

CHINESE
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CAI YANXIN





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China Intercontinental Press

图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

中国文化·建筑: 英文 / 蔡燕歆著; 译谷译. -- 北京: 五洲传播出版社, 2014.12

ISBN 978-7-5085-2741-3

I. ①中… II. ①蔡… ②译… III. ①文化史—中国—英文②建筑史—中国—英文 IV. ① K203 ② TU-092

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2014) 第 077540 号

中国文化系列丛书

主 编 : 王岳川
出 版 人 : 荆孝敏
统 筹 : 付 平

中国文化·建筑

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译 者 : 译 谷
责任编辑 : 高 磊
图片提供 : FOTOE 中新社
装帧设计 : 丰饶文化传播有限责任公司
出版发行 : 五洲传播出版社
地 址 : 北京市海淀区北三环中路 31 号生产力大楼 B 座 7 层
邮 编 : 100088
电 话 : 010-82005927, 82007837
网 址 : www.cicc.org.cn
承 印 者 : 北京光之彩印刷有限公司
版 次 : 2015 年 5 月第 1 版第 1 次印刷
开 本 : 889×1194mm 1/16
印 张 : 13.25
字 数 : 200 千字
定 价 : 128.00 元

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出版发行 : 五洲传播出版社

地 址 : 北京市海淀区北三环中路 31 号生产力大楼 B 座 7 层

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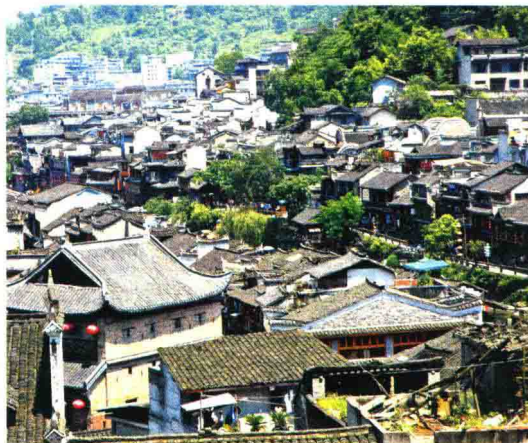
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Preface

The history of China's architecture can be traced back to ancient times when "a sage built houses with wood to protect people from harm" (*Hanfeizi – Five Vermin*). Since those earliest beginnings, ancient Chinese architecture has exerted a global influence and become a key part of the country's cultural heritage. Today it still influences modern architectural design. Getting to know ancient Chinese architecture is like opening a thick history book; one that vividly recounts the country's ancient legends and the great achievements and intrigues of its emperors and dynasties. As well as being a record of these momentous events, China's ancient architecture is also a record of the expertise and creativity of innumerable ordinary laborers who are not normally mentioned in the history books.

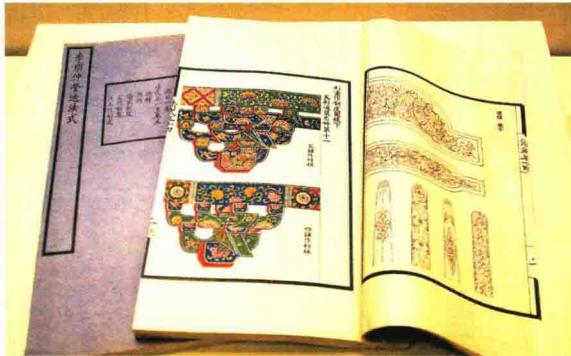
In terms of its achievements, ancient Chinese architecture includes imperial palaces,



A bird's-eye view of Fenghuang Ancient Town. This completely preserves the traditional layout and historical appearance of the buildings as they would have been in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Residential buildings have the characteristics of mainstream Huizhou-style architecture in Jiangxi and Guizhou, and create western Hunan buildings with their own characteristics in combination with the local economic conditions and ethnic features.

temples, palace halls, residences and tombs, amongst many other types of buildings. These buildings all exhibit a number of common architectural themes and layouts. Ancient Chinese buildings are generally symmetrical and orderly, with their important and less important parts clearly distinguished from each other. They also normally feature a central axis linking various closed courtyards. Overall, they reflect a closed, precise and reserved national character - pure Confucian style. Only the country's ancient garden architecture is different. It reflects the influence and ethos of Taoism and features free and flexible layouts full of changes and designs that strive to the utmost to create a natural atmosphere.

In ancient Chinese architecture buildings were divided into three main parts. An upper part (the roof), a lower part (the foundations) and a middle part (the columns, doors, windows and walls). The most important of these elements in ancient Chinese architecture was the roof. All roofs in the ancient Chinese style have beautiful, smooth curves. They can be classified into hip



Treatise on Architectural Methods or State Building Standards written by Li Jie in the Northern Song Dynasty at the Ancient China Exhibition in the National Library of China. This is a complete work on architecture written in the 3rd year of the Yuanfu Period of the Song Dynasty (1100) and published in the 2nd year of the Chongning Period (1103). The book consists of 36 volumes and five parts: definitions, various systems, functions and limitations, material and illustrations. These contain rules for the official architecture of that period in the central plains area.



The main building of the China Pavilion of the 2010 Shanghai Expo – “Oriental Crown” – ingeniously combines huge pillars and pendentives and rationally distributes force, making the whole building steady, grand, magnificent and rich in the Chinese style. Its inverted trapezoidal structure that leans forwards presents a major mechanical challenge even for modern architecture.

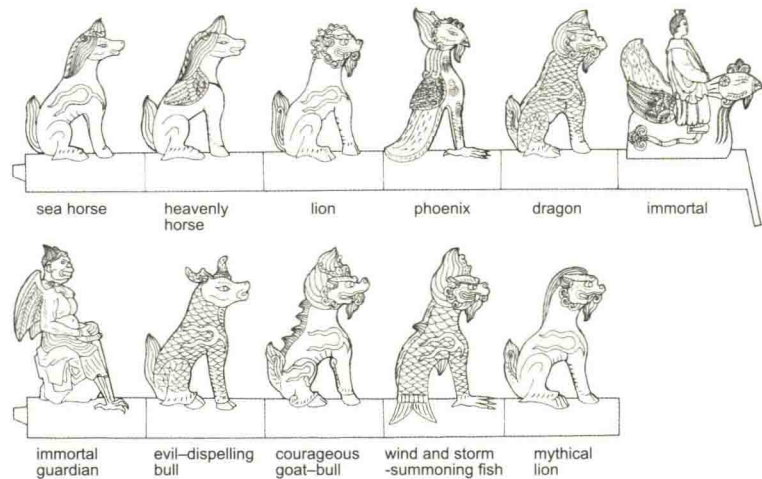
roofs, gable and hip roofs, overhanging gable roofs, flush gable roofs, pyramidal roofs, etc; each style having a different rank of importance.

The wood-framed structure of ancient Chinese architecture consists of a number of main components such as columns, crossbeams and purlins. These are all connected with tenons and mortises to make up a flexible, elastic framework. Such combination of tenons and mortises have been found in the architecture of the primitive Hemudu society in Yuyao, Zhejiang, showing that this approach emerged more than 7,000 years ago. One particular component that is particular to ancient Chinese architecture consists of layer upon layer of wood blocks positioned above a building's columns and below its roof structure. Such a structure is called pendentive. It can support a building's roof truss and has a strong decorative effect.

Chinese ancient artisans made full use of the characteristics of wood-framed architecture. They used knives, hammers, chisels, drills, brushes and other tools to create structural and decorative elements. In general, decorations on Chinese traditional architecture have a practical purpose and are closely combined with structural elements. In other words, they are artistic treatments of structural components rather than dispensable additions. Though they have decorative beauty, they more importantly reflect the structural beauty of a building and reflect the nature of the thinking and materials that have gone into its design and construction. A variety of different artistic approaches were used by the ancient Chinese to create architectural decorations. These included traditional Chinese paintings, carvings, calligraphy, colors, patterns, motifs, etc. All were used to strengthen a building's artistic impact and were seen as an important means of artistic expression.

“Rites” were the basic framework of Confucianism that dominated ancient Chinese feudal society. Naturally these Rites influenced the creation of architecture and its decoration and led to the creation of various architectural rules and norms. This meant that architecture was not only about “good appearances,” but also about creating a “distinction between the rich and poor.” Architectural types and sizes, and the styles, colors, textures and themes used in its decoration, all served architecture's social functions and were used to show architecture's social value.

As the art of architecture in China developed and matured it was inevitably affected by changing social conditions and by regional differences. This led to an almost constant reform and innovation of styles, themes, contents and techniques. Moreover, the fact that China is a multiethnic



The pottery "immortal" and beasts on the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Imperial Palace in Beijing and their illustrations. There is a small person riding a phoenix called "immortal" in front of the ridge, followed by a line of small beasts. A large beast-head in the back is the "vertical beast." The small beasts between the immortal and the vertical beast are collectively called "beasts." Each beast has its own name. There are strict rules on the order of beasts. Many ancient Chinese buildings' branch ridges are decorated with animals. The number is determined by the size of the palace and the level of the building. The Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Imperial Palace is the only Chinese ancient building with ten beasts.

country also affected the development of its architecture. This was because all ethnic groups liked to use traditional decorations in their architecture to proclaim their individual ethnic characteristics.

In the history of ancient Chinese culture and science, "architecture" did not obtain the same high position as some other artistic disciplines. The art of Chinese traditional architectural was mainly handed down through the generations and was created through the hard work of innumerable artisans. As such it was not generally regarded as an independent school of art and, as a result, a comprehensive and systematic "architectural history" did not become properly established. Fortunately, many historic literary works were based on cities or architecture. These works reflect the historic achievements of urban architecture and construction in China and also depict the appearance of urban buildings throughout the country's history. Many official histories, books and other ancient records contain details of the plans for imperial palaces and other important buildings from the country's various dynastic periods. The biographies of the officials or artisans in

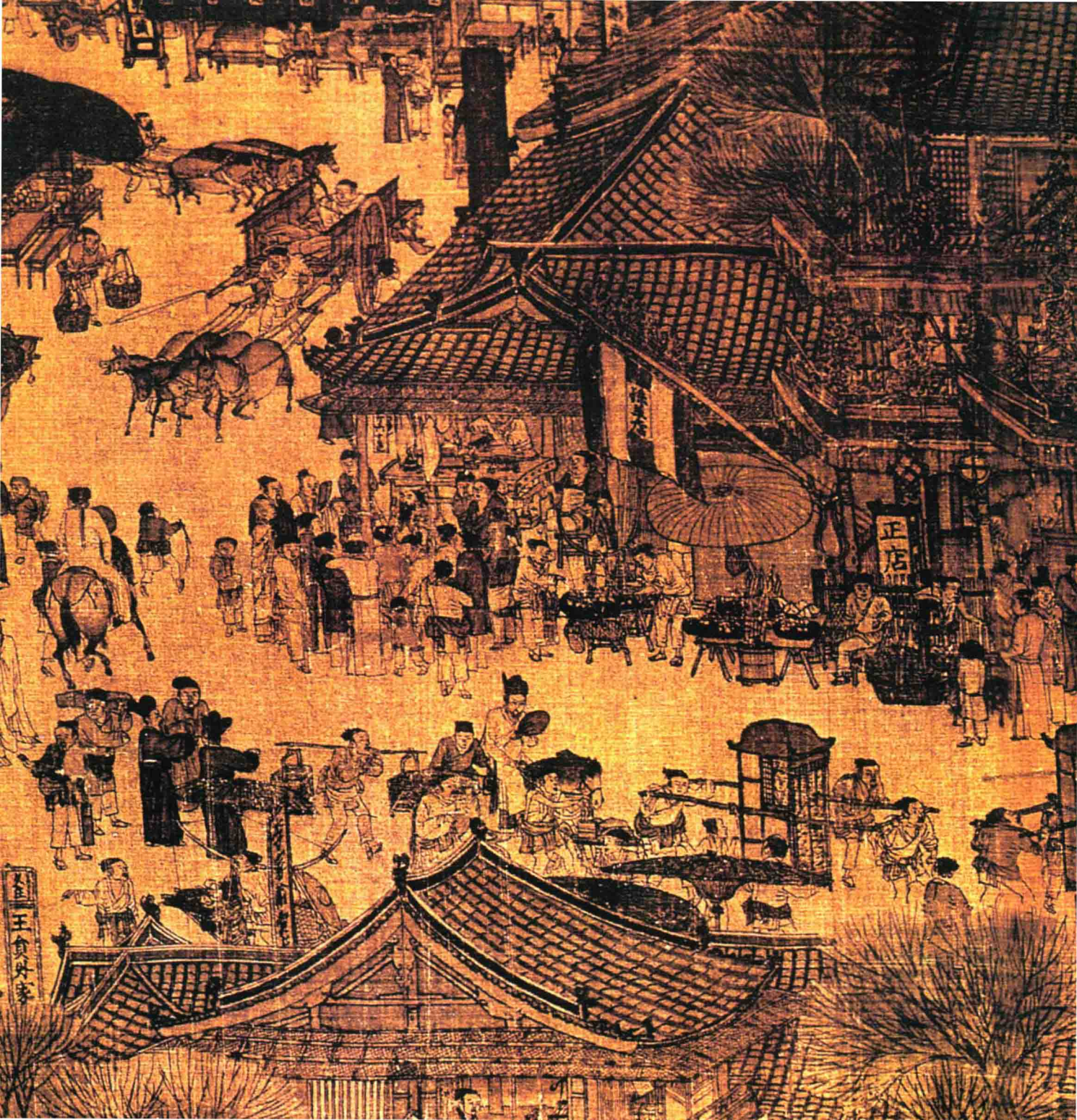
charge of historic architectural projects can also be found in their pages.

Some monographs written by architects have also been handed down. Though quite rare, these documents give us a unique glimpse of how ancient architectural construction projects were undertaken. They show us that ancient Chinese architectural design work was, in many ways, quite similar to its modern counterpart. Architects and the people in charge of architectural planning attached great importance to the investigation and research of contemporary or historic architecture. They usually made preparatory models and prepared drawings to develop their designs. Indeed, Chinese architectural artisans created a three-dimensional drawing method (similar to modern “axonometric drawings”) to guide construction. After the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), the formulation of “architectural design drawings” and “explanation documents” became an indispensable part of the construction of large buildings. In the mid-10th century, the development of architectural drawing techniques was already very advanced.

From the “winter offices” of the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC) to the “calculation offices” and “drawing offices” of the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911), China has always had special construction departments and officials in charge of architectural design and construction and the distribution of architectural materials. It was the work of these official institutions to ensure that labor, transport and materials were all managed effectively. They were also responsible for the promotion and implementation of the “standardization” and “modulation” of the core elements of classical Chinese architecture.

In modern times, China’s architecture changed significantly. This change followed the disintegration of the feudal system, the introduction of Western culture to the East, the development of modern science and technology and subsequent changes in people’s aesthetic tastes and culture. In the 20th century, especially after the reform and opening up of the country in 1978, the appearance of China’s cities began to change dramatically and architectural styles became more diversified. Today, Chinese modern architecture is characterized by an organic combination of modern and ethnic styles.

This book introduces the characteristics and development of the main types of Chinese traditional architecture. It then describes the complex course of Chinese architecture’s development in modern times, and analyzes the diversity of current architectural styles. Its aim is to give an overview of Chinese architecture from its earliest beginnings to the present day.



正店

王貪外家

Ancient Cities

China's earliest city emerged in the late period of primitive society (c. 3000-2000 BC). This roughly coincided with the period when the earliest cities elsewhere around the world started to be built. The famous American city planning theorist Lewis Mumford wrote in *The City in History*, "The most ancient urban remains now known mostly came into existence around 3000 BC, give or take a few centuries."

At that time cities were small and lacked a full range of municipal facilities. They were little more than castles surrounded by dwellings and were far removed from today's cities. However, in the Zhou Dynasty, Chinese cities not only underwent fast development, but also started to follow certain rules of city construction.

China's ancient cities had a grid-shaped plan. This first originated from the square field system of early farming. Other facets of city design were influenced by the weather: China's warm southern climate and cold northern climate directly led to construction of buildings facing the south with the sun on the lee side and indirectly led to the development of a mainly north-south road system.

The ideological basis of China’s ancient “square cities” was formed by the concepts of “round heaven and square earth” and “interactions between heaven and mankind” and the theories of “yin and yang” and “the five elements”. Most early city plans gave emphasis to the “selection of the middle” and “symmetry,” and clear axes dominated their basic layout. Many cities and the names and locations of buildings in them also had strong symbolic meanings.

The feng shui theory of “analyzing soil, tasting water, observing the sky and surveying land” was based on the ancient Chinese cultural tradition of respecting the sky, land, mountains, rivers and environment. It exerted important influence on the selection of city locations and layouts. The selection of the location of the Wu State’s capital by Wu minister Wu Zixu in 514 BC shows this most famously. To decide where to build, he examined soil quality and even personally tasted river water in potential locations. He also carried out field investigations, observed astronomical phenomena and studied feng shui to select the new city’s location. He finally built Helü City in the location of today’s Suzhou City.

Changes in social and economic conditions pushed forward the development of city planning and layouts. Before the Tang Dynasty (618-907) all cities adopted the closed neighborhood system: residential neighborhoods and markets were all separated by a grid-shaped road system. This was

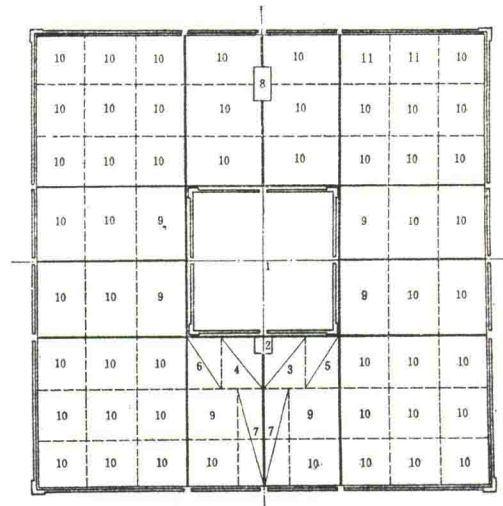


Illustration of the layout of the capital of the Zhou Dynasty.
 1- imperial palace; 2- outer court; 3- ancestral temple; 4- temple of land and grain; 5- government repository; 6- stable; 7- government office; 8- market; 9- official residences; 10- common residences; 11- granary.

done to facilitate management and ensure public order. The walls and gates of neighbourhoods and markets were all guarded by special personnel. They opened the gates in the morning and closed them in the evening. This arrangement created a lot of inconvenience in people's lives and restricted social and economic progress. In the Song Dynasty (960-1279), agriculture, handicraft, commerce, foreign trade, science and technology developed rapidly and the neighborhood system was gradually abolished. Closed markets disappeared to be replaced by commercial streets. Cities changed from having closed structures to being more open. This new arrangement is shown in China's national artistic treasure *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, which was drawn in the Song Dynasty. This picture shows the busy commercial streets of Kaifeng bustling with activity.