Innovation without fracture: a study of spatial negotiation in Chinese new urbanism and traditional urbanism communities

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Innovation without fracture:

a study of spatial negotiation in Chinese new urbanism and traditional urbanism communities

by

Tian Zhu

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

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ABSTRACT

Chinese new urbanism is changing the way people live and identify with their living spaces, shaping social identities away from tradition. As a result, new spatial practices are forming, which will have serious repercussions on the way people live together, and interact with each other, and eventually on the meaning of communal living. Through new design of communities, new/contemporary urbanism in China interrupts the traditional modes of interacting in public and private spaces, and makes communities developed as fractured entities. In particular, it fixes the boundaries between private and public spaces leaving no room for individual and collective negotiation. Traditional Chinese urbanism, instead, allows for endless negotiation between private and public spaces which permit the development of dynamic individual and collective identities. New urbanism in China should learn from tradition, and include in the design opportunities for negotiation between private and public spheres.
OVERVIEW

Introduction

As a result of its new economic and political role in the global economy, China’s built environment and urban way of life are changing at a fast pace. Dramatic changes are nothing new in the political, economic, and cultural landscape of this millenary country. The passage from Feudalism to Communism, the “Cultural Revolution” of the 1960s, and the “one child” policy are three very important transformations that in the twentieth century have restructured the basis of China’s culture and society. Qualitatively, however, the metamorphosis of China’s urbanism in the twentieth-first century is producing something new and worrisome that is calling into question the very mode of this country’s path toward modernization: the relation between private and public spheres.

Innovation with fractures

Although communities are called as “New Urbanism” by Chinese designers, they are bringing in modern design and construction techniques while forgetting the phrase’s emphasis on tradition and locality. Chinese new urbanism is changing the way people live and identify with their living spaces, shaping social identities away from tradition. As a result, new spatial practices are forming, which will have serious repercussions on the way people live together and interact with each other and eventually on the meaning of communal living. Through new design of communities, new urbanism in China is creating an innovation full of fractures. It interrupts the traditional modes of interacting in public and private spaces.
In particular, new urbanism fixes the boundaries between private and public spaces leaving no room for individual and collective negotiation.

Telling the fate of the physical environment without mentioning that of its residents would be like telling only half of the story. Indeed the built environment cannot be understood apart from the people who inhabits it and transforms it, and eventually adapts it to its own needs and desires. On this subject, the transformation of Beijing’s hutongs has transformed the life of thousand of its residents, sometimes for the worst, other times for the better. Those who had their homes razed very often have been relocated into new apartment complexes in ways that recall the worst, and now discredited; examples of urban renewal in the Anglo-American style. Used to living in a tight, interconnected, porous, horizontal physical world, hutongs residents have been packed into the self-enclosed, isolating, non-communicating vertical world of high-rise buildings with predictable result:

“[The interviewee] moved out to new places and I could rarely see them. One of my old neighbors was dead and I heard that news several years after her death. Living in these high buildings, I can hardly have any communication with my neighbors. I don’t know why, but the feeling changed. We used to chat with neighbors on the narrow hutong lanes. But what we do now is just nod our heads to those who live in the same building” (Zitai community resident, interviewed by the author, June 12th, 2009)

High rise apartment buildings with vast central public spaces and well-developed security and service systems are trying to provide residents a worry-free private life. There is a well-defined separation between private and public spaces and the separation between private and public spaces follows the separation between private and public life. Privacy is greatly emphasized while public life seems over simplified into several designated public open spaces - the two spheres lose connection with each other. Sitting in the couch in private
homes, facing the computer screen, they don’t know what their neighbors look like and don’t care about others living inside their community. They don’t need to take any responsibility for their community except paying monthly fees to the management company. The meaning of the word neighbor, now changes from friends next door to strangers next door. Communities are no longer a home-like place but spatial containers for isolated homes. Community spaces outside their apartment doors are nothing but connectors among their private cubes in the office, their narrow spaces inside cars, and their private homes. The separation between private and public spaces fractures communities as well as community life.

**Tradition**

Chinese new urbanism communities seem to have lost this negotiation between private and public spheres; however, it still exists in traditional communities. Traditional Chinese urbanism allows for endless negotiation between private and public spaces which permitting the development of dynamic individual and collective identities. This study cast a look at China’s future urban identity by focusing on contemporary approaches toward working class neighborhoods, particularly Beijing’s hutong communities. For centuries the agglomeration of these neighborhoods has constituted the urban web of the capital and their courtyards and small alleys defined the physical environment and urban identity of many generations of Chinese workers living and working in the shadow of the most magnificent, luxurious, yet unreachable among urban utopias: the Forbidden City of China’s emperor. Located in central Beijing, hutongs have been seen as undesirable places to live in recent decades because of the association with poor people, tight spaces and low hygienic standards.
Yet, hutong communities represent the DNA of Beijing urban life as well as that of China’s larger social and cultural characteristics at large.

Walking into a Beijing traditional urban community through hutong alleys, one can easily see wide-open store fronts and siheyuan gates, street-watchers sitting in front of their siheyuan gates, as well as local residents’ expansion of their living and storage spaces into the courtyards and hutong alleys. Features indicating a solid boundary between private and public spaces such as fences could hardly be seen here. The community spaces, as the reflection of human territorialization activities, spontaneously grew with layers of private, semi-private, semi-public and public spaces. Within these layers, people act purely individuals, with close relationships and interaction with their intimate surroundings, and then they step out into a place of more exposure and exchanges with other less familiar individuals and finally touch the boundary of the strange world. These spatial sequences are seen throughout the community, overlapping with each other. It is difficult to identify the exact boundaries between private and public spaces since all the physical boundaries are somewhat blurred.

**Innovation without fracture**

Innovation is inevitable. With its increasing urban population and housing needs, China could no longer return to the days of building one-story courtyard communities and having families share living spaces with each other. However, this does not mean that all aspects of these traditional urban communities should be dumped on the garbage heap of history. Instead of losing the possibility of negotiation, new urbanism in China should learn from tradition and include in the design opportunities for negotiation between private and
This study will try to compare the way Chinese traditional and new urbanism communities lead on the negotiation between private and public spaces, and look for possible solutions to build modern communities with local tradition, thus, achieving innovation without fracture.

**Research design and Methodology**

Upon the discussion, the thesis will study both new urbanism and traditional urbanism communities in Chinese cities, particularly, in Beijing. It asks the question on how spatial negotiation is neglected in Chinese new urbanism communities and represented in traditional urbanism communities. With the analysis and discussions, the thesis will come with a proposal regarding modern designs without fracture.

**Theses**

Chinese new urbanism is changing the way people live and identify with their living spaces, shaping social identities away from tradition. As a result, new spatial practices are forming which will have serious repercussions on the way people live together, interact with each other and eventually on the meaning of communal living.

**Hypothesis and proposal**

To analyze the theses, two hypotheses and the possible proposal are discussed as follows:
**Hypothesis I: Innovation with Fractures**

Through new design of communities, new urbanism in China interrupts the traditional modes of interacting in public and private spaces. In particular, new urbanism fixes the boundaries between private and public spaces leaving no room for individual and collective negotiation.

**Hypothesis II: Tradition**

Traditional Chinese urbanism allows for endless negotiation between private and public spaces which permit the development of dynamic individual and collective identity.

**Proposal: Innovation without Fracture**

New urbanism in China should learn from tradition and include in the design opportunities for negotiation between private and public spheres.

**Research design and methodology**

To answer the hypotheses, the study started from a review of literature on the history and theories of Chinese traditional urbanism and new urbanism community design. The history of hutong communities in Beijing and the most recent information on the housing market in Beijing were explored to find the communities selected for case study. Later, the study focused on two communities for the field research: Zitai Community as an example of a Chinese new urbanism community, and Dongsi North Hutong Community as an example of a Chinese traditional urbanism community. Both communities are in the urban area of Beijing: while the first is in the newly developed district and the latter is in the inner city, two blocks away from the Imperial City.
The Chinese new urbanism example, Zitai Community, was built in 2006 with the concept of Chinese traditional gardening and landscaping. The average house price here was around 20,000RMB/sq meter when the apartments were sold out (Sofun.com, 2009). Its general consumers are so-called upper-class people with high annual income and private automobiles. The reason to choose such an “upper-class” community is based on the consideration of its possibilities of “trickling down”: in China, rich people are usually the first ones to try out new ideas. While setting the example for other middle-class communities, this expansive new urbanism community is highly representative of modern community design and development in China. At the same time, with a better living environment, more educated residents, and more funding possibilities, communities such as Zitai have the potential to be the leader in innovation much more than those relatively poor communities in which housing issues are still the first priority.

The hutong community is among the most famous types of Chinese traditional urban communities. This urban residence type is based on the narrow alleys called *hutongs*, with courtyard houses alongside (Weng 1992). It was a type widely used in the northern Chinese cities and it is a representative of Chinese urban residences. The hutong communities in Beijing, because of their long history, fabulous architectural design, better preservation and vibrant community life, are especially known as the archetypical hutong communities. Whenever anyone mentions hutong community, the first image appearing in one’s mind is the hutong community in Beijing. As the example for Chinese traditional urbanism analysis, Dongsi North Hutong Community has existed for more than 700 hundred years. Its history provides chances for local residents to keep territorializing and reterritorializing its spatial features. During the years of innovation, the community keeps the negotiation between
private and public spheres alive everywhere. The individual and collective identity based on the negotiation is seen along the hutong alleys in every corner of the community.

For discussion purpose, this study will conduct analyses at three scales: urban scale, community scale and home scale, according to the level of privacy in these two study communities. After the two communities were chosen, interview questionnaires (see appendix) were developed, asking residents about their perceptions of spatial negotiation and identities of their communities. In June 15, 2009, this study’s IRB application was exempted by the Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, and the field research was conducted in summer 2009. During the field research the author led observations during two weeks spent living in Dongsi North Hutong Community and visits to Zitai Community. Photos were taken to describe either the negotiation or the isolation occurring at the three scales. At the same time, interview questionnaires were sent to those residents who were willing to answer. All interviewees responded to the questions immediately after they were asked to participate in the interview, and many of them gave their life stories and comments about the private/public spaces inside their communities. Their answers and comments were written down by the interviewer to avoid interviewee discomfort with voice recording.

Later after the three-week’s field research, interview questionnaires and residents’ answers were collected and summarized, stored along with the photos and observation notes. To protect the privacy of interviewees, their real names were not used and their personal identifying information was deleted.
This study will analyze the spatial negotiation at three different scales in both a Chinese new urbanism and a traditional urbanism community. Chapter 1 explores the boundary between the city and a community, inside the community and between private homes via the example of Zitai Community. By analyzing maps and photos, as well as life stories and interviews of the residents from this particular community, this chapter also shows that through new designs, new urbanism in China fixes the boundaries between private and public spaces, leaving no room for individual and collective negotiation. They are isolating individuals from community life.

Chapter 2, in contrast, provides snapshots of Chinese traditional urbanism, using hutong communities in the inner city of Beijing as an example. Dongsi North Hutong Community is the particular case study. On three scales (urban scale, community scale and home scale), the observations, mental map analysis, interviews and life stories help to explore how negotiation happens and how individual and collective identity is created based on these negotiations.

Chapter 3 further discusses the success of Chinese traditional urbanism, which allows for endless negotiation between private and public spaces and permits the development of dynamic individual and collective identity. And at the same time, this chapter compares Chinese new urbanism communities and Chinese traditional urbanism communities. New urbanism in China should learn from tradition and include in its designs opportunities for negotiation between private and public spheres.

Chapter 4 explores the possibilities for activating the private/public spaces by introducing traditional spatial features into modern designs. Also at the three scales, this
chapter analyzes certain successful cases and proposals to promote this connection between private and public spaces and the connection between the modern and the traditional.
CHAPTER 1. CHINESE NEW URBANISM COMMUNITIES: INNOVATION WITH FRACTURES

The features seen in today’s community developments in China are restructuring and redefining public and private spheres in a way different from either ancient Chinese urban communities\(^1\) or working units’ living quarters\(^2\) under the planned economy. These Chinese new urbanism communities bring residents privacy as well as isolation. This isolation happens on the edge between a community and the city, inside the community and among neighbors.

**Between a community and the city: community as a fortress**

Walls and gates are not something new to Chinese people\(^3\). In the earlier days, walls and gates were symbols of centralized governance. But today they mean security and privacy.

---

\(^1\) Examples of Chinese traditional urban communities include the hutong in northern part of China and the linong in south China, etc. These communities were built at the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Different from Chinese vernacularly-developed rural villages, many of these urban communities were planned and designed by ancient city planners.

\(^2\) Working unit is a special term under the Chinese planned economy. People were designated to work for different communal factories, institutes etc. (which were called *working units*). Usually, a working unit provided its employees and their families with apartments and everyday services in living quarters. The working unit owned all the land and properties. Employees were assigned the rights to live in the apartments. (Lu 2006)

\(^3\) Chinese emperors built walled cities for defense reasons as people did in most ancient cities around the world. Communities were designed with walls and gates. During the night time, gates would be closed for curfew. In the Song Dynasty (960 A.D. – 1279 A.D.), curfews were abolished and community walls disappeared (Dong 2004). Chinese
Chinese choose fences and stone walls to build their fortresses (figure 1.1) - no one could easily come in. With walls surrounding, a Chinese new urbanism community usually has several designated entrances. As shown in figure 1.2, the community offers three entrances, two for vehicles and one for pedestrians, with nearly two thousand\(^4\) of residents living inside the community. Residents cannot reach their apartment buildings directly from the streets. Instead, they must use the entrances. Meanwhile, community is walled by several layers: heavy bushes, high walls with intrusion prevention devices, and another lines of bushes and landscapes to prevent people looking in from the city streets (figure 1.3).

\[\text{Figure 1.1 Walled communities in China: gates of Golden Town neighborhood in Wuhan}\
\]
Security controlled gates require identification to enter and guard the community from strangers (circle in the picture). Photo taken by the author in April, 2006.

\(^4\) The community has 530 families, with 2.85 people per household in average (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2007).
Figure 1.2 Entrance location map of Zitai, a new urban community in Beijing
Entrances are designated as pedestrian-only and vehicle-only. The limited number of neighborhood entrances restricts access into the neighborhood. At the same time, neighborhood security is controlled at these entrances by guards and a neighborhood-entry identification system. Map drawn by the author based on google earth image and field research.

Figure 1.3 Walls surrounding the Chinese new urbanism communities
The boundary between a community and the city is formed by layers of walls, bushes, landscapes, intrusion prevention systems and etc. All these features show one thing: the separation between a community as a private sphere, and the city, as a public spheres. Left: photo of walls in Rainbow Garden, Wuhan available at: http://esf.wuhan.soufun.com/chushou/3_5918633.htm Right: photo of walls in Runyuan Community, Wuhan, available at: http://wh.house.sina.com.cn/lsxw/2009-02-23/102276298.html
Access to the community is restricted at the entrances. Residents need to show their identification to enter (figure 1.4). By swiping the card, the entrance will be opened, just like opening the door of one’s own apartment with keys. Guests need to contact home owners to prove their identification. Without the card, people will not be allowed to enter, even if he/she is a resident. Recently, Beijing News\(^5\) reported a conflict between community guards and a renter in Bluekey International Community\(^6\). The renter had not received an ID card from his landlord and the guard held him at the entrance and did not let him enter until the police came (Wang 2009).

![Figure 1.4 Residents must presented themselves to the entrance guards or guards will not allow them in](http://news.qq.com/a/20090905/000357.htm)

Figure 1.4 Residents must presented themselves to the entrance guards or guards will not allow them in
Residents need to provide it to get into the neighborhood anytime. People without the ID card will not be allowed to enter, even if they are living in the neighborhood (Wang 2009). Photo by Jianing Wang. Available at: http://news.qq.com/a/20090905/000357.htm

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\(^5\) Beijing News (Xinjing Bao) is one of the most important local newspapers in Beijing. Online editions could be seen at: [http://www.bjnews.com.cn/](http://www.bjnews.com.cn/). Its news is also shown in many Chinese website every day.

\(^6\) Bluekey International Community is also named as Landiao Guoji in Chinese. It locates in Fengtai District, Beijing.
This phenomenon reveals that the outside world is strictly kept out from the private spheres inside the community. The resources inside these modern communities are private rather than public; they are owned by local residents. Entrances are the only connections between the community and the city. Walls, fences and guarded entrances show that these communities are defined as private spheres where no stranger or outsider is allowed to walk in. These features build a rigid boundary between community life and city life, and a boundary between people living inside different communities; you can only reach and use those spaces you have paid for and meet those who have paid for the same resources as you have.

**Inside the community**

**On the pedestrian and vehicular paths**

Isolation also happens inside the community, between public spaces (such as community parks and streets) and private homes. To satisfy the increasing reliance on vehicles, Chinese new urbanism community developments address the convenience and safety on community streets. The Radburn community\(^7\) in early 1930s’ America is an example frequently mentioned in Chinese community development guidelines. Following

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\(^7\) Radburn is a new town in Fair Lawn, Bergen County, New Jersey, United States. It was founded in 1929 as a "town for the motor age" (Radburn Association 2008). It is famous in Chinese community planning and design field for its separation of vehicular traffic and pedestrian traffic, and the widely use of cul-de-sacs. The separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic is as a symbol of “motor age” Chinese community and a proof of quiet and safe community life (Li 2001). Its ample open spaces and centralized services are also praised in China.
this American community model for the motor age, Chinese communities are designed with two separate road networks: pedestrian and vehicular. Every two or three apartment buildings compose a living quarter with a dead-end vehicular path. Pedestrian paths are separated from vehicular traffics, and they connect apartment buildings to open spaces and services. As Li (2001), a Chinese planner, comments, the system guarantees quietness and safety inside residence living quarters, avoids impacts from vehicular traffic, and should be widely-accepted in modern community development projects.

Figure 1.5 shows the evolution of the Chinese community road network pattern. While earlier road networks (picture 1, 2 and 3) extend to each apartment building with sidewalks, the new road pattern creates a loop surrounding the entire community and goes into spaces between apartment buildings with cul-de-sacs.
Figure 1.5 The evolution of Chinese community road networks.
The earlier road networks were not designed for the motor age. Instead, people got into their community and their homes mostly by foot or by horse carriage, then by bike. The face-to-face interactions between neighbors happened during people’s everyday routine, from going to work to shopping for grocery. Although in picture 1 and 2, the location of major neighborhood streets changed with the introduction of townhouses and spotted apartment buildings, this fact did not change too much. Later with the emphasis on neighborhood central open spaces (picture 3), streets became separators between residences and central public spaces and services. However, vehicular traffic was still not emphasized in this model. Residents were still had most of their neighborhood life as a part of their daily routines. Chinese new urbanism community designs (picture 4) widely accept the separation between vehicular traffic and pedestrian traffic in order to satisfy the increasing usage of private cars. Now it is convenient for car owners to reach the city roads. But people no longer need to go through designed public spaces such as pedestrian entrances and central parks, and as a result, they lose their chance to meet with their neighbors and join in the neighborhood life as a part of their daily routine. Concept map drawn by the author.

In these Chinese new urbanism community developments, pedestrian entrances are separated from vehicular entrances. Vehicles pass through the guarded entrances from city arterials, traveling through the car lanes which lead to the cul-de-sacs with underground parking lots. At pedestrian entrances, residents can walk through the community open spaces.
and series of services to reach their homes. Pedestrian paths become connectors and paths for residents to reach their living quarters. As shown in figure 1.6, a community example in Beijing has separated the pedestrian entrances and vehicular entrances. People drive up from underground parking lots right under their apartments, onto the vehicular paths, and then join the traffic flow of the urban transportation network.

Figure 1.6 Models showing pedestrian entrance, vehicular entrance and underground parking entrance in Haitangwan Community
Left: pedestrian-only entrance  Right: vehicular entrance

The newly-developed community has two separate road systems (vehicular and pedestrian) that lead to different parts of the community. From the pedestrian-only entrance, residents could reach the central open spaces while from vehicular entrances the roads directly go to underground parking lot. Residents use stairs and elevators to reach their apartment door without any need to pass through designed open spaces. (Available at: http://bbs.soufun.com/qrbygfjh--1-10639/93778516_93778516.htm)

Pedestrian paths and vehicular paths are also separated as shown in figure 1.7. Pedestrian paths are designated as places where people may walk slowly, talk with their neighbors, watch their children playing and join in the community activities. And on the vehicular paths, residents sit in their cars, moving swiftly towards the city streets without any chance to greet those who live in the same community. Two sets of transportation systems sound reasonable; however, busy employees now no longer have reason to join in the everyday community life. They can simply take the vehicular paths in their private cars to go
to and return from work. They can live purely private lives going, from their homes to their cars without any connection to their neighbors. The separation between pedestrian and vehicular paths in reality separates the private from public life inside the community.
Figure 1.7 Plan of the Haitangwan community
The community design separate vehicular traffic with the pedestrian traffic. The outer loop is for vehicular traffic and has branches directly go to the underground parking lot just beside the apartment buildings.

Available at: http://house.focus.cn/votehouse/2481.html. Translated by author
In front of the hided and gated homes

Standing on the path in front of an apartment building, heavy bushes and shadow walls could be seen shading homes behind (figure 1.8). They build a boundary between private windows and open spaces in front of the building. Private life inside the buildings is shielded from pedestrians on the community streets and in open spaces,

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 1.8 Landscapes in front of the apartment buildings hide private life from the public sphere**

Heavy bushes and trees are commonly used to shield private homes from community streets. Eaves and waterscapes also convey a “keep out” image in the front and at the back of private homes while making the community attractive. Photo taken in Haitangwan community, Beijing. Available at: [http://house.focus.cn/photoshow/6829/51033131.html](http://house.focus.cn/photoshow/6829/51033131.html)

Walled front yards and balconies are behind the trees and bushes (figure 1.9 to figure 11). A walled front yard, for the first floor residents, is a nice extension of indoor private spaces. Here home owners are able to enjoy fresh air, sunshine, afternoon tea chat with their friends, while the wall helps shelter them from public life. Balconies, similarly, are the extension of private indoor life for the upper floor residents. Designers make the balcony spaces as closed or semi-closed by using shading boards. Closed balconies even act the same
as a part of indoor living rooms or bedrooms, providing residents more windows to allow sunshine to come into the room.

Figure 1.9 Walled yards on the first floor
Walls around the yards keep out community life. In the yard, home owners enjoy private life with their friends and families. Although the yard is in the open air, it is actually an extension of private life inside the homes. Photo available at: http://cache.aries.sina.com.cn/supportshouse_d/decor_stylephoto/0d/7c/20070216_278_12.jpg

Figure 1.10 Open balconies provide an extension of indoor homes for people to reach open air
However, the open balconies are still made as part of the private sphere where residents set furniture and decorations and enjoy their private time with friends instead of joining in the community life. Photo available at: http://cache.aries.sina.com.cn/supportshouse_d/decor_stylephoto/ba/83/20070413_327_5.jpg
Figure 1.1 Closed balconies as an extension of private living rooms.
Balconies are enclosed as a part of the living room. Steel cage-like security windows protect the balconies as a private sphere and keep the private homes free from outside interruption.

Photo available at: http://static.tofun.cn/UploadPic/HousePic/10672/10672_3_464334203.jpg

Apartment gates at the ground floor stairway act as guards between spaces inside and outside of the apartment building (figure 2.12). ID cards, passwords and keys are used again, similarly to what happen at the entrance of the community. This gate is always kept locked for security reasons. “Please show your password.” - This might be what the apartment building gate says. The gate isolates life inside apartment buildings from the rest of the community. Apartment buildings, with these gates, are becoming private spaces inside the private community. And from here, residents walk through the narrow stairways and ride in elevators, and enter their own fortress behind the secure doors of their apartments, and the landscapes, walls, window curtains, balconies and electronic gates of the apartment buildings play the same role. They separate the private life from nearly all the possible activities occurring in the community public spaces, as well as keeping out noises and interruptions.
Figure 1.12 Secure gates on the first floor of the apartment building.
Residents need to enter password (sometimes to wipe the ID card) to get access into the apartment building. Anyone without the password (or do not have the ID card) must ask their families or friends staying inside the building to open the gate for them through an intercom connected to the gate. Available at: http://www.sstak.com/2008/upfile/pic/20081119/20081119141024917.jpg

Inside the apartment buildings

Another kind of isolation happens inside the apartment buildings, at the places such as stairways, floor landings and elevators. As a result of the emphasis on private spaces, public spaces between homes are seen as waste spaces and are always minimized to make place for living rooms inside the apartment, as advertised in the brochures of many community development projects. Shown in figure 1.13, two families share a small floor landing where they can get into the elevator or walk up and down the stairs. This is not designed as a place to stand and talk with your neighbors for five minutes; it’s just a space for thirty seconds’ waiting for elevators, or a two-second walk from the apartment doors to the stairs. The tiny landings are the interpersonal spaces where you can meet your neighbors, or let your children running up and down with their friends. On the paths of residents’ everyday routine, they have spatial similarities to the community sidewalks. They could be
important spaces where people could stay, children could play and community contact could happen. However, while privacy is addressed and separated from public life inside the high-rise apartment buildings, these spaces become pure connectors and lose almost all their social functions.

Figure 1.13 A standard floor plan of a new apartment building
Public spaces inside apartment building, such as floor landing, stairs and elevators, occupy a small part of the whole floor plan. Instead of any emphasis on communication and interaction activities, floor landing in front of private apartment doors are just a space to pass through instead of staying in. Figure available at: http://images2.winfang.com/member/business/files/2008/09/7/200897070707450.jpg. Edited by the author.
**Zitai: An example of a Chinese new urbanism**

An example of Chinese new urbanism community development in Beijing is the Glorious Palace (Zitai<sup>8</sup>) developed by the Vanke Co... The community is a New Urbanism community located in Fengtai District, near the Fourth Ring Road<sup>9</sup>, to the west of the inner city of Beijing (figure 1.14). It is only 2.5km from the city center<sup>10</sup>, and several minutes’ walk from the city’s metro system.,

The community is close to several national sports centers developed for the 2008 Olympic Games and other services. In 2007, the community completed its first phase and the second phase was completed in April 2008. The entire community covers over 110,000 square-meters floor area with 88,000 square-meters for residences (Sofun.com 2009).

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<sup>8</sup> Its Chinese name “Zitai” means “purple stage” literally, while purple in Chinese is the symbol of royalty and “Tai” (or literally, “stage”) means the foundation of a building and further, a palace.

<sup>9</sup> Current Beijing’s urban road system has five major centric Ring Roads (loops) surround the Forbidden City. There is officially no First Ring Road. The Second Ring Road surrounds the ancient city walls of Beijing. In this thesis the area inside the Second Ring Road is referred to as the inner city of Beijing mentioned in this thesis. This area is also where most of the headquarters are located. The Third Ring Road passes through most of the important commercial and business areas and is the most modern part of Beijing, with new CCTV towers, Beijing World Trade Centers and other modern, high-technical skyscrapers. Areas around and outside the Fourth Ring Road are places where most of the modern urban communities are built. The convenient location makes living in this area very popular and expensive. Respectively, the Fifth and Sixth Ring Road are outside loops of the metropolitan area of the city.

<sup>10</sup> When mention the central area of Beijing, domestic residents usually mean the Tian’anmen Suqare, the Forbidden City and the adjacent historic areas. Zitai Community is 2.5km from Chang’an Ave West, the most important city road in Beijing (or, in China) which runs through Tian’anmen Square and in front of the Forbidden City’s major gates and walls,
As most of the Chinese New Urbanism communities do, Zitai community is composed of high-rise, huge scale 12 to 20-floor apartment buildings. These high-rise apartment buildings build a wall separating community life and the city space. As presented to prospective home buyers, Zitai includes four buildings with three ample courtyard-like open spaces in-between. The community was designed with a central open space and services at the entrance (figure 1.15 and figure 1.16) and two vast central open spaces between the apartment buildings, named as “Garden of Wen” and “Garden of Wu”\textsuperscript{11}. Most of the 530 families living inside the community are white-collars working in Beijing. Besides location, design is also mentioned by some of them as a reason to choose the community: “We were attracted by the blueprint for the first sight and the landscapes looked great. We thought it would be a nice place for a vibrant community life. Also, I wish my child would grow up in a nice, healthy community” (Zitai resident, interviewed by author, July 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2009).

As in most of the modern communities, Zitai is surrounded by brick walls and storefronts. As shown in the shaded part of figure 1.17, all these parts around the apartment buildings are two and three-story, wall-like skirt buildings with small shopping centers, grocery stores and services such as hair salons, cafes and restaurants. Residents need to take the major entrances on the gap between the commercial areas to get into the community (figure 1.18). Security inspection systems and guards’ rooms are hidden behind brick walls and landscaping, and identification is needed to get through the security door. Strangers and outsiders are not allowed to walk in, especially after all the apartments were sold in 2008. A

\textsuperscript{11}“Wen”, in Chinese, literally means “literature” or “civilized” while “Wu” means “valiant”. 

lady living in an adjacent community, who was doing some shopping in the stores in front of Zitai community, said she came to the stores several times a week but enter the community only once:

“I saw the community central open spaces once when it was still under construction and potential homebuyers were allowed to enter and have a look at those apartments. After that, I could not enter, not to say taking my daughter there to play. The guard will not let you to enter if you don’t have the access card or a friend’s invitation.”(Customers in a store in front of Zitai community, interviewed by author, July 23rd, 2009).

Stores occupy the first two or three floors of the skirt buildings. However, these stores are attempting to provide a private atmosphere, hiding all the services behind walls and windows. Having accesses to the stores do not mean the accesses to the community. The wall is also seen between Zitai and the adjacent community. The only entrances to enter the community are several guarded gates shown such as the one shown here. Only those who live in the community could enter and enjoy the facilities and services inside. The community becomes more of a private property instead of public.

Walking into Zitai community, there are rarely residents staying on the community roads and open spaces, especially during the weekdays. Zitai community has a separated system for vehicular and pedestrian traffics.
Zitai Community

Tian’anmen Square

Figure 1.14 Location map of Zitai community
The community is located near the Fourth Ring Road of Beijing, where most of the new urban community developments locate. Available at:
http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&rls=com.microsoft:en-US&rlz=1I7GGLD_en&resnum=0&q=beijing%20china&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=w1
The community is designed with ample central open spaces between buildings. These central open spaces are designated as gardens inside the community. They are the public spaces addressed by designers. The buildings are developed as private spaces where home owners’ privacy is protected as much as possible. Map from Google Earth, edited by the author.
**Figure 1.16** Perspective view of Zitai Community.
Available at: http://www.soufun.com/house/photo/d_other_13774010.htm

**Figure 1.17** Commercial “walls” around Zitai community
The plan shows the location of commercial buildings and the one on the right is the streetscape. People outside the community can access these commercials but the inner parts of the community, such as central open spaces are still not accessible. Left: map available from Google Earth, edited by the author.
Right: Available at: http://u.kbcdn.com/fangpicture/23/36/92/51/detail_big_sell_1239602479150.jpg
Residents need to enter from the pedestrian-only entrances and provide valid identification here. People without ID cards will not be allowed to enter. Those residents who drive will use two vehicle-only entrances and show their identifications there.

Available at: http://bbs.co188.com/content/0_1114199_1.html

In figure 1.19, the community is surrounded by a drive way with underground parking lot entrances. The roads between buildings are pedestrian-only, with underground parking lots’ exists. Designers have created a separation between vehicular traffic and pedestrian traffic inside the community. Most of the residents take the vehicular path everyday from the underground parking lots underneath their apartment buildings to private automobiles. They do not really need to go through the designated community public spaces. While the underground parking lots are right under the apartment building, with one lot for each family, residents will start their day from the underground parking lot and their cars instead of morning greetings to their neighbors:

“My wife and I rush out of the apartment building and go directly to the parking lot. Our car is there. Here is our route, we will drive through the driveway around the buildings, pass through vehicular entrance (figure 1.20) and go directly to the city road (figure 1.20 marked their route). Then I take
my six-year-old son to school, and my wife and I go to work. We don’t have the time or opportunity to see our neighbors in and around our apartment building. There is only one minute for us to go from our door to the parking lot, and that’s it.”(Zitai resident, interviewed by author, July 23rd, 2009)

**Figure 1.19 The separation between vehicular and pedestrian traffic**
The community has two sets of road systems for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. There is no overlapping between these two systems. Map available from Google Earth, edited by the author.
Everyday individual life is isolated from public social life. Local residents’ everyday routines take them from private homes to private vehicles and then to cubical working spaces. In figure 1.21, one interviewee’s daily routines to and from work have been diagrammed in dotted lines while the walk routes inside the community are in solid lines. They seldom have any overlaps. The separation between pedestrian routes and driveways functionally determined residents’ everyday routines. If you want to be in the community public space, use the stone paths: the solid lines with nice curves follow the designated paths between sculptures, shadow walls, fountains and bushes! Private everyday life activities and public community activities are separated by road systems and function zones. Go to private space for your private life, and if you want to talk with your neighbors and get involved in community activities, go to designated plazas. Private and public are two parallel systems.
Figure 1.21 Daily routines of a resident
This map shows the separation between private routines and public life. While residents are driving to work from the vehicular paths, they seldom meet their neighbors inside the community, not to say joining any community interactions.


During the day time, the community is quiet. Middle-aged adults, who are the majority components of the residents inside Zitai, go to work and children go to school. Old
people are scattered inside the community. Instead of sitting in her own yard or at her own gate to watch people on the street while cooking noodles in the kitchen, now the old ones need to walk for a much longer distance to see if there is any other old person like herself who is bored and willing to walk for a long time to the central open space. The walls and bushes hide private areas so good that they can hardly see their neighbors if staying at home.

“I put a set of beach chairs in my yard and bought some plants I like. It is a place where I can enjoy the open air in my pajamas. No one on the street will see me… Of course, it is much difficult for us to talk with our neighbors now. We need to dress up and walk to the central open spaces, but sometimes we might find no one there. People are busy nowadays. You cannot require them to spend an hour, dress up, and walk for ten minutes to find a neighbor to talk with. My mom does not like this. She is still living in a crowded siheyuan. I invited her to live here for several times but she could not stay for more than two days each time. For her, it is boring to live here.” (Zitai resident, interviewed by author, July 23rd, 2009).

The community public spaces which were said to be designed to encourage negotiation and communication among residents are surrounded by apartment buildings. Actually, they are too far away from private homes, especially for those living on the upper floors. People are living inside private spaces hiding behind heavy bushes, walls and windows. Walls, bushes and landscapes become curtains between public and private spaces. Landscapes are designed to create privacy: as seen in the detailed landscape design and the photos shown in figure 1.22, trees and heavy bushes, as well as shadow walls and waterscapes are used in front of the buildings, saying “no” to communication between private and public spaces. The buildings utilize its narrow gates, enclosed balconies, deep front yards and shadow walls in front to protect privacy. At the same time, central landscapes build another curtain with trees, sculptures, decorative walls and other structures. Layers of solid and semi-transparent features are placed private homes and central community life. Since
people can hardly see through these features from their private homes, their neighbors are prevented from the chance for interaction. People no longer have the chance to chat with their neighbors face to face simply from their windows.
Figure 1.22 Other landscaping features that separate private and public spheres

The drawing on the left shows the layout of central open space surrounded by apartment buildings in Zitai Community. Photos on the right show these landscape features. All these features are nice decorations of the community. However, they also act as a wall between private sphere and public sphere. The possible connections between these two spheres are cut down here.

Available at: http://bbs.co188.com/content/0_1114199_1.html
At the home scale, New Urbanism designs in Zitai community provide large and gorgeous rooms (figure 1.23). However, they neglect the spaces in-between homes inside the apartment buildings. Inside the building, two households share one floor landing (figure 1.24), with one elevator for each. “Actually, I see it as a waste of money to have two elevators for only two families on each floor. We paid money for elevators as a part of the management fees collected by the management company every month, for something we don’t really need.” (Zitai resident, interviewed by author, July 23rd, 2009). Residents use their elevator every day, going down to their parking lot. There, they will sit in their cars, close the windows and leave for the day’s work. Places such as stairs, floor landings and elevators are functional-only. Residents are not allowed to make any change of these spaces. What they do is passing through the floor landing and stay behind the locked apartment doors, and paying for maintenance fees every month. Designs for privacy and convenience become somewhat become a waste of money and build a cold wall between neighbors living on the same floor.

Figure 1.23 Large and gorgeous interior designs of the apartments in Zitai Community
Photos available at: http://www.soufun.com/house/photo/d_other_13774010.htm
Meanwhile, residents in Zitai now do not take any responsibility for community upkeep and enhancement. Enjoying a hassle-free community life seems good, however, interviewees feel something different:

“My mom used to ask me to clean our yards and the street in front of our house when I was young. All our neighbors did the same thing. It was a chance to meet and talk with my friends in the community, and it is a great pleasure when we see the results of our work. Now you need to pay about 3 RMB for every square-meter of your apartment to hire a management company to do all the stuff we used to do by ourselves. It is convenient, but I doubt I could ask my son to be involved in the community affairs and make him understand the importance of social responsibility.” (Zitai resident, interviewed by author, July 23rd, 2009).

Residents are losing their control over the community. They are no longer involving in community daily affairs and take no responsibility for the future of the community life. Vernacular works improving community life are disappearing. Paid management companies take care of everything from community safety to street cleaning, garbage disposal to landscape maintenance. What residents have are management fees paid to the company every
month. Lacks of involvement in everyday community development and maintenance activities does not seem to promote residents meeting, talking and working with their neighbors on community affairs.

Examples of Zitai community and its residents reveal the life in Chinese new urbanism community. There is an invisible line between private and public spheres. The walls and gates keep the community life isolated from the other people in the city. There are seldom any negotiation in-between private and public spaces. One step ahead, you are in the private, while one step backwards, you are within the publicity. Resources inside the community are private, belonging only to the residents living here. Community public spheres are far away from the residents’ private lives. Community activities such as street-talks which spontaneously happen in many old, traditional communities can hardly be seen here. And a resident might never know the name of his/her neighbors next door, since their lives are so far away from each other. They pass along the same paths every day, but never share the life experience inside the community.
CHAPTER 2. CHINESE TRADITIONAL URBANISM COMMUNITIES: EVERCHANGING TRADITION

On the contrary, in traditional communities, negotiation between private and public spaces happens almost everywhere, which permit the development of dynamic individual and collective identity. Dongsi North Hutong Community shows an example of negotiation also at the urban scale, community scale and home scale.

Hutong communities in the inner city of Beijing (figure 2.1) are one of the most famous ancient Chinese urban communities born with the city about 700 hundred years ago. During its evolution, residents kept territorializing and reterritorializing the private and public spaces inside the community, siheyans were divided and shared by families which do not have blood relationship, and hutong alleys have become spaces for neighborhood commercial and social activities. If, as discussed in the previous chapter, the modern are largely closed and isolated systems, hutong communities are comparatively open with negotiation between private and public spheres. This chapter will discuss this negotiation in ________

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12 Hutong communities are composed of courtyard houses (named as siheyuan in Chinese). For most of the times, Siheyuan are aligned along allays called hutong. Communities with siheyans were called hutong neighborhood/community. The siheyuan form and the community they composed can be traced back as early as the Zhou Dynasty (Knapp 2005); however, the name hutong was first used in the Yuan Dynasty (1206A.D. to 1368A.D.) (Shi and Hu 2007), and means “water-well” or “streets” (Weng 1992). Dadu (today’s Beijing), with grid road networks, was well-planned by Chinese ancient planners as the nation’s capital. Grid blocks were divided by city arterials, and a block was usually divided by east-west hutong alleys with square courtyard houses (siheyuan) alongside. The ancient siheyuan was a single family residence, while later unrelated families began to share a single siheyuan. The close neighborhood relationships and the neighborhood identity, as well as the unique architectural and spatial designs are famous as “something unique in historic Beijing”.
terms of spaces between the city and the community, inside community and among private homes with a case study of Dongsi North Hutong Community.
Figure 2.1 Hutong communities in the inner city of Beijing
Hutong communities are divided by grid street patterns. Usually, one block contains several major hutongs and numbers of smaller ones. Siheyuans were built along hutong alleys with gates faced to the hutong.

Left: Google Earth map of Beijing
Right: photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community in May 2009.
Between city and hutong community

The edges of a hutong community are blurred and closely connected with the urban environment. Hutongs, as shown in figure 2.2 and figure 2.3, are namely alleys connecting to city streets and narrow alleys connecting different hutongs together throughout the community. There are multiple intersections between a hutong community and the city. These intersections are also entrances to the community. Figure 2.4 shows photos of community entrances in Dongsì North Hutong Community. Instead of entering from guarded gates, people could enter a hutong community from the city streets via multiple entrances.

At the entrance from wider city streets to narrow hutong alleys, there is a spatial sequence (figure 2.5) which defines the neighborhood boundary. Standing at the entrance of the community, looking at the small businesses along narrow hutong alleys, and the road signs displaying the name of the community and the hutong’s name, there is a strong feeling of entering; however, the spatial sequence change does not mean a rigid boundary between the hutong community and the city. Instead, the hutong commercial and social activities are flowing onto the sidewalks of the city street. Visitors are free to enter and share the community spaces and resources. A community could be considered as the private property of local residents. But at these entrances, the boundary between private community and city’s public life is blurred.
Hutong Communities usually have several major, wider hutongs (5-7 meter wide, sometimes 9 meter wide) connecting with city arterials. These major hutong alleys are connecting by narrower (less than 5 meter wide) hutongs. Entrances are at the intersection between hutongs and the city arterials. (Weng 1992)
Figure 2.3 Examples of hutongs
Major hutongs inside the community could be nine-meter wide, the narrower ones are 1.5 to 2-meter wide.
Figure 2.4 Entrances of Dongsi North Hutong Community
A hutong community usually has ungated entrances at the intersections of hutong alleys and the city streets. These entrances are usually open, and have decorated frames with the names of the community on it, some have advertizing and others are simple entrances with a small road sign with the hutong’s names.

Figure 2.5 Analysis of hutong entrances
The hutong entrance provides a spatial sequence which goes from wider city streets to narrow hutong alleys. Local residents and outsiders share these entrances equally. This creates an extension of community life into the city and the rights of all citizens to join in this community life. The boundary between the community’s privacy and the city’s public life is blurred.
A busy hutong entrance usually has small businesses along the hutong alley. These businesses emphasize the feeling of entering, while offering daily needs to hutong residents as well as to people from other communities. A visitor always receives a warm welcome with greetings and smiles from local business owners (figure 2.6). Instead of hiding in the buildings with glass walls, these small businesses inside the hutong community are open. Most of the store owners occupy and territorialize the spaces in front of their store front (figure 2.7). This occupation makes an extension of commercial activities into hutong alleys. By doing these, shopping inside a hutong community becomes an activity with many opportunities for face to face communication and interactions among neighbors and visitors. At the same time, as important activators of community life, store owners take the responsibility for upkeep of the spaces in front of their stores, reducing maintenance costs while increasing store owners’ feeling of belonging to the community.

Figure 2.6 Posters in English seen at one of the entrances of Dongsi North Hutong Community. Local business owners show warm welcome to all the customers from and outside of the community. All small businesses inside hutong Communities are open to the public and are highly accessible. Chinese characters on
the poster in the figure read as: “cigarettes, cold beverages, long distance call 20 cents per minute, IP, IC cards” with English words on white paper reading “SIM CARD” and “INTERNATIONAL CALL RMB 3.5/min” (Photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009)

Figure 2.7 Business owners extend their stores onto hutong alleys
The blurred boundaries between indoor and outdoor stores provide more chances for neighborhood face to face interaction in the hutong. (Photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009)

Open does not mean unsafe. Instead of having gate keepers sitting at the entrance to check everybody’s ID cards, hutong communities have many eyes. Store owners and residents walking around or sitting near the entrances take the place of security guards when strangers comes in, the business owners immediately recognize them as such. Local residents and small business owners show warm welcome even to the strangers; however, they will also keep an eye on the new comers’ activities (figure 2.8).
Here at the entrance the hutong community shows its willingness to share community life, resources and spaces with everyone: no matter if you are rich or poor, you will always be welcomed when you show your friendliness. At the same time, the ability to control and change community spaces at the hutong entrances creates the feeling of territorialization. Instead of creating entrance spaces as pure public spaces connecting hutong allays and the community to the city, local business owners and residents here mark the place as “public-private space”. They take the responsibility for the security and up-keep at these spaces as a part of their homes, while proudly sharing their community life with people from other parts of the city.
Inside the neighborhood: life on hutong alleys

Walking into the hutong community along hutong alleys, the negotiation between private and public spheres can be seen in terms of residents’ territorialization of the hutong alleys. The territorialization, whether as temporary as sitting in front of the siheyuan gates (figure 2.9), or as permanent as setting one’s own flowerbeds under the siheyuan walls (figure 2.10), extend private life into public spaces.

The temporary territorialization usually happens in the area near siheyuan gates, under the trees and in front of store fronts. Two scenes are usually seen on hutong alleys. The first is that residents are sitting together in front of the siheyuan gates, watching people walking along hutong alleys, and chatting with each other. Sitting in front of Siheyuan gates along hutong alleys is actually an extension of private life onto public hutongs. Here on the hutong alley, these street watchers sit and meet with all neighbors inside the community. Spontaneously, communications such as chatting and greetings happen. Besides street-watching, neighbors with similar hobbies such as playing Chinese chess and raising dogs also gather together. The hutong alleys provide local residents a place to stay outside of their tiny, crowded siheyuan. Sitting together means more fun and interaction. Many eyes on the hutong alleys also ensure safety. Siheyuan gates are always open during the day time and parents feel free to have their children playing on hutong alleys (figure 2.11 and figure 2.12): there are always some neighbors ready to take care of the public safety.
Figure 2.9 Street watchers in front of siheyuan gates
Street watchers are seen in front of siheyuan gates, both single and in a group. They are monitoring the hutong alley. Photos taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009.

Figure 2.10 Local residents occupy hutong alleys with piles of goods and flower pots
Photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009.
Residents usually keep their siheyuan gates open, even if there is no one at home. It is safe in the community. Neighbors are willing to take care of other’s property. Photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009.

More permanent territorialization is usually seen in terms of storage piles, residents-planted trees and flower pots. Due to the spatial limitations inside courtyards, local residents
express their willingness to improve their lives by building small storage piles in front of their siheyuan and decorating their spaces with plants (figure 2.10). These are spontaneous actions due to the crowded courtyard spaces. Residents take some public spaces as their private storage areas and take care of that space by cleaning and covering the piles, and arranging them in the most efficient way. Trees and flower pots show local residents’ love of their hutong life. Nice-looking flowers in neat pots decorate hutong alleys and create a welcoming atmosphere. As with decorating their private rooms, local residents decorate the public spaces as well, which represent their willingness to take care of the hutong alleys and show their love of the community.

The temporary and permanent territorializations on hutong alleys are local residents’ extension of private life into the public sphere. With siheyuan gates open, people sit along the hutong alley and chat with each other as they could do in their private living rooms, arranging public spaces as their private gardens. Siheyuans, although surrounded and separated by brick walls and gates, are more of an open sphere today. Walls and gates separate private spaces inside a siheyuan and public spaces on hutong alley. However, temporary and permanent hutong occupations have created a negotiation between private and public life. By bringing activities happening in private rooms in Chinese new urbanism communities into public sphere, hutong communities own vibrant community life on alleys.
Among families: inside siheyuan

Siheyuans inside hutong communities were originally built as single family residences at the very beginning\(^\text{13}\). However, the increasing population inside hutong communities required families to live in very close proximity. Due to the population boom in the 1950s, the city mandated that all empty rooms should be assigned to those migrants who did not have place to live (Sit 1995). People from different parts of the country rushed into Beijing, and began to share the life in siheyuans. Now most of the siheyuans in Beijing are occupied by unrelated families (Weng 1992). The increasing diversity inside the neighborhoods brought many possibilities for change. As shown in the in figure 2.13, families built additions to original rooms. Activities changed from intra-family interaction to inter-family interactions. The “neighbors” in a siheyuan became more important than ever before (Weng 1992).

Courtyards inside siheyuans were places for family activities. A courtyard could be seen as private spaces for a siheyuan, while it is also public spaces shared among families. Private life happens inside rooms, as well as inside the courtyard.

The negotiations between private and public spheres inside the siheyuan also happen in terms of temporary and permanent occupations. These two terms usually come together but could be discussed separately. The temporary territorialization is an extension of

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\(^{13}\) Chinese ancient philosophy takes large family as the best. Usually, three or more generations lived together. Different generations occupied different portions of the house. A wealthy and large family might have layers of courtyards. Each lay of courtyard houses was for one son and his family. (Weng 1992)
residents’ private life into courtyards’ spaces. Due to the limited indoor spaces residents have to move parts of their everyday life, such as laundry, cooking, sometimes even eating and entertainment activities into the courtyard. Especially when weather is pleasant, it is common that families sit together around a small timber table under the tree, having dinner and chatting. After dinner, housewives wash dishes by a small cement washing pool at the corner of the courtyard, children help to clean the floor and husbands set up places for Chinese chess, playing cards, and after-dinner snacks. Instead of sitting in the couch watching TV shows alone inside private rooms, families join in the activities with their neighbors. During these daily interactions, families create strong ties with each other. Neighbors become a part of the family life, instead of chatting with the stranger next door—their neighbors.

Permanent territorialization, vernacularly constructions inside the courtyards, is a spontaneous reaction to the increasingly crowded indoor rooms. There is no pure private or public space inside the courtyards. Siheyuan residents build additions for storage and living inside the courtyard. Usually, these constructions are based on negotiation among neighbors. A family needs to get the approval from its neighbors to add an additional room inside the courtyard. Sharing and compromising are the fundamental philosophy for residents living in a siheyuan. At the same time, the right to change courtyard spaces help to build the feeling of belonging and controlling. Neighbors are sharing the right to use the spaces inside the courtyards as well as assuming responsibility to the space. The benefit for a courtyard is the benefit for all families living in the same siheyuan. As a result, residents build strong relationship in daily life to keep this benefit for all families and neighbors.
Figure 2.13 Different families’ occupation inside a siheyuan
Five families of different sizes shared a one-yard siheyuan. Inside the courtyard, residents built additions to satisfy increasing housing needs. The public spaces remaining in the courtyard is narrow and it requires compliance and negotiation to live within a siheyuan. Photos taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009.

By doing these temporary and permanent territorializations, a person understands the courtyard as a part of their private spaces which they share with their neighbors. Inside a siheyuan, a bedroom might be private; however, the courtyard, as an interpersonal space, is a place where private life and life among siheyuan neighbors mix together.
Dongsi North Hutong: an example of traditional hutong community

Dongsi North Hutong Community is one of the historic Beijing hutong communities - its history can be traced back to Yuan Dynasty 700 years ago (Dongsi Community 2008). There are nine major hutongs go from east to west through the community and connect with the city streets. Hundreds of narrow alleys connect the nine major hutongs together. Locates in Dongcheng District (figure 2.14), Dongsi North Hutong Community is now famous because of its vibrant hutong life.

Figure 2.14 Location map of Dongsi North Hutong Community
Maps available from Google Earth, edited by the author.
As the major research field of this study, the Dongsi North Hutong Community is a mix of working class residences. 17230 households (43731 residents) live inside the 1.65sq. km community. The community includes thirty hutong alleys, four schools, two hospitals and a kindergarten (Dongsi Community 2008) (figure 2.15). The straight alleys go directly from east to west, are about nine meters wide, and are lined by siheyuans.

During a week-long site visit, observations were made inside the community, especially in Santiao Hutong. When asked to answer the questionnaire, interviewees were encouraged to share their neighborhood experiences. These life stories provide knowledge of how Dongsi community became successful with strong neighborhood interrelationship by mixing their private and public life.

**Morning market and neighborhood small businesses**

10:30 am, June 8th, 2009. Two families met in a tiny grocery store on the Santiao Hutong entrance. It was nearly the end of the day’ morning market, but a plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits were still piled in front of the store. Wives from different generations did the same thing at the same time and the same place: selecting vegetables for their family. The husbands came too, helping to hold a new mop and the shopping bags (figure 2.7).
Figure 2.15 Major study area inside Dongsi North Hutong Community
The community is entirely open. Each major hutong alley is connected with the city streets. People living in and outside can walk into the community from these entrances. The morning markets\textsuperscript{14} are in general vernacular, and are regarded as one of the “important features in the neighborhood” (Santiao Hutong resident, interviewed by author, May 2009). When asked to point out the important features in their community, respondents always included the morning market. Meanwhile, some of them identified it as the way to tell Santiao Hutong entrance from other similar hutongs’. One resident explained: “It is easy. You walk along the Dongsi North Avenue; Santiao Hutong is the only one with a morning market. Everyone who lives in Dongsi North neighborhood knows it. And everyone can walk in. Visitors will always be welcomed”. (Santiao Hutong resident, interviewed by author, July 26th 2009)

The morning market builds a connection between the community and the city. People from different communities meet here, choose their groceries and chat with each other. Local business owners expand their private business into the public spaces. There is no rigid space definition between private stores and public sidewalks. Commercial activities are open to both local and non-local residents. There is no gate or guard. The morning market welcomes anyone inside the city. Community spaces belong to the local residents as well as non-residents.

Seven am to 10am in the morning is the golden time of a day in the morning market. During these hours, local residents, especially busy housewives who need to be at work

\textsuperscript{14} Zaoshi, or Xiaoshi in Chinese
before 8am, always picking up the daily groceries for the whole family, to feed their children and themselves with a hand-made pancake and rush to work, trying to be on time, through Beijing streets at the morning rush hour (figure 2.16). And at the same time, grannies and housewives will always get the freshest produce. “Greetings and small talks on hutong alleys are a must among neighbors, and even among visitors from other communities. We are happy and proud to have friends to come and visit us.” (Santiao Hutong business owners, interviewed by author, July 26th 2009). Located right on the everyday route of local residents’ way to work and anywhere inside the city, morning market as an entrance becomes a place for everyone to meet instead of a boundary between the community and the city.

Figure 2.16 Morning Market in Dongsi North Santiao
Street vendors and store owners occupying the hutong alley for business. Photo taken in Santiao Hutong, Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009
Figure 2.17 Grocery stores in Santiao Hutong
As shown in figure 2.17, residents establish small convenience stores and grocery stores at home. They pull down parts of walls and install gates and windows to make the room into a “home-store”. Shelves and glass cabinets are organized and filled with cigarettes, beer, soft drinks and other daily goods. The areas in front of the store become spaces for chit-chat on the hutong alleys. Residents usually stop by to get a bottle of vinegar or some beer, asking about the daily news, or they may sit for a while on the small plastic stool and join in the conversations among store owners and residents.

All stores in the morning market at the Santiao Hutong entrance are small. Unlike larger super markets in new communities, these hutong neighborhood stores do not have much interior space; however, the way store owners organized the spaces in front of the store create certain spaces where indoor stores and outdoor areas form a spatial sequence. This sequence has certain definition between private stores and public areas on hutong alleys, but does not give it too much emphasis. As described previously, the store owners in Dongsu North Hutong Community, especially those in the morning market, usually pile their goods in front of the actual store gates. The inner space flows out to the spaces in front of the store gate. Although happening un-intentional due to the limitation of inner spaces, the continuous feeling of the store space creates an opportunity for shopping in front of the store instead of between narrow shelves inside the store. Firstly, this space extension helps to act as advertising, attracting residents passing-by to stop and buy. Secondly, the larger open-air store space makes people standing in front of the store, around the piles of goods to pick up what they want. A discussion about the freshness of the fruits or the price could always be heard during the observation. Instead of formal neighborhood meetings, Dongsu North residents have the chance to interact with each other in a much more casual and flexible way.
Territorialization on hutong alleys

Walking into the middle sections of Santiao Hutong, it is easy to discover that the everyday neighborhood life here has escaped from the commercial atmosphere in the interface between the neighborhood and the city. Most of the siheyuans along hutong alleys are residential, with several small convenience stores squeezed in-between. The territorialization here are internally arising from the everyday living needs, and presents itself in the form of both temporary occupations and more permanent remodeling. These occupations contribute to the creation and enhancement of neighborhood public spaces for social interactions, especially the temporary stays on hutong alleys. Local residents are extending part of their private life onto the hutong alleys. As the major public spaces of the community, hutong alleys are considered as public spaces to share with neighbors, while residents take the responsibility to maintain them, similar to what they do towards their private property.

Temporary street territorialization

Temporary street occupations are street activities happening on the hutong alleys. Usually, the residents in Dongsi North neighborhood occupy part of the hutong spaces as stages for all kinds of different street activities, such as people watching, sitting and chatting. These activities reflect and contribute increased intimacy between neighbors. Everyone becomes quite familiar with their neighbors, and neighborhood affairs have already become part of their private concerns. These temporary occupations are reflections of territorialization, which relates to the social life more than the spatial features. They are a
form of mental territorialization, in which residents mark the space in their minds instead of changing the physical features of these spaces.

**Hutong story I: Mr. and Mrs. Street-watcher**

The role of street-watchers in Dongsi North Hutong Community is obvious. Images in figure 2.18 are usually seen in the hutong community. An old lady on Sitiao hutong is one of the street watchers I met every day. She was sitting on a rock in front of her siheyuan, watching passers-by, sometimes chatting with her neighbors when they were available. She smiled every time when I took a picture or walked by, and chatted with me kindly. She mentioned her neighborhood’s safety when asked about her attitude towards life in the siheyuan and hutong neighborhood.

“See, I know the guys living opposite my siheyuan well (pointing to the siheyuan door opposite the alley). Two couples have lived here for many years. And the other guy in that siheyuan rents his room to several young men. They work for a restaurant in a nearby hutong. We have such a safe neighborhood that they take valuable goods back from their restaurant every night. They even don’t need to lock the siheyuan door every night. There is no thief here, no thief dare to come. We have so many residents on the street, who dares to come and steal things? Everyone knows what’s going on in this hutong. The police station is also in our neighborhood, and we are all familiar with the officers there. Believe it or not, we never lose one bicycle here, even if you don’t lock it. You can never see this in those new communities. My daughter lives in an apartment building of a newly built neighborhood near Guomao 15, she has already lost two bicycles in that neighborhood. Even if you lock it, there is no use! They can steal it in only ten minutes. That’s one reason I don’t like apartment buildings. I don’t like the feeling there. Here I can talk with my neighbors, even if I am alone at home.”

(Sitiao Hutong resident, interviewed by author, July 27th, 2009)

15 A CBD area in Beijing named after one of the high-rise skyscrapers, the new CCTV building designed by Rem Koolhaas
Resident, especially the seniors, play an important role in protecting their
neighborhood and make their other neighbors feel safe and comfortable. The home-like
familiar and safe feelings on the street is the basis of communications between residents, and
generates a sense of belonging or “attachment” to the hutong neighborhood. From daily
meeting, residents as individuals become a part of the neighborhood kinship group and are
always ready to help and support each other when there is a need.

**Hutong story II: hutong talks**
It was a fine day afternoon in early summer. Some residents finished their dinner and took their small chairs and dogs out, sitting under the tree on the hutong alley or under a grape trellis (show in figure 2.19). Neighbors chat with each other about almost everything, from this morning’s meat price to the American presidential election.

![Figure 2.19 Street talks](image)

*Figure 2.19 Street talks*
Residents from siheyuans on the two sides of this cul-de-sac gathered with their dogs, enjoying the small talk and the shade beneath the grapes. Further behind is another side gate where three old ladies were sitting and chatting. (Photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, June 2009)

Chatting usually relates to no serious topics at all. However, everyday life is based on these trivial, routine things. When joining in conversation under the grape trellis, several residents were talking about their children and their friends’ children’s education. Similar things happen every day.

One reason for local residents to sit and play (figure 2.20) in hutong alleys is that they consider the hutong alley as safe. When the retired seniors escape from their crowded, small rooms into the hutong alleys and join in the street talk, the safety is guaranteed. Parents seldom worry about their children’s playing in the hutong alleys. And the residents in Dongsi
North Hutong Community always stay on the hutong alley, chatting with their neighbors or walking their dogs until late in the night, sometimes until 11pm in summer.

Most of the photos showing neighborhood chit-chat or simple staying were taken by the gates to siheyuan, either old, historic ones or newly added steel ones. These grey spaces near siheyuan gates, and the doors opened later by local residents on siheyuan walls, break the edge between private and public spaces. While siheyuan gates were designed to create transitional spaces, they intentionally provide the feeling of semi-public spaces. They can be considered as a part of the private life inside the siheyuan, as well as a public space where neighbors could stay. They are convenient, close to home, easy for reaching neighbors and feel safe to be in (figure 2.21). The drawings in figure 2.22 depict the locations where some of the community activities happen in hutong alleys inside Dongsi North Hutong Community on June 10th, 2009. Sections also help to explain the negotiation between private and public spheres at these points.
Figure 2.20 Activities on hutong alleys
Hutong talks were seen at all corners of the community, people were standing or sitting in front of their siheyuan gates, beside siheyuan walls or simply along hutong alleys. All these activities were spontaneously happening, involving residents in community social life.
Figure 2.21 Siheyuan gates
(Photo taken by the author in Dongsi Hutong Community, July 2009)
Figure 2.22.1 Different sections of Wutiao hutong shows spaces where negotiation between Siheyuan private homes and hutong public alleys
Street talks were seen on a narrow hutong alley connecting two major hutongs together. Residents living in the siheyuan along the hutong usually sit under the grape trellis in front of their siheyuan. Observation was made on the middle section of Santiao hutong in June 2009. Photo taken by the author in July 2009.
Figure 2.22.2 Different sections of Wutiao hutong shows spaces where negotiation between siheyuan private homes and hutong public alleys. Street watchers were seen on major hutong alley inside the hutong community, in front of siheyuan gates. Opened gates provide a negotiation between private spheres inside siheyuan and public spaces on hutong alley. Observation was made on the middle section of Santiao hutong in June 2009. Photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, July 2009.
Figure 2.22.3 Different sections of Wutiao hutong shows spaces where negotiation between siheyuan private homes and hutong public alleys
Observation was made on the middle section of Santiao hutong in June 2009. Photo taken by the author, July 2009.
Permanent remodeling and occupation

Looking through the siheyuan gates in Dongsi North Hutong Community, it is easy to identify different siheyuans by the ways residents remodel them. Trees and flowers, along with owner-built brick walls, piles of coals for winter, boxes and even the bed clothes on the hangers give each siheyuan a unique appearance and identity. Some residents paint their doors with Chinese characters, and some build storage areas along the siheyuan wall. Residents do all kinds of construction to improve their lives in these narrow spaces.

At a siheyuan gate inside Dongsi North Hutong Community, one family put their flower pots on the brick under the tree. Residents living inside this Siheyuan water the plants nearly every day.

“I am happy to put my plants here. I made several good friends because of it. Many old guys like me stop in front of my flowers and then walk in to talk with me about gardening stuff. We then share our experiences [on gardening] and exchange seeds.” (Dongsi North Sitiao resident, interview by author, July 27th, 2009)

The flower pots, storage piles, etc. are symbols of shared private life and interest with neighbors inside or even outside of the community. The occupations might occur mostly because of the crowdedness of the siheyuan spaces. However, it indirectly helps to create and consolidate the relationship between neighbors, while, of course, requiring residents to take responsibility for their community. At the same time, sense of community comes with the responsibility. People feel proud of their community as an extension of their homes and as a place where they spend a lot of time and energy to make it better.
Inside siheyuan: Mr. Ma’s remodeling

The community is open and friendly. For most of the times, a visitor could walk through an open siheyuan gate and say “hello” to the residents living inside. Inside siheyuan, different families share the rooms and courtyards. They extend their private space and activities into the relatively public courtyard. Here they build, use and maintain the courtyard spaces together. Mr. Ma’s siheyuan (figure 2.23) locates in Dongsi North Hutong Community. His family moved from Lanzhou to Beijing in the 1940s after the Japanese army occupied northern China. The family bought a new siheyuan in Beijing. Their new home was a small, one-yard siheyuan which belonged to a merchants’ family before Ma’s family moved in. (figure 2.24)

Mr. Ma’s family didn’t occupy the whole siheyuan for long. After liberation, five rooms were changed into shops and the remaining five rooms of the main hall were assigned to three families: the Ma’s, the Lu’s and the Song’s. Figure 2.25 depicts how three unrelated families shared the siheyuan in the late 1950s and the 1960s, when Mr. Ma was in his teens. Today, there are six families, including three renter families, sharing the small siheyuan (figure 2.26).

Here is what Mr. Ma has done to the spaces near his two rooms: under the window of the old siheyuan room, he put an approximately one meter tall cement shelf with a storage space under it, covered by plastic cloth. On the shelf, he piled mops, pots of China roses, shoes, small stools and sometimes vegetables and baskets (figure 2.23). As he said, his mops need sunshine to dry and his China roses need sunshine to grow and other things need space to be stored, and they should be easy to reach. At the same time, he changed the old kitchen
into his daughter’s room and built a small kitchen attached to the old one. (Ma, Dongsi North Hutong Community resident, interviewed by author, Beijing, China, 23 May, 2009).

His neighbors also built additions to their rooms. The neighbors negotiated with each other to reach a compromise on the arrangements of their new rooms. Public spaces inside the courtyards are utilized as private spaces. This vernacular occupation again extends the private lives which were originally inside rooms into the courtyard. During the process of negotiation, neighbors got the spirit of community: sharing and collaboration. While the reason is simple - just try best to make life easier for every family inside the siheyuan.

Summarized from the examples of Dongsi North neighborhood, these features are common throughout most of the historic hutong neighborhoods in Beijing. The intimate neighborhood relationship within compact neighborhood spaces is admired by visitors. More importantly, local residents are truly involved in the neighborhood life and they enjoy the
relationship with their neighbors as a vital part of their life. While local residents are and should be the real owners of their neighborhood, Dongsi North Hutong Community and other similar historic neighborhoods in Beijing (or even, China) provide a living example of a healthy neighborhood development. It shows that traditional Chinese urbanism allows for endless negotiation between private and public spaces which permit the development of dynamic individual and collective identity.

Figure 2.24 The original layout of Ma’s siheyuan.
It was a square, one-yard siheyuan, about three hundred square meters and with ten rooms. Walking through the wall-gate, a grey brick shadow wall was just in front. The shadow wall was intended to hide the inner yard from the street, and keep the chilly winter wind out. Standing in front of the shadow wall and looking left, the yard would be just in front of you. Depicted by the author according to the interview with Mrs. Lu and Mr. Ma.
Figure 2.25 Ma’s siheyuan with three unrelated families in later the 1950s and 1960s
Depicted by the author according to the interview with Mrs. Lu and Mr. Ma.

Figure 2.26 Today’s layout of Ma’s siheyuan
Depicted by the author according to the interview with Mrs. Lu and Mr. Ma.
CHAPTER 3. COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION: INNOVATION WITHOUT FRACTURE

Success of the negotiation between private and public spaces

In summary, residents get several major benefits. These benefits are the major contributors to the health of the community, and should also be considered in the context of modern community development:

Sense of community

The sense of belonging and controlling may be the most important factor in the success of hutong communities. By extending their private life into the public arena, local residents involve themselves in community life. Daily routines cover the major public spaces inside the community—the hutong alleys. And finally, the acquaintance with their neighbors, especially those inside the same siheyuan, gives residents a sense of belonging.

By having the right to control and change their community space, all public spaces could also be considered as part of private spaces shared among neighbors. Local residents become involved in the life happening on the hutong alleys, and the spaces hutong alleys are closely tied with residents’ everyday lives, territorialized with the intension and emotion of the residents. The responsibility for taking care of the community is shared by all. During these activities involving community affairs, the intensity of residents’ experience of the community is enhanced, as well as their sense of the place (Ralph 1976).
**Sustainability: full utilization of resources and low maintenance cost**

The sustainable effects inside hutong communities appear at two points. In terms of the city, hutong communities offer the whole city open resources: for residents living nearby, hutong businesses provide sufficient and convenient goods for daily needs. At the same time, the openness of the community makes hutong have the chance to present their traditional architecture and building arts in siheyuan residences. Nowadays, hutong communities have become a new place for tourism, which also brings more customers to the stores inside the community. It also helps hutong communities in the city to receive funding for preservation projects. In 2007, the city renewed the infrastructure and hutong alleys in Dongsi North Hutong Community without asking for a penny from local residents.

In terms of the community itself, hutongs provides chances for local residents to occupy and control over their public spaces. With the right to control community public spaces, residents also take responsibility to take care for their own community. Residents only pay for the most basic maintenance and upkeep of street lights, public restrooms and the like. They take care of the basic maintenance and upkeep of the hutong alleys in front of their siheyuans and inside their courtyards.

The hutong community mode, in terms of the benefits discussed above, makes the community a vibrant and healthy place to live. It is safe, it is sustainable, it is friendly and it is a place residents called “home”—everyone is involved, and private lives are overlapping.
Comparison: Lesson from spatial negotiation

Negotiation at the urban scale

Traditional communities, as discussed in the previous chapters, are small but open. Blocks of small living units are connected by city streets and narrow lanes. The high level of connectivity and openness make the community life full of shared experience: residents from different communities are able to share the resources and build social relationships with each other via the overlapping of their life routines. Figure 3.1 illustrates the entrances of Dongsi North Hutong Community, where residents and non-residents can enjoy the community life, at the same time, nine major hutongs and twenty-one narrower hutong alleys compose a high density road network. None of the seventeen entrances of the nine hutongs which connect to the city streets is gated or guarded.
Chinese new urbanism communities, on the contrary, are islands separated by gates, walls and fast-moving traffic. Large, closed community design avoids connection with other urban communities. Designated public spaces, without sharing and the sense of involvement and control, are becoming empty deserts, wasting maintenance costs while doing little to build of community life. While the Chinese new urbanism developments rely more on the
developers’ professional efforts, and should always accommodate the fast modern pace, it is impossible to have small, open communities which are entirely built and managed by local residents. At this point, an intentionally formed openness seems valuable during the design and early development process. The concept drawing in figure 3.2 illustrates an alternative idea, combining the openness and connectivity in traditional communities - while Chinese new urbanism communities are still designed and developed with their large-scale, form-based living unit concept, the boundaries between a community and the city, and among communities, could be blurred instead of rigid.

Negotiation and sharing could be reached among the developers in the urban scale. Negotiation helps communities to figure out a more sustainable and efficient way of resource/service accommodation. Instead of following the regulations on how many services a certain size community should provide to its residents, different communities could separate the responsibility of providing certain services, such as community open spaces, stores and service centers, and share the resources from others. With this negotiation, by opening the gates and breaking down the walls, originally private community spaces could be overlapping, allowing the experience of equally sharing. And by enlarging and opening the sharable spaces, community life more easily matches the daily routines of residents, which provides more chances for community social interactions. Community resources and services, although still being developed separately, could be open resources.

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16 National regulations on community design require a new community development project to include services according to its size.
Figure 3.2 Comparison of traditional and new urbanism communities and the new concept of new urbanism community development: at the urban scale
Negotiation at the community scale

Similarly, negotiation on the community scale is another lesson Chinese new urbanism communities could learn from traditional ones. As shown in figure 3.3, traditional communities allow residents to utilize their public spaces. Residents’ private life spheres extend into the public spaces and overlaps with other neighbors’. Public spaces in the traditional communities, although called “public”, are a combination of semi-private and semi-public life.

Figure 3.3 residents in hutong communities utilize public spaces to satisfy their needs.
Photo taken by the author in Dongsi North Hutong Community, June 2009.
In Chinese new urbanism community developments, public spaces for community life are usually designed as a separated and centralized feature. Apartment buildings are gated and isolated with nice-looking landscapes. There is no negotiation between private and public spheres and community social life to become an extra task in the daily life. In a word, well-designed community public spaces are not efficiently used to build vibrant community life. Although these community public spaces are large in scale, clean, comfortable and attractive, they can hardly compete with the narrow, somewhat dusty and crowded hutong alleys in terms of helping with community social interactions. (figure 3.4)
Figure 3.4 Comparison between traditional and new urbanism communities and the new concept of new urbanism community development: at the community scale
Residents, the interviewees of this study as examples, are willing to have large, clean and well-designed community public spaces, as well as valuing the activities of community life in traditional communities. Nice, large community public spaces are meant to provide healthy and comfortable life in modern developments. A balance between the traditional and the modern requires more negotiation between private and public spheres in the new communities. Boundaries between private apartment buildings and community public spaces should become blurred, and community public spaces, instead of keeping private life far away, could introduce semi-private life into the semi-public or even public arena. Public spaces should allow residents to watch, to pass through, to stay and to utilize. By having the right to utilize these spaces and share their efforts with their neighbors, residents could build the negotiation between private and public life by themselves via their territorialization and reterritorialization of these spaces.

**Negotiation at the home scale**

Inside a siheyuan in a hutong community families share the courtyard spaces. Spatial limitations push their private life out of their rooms and into the yard. Neighbors share the right to control and responsibility to maintain the courtyard spaces. Inside a new urbanism apartment building, families on the same floor close their doors and lock themselves in the large private living rooms. No one wants to wait longer than the time required waiting an elevator. The floor landings become a no-stay place that no one cares much about. (Figure 3.5)
Figure 3.5 Comparison between traditional and new urbanism communities and the new concept of modern community development: at the home scale

The floor landings and stairs, and similar spaces between homes actually present an opportunity to become a vibrant public space among families, similar to the courtyards in...
siheyuans. They are where residents can have the closest face-to-face interaction with their next door neighbors, and they are the most frequently used, daily-routine spaces in community life. These spaces should receive more attention during the design process. Families on the same floor could have better opportunities to utilize these spaces as a “living room among same-floor neighbors”.

In conclusion, while Chinese new urbanism communities keep the simple mode of separating private and public spaces with a rigid boundary, Chinese traditional urbanism communities provide all different ways to create the negotiation between private and public (figure 3.6). The three spatial scales of a community provide chances to begin the negotiation between private and public spheres, between private life and community life. These points could be the starting places to address the community social life. Providing opportunities for residents to give meanings to these spaces should be taken into consideration during the professional designs. New Urbanism in China, instead of copying modern design and building techniques, should learn from traditions and include in the design the opportunities for negotiation between private and public spheres. This slide shows different concepts of ways to create the negotiation between spaces: by interpenetration, permeation and by introducing in a threshold. The question here is how to activate the public/private negotiation in designs.
Figure 3.6 Comparison between Chinese new urbanism and traditional urbanism communities.
While Chinese new urbanism communities keep the simple mode of separating private and public spaces with a rigid boundary, Chinese traditional urbanism communities provide all different ways to create the negotiation between private and public. Concept drawing done by the author.

**Negotiation: Innovation without fracture**

Today, the increasing urban population and the increasing needs on life quality and living spaces make it impossible to duplicate hutong communities and life on hutong alleys. However, new urbanism community developments in China could still search for patterns that fit Chinese culture instead of just borrowing from Western community development experience. Comparing the modern community to the historic, traditional hutong
communities, Chinese new urbanism designs and developments lacks several aspects which are crucial to the community developments in traditional communities.

Negotiation is the most important features in hutong communities. This negotiation happens between private and public spheres, and in the shared community life among hutong residents. Negotiation of private and public spheres happen, as discussed ahead, on the boundary between city and the community, between community public alleys and private siheyuans, and inside siheyuans.

The negotiation between private and public spheres, on the city scale, breaks down the physical boundary between the community and city. Although traditional hutong communities usually do not have gates or walls, spatial definition of the boundary between a community and the city still exists; however, the negotiation between more privately defined community public spaces and the city public spaces blur this boundary. The negotiation, such as neighborhood commercial activities in the case of traditional hutong communities, attracts and brings people outside of the area inside, sharing resources with local residents. At the same time, this makes the social life in hutong alleys vibrant. Compare to what happens inside traditional hutong communities, the boundary between a community and the city in Chinese new urbanism development is rigid. Gates, security guards and walls makes a modern community off-limits to non-residents. And as discussed, resources are utilized in a less equal and efficient way.

The negotiation in traditional hutong communities allows the openness of resources. People have equal access to use of the community facilities and services as kinds of public resources, instead of keeping them as the private property of a small group of local residents. In a word, negotiation between the city and the community allows equity. In contrast, gates
and walls of Chinese new urbanism developments isolate the community as islands connected by vehicle traffic. People are not allowed to share the community spaces of others. The poorer can only stay in their communities with less facilities and services. They are not even allowed to enter and have a look at the community parks which are defined as absolutely private and can only be enjoyed by the few.

The negotiation also means efficiency. Resources are better utilized. Instead of being vacant all day long inside modern communities, open spaces inside hutong communities are always full of social activities: people passing through, chatting and working in hutong alleys, involved in the social life. And businesses and services are fully used - stores are always busy to satisfy their customers’ needs, but businesses opening inside Chinese new urbanism community developments are taking spacious rooms, expensive facilities and services, while only satisfying the needs of the local few. The inefficiency may finally lead to the downfall of these stores in the market - there might not be enough consumers to support them.

Inside a community, negotiation between private and public spheres helps to enhance the community social life among neighbors. Siheyuan walls no longer keep private life inside the courtyards and private rooms. Temporary occupation of public spaces such as hutong alleys and courtyards makes private life extend into public spaces. While all residents are sharing public spaces, private lives overlap. Residents share private lives and easily are involved in community life: sitting besides hutong alleys, chatting with neighbors, giving a hand to neighbors when they need help, providing road information and introduce community history to visitors, etc. All these are trivial and a part of community life which local residents regard as things to do for leisure, but the sum of these trivial activities enhances the chance of involvement in community activities in residents’ daily lives and
makes the entire community vibrant and friendly. However, in the examples of Chinese new urbanism communities, private homes and community public spaces are rigidly separated. Private homes are hidden behind walls, heavy bushes and fences, and kept away from street life inside the community. Public spaces are defined as landscaped community central parks, which are far away from the private homes. Residents are designated to some central spaces for designated community activities. By confining the private and public spaces inside the community, residents’ lives are designed. While trying to push different families and persons into one designed routine which is not really related to their everyday life, people might refuse to comply. Fewer spontaneous community activities take place. And of course, fewer community eyes are watching for safety, with less help from neighbors and fewer friends among neighbors.

In terms of more permanent occupations in the hutong alleys and inside courtyards, local residents gain a different feeling – the feeling of control. Public spaces are no longer “none-of-my-business”; instead, they are the extension of private spheres. Residents share and own the spaces, while taking the responsibility to take care for the space. Permanent occupations, compared to the temporary ones, do not appear in a way with many community interactions. However, these activities indirectly help to maintain the community public spaces as well as enhancing residents’ connection with the community. In a Chinese new urbanism development, floor landings and elevator/stair spaces seem comparable to the courtyards inside a siheyuan. Following the traditional hutong community model, these spaces would be public spaces shared among neighbors, and interactions happening at these places are symbols of overlapping private lives. However, the steel gates of each private home, narrow design for these spaces, and the regulations prohibiting any changes to these
spaces draw a harsh line between private homes and public spaces, and among private homes. Developments are enhancing private living rooms for residents to treat their friends while eliminating shared spaces among neighbors to keep the possible friends next door far away.

Negotiations between public and private spheres are seen in all three scales of spaces in a hutong community, but they have failed to be represented in all these similar scales inside Chinese new urbanism communities. In the name of safety and privacy, modern developments enclose community life by walls and gates and separate private homes and community public spaces with doors, walls, fences and landscapes. The new developments emphasize the privacy and ownership as symbols of being rich, but forget the social aspects of community life. In the era social equity and efficiency are being addressed and valued by the society. The unsustainable under beautiful architectural and environmental designs are actually going against the common will.

Spatial separation between private sphere and public sphere reduces the chance of meeting, of getting acquainted with and involved in the community social life. And of course, this reduces the opportunity for negotiation among neighbors. In the everyday life experience inside a hutong community, local residents learn to compromise and negotiate with each other, and to take their neighbors’ benefits into consideration. Chinese new urbanism developments seem to fail to provide chances for sharing these common benefits and taking responsibility for the shared spaces. Instead of taking care of their own communities, modern community residents pay others to do the job for them. The originally vibrant social interactions and the underlying sense of owning and responsibility for the community life now become something valued by money. Social responsibility is now something people can no longer learn from their daily neighborhood life as before; instead, the Chinese new
urbanism community gives the impression that money is more important than volunteer work and interaction with neighbors, because when you pay, you get your space cleaned, maintained and decorated.

Traditional hutong communities have long been famous for vibrant and healthy community life, providing local residents a sense of community, safety and sustainable life. These successes come from the cumulative efforts from years of changing and developing. Chinese new urbanism community developments, begun only recently, still have a long way to go. Replying on foreign theories of shaping spaces and arranging community lives, Chinese new urbanism communities fail to consider the social needs of Chinese people. Comparing the two, negotiations shaping inside traditional communities are lacked in Chinese new urbanism developments. In traditional communities the negotiation between private and public spheres, and the responsibility taken by all local residents, spontaneously happen, and they are valuable experiences from grass-roots Chinese people, providing great lessons for modern developments.

Innovation could be free from fractures. While Chinese new urbanism communities are bringing modern cities with high-quality housing, they are isolating individuals from community life. Modernity can be promoted without necessarily importing international models with no connections with local tradition but, rather, by reinterpreting local tradition into new design. Figure 3.7 shows different concepts of ways to create the negotiation between spaces: by interpenetration, permeation and by introducing in a threshold. The question here is how to activate the public/private negotiation in designs. Next chapter will initiate the further exploration on this topic.
Figure 3.7 Concepts of ways to create the negotiation between spaces (SALINGAROS 2000) Figures vailable at: http://zeta.math.utsa.edu/~yxk833/UrbanCoherence.html
CHAPTER 4. ACTIVATE THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPACES: A
REBIRTH OF TRADITIONAL SPIRIT IN CHINESE NEW URBANISM

COMMUNITY DESIGN

The goals of urban life, as summarized by Jacobs and Appleyard (1987), are evident in the hutong communities in Beijing: livability, identity, right of control, equity, meaningful community life, and a place for all. However, Chinese new urbanism communities do not include the traditional residence culture. What has happened in the new urbanism communities in China well represents the problems of modern urban design as concluded by Allen Jacobs and Donald Appleyard (1987). Loss of public life, placelessness and injustice push the residents into loneliness, and designer/developer-oriented professionalism takes away residents’ right to control their own community space.

Of course, the examples of traditional hutong communities in Beijing could not simply be duplicated in the new developments. The vernacular efforts of these traditional communities are difficult to replicate in the professionally designed community developments. As a result, modernity’s efforts to import international models to local tradition and reinterpret local tradition into new design become crucial. (Kelbaugh 1997). Chinese designers and planners are facing the question of how to activate the public/private spaces in modern community developments; essential features of the traditional communities can be studied and learned from. Based on the analysis and comparison between Chinese traditional and urbanism communities, the discussion on the reinterpretation of tradition into modern design could follow the same urban, community and home scales.
Innovation at the urban scale

Compared to the closeness in modern communities, traditional urbanism is more open. Shown in the comparison in figure 4.1, Chinese new urbanism communities are isolated from the rest of the city, while traditional urbanism communities keep the boundary between city public space and community private space blurred. Public and private spaces interpenetrate into each other. Thresholds made by stores at the entrances of the community (figure 4.2) also help to build the negotiation between public and private spaces. At this urban scale, the expansion of businesses onto the street helps to enhance the negotiation between the city and the community.

Figure 4.1 Comparison of Chinese new urbanism and traditional urbanism communities

Figure 4.2 Negotiation between private and public spaces at the urban scale
At the urban scale the initiation of community openness and negotiation between the city and a community relies more on planning ideology and the corresponding policies. It requires awareness of the importance of the spatial and social negotiation at large, and the willingness to be open and to share. Learning from traditional urbanism communities, Chinese new urbanism communities could open their walls and guarded gates, sharing their resources. The negotiation at this urban scale could also be achieved by collaboration on community amenities and activities. However, negotiation at the urban scale might best occur at a later stage in the current housing market, where having a place to live is still of the highest priority in China, and profit is always what the developers are seeking. On the contrary, spatial designs at the community scale and home scale are more feasible. Designers and community planners have more possibilities to influence the future of a community at these two scales.

**Innovation at the community scale**

At the community scale, there are rigid boundaries between private apartment buildings and designated public spaces, while activities in hutong alleys show the expansion of private life into the public spheres. The thresholds, such as hallways, open gates and sidewalks, make the negotiation happen. One effective way to introduce these thresholds to contemporary designs is to take some private space away from the indoor apartment and change the space into open, semi-private gardens, decks and balconies. As shown in the concept drawing in figure 4.3, these thresholds should be designed with the intention of creating a sequence of “public, semi-public, semi-private, and private” spaces. These thresholds act as the “C-elements” shown in the concept drawing in figure 3.7, connecting
private space with public space and building the negotiation between the two. By doing this Chinese new urbanism communities could provide more negotiation spaces between apartment buildings and community public spaces. Residents from different buildings could share these negotiation spaces instead of simply relying on designated central parks for community interactions.

![Figure 4.3 Suggested thresholds to be applied in Chinese new urbanism communities](image)

As shown in figure 4.4, in a community development case in Wuhan, China, designers retain the yard and garden concept, while by lowering the garden walls, the landscape as a private space is open to the public. Residents still have the feeling of entering by walking through paths defined by paving and walls. But the design also provides the chance for the negotiation between apartment buildings and community public spaces, connecting lives of different families, encouraging spontaneous social interactions, communications and involving residents in community affairs.
Figure 4.4 Successful examples of thresholds between private and public spaces at the community scale
Photos were taken by the author in Garden City Community, Wuhan, April, 2007

The idea of hutong alleys, hallways in siheyuan and other similar spaces allowing for spatial negotiation between private and public, are all features designed with the one-story residence type. and are easier to be reinterpreted on the ground floor. However, to meet the increasing housing needs in China, building vertically is essential. People need high-rise apartment buildings in the crowded city space. The method shown in the lower portion of figure 4.4 tries to extend private balconies out to create possibilities for interaction between lower-floor and upper-floor families. But the limitation still exists here when the design tries
to create negotiation between community public spaces and private homes, and between neighbors, thus a further solution is to enhance the opportunity for negotiation at the home scale: the spaces between private homes.

**Innovation at the home scale**

The home scale design for public/private negotiation requires the considering relatively small-scale interactions between residents. Going back to the photo taken of a hutong alley in Dongsi North Hutong Community in figure 4.2, there are several elements crucial to vibrant community life. The scale of hutong alleys, for traditional urbanism communities, is more of the community scale, but could also because of its size be considered and reinterpreted at the home scale inside modern community design. This could be a starting point for future research on all the different spatial features of different traditional urbanism communities, and enable reinterpretation of these features into new designs.

In this setting the important features could be conceptualized as: open-air space, blur boundary between private and public spaces (open store fronts and the expansion of businesses onto the hutong alley), and the potential activities initiating community social interactions (activities, in this particular case, residents buying their groceries here). The proposal shown in figure 4.5 is a good starting point to reinterpret these features into new designs. Open air spaces give residents chances to have negotiation with the community life outside. In this space glass makes the boundary between private and public blurred, and windows provide opportunity to create a courtyard feeling in which private life could expand to the public spaces. Although here the designer makes the space for agricultural use, it
demonstrates that we can reproduce what happens in hutong alleys and in the courtyards to this different setting. Figure 4.6 depicts possibilities of utilizing the home-scale spaces for semi-public and semi-private activities. Here, the floor landing space recalls the image of hutong alleys where local residents sit together, chatting, playing chess, and children play games.

Figure 4.5 Proposal that reinterpret tradition into new designs
Available at: http://www.inhabitat.com/wp-content/uploads/agrohousing1.jpg&imgrefur
This proposal, in general, breaks down the barriers between buildings and the surrounding community environment, and between private homes and public spaces. As shown in figure 4.7, the apartment building is modern, involving high-tech design and construction skills to provide residents high-quality housing, while at the same time, spaces for private/public negotiation reinterpret hutong tradition in the open spaces between homes. By creating the negotiation between private and public spaces, compromise and collaboration could develop among neighbors, which further permit the growth of individual and collective identity.
Throughout the study, while Chinese new urbanism communities are providing modern Chinese cities with high-quality housing, they are isolating individuals from community life. Instead of providing housing innovations by creating fractured communities, Chinese modern community developments would rather introduce these innovations without fracture. At all three scales, modernity can be promoted by reinterpreting local tradition into new design without needing to import international models having no relationship with local tradition. The negotiation between private and public spaces, as one of the important characteristics of traditional urbanism communities, provides an approach to begin this reinterpretation of tradition into modernity. The negotiations happening in the proposal discussed in this chapter are not the final products; they are instead more like procedures. Negotiations between spaces, meanwhile, are not the final destinations. Instead, communal life begins with the shaping of the spatial environment.
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Survey Questionnaire

Date:          Time:          Location:          

Demographics information

1. Age
   □ 18-30       □ 31-40       □ 41-50       □ 51-60       □ 60 above

2. Gender
   □ Female      □ Male

3. How long have you live in hutong neighborhood?
   □ Less than year
   □ 1-2 years
   □ 2-5 years
   □ 5-10 years
   □ 10 years and above

4. What is your average monthly income?
   □ Less than 500RMB
   □ 500 to 1000RMB
   □ 1000 to 2000RMB
   □ 2000 to 5000RMB
□ 5000RMB and above

**Spatial changes**

5. Have you remodeled your Siheyuan or build additions on hutong in front of your Siheyuan in last ten years?

6. What are the main reasons for you to remodel your Siheyuan or build additions on hutong in front of your Siheyuan?

7. Do you have future plans to do more Siheyuan remodeling/constructions on hutong in front of your Siheyuan?

8. If yes, what are your proposed remodeling and constructions?

**Place identity**

9. What are the features you like most in your hutong neighborhood? Why?

10. What are the features you like least in your hutong neighborhood? Why?

11. Can you draw a freehand map for your hutong neighborhood and mark those features which you think are the important or interesting?

**Perceptions on current conservation project and future neighborhood conservation planning**

12. Do you know the city’s current hutong conservation projects?
13. Does your Siheyuan in the conservation list?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

14. Did/Do the city do any maintenance or conservation work for your Siheyuan and hutong in front of your Siheyuan?

- Yes (go to Q14-1 and Q14-2)
- No
- Don’t know

14-1. Which parts in the Siheyuan did the city improved? (Check all that apply)

- Roof
- Siheyuan Gate
- Hall way
- Wall
- Window
- Yard paving
- Kitchen
- Restroom
- Planting
- Other (Please specify)

14-2. Which parts of the hutong did the city improved? (Check all that apply)

- Sidewalk paving
- Public restrooms
15. Do you like the conservation project? Why?

□ Yes  □ No  □ Don’t know

16. In your opinion, what should the city improve in future hutong conservation projects?
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