

# Heritage Regeneration, Planning, and Resistance

## The Bell and Drum Towers Area in Beijing

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### Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of urban heritage regeneration approaches in the Bell and Drum Towers (BDT) area in the past one and a half decades. At the heart of Beijing's historic centre and the north end of its historic Central Axis, the BDT area is one of the most iconic landmarks of the metropolis. The BDT area comprises some of the historic city centre's most intact and lively neighbourhoods. However, it has had its share of controversies, particularly during the regeneration project from 2010-2014. The square between the two towers and surrounding neighbourhoods became a stage of political tension, urban activism, and grassroots resistance, which were then 'wiped clean' nearly overnight. Although the noises have faded in the last decade, more subtle changes have picked up pace in preparation for the 2024 World Heritage inscription application of Beijing's Central Axis. Through critically examining the planning framework governing the BDT area's heritage management, the projects and controversies over the past 15 years, this paper highlights how heritage has been used in the somewhat fluid narratives for urban heritage regeneration in Beijing. It argues that some of these issues are emblematic of the low-rise and high-density historic urban areas with high land value, which remain sources of tension in the metropolis.

### Keywords

heritage regeneration, urban planning, Beijing, Bell and Drum Towers, historic neighbourhoods

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## INTRODUCTION

The Bell and Drum Towers (*Zhong Gu Lou*) (BDT) are located at the north end of the historic Central Axis of Beijing (BCA) from the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1911). Their strategic position in the capital city was established during the Yuan Dynasty (1261-1368) when it was at the centre of the Great Capital (*Dadu*, or Kahnbalig).<sup>1</sup> Both towers were later moved and reconstructed in 1420, slightly eastward, when the Ming Dynasty established a new capital just south of the Yuan Capital.<sup>2</sup> Just like most capital cities in ancient China, the urban morphology of Beijing was highly planned and symmetric, accentuating the central axis's significance. The monuments located at the strategic locations along the axis are all politically symbolic. One can argue that such symbolism has continued far beyond the imperial dynasties till the present.

The BDT, initially playing the significant role of time-telling, took on various connotations after this role was no longer needed. In the 1920s, during the Republic of China era, the BDT started displaying anti-colonial objects and took on the connotation of museum spaces and tourist attractions. This connotation has remained until today, even though the exhibitions have evolved. Distinct from the other monuments along the BCA is the proximity of their surrounding neighbourhoods. Being outside of the Imperial City (*huangcheng*) meant that *hutongs* (alleyways) and courtyard houses could be built almost immediately adjacent to the towers, despite their official status. Between the two towers is the Drum Tower Square, and the narrow Bell Tower Square is at the north end, both shielded from the main roads by the towers and nearby neighbourhoods. The squares' relatively small scale, their sheltered positions, and the proximity of their neighbourhoods create a sense of intimacy and safety. Compared to other awe-inspiring monumental squares such as Tian'anmen Square, the BDT squares and their neighbourhoods provide public space of the human-scale within Beijing's historic centre. The squares became a commercial area where temporary markets took place, evidenced by historical photos from the 1930s-40s (Figure 1), and this commercial characteristic was still present until 2012.

Although seemingly charged with less political tension, this area is not void of controversies, most notably during the 2010-2014 BDT Regeneration Project. The various actors' involvement through online and offline effort have been examined closely<sup>3,4,5</sup>. More broadly, Bideau highlights the loss or disregard of collective memories and emotions within Beijing's rapidly transforming urban landscape.<sup>6</sup> Liu's doctoral thesis discusses conflicts between state and private ownership in the BDT area. It sometimes takes the form of self-built houses being deemed 'illegal' by the state.<sup>7</sup> These conflicts are particularly heightened during a regeneration project like the one in BDT. Residents built these 'illegal' structures partly out of necessity and partly with the hope that these structures would be counted towards the total area based on which compensation is calculated should they be asked to move.

Stakeholder and community involvement in China's heritage activities has been the focus of many publications in recent years<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>, and some specifically examines the role of social media in the community or public participation in heritage activities, including those at the BDT project.<sup>12,13,14,15</sup> However, the more peripheral actors' involvement on-site, as presented in the BDT project, has not been addressed. Furthermore, existing literature has not considered

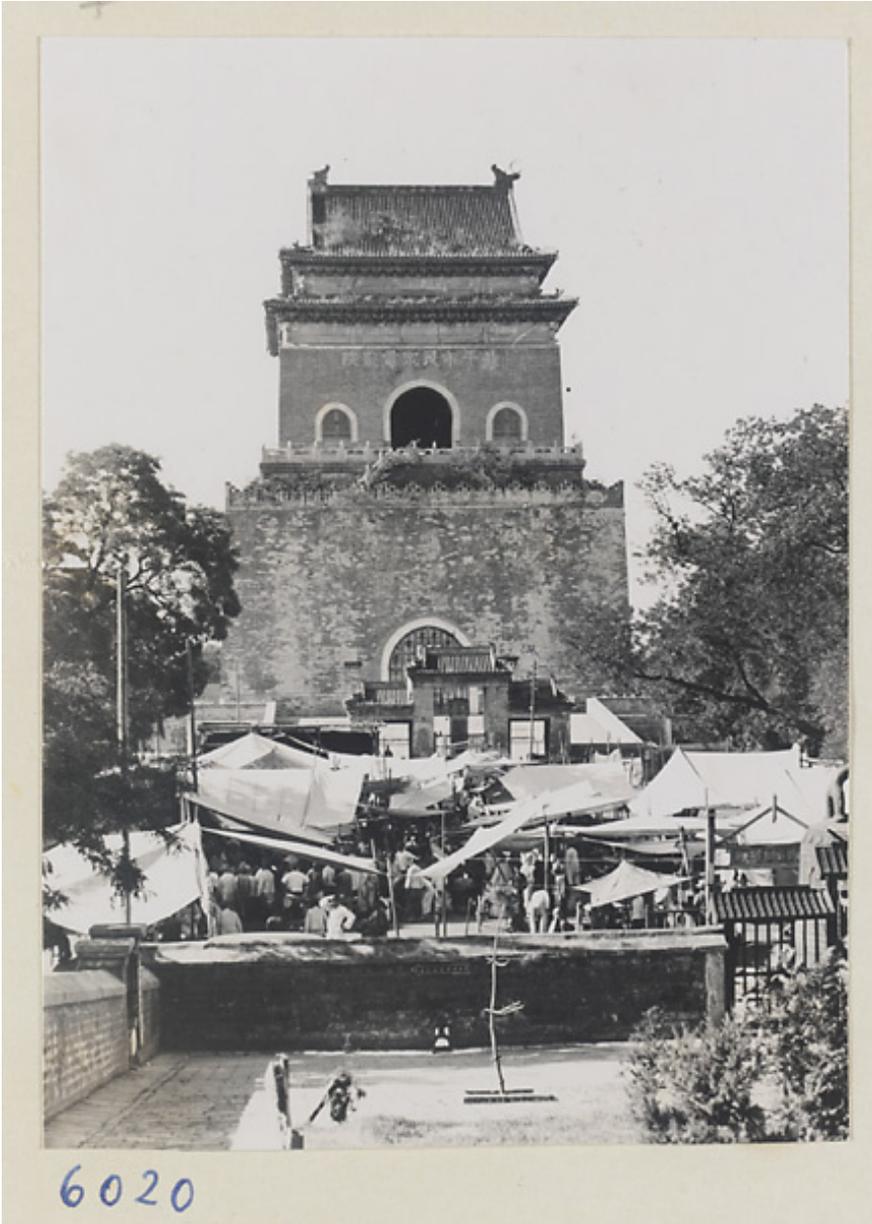


Fig. 1. The temporary market between the Drum and Bell Towers, 1933-1946, photographed by Hedda Morrison.

this regeneration project in the broader context of Beijing's urban planning. The most recent development of the planning context has not been explored either. Ten years since the regeneration was somewhat completed, efforts to get the BCA's inscription onto the World Heritage list, which will be deliberated in July 2024, have put the spotlight on the area again. Most of the urban planning framework that existed during the Regeneration Project was due to expire in 2020. New plans have been formulated since 2016. This article will examine these plans and the type of regeneration projects currently occurring along the central axis to explore how the approaches and emphasis on urban heritage conservation have evolved. It will consider the increasing attention paid to the 'public participation' concept and how it should be interpreted within China's heritage context.

The research informing this article spans from 2012 to the present. The review and analysis of the relevant planning and legislative framework will use primarily desk-based research methods, focusing on how this framework shapes the planning and management context of the BDT neighbourhoods. The change in the area has been documented through auto-ethnographical and ethnographical methods, including photographic documentation, field notes, and direct observations from 2012-2015.<sup>16</sup> The limitations of potential bias that come with auto-ethnographical methods should be acknowledged. This article will corroborate the empirical data with existing academic literature to ensure rigour. It will also take on a critical lens when analysing the BDTT and other relevant actors' actions during the project.

## THE 'OFFICIAL' AND 'UNOFFICIAL' HERITAGE IN THE BDT AREA

The BDT were designated National Protected Cultural Heritage Sites (PCHS) in 1996. The area has several lesser-known heritage sites or places of historical interest. Hong'en Taoist Temple (*Hong'en Guan*), a Municipal PCHS initially constructed in the Yuan Dynasty, is located at the north end of the Bell Tower Square. As explained in the next section, the recent uses of Hong'en Temple's various buildings played an intriguing role as part of the grassroots scenes in the area. A few courtyards are also listed, either for the integrity of their surviving historic layout or as a former residence of a historic figure or former temple, along with a historic garden and several ancient trees in the neighbourhood.

Besides these officially recognised heritage entities, the BDT area's richness as a historic urban landscape also lies in other 'unofficial' heritage associations, including the emotions and collective memories of the residents and the general public to this landmark area, the local businesses, the vibrancy of cultural activities, and the urban communal qualities. This richness and the hybrid form of public, commercial, communal, and residential space already existed in the form of temporary markets in the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. More recently, this richness was embodied through a different composition of small, often community-serving businesses in the area and the various community activities on the squares, such as dancing, singing, chatting, chess-playing, and family activities. Reviewing the urban plans that govern the conservation and management of the historic urban area around the BDT before 2016 demonstrates that such richness was somehow captured in a loose manner. However, it also

reveals a gradual reduction of scope from value assessment, value attribute identification, to planning measures and their implementation.

In the first one and a half decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the BDT area's urban planning and urban heritage conservation strategies were governed by two editions of the Beijing Master Urban Plan (BMUP) (1991-2010<sup>17</sup> and 2004-2020<sup>18</sup>), the Conservation Plan of the Beijing Historic Cultural City (CPBHCC) (2002), and the Conservation Plan of 25 Historic Areas<sup>19</sup> in Beijing's Old City (referred to as the 25-Area Plan in short) (2005).<sup>20</sup> The 25-Area Plan remains the most referential regarding Beijing's urban historic conservation areas. It includes detailed assessments of the height, building condition, and historical characteristics (*lishi fengmao*) of each building within each conservation area. However, the accuracy of these assessments is not always reliable. It also contains overall assessments and planning measures for each conservation area. This level of detail stands it out against all other urban plans relevant to urban heritage conservation in Beijing. The BDT neighbourhoods are primarily included within the Shichahai Area.

The 'Historic and Cultural Conservation Area (HCCA)' concept was conceived to account for various elements of the historic urban landscape. According to the 25-Area Plan, the Shichahai Area embodies historical and cultural values in three dimensions: 1) Historical Value refers to the tangible remains (such as ancient sites and traditional architecture) and intangible heritage (traditional culture) that directly document Beijing's historical evolution, historic figures, and events; 2) Cultural Value refers to the historic literature related to the area and how the area provides space for citizens' cultural activities; 3) Scenic Value refers to the natural resources within Beijing's city centre. The 25-Area Plan further suggests that the three value categories constitute the area's tourism value. The plan identifies five categories of value attributes for the Shichahai Area: the intact historic urban composition, a large number of historic landmark buildings, the overall spatial dimensions and urban fabric, the grey colour pallet of the urban built environment, and various folk customs as well as newly emerging cultural activities within the area. The plan acknowledged the intangible elements as significant for the residents' sense of belonging and coherence.

This holistic concept of HCCA and the value-based assessment in the 25-Area Plan, encompassing the natural, intangible, and urban-level heritage elements, was quite visionary at the time and had the potential to inform a holistic approach to the areas' conservation. However, from the value definitions to the value attributes, one can already see a reduced scope for 'unofficial' heritage elements to be considered and an increased emphasis on tangible and built elements. This reduction of scope was further emphasised when it came to the proposed planning measures in the 25-Area Plan. The plan does not include any specific measures for intangible elements. Understandably, this was perhaps due to the limited scope of an urban conservation plan. Even so, many measures suggested in this plan were not implemented in the end. Furthermore, the planning measures impose strict restrictions on building heights<sup>21</sup> and a relatively stringent limitation on building forms and colour palettes. Nevertheless, the measures did consider the residents' need to renovate traditional courtyard houses within the area and its potential benefit for the urban space's overall quality. The plan also acknowledged the challenges resulting from the fact that many of these traditional courtyard houses are owned by the state, discouraging residents from investing in renovation and maintenance.

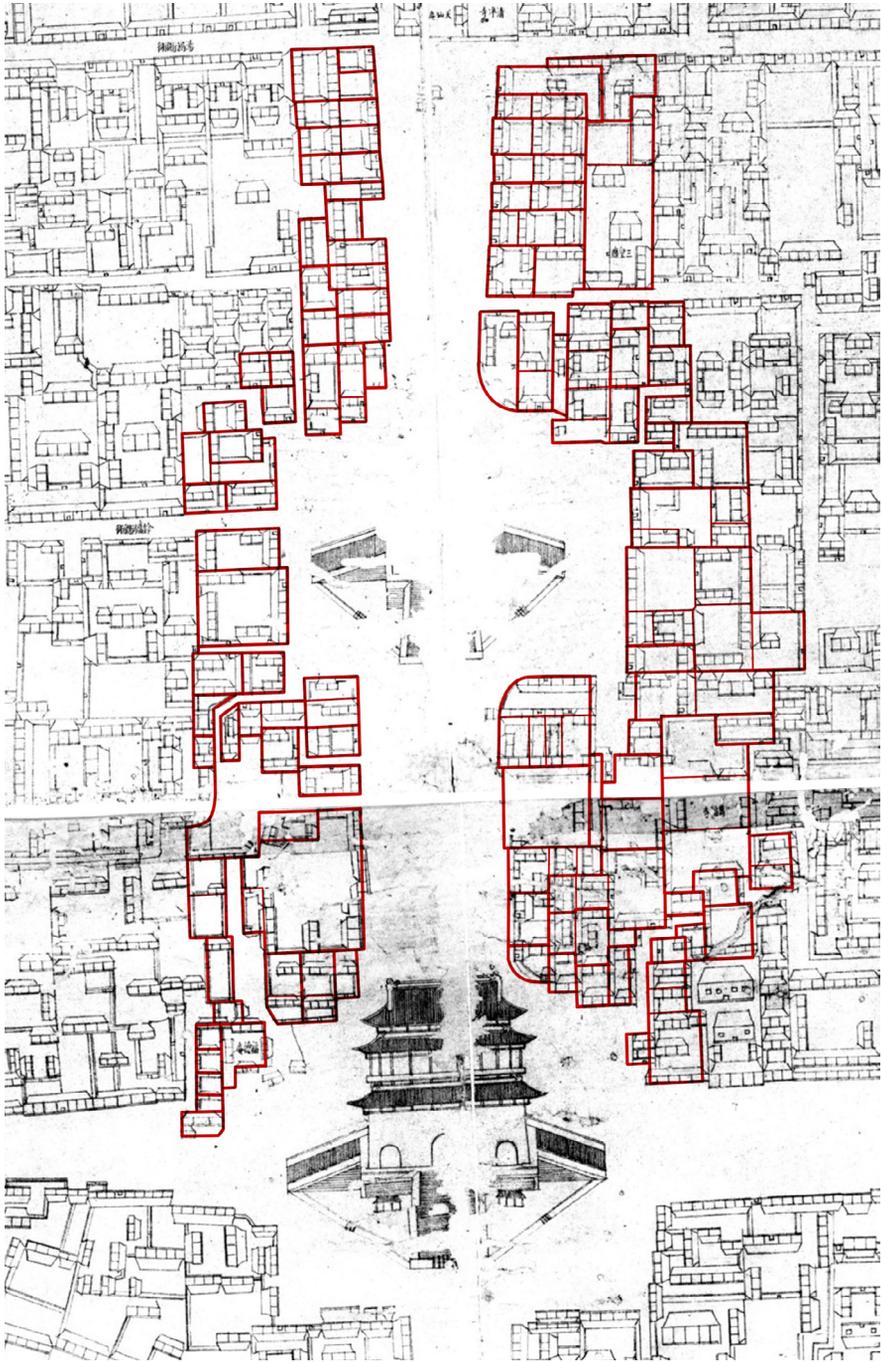


Fig. 2. The BDT area on the 1750 Complete Map of Beijing overlaid with courtyard boundaries within the boundary of the 'regeneration area' proposed in the 2010 project proposal.

## REGENERATIONS, DEBATES, AND RESISTANCE

The BDT area first drew contestation over its regeneration project in 2010, when the Dongcheng District government announced the proposal for the 'Restoration and Rectification Project of Bell and Drum Tower Square'.<sup>22</sup> This project went through various phases from 2010 to its eventual completion around September 2014 (2010-2011 and 2012-2014).<sup>23</sup> Besides the local authorities and the registered company responsible for the project<sup>24</sup>, various stakeholder groups were involved, not so much in the project's decision-making but rather through constructing and influencing discourse, performing and expressing resistance, and exercising individual agencies for personal advancement. These stakeholders included an officially registered civil society organisation (CSO)<sup>25</sup>, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center (CHP), an informal interdisciplinary team of volunteers, the Bell and Drum Tower Team (BDTT),<sup>26</sup> formed online and offline through common interests, the local residents, and local business owners. CHP was the leading civil organisation advocating against the project in the first phase, while the BDTT, formed in 2012, aimed to document the neighbourhood, its residents' micro histories and memories, and the demolition process. It also questioned the project's legitimacy by holding the decision-makers accountable for the inconsistencies within their narratives. The informal team included urban planners, heritage professionals, architects, journalists, sociologists, and student volunteers.

The proposed project plan published in 2010 was the only published document indicating the project's ultimate goal across the two phases.<sup>27</sup> According to the plan, the project intended to enlarge the existing squares to how they were documented on the 1750 Complete Map of Qianlong Emperor's Beijing City (*Qianlong Jingcheng Quantu*) (Figure 2).<sup>28</sup> The proposed plan took measurements from the 1750 map to determine the dimensions of the 'original squares'. It subsequently proposed the demolition of 'later buildings' that come within those 'original squares' to create a 'BDT Time Culture Square' and 'restore the historic visual characteristics of the squares'.<sup>29</sup>

This reference presents several issues. The 1750 map is a significant historical document to study the urban history of the capital in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was detailed to specific buildings and drawn approximately to scale. However, it was not a precise enough map from which to take small measurements. The more critical issue, however, is the historicist approach and somewhat fluid interpretation of the area's 'historic urban landscape'. The city certainly continued to evolve and grow since 1750. The project's approach implied that buildings that emerged in the 260 years after are less important (Figure 3).

The proposal also referenced the 25-Area Plan to determine the quality and historical significance of the surrounding buildings, including those to be demolished and 'regenerated'. The 25-Area Plan's inaccuracy regarding building condition and history mentioned above directly impacted the justification and legitimacy behind this proposal, demonstrating the problematic rippling effect of flaws in the planning process. Besides the historical reference, the project proposal also cited other practical reasons, such as widening the street around the towers for fire safety. However, the *hutongs* from which the fire engines would potentially enter the squares are not widened. Therefore, the actual impact of this intervention is questionable.

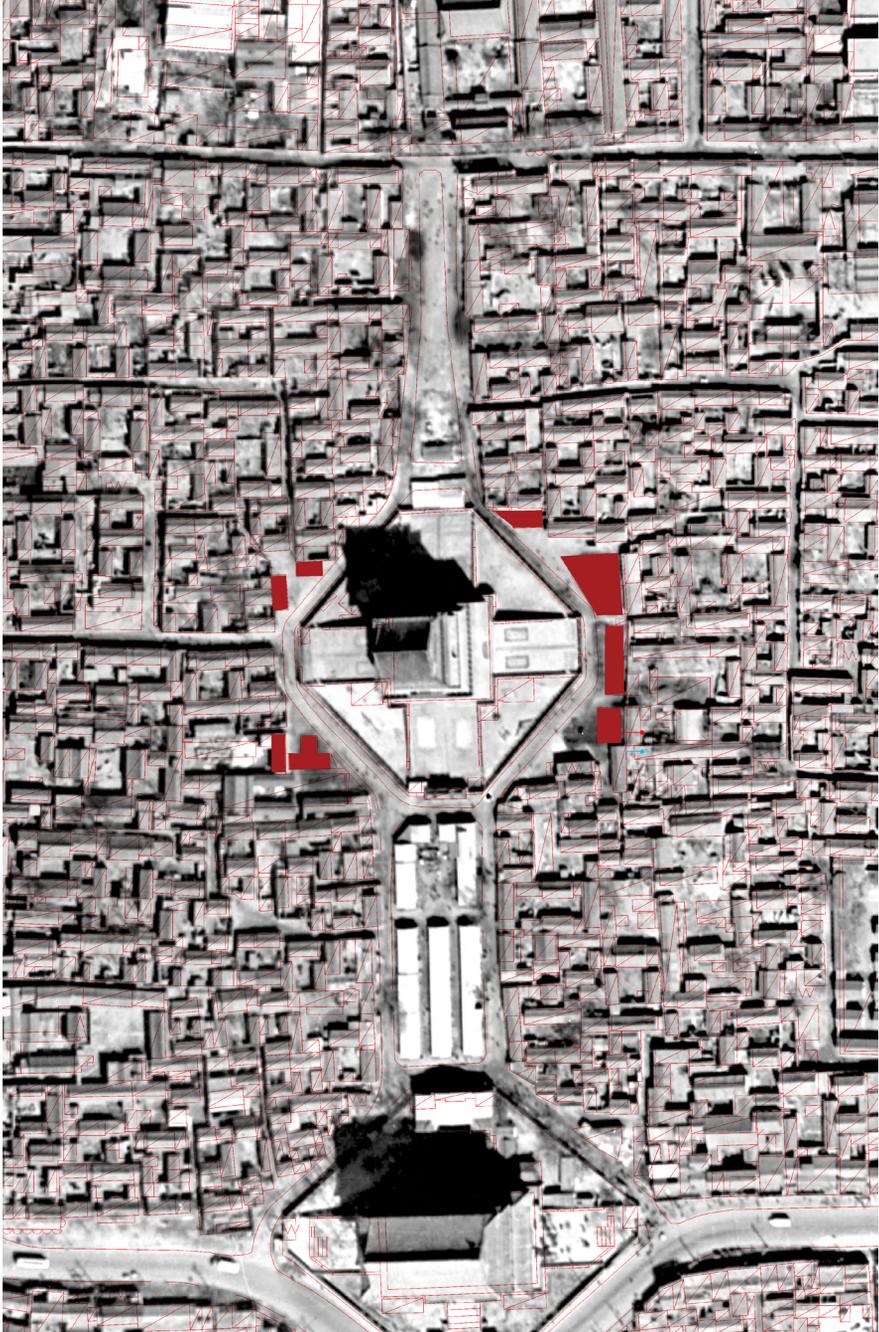


Fig. 3. The BDT area captured in a 1959 aerial photo overlaid with the situation in 2012. The buildings in red are the only ones that did not exist then. This directly contradicts the project proposal's claim that these buildings were all recent additions with no historical significance at all.

Furthermore, the assessment carried out in the 25-Area Plan does not account for the residents' potential enhancement of the houses. As revealed during the fieldwork in 2013 by the BDTT, some of these houses have been renovated or added with guidance and endorsement from the Dongcheng District Bureau of Housing Management<sup>30, 31</sup>. However, these additional buildings were still deemed 'illegal' in the announcement for demolition and evacuation that appeared around the neighbourhood overnight on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012, with no forewarning or consultation with the neighbourhood residents.<sup>32</sup>

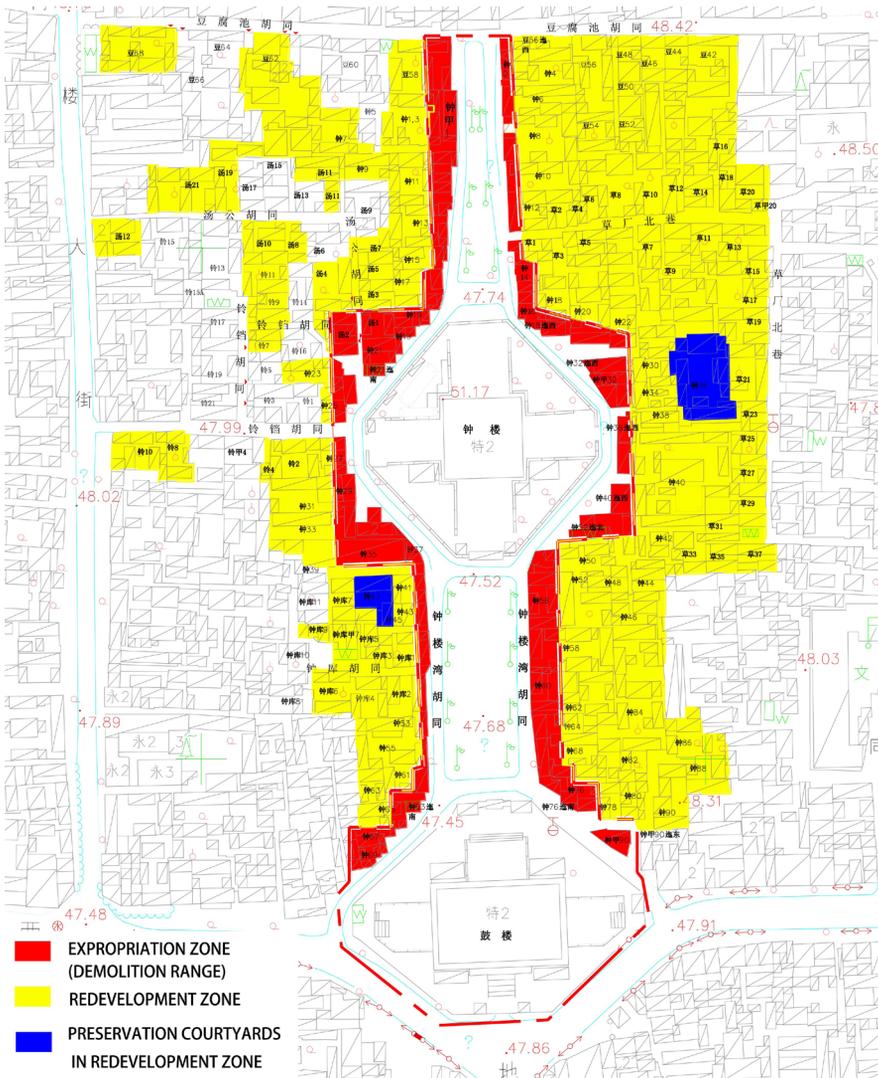


Fig. 4. Map of the demolition and redevelopment zones compiled by the BDTT in their unpublished report sent to UNESCO in January 2013.

This announcement signified the start of the project's second phase after a brief hiatus due to the restructuring of the Dongcheng District Government. In this announcement, two categories of courtyard houses were requested to be evacuated, including 66 courtyards (136 households) to be demolished and another 126 courtyards (1000+ households) to be 'regenerated' (Figure 4). Compared to the 2010 proposal, the demolition zone remained approximately the same, but with a much larger evacuation area in the 'regeneration' zone. Due to the lack of an updated project proposal, it was unclear what this 'regeneration' entailed and how this boundary was decided.

Much more resistance was heard in the second phase compared to the first, partly due to the more immediate impact of the evacuation on the local residents and businesses and the emergence of Weibo as an online platform that fundamentally changed how grassroots discourse and debates on heritage related issues were made visible and spread<sup>33,34</sup>. Despite the short turnaround time in the announcement, which gave the residents two and a half months to negotiate their compensation and move out, the evacuation process started slowly after the first family left in February 2013. The demolition took up pace from the summer of 2013 and carried through to the summer of 2014 (Figure 5). The demolition process was much slower than most other projects in the historic centre of Beijing, partly due to the scrutiny it received for its central location, the public debates it ignited, and the split opinions among residents.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the area surrounding the BDT squares remained an open ruin for almost a year, something quite extraordinary in Beijing's historic centre.

Besides voices from the BDTT and split opinions of the residents expressed online and offline<sup>37,38</sup>, the open ruin became a stage of informal resistance online and offline. The general public's interest was drawn to the demolition sites after a renowned traditional street food shop (*Baodu Ren*) on the square was removed, and its demolition site was posted on Weibo. Subsequently, graffiti started to creep up on the demolition sites, including some well-known graffiti 'writers' who tag as 'Zato', 'Wreck', and 'AK47' (Figure 6). Zato's graffiti can be seen all around Beijing, especially around the Drum Tower area. It is sometimes accompanied by the phrase 'I have no past. I have no future'. AK47, whose real name is Zhang Dali, a painter among the first street artists in China, often leaves his marks at demolition sites to 'converse with the urbanisation process.'<sup>39</sup>

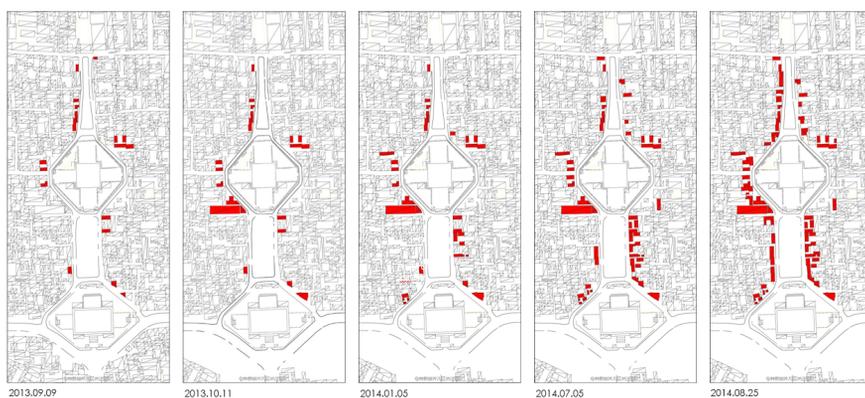


Fig. 5. Buildings demolished around the two squares from September 2013 to August 2014, published by BDTT's Weibo account.<sup>36</sup>

Two other grassroots events were organised at the gate of the Hong'en Temple in 2013. Before the most recent restoration in 2023, there was an additional building in the courtyard space between the temple gate and the main hall, used as the grocery market after Bell Tower Square was no longer allowed to be used as a market in the 1980s. The additional building was built during the 1960s-70s when the temple, much like many temples across the country, was used as a factory during the 'Socialist Transformation' movement<sup>40</sup>. The temple gate was initially used as a tofu workshop until a Chinese-Italian couple of independent filmmakers and artists transformed it into a studio and café in 2001 called Zajia Lab.<sup>41</sup>

Zajia organised a Hutong concert in March 2013 at its doorstep, next to the Bell Tower square and a recently emptied-out corner shop. The event did not address the regeneration project directly but aimed to raise awareness and highlight the vibrancy of culture in the area, which constitutes part of the intangible elements within the historic urban landscape. Another event was a discussion organised by the author and a Die Zeit newspaper journalist in December 2013. At this point, the demolition was well underway, but over that winter, the pace was slowed down again. The discussion was attended by an international and wide variety of stakeholders and those who were concerned about the project, including local residents, business owners, new neighbours who had just moved to the area, journalists, architects, heritage professionals, urban planners, artists, and tourism providers. The discussion was peaceful and open, and the fact that it took place was already quite extraordinary, particularly considering a public discussion organised by CHP during the project's first phase was called off by the government last minute.<sup>42</sup> In hindsight, however, such discussion would have been more effective if the decision-makers were present, if it happened before the community felt 'threatened', and if local media were present. However, the timing and sensitivity of the project and such a public discussion event largely excluded these elements. On the other hand, the event would have drawn more attention from the local authority if it were more effective, increasing the risks to the organisers and participants and the potential for it to be shut down.



Fig. 6. Series of graffiti appearing on the BDT demolition site from 2013-2014.

The graffiti was present for the better part of a year before the ruin was eventually cleared out or 'hidden' by a new wall erected around the boundary of the demolition in September 2014.<sup>43</sup> While some of the project's components, such as the construction of a Time Museum on the south side of the Drum Tower, continued, October 2014 largely signified the completion of the evacuation and demolition. Most of the businesses along the edge of the squares were removed. Instead of allowing the courtyards' gates to open directly towards the square, the new wall prevented the buildings from being turned into shop fronts.<sup>44</sup> The eventual evacuation and demolition area was much smaller than the project intended. While it is hard to know exactly who or which factors were most determinative, it is reasonable to conclude that the public debates and various resistance from local residents and other actors did play a role in it.

## 'SURGICAL' REGENERATION AND WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION

As mentioned in the introduction, most of the planning and legal framework governing the management and development of the BDT area has been renewed over the past eight years, most of which had an overarching emphasis on the preparation to inscribe the BCA onto the World Heritage List. This new framework includes a new Beijing Master Urban Plan (2016-2035)<sup>45</sup>, a new Controlled Detailed Plan of the Capital's Functional Core Zone (Street and Neighbourhood Level) (2018-2035)<sup>46</sup> as well as the latest Conservation and Management Plan of Beijing's Central Axis (2022-2035).<sup>47</sup> Relevant regulations were also formulated to guarantee the implementation of these plans, such as the Regulations for the Beijing Central Axis's Cultural Heritage Conservation.<sup>48</sup> One of the hidden issues in the conflicts between residents and the demolition office during the BDT Regeneration Project was that residents, whether wanting to leave the BDT area or not, generally thought the compensation rate was far from enough.<sup>49</sup> The low-rise and high-density characteristic of the historic centre has long been a source of conflicts during relocation negotiations.<sup>50</sup> The latest BMUP emphasises a strategy to reduce the population density in the city centre by developing a satellite city centre and moving some of the facilities and businesses out of the city centre. It sets a target to reduce the population of the six central districts from a target of 23,000,000 in 2020 to 10,850,000 from 2035 onwards.<sup>51</sup>

These latest plans further emphasise the 'holistic conservation (*zhengti baohu*)' of Beijing's historic city and accentuate the two axes (the BCA and the horizontal axis along Chang'an Street). Interestingly, many documents quote a directive from President Xi Jinping, who requests that 'the old city must not be demolished anymore (*lao cheng bu neng zai chai le*)!'. Besides the urban planning framework and existing PCHS conservation and controlled construction zones, the BDT area also falls within the World Heritage buffer zone of the Forbidden City. The buffer zone's management is enforced through the local planning and management system rather than having additional requirements. The latest 2022 Conservation and Management Plan of Beijing's Central Axis also put the BDT area within the buffer zone of the BCA. However, it does not stipulate additional measures on the area.<sup>52</sup> One notable change in the latest plans is that they highlight the need for 'surgical regeneration' rather than the large-scale demolition and regeneration projects seen in previous decades. This strategy will hopefully put a stop to the large-scale alterations of the historic urban fabric and displacement of

residents. The latest projects aimed to ‘enhance the historical characteristics’ along the BCA have highlighted this strategy.<sup>53</sup> Future case studies on some of these surgical regeneration projects will be needed to examine their impact.

The 2018 Controlled Detailed Plan stipulates specific measures for preserving the intangible elements of the historic urban landscape, including preserving traditional shops (*lao zi hao*) and their original locations, recording oral histories, and retaining traditional performance and folk customs.<sup>54</sup> This inclusion is undoubtedly a step up from the 25-Area Plan. The 2022 Conservation and Management Plan of Beijing’s Central Axis highlights the significance of public participation.<sup>55</sup> Whether this element can be genuinely implemented in China’s political reality is questionable.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the detailed measures suggested in the management plan are a promising sign.

## CONCLUSION

It should be noted that the various forms of resistance performed during the 2013-2014 regeneration project were not homogenous. The ambivalent and implicit messages behind the graffiti are an appropriate analogy to the fluidity of stakeholders’ opinions on what they were trying to resist. Many residents were willing to move to better living conditions if the compensation and relocation process were more just, while others had more attachment to the place rather than any specific historic courtyard houses to be demolished. For the conservationists such as BDTT and CHP, their reactions were triggered by the fear of the BDT area going through sweeping demolition and wholesale ‘regeneration’ that creates ‘pseudo-antiques’ (*jia gu dong*) in such a cherished historic neighbourhood. Some of the media and expat writers who wrote about the project framed it as yet another top-down initiative to displace local communities, the composition of which is indeed much more complex and nuanced. For the general public, those who expressed resistance online were more concerned about losing some of the traditional businesses than other historic urban fabrics.

Reviewing the project proposal from 2010 highlights how the urban plans can be used in various ways. The holistic approach to urban heritage conservation in the 25-Area Plan was somehow ignored or manipulated in the proposal, and the inaccurate assessment of individual buildings was used to legitimise demolition and evacuation. As pointed out by Bideau and Yan, the collective memory and emotions of this historic urban landscape have not been considered in these projects.<sup>57</sup> The latest development of urban plans and other relevant planning tools further elevated the significance of holistically preserving the historic city centre. It is encouraging to see that in the Controlled Detailed Plan and the BCA’s World Heritage planning framework, intangible heritage has been highlighted, and the BCA’s management plan and conservation regulation show a higher level of commitment to encouraging public accountability and public participation in heritage management. However, public participation is still characterised primarily as an obligation of the public rather than a civil right, a distinct characteristic compared to the same notion in other heritage contexts.<sup>58</sup> It remains to be seen how these measures will be implemented and how much the public and communities will be able to influence decision-making.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge that much of the data and information would not have existed without the painstaking fieldwork and analysis of the BDTT team members.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author was a member of the BDTT group volunteering to document the transformation of the BDT area during the 2013-14 regeneration phase. However, the analysis and opinions within this article are formed with ten years' distance from the event and with academic integrity and rigour supported by evidence.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Dr **Lui Tam** is a lecturer of architectural history at the Welsh School of Architecture (WSA), Cardiff University. Her experience and expertise stand at the interdisciplinary crossroads of architecture, archaeology, urban planning, and heritage studies. Before joining the WSA, she practised as a heritage conservation planner and consultant for sustainable heritage tourism. She is the deputy lead of the History Heritage & Conservation Research Group at the Welsh School of Architecture. Her publications and research interests cover topics such as sustainable heritage management, heritage tourism and community development, Historic Urban Landscape, and adaptive reuse of historic buildings, focusing on empirical studies in China and Southeast Asia while also expanding into heritage in Wales.

## TABLES AND FIGURES

**Figure 1** The temporary market between the Drum and Bell Towers, 1933-1946, photographed by Hedda Morrison. Source: Morrison, Hedda. "South Façade of the Bell Tower, and the Adjacent Market, Beijing." Harvard-Yenching Library, 1933-1946. [http://id.lib.harvard.edu/images/olvgroup39/urn-3:FHCL:4821/cataloghttps://images.hollis.harvard.edu/primo-explore/viewcomponent/L/HVD\\_VIAolvgroup39?vid=HVD\\_IMAGES&imageId=urn-3:FHCL:4821&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine](http://id.lib.harvard.edu/images/olvgroup39/urn-3:FHCL:4821/cataloghttps://images.hollis.harvard.edu/primo-explore/viewcomponent/L/HVD_VIAolvgroup39?vid=HVD_IMAGES&imageId=urn-3:FHCL:4821&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine).

**Figure 2** The BDT area on the 1750 Complete Map of Beijing overlaid with courtyard boundaries within the boundary of the 'regeneration area' proposed in the 2010 project proposal. Source: Adopted by BDTT, from Uya Hala, Haiwang, Yuan Shen, and Giuseppe Castiglione. "Compete Map of Qianlong's Beijing City." 1750. <http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/II-11-D-802/>.

**Figure 3** The BDT area captured in a 1959 aerial photo overlaid with the situation in 2012. The buildings in red are the only ones that did not exist then. This directly contradicts the project proposal's claim that these buildings were all recent additions with no historical significance at all. Source: Adapted by Tam, from Bell and Drum Tower Team. *Brief Report About the Recent Situation in Bell and Drum Towers Square Area and Its Impacts to World Heritage Site*. (2013). p. 28.

**Figure 4** Map of the demolition and redevelopment zones compiled by the BDTT in their unpublished report sent to UNESCO in January 2013. Source: Bell and Drum Tower Team. *Brief Report About the Recent Situation in Bell and Drum Towers Square Area and Its Impacts to World Heritage Site*. (2013). p. 9.

**Figure 5** Buildings demolished around the two squares from September 2013 to August 2014, published by BDTT's Weibo account. Source: BDTT, "Weibo Account of the Bell and Drum Tower Team," *Sina Weibo*, 2013, <https://weibo.com/u/3229147557>.

**Figure 6** Series of graffiti appearing on the BDT demolition site from 2013-2014. Source: Tam, Lui. "Graffiti in the BDT Area." 2013-2014.

## ENDNOTES

1. This was the first time the capital's central axis was moved to approximately the position it is now, northeast of the previous Middle Capital (*Zhongdu*) of the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234).
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  12. Marina Svensson, “Heritage struggles and place-makings in Zhejiang Province: Local media, cross-regional media interactions and media strategies from below,” in *Mapping Media in China* (Routledge, 2012).
  13. Xiaoxu Liang, “Participatory management for cultural heritage: social media and Chinese urban landscape” (paper presented at the International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction, 2020).
  14. Xiaoxu Liang, Yanjun Lu, and John Martin, “A review of the role of social media for the cultural heritage sustainability,” *Sustainability* 13, no. 3 (2021).
  15. He et al., “Measuring social network influence on power relations in collaborative planning: A case study of Beijing City, China.”
  16. The auto-ethnographical component includes my experience as a member of the Bell and Drum Tower Team (BDTT), a voluntary group who was an active advocate during the BDT regeneration project in 2013-2014.
  17. Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning & Design, *Beijing Urban Master Plan (1991-2010)*, (Beijing: Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning and Natural Resources, 1992).
  18. Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning & Design, *Beijing Urban Master Plan (2004-2020)*, (Beijing: Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning and Natural Resources, 2005).
  19. ‘Historic Area’ is used as the translation for 历史文化保护区 (*Lishi Wenhua Baohu Qu*) in the English title of the plan, but this protection category should be more accurately translated as ‘Historic and Cultural Conservation Area’. The 25 conservation areas were designated in the 1990s, with a further five within the Old City (within the Ming and Qing Dynasty city walls) designated in 2002, and three more in 2004-2005.
  20. Beijing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Heritage, *Conservation Plan of 25 Historic Areas in Beijing’s Old City*, (Beijing 2005).
  21. The building height is the most fixed criteria when it comes to controlling the construction within these conservation areas. The height restriction is aligned with other legislative and planning framework regarding PCHS’s Controlled Construction Zones. In Beijing, these are stipulated in the ‘Management Regulation of the Conservation Zone and Controlled Construction Zones of Beijing’s PCHS’ (2007), and their boundaries are drawn across the entire Old City area, distinct from the rest of the country where these measures are usually specifically determined in each PCHS conservation plan.
  22. Boston International Design Group, *Zhong Gu Lou Guang Chang Hui Fu Zheng Zhi Xiang Mu [Restoration and Rectification Project of Bell and Drum Tower Square]*, Dongcheng Historic City Preservation and Construction Ltd. (Beijing, 2010).
  23. The project is described as having two or three phrases within the same project or two consecutive projects in various literature.
  24. The initial project in 2010 was commissioned and developed by Dongcheng Historic City Preservation and Construction Ltd. (DHCPC), which is a subsidiary real-estate company of Beijing Oriental Cultural Assets Operation Corporation, a company whose capital was injected by state-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council. The proposal was designed by the Boston International Design Group (BIDG), a company that was accused of corruption and plagiarism at the beginning of 2012.
  25. CSOs in China are NGOs officially registered with the government and required to go through an annual inspection with the Bureau of Civil Affairs.
  26. The Chinese name of the team 钟鼓楼片区关注团队 (*Zong Gu Lou Pian'er Qu Guanzhu Tuandui*) can be

more accurately translated as 'the Watching Team of the BDT area'. For convenience, BDTT will be used as the acronym in this article.

27. Boston International Design Group, *Zhong Gu Lou Guang Chang Hui Fu Zheng Zhi Xiang Mu [Restoration and Rectification Project of Bell and Drum Tower Square]*.
28. Haiwang Uya Hala, Yuan Shen, and Giuseppe Castiglione, "Compete Map of Qianlong's Beijing City," (1750). <http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/II-11-D-802/>.
29. Boston International Design Group, *Zhong Gu Lou Guang Chang Hui Fu Zheng Zhi Xiang Mu [Restoration and Rectification Project of Bell and Drum Tower Square]*.
30. Bideau and Yan, "Historic urban landscape in Beijing: The gulou project and its contested memories."
31. Bell and Drum Tower Team, *Brief Report about the Recent Situation in Bell and Drum Towers Square Area and Its Impacts to World Heritage Site* (2013).
32. This is not a singular incident in Beijing, but a common tactic used for various displacement or demolition areas within the historic city.
33. Zhaohua Deng et al., "Collaborative planning in the new media age: The Dafo Temple controversy, China," *Cities* 45 (2015).
34. He et al., "Measuring social network influence on power relations in collaborative planning: A case study of Beijing City, China."
35. Bideau and Yan, "Historic urban landscape in Beijing: The gulou project and its contested memories."
36. Another problematic aspect that further undermines the credibility of the project is that the demolition resulted in various complete courtyards being cut half. One notable example is the three-courtyard complex at the northeast corner of the Bell Tower (the tower above), where the first row (jin) houses were demolished, the traces of which can still be seen today, like a gaping wound of the courtyard behind.
37. Zhang et al., "Strategies of the built-heritage stewardship movement in urban redevelopment in the Internet Age: The case of the Bell-Drum Towers controversy in Beijing, China."
38. Bideau and Yan, "Historic urban landscape in Beijing: The gulou project and its contested memories."
39. Anon., "Zhongguo You Tuya: Shenye Jietou de Jinji Youxi [China has Graffiti: A Forbidden Game on the Midnight Streets]," *Jiemian Global*, 11/12/2017, 2017, <https://en.jiemian.com/article/1806253.html>.
40. The temple's main hall, accessed via a small lane next to the temple gate, was occupied by a private owner after a restoration by a Brunei architect in 2004. The additional building was demolished during the recent restoration in 2023, and all other private users have been moved out.
41. S. A. Smith, "Contentious Heritage: The Preservation of Churches and Temples in Communist and Post-Communist Russia and China," *Past & Present* 226, no. Suppl\_10 (January 1 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtu027>.
42. From around 2001-2015, this was a venue where independent film screening and a wide variety of arts events took place, including films that were banned in the country and artists who were on the government's watchlist due to their political stance. It is no less than miraculous that such a venue was able to survive for as long as it did in the historic centre of Beijing. The temple site is now reopened as a museum for postal history. The exhibition also includes a sign from Zajia donated by the owner.
43. Zhang et al., "Strategies of the built-heritage stewardship movement in urban redevelopment in the Internet Age: The case of the Bell-Drum Towers controversy in Beijing, China."
44. It was likely to 'tidy up' the squares for the National Day Golden Week in October. The current information board in front of the Drum Tower explicitly states that 'all forms of graffiti are prohibited' on the square.
45. More recently, small businesses were opened on the annex buildings of the BDT. Businesses did come back to the area, but in a different profile.
46. Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning & Design, *Beijing Urban Master Plan (2016-2035)*, (Beijing: Beijing Municipal Planning and Land Resources Management Committee, 2017).
47. Beijing Municipale Planning and Natural Resources Committee, *Controlled Detailed Plan of the Capital's Functional Core Zone (Street and Neighbourhood Level) (2018-2035)*, (Beijing: Beijing Municipal Government, 2018).
48. Beijing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Heritage, *Conservation and Management Plan of Beijing's Central Axis (2022-2035)*, (Beijing 2023).
49. Beijing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Heritage, "Regulations for the Beijing Central Axis's Cultural Heritage Conservation," ed. 15th Standing Committee of Beijing's Municipal People's Congress (Beijing: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Heritage., 2022).
50. Florence Graezer Bideau and Haiming Yan, "Re-creating memories of Gulou: Three temporalities and emotions," in *People-Centred Methodologies for Heritage Conservation* (Routledge, 2021). 1A household of three to five people within a courtyard, which is often shared by multiple households, can sometimes have only 20sqm within their 'legal structures'. Even with a compensation rate much higher than new-built apartments per square meter, the total amount is still far from enough for the families to move to a decent

apartment elsewhere, let alone the fact that these allocated apartments are often far less convenient than the city centre.

51. Beijing Municipal Institute of City Planning & Design, Short Beijing Urban Master Plan (2016-2035). Strangely, however, the BDT neighbourhood area was already within the national PCHS conservation zone of the two towers, which stipulates that new construction is restricted, and any demolition must be justified. It apparently did not stop the demolition to take place in 2013-14, because the buildings were labelled 'illegal' and had no historical significance. The intricacy and complex inconsistencies between these planning mechanisms deserve further dissecting but will not be elaborated on further due to the limited scope of this article.

52. Yan Du, "Zhong Gu Lou Zhou Bian Di Wu Li Mian Feng Mao Hui Fu - Deng Lou Nan Wang Lan Zhong Zhou Xian Feng Mao [Restoration of the fifth facade in the surrounding of the Drum and Bell Towers - A southward view of the Central Axis on the tower]," *China News (Zhong Xin She)* (Beijing) 2022, <https://www.bj.chinanews.com.cn/news/2022/1107/88509.html>.

53. Beijing Municipale Planning and Natural Resources Committee, Short Controlled Detailed Plan of the Capital's Functional Core Zone (Street and Neighbourhood Level) (2018-2035).

54. It should be noted that public and community participation has now become an essential element in any World Heritage inscription dossier. This management plan, being the primary planning framework support for the inscription, needs to include this element.

55. Haiming Yan, *World Heritage Craze in China - Universal Discourse, National Culture, and Local Memory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018).

56. Bideau and Yan, "Re-creating memories of Gulou: Three temporalities and emotions."

57. Lui Tam, "Sustainable Heritage Management in Contemporary China" (Doctoral Thesis, Cardiff University, 2022).

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