground in the middle of the compound. It used to be plain with nothing in it. As more and more families owned cars, they started to paint the space for car parking. Also next to the parking area, someone dropped an unwanted sofa. So this area became a social space where people could sit and talk to each other. Since the sofa was not big enough to accommodate more than four people, if more people wanted to join this chatting group, someone would bring their own stool to sit around this area which used to be a space for inhabitants to

pass by. It is obvious that in the high-rise buildings, there are fewer overlapping spaces, since most of the space implements the single function as it originally was.

For an individual, overlapping space can be seen as a way to describe the intersection with others, physically and socially, within a certain space. Here is a very general example. No.7 courtyard, X Street was the overlapping space for me and my informant Mr. Yang where we have many communal memories of the past. In everyday life, I also have many overlapping experiences with my neighbours living nearby: for example, we have a meal together, sharing food. We would meet and chat to each other at least twice a day, even though our physical houses were separated by a physical wall. Our personal space could still overlap through the wall. I could hear Mr. Yang's phone ringing and then hear him pick up the phone and say 'hello' on the other side. When he had a quarrel with his wife, I could hear very well that his son stood up and accused him: 'She is my mother. How could you slap her?' All of these details could be heard from the other side of the wall. Similarly, Mr. Yang could also know well what was going on the other side of the wall of his house.

The following example happened very often during my stay in hutong. Sometimes when I went out and forgot to bring my mobile phone, someone rang me. When I got back and passed Mr. Yang's house to get to my house, if he was in, he would definitely speak to me through the open window: 'Someone rang you today after you left'.

There was an embarrassing situation one day when Mr. Yang went to my place and talked to me and my mother, having brought us some Zhajiang Noodles.¹⁰ Mr. Yang said to us: 'You two are a very lovely mother and daughter. Every morning when I wake up, I can hear Qingqing call you, "Mummy"'. (He tried to imitate how I sounded like when I called my mother, which, as far as I could remember, is very babyish and infantile, and this is how I joke with my mother which is definitely not supposed to be heard by anyone, other than my family members). How nice!

Mr. Yang meant to show that he praised my intimacy with my mother by telling us what he heard from the other side of the wall. But to me when I first got to know that Mr. Yang could hear everything clearly, I was so surprised and, of course, very embarrassed. Well, in this way, I had my private space overlapping with Mr. Yang's, albeit reluctantly, and even though we might be physically separated by the wall in between our houses.

In the high-rise apartment, apart from the public area, like the corridor, parking spot and the entrance of the compound, which are shared by all the residents living within this compound, it is not easy to find an overlapping space at the individual level.

It is not difficult to conclude then that compared with the high-rise compound, the hutong is a place where there is more overlapping space, both as concerns individual dwellers and particular physical spaces.

Overlapping space, possessing more dimensions, I might describe as 'thicker' than single-dimension space. Different individuals attach different memories, experiences and emotions to areas within their living space. What is more, one's

¹⁰This is a traditional Beijing noodle dish served with black bean sauce.

attachments to the physical space are interlinked with one another and strengthened by the others. These connections interweave into a knot making the character of the space much more solid, firm and compact. To put it in another way, if we were to use a linear measure to describe the intensity of interaction within a certain space, then we would find that the 'line of interaction' within the hutong was short and thick, while contrariwise, in the high rise, the line is much longer but thinner. This makes the different results very clear. *Space within hutong is more stable, durable, persistent and sustaining. Meanwhile, in the high-rise building compound, space is much easier to pull apart or fragile.* If we compare the texture of the two different types of compound to some everyday material, the hutong compound would be rubber and the high-rise building compound would be tissue paper.

8.6 Consequences of Overlapping Spaces

But one might say, so what? Why is overlapping space of consequence? What is the purpose of developing this concept, and what, anthropologically speaking, does a greater overlapping space mean to the residents living within this physical space?

I say that the degree of overlapping in a certain space can be used as a good indicator of *social intimacy*. The more overlapped the space is, the more intimacy is to be found amongst the individual inhabitants within it. Indeed, the interaction between space and the individual, or amongst individuals within a certain physical space, could be seen as a way to build up intimacy and make it more compressed, unbreakable and long lasting. Interweaving the texture of the space is a way to strengthen it.

The texture of space, although intangible, becomes more obvious to us when we have to move out from a certain physical space. At first, I planned to do a field study in the hutong for 8 months and spend 4 months in the high-rise apartment. In the end, I ended up staying within the hutong for 10 months, and part of the reason was that my mother felt it was very comfortable emotionally to live in this area, and so did I. On the day we started packing, a melancholic atmosphere began to surround us. Even when we had been in the high-rise buildings for a few months, we still talked about the stories of our experiences in the hutong.

Three days before we had to move, my mother and I started to pack the kitchen stuff. Then we both recognised one plate different from the others, which was brought by Mr. Yang. So I said to my mother: Mum, this is Mr. Yang's plate, right?

'Yes, I thought that too. It was not long after we moved in, he brought the ribbon fish for you. He used this plate to hold it', My mother brought more scenarios.

This piece of memory was very clear in my mind, and I responded to her immediately: 'Exactly, and he insisted to leave the plate with us, because he assumed that we were newly moved in and did not have too much kitchenware. In order to help us save money, he insisted on leaving the plate to us, even when we told him we had plates. Mum, you were so annoying! Why did you tell Mr. Yang that I recognised from the smell dispensed from the kitchen that he was cooking fish and I loved the

smell so much? I didn't want to make him feel I am greedy for food', I whispered to my mother to complain, in case Mr. Yang could hear us from the other side of wall.

'It's nothing. There is nothing wrong admitting that you love the smell. Then you got fish two days afterwards, and you really loved the fish that Mr. Yang cooked for you, right?' My mother chuckled.

'Mum, you know me so well', I couldn't help but laugh out loud.

When I look back at this story, I notice that my mother did me a great favour in helping me to build a relationship with Mr. Yang by putting me in a slightly embarrassing situation. At the moment I held the plate, which itself is just a physical item with no real life, I suddenly realised that the plate I held was not air or just fish 7 months ago; more than that, it contained the good will that Mr. Yang wanted to build up the intimate relationship with us which was still alive. That is why after we moved out, my mother and I continued to talk about the stories that happened within hutong in between Mr. Yang and us. And even though it is now three years in the past, the scene in which Mr. Yang brought me the fish over to my house with this plate is still very clear in my mind.

It is exactly as I have described in the previous paragraph that the texture of the space within hutong can be compared to rubber, which is highly stretchable: even when we physically move out from the area, or it has passed a long time ago, it is still there clearly. And also as a rubber-textured space, it is not easy to separate one scene from another, because one stretches into another. And when we see the plates, we will automatically link it to the story where Mr. Yang kindly shared the food he had cooked with us.

The whole area where we dwelled in hutong is like a big container, which contains all of the stuff that stays there stubbornly and strongly resistant in spite of passing time and physical separation. Even though the individual is physically out of the time and space, yet still spiritually they are linked with the space, because the memories of experiences that happened within the physical space strengthened one another in the way that rubber texture is built up. It is like using hands to tear chewing gum. Even though the bit you are tearing is far away from the main body, still it is somehow linked with it. This situation, which happened within our living space, is very stubborn, and every time we recall the memories, we will always use the preposition 'in' or 'at' referring to a certain physical spot within hutong, such as the doorway of the courtyard, outside our gate or whatsoever.

On the other hand, when we moved out from the high-rise apartment, we did not have as many memories attached to where we lived as we had in hutong area. My two major informants in the high-rise apartment rarely appeared in conversation between my mother and I after we moved out. Instead, my mother always tried to remind me to call Mr. Yang and Xiaojun on some special occasions like Spring Festival or Mid-Autumn Day to send my wishes and greetings to them. But she never mentions anyone we knew from the high-rise apartment for me to call, because emotionally she felt we were closer to the hutong residents.

So space is like a big container, which doesn't only accommodate the residents but also serves as a holder of the relational net built up by those dwelling within it. The more it contains, the heavier it is and the more stretchable and unbreakable it is.

8.7 Challenging the Concept of “Human Ecology”

Returning to the main theme of this chapter, ‘urbanisation through specialisation’, it could be said to be reflected in human behaviours both at a micro level of society and on a macro level. It concerns the way that space has been used differently in two different residential forms.

It seems that as urban space has developed as a big container, space has become more specialised. We could see the change by looking at the two different residential forms that represent the status of ‘urbanity’ in different time periods. In the hutong, which is representative of the old-fashioned city, space is more overlapping, and residents tend to seek more of an overlapping lifestyle with one another, as could be clearly seen through their concept of being ‘polite’.

I like how the idea of ‘human ecology’ embodies a community: ‘As the sociologists would like to use the term, it is however, not identical with geography, nor even with human geography. It is not man, but the community; not man’s relation to the earth which he inhabits, but his relations to other men, that concerns us most’ (Hughes et al. 1952: 165). This conclusion is very true in describing the transition from an agricultural society to an urban society, but if we look closer at the process of transition from one old-fashioned urban society to a modern urban society, it is possibly not the case. Traditionally, the old-fashioned urban society is like what Hughes et al. describe, concerned more about the ‘relationship to other men’ which is community based, with much more overlapping space. But as the division of the physical space comes to be specialised, which is seen as a way to increase efficiency, so human society becomes more individual based, with people able to rely on or benefit from modern networks, from electricity to the Internet. In the beginning, it is just the physical space that is specialised; then later on, the abstract and social spaces also join in the process of specialisation. When this development occurs, as in the high-rise apartments, it seems as if ‘human ecology’ no longer describes urban space at all, for community and ‘relations with other men’ have given way to an individuation that covers all kinds of space, physical, abstract and social, alike.

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Chapter 9

A Conversation with Henri Lefebvre-The Dynamics of Space

There is a traditional Chinese saying: ‘You can’t judge a person by how he looks, just as you can’t measure the water in the ocean by using a measuring cup.’¹ This has been widely used as a living philosophy in China, promoting the idea that one should not judge a person by applying one’s own standards or norms of measurement. This principle is also valid in judging space, I would argue. It is not possible to judge how a space really is by how it looks, as space does not just function simply as a sight or view to be appraised by a passer-by.

For instance, on first visiting a shabby courtyard in the hutong, it is difficult to believe that inhabitants living inside might enjoy their life. Even for me as an anthropology student, in the first few weeks of my stay in the traditional hutong, with no bathroom nearby for showering, and needing in the early morning to queue for the toilet, I started doubting myself: how was I going to survive under these living conditions. At the other extreme of dwelling conditions, the modern, fancy, and nice-looking high-rise apartment blocks do not guarantee a really ‘good life’ to the dwellers inside.

What an outsider first sees is primarily what Lefebvre has described as the first level of space: *physical nature or the cosmos* (1991: 11–12), this being non-dynamic, objective, tangible and relatively stable. Lefebvre also pointed out that space is *mental* (1991: 11–12) and *social* (Lefebvre 1991: 11–12) implying another two levels of space and which I have summarised as ‘abstract space’ and ‘social space’, respectively.

What my informants have taught me during my fieldwork proved that what Lefebvre has written in his book is very much the case. Space should be understood in terms of various levels and dimensions. Space does not possess merely a physical existence. It has life, spirit and stories, past, present and future. It does not only carry and deliver the designer and the builder’s understanding of this particular area but also, after accommodating dwellers for a certain period of time, it possesses a

¹The Chinese term is 人不可貌相,海水不可斗量 (ren bu ke mao xiang, hai shui bu ke dou liang).

relationship built by the users of that space and formulated both consciously and unconsciously: the abstract space and social space that the main body of the book has taken pains to explicate. What has proved most interesting and meaningful to me has been the ways in which rules, rituals, habits and rites weave the abstract space and social space together so as eventually to generate or produce another new physical space. For instance, the courtyard is built to accommodate only the residential house inside. Cooking is supposed to take place inside the house. But in this way, the soot from cooking easily pollutes the house. So residents start to build sheds as their kitchens, by taking up the public space. In this way, a public space shared by all the residents becomes somewhere private with a lock to prevent others from getting in. The secret is to take up space next to or directly opposite your main house. By understanding this rule, residents could turn the public communal space into a personalised space. Besides this, the new owner of the space modifies the inside by installing relevant facilities and puts up decorations to turn the space into the one he had predetermined. On top of this newly built physical space, the abstract space and social space has been developed accordingly. These rules are usually unwritten and non-official; they are things that become familiar to dwellers who want to live a harmonious life and wish to produce space that possesses a variety of dimensions at once: physical, abstract and social combined. Atop a newly produced physical space, the user of the space will start another round of production, making abstract space and social space gradually and unintentionally and eventually even changing the physical environment as originally planned and built.

To residents dwelling within a certain physical space, I would argue, a good, harmonious life is all about interweaving a relationship between physical space, abstract space and social space. As these three levels of space are not separated, isolated or unrelated, once a level of space has changed, then the other levels of space will be also changed accordingly. To understand a space, in short, is not just about understanding the physical layout of a certain area or how to get somewhere; more significantly, it is to familiarise oneself with the abstract and social space: for instance, ways of being polite, the principle of reciprocity and the mechanisms of losing and gaining face. At a more advanced level, according to my experience living in Beijing, it is to produce the new space based on the rules one has learnt.

Through participant observation within two different residential forms of space—traditional courtyards in the hutong area and high-rise apartment in a modern compound—it is easy enough to see both the distinction between the components of a space and also how textures of space are differentiated in these two residential forms. The hutong is more community focused, while the high-rise apartment is more individual focused, this leads to a further distinction in the texture of space, in its abstract and social characters. In the hutong, space is thick, stretchable, bendy and soft; in the high-rise apartment it is thin, hard and rigid.

Moreover, through studying the two groups of city dwellers, it is possible to see how the space has been experienced and transformed by the dwellers in different ways. Also these two different ways of constructing living space lead to a different way of communication among the residents. The traditional courtyard is designed to enable the dwellers to share their personal information with their neighbours

more frequently as a way of showing their intimacy. The way that the high-rise apartment has been built, meanwhile, is to protect the privacy and security of each individual living within this compound. The only way to respect others is to respect their privacy.

The traditional hutong has a mixed up character, as inhabitants have many chances to get involved with their neighbours. I summarised this in the study by the term 'overlapped space'. And they also tend to share their personal domestic problems with neighbours living nearby, looking for assistance in getting the problem mediated smoothly; this would never happen in the high-rise apartment.

To lead a good, harmonious life within a certain physical space does not merely mean to obey the rules set by the bricks or walls, then, but more significantly, it is to discipline oneself to abide by the social rules. Harmoniousness is a value because firstly, the residents greatly rely on the resources from the community to maintain their life. The resources do not mean natural resources but more importantly the social resources, such as information exchange and conflict negotiation as I explained in the previous chapters. So living harmoniously with the community is a necessity.

These rules can be divided into two kinds: 'high culture' and 'low culture', as I have described them. High culture includes the language people use to communicate, the way they relate with the past through old things and their concept of politeness. There is a big difference in the high culture that characterises our two residential forms, and this is a major reflection of the difference between the social spaces that inhabitants build.

However, one thing is also certain: the high culture has power over the low culture in both the high-rise compound and the traditional courtyards in the hutong. For low culture is something associated with individual living habits, and these are relatively personal. As a researcher I could only try my best to adapt myself to the high culture, since it would be almost impossible for me to be the person to change the high culture after staying there for a year or so. By contrast, the low culture that developed between my key informants and myself was something to which I and they devoted much of our energies. It sounds like the high culture and low culture are terms of value, but as a matter of fact for me, these terms describe different degrees of formality and publicness.

Beijing, as a modern and large city, has developed by following the common trend of increased specialisation. It seems the more 'modern' an urban environment is, the more it is specialised. Each piece of space functions independently of the others. Individual dwellers may choose to occupy a 'mobile mode' all the time, moving continually from one place to another, seeking out better and better locations and cheaper prices, without any sense of melancholy, because they are not tangled or 'overlapped' with the spaces in which they used to dwell. As a contrast to the traditional hutong courtyard, then, residents in the high-rise apartment did manifest great mobility, then, and they did not tend to relate too much with the past and their surroundings. They see their living place as simply that a place to live. For their socialising, they would leave this living space for a karaoke bar, a restaurant or café. To the hutong dwellers, by contrast, their living place is synthesised rather than specialised, including the practical aspects of living, entertaining, problem

solving and information exchange and so on, all of which tie the dwellers tightly and inseparably to one another. If I were to leave the hutong area and walk to the high-rise compound, it would seem as if everything around me, including the dwellers, was becoming modern: industrialised, standardised and one dimensioned—and thus easy for outsiders to adapt to.

Space in general is dynamic, as it is always in the process of being constructed and reconstructed, being formed and transformed. There is always something more for the dwellers to learn about their own living space and to have it mean.

But there are some limits to this dynamism. The gap between the space of the high-rise apartment and that of the courtyard hutong is always there. I even have a bold speculation: it is that the high-rise dwellers could never come to mean by their space what the hutong dwellers mean by theirs. Because the high culture is a dominant factor that shapes and reshapes the residents' way of behaving, this way of behaving descends from one generation to another through words and actions.

The meaning, which the hutong dwellers attach to their space, varies from time to time, then. During my research, I saw the ways in which residents perceived the space and the ways in which space formed the residents' way of behaviour, as an endless process of mutual interaction. The space as something physical constrains what social and abstract senses can be made of it, while the social and abstract senses also construct and transform the physical space. This dialectic affects those living in the high-rise apartment. Compared with hutong courtyard, this dialectic effect is only obvious within the resident's own home space in the high-rise compound, while for the hutong courtyard, it is easily noticed in both inside and outside space. This means that I could never hope to capture the whole picture of the life of those dwelling in the traditional courtyards no matter how hard I tried. In recent years, some of the hutong have been turned into tourist sites and modified to accommodate the tourists to let them taste life in the hutong. Some of the hutong have been turned into hotel restaurants. Accordingly, some of the newly created terms, like 'Hutong Inn', 'Hutong Pizza' or even 'Great Leap Brew', have become very familiar to Western tourists and they enjoy the experience a lot. But to the indigenous residents in the hutong, even those who have moved out from hutong, they find it is a bitter concept to accept. Those new functions now affiliated to the traditional courtyard in hutong by the powers that be will become the main focus of the next research I hope to conduct.

When I finished writing this conclusion, one of the characters who has appeared most frequently in this book, Mr. Yang, popped into my mind. All of a sudden, many of the memories I have that concern him came to my mind and in the form of certain key words: Mr Yang's 'soiled feature', his 'hot pot', his 'inner city tour', his 'face', his 'hot water service', his 'quarrel with his wife', the 'moon cake' he gave to us as a gift and so on. What he taught me is not merely his knowledge about Beijing; more importantly, he inspired me to look at the space we live in in a multi-dimensional way. Exploring his way of living with other neighbours has been the most fantastic experience of my life.

Without hesitating, I picked up my phone and gave Mr. Yang a call to see if there were any new stories he would like to tell me:

‘Hello Uncle Yang. This is Qingqing’.

‘Yo, Qingqing! Where are you now?’

‘I am still in the UK and about to finish my thesis. How is everything going there?’

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