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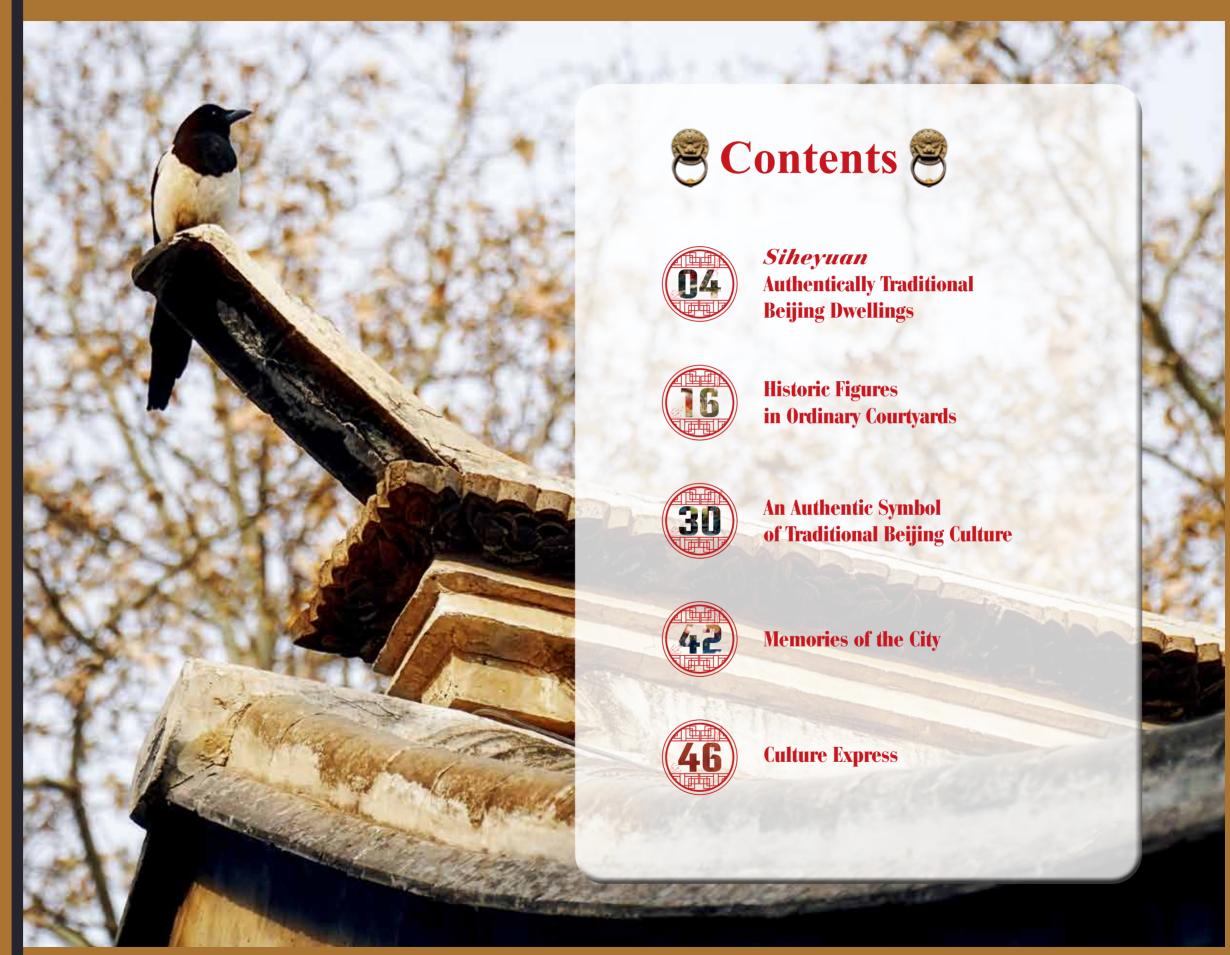
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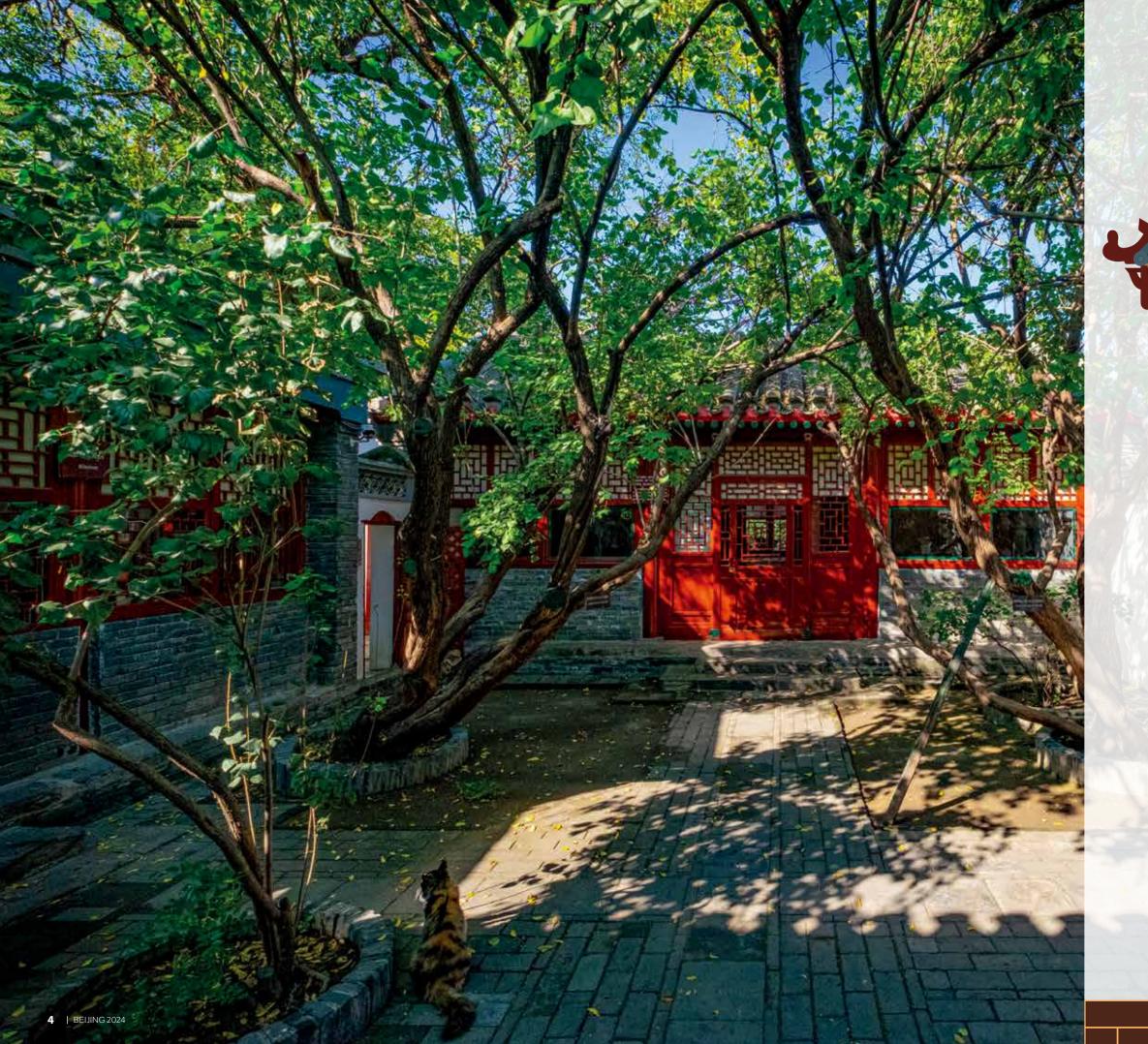
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Siheywan: Authentically Traditional Beijing Dwellings

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Li Bin, Zhang Xin, Zhou Mingxing

Throughout different historical periods, Beijing has been known by various designations. However, *siheyuan*, or traditional Beijing courtyard houses nestled within the city's hutongs, have remained emblematic dwellings for native Beijingers across generations. *Siheyuan* are characterised by single-storey structures, and boast expansive quadrangle courtyards, grand main buildings, intricately ornamental gates with traditional Chinese motifs delineating separate areas within the courtyard and elegant wing rooms. They have endured as graceful and idyllic sanctuaries for the everyday lives of Beijing inhabitants for centuries.

Nevertheless, this style of courtyard houses is not exclusive to Beijing, as similar enclosed courtyard residential structures can be found throughout the vast nation. On the principles of feng shui, an integral component of traditional Chinese philosophy, these courtyard houses serve as protective shelters from the elements, gather vital energy and have contributed to an enduring belief: "A harmonious family fosters prosperity." This concept has been passed down through generations.



A home serves as a sanctuary of comfort and tranquillity. Throughout history, both in China and beyond, ancient civilisations have frequently embraced courtyard houses as their preferred residences. Dating back to as early as 5,000 to 6,000 years ago, inhabitants of the Western Asian region utilised thick adobe walls to enclose independent courtyards, as noted in the book *Beijing Courtyards*. The ancient Romans not

only enclosed their residences within courtyards but also embellished them with ponds, fountains and verdant foliage, crafting enviable and delightful home environments. Similarly, ancient Islamic dwellings featured courtyards bordered by colonnades, often incorporating cross-shaped water channels symbolising the Garden of Heaven from the *Quran*. In post-Renaissance Europe, numerous mansions were erected, many adopting the

courtyard house design, which combined multi-storey structures with secluded inner courtyards.

The tradition of Chinese courtyard residences has roots that extend deep into antiquity, spanning numerous historical epochs. Evidence of these architectural gems can be found throughout history, from the unearthing of a courtyard house dating back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century–771 BC) with two courtyards

in present-day Qishan, Shaanxi Province, to the depiction of domestic life within courtyard residences on painted bricks from the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) in Sichuan Province. The opulent lifestyle depicted in Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) murals in Dunhuang, along with the portrayal of urban and rural courtyard residences in monumental artworks such

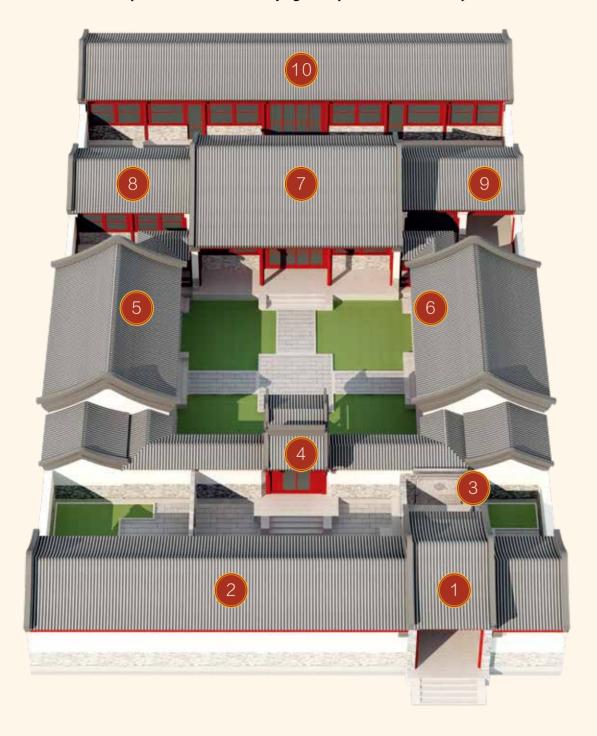
as "Along the River during the Qingming Festival" and "A Thousand-Li of Rivers and Mountains" from the Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279), further underscores the profound significance of courtyard living throughout Chinese history. During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, courtyard residences in China attained unprecedented magnificence. These included Beijing's iconic siheyuan, Jiangsu and Zhejiang's sishuiguitang ("Four Waters Returning to the Hall"), Anhui's residences distinguished by horsehead walls, Guangdong's interconnected houses and Yunnan's yikeyin, or traditional residences with central atriums. Across the vast expanse of the nation and over the course of many centuries, courtyard houses of various styles remained the preferred choice of dwelling for the Chinese populace.

The ancient Chinese held profound reverence for the concept of the home, a sentiment that resonated deeply in the meticulous design of the courtyard house, where every structure within the enclosed space was thoughtfully arranged. A traditional Chinese courtyard house exudes a refined elegance, with key buildings often nestled discreetly behind its main entrance and walls, rather than immediately visible. Upon entering a courtyard house, visitors begin a journey through layers of walls and winding corridors before arriving at the heart of the residence. However, for its inhabitants, the courtyard house embodies a sanctuary where family members gather to share meals and lives, nurturing bonds of closeness and affection among them.

Residing in a courtyard house has not only nurtured but also embodied the cherished Chinese value of harmony within the home. Enveloped by the ethos of "a harmonious family being able to lead to prosperity," generations of Chinese have recognised the significance of fostering harmony within the confines of their homes. This emphasis on familial cohesion, reverence for elders, nurturing of children and the profound value placed on family bonds represents deeply ingrained ethical principles. Through the passage of time,



The layout of a traditional Beijing courtyard residence (siheyuan)



① Main gate ② A row of rooms with doors facing the inner courtyard ③ Screen wall ④ Festoon gate ⑤ West wing rooms ⑥ East wing rooms ⑦ Main room ⑧ West side room ⑨ East side room ⑩ A back row of rooms

the concept of harmony cultivated within courtyard houses has persistently shaped the familial ideals of every Chinese individual, exerting a lasting influence that endures to this day.

In the pursuit of cultivating the ethical value of "harmony" in China, courtyard houses served as a foundation for establishing a set of guidelines to be followed. According to the wisdom of ancient Chinese sages, each family member possessed distinct roles and responsibilities, and it was imperative for these roles to harmonise effectively for the collective benefit of the family unit. Irrespective of its particular architectural design, a courtyard house was fundamentally designed to accommodate every member of the family. In the old days, within an authentic courtyard house, individual buildings were designated for specific

family members, including parents, children and servants. The spatial arrangement of their cohabitation closely mirrored the layout of the courtyard house, thereby imbuing a hierarchical and orderly cultural significance through various elements such as positioning, orientation, width and height of each building. These considerations underscored the traditional belief that "elders hold precedence over the youth."

The beauty of a courtyard house lies in its unity, while its worth is found in its spaciousness. This unity ensures that family members can coexist harmoniously, while still affording individual spaces for each person and their respective small families. The generous layout permits anyone stepping beyond their threshold to appreciate the vastness that lies beyond, avoiding the confines of narrow spaces. It remains challenging to ascertain whether the layout of these courtyard houses, in which generations have dwelled, has influenced the character of the Chinese people, or if it is the character of the Chinese people that has dictated the layout of courtyard houses. Perhaps the serene and dignified disposition of the Chinese populace has engendered the gracefulness of courtyard houses, while the open and generous design of courtyard houses has nurtured the distinctive character, temperament and spiritual qualities of the people. Over millennia, these elements have intertwined, becoming indistinguishable from one another. For countless generations, the Chinese people have peacefully inhabited courtyard houses, embodying a poetic way of life passed down through the ages.





The Art of Living a Harmonious and Orderly Life

When discussing traditional Chinese courtyard houses, many often associate this architectural style with residences in Beijing. Authentic traditional Beijing courtyard houses trace their origins back to the Liao Dynasty (AD 916-1125) and reached their zenith during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Liu Bingzhong (1216-1274), the chief architect of the construction of Dadu (presentday Beijing), the capital of the Yuan Dynasty, meticulously followed the urban planning principles outlined in Kaogongji, a renowned ancient Chinese treatise on science and technology. The city of Dadu featured streets arranged in a grid-like pattern, with residential buildings of uniform scale and layout. Historical records indicate that during the Yuan Dynasty, hutongs in Dadu were situated on both sides of the streets, predominantly running east-west, with courtyard houses lining both sides of the hutongs and additional courtyard houses located to the north and south of the streets. Unfortunately, physical remnants of Yuan Dynasty courtyard houses in Beijing have not endured to the present day, with the excavated ruins of a residence from that era in Houyingfang serving as the only available reference. The surviving courtyard houses in Beijing today primarily date back to the Ming and

consist of the fundamental unit known as a "courtyard" or "courtyards," typically featuring a central open space encircled by buildings on all four sides. Larger courtyard houses may encompass up to nine courtyards arranged longitudinally. In the old days, residences exceeding one courtyard in size were considered relatively spacious. Wealthy families often inhabited courtyard houses with multiple courtyards aligned along a central axis, supplemented by additional courtyards connected horizontally to the main courtyard. Residences belonging to affluent and influential families frequently shared similar layouts with multiple courtyards. For example, the residence of Na Tong (1856-1925), a prominent minister during the late Qing Dynasty, situated in present-day Jinyu Hutong, boasted seven side courtyards horizontally, each containing multiple courtyards longitudinally, comprising hundreds of structures that once occupied nearly half of the alleyway. The most lavish Beijing-style courtyard houses featured gardens, seamlessly integrated into the residence by transforming one or more courtyards. Private garden architecture in historical Beijing attained unprecedented heights, with notable examples including

the gardens of princes and high-ranking

officials. The impeccably preserved

Traditional Beijing courtyard houses

gardens of Prince Gong's Mansion and Prince Chun's Mansion stand as exceptional exemplars of this architectural tradition.

In the old days, the standard layout of traditional courtyard houses in Beijing typically faced south. This orientation was carefully chosen by local residents in adherence to feng shui principles during the construction of their courtyards. In terms of ancient Chinese belief, water is traditionally located in the north, while the wind predominantly originates from the southeast. Consequently, the primary structure of each courtyard house was ideally positioned in the north, where the presence of water was believed to offer protection against fires. Additionally, the door was strategically placed in the southeast, as this direction allowed the house to harness wind and energy more effectively. Courtyard houses designed in accordance with these principles were deemed to be auspicious and conducive to harmony. In reality, the construction of traditional Beijing courtyard houses amalgamated

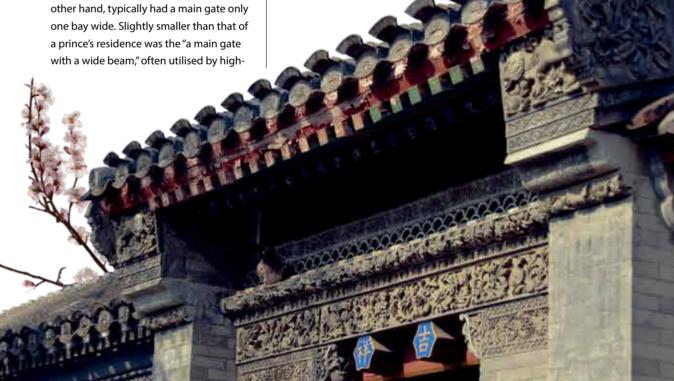
both feng shui principles and scientific rationale. From a perspective of the natural environment, positioning the house in the north and situating the door in the southeast also served to shield against the harsh northwest winds that prevail during Beijing's winters.

In ancient times, the main gate of an authentic traditional Beijing courtyard house held significant symbolism, serving to denote the owner's identity and occupation, thereby giving rise to concepts of social status. In the Beijing dialect, the term "dazhaimen," meaning "a large main gate," was commonly used to describe the residence of a high-ranking official or wealthy family, while an ordinary household was referred to as "xiaomen xiaohu," translating to "a small main gate and household." The most prestigious main entrance belonged to a prince's palace. According to regulations during the Qing Dynasty, a prince's residence featured a main gate spanning five bays wide, while a Prince of Prefecture (a noble rank below the prince) had a three-bay wide entrance. Other official residences and common courtyard houses, on the other hand, typically had a main gate only one bay wide. Slightly smaller than that of a prince's residence was the "a main gate

still be found in some surviving traditional Beijing courtyard houses.

An authentic Beijing-styled courtyard house offers a heightened level of privacy, with onlookers typically afforded only glimpses of the varying heights of the roofs and the interwoven branches of trees. The other facets of the house remain nearly concealed, obscured by the courtyard walls. Accessing such a courtyard house requires visitors to navigate not only through the main gate but also around the "yingbi," commonly known as a "screen wall" or "spirit wall." The screen wall is typically positioned in one of two ways: either directly opposite the main gate and across

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ranking officials. Main entrances used by

officials were designated as "a main gate

with golden columns." A lower-tier main

entrance was known as the "manzi-style,"

believed to have been first adopted by

southern Chinese merchants engaged

in trade in Beijing. This type of entrance

column eaves, minimal space between the

highest doorstep and the main gate, and

a spacious gateway inside for temporarily

featured a gate frame affixed to the

storing goods. The main entrance of

an ordinary household was referred to

as a "ruyi gate," often embellished with

gate pegs engraved with the Chinese

everything to turn out as you wish." In

house, with households meticulously

the main gate, including the threshold,

as mounting and dismounting stones.

featuring the aforementioned styles can

Today, examples of main entrances

knockers, gate columns and piers, as well

considering every aspect related to

characters for "ruyi," meaning "expecting

ancient China, the main entrance served as the face of a traditional Beijing courtyard

Qing dynasties.

the hutong from it, or inside the main gate, facing toward it. Often adorned with ivy and featuring water tanks and flowerpots, the screen wall plays a pivotal role in the layout of a courtyard house. If the screen wall stands independently on the ground, it is referred to as an "alone screen wall." If it is constructed against the gable wall of a wing room, it is known as a "sitting screen wall." In ancient times, Beijing residents believed that the screen wall could ward off evil spirits and misfortune, representing the homeowner's desire for peace and harmony through intricate floral patterns and auspicious Chinese characters carved or embedded on it. The primary function of the screen wall was to demarcate the boundary between the interior and exterior spaces. Beyond the wall lay the outside world, while within it resided the realm of the home. Passing by the

screen wall signified entry into the

homeowner's sanctuary.

In a traditional Beijing courtyard house, a "chuihua gate," commonly known as a festoon gate, is distinguished by two hanging short columns on either side adorned with floral motifs. This gate serves as a divider between the inner and outer courtyards within the residence. In the past, female members, particularly daughters from affluent families, were typically prohibited from venturing beyond the main gate and sometimes even the secondary gate. Here, the main gate represented the primary entrance of their courtyard house, while the festoon gate served as the secondary entrance. Resembling a majestic gate tower within the courtyard, the festoon gate takes on the appearance of a square pavilion. Historically, it was often kept closed, serving as a screen wall or barrier between the inner and outer courtyards. Except for significant occasions such as weddings and receptions for distinguished guests, this gate usually remained closed, and individuals entering or exiting had to utilise the side gates.

The festoon gate, while commonly associated with Beijing, can be found in various regions

across the nation today. Authentic traditional Beijing courtyard houses prioritise coordination and elegance in their colour choices, often favouring natural materials for most structures within the courtyard. The festoon gate stands as a vibrant centrepiece, distinguished by its colourful adornments, particularly the prominent hanging columns embellished with lotus motifs on each side. The central plane between these columns, known as the "efang" structure, is intricately decorated, adding to its allure. Encountering a festoon gate, or multiple ones, within a courtyard house signifies the presence of inner courtyards within the residence, with the outer courtyard typically reserved for receiving guests. Although it may be challenging to casually enter an authentic traditional courtyard house in Beijing nowadays, festoon gates can still be readily admired in well-preserved former imperial complexes, such as the Forbidden City, Beihai Park and the Summer Palace, all of which feature these gates leading to various courtyards.

Upon passing through the festoon gate of a courtyard house, visitors are ushered into its main living compound.

Directly opposite the festoon gate stands the principal building, positioned in the northern section of the area, distinguished as the most prestigious and well-illuminated structure within the entire courtyard house. This north-facing building comprises a main room and two side rooms. In the context of a courtyard house, a "room" denotes the space between two beams. The main room, also known as the main hall or central bay, typically serves as the host's reception area, while the two adjacent rooms may function as studies or auxiliary spaces. The north building typically features only one entrance leading into the main room, with access to the side rooms facilitated from within the main room itself.

The structures flanking the courtyard house on its east and west sides are referred to as the east wing rooms and west wing rooms, respectively, designated for the younger generations to inhabit. Traditionally, the eldest son in a family would occupy the east wing rooms, while the second son would reside in the west wing rooms. However, from a residential standpoint, the west wing rooms are oriented towards the east, allowing for the morning light to

filter in, while the east wing rooms face west, receiving the setting sun, which can be uncomfortable during the summer months. Consequently, some families chose to repurpose their east wing rooms as additional living spaces.

To the north of the main building in a courtyard house lies the back row of rooms, traditionally reserved for unmarried daughters and other young female members of the family. Some courtyard houses featured a two-storey building as this "back row" of rooms. Positioned as the northernmost structure in the courtyard, during winter, the back row of rooms provided protection for the main building against the strong north wind. Conversely, the building located in the southernmost part of a courtyard house is typically situated in the outer courtyard, rather than the inner courtyard. On the southern side of the outer courtyard, there exists a row of rooms with doors facing the inner courtyard. These rooms were commonly utilised to host family guests, serve as studies or accommodate household servants.

Traditionally, the kitchen occupies the south-eastern corner of the main building, a strategic placement considering the prevailing northwest winds during Beijing's winters. This positioning effectively disperses cooking fumes and maintains fresh air within the courtyard during culinary activities. In the past, some traditional courtyard dwellings lacked private bathrooms, necessitating the use of communal facilities in nearby alleyways. If a courtyard house did incorporate a bathroom, it was typically positioned in the southwest corner. This direction was historically considered unfavourable due to its association with impurity, often referred to as a domain of the "five ghosts." Such placement was believed to mitigate negative energy within the household.

Beijing-styled courtyard houses not only prioritise their architectural layout and feng shui principles but also encapsulate profound cultural connotations. Within these spacious and dignified compounds, every element, from intricate brick carvings and paintings adorning eaves and ridges to indoor furniture and tended flora, embodies boundless knowledge and meticulous attention to detail.



Ideal Living Spaces with Happy and Auspicious Elements

In a courtyard house, one can observe window lattice patterns meticulously arranged in specific orders. Among these is the most prevalent "stepby-step brocade" pattern, characterised by horizontal and vertical lines intricately arranged within a particular design, and framed by simple carvings. The label "step-by-step brocade" embodies the homeowner's aspiration for continuous progress and a prosperous future. Various cultural elements, including pictograms, ideograms, homophones, metaphors and analogies, are employed to craft intricate patterns, designs and adornments that express aspirations for happiness, beauty, prosperity and good fortune.

The "lantern frame," another common traditional window lattice pattern, abstracts the image of a lantern in a simple yet elegant manner, featuring a sizable blank space in the middle for the inscription of poems or paintings depicting plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo, chrysanthemums, landscapes and birds, evoking a fresh and refined ambiance.

In ancient China, lanterns have always symbolised brightness and celebration, and utilising the abstract lantern pattern as a decorative window lattice conveys residents' yearning for a beautiful and radiant life. Mullions adorned with octagonal or hexagonal geometric shapes, known as "turtle shell" patterns, hold significance in traditional Chinese culture, suggesting longevity and expressing the wish for a long and healthy life. Traditional decorative patterns often incorporate natural textures, such as plum blossoms, bamboo and cracked ice patterns, reflecting the pursuit of the inherent beauty found in the natural world.

In addition to geometric patterns, the brick and wood carvings found in traditional Beijing courtyard houses feature a plethora of animal, plant and human figures, expressing auspicious and fulfilling wishes through homophones and associative meanings. Traditional Chinese culture imbues symbols with significant meanings: bats symbolise happiness; the character "shou" (longevity) or peach

bamboo and chrysanthemum motifs represent elegance, transcendence and the qualities of noble-minded individuals. Peonies and magnolias depict elegance and wealth, while gourds, pomegranates and grapes symbolise numerous offspring. By combining these elements, a wide array of themes can be expressed: a pattern combining bats together with the Chinese characters "wan" and "shou" indicates endless happiness and longevity, while a combination of bats, peaches and pomegranates implies even more happiness, offspring and longevity. Orchids and lingzhi mushrooms represent the friendship between gentlemen, while a motif consisting of the Chinese character "wan" together with persimmons and ruyi icons conveys the message "everything goes as you wish." A vase with roses and quails symbolises "peace throughout the four seasons," while lotuses and peonies represent "glory and wealth." Furthermore, gourds, together with pomegranates or grapes with entwined branches and leaves indicate "one's numerous children and future generations." Beyond carvings on screen walls and doors, the themes of carvings on the protruding structures of eaves are equally diverse, encompassing depictions such as "cranes and deer in spring," "kirin resting under pine trees," "senior and junior scholars," "antique censers and vases" and "mandarin ducks and lotus flowers." These patterns not only

patterns signifies long life; "qing" (an

ancient Chinese percussion instrument)

implies celebration; while plum, orchid,

Beijing's courtyard houses with multiple courtyards typically include long

boast beautiful compositions and strong

decorative qualities but also carry rich

cultural connotations.



corridors between the main buildings, with wing rooms and festoon gates. These corridors, known as "chaoshou," derive their name from their layout resembling a person with folded arms. Serving multiple functions, the corridor acts as a pathway for people to traverse, offering shelter from strong winds and rain, and providing a tranquil resting place to admire the courtyard scenery.

In the past, courtyard houses belonging to high-ranking officials and wealthy individuals in Beijing boasted spacious areas adorned with rockeries and ponds housing ornamental goldfish. Regardless of the size of these Beijingstyled courtyard houses, designated spaces were always allocated for flowers and trees, many of which have become quintessential courtyard plants. Among these, the flowering crabapple tree reigns as one of the most common and beloved species in Beijing's courtyard houses. Affluent businesspeople and influential officials often took pleasure in planting flowering crabapple trees in their courtyards, typically positioning them on both sides in front of the main building to symbolise wealth and harmony among siblings. In the landscape of traditional Beijing courtyard houses, fish ponds were frequently positioned alongside flowering crabapple trees, where the goldfish together with the trees symbolise the auspicious idiom "a house full of gold and jade." Notably, the former residence of Soong Ching-ling (1893–1981) showcases two flowering crabapple trees over 100 years old, reportedly planted by Prince Chun (1883-1951) himself, now regarded as two of the most magnificent flowering crabapple trees in Beijing.

Pomegranate trees are celebrated ornamental fixtures in courtyard houses, cherished by local residents for several compelling reasons. Firstly, pomegranate flowers boast a striking fiery red hue, with the fifth lunar month marking the peak of their vibrancy when the tree bursts into full bloom, emitting a delightful fragrance, thus earning it the endearing nickname "Pomegranate"

Month." Secondly, pomegranates are renowned for their abundance of seeds, which swell to plumpness when ripe, signifying the aspiration for a household brimming with numerous offspring and boundless prosperity.

Common ornamental plants that enhance the scenery of an authentic Beijing courtyard house, alongside flowering crabapple and pomegranate trees, include magnolia, wisteria, peony and lotus, each symbolising auspiciousness. Thoughtfully crafted decorations seamlessly integrate with the dignified and expansive atmosphere of the courtyard, fostering a natural and welcoming ambiance. Within this familial setting, successive generations of Beijing residents have pursued studies, embarked on careers, celebrated marriages, raised children, tended to aging parents and tranquilly lived out their

Today, traditional Beijing courtyard houses have become emblematic of the capital city. Due to the passage of time and the weathering effects of wind and rain, many of these courtyard houses have faded from



their former glory. Nevertheless, every brick and stone within them retains the power to evoke memories of history and ignite a longing for traditional Beijing culture among the city's residents.





Historic Figures in Ordinary Courtyards

Translated by Zhang Hongpeng Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Cao Bing, Li Bin, Su Linchong, Wang Jianzhong, Zhang Xin

Since the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), numerous historical figures, including scholars, senior officials, luminaries, rich merchants and magnates, have resided or stayed in *siheyuan* (courtyard residences) in Beijing. During their time there, they made decisions that influenced China's history, or created their own legends. Today, these courtyard dwellings have opened to the public as existing mansions or former residences of luminaries. Visitors can explore the architectural structures of traditional Beijing-style *siheyuan* and learn about the lives and experiences of their original inhabitants. Due to the enduring fascination with the experiences of historical figures, these courtyards have become popular tourist attractions in the city.



Stories in Mansions

Statistics reveal that Beijing is home to 19 grand mansions, with 15 designated for princes and 4 for dukes. Additionally, the city boasts a number of well-preserved residences for princesses of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). No other city in the world can boast such a concentration of mansions. Within the walls of these mansions, numerous legends persist, captivating visitors with tales of individuals, cities and nations.



Temples and Mansions Witnesses to Historic **Events**

The Forbidden City is not the sole witness to the history of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties. To the east of the Forbidden City lies Pudu Temple, located at the junction of Nanchizi Street and Pudusi Front Lane. This temple, also known as "Xiaonancheng" and "Prince Rui's Mansion," bore witness to many significant events during the Ming and Qing dynasties, solidifying its status as a historical landmark.

In July of 1449, the army of the Wala (Woyela) Mongols launched a southward

invasion into the Ming Dynasty. Emperor Yingzong of Ming, Zhu Qizhen (1427–1464), spurred on by the eunuch Wang Zhen (year of birth unknown, died 1449), personally led troops in battle with the Wala army. However, the Ming forces suffered defeat, and Emperor Yingzong was captured. In 1450, the ruler of the Wala Mongols released Zhu Qizhen and returned him to the Ming Dynasty. Upon his return to Beijing, Zhu Qizhen was confined to house arrest at Xiaonancheng (the precursor of today's Pudu Temple) by Emperor Daizong, Zhu Qiyu (1428-1457, Zhu Qizhen's halfbrother). Unwilling to merely serve as a nominal retired emperor, Zhu Qizhen conspired with his supporters in 1457 to overthrow his brother, who was gravely ill. This led to Zhu Qizhen reclaiming the throne while Zhu Qiyu was expelled from the Forbidden City and placed under house arrest at Xiaonancheng. Shortly thereafter, Zhu Qiyu succumbed to illness while in captivity.

After the Qing Dynasty's relocation of its capital to Beijing, the Manchu prince and regent of the early Qing Dynasty, Dorgon (1612-1650), built his

mansion at the site of Xiaonancheng. Fulin (1638–1661) ascended the throne at the tender age of six and assumed the title of Emperor Shunzhi. Consequently, authority was effectively wielded by Dorgon, who was Fulin's uncle. As Dorgon became an influential political figure, his mansion evolved into the de facto political centre during the early Qing Dynasty.

Nevertheless, a mere two months after Dorgon's death, all his titles were revoked. His residence, Prince Rui's Mansion, fell into disuse and disrepair. However, in 1776, Dorgon's title, Prince Rui, was reinstated, prompting the reconstruction and expansion of Prince Rui's Mansion. During the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735-1796), the mansion was bestowed with the name Pudu Temple.

Thus, Prince Rui's Mansion underwent a transformation into a temple. The existing Hall of Shanmen and the main hall within the temple offer visitors a glimpse into the grandeur of the original mansion. The temple's principal hall, known as "Ciji Hall," once displayed a plaque bearing the inscription "jue hai ci hang" (meaning "the way of salvation in the fathomless ocean of enlightenment"),

personally penned by Emperor Qianlong. Facing south, this hall enshrines Mahakala, symbolising supernatural power, military accomplishments and prosperity. The original Buddha niche from the hall now resides in Wanfu Hall within Yonghe Lama Temple.

Wanfu Hall, modelled after the

heavenly palace-shaped structures of the Tang (AD 618–907) and Song (AD 960-1279) dynasties, stands out for its striking left and right-sided corridors. Such architectural elements are often depicted in ancient paintings but are rare finds in real life. Among all the structures within Yonghe Lama Temple, this hall holds a special significance. Historical records reveal that in 1750, the 7th Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso (1708–1757) procured a seldom-seen, large log of Symplocos tanakana Nakai from Nepal and crafted a magnificent statue of Maitreya. In a gesture of gratitude for Emperor Qianlong's efforts in pacifying rebels in Tibet, the statue was presented to the emperor. To house the statue, Wanfu Hall, originally part of the Ming Dynasty building cluster on Jingshan Hill, was relocated to Yonghe Lama Temple. Furthermore, the Buddha niche originally situated in the main hall of Pudu Temple was also relocated to Yonghe Lama Temple by imperial decree.

Before its transformation into a temple, Yonghe Lama Temple was known as Yonghe Palace, and was the birthplace of Emperor Qianlong. This historic palace holds the distinction of being the residence of two Qing Dynasty emperors prior to their enthronement.

Historical records reveal that Yonghe Palace originally served as the residence of Yinzhen (1678-1735), who later ascended to the throne as Emperor Yongzheng. After Yinzhen was granted the title of Prince Yong, the palace was designated as Prince Yong's Mansion. Upon his accession to the throne, it was officially renamed Yonghe Palace. The practice of converting residences into temples has

been a longstanding tradition dating back to ancient times. During the Wei (AD 220-265), Jin (AD 265-420) and Southern and Northern Dynasties (AD 420-581), Buddhism experienced widespread popularity, prompting numerous nobles and affluent individuals to donate their residences for the construction of temples. This tradition has persisted for over 1,800 years. In homage to Emperor Yongzheng's devout belief in Buddhism, Emperor Qianlong undertook the reconstruction of Yonghe Palace, transforming it into

Yonghe Lama Temple in 1744. Yonghe Lama Temple stands out among all temples in Beijing due to its unique characteristics. Unlike typical temples, the architectural layout of the temple adheres to the design principles of princely mansions. Along its 400-metrelong central axis, Yonghe Lama Temple is flanked by 7 yards. The southern portion of the temple, constructed during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, features three ornate wooden memorial archways and a grand screen wall at its entrance, forming a magnificent front yard. A narrow, elongated lane leads to Zhaotai Gate, marking the starting point of the former Prince Yong's Mansion. Here, the Yonghe Gate, Yonghe Hall and Yongyou Hall now stand atop the original site of the mansion's main gate, main hall and sleeping quarters, respectively. The final two yards, Falun and Wanfu halls, were part of the original rear section of the mansion, adorned with numerous towers

and structures. Visitors can leisurely stroll through the temple, carefully observing the meticulously preserved architectural elements of this renowned former prince's residence.







Aside from Yonghe Lama Temple, another well-preserved mansion currently open to the public is Prince Gong's Mansion. This grand estate comprises two sections: a residential area and a garden. In the architectural hierarchy of the Qing Dynasty, Prince Gong's Mansion occupied the highest echelon. The residential area is divided into three segments: the eastern, middle and western roads, each connecting multiple courtyard residences from north to south. Originally, the mansion served as the private residence of Heshen (1750-1799), a formidable courtier during the reign of Emperor Qianlong. In 1789, Heshen's eldest son, Fengshen Yinde (1775–1810), married Gurun Prince Hexiao (1775-1823), Emperor Qianlong's youngest and favoured daughter, under the emperor's decree. Consequently, the residence was bestowed with the title of Princess Hexiao's Mansion. Reflecting ancient customs where the east was considered noble, the princess resided on the eastern road due to her higher status than Heshen. The main room of the front

yard on the eastern road is known as Duofu Chamber, in front of which grows a 200-year-old Chinese wisteria.

The main buildings on the middle road are Yin'an and Jiale halls, distinguished by their green glazed roof tiles. These majestic halls serve as a testament to the prince's dignity and status. Meanwhile, the siheyuan along the western road exudes a sense of refinement and delicacy, featuring two main buildings: the Baoguang Room and the Xijin Study. The courtyard serves as a tranquil living space within the mansion. Together, these three types of buildings harmonise seamlessly, epitomising the exemplary architectural standards of Qing Dynasty mansions.

Within the mansion's garden, the layout mirrors that of the residential area with its eastern, middle and western roads. The middle road is distinguished by a Western-style marble archway at its entrance. Positioned at the centre of this road is a stone stele bearing the Chinese character "fu," symbolising happiness and auspiciousness. Flanking the stele are Dule Peak and Fuchi Pond to the front, while Lütianxiaoyin house and Futing Hall stand behind it. The stone stele is a focal

point and a popular attraction within the mansion. Legend has it that the character "fu" engraved on the stele was personally written by Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722), earning it the title of the "number one 'fu' in the world." As the character signifies happiness, many visitors are drawn to touch it as a gesture of prayer for happiness and prosperity.

The main room in the backyard along the eastern road is known as "Ledao Hall," serving as the bedroom of Yixin (1833-1898), the third owner of the mansion. Yixin had significant influence on modern Chinese history. In 1861, Emperor Xianfeng (1831-1861) succumbed to illness in a temporary imperial palace in Rehe (present-day Chengde, Hebei Province). Yixin collaborated with Empress Dowagers Ci'an (1837-1881) and Cixi (1835-1908) to orchestrate the Xinyou Coup. During this coup, they ousted eight regents appointed by the late emperor and executed Zaiyuan (1816–1861), Duanhua (1807–1861) and Sushun (1816-1861). Subsequently, Empress Dowager Cixi seized control of the Qing government, altering the fate of the Qing Dynasty.

If Yixin, the third owner of Prince Gong's Mansion, played a crucial role in altering the fate of the Qing Dynasty, Princess Hejing (1731-1792) deserves recognition for influencing changes in political marriage customs due to her parents' favour.

According to historical records, Princess Hejing was a cherished daughter of Emperor Qianlong and Empress Xiaoxianchun (1712-1748). In 1747, Emperor Qianlong arranged for the 16-year-old princess to marry Sevdenbaljir (year of birth unknown, died 1775), a Mongolian prince from the Borjigin clan. To accommodate the couple, the emperor bestowed upon the princess a mansion in Beijing. However, Qing Dynasty regulations stipulated that married princesses were to reside in their husbands' homes, often located in distant regions, separating them from their parents indefinitely. Princess Hejing deeply longed for her parents and was reluctant to live so far away. Understanding her desires, and with no intention of sending her to Mongolia, Emperor Qianlong permitted the princess to remain in Beijing. Consequently, Princess Hejing resided in the city with her husband Sevdenbaljir, who accompanied her, along with their sons, to live and

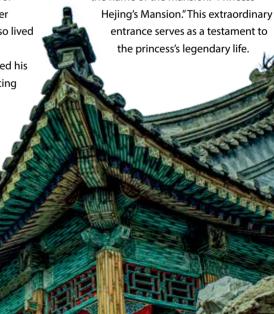
work in Beijing.

Following Princess Hejing's example, the Qing government permitted married princesses, their husbands and descendants to reside in Beijing. Subsequently, other princesses, such as Emperor Qianlong's seventh daughter, Emperor Jiaqing's (1760-1820) third and fourth daughters, and Emperor Daoguang's (1782-1850) daughter Princess Shou'an (1826–1860), also lived with their husbands in Beijing.



faced south and consisted of eastern, middle and western sections, with three gates. Today, the mansion retains its majestic and impressive stature.

At 7 Zhang Zizhong Road, visitors are greeted by a large red gate and two intricately carved screen walls. Adorning the lintel of the gate is a plaque bearing the name of the mansion: "Princess





has not yet succeeded. Comrades, you must carry on!" reverberated worldwide from this very room in the courtyard.

After Sun's passing, Gu made the decision to donate 37 rooms in the western section of the courtyard to serve as a memorial hall for Sun Yat-sen's passing in Beijing. Subsequently, the location was renamed the "Memorial Hall of Sun Yat-sen's Decease."

In 1981, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution, the memorial hall underwent renovations and was opened to the public. This marked a significant event in Beijing at the time. Coincidentally, in the same year, another historic event occurred in Beijing: the passing of Soong Ching-ling (1893–1981), Sun Yat-sen's wife, at 46 Houhai Beiyan.

The estate at 46 Houhai Beiyan, formerly the west garden of Prince Chun's Mansion, underwent a significant transformation. In 1962, Premier Zhou Enlai presided over the construction of a courtyard. Following the reconstruction, the courtyard preserved the original

layout, spanning over 20,000 square metres (sq.m), adorned with pavilions, towers and terraces, surrounded by hills to the north, south and west. The following year, Soong Ching-ling, at the age of 70, took up residence in the garden and remained there until her death.

Near the east gate, Soong personally transplanted a grapevine along the footpath and positioned 10 pomegranate shrubs in barrels. Within the garden, she cherished two particular items. One was a three-metre-tall Taihu stone bearing the inscription "sui sui ping an," signifying "peace and safety every year," believed to be inscribed by Prince Cheng Yongxing (1752-1823), the former owner of the garden. The other was a 200-year-old pomegranate bonsai from the Qing Dynasty. Soong frequently posed for photographs with visiting foreign guests in front of these two cherished objects. Additionally, two magnolia coco plants on the waterside, situated in front of Nanlou Tower, were planted by the renowned Qing Dynasty poet Nalan Xingde (16551685) during his stay in the garden.

The former theatre of Prince Chun's Mansion underwent a transformation into a spacious living room, while the Changjin Study was turned into a large dining hall. Adjacent to the western wing room, a traditional Chinese-style twostorey building housed Soong's personal quarters. Her bedroom and study occupied the second floor, while a small living room and dining hall adorned the first floor. Within this building, Soong hosted dinners for foreign dignitaries and close friends, fostering meaningful connections. Notably, a portrait of Sun Yat-sen graced the eastern wall of the small living room. When entertaining guests, Soong often positioned herself beneath the portrait, a gesture of deep respect towards Sun.

The mansions at 23 Zhang Zizhong Road and 46 Houhai Beiyan have today been transformed into memorial halls dedicated to Sun and Soong, respectively, bearing witness to the lives and experiences of these influential figures.





Beijing as Beiping and designated it as a special city, shifting the political centre away. Despite this change, during the Republic of China period (1912-1949), Beijing remained a vibrant cultural hub. Renowned intellectuals and cultural luminaries in art, education and literature flocked to the city, finding inspiration within their own courtyard residences. Their contributions played a pivotal role in shaping China's cultural landscape in the 20th century, leaving a lasting impact on Beijing's cultural heritage. While many of these figures have since passed away, their former residences offer people of today a glimpse into their lives and legacies.



Caishikou holds significant historical importance in China. In ancient times,

it served as a bustling market and also functioned as an execution ground during the Qing Dynasty. Notably, Sushun, one of the eight regents appointed by Emperor Xianfeng, along with six individuals involved in the Hundred Days' Reform, were executed there in 1861 and 1898, respectively. The public executions, marked by bloody decapitations, deeply troubled late Qing Dynasty politician and jurist Shen Jiaben (1840–1913). In response, Shen vehemently denounced the practice of public executions and advocated for the implementation of capital punishment in designated areas, away from public scrutiny.

Shen's initiatives drew attention from the government, leading to the cessation of cruel executions in bustling markets. Located north of the first trunk road in the Caishikou area, Jinjing Hutong is home to the Wuxing Guildhall at number 1. Hailing from Wuxing (present-day Huzhou, Zhejiang Province), Shen Jiaben maintained

strong ties to his hometown. In 1901, at the age of 61, Shen returned to Beijing and ascended to the position of Right Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Punishments, following eight years of service in regions outside Beijing. Shen purchased the abandoned Wuxing Guildhall and modestly adorned the siheyuan with three yards before relocating his family there. Remarkably, after more than a century, the courtyard's layout remains largely unchanged.

In 2018, Shen Jiaben's former residence opened to the public following renovations. The principal house in the first yard comprises three rooms, the western wing has three rooms and the eastern wing has been expanded to a two-storey building with five rooms. The eastern wing, a fusion of traditional Chinese and Western architectural styles constructed by Shen in 1905, is known as Zhenbi Tower. This two-storey building, crafted from bricks and wood, served as Shen's private library and houses over

50,000 books on its second floor, with a living room situated below. Incorporating elements of gardening from southern China, the construction of Zhenbi Tower imbues the courtyard with a distinct character, setting it apart from traditional Beijing-style siheyuan.

In the decade preceding his death,
Shen devoted himself to reforming the
Laws and Regulations of the Qing Dynasty.
He also oversaw the establishment of the
Imperial Law College, China's first national
school of law. Shen's efforts played a
pivotal role in the modernisation of
China's legal system and the emergence of
modern Chinese law. Unfortunately, Shen
did not live to see the implementation of
the laws he drafted, having passed away
on July 12, 1913.

Three months after Shen's death, Guo Kaizhen (1892–1978), later known as Guo Moruo, departed his hometown for Tianjin to sit an entrance examination for Tianjin Military Medical School. However, three days prior to the publication of successful candidates, Guo relinquished his admission qualification, deeming the examination questions absurd. Instead, he boarded a train to Beijing to visit his eldest brother, Guo Kaiwen (1878–1936), marking his first visit to the capital. After a 50-day stay in Beijing, his brother resolved to send him to Japan for further study. On December 30, 1913, Guo Kaizhen departed for Japan. Several years later, under the pen name Guo Moruo, he would captivate the Chinese literary circle.

Upon his return, Guo resided in Beijing for nearly 30 years, marking it as the culmination of his cultural journey and a pivotal point in his remarkable success. In October 1963, Guo relocated from 5 Xisidayuan Hutong to 18 Qianhai West Street, where he remained until he died on June 12, 1978. Spending his final 15 years in this courtyard residence, Guo's legacy continued to flourish. In June 1988, commemorating the 10th anniversary of his death, the courtyard residence was opened to the public, establishing it as yet another memorial hall honouring cultural luminaries in Beijing.

Guo possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of literature and history, leaving behind an extensive body of work comprising over 10 million Chinese characters. Notably, he authored historical plays such as Flowers of Brotherhood, Qu Yuan and Gao Jianli, which have attained the status of classic modern Chinese dramas and continue to grace stages today. In addition to his theatrical endeavours, Guo authored several historical works, including Jiagu Wenzi Yanjiu ("Research on Tortoise Shell Characters") and Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Yanjiu ("Research on Ancient Chinese Society"). Moreover, Guo made significant contributions to scientific excavations and the dating of inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells.

Guo's final masterpiece, Li Bai and Du Fu, was completed at 18 Qianhai West Street. In this work, Guo delved into the political careers of Li Bai (AD 701-762) and Du Fu (712-770), analysing the political landscape of their time. Upon entering the Guo Moruo Memorial Hall at 18 Qianhai West Street, visitors encounter the "Mama Tree," a tall ginkgo transplanted by Guo and his children from Dajue Temple in 1953. When they planted the tree, Guo's wife Yu Ligun (1916–1979) had left Beijing for medical treatment. As a symbol of hope for her recovery, they named it the "Mama Tree." When the family relocated from 5 Xisidayuan Hutong to 18 Qianhai West Street, Guo ensured the tree accompanied them, reflecting his deep emotional connection, evident in his works.

Elegant and Charming Pursuing Purity and Pleasure At 9 Huguosi Street in Xicheng District is a typical Beijing siheyuan.

District is a typical Beijing siheyuan. Upon entering through the main gate, one encounters a brick and tile screen wall, flanked by a row of bamboo. A majestic Chinese parasol tree graces the courtyard's southern end. Beyond a verdant door lies a modest wooden screen wall, preceding four petite stone seats adorned with intricate cloud carvings. In the yard lies a stone pond, once home to the original owner's goldfish. Surrounding the courtyard are corridors linking rooms in the east, west and north, boasting vibrant red pillars and intricately painted eaves. Within the yard, persimmon, apple and Chinese flowering apple trees flourish, symbolising safety and peace in

Chinese culture. Though not expansive, the courtyard exudes elegance and charm, much like its renowned former owner, Peking Opera virtuoso Mei Lanfang (1894–1961).

Walking in the courtyard, visitors feel a profound connection with Mei. Today, the courtyard has been transformed into the Mei Lanfang Memorial Hall. Inside a dedicated screening room, guests can watch videos of Mei honing his craft, practising Peking Opera amidst the tranquil surroundings. Mei called this courtyard home during his final years, often using it as a space to rehearse and perfect his performances. Prior to captivating audiences with *The* Hegemon-King Bids His Lady Farewell, one of his most renowned works, Mei would meticulously practise the sword dance beneath the sprawling branches of the persimmon tree. In 1957, in celebration of the founding of the Northern Kun Opera Theatre, Mei collaborated with

Kun Opera artist Han Shichang (1897–1976) to stage the Kun Opera *Dream of the Garden*. Their dedication was evident as they rehearsed late into the night, refining each movement to perfection within the serene confines of the courtyard.

Mei's sincerity and honesty left a lasting impression on Chinese painter Qi Baishi (1864–1957). At a dinner party, Qi, donning simple clothes, went unnoticed by the other guests and sat alone. Upon Mei's arrival, he immediately approached Qi and bowed in respect, acknowledging his presence. Mei's genuine gesture caught Qi's attention, prompting others to join in praising him. Touched by Mei's sincerity, Qi later created a painting as a token of appreciation. This encounter led to Mei studying painting under Qi's guidance, a story that has since become widely renowned in artistic circles.

Qi was adept at integrating simple delights into his works. In the spring of 1922, Chinese painter Chen Shiceng (1876–1923) brought several traditional Chinese paintings to the Sino-Japanese Joint Painting Exhibition. Qi's pieces caused a sensation at the event, with over 200 of his works selling at high prices within just three days. Numerous French art enthusiasts acquired his paintings to display them at the Paris Art Expo. In Beijing's Liulichang area, art dealers noticed a sudden surge in demand for Qi's previously unpopular paintings among foreigners. Capitalising on this newfound popularity, dealers raised the prices of Qi's works several-fold, yet they continued to sell briskly, attracting a swarm of dealers

Qi's former residence is situated in Kuache Hutong, located in Xicheng District. This courtyard, though atypical, comprises a southern yard and a principal yard. The principal yard features three rooms to the north, with two additional rooms on the eastern and western wings. Qi resided in the northern

to Qi's residence.

trio of rooms, utilising the middle room as a living space, the western room as his painting studio and the eastern room as his bedroom.

On September 16, 1957, Qi passed away in his home. According to legend, during a meeting between Chinese painter Zhang Daqian (1899–1983) and Picasso in France, Picasso proudly presented Zhang with five volumes of Chinese paintings, all created by himself. Picasso had painstakingly reproduced Qi's ink-wash paintings using ink brushes. He remarked to Zhang that when Qi painted fish, he didn't merely depict water; rather, he conjured the essence of the river itself within his paintings.

Today, stepping into the former residences of Mei Lanfang and Qi Baishi, visitors can catch a glimpse of the purity and joy that characterised these two artists' lives, reflected in the settings and exhibits found there.







Traces and Memories Recording Interesting Stories of Everyday Life

Neiwubu Street, situated a few alleys south of Dongsi, is more accurately described as a hutong than a street. Originally named Goulan Hutong, it gained its current name when the Neiwubu (Ministry of Civil Affairs) established its office there during the Qing Dynasty. The alley is flanked by modest grey brick bungalows, among which stands the unassuming Number 39 Courtyard. Despite its outward simplicity, this courtyard was once the residence of the renowned writer Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987).

Liang's residence, and also his birthplace, stands out among other former residences of

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reflecting his nostalgia.

luminaries in the city. Born into affluence,

Liang indulged in various culinary

delights, chronicling his adventures in

his book Yashe Tanchi (literally, "Talking

about Eating in an Elegant Cottage").

His vivid descriptions of Beijing's local

a sumptuous feast. In his prose, Liang

nostalgically reminisced about the

to the gate, flanked by mounting

courtyard where he grew up, vividly

portraying the imposing steps leading

blocks, a shrine within the courtyard, a

in the inner yard. Blooming Chinese

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spacious bath and picturesque rockeries

flowering apples and lilacs added to the

Under Liang's pen, the

descriptions are vivid,

cuisine evoke the sensation of attending

Liang's vivid portrayal of old Beijing's landscapes and its people captivates readers with its charm and allure. Yet, beyond his literary contributions, Liang is often remembered for his debate with the esteemed Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936). Despite their significant age gap, spanning 22 years, both intellectuals shared profound connections with Beijing and its iconic siheyuan courtyards.

In 1919, Liang bid farewell to 39 Neiwubu Street, leaving behind memories cherished in later years. Meanwhile, seven years later, Lu Xun departed from 19 Gongmenkou Ertiao in the Fuchengmennei area, leaving behind the best-preserved former residence of Lu in Beijing.

Today, the courtyard has been transformed into the Lu Xun Museum. Upon entering the museum and passing through a trellis adorned with wisteria, visitors are greeted by a marble archway bearing golden Chinese

> characters, marking the site as Gongmenkouxi Santiao. Passing the archway,

people will meet a pair of black double entry doors leading to Lu Xun's former residence. A short lane, divided by a screen wall connected to the east room, guides visitors to a red door frame with four green doors. Behind these doors lies a small yard enclosed by grey brick walls, where Lu Xun resided for over two years. Adjacent to the bedroom stands a 6- to 7-sq.m room that served as Lu's study. It was within these walls that Lu penned notable works such as Wandering, Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk and Wild Grass, solidifying his important position in Chinese literary history.

On October 19, 1949, an unassuming courtvard at 21 Fuchengmennei Xisantiao was officially designated as the Lu Xun Museum. Following its establishment, numerous former residences of luminaries have been opened to the public as memorial halls. In that same year, writer Lao She (1899-1966) returned to Beijing from the United States and purchased a modest courtyard at 19 Fengfu Hutong as his residence.

The courtyard occupies a modest area with three main rooms, two of which served as living spaces, while the eastern room functioned as Hu

Jieqing's (1905-2001) painting studio and

of his collection of objects.

bedroom. On the eastern and western

sides of the main rooms is a wing room.

while the western wing was designated

as Lao She's study and bedroom. Despite

his prolonged absence from his native

deeply. Today, its original layout and

furnishings from the 1950s and 60s are

meticulously preserved, offering visitors

a glimpse into the past. Photographs

of Lao She adorn the walls, capturing

moments from his life. During his 17

to a disciplined routine: mornings

years in the courtyard, Lao She adhered

were dedicated to exercise and creative

pursuits, while afternoons were reserved

for administrative tasks and interviews.

In his leisure time, he tended to flowers

and cats, maintained the

Beijing, Lao She cherished the courtyard

The eastern wing housed a bathroom,

Lao She's influence extends beyond Beijing, as several cities across the country have established memorial halls in his honour. Yet, the memorial hall erected on his former residence in Beijing holds a unique significance, serving as a cultural icon for the city. Within its courtyard, Lao She penned his renowned works, such as Dragon Beard Ditch and Teahouse, vividly portraying the daily lives of ordinary citizens in Old Beijing. Through his writing, Lao She recorded cultural memories of Old Beijing. Today, countless readers flock to the memorial hall, paying tribute to the writer who held profound respect for ordinary people.



An Authentic Symbol of Traditional Beijing Culture

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Li Bin, Zhang Xin, Zhou Mingxing

When exploring Beijing, one should not miss its hutongs, the traditional alleyways that encapsulate the essence of the ancient capital. Delving into these hutongs naturally ignites an interest in *siheyuan*, the traditional Beijing courtyard houses that were once typical dwellings of native Beijingers. These Beijing-style courtyard houses offer a glimpse into meticulously arranged layouts, intricate decorations and the profound emphasis on etiquette and tradition that have been cultivated within Beijing families over generations. Yet, the allure of these courtyard residences extends beyond mere architectural and cultural aspects. The aged structures and artefacts within these courtyards showcase a distinctive Eastern aesthetic, serving as deep reflections of a rich historical and cultural legacy. Moreover, the relationships fostered among neighbours in these courtyard houses along the hutongs are characterised by enduring warmth and camaraderie.

Visiting traditional Beijing courtyard houses presents a captivating experience, where ancient trees stand as silent witnesses, intricate brick carvings whisper tales of bygone eras and the soft cooing of doves creates a serene backdrop, evoking a deep connection to the nostalgic allure of Old Beijing. Amidst their structured and disciplined layout, these time-honoured courtyard residences emanate a gentle warmth, akin to precious gems adorning the dynamic canvas of the ever-changing metropolis.





Nestled in Dongcheng District and inaugurated in 2013, the Shijia Hutong Museum stands as Beijing's first museum of its kind. A testament to the architectural style of a traditional Beijing courtyard house, the museum boasts two courtyards spanning over 1,000 square metres (sq.m). Despite its modest dimensions, every corner of this compound showcases exquisite craftsmanship. Surrounded by towering old persimmon trees, the courtyard house is bathed in dappled sunlight, its grey brick and tiled structures evoking a sense of timeless elegance. Birdcages sway gently in the breeze on the small verandas, offering visitors an alluring glimpse into the opulent lifestyle of a wealthy family from the late 19th to early 20th centuries, a scene often romanticised in television dramas set in the ancient capital.

The original owner of the courtyard house was the esteemed writer Ling Shuhua (1900–1990), born into a wealthy family during the tumultuous period in the decade before the downfall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). As part of her dowry upon marriage, Ling's father bestowed upon her a courtyard residence consisting of 28 structures. What visitors now behold in the museum is but a fragment of the former residence, a demonstration of the expansive scale of its original layout. Ling, a gifted author, penned the renowned work Ancient Melodies in English. The success of this literary masterpiece was significantly shaped by the guidance of the esteemed British writer, Adeline Virginia Woolf (1882–1941). Woolf's letters to Ling urged her to depict the enchanting essence of traditional Chinese culture with meticulous detail, including daily life, homes and furnishings. Guided by Woolf's insightful advice, Ancient Melodies exudes an Eastern charm, vividly capturing the minutiae of everyday life within the traditional courtyard houses in Old Beijing. Upon its publication, Ling's novel garnered high acclaim from a prominent British newspaper, attesting to its profound impact and literary merit.

Like Ling, her grandson Qin Siyuan, also known as Colin Siyuan Chinnery, shares a deep affection for Old Beijing. As an artist of mixed Chinese-British heritage, Chinnery's profound attachment to Chinese culture permeates his work. Following Ling's passing, Chinnery's dedicated efforts to complete the Shijia Hutong Museum reflect his commitment to preserving and honouring their shared cultural legacy.

meticulously preserved brick carvings adorned with vibrant motifs. Among its many attractions, the museum's standout feature is its intricately crafted miniature models of traditional Beijing courtyard houses. These models intricately detail the layout and characteristics of the main buildings, backyards, ornamental inner gates (festoon gates) and verandas, offering even those unfamiliar with these architectural marvels a comprehensive understanding of their structure. Furthermore, an exhibition hall within the museum hosts an impressive scale model of Shijia Hutong, spanning approximately 21 sq.m. This detailed model faithfully represents the appearance of the hutong around 1959. By juxtaposing it with an aerial photograph from 2009 displayed on the wall, visitors can discern and appreciate the evolution and transformations that have transpired within the alleyway over the past five decades.

The Shijia Hutong Museum boasts

To gain a comprehensive understanding of traditional Beijing courtyard houses, a simple examination of the courtyard models at Shijia Hutong Museum may leave one wanting.

Instead, visitors have the option to explore the authentic layout of Dongsi Hutong Museum, originally a traditional Beijing dwelling with three courtyards. Here, visitors can reference the model components and compare them first-

hand in a standardised Beijing courtyard house setting. The museum, once the office of Dongsi Police Station, has been transformed into a unique space where traditional Beijing dwelling elements blend with mirrors and glass, creating a distinctive ambiance. While the design incorporates modern art on a grand scale, the museum meticulously preserves the traditional characteristics of the courtyard house. Despite its modest size, the museum's value lies in its faithful representation of a traditional Beijing courtyard house layout. Upon entering through the main gate and passing by a screen wall adorned with five bats holding the Chinese character "shou," symbolising longevity in traditional Chinese culture, visitors can observe the main building, BEIJING 2024 | 33







east and west wing rooms, and a back row of rooms. They can grasp the locations and construction relationships of these elements and explore traditional Beijing architectural details, such as daoquameizi (adornment structures for verandas) and queti (intricately decorated brackets on columns). Thanks to the museum, traditional Beijing courtyard houses transcend mere abstract concepts, transforming into captivating and aesthetically pleasing homes in the minds of visitors.

If Dongsi's hutong neighbourhood can be likened to a book on traditional Beijing culture, the museum serves as its comprehensive index, encompassing everything from the former residences of local luminaries to the original layout of the neighbourhood and the meticulous renovation process. With its rich historical narrative spanning over 700 years, the museum introduces every visitor to the vibrant tapestry of Dongsi's heritage. Through the museum, visitors can deeply immerse themselves in the authentic essence of traditional Beijing culture embodied by Dongsi. "Impressions of Dongsi," a captivating photography exhibition, evokes a profound emotional connection through old photos depicting hutong life in Dongsi, from the intricately decorated ruyi gates to the playful sight of cats leaping on the eaves of courtyard houses. In the "Melodies of Beijing" exhibition area, the melodious sound of long pigeon whistles transports visitors to the nostalgic ambiance of Old Beijing under azure blue skies and billowing white clouds, featuring iconic landmarks like the

Drum and Bell towers, as well as authentic local snacks such as deep-fried dough sticks and mung bean milk, evoking fond memories of days gone by.

Around the world, the practice of

raising pigeons is common. Yet, it is an uncommon tradition that native Beijingers take part in, attaching whistles to the tails of pigeons, creating melodic sounds as they soar—a unique custom of the ancient capital. Stepping out of the museum and wandering along the alleyway, one can easily spot a dozen plump pigeons nestled under a roof. These avian companions gather closely, occasionally pecking at frozen water in a jar or engaging in playful wing-flapping skirmishes. Eventually, they take flight in unison, gracefully circling and soaring above Dongsi. The elegant melody of pigeon whistles, emanating from the museum, seamlessly blends with reality, vividly resurrecting memories of old days in Beijing. The essence of ancient tunes lingers in the air, their echoes reverberating throughout the surroundings.

The Elegant Ambiance of **Old Courtyard Houses**

Located in Xicheng District, Zhuyuan (Garden of Bamboo) Hotel has undergone a radical transformation in terms of its courtyard layout compared to its original design. What is now the main entrance was once the back gate of the courtyard house, while the original main entrance has been relegated to the status of the back gate. Despite this complete reversal in layout, the ancient buildings and antiquities within the courtyard have

been meticulously preserved. Visitors may chance upon a casually placed bamboo couplet, possibly inscribed by the Qing Dynasty calligrapher Deng Shiru (1743-1805), discreetly hanging on a door's sides. The essence of traditional Chinese culture permeates the courtyard, evident in the plethora of calligraphies, plagues and couplets crafted by renowned artists. With a legacy spanning over two centuries, the courtyard house exudes an elegant and tranquil ambiance of its own. As the breeze whispers through the lush bamboo in the garden, the gentle rustling sound envelops visitors in a profound sense of peace and serenity.

This was the Garden of Sheng, once the residence of Sheng Xuanhuai (1844–1916), a prominent minister during the late Qing Dynasty. Whenever Sheng undertook official duties in Beijing as the assistant minister of Imperial Rites, he would retreat to this splendid courtyard house. Following traditional Chinese courtyard-style architecture, the garden boasts quintessential Beijing courtyard characteristics and style. However, it also exudes a similar allure to Sheng's grand mansion, or the Garden of Liu in Suzhou, nestled in the eastern China's Jiangsu Province. The picturesque scene of small bridges, meandering waterways and elegant white railings offers visitors a look into the enchanting beauty of authentic Suzhou-style gardens.

The garden art at Zhuyuan Hotel is truly magnificent, boasting a diverse array of tree species, some with a history spanning hundreds of years. One of the most anticipated events in spring is the

blossoming of a flowering crabapple tree, which is over 300 years old. Typically, around April 5, delicate pink blossoms emerge, transitioning to vibrant red before fading to white, creating a breath-taking display that lasts about a week. With a gentle spring breeze overnight, the ground is delicately blanketed with fallen petals by morning. Come summer, the Chinese scholar tree takes centre stage, blooming with white blossoms from June to August, a tradition that has endured for over 400 years. The courtyard also boasts four ginkgo trees, two male and two female, as well as many majestic white pine and towering Chinese toon trees of over 200 years in age. In autumn, visitors are treated to the sight of hanging ginkgo fruits and leaves turning golden, while in winter, the grand pines stand resolutely in the snow, each exuding its own unique charm.

Throughout the four seasons, various tree species take turns gracing the Garden of Sheng, including the timeless allure of evergreen bamboo. The transition from the Garden of Sheng to the Garden of Bamboo remains veiled in mystery. In ancient times, Chinese scholars utilised their courtyard houses as a canvas to showcase their refined taste and scholarly achievements. Within the tranquil embrace of the bambooshaded courtyard, Sheng diligently penned influential documents such as the "Request for the Establishment of Banks" and the "Request for the Establishment of Modern Schools," presenting them to the emperor. His visionary leadership and direct involvement in pioneering modern Chinese industries—ranging from steamships, mines, telegraphs and textiles, to railways and banks—laid a robust foundation for the advancement of modern industry in China.

Standing in the courtyard, one cannot help but imagine the scene when Sheng resided there. The interconnected pavilions and meandering verandas, accompanied by the gentle rustling of bamboo, create a serene and refined atmosphere. The harmonious fusion of the bamboo groves and the centuryold courtyard has birthed a timeless and

innate artistic essence in the garden. The owner's meticulous attention to detail is evident in the landscaping of garden plants and the pavilion design, exemplified by the vibrant and upright bamboo that retains its verdant hue and straight stature throughout all four seasons.

In traditional Beijing courtyard houses, alongside old trees and bamboo, wisteria stands as a cherished plant species renowned for its graceful and distinctive form. Revered for its symbolism of enduring literary prowess, wisteria holds a special place in the hearts of many, particularly among scholars in ancient China.

The former residence of Ji Xiaolan is home to the city's oldest wisteria, originally planted by the Qing Dynasty scholar himself. Upon arriving at Ji's former residence, visitors are greeted by a pergola adorned with lush wisteria leaves, standing proudly in front of the old courtyard house. This pergola casts dappled shadows on the grey square bricks, creating a picturesque scene that sets the tone for the experience ahead. Initially, the wisteria resided within the courtyard rather than in front of the main gate, a testament to the evolving landscape of the residence over time. While Ji's residence, once a compound featuring three courtyards along its north-south axis and horizontal side small

courtyards, now retains only two courtyards, occupying less than one-third of the original area, the main building fortunately remains intact. Facing south, Ji's former residence showcases a spacious main gate in the first courtyard, leading to a main hall and several rooms with doors opening towards the main hall. The main hall comprises five rooms, with seven purlins extending to the front porch. Notably, the southern facade exhibits a unique blend of Chinese and Western architectural styles, added after the Qing Dynasty's downfall. Moving to the second courtyard, the main hall known as Yuewei Cottage, boasting a gabled tiled roof, houses five rooms, seamlessly connected to three small rooms



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Ji Xiaolan held a special fondness for the wisteria in his courtyard house, a sentiment that inspired esteemed figures like Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) and Zhang Boju (1898–1982) to develop a deep appreciation for the plant out of respect for Ji. The ancient wisteria has long been a beloved feature in the ancient capital, blooming in vibrant hues of purple and green every May, a tradition that has endured for over 200 years. During the flowering season, calligraphers and painters from across Beijing often gather in the courtyard to pay homage to the wisteria through their art. Adding to the charm, next door, Jinyang Restaurant hosts an annual wisteria banquet, serving delightful wisteria cakes and pastries to enchant its customers and celebrate the enduring beauty of this beloved plant.



A Legendary Temple

When discussing traditional Beijing courtyard houses, one cannot overlook the significance of Xuannan Culture Museum. During the Qing Dynasty, Han people, including officials and scholars, were restricted to living in Beijing's outer city. The southern part of the

outer city became home to over 1,000 notable figures, including Gu Yanwu (1613–1682), Lin Zexu (1785–1850) and Kang Youwei (1858–1827). Provinces such as Hubei, Anhui and Guangdong established their respective guild halls in this area, serving as gathering places for candidates from various regions preparing for imperial examinations. While many historical courtyard houses have not survived, Xuannan Culture Museum meticulously integrates and organises the history of this era, allowing the significance of these courtyard houses and guild halls to shine once again.

Constructed on the site of the one of the capital city's prime temples, Changchun Temple, dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the museum's compound, with its three courtyards, boasts a Zen-style design and imperial characteristics, setting it apart from traditional Beijing courtyard houses. Unlike many old buildings, Changchun Temple is oriented towards the east, a rarity in Chinese architecture where a south-facing layout is more common. Song Meili, a staff member at Xuannan Culture

Museum, notes that Changchun Temple, built during the reign of Emperor Wanli (1573-1620) of the Ming Dynasty, was the largest and most magnificent in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Within the museum lies a precious artefact, the base of the Pagoda for Prabhutaratna. Historical records describe this pagoda, one of the few large alloy structures in Beijing and the country as a whole, as having been covered in gold, emitting an exceptional beauty with its "dazzling golden light."

Today, the museum preserves the base of the pagoda, while the exquisite main body has been relocated to Wanshou Temple after undergoing meticulous restoration. The decision to transfer the main body to Wanshou Temple stems from its historical connection as the sister temple of Changchun Temple, both initially erected by Emperor Wanli to honour his revered mother, Empress Dowager Xiaoding, known for her deep devotion to Buddhism. Keen-eyed visitors at Xuannan Culture Museum will immediately notice that the side halls are adorned with yellow glazed tiles of notably higher quality than those on the main building. Legend has it that

the side halls of Changchun Temple showcased portraits of two influential empress dowagers: Empress Dowager Xiaoding, mother of Emperor Wanli, and Empress Dowager Xiaochun, mother of Emperor Chongzhen (reign: 1627–1644). This accounts for the roofs of the two side halls being adorned with yellow glazed tiles, a material exclusively reserved for imperial structures in ancient China.

Changchun Temple once enshrined a statue of the Bodhisattva with Nine Lotus Flowers, embodying the essence of Empress Dowager Xiaoding herself. During the reign of Emperor Wanli, the Empress Dowager played a pivotal role in nurturing and guiding her son. Their profound connection nurtured a bond grounded in mutual reliance and encouragement. Upon the temple's completion, where Empress Dowager Xiaoding extended her patronage to Zen Master Shuizhai, Emperor Wanli bestowed upon it the name "Changchun," signifying health and longevity, a deep reflection of the emperor's heartfelt blessings for his mother.



A Dream of Red Mansions, regarded as one of ancient China's four great novels, intricately depicts the regulations and daily rituals within traditional Chinese courtyard houses. The Mansion of the Jia Family emerges as a sumptuous and extravagant complex boasting five courtyards, where aristocratic inhabitants are attended to by a plethora of maids and pages. This literary masterpiece vividly portrays their lavish lifestyle, from their attire to their cuisine, providing a fascinating window into the opulent world of elite households in ancient China. Delving into this literary work offers a valuable opportunity to glean insights into the lifestyle prevalent within these sprawling aristocratic residences.

The author of the novel, Cao Xueqin, vividly portrays life within the courtyard houses of high-ranking officials and affluent individuals, drawing inspiration from his keen observations and profound

insights. Having once resided in a traditional Beijing dwelling known as "Seventeen Rooms and a Half," situated at Suanshikou in Beijing and now located at Courtyard 207 on Guanggumen Inner Street, Cao's personal experiences deeply inform his narrative. This location stands as the sole former residence of Cao, supported by reliable historical documentation. The memorial museum dedicated to him meticulously recreates the original structure of Cao's "Seventeen Rooms and a Half," capturing its essence with elements such as blue bricks, grey tiles, window frames and intricate brick carvings, all of which exude an enduring ancient charm.

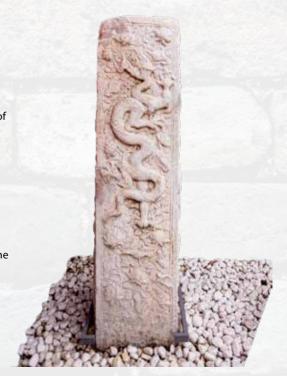
Cao's monumental work, a

comprehensive encyclopaedia-style masterpiece about ancient China, could not have been completed without his extensive panoramic observations and meticulous microscopic analyses of the social life of the time. Suanshikou, where he once resided, nestled in the southern part of Beijing's outer city, served as a melting pot for individuals from diverse backgrounds, including carpenters, craftsmen, coachmen and street artists. The vibrant and diverse scenes of life in this southern city provided Cao with a wealth of material for his creative endeavours. Many episodes, contents and descriptions in his novel resonate with the surroundings of his former residence in Suanshikou. There, Cao traversed the streets, absorbed the sights and lived among the people, using his pen to interpret the nuances of life in the capital city. In his later years, Cao endured a life marked by hardship and poverty. It is said that he spent the last decade of his life in a remote village on the Western Hills, situated on the outskirts of the city. A memorial museum dedicated to Cao has been established on the Western Hills, with the aim of reconstructing his former living environment. In front of the museum, several centuries-old trees stand as silent witnesses to the passage of time, perhaps evoking memories of Cao's contemplative walks.

It is conceivable that Cao, while writing the poignant scene of "Lin Daiyu burying flowers," may have been moved to tears. Inside the museum, bamboo groves sway gently, creating a serene and secluded atmosphere. It was within such a humble setting that Cao ultimately completed his timeless masterpiece.

Although not native to the capital city, Cao spent the majority of his years there, deeply ingraining himself in its tapestry of life. He engaged with prominent figures such as Duncheng (1734-1791) and Fupeng (1708-1749), delving into the cultural intricacies of Beijing's imperial mansions. Simultaneously, he forged connections with ordinary folk artists, immersing himself in the grassroots culture of the city. These diverse interactions profoundly shaped the vivid portrayal of both aristocratic and commoner lifestyles in his novel. Drawing from the customs and traditions of Old Beijing, Cao laid the groundwork for his creation, infusing it with the essence of the city's rich history and culture. This epic literary masterpiece can be likened to a wave in the sea of literature, seamlessly blending into Beijing's enduring historical and cultural legacy, thereby enriching its magnificence.

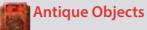






Legacies of Courtyard Houses

Today, Beijing balances rapid change with the preservation of its rich heritage. Amidst the bustling streets and ancient hutongs, weathered gate piers and stone carvings adorn traditional courtyard houses, echoing the city's past. These remnants, along with the enduring rhythms of courtyard life and neighbourly bonds, form a unique and ancient tapestry, a testament to Beijing's spirit.



When discussing old items associated with traditional Beijing courtyard houses, some may think of a pair of imposing stone lions commonly positioned outside a courtyard house's main gate. These lions, with their distinctive features, command attention at the outermost part of the courtyard, visible without the need to walk further into the property. However, what's less recognised is that in ancient times, not every household had the privilege of owning "guardian lions," as only affluent households were permitted to display them. Nonetheless, the widespread appeal of the "lion-worshipping custom" extended from the nobility to the common folk, all of whom took delight in adorning their doorways with lion-shaped objects.

In addition to the majestic stone lions, ancient noble families often erected hitching posts adorned with lion-shaped motifs atop them in front of the main gates of their courtyard houses. Today, only a few of these old objects remain in Beijing, like those at Courtyard 25 on the north side of Huageng Hutong in Jiaodaokou and in front of the old courtyard houses along Feilongqiao Hutong, offering glimpses into the past. Notably, Courtyard 67 in Dongsi Batiao boasts a concentration of hitching posts with expressive lion motif. These small structures with lion carvings are vibrant and expressive, showcasing a variety of unique poses and expressions such as sitting upright and playing with pearls. In ancient times, the number of hitching posts reflected the owner's wealth and prestige, with affluent households often adorning their main gates with numerous posts to flaunt their riches. These hitching posts became emblematic of the family's social standing, serving as a tangible symbol of their status within the community.

In bygone times, while grand guardian lion statues and stone hitching posts adorned with lion patterns were reserved for the affluent, ordinary households expressed their reverence for these mythical creatures and their desire for protection through intricately carved

gate piers flanking the main gate's frame. Though not as imposing as the stone lions at wealthy estates, these piers were meticulously crafted and dynamically shaped, depicting lions in various poses crouching, standing, lying down or gazing upwards. Despite their modest size, they served as the household's protective deities, symbolising their aspiration for safety and warding off evil influences.

Gate piers adorned with lion motifs are ubiquitous fixtures in front of traditional Beijing courtyard houses that have endured the passage of time. Another common design, simpler yet elegant, presents rectangular gate piers with intricately carved patterns on each side. Initially intended for structural support and the smooth operation of gates, these piers now serve as ornate symbols, embellished with elaborate designs reflecting the inhabitants' desire for a prosperous and meaningful existence beyond mere functionality.

Along Wudaoying Hutong, a sensory feast awaits those eager to marvel at a diverse array of gate piers, with nearly every household proudly displaying this architectural feature outside their main gates. While some gate piers no longer serve a functional role in fixing gate frames and others are detached from the main gate altogether, they all serve a decorative purpose. The box-shaped gate pier represents the most fundamental type, contrasting with the intricate drum-shaped designs embellished with lotus patterns on the sides. These drumshaped gate piers boast elaborate designs featuring auspicious combinations like "a unicorn resting under a pine tree," "a rhinoceros gazing at the moon," "a butterfly over a mountain with orchids" and "five lions living together," with lions depicted in various poses atop them. Along Wudaoying, one encounters a variety of traditional styles alongside newly crafted gate piers that deviate from classical patterns, including hollowedout double dragons playing with a pearl, circular engravings of exotic elephants and reliefs of auspicious clouds intertwined with mythical beasts. These unique gate

piers complement the modern ambiance of the hutong, reflecting residents' reverence for courtyard house culture and gate pier art. In ancient times, before entering a

courtyard house, visitors would lightly tap the pushou on the main gate using the knocker. The *pushou*, firmly affixed to the main gate to support the knocker, typically showcases intricate designs featuring fierce legendary creatures like iiaotu and bi'an (two dragon sons), lions and tigers, symbolising protection and warding off evil spirits. As one explores traditional Beijing courtyard houses, they will notice that the *pushou* on the main gates often depict these animals grasping the knocker. Some showcase their two rows of teeth, while others display their upper and lower fangs, and some even hold the knocker in their mouths. The use of pushou in ancient times was subject to strict hierarchical regulations, with majestic beast patterns reserved for the emperor or nobles. Common households' pushou were typically wrought iron, circular or hexagonal in shape, adorned with floral, plant or cloud-shaped motifs on the edges, paired with variously shaped knockers or pendants, blending aesthetics with durability. An unusual sight can be found on the main gate of Courtyard 5 in Dongsi Sitiao, featuring an ordinary pair of pushou and knockers. The circular pushou has a round border shaped like ruyi (a curved decorative object), resembling an inverted "straw hat."

Furthermore, certain traditional Beijing courtyard houses incorporate nontraditional Chinese elements. Courtyard 15 in Dongmianhua Hutong stands out as the city's sole surviving stone archway with Western architectural influences. Originally part of General Liu Fengshan's (1860-1911) mansion in the late Qing Dynasty, this courtyard house reflects his fascination with Western culture following his European



travels. Constructed with blue bricks, the brick archway boasts intricate carvings throughout. At its base, a Buddhist-style lotus pedestal adorned with floral and animal carvings supports the arch, while the top features a railing adorned with pine, plum and bamboo motifs. The sides of the archway are adorned with curio box patterns and discreet Eight Immortals motifs. Although the inscription of Chinese characters at the top, meaning "expecting to have both civil and military abilities," has faded with time and the lower patterns are incomplete, the fusion of Eastern and Western styles in the archway continues to exude enduring beauty. The passage of time has only enriched its profound and elegant allure, serving as a testament to the courtyard's evolution and recalling its captivating past and legends.





area where, during the Qing Dynasty, only four households resided in the northern part, all belonging to imperial and noble families. Among them was Courtyard 67, once home to the mother and aunt of the last empress, Wanrong (1906-1946), as well as Wang Mintong (1913-2003), who sought to marry Puyi, the last Qing emperor (reign: 1908-1911). Restored to its former splendour in 2000, this courtyard, once inhabited by Wang, now attracts a surge of university students conducting research and exploring historical sites during the summer holidays. Gathered in front of the red main gate, they listen attentively as an elderly man with a birdcage recounts the courtyard's rich history and its significance in the present day.

To uncover the history of courtyard transformations in Dongsi, visitors are often drawn to the captivating tales of Courtyard 9 in Dongsi Liutiao. In 1948, this residence served as a clandestine meeting point for the Communist Party of China in Beijing, holding negotiations with Sha Qianli (1901-1982), one of the "Seven Gentlemen" residing at Courtyard 55 along this hutong, regarding the peaceful liberation of the city. Preserved within the courtyard is an air-raid shelter, though never utilised for military purposes. Today, this shelter has found a new life, hosting electronic music parties on weekends. Visitors gather here to revel in music and dance, making it one of the city's trendiest and most distinctive bars.

Dongsi's hutongs have long been renowned as a gathering place for luminaries. In Dongsi Toutiao, one can find the former residence of the writer Qian Zhongshu (1910-1996), while Courtyard 5 in Dongsi Sitiao was once the home of the writer Chu Tunan (1899-1994). Additionally, Dongsi Batiao was once the residence of Zhang Shizhao (1881-1973), a participant in the 1911 Revolution. Randomly selecting any courtyard in this area may lead to discovering the former home of a notable historical figure. However, within Dongsi's hutongs, these individuals, like other ordinary residents, have simply left behind traces of their lives in their courtyard houses.

Courtyard 13 in Dongsi Sitiao is said to have once been the residence of a warlord from the Beiyang Government (1912-1928). Today, his grandson, currently residing in Tianjin, returns to this courtyard house every summer to reminisce about the past. The house, boasting three courtyards, still retains the grand scale of its historical significance. Its original layout remains standardised and exquisite, featuring a small gatehouse, elevated doorsteps, and upon entry through the gatehouse, a substantial brick and tile screen wall. Positioned in front of the main building are two sizable flower beds, flanked by east and west wing rooms on either side.

After being transformed into a large courtyard accommodating multiple households, smaller structures emerged within its confines, gradually filling up with various items. Nevertheless, the original charm and spaciousness of the courtyard remain evident. For instance, a structure suddenly appeared where the expansive flower bed once stood in front of the courtyard's main building. Following the abandonment of an underground air-raid shelter, a structure was erected at the entrance of the shelter to conceal it. Every corner of the courtyard bears traces of its rich history. Despite prolonged use, the buildings, along with their ancient bricks and tiles, have been meticulously preserved. The door frame of the main building, adorned with intricate carvings, along

with the window frames exudes antique charm, showcasing the aesthetic taste of the past. While the drainage outlets in the courtyard may seem unassuming, they were cleverly designed to accommodate the terrain's elevation and undulations. Despite challenging weather conditions, the drainage system has consistently performed well. With their wide and high roofs, the courtyard buildings provide favourable temperatures in winter and coolness in summer, offering a refreshingly pleasant and comfortable living environment. These elements reflect the ingenuity of traditional Beijing courtyard construction from its inception.

life. Upon moving in, he planted a tree

at the rear of the courtyard, which has

since grown into a towering presence

with a sprawling canopy. Another tree

in the courtyard, situated near the side

rooms and adjacent to the courtyard

neighbours with the gentleman's family. The residents of Courtyard 13 in Many traditional Beijing courtyard Dongsi Sitiao are primarily senior citizens. houses have transformed into expansive Among them is an elderly couple residing spaces accommodating diverse residents, in the main building, with the husband prioritising the cultivation of harmonious being the courtyard's longest-standing relationships between households. occupant. He relocated to Beijing from Despite these changes, they remain Shenyang in Liaoning Province at the cherished homes, and some Beijingers are age of 15, accompanying his father, who hesitant to part ways with them. worked in an aircraft manufacturing plant. Since then, he has called this courtyard home for the majority of his

wall, extends its branches beyond the

wall. Each May, this tree blooms with

stunning yellow flowers, and its petals

drift into the neighbouring courtyard.

lady in her 80s with silver hair, often

The owner of the side rooms, an elderly

attempts to sweep up the fallen petals to

avoid inconveniencing her neighbours.

the suggestion that the petals enhance

the courtyard's beauty. When she first

prime, residing in the cosy side rooms

with her young daughter. Over several

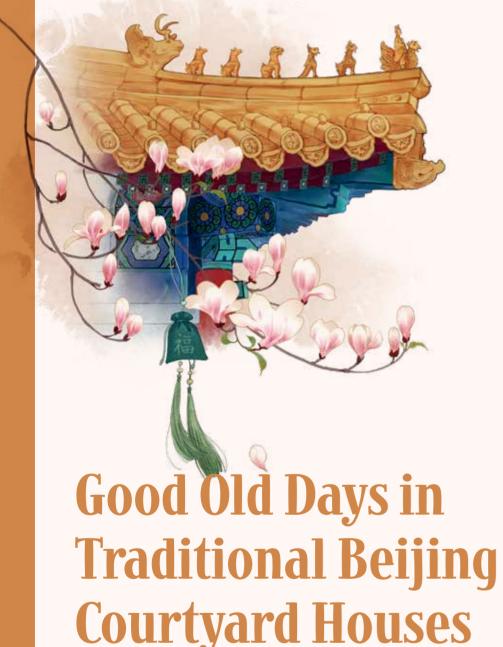
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decades, they have been cherished

moved into the courtyard, she was in her

However, she is graciously declined, with

Memories of the City



Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi

In many cities throughout China, including Beijing, progress is an ever-present phenomenon. As the capital city undergoes rapid development, its traditional courtyard houses, known as *siheyuan*, nestled within its hutongs or alleyways, have become concealed amidst towering structures. Since relocating from my former hutong courtyard house, I have

lost touch with my childhood playmates and neighbours, who were once like family to me. However, whenever I find myself passing by the site of my former residence, I am inevitably drawn to pause and search for traces of the past. Yet, it is disheartening not to find certain familiarities, such as the jujube tree.

It was a great honour for me

to compile the first chronicle on Beijing's hutong courtyard houses. This undertaking required extensive research and numerous visits to courtyard houses to meticulously examine various sources. As a result, I have documented a comprehensive record of over 900 courtyard houses across the city. This documentation includes details on the historical development of the courtyard houses, their distinctive structural features and importantly, architectural guidelines and illustrations. The compiled documentation will serve as a reliable reference for any potential reconstruction efforts of dismantled courtyard houses if the need arises.

Traditional Beijing courtyard houses have played a pivotal role in the city's development and harbour immense historical significance. The earliest traces of this architectural heritage date back to the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), particularly evident in Houyingfang Hutong, serving as a testament to the urban dwellings of that era. As the city expanded during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, the number of courtyard houses increased rapidly, exceeding 26,000 as depicted in a map of the entire city of Beijing published during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735-1796) of the Qing Dynasty. However, during the late Qing Dynasty and following its collapse, the city witnessed a marked decline in its courtyard house population. Subsequent to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the courtvard houses underwent further transformations, with many repurposed as mixed residential spaces accommodating multiple households. By the 1980s, aerial surveys revealed that there were 805 wellpreserved courtyard houses in Beijing, with 709 located within the former Inner City and 96 situated in its Outer City.

The transformations taking place in the capital evoke a mixture of regret and anticipation for new lifestyles. Many of the surviving courtyard houses in the city are no longer exclusively owned by individual households. While typical courtyard houses were once enclosed on

all sides, their original layouts no longer adhere strictly to authentic Beijing style, as a variety of structures of varying sizes and shapes have emerged within. However, despite these changes, the narrow spaces within these courtyard houses have always fostered a genuine atmosphere of mutual assistance. On the day my daughter was born, one of my neighbours, Madame Miao, accompanied my wife to the hospital. Although occasional minor disputes arose with neighbours, I often fondly reminisce about heart-warming moments, such as children from different households within the same courtyard house freely visiting each other to play and share meals. It was customary to enjoy delicious food together, such as dumplings.

These traditional Beijing courtyard houses hold a significant place in the annals of world architecture, serving as an unparalleled testament to architectural heritage. Illuminating the ancient capital with a history spanning over 3,000 years, these courtyard houses contribute immensely to its historical allure and cultural significance. Their presence enriches the cityscape, imbuing it with a unique charm and grandeur that would be sorely missed if absent.

The ancient capital is inseparable from its courtyard houses, as they embody the essence of the historical and cultural city. To truly grasp the essence of Beijing, one must explore its courtyard houses. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Beijing, then a walled city, comprised the Forbidden City at its core, surrounded by the Imperial City, Inner City and Outer City. Today, Central Beijing hosts the wellpreserved and majestic Forbidden City, serving as the imperial palace during the Ming and Qing dynasties, along with other historical buildings. These magnificent ancient structures, with their solemn red walls arranged in varying heights, evoke a sense of grandeur complemented by the distinctive shapes and colours of traditional Beijing courtyard houses located beyond the former Imperial City. In the past, the Forbidden City, Imperial City, Inner City and Outer City formed an interdependent system in Beijing's overall layout. The

central area of present-day Beijing, adorned with striking imperial buildings in vibrant colours, is starkly contrasted with the understated structures, including courtyard houses with grey walls and tiles, surrounding the area. Historically, the courtyard houses in the Inner City and Outer City were indispensable components of this integrated whole. Without these courtyard houses, the imperial capital's status could not have been elevated, nor could the charm of Beijing as one of China's magnificent ancient cities be fully showcased.

I hold a profound admiration for traditional Beijing courtyard houses, whether I am within their walls or admiring them through photographs. These courtyard houses are characterised by their classic brick and wood structures, embodying the age-old saying that "Walls will not fall though they are constructed with broken bricks." Despite the passage of time and the weathering effects, the rich cultural essence of the courtyard houses still shines beneath their aged grey walls and tiles.

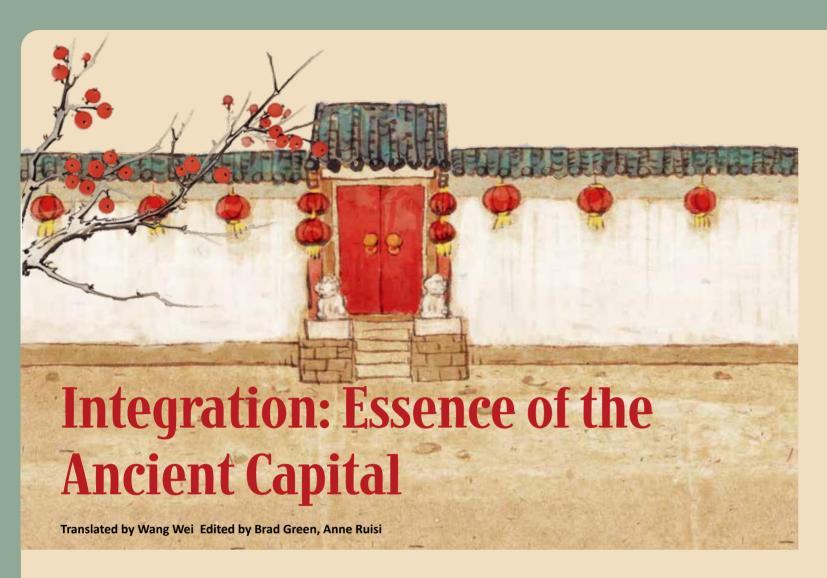
One of the most remarkable features of traditional Beijing courtyard houses is the intricate embellishment, such as carvings, that adorn them.

These decorations serve as significant highlights, exuding the essence of the

city's heritage to the fullest extent. They are not merely ornamental but hold intentional symbolism and auspicious meanings. Scattered throughout the courtyard houses, these embellishments depict the hopes and dreams of the locals, expressing their aspirations for a better life. While some of these ideals may be attainable, others remain elusive. However, they all find expression through the diverse array of decorations within the courtyard houses. Thanks to these exquisite brick, stone and wood carvings, the city's courtyard houses stand as a unique legacy, highlighting their profound cultural significance.

In recent years, Beijing has designated 40 protected areas as part of its urban planning efforts. While exploring the traditional Beijing courtyard houses, visitors may notice that the ownership of these courtyard houses has changed over time. However, the writings on the couplets adorning the main gates remain distinguishable, and the auspicious patterns carved on the gate piers continue to radiate a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Despite the fact that most of my former neighbours and I have relocated beyond Beijing's Fourth Ring Road, distancing ourselves from the city's central area, memories of our time spent in those courtyard houses often return to me in my dreams.





For quite some time, I contemplated the question of what makes the essence of Beijing. It was on an evening during the 2024 Lunar New Year holiday, as I took a leisurely stroll outside Central Beijing's Qianmen area, when I began to find my answer. The bustling energy of Qianmen Street and its neighbouring areas like Dashilar surrounded me. However, when I walked into a small hutong—a traditional Beijing alleyway—the scenery transformed. Walking along its grey brick path, enveloped by the soft glow of courtyard houses' lights and tantalised by the aromas wafting from family kitchens, I experienced a moment of clarity. Could this scene encapsulate the very essence of Beijing? Was this not the essence of how Beijing residents carry out their daily lives? I came to believe that the defining essence of the city could best be described as "fusion and harmony."

The essence of Beijing is undeniably shaped by its diverse populace. To understand the city's early inhabitants,

we must delve into its rich history dating back to ancient times. While we will not explore the era of Peking Man from today's Zhoukoudian in Fangshan District, over 700,000 years ago, given the distinction between Homo erectus and modern Homo sapiens, it is crucial to acknowledge their existence. Later ancient human species such as the New Cave Man, Upper Cave Man and the Donghulin People thrived on this land, profoundly influencing the history of what would evolve into one of the nation's great cities. Successive waves of ethnic groups including the Shanrong, Wuhuan, Xianbei, Han, Mongolian, Hui, Manchu and others further enriched the tapestry of Beijing's history, showcasing a grand mosaic of ethnic fusions. In the early 20th century, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) introduced the concept of the "Chinese nation," a notion that resonates deeply today with China's 56 ethnic groups, likened to 56 flowers in one family. Beijing stands as a central point to the nation's diverse ethnic groups, nurturing integration, development, harmony and

peace, reflecting the city's rich legacy of cultural diversity and ethnic unity.

Many native Beijingers take pride in their connection to this ancient capital, though the term "native" holds relative meaning. In 1644, the Qing Dynasty's (1644–1911) Eight Banners Army marched into Beijing, marking the Manchu people, who previously resided in northeast China, began to roll out the campaign of unifying the country. As the Qing Dynasty made Beijing its capital, the Inner City saw a predominance of Manchu residents, leading to the relocation of original inhabitants, mostly Han people, to the southern part of the capital outside Xuanwu Gate. With the Qing Dynasty's decline in the early 20th century, migrants from across the country flooded to the capital, resulting in cultural fusions, exemplified by the emergence of over 10 Jiangsu-style restaurants along Chang'an Avenue. By the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Beijing's permanent population stood at a mere

2 million. Today, however, the figure has since multiplied tenfold and this ancient capital thrives as a melting pot, welcoming residents of diverse backgrounds. Some trace their lineage to those who settled post-1949, while others arrived from various regions in pursuit of opportunities.

Beijing boasts a storied history spanning over 3,000 years of urban development and has served as a capital for more than 800 years. A hallmark of ancient Beijing was its meticulously planned city layout, even before physical construction began. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), Liu Bingzhong (1216-1274) crafted the design for Dadu, the precursor to present-day Beijing, drawing inspiration from the imperial city concept outlined in Kaogongji, a renowned ancient Chinese treatise on science and technology. In Dadu, all imperial structures and civilian residences faced south for precise alignment, reflecting meticulous planning. A grand central axis cut through the city, adorned with symmetrical buildings flanking it on either side, symbolising the authority of imperial power. Renowned Italian explorer Marco Polo (1254-1324) lauded Dadu as one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Since ancient times, the city of Beijing has been shaped and nurtured by the ingenuity of its working people. Notably, while the Yuan Dynasty's Dadu was masterminded by Liu Bingzhong, a native of Xingtai, Hebei Province, Aniko (1244-1306), hailing from present-day Nepal, left a lasting mark on the city during the same era with the design and construction of the White Dagoba. Moving into the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Nguyen An (1381–1453), originating from what is now Vietnam, oversaw the construction of Beijing's formidable city walls. Kuai Xiang (1398–1481), chief carpenter for the Forbidden City's three main halls during the Ming Dynasty, hailed from Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. The Lei family, renowned for their architectural prowess in shaping the imperial buildings of the Qing Dynasty in Beijing, traced their origins to Jiangxi Province. Post-1949, the builders behind Beijing's top 10 structures and subsequent landmark projects such as the "Bird's
Nest" and "Water Cube" for the 2008 and
2022 Olympic Games, as well as the
expansive Beijing subway system,
hailed from diverse regions across
the nation. Beijing, renowned for
its harmonious ambiance, stands
as a testament to the convergence
of global wisdom and collective
endeavours throughout its history.

The culture of Beijing is a

tapestry woven with richness and

profundity, a testament to harmonious integration. Peking Opera, celebrated as one of the world's great performing arts and a pinnacle of traditional Chinese culture, emerged from a fusion of diverse art forms from across the nation. During Emperor Qianlong's reign (1735–1796), the collaboration of four major troupes from Anhui Province with artists versed in Han tunes from Hubei Province, alongside influences from Kungu Opera and Qin Opera, sparked an exchange and integration that birthed Peking Opera. A notable aspect of Peking Opera is the portrayal of characters of high status speaking or singing in the Hubei accent, while young male roles adorned with painted faces feature the distinctive Beijing dialect, a hallmark seldom found in other traditional Chinese theatrical forms. Transitioning to the luminaries of the New Culture Movement in the 1910s and 1920s, who left an indelible mark on Beijing, figures like Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) and Hu Shi (1891-1962) hailed from Anhui, while Li Dazhao (1889-1927) originated from Hebei and Lu Xun (1881-1936) from Zhejiang. Additionally, Ku Hung-ming also known as Gu Hongming (1857-1928), born in present-day Malaysia, stood out for his conservative ideologies and self-identification as a "person from all directions."

In today's Beijing, one can experience a world where traditional Peking Opera, Western opera, *erhu* (a traditional Chinese two-stringed bowed instrument) and rock and roll tunes coexist in harmony, as do time-honoured brands and trendy

bars. The city boasts a juxtaposition of the magnificent Forbidden City and avantgarde cultural and creative parks like Songzhuang Art Town. Beijing, an ancient capital yet a modern metropolis, embodies a fusion of traditional local culture, patriotism and a culture of innovation.

Integration indeed lies at the heart of Beijing's character, defining its essence.



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Preserving the Historical Memory of Traditional Beijing Courtyard Houses

The Chronicle of Traditional Beijing Courtyard Houses, compiled over a five-year period by the Office of Beijing Municipal Committee for Local Chronicle Compilation, presents a pleasant mixture of text and captivating photos. It boasts over 4,000 architectural drawings of traditional Beijing courtyard houses (siheyuan), more than 700 layout plans for courtyard residences and over 40 detailed maps depicting the layout of related streets. Published by the Beijing Publishing Group in 2016, this chronicle has garnered widespread popularity, emerging as a pivotal addition to the nation's foremost libraries.

The chronicle precisely elucidates the origins, architectural forms and cultural traditions of traditional Beijing courtyard houses. It documents their preservation, utilisation and evolution, showcasing the unique residential folk culture of the ancient capital. Each narrative and legendary figure adds vibrant hues to the city's courtyard houses, characterised by grey brick walls and grey-tiled roofs.

The book delves deep into the intricacies of prominent courtyard houses, detailing their geographical locations, historical evolution, structural regulations and cultural backgrounds, along with key events and figures associated with them. Enhanced by an array of diagrams, layouts and drawings, these visual representations offer a comprehensive insight into the current state and distinctive features of these courtyard residences, amplifying the richness of the textual narratives. Notably, the meticulously crafted courtyard layout plans by the Beijing Institute of Ancient Architecture stand out, accurately capturing the form and structure of the courtyard houses. This feature

significantly bolsters the chronicle's scholarly merit and augments the potential for the reconstruction of select courtyards.

To compile the chronicle effectively, its compilers extensively employed survey results and data on national cultural relics provided by the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau. They conducted comprehensive on-site research across all 16 districts of the city, gathering a wealth of valuable information. This involved examining the layouts of courtyard houses, rediscovering their stories, verifying related historical facts and capturing numerous photographs. The chronicle, totalling one million characters and showcasing over 900 traditional Beijing courtyard houses, underwent five years of rigorous revisions before its release, cementing its status as an authoritative publication in this field.



A New Exhibition of Artist Duo Craig & Karl Opens in Beijing



The artist duo Craig & Karl, comprising Craig Redman and Karl Maier, is celebrated for their distinctive pop art style and surrealist spirit. They continuously challenge traditional art concepts with their bold use of colours and innovative visual language, capturing widespread attention and igniting dynamic discussions. Their expansive exhibition, titled "Inside Out," is presently showcased at the Times Art Museum in Beijing.

This exhibition features over 100 installation works, spanning a vast 2,000-square-metre space adorned with nearly 100 different colours, transforming the museum into a vividly imaginative realm. Visitors are not only treated to the

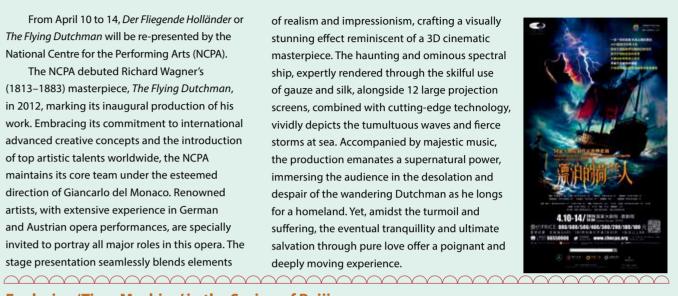
duo's classic portrait series, witnessing the revival of ancient art forms, but also engage in various interactive activities. immersing themselves in the fusion of art and sports. The innovative spatial design of the exhibition invites visitors on a journey between the fantastical realms of "Zoom in" and "Zoom out," experiencing the impact of giant sculptures at times and the whimsy of miniature worlds on tabletops at others. This unique spatial narrative not only showcases the artists' boundless creativity and imagination but also invites visitors to explore the limitless possibilities of art while enjoying their masterpieces. The exhibition will remain open until May 26.

Re-presenting The Flying Dutchman

From April 10 to 14, Der Fliegende Holländer or The Flying Dutchman will be re-presented by the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA).

The NCPA debuted Richard Wagner's (1813–1883) masterpiece, The Flying Dutchman, in 2012, marking its inaugural production of his work. Embracing its commitment to international advanced creative concepts and the introduction of top artistic talents worldwide, the NCPA maintains its core team under the esteemed direction of Giancarlo del Monaco. Renowned artists, with extensive experience in German and Austrian opera performances, are specially invited to portray all major roles in this opera. The stage presentation seamlessly blends elements

of realism and impressionism, crafting a visually stunning effect reminiscent of a 3D cinematic masterpiece. The haunting and ominous spectral ship, expertly rendered through the skilful use of gauze and silk, alongside 12 large projection screens, combined with cutting-edge technology, vividly depicts the tumultuous waves and fierce storms at sea. Accompanied by majestic music, the production emanates a supernatural power, immersing the audience in the desolation and despair of the wandering Dutchman as he longs for a homeland. Yet, amidst the turmoil and suffering, the eventual tranquillity and ultimate salvation through pure love offer a poignant and deeply moving experience.



Exploring 'Time Machine' in the Spring of Beijing

On March 23, the UCCA Centre for Contemporary Art in Beijing welcomed the opening of "Hiroshi Sugimoto: Time Machine," the first major institutional solo exhibition of the internationally acclaimed artist Hiroshi Sugimoto.

This exhibition offers a comprehensive retrospective of Hiroshi Sugimoto's 50-year artistic journey, presenting over 120 works from more than 10 series. Revered in China, Sugimoto is acclaimed for his meticulous use of largeformat cameras and hand-developed black-andwhite prints from in his own darkroom, as well as his profound exploration of photography themes spanning from the 19th century onwards.

These themes include dioramas, wax figures and architecture. The exhibition highlights some of Sugimoto's most iconic series, such as seascapes, theatres, lightning fields and portraits. Additionally, visitors have the opportunity to view a series of Sugimoto's specially created calligraphic works for the first time. Through these diverse works of art, Sugimoto embarks on a philosophical and playful examination of established notions of time and memory, underscoring the multifaceted nature of photography as a medium that seamlessly blends documentary and inventive elements. The exhibition will remain on display until June 23.



A Drama for Women, Directed and Performed by Women

American dramatist Marsha Norman's acclaimed work *Night*, *Mother* is scheduled to grace the stage of the Beijing International Theatre Centre on March 29. Directed by two female directors, Tang Ye and Gong Lijun, this production features a cast comprising solely two female characters. This innovative approach marks the first of its kind at the Beijing People's Art Theatre.

The drama, which garnered the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, revolves around a daughter and her mother engaging in a profound and reflective conversation over the course of a single evening. From a female perspective, it delves into themes

of family, marriage and life. While the essence of the drama carries a weighty tone, the collaborative effort of the two directors infuses it with a touch of humour. The dialogues between the mother and daughter are subtly laced with humour, intertwined with a sense of helplessness that carries a hint of understanding. In this production, both performers opt for minimal makeup, and all stage elements maintain a realistic aesthetic. There is no background music or effects, ensuring that the entire focus remains on the dialogue between the two performers. The performance is scheduled to run until April 15.



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