AUTHENTICITY AS A CHALLENGE IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF BEIJING'S URBAN HERITAGE: THE COMMERCIAL GENTRIFICATION OF THE GUOZIJIAN HISTORIC AREA[*]

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Abstract

The transformation of Beijing's historic center is in need of an evaluation from the standpoint of authenticity, a concept increasingly used and constantly redefined. Beginning with a heritage-based definition of authenticity, this article will present a review of the urban intervention policies that have been implemented in Beijing's inner city *hutongs* since the Revolution in 1949, evaluating their effect on the capital's preservation. Then, the paper will continue describing how current urban redevelopment is assuming contemporary definitions of urban authenticity emanating from the creative city paradigm and the tourism industry, leaving a lasting effect on its vernacular heritage. Taking the historical area of Guozijian as a case study, this article will evaluate the integration of contemporary commercial architecture into this historic setting. This evaluation will highlight how flawed conceptions of authenticity have brought about an ongoing gentrification process that is displacing a large share of the population, a fundamental component of urban heritage authenticity.

Keywords

Urban heritage, creative city, authenticity, urban renovation, gentrification

Introduction

Contemporary debate about urban authenticity revolves around a series of issues with an important economic dimension. The foremost involves heritage, which is the departure point of this paper. Even though the discussion among experts regarding authenticity and architectural heritage has reached a certain consensus (De Naeyer et al., 2000), it vanishes when heritage assets characterized by constant change, such as cities, are addressed.

Due to the complex nature of the historic city, different definitions of authenticity apply through the lens of the tourism industry and the creative economy, producing a lasting effect on the transformation of historic cities through thematization and gentrification. This introduces a distortion in heritage conservation that not only affects the historicity of urban areas, but also their communities and activities.

As a global authority in heritage matters, UNESCO has designed a holistic approach to this issue, the 2011 Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Recommendation, which ambitiously tries to reconcile these diverging visions (UNESCO, 2011, Bandarin and Van Oers, 2012). HUL methodologies are applicable in urban contexts undergoing large transformations, and they highlight the role of heritage and culture as engines for the development of historic environments, as well as for the city and the territory. This vision has received criticism for its allegiance to the interests of the tourism and creative industries (Lalana, 2011). Nevertheless, it is receiving international attention due to cities' ever-growing interest in becoming powerhouses of international economic development, along with a growing concern regarding the loss of massive tracts of traditional landscapes, communities and economies as a result of globalization.

This especially applies to cities in China like Beijing. Its 11[th]Five-year Plan (2005-2010) expressed that one of its goal was to turn China's capital into a global city, along with the idea of becoming an appealing travel destination thanks to its unique urban and architectural heritage and a rich cultural scene (Li, Zhao, 2009; Yang et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2015). To this we must add changes introduced in the productive framework, in order to turn it into a new, knowledge-based model (Ren, Sun, 2012). In the 12th Five-year Plan (2010-2015), Beijing's local authorities insisted on promoting the capital's new profile as a creative city, focusing on the "created in Beijing" brand, which has resulted in Beijing's adhesion to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2012.

The policy imperative of the creative economy has had an impact on society and urban planning. The ideological aspirations of the so-called "creative classes" (Florida, 2002) have become a relevant social phenomenon in today's Beijing. Despite the controversy raised by Florida's theories (Markusen, 2006; Krätke, 2010), Beijing shows signs that its local government is among its most ardent followers, not only by how it guides the arrival of new businesses, but also by how it fosters conventional tourism marketing and inner city redevelopment strategies (Markusen, 2006). This entails the development of new and sophisticated commercial and leisure areas (Keane, 2009; Li, Zhao, 2009; Yang et al., 2013), and a new appreciation for urban heritage, which is considered both a tourism resource and an appropriate setting for creative, real estate and retail activities (Wang, 1997, Du Cros et al., 2005).

This article analyzes the role that the renewed interest in the authenticity of Beijing's urban heritage plays in this process, as well as the actions that are currently being carried out to preserve and reuse these assets, which are leading to commercial gentrification. In the first place, this paper will review how Beijing's built heritage has been valued, how it has been approached and what problems it has faced from the perspective of urban planning since the triumph of the Revolution in 1949 until now. Secondly, I will point out the change of attitude that has taken place with regards to how to deal with the quandaries of this urban heritage, beginning with its artistic interpretation and the initial steps taken to use it as a tourism resource. In the third place, current changes in the designated historic area of Guozijian will be evaluated, with the study of the commercial transformation of the area's residential tissue. This assessment will lead to a discussion around the idea of authenticity, taking into special consideration the complexity of such an issue in Chinese heritage practice, where

despite being considered an objective fact (ICOMOS CHINA, 2004; ICOMOS CHINA, 2015), it remains interpreted and manipulated for commodification purposes.

## Vanishing *hutongs*: the controversial fate of residential heritage in the Inner City of Beijing

Ever since the first legislative measures were taken to protect heritage assets, Beijing has strived to situate itself high on UNESCO's Word Heritage lists, inscribing seven sites in order to become the contemporary mirror in which the tourism industries look at themselves (Johnston, 2014). The difficulties of concealing this purpose with the conservation of its more mundane, residential urban tissue are exemplified in the latest initiative involving World Heritage in Beijing, which is the proposed inscription of the city's North-South axis on the UNESCO lists.

The stakes are high in order to achieve this inscription, since it symbolizes China's contemporary renaissance and it legitimizes its links with the mythical origins of the city and the imperial institution in an exercise of nationalist assertion promoted by the Chinese Government (Yu, 2008, Su, 2011). But at the same time, the North-South axis illustrates the current results of urban regeneration "towards a new Beijing" (Meyer, 2008), which are, basically, the commodification and thematization of public space that take place after evictions and massive demolitions (Abramson, 2007; Shin, 2015).

This has been decried from a heritage perspective and exemplifies the huge impact that urban redevelopment has on Beijing's vernacular built heritage, which is fundamentally based upon the *siheyuan* housing typology and the communal street or *hutong*. A look at the history of the conservation of this urban heritage shows how vulnerable it is, as well as the effects that inconsistent urban renovation policies have had upon it over the last century.

Siheyuan translates, literally, as "courtyard with four walls", and it is the traditional housing typology of the capital (Figure 1). Traditionally it is closed off from the outside, and it is accessed through an atrium, known as *xin bi,* on its southeastern side. The rest of the facade to the street has no openings, and the outermost bay is known as *daozuo fang*. The main feature within the *siheyuan* is an open courtyard, around which rooms are placed symmetrically, preferably following a north to south sequence.

It is the built reflection of the hierarchical structure of the traditional Chinese family. The room belonging to the figure head, known as *zheng fang*, is oriented to the south, while the quarters of his descendants and other family members, which are known as *xian fang,* are placed to the east and west. Annexes to the south and to the north were used as storage spaces and to house the servants.
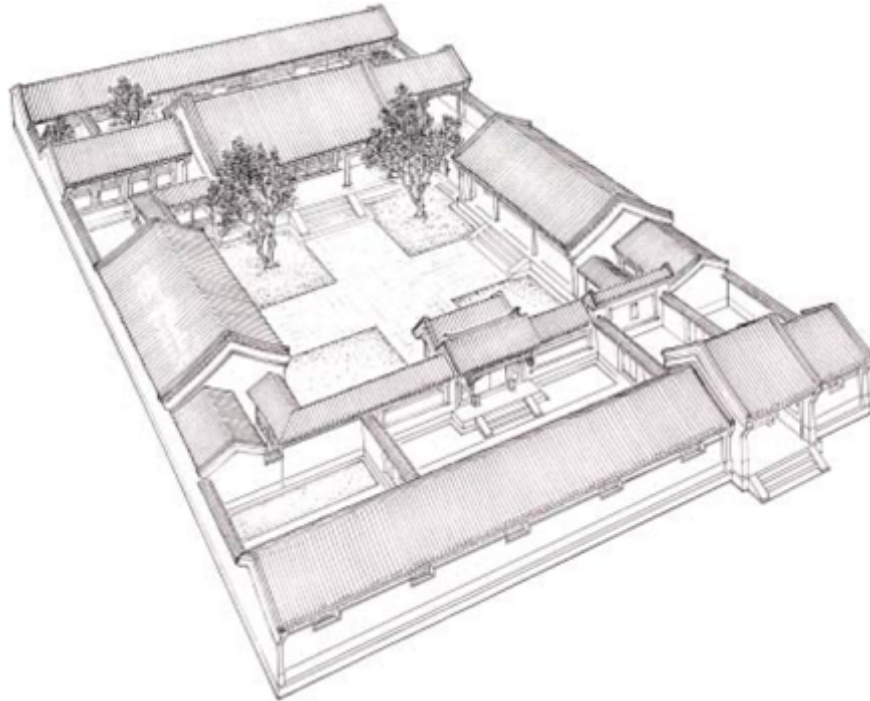
Figure 1. Diagram of a *siheyuan*, Beijing. Source: Yutaka et al., 2002

A *hutong* is defined as a residential agglomeration of *siheyuan* along an axis that, in Mongolian, originally could be translated as "route to the water well" (Johnston, 2014). In general, a *hutong* is rectilinear, it normally follows an east to west orientation and its length varies. It always follows the geometric layout of the capital, even though there are some *hutongs* with different orientations and others that have zigzagging configurations.

The *siheyuan* and the *hutong* complement each other. They are the basic features of the urban landscape of Beijing's center, where, traditionally, a family's prosperity could be seen in the home improvements it carried out—these houses were constantly rebuilt, generation after generation. A *siheyuan* was originally conceived as a single family home, so in the event of scarcity of resources, this regular renovation process would be hindered. This became a generalized phenomenon from the end of the Qing dynasty, in 1912, onwards. The *siheyuan* gradually deteriorated, and these quarters were divided up to house more than one family (Johnston, 2014).

The changes that came about in how property was distributed, consubstantial with modernization, were a first challenge to the authenticity of the *siheyuan*. But back then heritage issues were not part of the discussion. Things went further with the arrival of Communism in 1949, when housing was socialized and the real estate market was abolished. Since it was a consumer good, the Chinese Government deliberately reduced rental prices (Zhang, 1997; Leaf, 1995). However, this measure had major negative effects: towards the end of the 1970s, rent averaged only 2,3% of average family incomes, initiating to a vicious cycle in which the revenue that the state received was never enough to carry out the constant repairs that these buildings needed. Furthermore, the inferior economic status of district-owned work units hindered the possibility of decent renovations (Zhang, 1997).

In 1976, the Tangshan earthquake severely affected Beijing, and many *siheyuan* suffered structural damages. In order to counteract the sudden lack of inhabitable space after the earthquake, the local government allowed the construction of temporary structures within the courtyards, many of which were occupied by new inhabitants (Lü, 1997). This brought about their functional obsolescence, and *hutongs* became hovels. This tendency increased furthermore when the Cultural Revolution ended and changes were introduced in economic policy in the late 1970s. In the 1980s floor area occupation reached up to 83% and densities were up to 7,8 m² per person in some areas of central Beijing, such as Ju Er Hutong (Wu, 1991) (Figure 2).
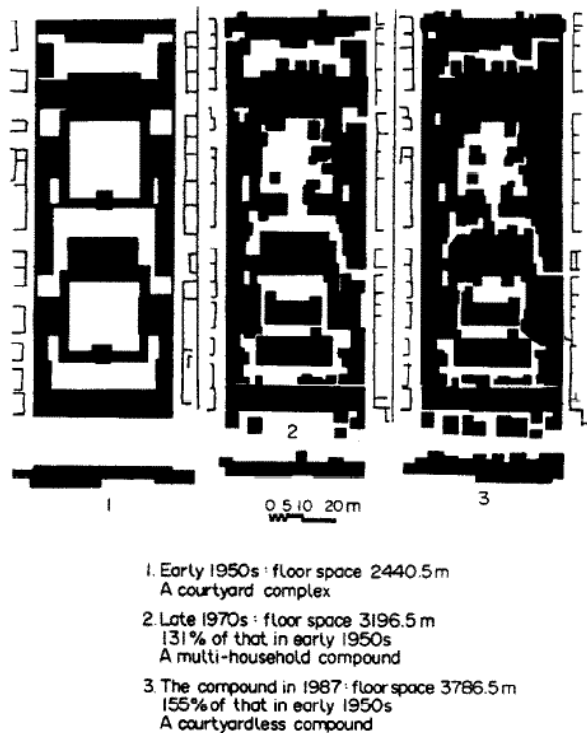

1. Early 1950s : floor space 2440.5 m
A courtyard complex

2. Late 1970s : floor space 3196.5 m
131% of that in early 1950s
A multi-household compound

3. The compound in 1987 : floor space 3786.5 m
155% of that in early 1950s
A courtyardless compound

Figure 2. Hovelling process in Beijing. Source: Wu, 1991

The authorities tried to reverse this process with urban planning tools. Beijing's 1983 Master Plan pinpointed 29 dilapidated areas for their renovation, 95% of which were within its historic center. But even though the first national Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics enacted in 1982 recognized the cultural and historical value of cities, this plan did not take the historic center's heritage issues into account; it merely dealt with housing problems (Zhang, 1997).

The degradation continued, and surveys taken in 1990 revealed that 48% of the city center's built area was structurally unsafe or inadequate (Zhang, 1997). In 1990 the Old Dilapidated Housing Renewal Plan was approved (Lü, 1997; Meyer, 2008). The goals that this plan set out to accomplish were to eliminate sub-standard housing and reduce population densities in the historic center by enabling changes in land use—from residential to commercial— widening roads, creating new parks and setting up a real estate market by putting aside land for future developments linked to infrastructure renewal (Johnston, 2014; Lü, 1997; Leaf, 1995).

The Plan's only concession to heritage preservation was to regulate the maximum height of buildings in the historic center, questionably assuming that heritage authenticity could be preserved merely by controlling building volumes. The consequences were disastrous, for there is one crucial difference between Beijing's historic center and those of other major capital cities: the unusually low height of its buildings, on average they are just one or two storeys high. Hence, an economic contradiction ensued: due to this limitation, real estate development was totally incompatible with market financial outputs (Abramson, 2007; Leaf, 1995; Lü, 1997; Wu, 1991). The plan solved this contradiction by implementing two measures: firstly, by raising the maximum height to three storeys, so as not to surpass the height of the trees in the historic center; and secondly, by forcefully displacing the inhabitants of the *hutong*, in order for these spaces to be occupied by new residents that could face the rising costs of the new homes.

The ensuing boom in Beijing's real estate market brought about evictions and densification processes. This boom was led by the municipal government in its search for ways of attracting investors that could carry out the renewal of the city center. Throughout the 1990s, this policy increased the availability of new land for future developments by means of tearing down historic neighborhoods (Abramson, 2007). The result was catastrophic: in broad figures, of the 3,250 *hutong* that existed in the city in 1949, only 1,204 remained standing by 2004 (Leinonen, 2012).

Quests and opportunities for urban conservation in Beijing

Some noteworthy attempts have been made to stop the mentioned degradation and preserve Beijing's urban heritage from the undesired effects of modernization (Chen, 2003). Prior to the Liberation, the then mayor of Beijing, Yuan Liang, promoted a Plan to Construct a Tourist Zone in Beijing, in order to counteract the decadence of the inner city, especially after the government was transferred to Nanjing in 1927. This plan, which was approved in 1934, was never implemented due to the Sino-JapaneseWar that broke out in 1937 (Dong, 2003; Dryburgh, 2005). Nevertheless, it set an early example of the influence of Western approaches to urban conservation in China.

After the Revolution, the architect and scholar Lian Sicheng along with Chen Zhanxiang advanced the first heritage preservation attempts at an urban scale. Their 1950 plan proposed the construction of a new administrative center to the west of Beijing, in order to avoid overcrowding in the historic inner city (Abramson, 2007; Yu, 2008). The principles to which this Plan adhered were consistent with the 1931 Athens Charter, which still acted as a document of reference in the field of heritage preservation (Athens Charter, 1931). This attempt was unsuccessful, and the center of Beijing ended up accommodating all of the major bodies that represented China's new revolutionary powers, right at the time when its urban heritage began to decline (Abramson, 2007).

The next attempt to heighten the value of heritage came from the academic sphere, once the Cultural Revolution had ended. Beginning in 1978, professors from Tsinghua University demanded the respectful renewal of the historic center following "creative paths to abstract inheritance" (Wu, 1991), similarly to the theories that were being carried out at the time in Europe by the Italian Tendenza movement (Rossi, 1999). This meant a step forward from the more aesthetic motivations of the Athens Charter, as the

notion of architectural typology was identified as an important bearer of heritage authenticity.

The arguments that favored the idea of typological continuity in residential architecture and an appreciation of the idea of urban environment helped in the development of new preservation measures, as the 1976 UNESCO Recommendation of Nairobi stated (UNESCO, 1976). In 1986, the Chinese Council of State adopted, for the very first time, the idea of preservation for streets and districts and urban heritage conservation (Abramson, 2007). The quest for updating regulation was clear, as this was only one year in advance of the 1987 ICOMOS Washington Charter, which recalled the link between authenticity in heritage areas and "not only the physical structures and their relationships, but also to the setting and its surroundings, as well as the functions acquired by the city over time" (ICOMOS, 1987).

However, these measures were useless in Beijing given the lack of attention towards heritage in its 1990 Plan and the interests that developers had in the historic center. Beijing's 1993 Master Plan attempted to revert this situation and stand up for the preservation of the historic city. To such effect, it included a chapter that defined the traits of Beijing's heritage from an aesthetic point of view. A series of elements were designated for their preservation, among them, the traditional colors of the city, its horizontal skyline, and the ancient trees along its streets. But no concrete measures were taken to establish a limit to the height of buildings, which was raised to four stories (Abramson, 2007).

This environmental interpretation of urban heritage aimed to fulfill the efforts carried out by the authorities and scholars; in the meantime demolitions continued. But this was also the basis for a renewed understanding of authenticity for the sake of mass tourism, since it started to demand more "authentic" environments and experiences that would make visiting the city unique. Of special importance were the appreciations of Beijing artist Xu Yong. In 1989 he began taking pictures of the cityscape's everyday scenes: he paid special attention to its architecture, the richness of its layout and the humble living conditions of its inhabitants.

Following his entrepreneurial instinct, Xu Yong himself turned his knowledge regarding this nearly extinct heritage into an economic initiative. Beginning in 1993, Xu Yong's rickshaw business "Hutong Go Around" offered Beijing's first foreign visitors the opportunity to come into direct contact with this unique habitat (Wang, 1997; Johnston, 2014). By valuing its beauty above its inhabitational issues he underlined the potential of the historic center as an economic resource within the rise of the tourism industry.

The local government, which by that time was worried about the growing unrest its demolition policies was producing (Shin, 2010), became aware of this phenomenon— which had reached its height with the uncontrolled proliferation of touristic rickshaws— and began considering a new approach to the value of its urban heritage. In this sense, in 1999, Beijing's municipality promoted the Plan for the Conservation and Control Scope for the Historic and Cultural Conservation Areas in the Old City of Beijing. As a novelty, it went beyond the traditional focus on monuments themselves and showed certain awareness regarding the idea of heritage areas (Shin, 2010).

In the same spirit as the 1999 local initiative, in 2002 the Beijing Municipal City Planning Commission followed up with plans for the conservation of 25 historic areas in Beijing's old city (Beijing Municipal City Planning Commission, 2002; Chen, 2003; Shin, 2010) which established legal measures to protect a surface area of approximately 42% of the historic center of the capital (Abramson, 2007). The 2002 Plan was an important step forward, compared to the lack of protection of the 1990 Plan, but at the same time, it maintained the ongoing real estate development by allowing demolitions and new buildings to go up in zones of the historic center that were left out of the protected areas. (Shin, 2010).

The goal of the 2002 Plan was to wrap up the restoration of these historical areas in time for the 2008 Olympics, as part of a city branding strategy (Li, Zhao, 2009). The Olympics offered the opportunity for visitors to get to know the everyday life of the historic center, paying renewed attention to another component of urban authenticity: the complex layer of social relations that take place there, in the spirit of the Declaration of Amsterdam of 1975 (Council of Europe, 1975). At the same time it became a showcase habitat for potential new residents, triggering gentrification in the inner city of Beijing. In this context, it was very significant that a group of traditional homes that were in good state were turned into "Olympic Households", temporary dwellings for visitors and personnel who worked at the Olympics (Shin, 2010)

These intentions went well beyond the celebration of the Olympics, and in 2011 the program "Beijing households for folk traditions" was set up. Its goal was to select homes for the foreign residents market within the 25 areas designated by the 2002 Plan (Johnston, 2014). The requisites established to select these houses paved the way to their refurbishment to meet the infrastructural demands of the new, more affluent residents, showing the importance of heritage as an enticement. In order to offer an intensified contact with the past, traditional furniture was incorporated and special attention and care was taken in the restoration work.

This chain of events, together with the subsequent proliferation of the so-called "hutongtels" (Liu et al., 2015) has progressively turned the negative social perception of these areas into the renewed commercial interest of the real estate market and the tourism industry, with heritage appreciation as a key factor. This is how the preservation of the historic center has gradually brought about the gentrification of the 2002 Plan protected areas. Outwardly, the authorities observe this phenomenon with mistrust (Yang et al., 2013). However, facts seem show that beyond this apparent condescension lies to the active promotion of this transformation, as the 12th Five-year Plan of Beijing stated (Beijing Municipal Government, 2010).

Guozijian as a case study. Addressing the compatibility between authenticity and change

The current transformation of Beijing's historic center is symptomatic of deep social and economic changes. The rapid rate of these changes poses the question of whether or not they comply with an internationally assumed requisite that must govern all interventions on heritage assets—architectural or urban— which is to respect the principle of authenticity (ICOMOS CHINA, 2004; ICOMOS CHINA, 2015).

There is an intense debate surrounding the concept of heritage authenticity in China, which underlines the cultural differences between the East and the West and takes a critical stance against the Western vision of this notion (Qian, 2007; Ryckmans, 2008; Zhu, 2015). The position of the Chinese State Administration of Cultural Heritage regarding this issue was first expressed in the document *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China,* also known as the *China Principles,* in which this concept — translated into Chinese as "verifiability"—fully adopted the objectivity of its Western definition (ICOMOS CHINA, 2004).

Figure 3. Guozijian Protection Area in the Inner City area of Beijing. Source: Google Maps / the author

This definition of authenticity has stirred a heated controversy among heritage experts, not only due to its top-to-down implementation, but also because it collides with the traditional practice of constant building renovation that has been inherent to Chinese culture throughout history (Qian, 2007). Moreover, the differences between theoretical discourse and real practice, along with a rising awareness regarding the new appreciation of heritage as a resource for economic development, have led to a wider understanding of heritage authenticity, which was expressed in the updated version of the *China Principles* published in 2015 (ICOMOS CHINA, 2015).

The new *China Principles* reinforce the attention that urban conservation needs, following the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Recommendation (UNESCO, 2011; ICOMOS CHINA, 2015). This can be seen in its renewed call for authenticity, pointing to cultural and social values as a key for continuity, which is one of the fundamental goals of contemporary conservation practice. The fifth chapter of the *China Principles* makes a reference to adequate uses in these contexts, highlighting the role of heritage in the promotion of economic development (ICOMOS CHINA, 2015),

in the same way that HUL calls for bridging the gap between urban conservation and "the practical reality" of the markets (Bandarin and Van Oers, 2012).

This has created a new set of misunderstandings, as the issue of heritage authenticity is confronted with definitions that have their origin in the realm of tourism and the creative class aesthetic ideals (Florida, 2002; Du Cros et al., 2005; Cohen and Cohen, 2012), which do not necessarily fit in with the in-depth understanding of heritage terms. The integration of tourism and heritage has been controversial. After the conceptual renovation brought by the Nara Document in 1994, the 1996 Declaration of San Antonio acknowledged the contribution of different stakeholders to define urban authenticity, including also tourists among them (ICOMOS, 1996). Policies favoring the touristic –adding later the creative- perspective have become mainstream ever since.

The conflict lies in the increased attention that cultural policy makers give to the tourists' authentic experience, which hinders the true debate, that is, about which rights –human, cultural, economic, political, gender, environmental- are being sacrificed to make tourism prevail (Silverman, 2015). The same applies for the ideology of the creative class, whose market-oriented approach is growing recognition in China, neglecting part of the original purposes expressed both in the *China Principles* and the UNESCO HUL Recommendation. Both make a specific call against the transformation of residential districts into commercial precincts, and favor public participation as well as the community's shared responsibility in heritage preservation issues (UNESCO, 2011; ICOMOS CHINA, 2015).

None of this is being observed. Instead, gentrification is dispossessing these communities of their spaces and capitalizing heritage values for corporate profit. Following Zukin's argument, this is the outcome of the monopolistic emergence of tourism, culture and creativity as economic forces in historic cities (Hutton, 2004), enabled by an incomplete implementation of the comprehensive approach of the UNESCO HUL Recommendation: "authenticity is a cultural form of power over space that puts pressure on the city's old working class and lower middle class, who can no longer afford to live or work there" (Zukin, 2010).

This can be examined by evaluating the degree of heritage authenticity of contemporary interventions in Guozijian (Figure 3), one the 25 protected areas in Beijing's historic center designated by the 2002 Plan (Figure 4). Guozijian has been chosen for two main reasons. In the first place, Guozijian has an abundance of monumental heritage assets including the Lama Temple, the Confucius Temple and the Imperial College. All of these sites are of great importance at a national level, with strong links to the imperial institution and traditional Chinese state administration. Their preservation is superb, and they make up a prime focal point for those who visit the city's Northern sector. Secondly, the Dongcheng district, to which the Guozijian area belongs, is a sector of the historic center where the tourism, creative and cultural industries play a key role in urban transformations. This process has been underway since 2006, when the Beijing Center for Creativity opened its doors near the Lama Temple, as an initiative of the Gehua Cultural Development Group, which belongs to Beijing's municipal government (Keane, 2009). This company promotes the Beijing Design Week, an event that has constantly asserted the heritage value of Beijing's *hutongs*. Additionally, ever since the creation of this Center, the Gouzijian area has been chosen to host new experiences

regarding tourism and the creative city paradigm, such as the Dadu Museum and Fangjia 46 creative cluster, both of which rely heavily on contemporary design and historic heritage (Keane, 2009).
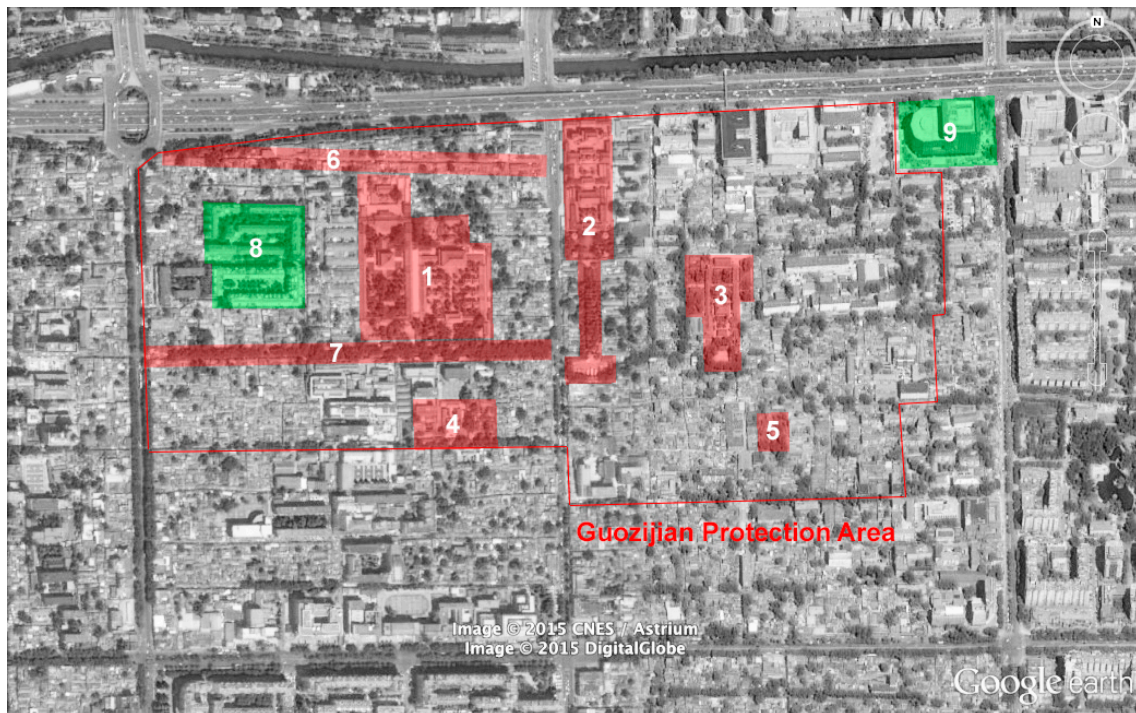
Figure 4. Guozijian Protection Area, Beijing. Legend: (1) Confucius Temple and Imperial College, (2) Lama Temple, (3) Bailin Temple, (4) Former Residence of Prince Xun, (5) Former Residence of XuHaidong, (6) Wudaoying Hutong, (7) Guozijian Street, (8) Guangshuyuan residential complex, (9) Gehua Cultural Development Group Headquarters – Beijing Center for Creativity
Source: Google Maps / the author

Therefore, Guozijian presents an exceptional environment to observe the clash between different versions of the notion of authenticity. Guozijian's urban structure is based on a network of *hutongs* of great historical value. Despite the municipality's efforts to spruce them up, most of these *hutongs* are overcrowded and highly deteriorated. What this article argues is how recent interventions transforming them into commercial premises are abandoning an objective, heritage-based notion of authenticity. Being responsible for the management of cultural heritage, district and municipal authorities are favoring other notions of authenticity related to tourism and the creative economy, as part of a new predominant authorized heritage discourse (Smith, 2006; Silverman, 2015).

There is a correspondence between the varying character of these businesses and their clientele, which reinforces the different degrees of exclusivity reached by the traditional *hutongs*, in clear contradiction with the HUL Recommendation and the *China Principles*. Hence, the different interpretations of the notion of authenticity in the reuse of these *siheyuan* have done away with mixed uses within the *hutong*, their traditional defining trait, have led to social differentiation as well as the loss of the original urban fabric. The heritage assessment we have carried out mainly takes architectural, historical and cultural values into account. This analysis is the product of the direct observation of a selection of case studies, basically, traditional *siheyuan* on Wudaoying Hutong and Guozijian street, the residential uses of which have turned into new

commercial uses— partially or completely—amidst the growing commercial gentrification of the area.

The thematization of Wudaoying hutong and the global aesthetics of tourism

Commercial gentrification shows just how contradictory the transformations under way are. It excludes the needs of the local population and caters only to those of visitors and new residents. This speculative real estate process (Rossiter, 2006) has an impact on the physical and typological realms, and in an updated version of Zukin's "Artistic Mode of Production" (Zukin, 1982), employs neo-bohemian aesthetics (Ley, 2003; Wang, Lau, 2009; Lawton et al., 2013) as a filter to determine the authenticity of the urban heritage against established heritage criteria. The aesthetics and atmosphere of new shops and businesses reinforces the sense of the neighborhood's creative cultural distinction (Zukin, 1982, Zukin et al., 2009), adding to the potential revenue that both private and public stakeholders expect from heritage commodification.

As Zukin shows, commercial gentrification is generally welcome from a neoliberal economic perspective as a sign of urban revitalization (Zukin, 1982, Zukin et al., 2009; Wang, 2011), paving the way, if successful, to residential gentrification. In these cases, it is important to point out how in the debate regarding this urban change, ethical arguments favor this kind of regeneration due to the extremely deteriorated state of buildings and infrastructures, which allows people to exert their right to improve their living standards. However if this imperative is accepted, a second ethical argument rises around the questions of which stakeholders are the most favored by these changes economically and in the long term, how favoring dispossession leads to the uneven redistribution of wealth derived from heritage (Shin, 2015).

Now that the complete obliteration of Beijing's urban heritage is under strong public scrutiny, commercial gentrification in the city's protected areas is taking on a subtler tone. The apparent preservation of buildings is being carried out by two means: thematization and typological reconstruction. If we look at thematization processes, it is easy to perceive a shift in the original appreciation of vernacular housing as heritage, which started in China in the mid 1990s (Wang, 1997). At that time, increasing touristic interests led to, on one hand, a "real" approach to vernacular housing exemplified by the aforementioned "Hutong go around" initiative, and on the other hand, an "artificial" approach through the construction of fake suburban vernacular housing theme parks, as was the case of Shenzhen's "Chinese ethnic culture village" (Wang, 1997).

Due to the financial risks this "artificial" approach entails, tourist marketing strategies have evolved towards the current kind thematization that is taking place in Beijing's *hutongs*. The precedent of this can be seen in Nanluoguxiang in the Dongcheng district (Shin 2010). In Guozijian the same takes place in the highly popular Wudaoying Hutong, which has turned into a prime tourist attraction due to the diversity of its commercial offer. The main change introduced by the shop owners has been the transformation of the first bay of the *siheyuan*, a space known as *daozuo fang*. Traditionally, this part of the building, with its north facing orientation, housed the servant's quarters and looked onto the access atrium and into the central courtyard.

In this *siheyuan*, what used to be the traditionally blank wall of the *daozuo fang* facing the street has become permeable, so that spaces that used to belong to the private realm are now exposed to the public. Even though these changes are based on the reuse of a heritage asset, their goal is neither the enhancement of its historical values nor the preservation of its authenticity. On the contrary, the result is an exaggeratedly fragmented space that is nowhere near a rigorous assessment of the value of the built environment in which it is set.

Figure 5. Shops along Wudaoying Hutong, Beijing. Source: Plácido González Martínez, 2015

Any expectations for authentic experiences that tourists may harbor obtain a thoughtless, neglectful scenography response. Tourists, lacking the time to develop an authentic appropriation, receive easy simplifications of culture and place, inoculated trough the aesthetics of globalization. These shops tend to follow "global", "ethnic" or "exotic" themes, and so does their architecture, a common feature of all establishments that cater to mass tourism and it has become omnipresent throughout this *hutong* in recent years. Hence, in this urban simulacrum shop windows compete with each other by incorporating popular themes in their decor, in an effort to make these businesses look like those in alien geographies, such as Mexico, Greece or France (Figure 5).

This aesthetic globalization of souvenir shops and eateries creates an homogeneous urban landscape (Zukin, 1982), which is perceived as a win-win situation: for Westerners visiting the area, this atmosphere can be interpreted as "home", even when "home" is understood as the sphere of globalized tourism; for Chinese visitors, this image refers to an idea of international legitimation and economic success. Behind these premises in the outermost bays of the buildings, relinquished to new commercial uses, the original local population lives on. Although it is quite possible that eventually they will be displaced because of rising rents and the encroachment of these commercial activities further into the more intimate original spaces of the *siheyuan*.

13

Behind the appearances: contradictory typological renovations in Guozijian Street.

Typological reconstruction is a second trend in commercial transformations with effects that are just as incongruous on urban heritage as the previous examples, even though, at first glance, their approach is cohesive with the *siheyuan* typology. This can be seen on Guozijian Street, with samples of China's new architecture dedicated to typological reinterpretation. The high-end clothes, furniture and design shops that are located at the western end of this street go beyond the mere transformation of the *daozuo fang*. Interventions encompass the entire lots, offering enticing examples of a return to the supposed pristine original aristocratic origins of the *siheyuan* and an ideal construct of a historical period.

Contemporary architectural expression adds value to these investments and lures potential clients, both tourists and new residents, both Chinese nationals and foreigners. This is the case of businesses such as Lost & Found, devoted to design clothing, or the Aroma Zen Tea Club, which sells exclusive brands of tea, located next to the Imperial College. Both stores offer their customers a "living experience" related to domesticity, which is highly appreciated as an immaterial asset while shopping, and authenticates these transformations (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). This is shown in clean and sober designs, in a return to simplicity that is a strong reminder of Wu's "creative paths to abstract inheritance" (Wu, 1991).

Figure 6. Main facade of the FNJI store, Guozijian, Beijing. Source: Plácido González Martínez, 2015

Among these shops the example of the FNJI furniture store, designed by the architect Gu Qi Gao, must be highlighted. On the outside it seems like it has fully respected the original typology. Even though larger openings appear on the facade of the *daozuo fang*, they are placed where the original high windows were (Figure 6). Access into the store takes place through the traditional *xin bi*, at the eastern end of the south side of the

siheyuan, leading into the atrium of the main courtyard. Even though the space has been closed off in the renovation, it still reminisces its original open nature thanks to the use of sheets of glass set in a light wood and steel frame structure (Figure 7). In the inner courtyard of the *siheyuan*, the rooms look onto the open space and preserve the spirit of Beijing's vernacular residential architecture, its materiality and its atmosphere.

Figure 7. *Xin bi* and access atrium to the main courtyard of the FNJI store, Guozijian, Beijing.
Source: Plácido González Martínez, 2015

Typological reinterpretation and design innovation strive to give continuity to the surrounding urban tissue, and, at least on the surface, commercial activities are incorporated into the scheme as yet another layer of the changing history of this area. Even the domestic atmosphere of the shop is reinforced trough the vintage, hand made character of the furniture, something that, initially, seems coherent with a heritage definition of authenticity. However, the FJNI store has a huge basement, which is far from traditional and actually almost duplicates the floor area ratio of the lot. The resulting design is brilliant in its refinement, but instead of being a creative and carefully rigorous intervention on cultural heritage, the project is actually a reconstruction of the area's vernacular architecture. Its historical skin is yet another example of a sarcastic approach to heritage, since it is the product of the displacement of traditional commercial activities and it has benefitted from the increase in retail surface.

The irreversible gentrification of the neighborhood puts forward the difficult issue of legitimacy. This question appears when it comes to critically assess the loss of social

diversity in the historic landscape. Even if it is explicitly defined in the *China Principles*, a critical view of its top-to-bottom implementation may reveal that the concept of authenticity is alien to traditional Chinese culture (Zhu, 2015). Likewise, the Nara Charter establishes the need to adapt intervention criteria to cultural particularities (ICOMOS, 1994). Moreover, this assessment leads to questioning the power that the cultural authorities have to impose preservation criteria (Cohen and Cohen, 2012), something that is particularly telling in the case of China (ICOMOS CHINA, 2004; ICOMOS CHINA, 2015).

The concept of authentication may shed light on these apparent contradictions. As Cohen and Cohen argue, authentication is "the process by which something is confirmed as genuine, real, trustworthy" (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). But when the power of authentication is the responsibility of the authorities that manage heritage areas such as Guozijian through planning and heritage regulations, inevitably political and economic interests enter the scene.

By following Zhu's three steps of authentication (Zhu, 2015), we may discern the lasting effect that the current transformations will have, not only in the Guozijian area, but also in heritage practices throughout Beijing and China, reflecting their connection in cultural terms with a wider, globalized scenario. From this point of view, the alliance between the tourism industry and the creative class ideology seems to brush aside a true interpretation of heritage. In the first place, the physical separation that authorities establish between the heritage asset and the public realm is solved by commodifying the built fabric, turning it into mere real estate, made available for new clients and open to entrepreneurship. Secondly, the emotional banishment that interventions on heritage assets cause is solved by allowing consumer culture to take hold, the food or design clothes offered in these newly gentrified shops are appropriated by their clients, thus creating a new, almost cannibalistic relationship between customers and heritage that replaces the original bond between the local residents and their everyday spaces. And thirdly, heritage designations not only bring about a change in the economic value of these spaces, they especially enable a moral shift, one that is didactic and easy to transmit: the interventions that are being permitted in protected areas become legitimized to the eyes of the general public immediately, much to the astonishment of heritage practitioners and for the future of heritage practice.

Conclusions

Heritage authenticity is an evolving concept, whose definition for urban areas remains controversial. This especially applies to Chinese cities: the case of Beijing shows how a history of inattentive management of urban heritage has led to the loss of great tracts of valuable vernacular housing in the city center.

Rising awareness about the heritage values of Beijing's *siheyuan* and *hutongs* is recent, and simultaneous to a growing concern about heritage authenticity. The UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (2011) has been the most important contribution at an international level on this field, and its layered approach to this notion has strongly contributed to updating the *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* (2015), which act as a reference also for urban conservation in China.

These two contributions explicitly refer to the need to maintain heritage authenticity in urban heritage sites, especially highlighting the request to provide continuity to the life of communities and their social, cultural and economic activities. They establish community participation as a tool to guarantee the provision of social benefits as stakeholders of heritage conservation. Heritage authenticity is thus located not only in aesthetic or environmental aspects, but also includes the exercise and defense of the rights of the community, be they social, cultural or economic.

The last of these rights is the right to the city. But the conflict arrives at a conceptual level when confronting these assertions with the interests of the tourism industry. And it is an issue of legitimacy, as ICOMOS recognized in 1996 the contribution of tourists to the definition of authenticity, as stakeholders of urban conservation (ICOMOS, 1996). Since then, the aim of cultural policy makers to satisfy the claim for authentic touristic experiences has collided with the rights of communities.

A major task for heritage practitioners remains to observe the respect of these rights, for when they are hindered there is a loss of urban heritage authenticity. This is most frequently seen in cases of dispossession and gentrification, when the original population is excluded in urban transformation processes and their activities disappear (Lü, 1997). A marketable version of the notion of authenticity applies in that case, trying to fulfill an ideal image of a mixed-use city at the cost of the real mixed society (Zukin, 2010).

Guozijian offers an exceptional opportunity to test this, summarizing the effects that the change of course in the Chinese economic framework is having on historic centers (Hutton, 2004). New economic development has been accompanied by the promotion of initiatives that have improved the urban environment, along with transformations in traditional commercial activities that are now globally oriented. The latter have come about in order to cater to tourists as well as to lure the new creative classes to the capital, both of which understand the value of heritage as an enjoyable aesthetic and as a way of appropriating the urban environment.

However, the case studies shown reveal that, at a conceptual level, there is a major conflict when it comes to addressing interventions on heritage assets and their authenticity. In the shops along Wudaoying Hutong and Guozijian street, heritage authenticity—which together with material authenticity includes the continuity of community life, activities and different uses within the form and typology of architecture—is not always compatible with the commercial exploitation of cultural and heritage resources.

The marketable version of the notion of authenticity results also a fraud of more conventional, assumed principles of heritage intervention. The introduction of foreign aesthetics to the historic environment becomes a falsification. Also more apparently respectful typological interpretations are the result of reconstructions, which are explicitly rejected in heritage practice. Following Baudrillard's categorization, the outcome is the creation of simulacra, lacking distinction between the authentic and its representation, thus devaluating any appreciation of heritage in terms of objectivity (Baudrillard, 1994).

This article has aimed to provide some insight into how these interventions on urban heritage, carried out from a non-heritage understanding of authenticity, are producing higher revenue due to their adherence to an aesthetic that is easily marketable (Zukin, 2010). Those generic and commercially oriented definitions may serve the purposes of the tourist and real estate industries, but they lack any trace of honesty from the perspective of urban heritage conservation and are gravely distorting Beijing's urban heritage.

Acknowledgements

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