

## Chapter 2

# The Transformation of the Old City of Beijing, China—A Concrete Manifestation of New China's Cultural Reconstruction

In the modern world, China is both a developing nation and a newly emerging socialist state. Coming from an ancient cultural tradition, she now faces a new era of unprecedented social change. While overhauling her backward economy and actively pursuing reconstruction and modernization, she is also rapidly developing a new socialist culture. In the process of modernization and reconstruction, it is necessary for China to adopt the foreign science and technology according to her own needs. But the development of a new socialist culture, however, entails a more important and complex problem: how to identify and preserve the valuable part of China's own traditional culture.

It is impossible, of course, for China's new socialist culture to drop from the sky, or be imported intact from any particular foreign country. It can only grow from China's own native soil. This is not to say that all foreign cultural influence should be rejected, but it can only contribute positively to China's new, modern culture by being first fused with China's unique traditional culture. Taking into account this background of great social change, this essay attempts to describe and explain a concrete example of the issues which must be faced in creating the new socialist culture. In presenting the problem of transforming an old, historical city into a modern, new one, I can only offer the perspective of an historical geographer, not that of a specialist in city planning, but hope this discussion has some value in that context.

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## 2.1 The Relevance of Ancient Chinese Planning Theory

With the growth of world urbanization in recent times, city planning as a specialized science has become more complex and more important each day. But it is not a new science, as it was already flourishing in some of the great civilizations of antiquity. Ancient China was no exception, and Paul Wheatley has drawn particular attention to the symbolic nature of the “ideal” planned layout of ancient China’s cities, citing corroborative evidence in the *Book of Artificers* (Kao Gong Ji). One of the outstanding features of the ideal layout is the north-south axis of the whole city, and “this axial design is superbly executed in Pei-Ching [Beijing].”<sup>1</sup>

The *Book of Artificers* was completed around the fifth century BC and deals primarily with manufacturing technology. It also records the plan for the construction of the imperial capital, which is somewhat ambiguous and has been subject to varying interpretations and reconstructions. The main points of the plan include the following. First, the capital should be laid out as a square, surrounded by a city wall; each side should extend nine *li* (Chinese mile, equal to about 1/2 km) and contain three city gates. Second, within the city there should be nine longitudinal and nine latitudinal thoroughfares, or three longitudinal and three latitudinal thoroughfares, each consisting of three chariot lanes. Third, in the center of the capital is the Imperial Palace of the emperor. On the left side of the Imperial Palace is the “Tai Miao,” where the emperor pays homage to his ancestors. On the right side is the “She-ji Tan,” where he worships the gods of soil and grain. The front part of the Imperial Palace is the emperor’s administrative center, and to the rear of the Imperial Palace is the capital’s main market and commercial center.

These declarations in the *Book of Artificers* refer to the capital and largest city of the empire; “left,” “right,” “front,” and “back” refer to the four cardinal directions (respectively east, west, south, and north). The Imperial Palace of the emperor faced true south and was located in the geometric center of the whole city. Tai Miao (the Imperial Ancestral Temple) lay to its east, She-ji Tan (the Altar of Soil and Grain) lay to its west, and the city market to its north. The city was aligned along a north-south axis, facing the south and with its back to the north. This orientation bore a close relationship to the residential traditions of the lower reaches of the Yellow River (Huang Ho), where Chinese civilization originated. The plains of the lower Yellow River, small ones such as the Jing-Wei and Yi-Lo Basins as well as the great North China Plain, have a flat and open topography. They are located in the temperate zone, characterized by strong prevailing monsoons and four distinct seasons, with hot, rainy summers and cold, blustery winters. In order to maximize ventilation in summer, while in winter providing maximum exposure to the sun and shelter from the cold north wind, residential structures in this area were built to open toward the south, with their backs to the north. Over time, these evolved into the *si-he-yuan*

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1971, p. 425.

(house built around a courtyard). The *si-he-yuan* has structures facing the center on all four sides, with the principal one, called the *zheng-fang*, on the north.

The *si-he-yuan* is, in fact, the “cell” of traditional Chinese city structure. If the streets and alleys defined by rows of *si-he-yuan* are arranged in a certain pattern and surrounded by a wall, a city is formed. The emperor’s palace in the national capital was simply a grand *si-he-yuan*, or a collection of them, surrounded by a palace wall and referred to as the Gong Cheng or Imperial City. The Imperial City was supposed to have a dominant position, at the center of the city’s primary north-south axis, and this central location symbolized the center of the cosmos. Also, according to ancient custom the “Tai Miao” could only be built in the nation’s capital.

China is an agrarian nation, and the “She-ji Tan” was an important symbol of the emperor’s authority. As for the market, it was a necessity of city life. All these basic elements of the city were clearly set forth in the *Book of Artificers*. Of all the written works concerning the construction of the capital city which have been passed down from antiquity, this is the earliest and most important, and had the greatest influence on the actual design of the ancient capitals.

Of the several imperial capitals in Chinese history, the last built was Beijing, or more specifically, that part of modern Beijing referred to as the “Old City,” and it is the actual design of this city that comes the closest to expressing the ancient principle of “palace in front, market in back, ancestral temple on right, altar of soil and grain on left.” After the foundation of New China, the capital was re-established in Beijing, with its center in the Old City, and work commenced to build a “people’s capital” for the new socialist era. Thus, the redevelopment of Beijing’s Old City plan became an urgent task. In order to fully understand the nature of this task, it is necessary to examine the plan of Beijing’s Old City in some detail.

## 2.2 Early Planning and the Rise of Dadu City

Although Beijing is an ancient city with a history spanning 3,000 years, it has been in its present location only since the establishment of Dadu City by the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) in the thirteenth century. The previous location was in what is now the southwest suburbs of the city. The last and largest city built in this old location was Zhongdu, the capital of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234). The establishment of Zhongdu marked the beginning of Beijing’s emergence as a national political center.

To the northeast of Zhongdu City there was a scenic area with a natural lake, which was utilized by the Jin emperor. The lake was expanded on its southern part and two islands were created and an imperial retreat, called the Tai-ning Palace (Palace of Great Tranquility) was built (Fig. 2.1). In the year 1215, the army of the Mongolian leader Genghis Khan swept down from the north, occupying Zhongdu City and razing the Imperial Palace. But Tai-ning Palace outside the city was spared. Forty-five years later, Genghis Khan’s grandson, Kublai Khan, in order to consolidate his rule over China, decided to establish his capital in Zhongdu. But the



aqueduct had been constructed to divert the water of the Yongding River (then called the Lu-gou River) eastward, following the natural topography, to the north moat of Zhongdu City. From there a canal continued eastward to Tong-zhou (east of present-day Beijing). The plan was to bring together river shipments of grain and other material at Tong-zhou for transshipment to Zhongdu. But when the Yongding River flooded, however, it could not be effectively controlled, and the scheme proved to be unworkable.

Kublai Khan therefore decided to abandon old Zhongdu City and commissioned the Han scholar Liu Bing-zhong, who was acquainted with the ancient classics as well as experienced in city construction, to draw up plans for a new city centered on the lake by Tai-ning Palace. Liu Bing-zhong and his student Guo Shou-jing, an expert astronomer and hydraulic engineer, began directing the construction of the new city and its canal system in 1267, but the work was not completed until 1285. What they created was the historically renowned Dadu City. It was during the construction of Dadu that Marco Polo visited China and became an official of the Yuan Dynasty. Later, after his return to Italy, he recalled the grandeur of Dadu and the splendor of the palace in his account of “Khanbaliq” in *Marco Polo’s Journal*.

This account of the founding and initial construction of Dadu City is well enough documented, but the decisions concerning planning and design of the city are more obscure since no official papers or other accounts have been passed down. The only direct evidence for the city’s internal organization consists of a restored map of Dadu City and some incomplete historical records. My own reconstruction of the city’s plan development is as follows.

First, it was decided that the north-south axis of the city would be located close by the east bank of the northern part of the lake, which at that time was called Ji-shui Tan (see Fig. 2.1). The north end of this axis was set at the northeast bank of Ji-shui Tan. The emperor’s palace, surrounded on four sides by a palace wall (which became known much later as the “Forbidden City”), was located on the east bank of the southern part of the lake and centered on the city’s north-south axis.

On the west bank were two palace complexes, the southerly one being the palace of the crown prince and the northerly one the palace of the emperor’s mother, or “empress dowager.” These two complexes were also surrounded each on four sides by a palace wall, and faced the emperor’s palace from afar across the lake. In the middle of the lake, equidistant from the three palaces, was a small island, which remained from the old Tai-ning Palace complex, called Ying-zhou. Bridges extending from Ying-zhou Island to the east and west shores of the lake connected the three palaces together. North of Ying-zhou Island was a larger island, called Qiong-hua Island, upon which was the main concentration of buildings of the Tai-ning Palace. Surrounding the three palace complexes was a city wall, which defined what was known as the “Royal City.” Henceforth the south lake was surrounded by the Royal City, and according to tradition, was given the name “Tai-ye Chi” (Supreme Liquid Lake). Around the shore of Tai-ye Chi an imperial park was planned.

Since the northern part of the lake now lay outside the Royal City, and being separated from the southern part, a canal was constructed to divert its outflow

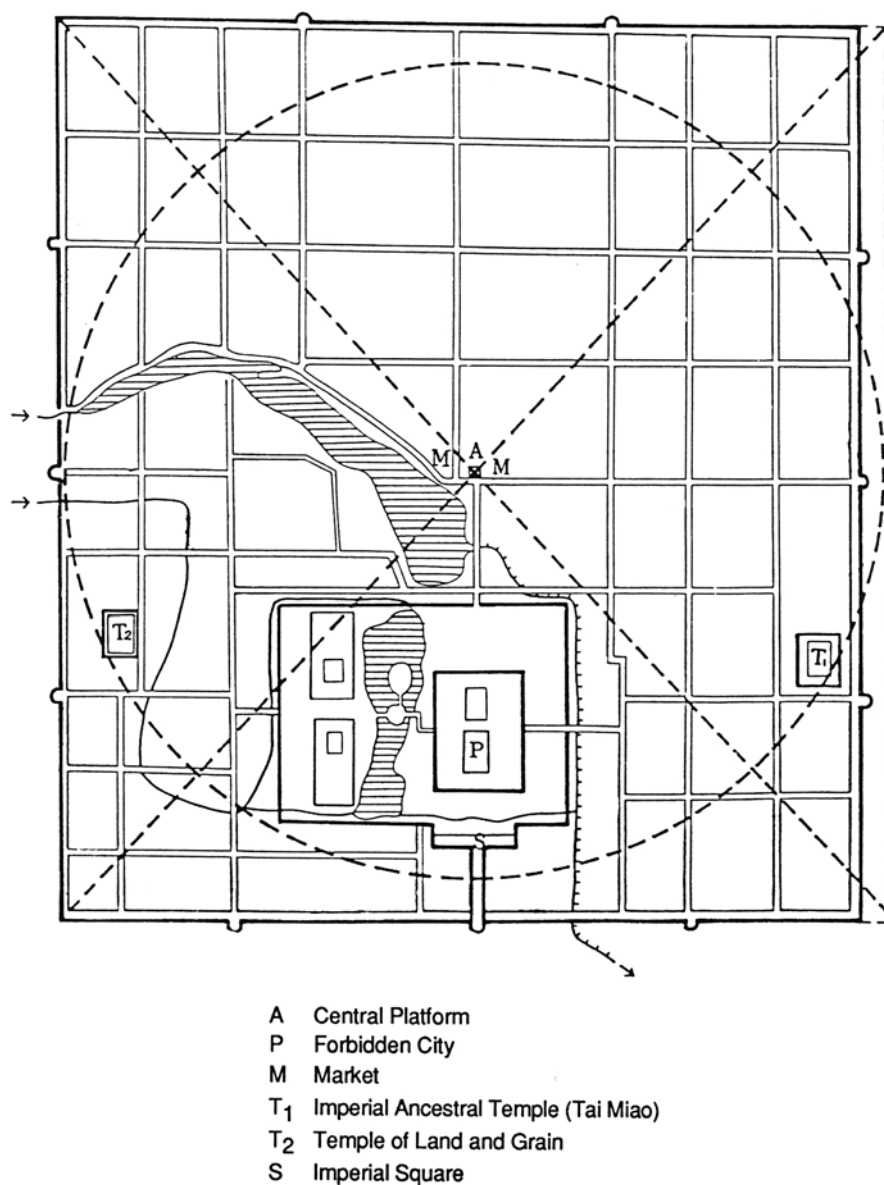
around the east wall of the Royal City and on toward the south suburbs. At the same time, a new source of water was found for the Royal City's Tai-ye Chi; an aqueduct was dug connecting the lake to a spring at the foot of Yu-quan (Pearl Spring) Hill northwest of the city. The outflow from the lake passed along the front of the Imperial Palace, then out to join the canal which drained Ji-shui Tan (see Fig. 2.1).

A large secular city was constructed around the Royal City. The plan for the large city placed its geometric center at the north end of the axis of the Royal City. At that site a platform was built, and on it were inscribed the four characters "Zhong Xin Zhi Tai," meaning "Central Platform." This shows clearly the careful measurement that went into the city's layout. From the Central Platform on the east to its western end, Ji-shui Tan is about 3.3 km in east-west extent. The location of the west wall of the enlarged city was set a little farther than this from the city center. Ideally, this should have been the standard distance determining the location of the east wall of the enlarged city. The land at that easterly location, however, was swampy and unsuitable for heavy construction, so the east wall could not be placed that far out. The south wall of the enlarged city was located about 3.75 km from the Central Platform, that being the distance which allowed the Royal City to be included within the enlarged city. It was then decided that the north wall should be placed at the same distance. Consequently, the shape of the enlarged city after the construction of the four walls was that of a slightly elongated rectangle.

The east, west, and south walls of the enlarged city each had three gates, but the north wall only two. Inside the southernmost gate of the east wall was built the Tai Miao, and inside the southernmost gate of the west wall was built the She-ji Tan. Spanning the area between the eleven city gates, which were spaced at approximately equal distances from one another, were wide avenues. Including the "wall streets," which ran along the insides of the city walls, there were nine aligned north-south and nine east-west. Many smaller lanes were laid out running east-west between the primary north-south avenues. Thus, the basic layout of all of Dadu City was accomplished (Fig. 2.2).

At this point, it is important to note the special significance of the location of the central gate of the south city wall, at the south end of the city's north-south axis. Along the sides of the "Imperial Road" which connected this city gate to the south gate of the Royal City, a T-shaped square was built. This was equivalent to the so-called "Wai Chao" (Outer Court) of antiquity. Precisely located along the central axis of the whole city were the chief buildings of the emperor's palace, as well as the emperor's throne. The purpose of this was to demonstrate that the emperor was "number one under heaven," a concept with great symbolic meaning.

The last major project in the construction of Dadu was the tapping of the springs of the mountains to the northwest to provide the city's water supply (Fig. 2.3). All these springs, except for those of Yu-quan Hill which were used exclusively to feed the Royal City's Tai-ye Chi, were brought together into a single channel which flowed into Dadu City's Ji-shui Tan. From there, these waters were channeled southward around the east wall of the Royal City, joining the old Jin Dynasty canal in the



**Fig. 2.2** The layout of Dadu City (Beijing)

southern suburbs which led to Tong-zhou. At Tong-zhou this joined with the historically renowned Grand Canal, which linked the area to China's southern regions. The northern terminus of the Grand Canal system therefore was Ji-shui Tan, which became a bustling port, crowded with boats laden with grain and goods

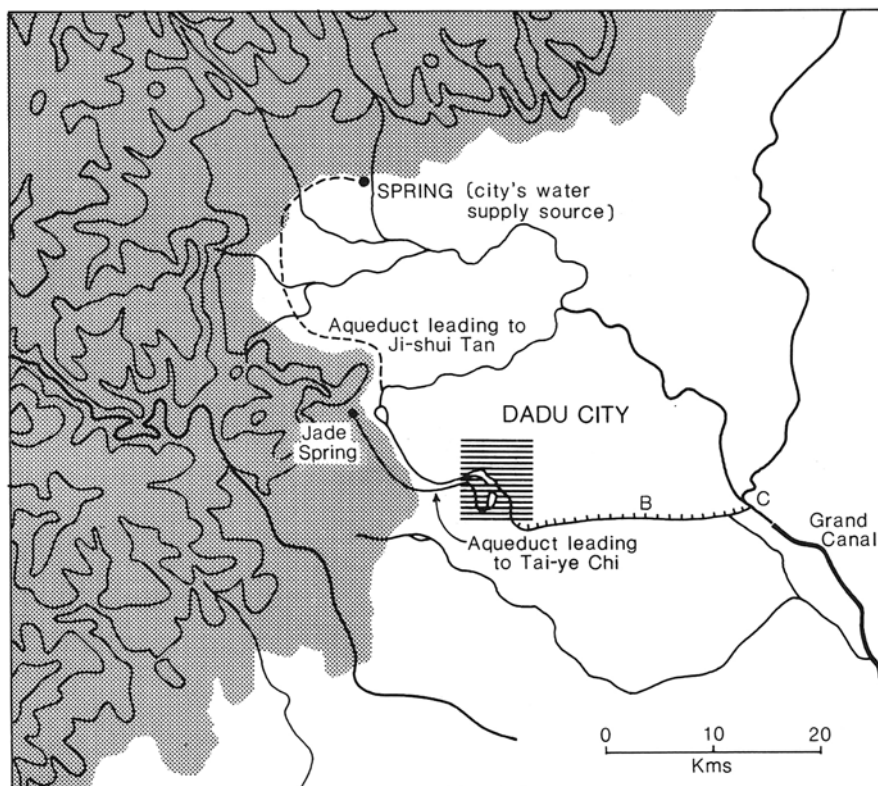
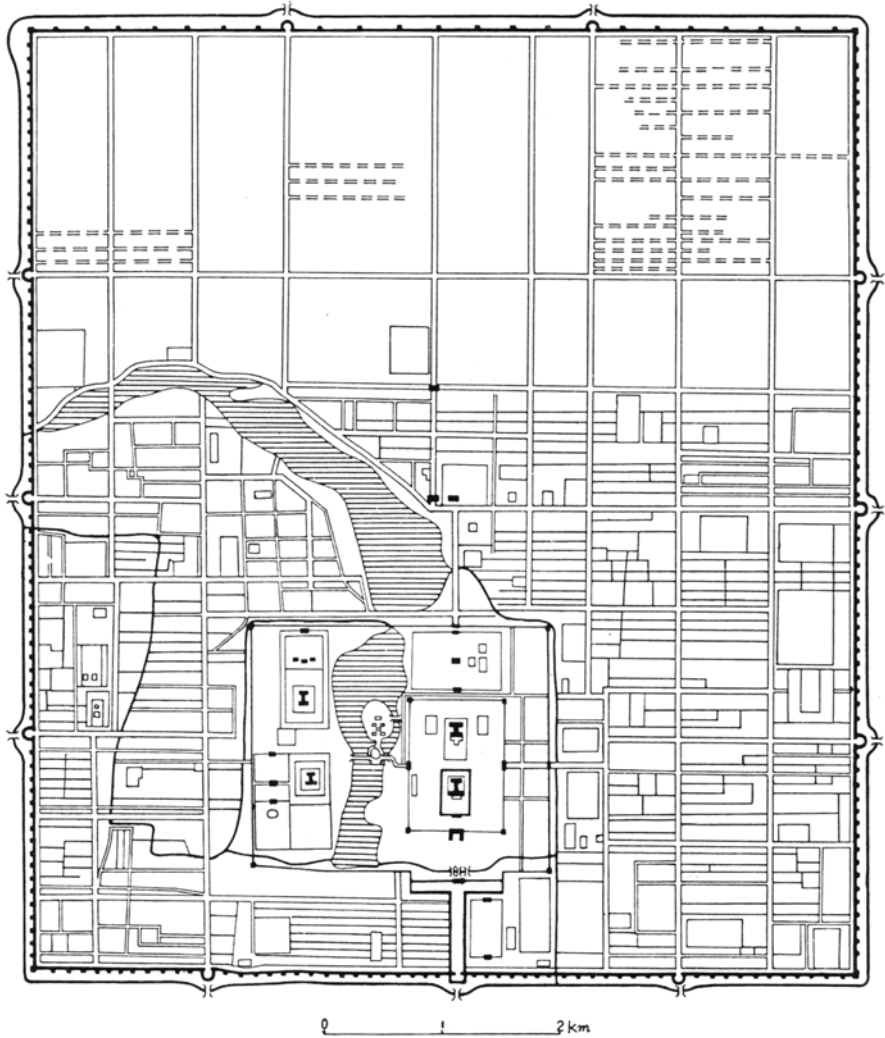


Fig. 2.3 Waterways in the vicinity of Dadu City (Beijing)

from the lower valley of the Changjiang (Yangtze River). An area on its northeast shore, including the vicinity of the Central Platform and a street along the north side of the lake, became the most prosperous commercial center of the city (Fig. 2.4).

The Yuan Dynasty's construction of Dadu City required 18 years from beginning to end. If the design of Dadu is compared to the elements of ideal city layout set forth in the *Book of Artificers*, such as "palace in front, market in back, temple of ancestors on right, altar of soil and grain on left," and the street plan, it can be seen that these principles were completely realized in the construction of the city. Thus, the design of Dadu City without question had its origins deep in Chinese culture. But it was not just a machine-like copy of the ancient ideal form; its sides were not built in the form of a perfect square, but rather the ideal was modified to meet the requirements of reality to produce a creative work. By building the city around a wide body of water and extending its north-south dimension, it was possible to create a great city which combined grandeur with beautiful scenery. Moreover, the main elements of the ideal plan were still strongly represented, and this was no mean achievement.





Dashed double lines indicate street locations established by archeological evidence; In empty areas, archeological evidence is lacking.

Fig. 2.4 Reconstruction of the layout of Dadu City (Beijing) during the Yuan Dynasty

2.3 Planning Changes in the Ming and Qing Periods

Less than a century after Dadu City was built, an uprising in the lower reaches of the Changjiang (Yangtze River) resulted in the establishment of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), which eventually extended its rule over the whole of China. The Ming

Dynasty originally had its capital at Nanjing. After it occupied Dadu, it changed that city's name to Beiping or "North Pacification." During the reign of the third emperor, who intended to rule from Beiping, to begin with the name was changed to Beijing, or "Northern Capital," and then the capital function itself was moved from Nanjing to Beijing. Concurrently, a major reconstruction of the city was begun (Fig. 2.5).

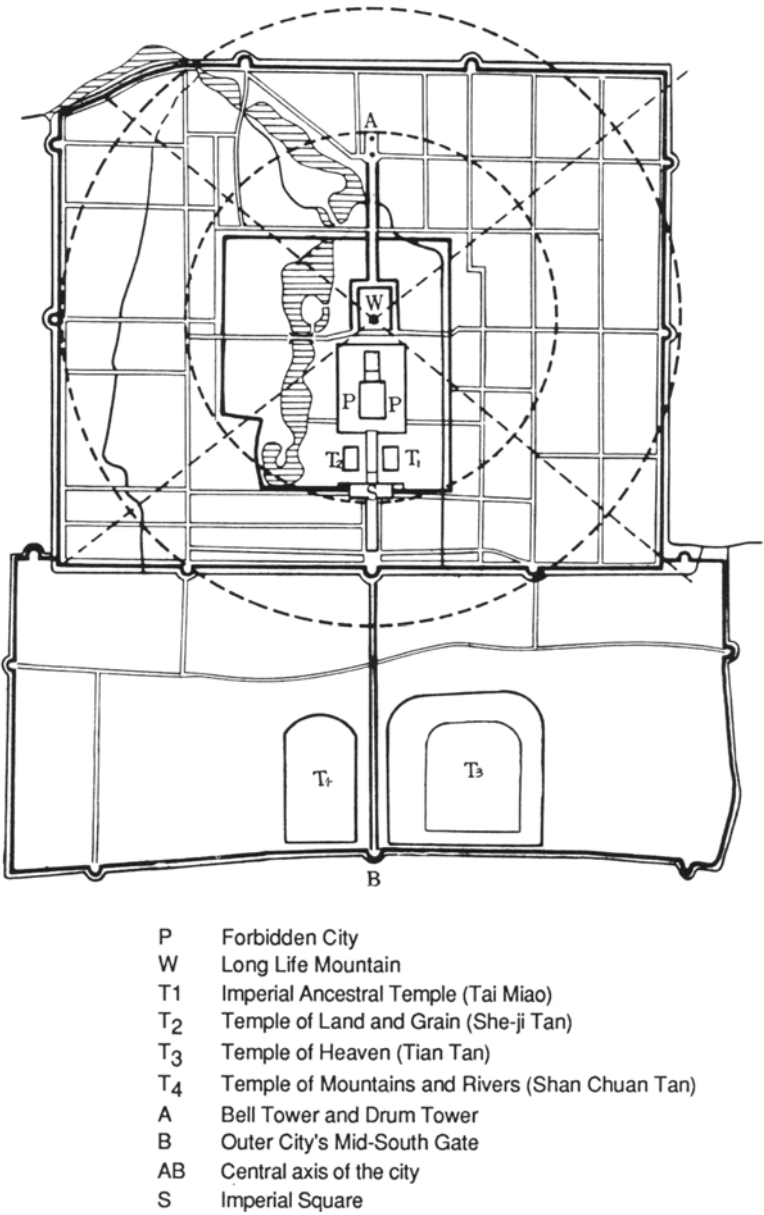


Fig. 2.5 Dadu City's transformation into Beijing City under the Ming dynasty

First, the north city wall was moved about 2.5 km to the south, leaving the northwest part of Ji-shui Tan outside the city. Then both the south city wall and the emperor's palace were rebuilt a little to the south. This reconstruction produced the new emperor's palace, or the Forbidden City, which has been passed down to the present, and is today's Palace Museum. Within the Ming Dynasty's Forbidden City, the most important buildings were a row of six great palaces, built along the city's main axis, which symbolized the supreme power of the emperor. The geometric center of the whole city was no longer at the Central Platform, but had shifted south to a point just north of the new Forbidden City. In order to clearly mark the new city center, soil excavated from a new artificial lake at the southern end of the Tai-ye Chi and from a newly constructed moat of the Forbidden City was used to build a hill about seventy meters high. This was named Wan-sui Shan (Long Life Mountain) and symbolized the eternal ruling power of the emperor.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Tai Miao and She-ji Tan were moved from their old locations inside the east and west walls to new locations just outside the south gate of the Forbidden City. They were still placed on the left and right sides of the meridional axis, respectively, in keeping with the tradition of "Tai Miao to the right and She-ji Tan to the left." At the same time, the south, north, and east walls of the Royal City were extended a bit, so the Tai Miao, She-ji Tan, and the new lake south of Tai-ye Chi were all contained within them.<sup>3</sup>

More importantly, two major new groups of buildings were constructed in the southern suburbs, one east and one west of the meridional axis. To the east was the Tian Tan (Temple of Heaven), where the emperor paid homage to the gods of heaven, and to the west was the Shan Chuan Tan (Altar of Mountain and River), where he paid his respects to the gods of mountain and river.<sup>4</sup> Up until 1553, this southern part of Beijing was outside the city wall; then an "outer wall" was built to formally incorporate the above-mentioned temple and altar into the city. The middle gate of this new outer wall was situated on the center axis, between these two groups of buildings. The main north-south road within the gate was built along the axis.

At the northern end of the axis, where the old Central Platform was located, two new buildings were constructed: the Bell Tower to the north and the Drum Tower to the south. The newly extended north-south axis had a full length of almost 8 km. The Forbidden City occupied the most important location on the axis; to its north, standing like a picture screen, was Wan-sui Shan; to its south, on the left and right, were the Tai Miao and the She-ji Tan. Between these two temples was the Central Imperial Avenue, which started at the Wu Men (Meridional Gate) at the center of the south side of the Forbidden City and extended to the Tian-an Men (Gate of Heavenly Peace)<sup>5</sup> at the center of the south side of the

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<sup>2</sup>Later the name was changed to Jing Shan (Scenic Mountain) and also Mei Shan (Coal Hill).

<sup>3</sup>During this period, the canal formerly outside the Royal City's east wall was incorporated into the Royal City, and shipping on the Grand Canal was thus unable to reach Ji-shui Tan. The lower part of Ji-shui Tan was connected with Tai-ye Chi to the south, and the aqueduct which had been specifically created to supply water to Tai-ye Chi was abandoned. Altogether, the city's water system regressed under the Ming Dynasty's management.

<sup>4</sup>The name "Shan Chuan Tan" was later changed to "Xian-nong Tang" (Altar of the God of Agriculture).

<sup>5</sup>During the Ming Dynasty, the Tian-an Men was called the Cheng-tian Men.

Royal City. After passing through the Tian-an Men, the avenue widened into a T-shaped palace square. The square was bounded on three sides by red brick walls. Inside the east and west walls, long corridors called the “Corridor of a Thousand Steps” were built. Outside the south central gate of the square was the south central gate of the inner city wall. This gate was known as the Zheng-yang Men, or Front Gate, and the part of Beijing which lay beyond it was called the outer city. Along the main axis of the city, which had been extended, the fundamental principles of the design of Dadu City were further developed, and a higher aesthetic level was achieved.

The Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the last imperial dynasty in China’s history, also established its capital in Beijing. Besides erecting more palace buildings in the Forbidden City and in the imperial park around Tai-ye Chi, it did not do much to change the layout of the city. Thus Beijing City—or as we now call it, Beijing’s Old City—was preserved until the eve of the birth of New China. Starting with the principles set forth in the *Book of Artificers* with adjustments made to accommodate local geographical characteristics, and then having gone through numerous reconstructions, Beijing has finally come down to us as the ultimate expression of the ideal traditional Chinese city.

It is just this Beijing City that has been the object of high praise from Western urban planners. For example, the renowned Danish architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen, in the preface to his book *Towns and Buildings*, wrote:

There are excellent German and Japanese guide books giving detailed information about every single palace and temple in Peking. But they do not contain a single mention of the fact that the entire city is one of the wonders of the world, in its symmetry and clarity a unique monument, the culmination of a great civilization.<sup>6</sup>

Another example is provided by the distinguished American city planner Edmund Bacon, who was Executive Director of the Philadelphia Planning Commission for 20 years and made an important contribution to historic preservation and restoration in that city. In his book *Design of Cities* he wrote this regarding Beijing’s Old City:

Possibly the greatest single work of man on the face of the earth is Peking. This Chinese city, designed as the domicile of the Emperor, was intended to mark the center of the universe. The city is deeply enmeshed in ritualistic formulae and religious concepts which do not concern us now. Nevertheless, it is so brilliant in design that it provides a rich storehouse of ideas for the city of today.<sup>7</sup>

Bacon’s comment is noteworthy. As a center of imperial rule, he said, it was a great design achievement and should be studied by city planners today. At the same time, he points out that it contains much that does not serve the needs of the present. This clearly reveals the dilemma we face today.

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<sup>6</sup>Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, paperback edition. Cambridge, Mass.: First M. I. T. Press, 1969. Preface, p. v.

<sup>7</sup>Edmund N. Bacon, *Design of Cities*, revised edition. London: Penguin Books, 1980, p. 244.

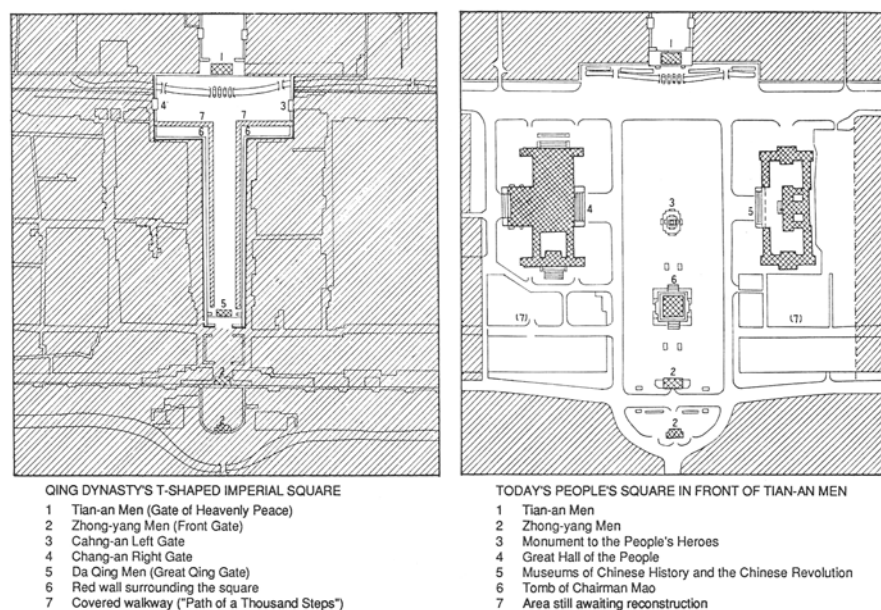
## 2.4 Plan Changes in the New China Era

Following the progress of history and the passage of time, old cities—especially those of intricate design—unavoidably face the necessity of continuous redevelopment. This is especially true in the case of Beijing's Old City, since the single underlying motif of all its splendid architecture and ingenious design—namely, symbolizing the supremacy of a medieval sovereign—stands in such sharp contrast to the spirit of the present time. The establishment of New China represents the beginning of a new, socialist era. As Beijing is the nation's capital in this new era, the reconstruction of the city should reflect the fact that the people are now the true masters of their country.

How can this reconstruction effectively be carried out? First, it must be seen that this is not simply a matter of engineering and technology, but also a problem concerning our custodianship of a venerable historical and cultural inheritance, as well as the challenge of creating a new socialist civilization.

All of Beijing's Old City is part of China's historical and cultural inheritance. It is a symbol of the magnificent development of China's culture in imperial times. As Rasmussen pointed out, it is a significant monument to the highest achievements of a great civilization. The new Beijing City, as the people's capital and a symbol of the new socialist culture, can only rise from this historical foundation. But as we assume our charge over this historical and cultural legacy, we must adhere to the principle of maintaining a critical perspective. We can neither totally deny the legacy nor totally accept it. It is important to distinguish between the "wheat" and the "chaff"; we must accept and make full use of the wheat, while criticizing and giving up the chaff. In this way we can follow the principles of "making the past serve the present" and "weed through the old to bring forth the new," in order to use our historical foundation to create something new. We must note, however, that the standards for distinguishing the "wheat" from the "chaff" have changed through time. Today, we place a high value on all things which benefit the masses or fully express the people's creative abilities. That which truly embodies this populist spirit should be accepted and developed. That which does not should be criticized and given up. Today, this principle must be applied to the reconstruction of Beijing's Old City.

Some reconstruction work affecting the layout of Beijing's Old City has already been done since the establishment of New China. The most notable example of this is the reconstruction of Tian-an Men Square. As noted earlier Tian-an Men was originally fronted by a T-shaped square. This was designed to serve as an imperial square—a place where the emperor performed important ceremonies (Fig. 2.6). On its east, west, and south sides were red walls which totally shut off public access. It was thus a great obstacle to east-west communications within the city. Viewed from the south end of this imperial square, the Tian-an Men loomed to the north as a lofty, ornate palace built upon a red platform. In old times, this sight served to create an impression of grandeur and solemnity. In 1911, after the overthrow of the last dynasty, Tian-an Men Square was opened and people were allowed to pass through, but the red walls were kept as before. On October 1, 1949, the declaration of the

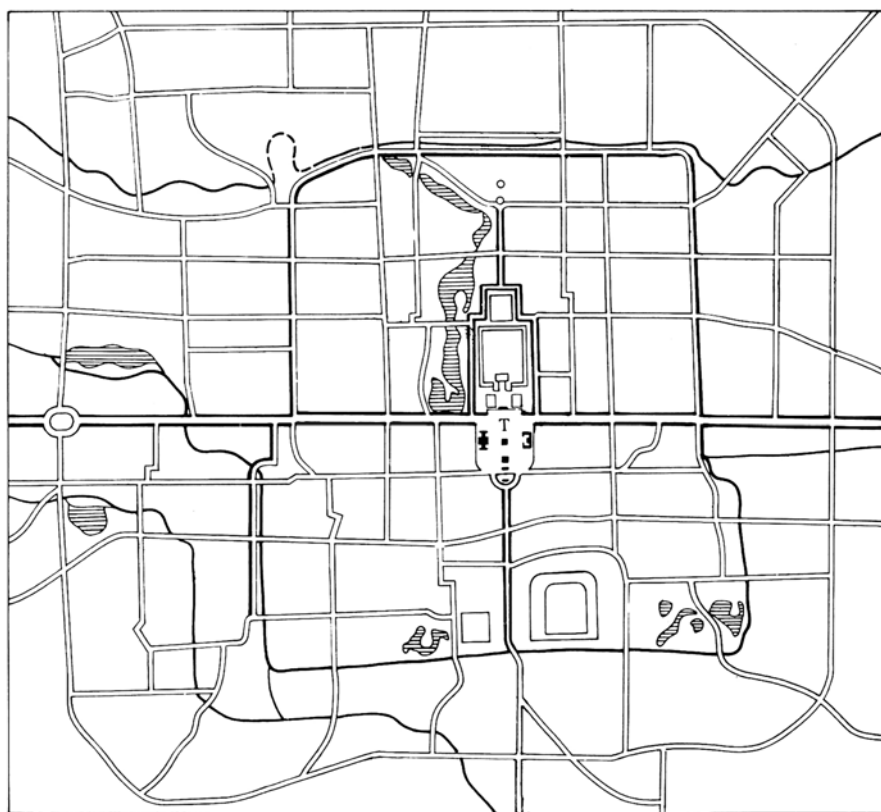


**Fig. 2.6** From imperial square to people's square at the Tian-an Men, Beijing

establishment of New China took place there. An important reason for this was that Tian-an Men Square was the site of the outbreak of the May 4th Movement of 1919, which set the stage for the New Democratic Revolution. Thus it is one of the places in Beijing's Old City with an honored revolutionary tradition.

The Tian-an Men, which stands above the square, expresses the full talent and intelligence of China's working people in the art of construction. It could be considered a masterpiece among the ancient structures of Beijing. As for the red walls on the east, west, and south sides of the square, they still obstructed the movement of people and were actually a public nuisance. Therefore, on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the nation, the red walls surrounding the square were totally demolished, and a new square appeared which was several times larger than the old one. On the west and east sides of the square, two modern buildings were constructed. On the west arose the Great Hall of the People, and on the east was built the structure containing the Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution. In the center of the square stands the Monument to the People's Heroes. On the eve of the 30th anniversary of the revolution, the Memorial Hall of Chairman Mao was built on the south side of square, just inside the Zheng-yang Gate. The transformation of Tian-an Men Square to the center of political activity was essentially complete. Although its location remains the same, its nature and function have totally changed, and it has an entirely new appearance (see Fig. 2.6).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The actual work, of course, was not without problems. For instance, in the cases of the demolition of the old city wall and most of the old gates and the filling of the moat, there was serious disagreement in the beginning. From today's point of view, these are simply irretrievably lost.



**Fig. 2.7** Chang-an Street, Beijing, extending east and west from Tian-an Men

At the beginning of the reconstruction of Tian-an Men Square, its left and right wings extending along Chang-an Street (the street's name was derived from the former left and right Chang-an Gates on either side of the old square) were widened and extended to become a broad, tree-lined thoroughfare. This thoroughfare extended to the east and west suburbs and created a major new axis for the whole city (Fig. 2.7). On one hand this reinforced the primacy of Tian-an Men Square's location in the layout of the whole city, and on the other hand it relegated the location of the old Forbidden City to "backyard" status. That ancient symbol of imperial primacy thus lost its exalted position relative to the rest of the city.

Although work remains to be done in the reconstruction of Tian-an Men Square, its position as the center of political activity in the city has been established. The old buildings on the square, such as the Tian-an Men and the Zheng-yang Men, and the modern buildings, such as the Great Hall of the People and the Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution, all go together very well, showing at the same time continuity with the past and the new spirit of the present.



The principle of “weed through the old to bring forth the new” has been fully realized. With regard to the improvement of the layout of Beijing’s Old City, it cannot be said that this was not a success.

There are still many opportunities for today’s city planners to apply their creative talents, in accordance with this principle, to the reconstruction of Beijing’s Old City. For instance, one such case is the question of what to do with the old Ji-shui Tan. Should we consider it an obstacle to the city’s development and fill it in to create land for buildings? Or should we consider it a place of historical significance in the development of the city and protect and improve it?

The Ji-shui Tan of antiquity, as discussed earlier, had a great influence on the location and layout of Beijing’s Old City. The city’s main axis was set next to the eastern shore of Ji-shui Tan, and the width of the lake determined the location of the east and west city walls. It could be said that had Ji-shui Tan not existed, Beijing would not exist in anything like its present form. In Dadu City of the Yuan Dynasty, Ji-shui Tan was of great importance as the northern terminus of the Grand Canal. After the early period of the Ming Dynasty, when the north city wall was moved southward 2.5 km, the northwest part of Ji-shui Tan was excluded from the city, and the area of the lake inside the city was greatly reduced. Subsequent reconstruction of Beijing’s Old City, while further developing the primary themes of the original city plan, resulted in the filling of the Grand Canal’s bed within the city and the elimination of its upper reaches. All that remained was the spring from Yu-quan Hill, which flowed into Ji-shui Tan and thence on to Tai-ye Chi. After this rearrangement of Beijing’s water system, Tai-ye Chi, which was inside the Royal City, was again enlarged by the addition of a new lake at its southern end. The trees and structures around it increased in number, and it developed into the most scenic park district in the city. The lake became known as the “Three Seas”—the “South Sea” (Nan-hai), the “Middle Sea” (Zhong-hai), and the “North Sea” (Bei-hai). The “North Sea” has now been opened to the public; known as the Bei-hai Park, it is renowned for its most beautiful scenery. This was the location of the Jin Dynasty’s imperial retreat, Tai-ning Palace.

Ji-shui Tan, which lay outside the Imperial City, has a much different fate than the “Three Seas,” with their imperial parks and gardens. Throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties and up to the establishment of New China, it never received much attention from the highest rulers. Thus it has not benefited from any definite plan or development, and has quite naturally become a neglected backwater. The lake shrank into three parts, and only the northwestern most part was still called Ji-shui Tan. A larger part of the lake, to the southeast, was called Shi-cha Hai. The area remained, however, one of the most scenic parts of the city. Especially lovely was the view looking west from the east shore of Shi-cha Hai; the reflected peaks of West Mountain seemed like part of the city landscape. Therefore this region in old times, especially during the Qing Dynasty, attracted some of the imperial nobility. They built great houses near the lake shore and channeled lake water into their private gardens. In addition, a number of large, wealthy temples were established around the lake. But, apart from the nobles’ houses and temples, the greatest part of the lake region became a public recreation place for the common people. The southern part, especially, evolved naturally into a



real “people’s park.” Concurrently there arose in that place a common people’s market, where prices were low and merchandise was good. Because of a profusion of lotus growing along the lake shore there, this market came to be called the “Lotus Market.” Up to the eve of the birth of New China, this region remained a haven for the common people, where they could relax and enjoy life in a rustic setting. This informality contrasted sharply with the detailed planning and arrangement of Tai-ye Chi and its imperial gardens.

Now, inside Beijing’s Old City, this overlooked lake is still there, and along its shores there are still patches of greenery and glimpses of its former beauty.

Further planning and reconstruction of the Ji-shui Tan district has already been scheduled as part of the effort to improve and reconstruct Beijing’s Old City, in coordination with the overall plan for greater Beijing (Fig. 2.8). As this process goes forward, we must consider the historical importance and value of this region. We must consider the strong association of the common people with this place and the present necessity of creating more spacious, pleasant and culturally meaningful recreation areas for our citizens. We must consider the potential for improving the natural environment and making the city a more beautiful place. We must also build our plan upon the historical base we have inherited, all the while maintaining a critical attitude and doing our best to realize the principle of “weeding through the old to bring forth the new.” Ji-shui Tan is waiting for us to make this effort.

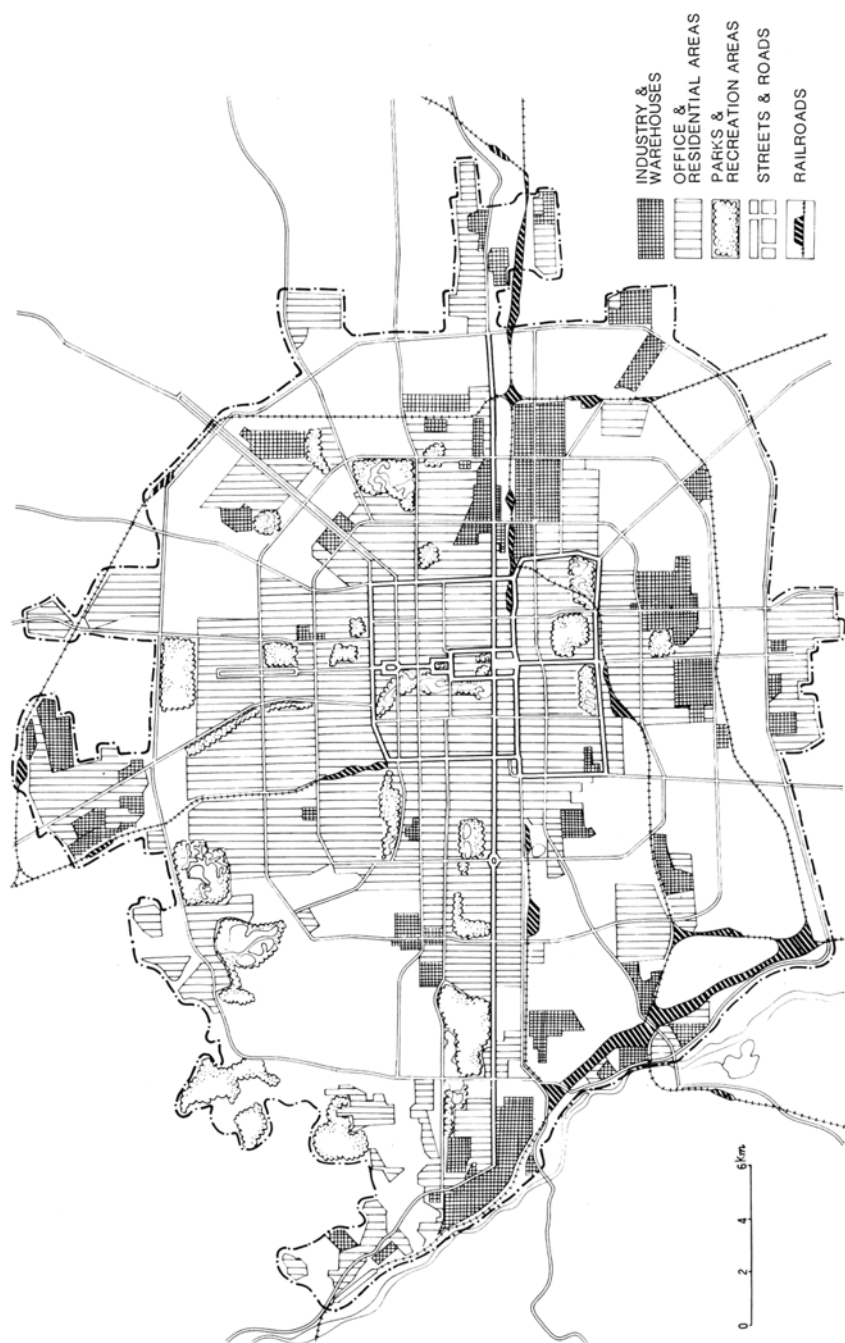
## 2.5 Conclusion

This essay examines only two examples, from the geographical perspectives of city location and design, in an attempt to assess what attitude we should have and what basic rules we should observe in the process of reconstructing Beijing’s Old City.

In July of 1983, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council approved in principle the Master Plan for the City Construction of Metropolitan Beijing. This plan clearly evaluates Beijing’s Old City, and while pointing out those strengths and notable traditional characteristics which should be preserved in the process of reconstruction, it also emphasizes the creation of a new style characteristic of the people’s capital in the new era.<sup>9</sup> Thus, we have reason to believe that by the end of this century a new Beijing City will emerge, one which will maintain not only its ancient cultural tradition, but with a new face reflecting a prosperous, new socialist culture. At the same time we also hope that this new culture, which is still developing, can make an important contribution to the civilization of all mankind.

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<sup>9</sup>See *The Beijing Daily (Beijing Ribao)*, August 3, 1983, and *The Beijing Evening News (Beijing Wanbao)*, August 4, 1983.



**Fig. 2.8** Land use for metropolitan Beijing, 1983

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