

From *Hutongs* to Skyscrapers....a Shift in Culture or a Loss of Culture?

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The opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China, displayed the ancient city and a people rich in tradition and heritage among great innovations and technological advances. The Olympics were strongly impacted by their remarkable presentations and will forever be changed. Thousands of people performed in the opening ceremony with great precision and talent. However, traditional silk dresses, traditional hairstyles and makeup, traditional music instruments, and traditional performances, were all within the nontraditional Bird's Nest Stadium that is not characteristic of this same ancient heritage (Beijing 2008 Olympics opening ceremony [2008年夏季奥林匹克运动会开幕式], 2010). Architecture in Beijing is changing and in its place are skyscrapers that take the form of businesses, shopping centers, and apartment buildings, leaving many to mourn the loss of their traditional culture, what makes them Chinese. From the opening ceremony, it is hard not to see the heritage that the Chinese possess although their outwardly appearance seems urban or modern. The Chinese showcased their city well with a combination of new and old and their pride radiated to everyone around the world.

Since the 2008 Olympic games, the government has been working to create a metropolis to house more citizens in an overcrowded city, to decrease traffic congestion, and to meet the needs of living in a modern society (Chong, 2010, p.5-6). With the anticipation of their city being under the eyes of citizens all around the world during the Olympic Games, they wanted to prove to everyone that their city was not old and run down, but that they are modern like the rest of the world. However, as the face of Beijing is changing, more and more people are fighting for the preservation of their culture in fear that their values and way of life are in danger and could be lost forever. Alternatively, many have found that although their culture is changing, it is possible for them to keep their values and maintain their identity. Those living in Beijing may no longer have their traditional Hutongs, but they still demonstrate their community living in a

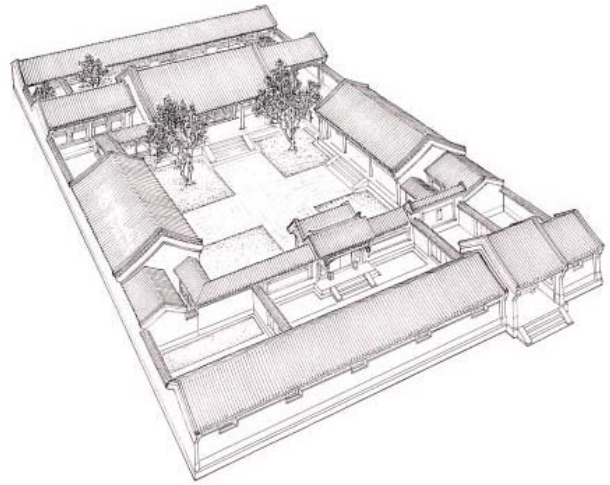
different setting. The health, safety, economic, and aesthetic effects of change are apparent through the analysis of this community's struggles with housing. Beijing is gaining a more global visual culture, but looking deeper it is possible to see their unique culture that still remains. It is for each person to weigh the positives and negatives of *hutong* living and apartment living, but this leads us to wonder who really owns the Beijing architectural culture? Who has the right to tear down traditional buildings and reconstruct new high rises? Will the Chinese people regret their decision like some have in prior cultural transformations?

The restructuring of Beijing is nothing new to the Chinese people. With the rise in Communism in the late 1940's, the needs of the city began to change and so did the plans (Collins, 2005, p. 1). The communist revolution brought about great fear for the Chinese and a possible loss of their culture. Nationalists began shipping cultural artifacts out of China and into Taiwan so that communists would not be able to destroy them (Richey, 2010). However, they had to leave certain immovable objects behind, mainly traditional Chinese buildings. Communists did not want to glorify the slum that they saw with poor roads and housing conditions; they could see no reason to hang on to the cultural traditions that left the country so far behind the rest of the world (Richey, 2010). Many young college students and adults, not "contaminated by tradition" as the communist leader Mao would say, joined the communist party and eagerly searched for a way to move forward and modernize China (Richey, 2010). They searched for a way to be both Chinese and modern. Traditionalists were devastated as their traditional city began to crumble and they realized that their culture had not protected them from western influence. Buildings were destroyed, Mao died in 1976, and people began to clean up after the Cultural Revolution (Richey, 2010). At this point, people were less sure that the modern changes had made their country better and surer that they had lost a significant part of what made

them Chinese. These thoughts brought about actions to form many heritage protection laws and regulations in the 1980's (Tibet Heritage Fund). Chinese people would continue to try and save what was left of their culture and discover what it was that really made them Chinese.

As Beijing has grown, so have the housing needs of the people. The 2008 Olympics worked as a catalyst to another modern boom in the change and development of what was left of the ancient city. The Chinese wanted to

showcase their urban city to the entire world, but their old centrally planned city dating back to the Yuan Dynasty in the thirteenth-century did not measure up to their image of modern Beijing (Chong, 2010). For this change or shift to occur, traditional Chinese *hutongs* had to be



demolished to make room for the newly developed skyscrapers. *Hutongs* are alleys that

Source: Tibet Heritage Fund. (n.d.). *Beijing Hutong Conservation Study Publication*. Retrieved October 30, 2010, from Tibet Heritage Fund International:
http://www.tibetheritagefund.org/media/download/hutong_study.pdf

are formed between residential houses and are a form of community living. Situated around these *hutongs* are *siheyuan* homes, which consist of a single story home with four sections and a central courtyard (On Hutongs and Highrises, 2006). As the image above shows, additional structures have been built within the *hutongs* making the collection of homes more than four sections. From the image you can also see that there is a central entrance to access the inside buildings. However, from other texts and images, this is not the case of all *hutongs*. Scholars and the people of China use the term *hutong* to refer to the group of *siheyuan* homes with the central courtyard not just the alleyways themselves. The *hutongs* are in poor condition and mostly house the poorest of Beijing citizens, but *hutongs* are more than just housing, they are a

way of communal living. As the image to the right suggests, poorly constructed additions have been made to the *hutongs*. Roofs have not been repaired, flimsy material has been used, and modern advancements have not been added. Although the government has paid these home owners and helped them to move into improved living conditions, many are devastated by their loss, some even to the extent of attempting suicide. In 2003, Wang Baoguang burnt himself to death as he was being forcibly evicted from his home (Gallagher, 2006). On the other hand, there are many young people who are paying high prices to be part of this new style of living that is characteristic of urban cities throughout the world.



Source: Tibet Heritage Fund. (n.d.). *Beijing Hutong Conservation Study Publication*. Retrieved October 30, 2010, from Tibet Heritage Fund International: http://www.tibetheritagefund.org/media/download/hutong_study.pdf

The Beijing people are experiencing significant changes in their lifestyle when they move from *hutongs* to skyscraper apartments. There are clear advantages and disadvantages for people living in apartments versus *hutongs*. In stoves within their homes, 95% of families living in *hutongs* burn coal for heat (Jakes, 2002, p.1; Tibet Heritage Fund, p. 38). This source of heat causes air pollution and although once inexpensive, coal prices have begun to rise (Tibet Heritage Fund, p. 38). In warmer temperature conditions, *hutongs* lack central air, which can make the long hot summers seem even more stifling. When former *hutong* residents move into apartments, among the modern amenities is central heating and sometimes cooling (Jakes, 2002). These amenities are convenient and now that coal prices have risen, heating bills are likely

cheaper than the 300-400rmb that some *hutong* residents pay in the winter (Tibet Heritage Fund, p. 38).

Some *hutong* residents have running water, but few have private restrooms in their homes (Hessler, 2006, p. 1). The majority of public toilets were built during the Communist takeover in 1949 and *hutong* residents have no choice but to use them (Beijing's Toilets Go Upscale). Public toilets are not well kept and are not in sanitary condition. Someone must squat over a hole surrounded by a small brick wall to use the restroom. These holes allow the waste to fall into barrels beneath the building and waste is later used as fertilizer. One resident of an apartment describes what he sees and hears from the surrounding *hutongs*, "Usually I'm awake by dawn, and from my desk I hear residents chatting as they make their way to the public toilet next to my building, chamber pots in hand (Hessler, 2006)." Most people prefer to take their chamber pot with them so that they do not have to deal with the toilets. They use their own pot and clean it out at the river, which contaminates this water source (Beijing's Toilets Go Upscale). Nearly 87 rivers in China are contaminated from this type of improper disposal of waste, forcing Beijing people to rely on groundwater rather than their river sources (Fung, 1998). There are other factors contributing to this contamination, but chamber pot cleaning has a significant impact. Do the environmental and health impacts outweigh the social costs of leaving *hutongs*?

Toilets are completely open within a building, so this gives residents an opportunity to make small talk with their neighbors. Tourists have complained for many years that the toilets lack privacy, modern necessities like toilet paper, and cleanliness (Beijing's Toilets Go Upscale). To the tourist wishes, in 2008, the Beijing Tourist Administration decided to build new public toilet facilities based on a star rating (Beijing's Toilets Go Upscale). While the renovation of these new toilets brought hygienic conditions to *hutong* bathrooms, *hutong* residents continued to add

their special touches to their public spaces. In the Ju'er *hutong* when their public toilet was remodeled, they added some couches in front of the toilet entrance, a chess board, folding chairs, and a wooden cabinet stocked with beer glasses (Hessler, 2006, p. 2). Soccer games were watched in the bathroom, and barbecues were held in front of the restrooms on the weekend (Hessler, 2006, p. 3). *Hutong* residents made their toilets into more than just places to rid oneself of waste, but a place of social gathering. Chatting while going to the toilets is more than just the result of lack of social space, but is a part of tradition. This is much like the tradition in the United States, where girls go the restroom in groups and as friends to talk and gossip. Parks, playgrounds, and courtyards could be great spaces for this type of conversation, but there is something special about chatting in restrooms that are private only to the outside world.

Residents of apartments miss the social gathering place that they once had in their *hutong* community. They have private clean spaces within their homes, but they are no longer seeing and communicating with their neighbors. The value of communal living was shown strongest when new structures were erected or people were taken away from their way of living. Mr. Mah Wengam says, "I want to stay in my house. I absorb the earth's energy there. I can't absorb it in an apartment. Old folks feel cooped up in apartments. It's stifling (Kuhn, 2006)." Mr. Wengam literally lived close to the earth in his one story apartment. It makes sense that he could lose the connection to the earth in a building that is several stories from the ground. The reality is that many people not only feel unconnected to the earth, but they are lonely in apartments. They feel constricted and do not have a reason to leave their private spaces like they once did in *hutongs*, leaving us to wonder if Beijing people really need public toilets to have strong relationships and social gatherings with their neighbors. Can they find companionship in other ways or were they just accustomed to communal spaces?

Jeff Richey describes his experience as he visits a professor in his apartment in Beijing. He says that there was no contact with people on your way to the apartment; you step straight off of the elevator and into the apartment (Richey, 2010). They were sturdy and clean, but entirely private and the owner of the apartment was saddened that he didn't know anyone else in their building (Richey, 2010). Like apartments, the layout of *hutongs* with their shallow surrounding wall, gate entrance, and courtyard also provided a secluded environment away from the city. The sunlight still enters into the *hutongs* and families can mingle between alleys and within courtyards, yet they still have somewhat of a degree of privacy (Tibet Heritage Fund, p. 16). It seems as though many Beijing people want a private home, or a home with only their clan or family, but they would also like to have appropriate places to mingle and socialize with their neighbors and community. I do not think that they miss the public toilets themselves, but they miss the socializing that they could do while visiting the toilets. This is much like the transition for a college student from a dorm to an apartment. Although they have to share their space, they find something pleasing about being able to socialize in communal spaces and often miss those when they move into more private living situations. Apartment buildings that have communal showers and restrooms might be a good way to incorporate the same type of community gatherings that people were once used to. Residents would probably also enjoy communal spaces for lounging, relaxation, and talking. People could get to know their neighbors if they visited their apartments, but Beijing apartments have very limited space and having too many people would likely be uncomfortable. Regardless, communal living is an important part of Beijing culture and they need a way to do this in order to keep their identity and live happy lives.

The new population policy of the 1950's and 1960's pushed people to have as many children as possible, leaving *hutongs* overcrowded (Collins, 2005, p. 1). In 1958, many *hutongs*

became public property, supporting the construction of new building within *hutong* courtyards (Collins, 2005, p. 1). The compounds that once housed only families of one clan were transformed to occupy many households. Each of the *siheyuan* houses would house a different generation of a family (On Hutongs and Highrises, 2006). Families are used to living in tight quarters, and to no surprise families are continuing to live together in apartments. Three generations of a family can be living in a small apartment at one time (Jakes, 2002). Beijing people are keeping their familial relations strong by living together in one space, but for some living together could be solely for an economic benefit.

The economic difficulties that many have assumed in their move from *hutongs* to apartments are weighing on them heavily, making their stay in apartments more of a financial stressor than a safe and healthy environment. *Chai*, meaning demolish or destroy, is a term that many Beijing people are familiar with because it has been painted on *hutongs* throughout their neighborhood (Jakes, 2002, p. 1). Fortunately, residents are not merely kicked out of their homes, but they instead are given compensation based on the size of their home (Jakes, 2002, p. 1). However, as we have seen with young adults, this is not enough to find adequate housing elsewhere.

When the low-income housing, *hutongs*, is no longer available in Beijing, people must find other homes and alternatives for their families. According to Homelink Real Estate, “In Beijing, where the average monthly salary is roughly \$545, the monthly rent for a typical one-bedroom apartment was about \$427 in June of 2010 (Jiang, 2010).” A family trying to make a \$427 housing payment with a monthly income of \$545 would be considered house poor. The harsh reality is that these house poor families are paying a significant percentage of their income toward housing with very little income left to provide other needs for the family like food. One

alternative choice for a family or person is to share an apartment with other families or roommates. Families can put their resources together and be able to afford their housing expenses with money left over for other needs. However, the money saved cannot buy the residents any more space without leaving them house poor, so many have to sacrifice space and privacy.

It is not uncommon for young professionals to have between three and eight roommates in their apartments, giving us an image like that of the *Friends* television show. Loneliness is something that they are likely not experiencing in their lives. There is much more to share than just the space itself; they must share the refrigerator, kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms, and the living room. This communal living has left many frustrated with their restricted space and privacy. This is good news to businessman Du Xin, who owns Central Perk coffee shop in Beijing because he can provide a comfortable setting for friends to hang out (Jiang, 2010). Friends are not only seeking outside relief from their crowdedness, they are seeking new living situations all together. Some are willing to live in the countryside and commute two hours to work to gain privacy and space of their own (Jiang, 2010). Social relationships are important to Beijing life, but not all are satisfied with communal living. This can be related to the sibling that you rarely see. When you get to see the sibling you are ecstatic and have great times together, but should that sibling move in with you, they quickly start to get on your nerves and become irritating. The beauty of public spaces is that you are free to come and go as you please, leaving you to value the time that you spend with your friends, not finding it irritating.

For those who desire private space, their search for alternatives often leads them further away from Beijing. An alternative that many choose instead of having roommates or multiple families in a home is to move outside of Beijing and commute one to two hours to work and

school. Like in other very large cities, those living on the outskirts of Beijing are able to find more affordable housing. Lao Jiu lives on the outskirts of Beijing, but he is mainly concerned about his nephew who has to commute one hour to school (Jakes, 2002, p. 4). Having to commute is taking away from his nephew's crucial socializing time with his friends. When he lived in the *hutongs*, he was able to walk home with his friends and spend time playing with them after school (Jakes, 2002). Because children do not live near their classmates or friends, parents fear that their children will not be able to socialize properly and will in turn not develop properly. Proper socialization is increasingly important to the Chinese because most have single child families today. When families are driving an hour to two hours to and from work or school, they are spending less time with their families. This can be draining to family relationships and the quality time that families spend with one another.

For some, they are not able to have roommates or multiple families in their homes because they have too long of a commute into the city. Meng Liantong was offered \$950 per square meter for her *hutong* and with her \$19,000 she was able to find an apartment that has central heating and toilets (Jakes, 2002, p.1). For now, her apartment is empty because she is living with her grandparents, where they can be close to a hospital and near her daughter's school (Jakes, 2002, p. 1). She ultimately would like for her grandparents to be able to live with her in her apartment, but her apartment is on the outskirts of Beijing. Meng's grandparents are not in the best health and need to be near a hospital. She would also like for her daughter to be able to go to a well established school, one that is not in the outskirts of Beijing (Jakes, 2002, p. 1). Her compensation for her *hutong* was not enough to buy a place in Beijing close to her family's needs, but will life in her apartment be satisfying in the future? Meng's future living situation in her apartment will likely not include her grandparents. Meng is having similar

struggles to others searching for an apartment after living in a *hutong* in central Beijing. Living on the outskirts can save money, but there are fewer schools and hospitals located close to one's home.

Economically, not only are *hutong* dwellers affected by the housing changes, but also *hutong* vendors. Hutongs were once filled with sounds of busy street vendors, who traveled up and down the alleyways looking for customers yelling, “Maaaaaiiii piiiijiuuuu, or Buuuuyyyyyy Beeeer (Hessler, 2006, p. 1).”

Vendors sold everything from garlic to toilet paper. Some were even freelance recyclers buying cardboard, paper, and broken appliances from residents (Hessler, 2006, p. 1).



Source: Chung, C.-M. (n.d.). *China Changing Places*. Retrieved September 16, 2010, from Time:
http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/china_cul_rev/photoessays/suburb7.html

Hutong vendors, equally as frantic as residents, have lost

their central business and selling grounds. Vendors were once popular because *hutongs* were too small for supermarkets. Now, with no alleyways to roam or neighborhood friends to bargain with, vendors are left alone among the rubble as the image suggests. The homes no longer exist and neither do the customers, but this young man is still trying eagerly to sell his goods. Most vendors ride on bicycles with their goods attached, but this many has parked his bike and taken the time to display all of his merchandise. This man's body language seems discouraged, he is setting on rubble, hunched over, and his arms are resting on his knees. From this image, I cannot hear the sounds that once occupied the busy alleys. Vendors have not only lost their business,

they have lost their social networks. Vendors roamed the same alleys for years and residents became acquainted with them and they became friends. It is easy to say there are still streets in Beijing for vendors to occupy, but *hutong* vendors cannot compete with all of the shops along the streets who have better quality products to offer. If vendors had an apartment, they could possibly sell their products out of their home. Otherwise, it is hard to see whether these *hutong* vendors still fit into the modern China. Few are thinking of these vendors in their debates over the advantages and disadvantages of living in apartments and more are focusing on issues like safety.

Currently, *hutongs* are not as structurally sound as the apartment buildings, so apartment living could keep residents safer in case of an earthquake and also prevent them from having health related complications due to mold. When *hutongs* were first built, they were strong and much different than they appear today. Overtime, *hutongs* have not been maintained and they continue to decay (Chong, 2010, p. 4). After rules about design and construction in *hutongs* became lax, people built extension buildings within their courtyards to be able to accommodate a rising population (Tibet Heritage Fund, p. 35). The result was flimsily built structures and poorly maintained homes. When roofs are not maintained or are fixed improperly, leaks occur and homes struggle with too much moisture (Tibet Heritage Fund, p. 35). When families are exposed to mold from moisture in their homes, they are likely to get ill frequently with respiratory and sinus problems, which could lead to even more dangerous complications.

An earthquake in 1976 showed the Beijing people just how devastating and destructive a natural disaster could be. 28,000 buildings collapsed and over 100,000 more were damaged, proving that the *hutong* structures could not withstand such a natural disaster (Tibet Heritage Fund). An earthquake with the magnitude of the 1976 earthquake would demolish even more of

the traditional homes in Beijing. With their poor maintenance and flimsy additions, their structure is not sound enough to withstand such an earthquake. The safety of the *hutong* dwellers would be in jeopardy if an event of this sort should ever happen. Apartment buildings built in the past few years have more advanced technology and safer precautions are taken in the building of these structures to help prevent damage during an earthquake. Apartment buildings are typically inspected and have to meet standard building codes. However, rushed construction in China has lead to laxly enforced building codes and contractors have even hired unlicensed workers. This was apparent with the fire in one Shanghai apartment building that killed 58 people (Building tragedies hit China, India; 119 killed, 2010). Beijing people are wondering if their safety has even been a concern. Perhaps, architects have focused too much on the aesthetics of these buildings and not enough on the safety.

Aesthetically, the face of Beijing is changing, but the skyscrapers have their own unique characteristics stamped by the Beijing people. Sky scrapers are neither based on traditional architecture nor identical to any other urban city around the globe like New York City or London. With these unique characteristics we can see that Beijing is changing, but is not being lost among all of the other people and cities around the world.



Source for photo on the left: Hunkins, J. (2008, April 14). *Pangu Plaza Construction, Beijing* 389. Retrieved October 9, 2010, from Flickr Photo Sharing: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/joeduck/2420770746/in/photostream/>

Source for photo on the right: *TravelPod*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 1, 2010, from Tiananmen Square Gate: <http://www.travelpod.com/travel-photo/mrhodgeswgeo/1/1246400454/tiananmen-square-gate.jpg/tpod.html>

As shown in the images below, traditional architecture differs greatly from the modern skyscrapers that are being built, but does this make the skyscrapers less Chinese? The image on the left is a photo of the construction of an apartment building in Pangu Plaza and was featured in the Olympic Ceremonies with light beams synchronized to music (Hunkins, 2008).

Apartments in this building can be about \$5 million, housing wealthy Beijing people (Hunkins, 2008). The most noticeable characteristic of this building is its shape; it is shaped like a dragon. The dragon has held great significance in Chinese history, being present in folklore, mythology, architecture, and expressed in Chinese art. Where else in the world can you see a building shaped like a dragon? Although skyscrapers are seen in many cities, the dragon skyscraper is uniquely Chinese and has special meaning to the Chinese culture. The skyscraper is made primarily of metal and glass. However, the light beams and dragon shape set this skyscraper apart, making it a piece of art. As an outsider, when I think of China, I picture a building like the one in the right image. The image on the right is a picture of Tiananmen Square, which has great historical significance to the Chinese. The characteristics of Tiananmen Square fit the typical image of Chinese architecture with its wooden structure with a curved roof, intricate wood work designs, deep colors, tall pillars, and the tiered effect giving a hierarchical feeling. However, both of the structures in the images are uniquely Chinese and a part of their culture.

Both *hutongs* and apartments are uniquely Chinese, but with different images of China. We can see clear distinctions between the two different housing situations and goals of the constructors based on an image comparison. The image below on the left is a photo of the outside of a *hutong* home and the image below on the right is a photo taken from the street of a row of apartment buildings. From the image on the left of the *hutong*, I can assume that the space inside the homes is limited because a lot of things are stored outside. The things outside seem

worn out, dirty, and unorganized. The homes are only one story, limiting the number of people per square foot. The spaces between the homes are tight, leaving little room for traveling between. The image of skyscrapers seems endless and they all look identical. There is space for cars and traffic to travel around the buildings and the many levels of the buildings make room for many residents. Seeing the two images together, I would not think that they were from the same



Source:

On Hutongs and Highrises. (2006, October 23). Retrieved September 19, 2010, from Magical Urbanism:
<http://www.magicalurbanism.com/?p=154>

city. I see the *hutong* image as one of poverty, lacking modern amenities. I see the apartment image as one of modernity with residents living in clean homes with modern technologies. *Hutongs* display a more rural lifestyle, while apartments have a more urban look and feel.

For the Chinese, it may not be the architectural style of the buildings that they miss, but the communal living spaces that they once shared with their neighbors. It is clear that architects are working on defying gravity and making one-of-a-kind structures, but we can wonder if this is their only motive. Jeff Richey described his experience in one apartment as a

strong one because he did not come into contact with anyone, just straight to the apartment (Richey, 2010). If residents are feeling lonely and missing their public toilets, then they must not have the communal or public spaces available in their buildings. Buildings with higher costs of living might have more public spaces, but is this fair to those who are used to communal living? I do not know if former *hutong* residents would be happier in apartments if they had public spaces, but it would be appropriate for architects to make buildings according to the needs and wants of the residents. This could be somewhat difficult considering many of the architects of these strangely unique skyscrapers are not residents of Beijing or even China. Architects come from England, Switzerland, Germany, and France (Craven). This leads us to two important questions. Are the skyscrapers even Chinese or unique to the Chinese people if the Chinese are not the architects? Who should get to make the decision to tear down *hutongs* and who gets to make new construction decisions?

Perhaps, our answers lie in the hands of the elders. Many elders have been living in the *hutongs* since birth and many are devastated at the loss of their traditional living conditions and view of Beijing. Elders have lived in *hutongs* for centuries. Their sudden loss of communal living space has left many of them lonely and uncomfortable in their new living situation. Elderly residents of *hutongs* see apartments as a means of modern living with modern amenities, but that is not the China that they have grown up in. They have paid for their *hutongs* and were content with their living conditions. Elders have strong relationships with their friends and street vendors that traffic their alley ways (Hessler, 2006, p. 1-3). Residents may no longer live in *hutongs*, but they have childhood memories of their experiences of dancing and music in the *hutongs* as well as family meals (Koo, p. 5-6). Their lives revolved around their *hutong* communities and when many of us think of our heritage or culture, we often think of our

childhood. Destroying childhood homes is equivalent to destroying childhood memories and culture in the eyes of the elders although they may remember many details about their lifestyle. Ms. Qua Shi Min says, “Our memories and the city’s memories are disappearing. I was born in a *hutong*. I remember where I played ping-pong when I was small and where I went to the movies to do homework with my classmates. Now these places and these memories are all gone (Kuhn, 2006).” If *hutong* residents are happy in their living conditions and they own their homes, who can say that they have to move out? Who has the people’s needs in mind?

The government is trying to improve living conditions and make more room for an increasing population and *hutongs* are only making the situation worse. Alley ways are not wide enough for traffic, causing congested city roads. Families living in *hutongs* are living in unsanitary conditions and lack modern amenities. The government would put less money into renovating the *hutong* structures than in demolishing and rebuilding new apartment buildings (Chong, 2010, p. 7). However, *hutongs* house fewer people than a skyscraper building and renovating would not solve the traffic congestion issue. The government did not merely kick the *hutong* residents out on the street; they provided compensation for their homes (Jakes, 2002, p. 1). Due to the negative reactions of many, organizations within in the government have worked to renovate and preserve some of the remaining *hutongs* in an effort to regain the characteristics of the ancient city (Achakyva, 2005, p. 234). To former *hutong* dwellers this was an unsuccessful effort on the part of the government because the renovated *hutongs* now house wealthy foreigners who can afford the million dollar bill to live in their ancient buildings (Troy, 2008).

Young adults are the future of China and they are eager to live in new urban apartments and are taking advantage of the new housing opportunities. The modern amenities and living conditions are suitable to their life style choice and are similar to the life style that they are used

to seeing on popular American sitcoms like *Friends* (Jiang, 2010). Many modern trends and technologies start with young people like the use of computers, cell phones, mp3 players, and so forth. It is no surprise then that young adults would be happy and eager to live in modern apartments. The question to ask then is why young people are more prone to modern advancements. I believe that in a way Mao was right when he said that young people were not “contaminated with tradition” (Richey, 2010). Young adults are seeking to make their own traditions and can sometimes be annoyed that their parents do things the old fashioned way. A lot of advertising is now geared toward children and young adults in a bandwagon type of appeal; everyone else has it or is doing it. Most families only have one child and many of those parents let their only child indulge in many consumer decisions from a young age (Chan & McNeal, 2004, p. 29). Adults today have grown up with continuous marketing and advertising for new technologies geared toward them unlike their elder parents, who have not been exposed as children and who may be able to resist these marketing strategies. Knowing that young adults are prone to modernization, is it best for the choices of the city to be in their hands?

Beijing receives billions of dollars from tourists each year, from people who are seeking the experience of traditional China in their travels. Tourism contributed to a 3.412 billion dollar profit to China in 2008, but these numbers have fallen almost 12% since 2007 (Data of Tourism Economy Operation Sept. 2008, 2008). There has been an emergence of *hutong* tours within the city after the destruction of many *hutongs*. Tourists from around the world are seeking the image that they have of China when they tour the country, and for most this image is of an ancient city rich in traditions like those shown in the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympic Games. Many *hutong* preservation efforts have been made because tourists from around the world wish to see the ancient city as it once was. If the people of the world desire to see ancient China and are

paying billions of dollars each year to see it, should they have their wish granted? Can China survive without their profit from tourism and will people still see something different in China than they see in their own culture? Should tourists not have some say in the future of Beijing?

The debate over who owns this piece of Beijing culture is likely to go on for quite some time, but one thing that remains clear is that the Beijing culture is changing. Just as much as the culture is changing, it is still unique to the Chinese and the Chinese still embrace their cultural heritage, as was demonstrated during the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympic Games. Tourists, residents, elders, young adults, and governmental officials see both positive and negative health, safety, economic, and aesthetic aspects of destroying *hutongs* and replacing them with skyscraper apartments. Hessler describes the situation well, “The *hutong* essence had more to do with spirit than with structure, and this spirit often showed strongest when the neighborhood encountered some modern element (Hessler, 2006).” Regardless, some will continue to show their *hutong* essence, governmental agencies will continue to try and preserve the remaining *hutongs*, people will live their lives in apartments, and China will continue to do what it does best, be Chinese.

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