The transformation of Chinese cities in times of accelerated economic development has led to the disappearance of many historic and traditional residential districts. The increase of the urban population, and growing needs for organized transportation, commercial space, public institutions and recreational areas, have created a shortage of affordable housing. Meanwhile the growing number of international visitors, and the growing interest in traditional Chinese culture, have raised the question of the balance between urban conservation and development.

The Shichahai area, in the old centre of Beijing, is the biggest conservation area in the old city with a special location and meaning in the urban landscape. It is located just behind the Forbidden City, beside the end of the central North-South axis of the city, and its position in the structure gives the area an important image. The meaning and historical importance of the Forbidden City itself is dependent on its surrounding areas. As part of the background area for the great palace and because of its particular position in the structure, the area attracts 2,500,000 tourists a year. This brings with it a serious problem: How to adapt and preserve this 700 years old residential area in a larger area which has historically been an entertainment and shopping centre for the whole city and now even the whole country? How also to allow it to open up to the pressures of tourism while maintaining itself as a place of cultural heritage?

Urban space is fundamentally relational, and the production of the city as a social artifact is accomplished through everyday action, interaction and experience. It is a social fabric, within which masses of social relations are enacted. Society is in fact a relational product set up within the networks and pathways of the real world. And transformations in that society can be seen as
the product of the making of connections and relations in the world we make for ourselves today. According this understanding, the design needs to give attention to the changes in the range and possibilities of people’s contacts and movements through these networks. It is here that issues of place and of the quality and the experience of public space can be located. The intention is to think about how to achieve experiential ends within this object we live in – how to build the bridgework to link the physical fabric and social fabric.

The form of the city is related to the ‘urban-social’ through the dynamics of the movement and social group interface. Particular social conditions are set up in this interface which produce the particular street-scene. The city is the ‘machine’ and urban space is the mechanism of the city. People occupy the city dynamically at diverse scales and move differently and choose different mobility webs or networks depending on the length of the journey they are undertaking. Through the manipulation of this machine, urban experiential and social-functional factors can be influenced substantively.

From this point, it is easy to understand what is going wrong in the scale and movement overlaps in the Shichahai area. A global scale suddenly rushes into this sensitive local scaled neighborhood through its connection to the circuits of tourist movement, and it can be seen that the more urban scaled movement network needs to be designed to control the way tourists move in the local area and to preserve a valuable traditional residential culture. This means that the interface between circuits of local people and circuits of tourists needs to be designed. The experiences of local people are therefore not only about their expectations of the local space but also about how other scales of movement change the uses of the local grid. Our analysis of these changes have to provide principles to guide the design.
Chinese philosophy understands the world not as an antagonism of fractured differences, but through an idea of the continuity of the world. At any moment in our existence, our life and nature are inextricably intertwined and completely involved in each other. This is the doctrine of 'equalizing all things', and this concept is used in the design, seeing the environment as bridging differences between local inhabitation and tourism and building a strong interface between them, and developing advantages to both groups by their sharing of the same territory.

The strategies used all deal with the same issue; from the courtyard house (local) to the folk culture museum (global-international), what we want to solve is the interface between the global and the neighborhood scales. We need to use these strategies to make a place for both development and preservation.

The method of intervention comes from a basis in Chinese philosophy, but is also based in a modest attitude. The method uses particular space to create order and coordination, which can be applied from the small scale to the large scale. 'Particular' space means that it transfers different information to different ‘perceptors’ – it means allowing different meanings for different people. This idea penetrates to each level of this design, from the basic courtyard house to the public node. For instance, the so-called
'enclosure' for the tourist is the open place for the local inhabitant. This method of 'particular' space is used to deal with the issue of people's interaction both between populations and within populations.

Human activity itself is defining the identity of space, or, more correctly, place – and place may have its own special identity in relation to a particular group. This image of place can also change in time. A place which has a special meaning for each group in the daytime, may become a public communal place at night. The process is from a simple overlap to real communication, and the change of character or identity is based on the qualities of people's actions. The particular space should be redundant or flexible enough to support changing identities. The design needs to be adjustable or flexible enough to fit changing functional and social conditions. The whole scenario derives from Chinese traditional ideology, which finds a balance between stability and change, between tradition and innovation. It allows, at the same time, both clarity and confusion in the real orders of our world.