

Part III

From Homogeneous Residence to Segregated Residence

In Part II, I analyzed the reasons for the decline of the courtyard house and the destructive effects of the redevelopment projects on Beijing's Old City. Based on the economic analysis of costs and benefits of the redevelopment projects in the old city proper, I concluded that the fundamental solution that would protect Beijing's Old City was to change Beijing's mono-centric urban structure into a polycentric one. In Part III, which consists of Chaps. 6–8, I shall focus on the transformation of Beijing's residential structure from a homogeneous type, which was under the planned economy, to a segregated type, which is now becoming under the market economy. While the discussion of Part II was mainly concerned with Beijing's urban spatial structure, that of Part III will shift to its urban social structure.

In addition to the traditional courtyard houses in the old city proper, a new type of residence, the “work-unit” compound, appeared in Beijing for the first time after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. “Work-unit” compounds were built up in the suburbs or squeezed into the old city proper and gradually became a new and important component of the city in the era of the planned economy. However, after 1979, when China gradually changed from a planned economy to a market economy, the urban housing reform began to encourage the development of the real estate industry, which gave rise not only to the large-scale redevelopment inside Beijing's old city proper, but also to the rapid housing development in the suburbs. The most significant result of this trend is that the residential structure of the city has gradually transformed from a homogeneous one to a segregated one.

In Part III, I shall, first of all, examine the origin of the “work-unit” compound and its homogeneous feature during the era of the planned economy (Chap. 6). Then, I shall discuss the development of new housing under the market economy and the associated trend toward residential segregation (Chap. 7). Finally, I shall analyze the problems with the “low-rent housing” and “affordable housing” schemes and suggest some solutions for improving the schemes and reducing the trend toward residential segregation (Chap. 8). The main thesis of Part III is that

the “work-unit” compound that developed under the planned economy no longer satisfies the demands placed on housing in the market economy. At the present time, household income is becoming the main cause of the residential segregation in Beijing. Beijing’s “low-rent housing” and “affordable housing” schemes have failed to help low-income households with their housing problems. It is thus necessary for Beijing’s municipal government to improve the housing security system in order to diminish the increasingly serious trend toward residential segregation.