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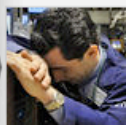
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*From "After the Inferno" by Thomas J. Campanella in Obit magazine, Feb. 24.*

The CCTV complex [whose nearly completed Television Cultural Centre tower was destroyed by fire on Feb. 9] is a paramount symbol of the new China, crown jewel of a 30-year economic boom that has propelled an urban development revolution unmatched in human history. . . .

For more than 600 years Beijing was enclosed by vast defensive walls; within, a dense mat of *hutong* neighborhoods orbited the Forbidden City. Mao pulled the walls down in the 1950s, carved out Tiananmen Square, and flanked it with Soviet-style mammoths like the Great Hall of the People. The *genius loci* of old Beijing was greatly diminished, but survived.

That unique atmosphere did not survive the post-Mao boom. Since the early 1990s, nearly all of Beijing's historic residential neighborhoods have been razed for redevelopment. . . . Described by the late Edmund Bacon as "possibly the greatest single work of man on the face of the earth," Beijing today is fast becoming a jacked version of Dallas, a sprawling conurbation of office towers and superblock housing estates scored with impossibly wide motorways. What was once an exquisite canvas has become a city of monsters, each dancing to a song only it can hear. Immense object-buildings like those at the CCTV complex may well be architecture, even award-winning architecture; but they are egocentric and self-absorbed, and they do not a city make.

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