

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
FIRST SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture (Construction)
Honors theses

OLYMPEKed: Beijing-Torino Design Studio 2008

Modern *siheyuan* for a new Beijing

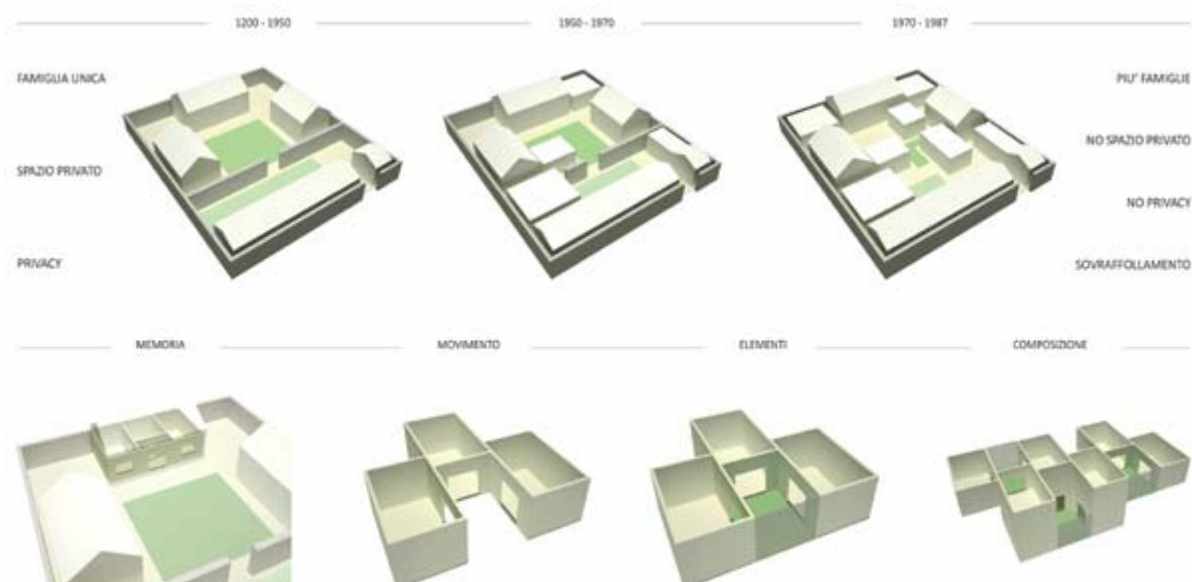
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The starting point for my thesis was to understand what were the conditions of the siheyuan (traditional Chinese homes) not yet subjected to interventions. The goal was to find all the features that made these houses unique in their genre, but nowadays, due to social changes, have been radically transformed both architecturally and them traditional principles.

Basic elements like the spatiality of the private court, the distribution of housing according to the cardinal points, green care and all that sense of privacy and tranquillity that distinguish these areas are lost. Not to mention all the care that once the owners relied decoration and maintenance as a symbol of wealth and family welfare. Today the private courtyard has disappeared: the new rooms were added to the old house at the siheyuan resulting in overcrowding of people and resulting in a series of problems, in fact poor health and crime have turned these areas into the poorest places of the city. These facts rise to the Municipality's decision to take their complete transformation without to consider the habits of the old neighbourhoods: residential buildings tower replaced the traditional low houses with curved roofs.



To ensure at new housing system a similar reference to the traditional, has been given different importance to various elements that for hundreds of years have characterized *hutong* (narrow and long in an east-west) and *siheyuan*. The most significant elements were to keep the court as open space and private sectors, to ensure a sense of privacy inside the house and the possibility of having a common meeting place comparable to the function of the ancient outer court.



The project aims to go beyond the architectural elements, a discourse more generally it should be done on the ancient ideologies that have been retained:

- Privacy and communication. The new prototype design keeps the neighbourhood distribution of buildings according to which approach own building is compared to the increase of privacy, the clear separation with the outside, the distribution of the court as a "game" of relationship between privacy and communication.
- Private and public space. We can speak of the distinction between private and public space at three different scales: between street and building, building and housing, housing and private courtyard. As in the past where the *hutong* was considered public space while *siheyuan* private space of the family.
- Interior and exterior. This idea is ensured as in the past because the court becomes a space outside the building when viewed from the homes and is considered inside if seen from *hutong*. So even for the private courts: they become external when viewed from own homes, become extension of the dwelling when viewed from *hutong*.



- Nature in an artificial environment. Recreate the beautiful gardens of the Chinese courts *siheyuan* with flowering trees, rocks and ponds has not been my aim. Anyway flowers and small plants can be treated in the court, since it is a good amount of light and a double height floor.

This proposal did not wish to keep the system characterized by residential housing with one level, curved and prominent roof, wooden frame, painted decorations and care in maintaining the patriarchal form of the family that for several generations have marked Chinese society. It's a reinterpretation, in a modern way, of those principles which in the last fifty years have been lost, but who are part of an ancient culture that has resisted for hundreds of years.

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