

Part II

Decline of Courtyard House and Protection of Beijing's Old City

In Part I, a general review of Beijing's urban development process during the twentieth century and the relevant literatures were presented with the purpose of supplying a historical and theoretical background for the further studies thereafter. In Part II, which will be composed of this and the subsequent chapters (Chaps. 4 and 5), I will focus on the transformation of Beijing's courtyard house and its Old City as well as the problems they encounter today.

As the traditional type of housing in Beijing, the courtyard house has lasted for hundreds of years. It has, however, gradually declined since the 1960s and suffered large-scale demolition especially during the redevelopment of the Old City since the 1990s. How to protect the courtyard house and Beijing's Old City has been a topic of heated debate by Chinese architects and urban planners for many years. In addition, Beijing's municipal government has instituted many policies and regulations such as zoning control and the creation of the "Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts" (HCCD). The situation, however, has not improved. In fact, along with China's rapid economic development and the increasingly intense competition for land within the old city proper, the demolition of the traditional residential districts has accelerated and the original residents have increasingly been urged to move out of their original neighbourhoods.

The main task of Part II is to investigate the reasons underlying the demolition of a large number of the traditional courtyard houses during the redevelopment of Beijing's Old City (Chap. 4) and to search for a solution that would reduce the damages to the courtyard houses and thus protect Beijing's Old City from further demolition (Chap. 5). The main thesis of Part II is that the apparent reason why the redevelopment projects have caused great damage to Beijing's Old City is that these projects were undertaken on a large-scale by developers with the purpose of maximizing economic profits. The most basic cause, however, is that Beijing's current mono-centric urban structure has caused intensive competition for the land in the old city proper and thus aggravated the difficulties in protecting the Old City. The fundamental solution to protect the courtyard houses and Beijing's Old City is to

establish a polycentric urban structure in order to reduce the demand for the land within the Old City. It is necessary to clarify that a “polycentric” scheme was proposed in the Master Plan of Beijing (2004–2020) in 2005. However, the polycentric urban structure I proposed in this dissertation is substantially different from it.