

# Formal City Grows in an Informal Way

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**Keywords:** Formal, Informal, Xi'an, Muslim Quarter.

**Abstract:** The cities study today marked themselves a paradox that the “Scenario Planning” of the city are supported by developed regions, but the core factors of how city operation are remaining rooted by the developing regions. As to a specific city, even if it has perfect geometric shapes and urban boundaries, it is not actually working in a regular way. These formal rules or laws and informal disciplines seem to be wrapped in a magic box which decide the development of the city in negotiation methods. This paper is focus on a case study of the Urban Conflict of Muslim Quarter in Xi'an, China. Muslim Quarter is a historical block. Since 21st, Muslim Quarter has become an invisible and sensitive area, gradually forming a situation of regional autonomy. While adding benefits to the city, it has added a lot of contradictions and pressures.

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## 1. Introduction

Stable, or the lack of it, is always being most fundamental conception of a system but it also be relative balanced by several semi-activated elements, which is tagged as “MARGINALLY STABLE”. People have made the progress so artificially and systematically that we could live peaceful in urban. However, it's still uneasiness for us facing the constant changing conditions. That's why we need to know how it formed in order to respond properly.

As for a specific case, the Muslim Quarter in Xi'an City could be a paradox of stable mixed by three mutual restraint powers: The Government as control, the Muslim as faith, the Citizens as freedom, which make the area an “Half-blood Slum”. On the one hand, with its cultural, it has become one of the most important pillars of tourism in Xi'an and brought huge economic benefits. On the other hand, it has the same poor living conditions as other slums. The Muslim is not only a business area but also a residential place. However, it is sensitive to discuss about democratic renewal under the centralization, especially meet with the religious and ethnic issues that have a strong desire for autonomy. Therefore, none of the three actors can move the first step. “Acting” and “No-acting” become a balance game, when someone involves in, he needs to know the roles and rules here.

## 2. Methodology and Analysis

### 2.1. Image and structure

The imagery of the Muslim Quarter is constructed by three elements: landmarks, houses and streets, which also help the roles delineate the area. The government building is for officers, the mosque and the houses are for Muslim, the streets are for citizens. According to the map, the government and the Muslim have their own power agency and confront each other and the streets seem to be the neutral place. The thing is who can take the advantages of the citizens to make it a protection or an opportunity.

As the consequence, we can abstract these roles and relationships in a triangular structure model. From the objective perspective, the Muslim Quarter located almost in the center of the city. Therefore, it attracted most resources and eyesight from city. No matter when the city is innovating or developing, it influences the efficiency of the process and will always be a site to test the results. Besides, the Muslim Quarter has made enormous benefits both in economy and culture. The Government must consider it together with the future of the Xi'an city. However, the Muslims has themselves managed by their religion and nation beliefs. As for them, they have settled here for hundred years since the city was not fully developed. Their determination of surviving in the city is no less than other citizens and just differ from some historical factors which bring the economic potential while also limit themselves to improv from the poor living conditions. From now on, there are 60,000 Muslims living here which mean that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the entire minority population in the whole Xi'an City. This will never be a simple slum transformation issue. As to other citizens, they spare no effort to improve the surroundings to support the city and look forward to protecting every historical area, doing as narrators.

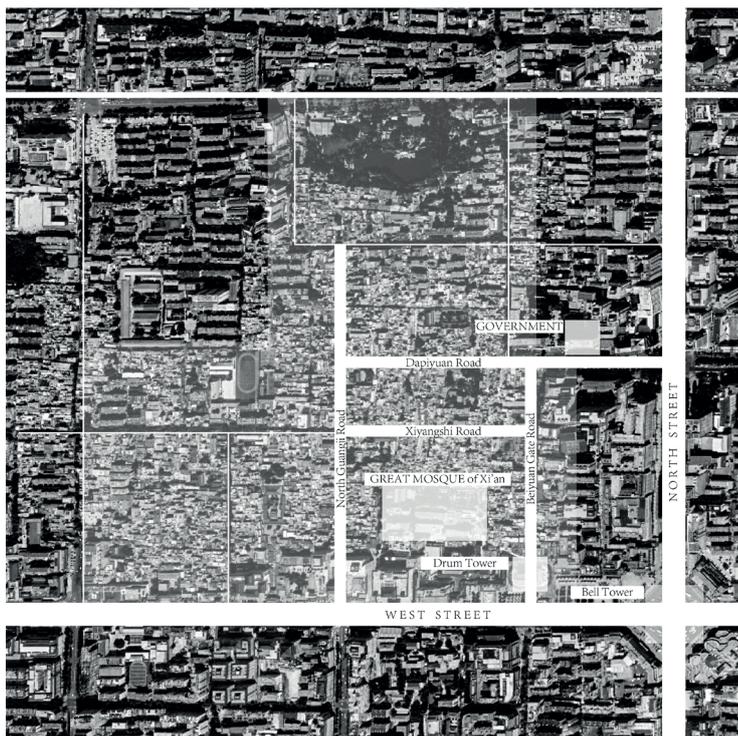


Figure 1. *The Mapping of Muslim Quarter in Xi'an.*

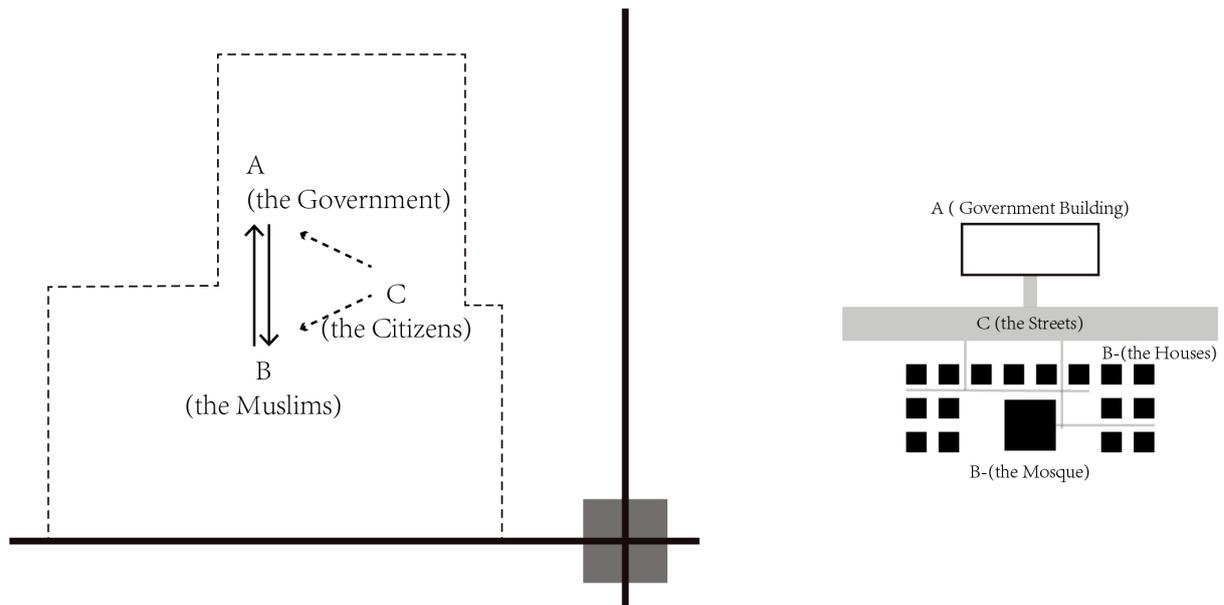


Figure 2. *The triangular structure of 3 Actors and The space structure*

## 2.2. Acting as “half-blood” slum

The inconsistency of container and content leads the Muslim Quarter acting as a “Half-Blood Slum”. The Muslim Quarter has won a good reputation benefited from its history, culture, etc., which represent as contents. These intrinsic qualities are coming from the accumulation of inner culture and the belief of the nation and region. However, these culture self-esteems hindered the innovation of the area. As to a residential area, it has poor conditions of infrastructure, buildings, streets, environment and so on which bring unsafety, disease, and uncomfortable for living, called as the insufficient of container.

### No-slum

The glory of the Muslim Quarter origins from its historic landmarks and nation belief. One of the most famous buildings is the Drum Tower (1380) which is the entrance of the Muslim Quarter, belonging to the Beiyuan Gate, one of three historical areas in the center of Xi’an. As time goes by, there also remain a large number of architectures, courtyards and arches as Ming and Qing dynasty aging hundred years old. Since from Tang Dynasty, Xi’an as the capital in China is prosperous due to the successful of Silk Road. During this period, foreign embassies, merchants and scholars came to do diplomatic activities and commercial life, constantly proliferating here such as Arab and Persian who are regarded as the ancestor of the Hui, later the Muslims. The Great Mosque of Xi’an (742) can be another landmark shows their nation belief. In 1956, the mosque was declared a Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the Shaanxi Province Level, and was later promoted to a Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level in 1988. The mosque is still used as a place of worship by Chinese Muslims, primarily Hui people, today. Besides, people also can find different types of mosque in this area, totally in seven.

History and culture establish the self-esteem and self-confidence of the Muslims. Though several of these bustling streets which connecting these important architectures and squares, they are still united to live and multiply, holding regular religious activities, following the tra-

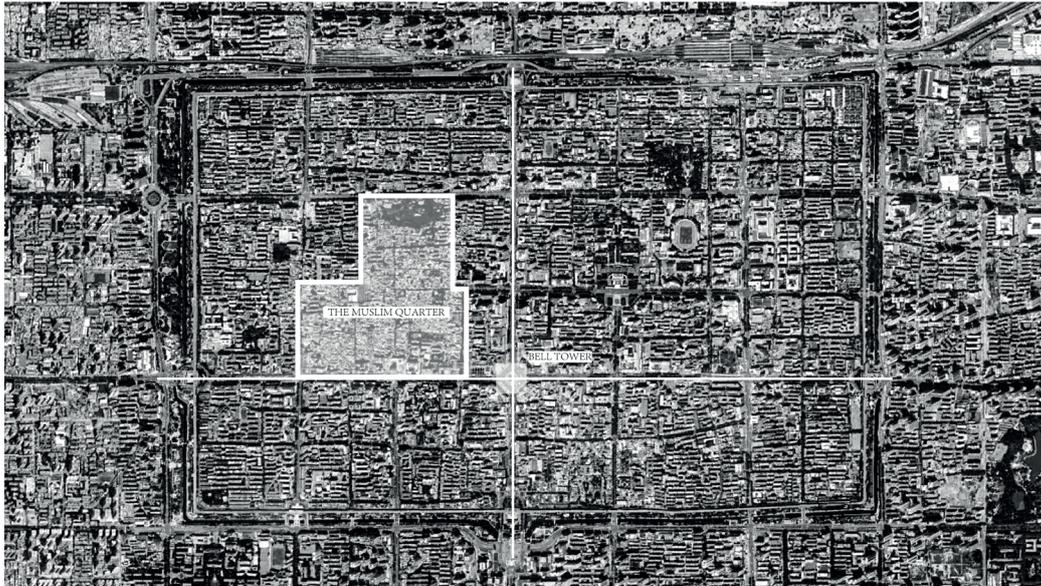


Figure 3. *The Muslim Quarter in City Scale.*

ditional customs, creating eating habits attracting a large number of tourists who can entirely enjoy the happiness of life. The inner world of the Muslim is so powerful that every soul has an unyielding spirit that propels him/her forward.

### *Slum*

The perspective determines the horizon. As the matter of fact, the mainly function of the Muslim Quarter is residence for the Hui, but not the business for the tourism. Although there is no strict definition about the boundary of the Muslim Quarter, it's absolutely not the street level and the problem never can be covered up by such apparently prosperous. According to business street which have been developed previously, it has enclosed in area no less than 0.75 km<sup>2</sup>. That also reflects the potential drawbacks of the Muslim Quarter and the necessity of government to transform it. It is obvious that when it comes to a quarter of the city level the economic benefit of some streets cannot worth a point, not to mention about the living conditions of 60,000 Muslims.

The opposite of the history is always being stale and conservative. Actually, the glory of the Muslim Quarter just like stars in the night, no matter how it shinning it will never reject the dark. There are some traditional courtyard houses in the historical district of Drum Tower, and most of the residents live here for generations. Some of these dwellings have been preserved well, but majority of the residential buildings in the block is not optimistic. With the continuous improvement of the material living needs of residents, in order to improve the existing living conditions, residents have carried out a large number of spontaneous construction activities on houses within their property rights which have caused great damage to the overall style of the historical block. At present, the Muslim Quarter stack lots of low-rise and multi-story residential buildings, and most of them are simple and rough. The houses are dense and crowded, the infrastructure is bad, the sanitation is poor, and the quality of the living environment is low. According to the trend of the population growth and the process of the urbanization leads to decrease the area of the slum, the Muslim Quarter will be naturally reduced under the lack of

living condition. In the rapid urban renewal, some slums are forced to die because of saturation of population, lack of resources, and even have not formed a nausea cycle.

### 2.3. Conflicts and challenges as no-acting

The Muslim Quarter is always in the state of “MARGINALLY STABLE”. The appearance of the prosperous and harmonious carries a lot of pressure from slum which almost comes from themselves not outside. The Muslim have limited ability, meanwhile they can’t easily transfer their rights to others because of history and belief reasons. Under such circumstances, they would rather choose to continue confront with the government, although they will eventually make a choice.

#### Conflicts

Shaanxi has been a mixed area between the Hui and the Han since ancient times and once had fierce conflicts in the history. At the beginning, in order to be harmonious, they all served as the ruling class of the Manchu. However, in the last years of the Qing Dynasty, along with the Hui and Han nationality. The level was growing stronger, and there was a constant conflict between land resources. The dispute of the lands reflected the landlord class of the Han and landlord class and the wealthy class of Hui competing for lands and markets. As a result of fighting, the contradiction between the Han and the Han nationalities had intensified, and the relationship between the Han and the Han had deteriorated. In 1862, the Dungan Revolt erupted out. The conflict ended in 1877, lasting 15 years, eventually led to large-scale massacre of Han and Muslims. In Shaanxi, 83.7% (-5.2 million) of the total loss occurred in the period of war as a consequence of mass migration and war-related death. Many civilian deaths were also caused by famine due to war conditions. At the same time, 17th May became a ceremonial ceremony held annually by the Xi’an Hui people to commemorate the compatriots who suffered the massacre during the Tongzhi reign.

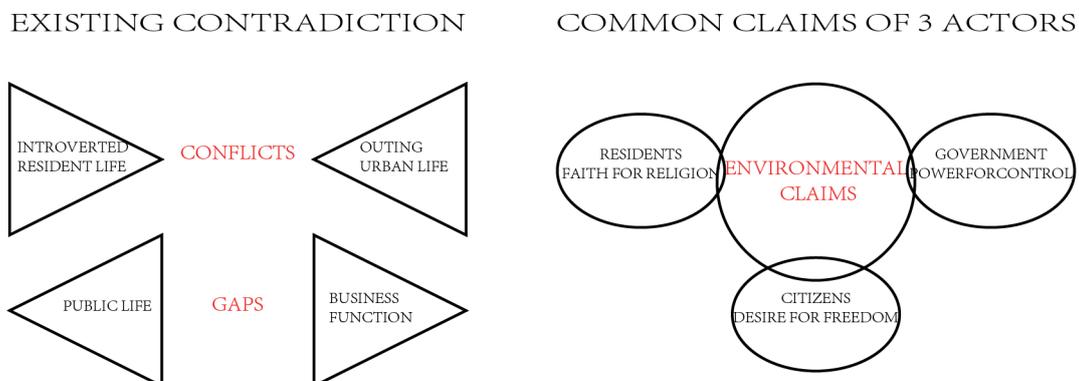


Figure 4. The Relationship among Actors.

### Challenges

In the process of confrontation between the two sides, the common interests have become an important breakthrough. In the current situation, both the Muslim and the government want to protect the culture in this area, the difference is that the former need an introverted life and keep their own rights to survive, the latter prefer an extroverted life serves to citizens and make more profits. In 2017, the government cooperating with OCT Group restarted to make the strategy of urban transformation and the Muslim Quarter was the core of the plan. It seems to be culture-oriented and replace “reform” with “protection and promotion”. However, people are more willing to see specific details and actions rather than the concept or the idea to describe the future. It still makes no sense if the government only catches up the profits but avoids to solving the residential problems. Another example is a studio practice from Xi’an University of Architecture and Technology: the professor required students to use words, pictures, sketches and abstract drawings to describe the atmosphere of the Muslim Quarter from their own perspective before they did the design. They try to reveal the common points and record as design elements. I appreciated the latter’s using of a bottom-up behavior to practice those great ideals which will give both the clients and ourselves a sense of safety. If we think further, there might be a participatory design method among the Muslims, citizens and government. Attempting to use the power from the public to counteract the conflicts among the actors. In any case, no one can stop the steps of social development. Urban renewal will definitely happen. But there is no piece of land in the city belongs to one side, and even the more powerful the right is the stronger restricted and resisted will take place.

### 3. Discussion/Conclusion

This paper fully discusses about the renewal of the slum in urban level. The author uses the concept in the theory of dynamical systems and control theory as “Marginal stability” to describe the relationship between the slum and the urban system. During the process of urban transform, not all the gray places as slums are just waiting for the aids from the governments, sometimes they even fight against each other, and finally form a mutually restrictive situation which construct a dynamic balance in critical state. With the case studying, the paper tries to figure out how to specific this situation and why it comes out?

The Muslim Quarter in Xi’an is such a sensitive place that with the no-acting of the government, the acting by themselves and intervention of the citizens, the three actors make it a “Half-blood Slum” in the city. Power of control, faith of brief and desire of freedom have become three strength to interact each other. All of them realize the potential of transformation, but no one could evaluate and take the risks. What they doing is like a way of collaging which avoids major problem of residents but only concern about the economic benefits. It would be a intriguing question that who will make the first step to break this deadlock or they will compromise together under the impetus of a historical event.

As mentioned in the article, although it is difficult to discuss about democratic renewal under the centralization, especially meet with the religious and ethnic issues that have a strong desire for autonomy, the urban renewal will definitely happen. There is no piece of land in the city belongs to one side, and even the more powerful the right is the stronger restricted and resisted will take place.

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