

Shan Deqi

CHINESE VERNACULAR DWELLINGS

People's Daily Life with Their Houses

Translated by Wang Dehua et al



CHINA
INTERCONTINENTAL
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People's Daily Life with Their Houses

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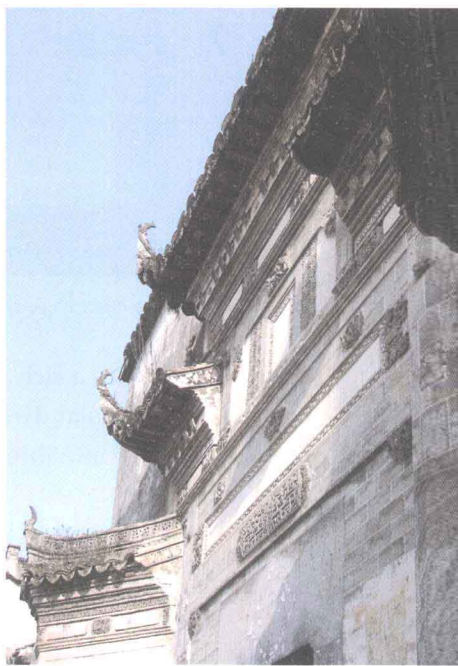
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Introduction

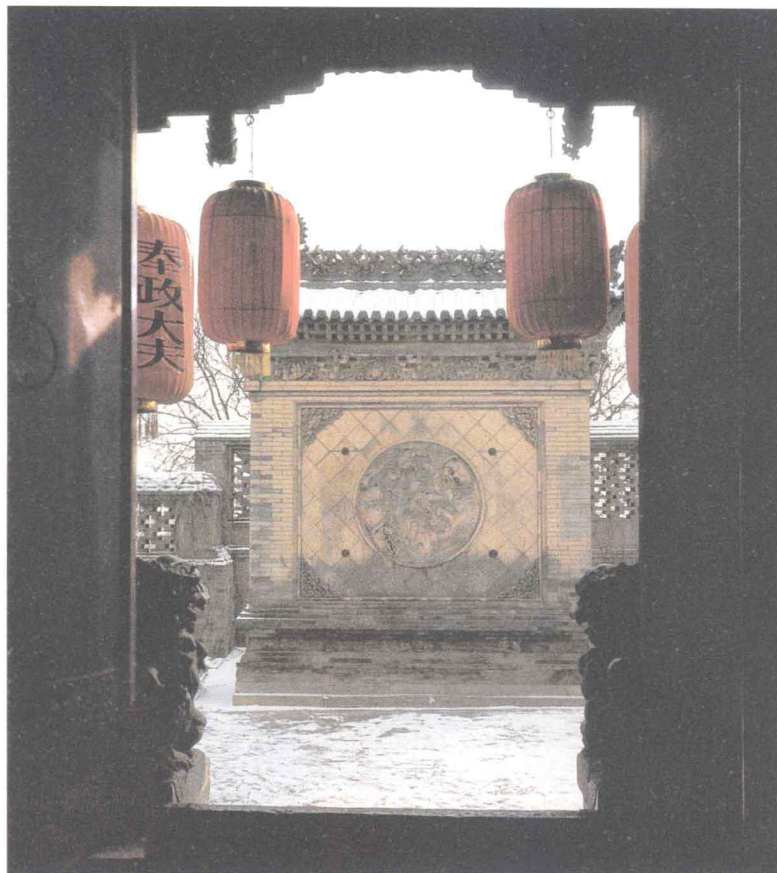
In 2000, the ancient villages of Xidi and Hongcun located in Anhui Province of China were formally approved in the 24th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee to be inscribed into UNESCO's World Heritage List. In early spring of that year, the Japanese expert assigned by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, Dr. Naomi Okawa, highly valued the villages after his field investigation by saying, "It's really an unrivalled village scene such as Hongcun. The village Xidi still remains its beautiful ancient streets and alleys, which is seldom in the world." In 1997, the old town of Lijiang in Yunnan Province and ancient city of Pingyao in Shanxi Province were inscribed into the World Heritage List; nowadays, the famous river town Zhouzhuang in Jiangsu Province has been put up for consideration for the list. At the turn of the century, the Chinese traditional vernacular dwelling is unveiling itself to the world, becoming a grand stage for China's access to the world and for the world to have a better understanding of China.

China is a country with vast territory, varied topography, and diversified climate; together with its different kinds of nationalities and



A land of peach blossoms: Xidi.





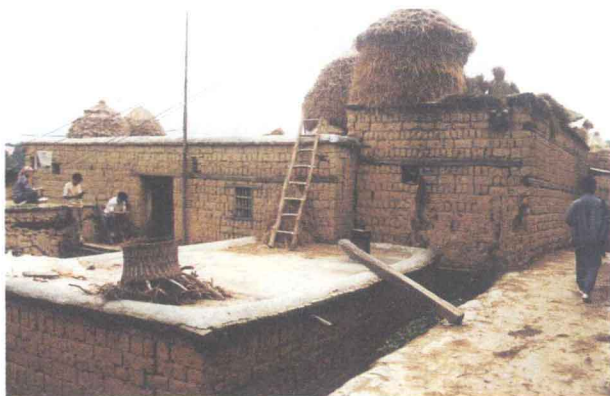
The screen wall of a quadrangle courtyard.

cultures, it creates a rich variety of settlements and buildings of traditional vernacular dwelling. The vernacular dwelling can generally be divided into three patterns: courtyard, storied and caved dwellings.

I

Courtyard dwelling is the most popular vernacular dwelling among all the patterns and it is also the one with most advanced material and structure technology, the richest components, the most





The clay *Zhang* dwelling in Ailao Mountain region, Yunnan Province.

complicated arrangements of traditional ethical codes, and the most diversified decorations. In a sense, it is the most advanced dwelling style in the farming society and also the ideal mode to materialize the natural environment in the feudal society. The *Si He*

Yuan quadrangle courtyards in Beijing are the typical of this pattern. The fundamental character of the courtyard dwellings is as follows: enclosed features, symmetry along the middle axis, and a clear distinction between the primary and the secondary, outside and inside. These kinds of dwellings are mainly seen in Northern China, the Central Plains, the Shandong Peninsula, and Southern China's

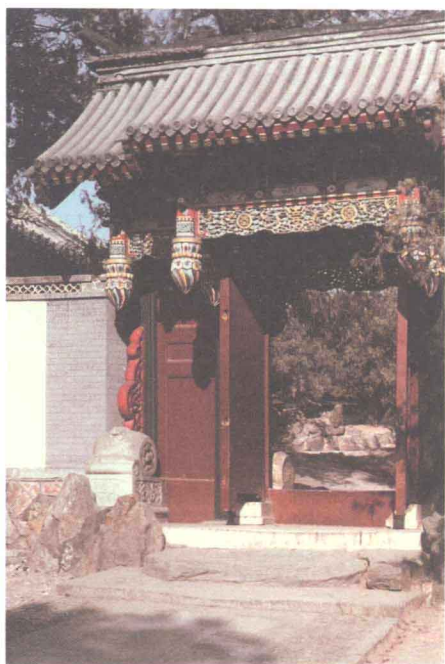


A quadrangle courtyard in Beijing.





The color picture and carved decoration of a quadrangle courtyard.



The main gate of a quadrangle courtyard.

plains and coastal areas. It also can be found in some basins and plains of Southwest China, in areas of Chengdu in Sichuan Province, Kunming and Dali in Yunnan Province, and plain areas of Taiwan Island, etc. The courtyard dwelling is common to many areas related to the ethnic Han, including the areas where the Hans settle in, ethnic minority areas in close exchange with Han culture such as the Bai and Naxi nationalities, and some developed areas such as Zhuang and Yi nationalities, or the ethnic minorities living with the Han nationality such as Manchu and Hui nationalities.

As Beijing advances into one of the world's metropolises, laws have also been formulated in Beijing to protect its 25 lanes and quadrangle courtyards in the ancient areas, ranging from Prince Gong's Residential to common houses that have still kept the most complete forms of the courtyard dwellings. As for the gates, there



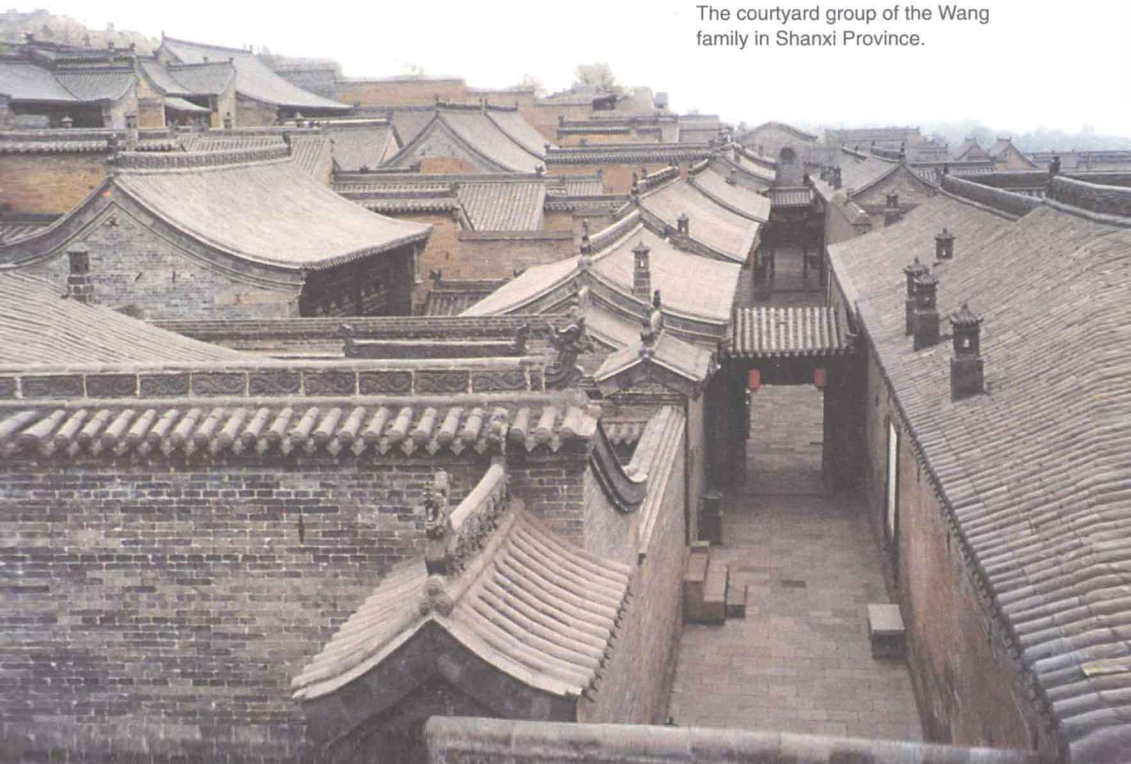
Building ornaments

Mini edifices were constructed around the principal building to beautify the environment, emphasize the features of the area, divide the space, and decorate the principal building supports, e.g. pavilions, bridges, corridors, lattice walls, fences, screen walls, decorated archways, stone lions and even tables and chairs.

is the *Naizi Fang* gate, the golden-column gate, the brilliant gate, the *Ruyi* gate, the *Manzi* gate, and so on. These gates show the real history of the courtyards. During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1616–1911) dynasties, businessmen from Shanxi Province were the leaders in building private residential homes. The courtyard group of the Wang family in Lingshi County, known as the No. 1 Residence of Shanxi Province, is composed of over one hundred courtyards.

Despite variations in scale, material composition, decoration, ornament and other aspects, all the courtyard-style dwellings have similar underlying and fundamental characteristics. This style is most popular in the northern plain areas, but can be seen in the famous Confucian Residence in Qufu, Shandong Province; Qing painter Zheng Banqiao's Residence in Weifang, Shandong Province; and the numerous old-style banking houses in the ancient city of Pingyao in Shanxi

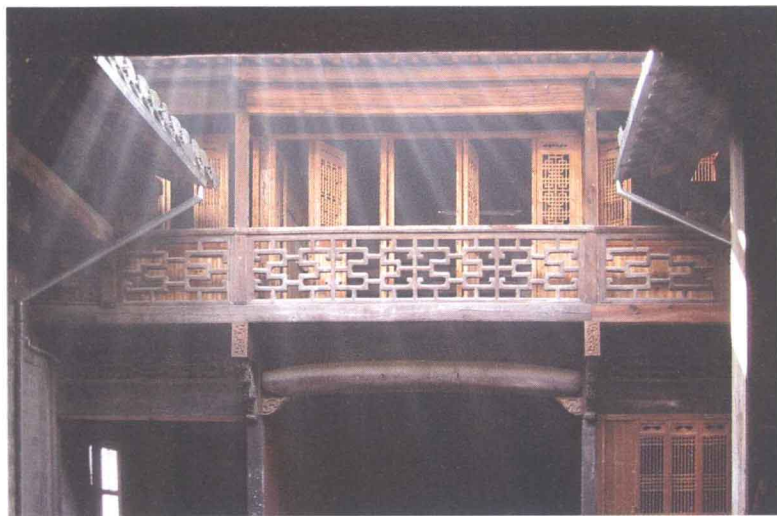
The courtyard group of the Wang family in Shanxi Province.



Province, etc. The dwellings in the vast countryside are not as complete as the typical quadrangle courtyard in an urban setting; some dwellings only have two or three houses around a courtyard, such as the Manchu's sun-facing rural dwelling in Liaoning and Jilin provinces, *Tu Wei Zi* in Shaanxi and Shanxi Provinces, all of which are of simplified courtyard dwellings. However, they retain the basic structure of a gate, wall, courtyard, central room, and wing-room. There are many variations of such a courtyard dwelling: the residential dwelling called *Yi Ke Yin* in Kunming, Yunnan Province, which generated from the uncalcined clay cave dwelling; Huizhou's courtyard residential dwelling in Anhui Province, which came from the *Ganlan* wood structure combined with a courtyard was a common architectural style in Southern China in the ancient past; and the Yongding's Hakka residential dwelling in Fujian Province, which were mainly built for self-defense under the specific historic and geographi-

Yi Ke Yin

Consisting of a principal room, wing room and opposite house, *Yi Ke Yin* assumes a square shape. *Yi Ke Yin* uses a tile roof and an earth wall. Due to its compact layout and square shape, like a Chinese seal, it acquired the name of "*Yi Ke Yin*."



The patio in Huizhou dwelling.





The clay buildings of western Fujian Province.

Tianjing

In Chinese traditional architecture, the courtyards with narrow but high spaces were called *Tianjing*, or patio. *Tianjing* is often seen in wet and hot southern climates where it was constructed for ventilation purpose.

cal circumstances; and *Da Cuo* (mansion), a courtyard dwelling composed of red-brick walls, sloping roofs and slanted fireproof walls, made by immigrants from Guangdong and Fujian to the Taipei area of Taiwan.

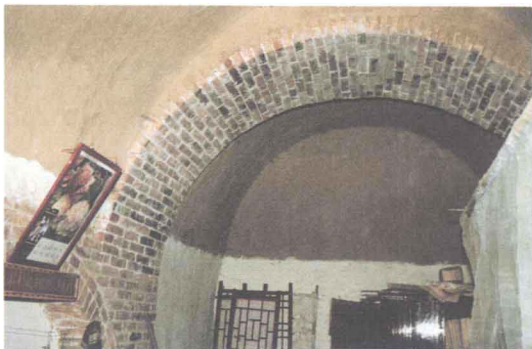
The earliest form of the courtyard dwelling emerged first in the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han (206 BC–220 AD) dynasties. The figure bricks in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220) give us the complete structure of courtyard domiciles of the time. The widespread use of such a dwelling culture was due to the technological foundation of the Qin's bricks and the Han's tiles, the improvement of feudal farming family relationship, and the popularization of etiquette norms. Over a long period of time in an agrarian society, this vernacular dwelling pattern showed its extremely strong vitality.

II

Cave-style and storied dwellings have explicitly

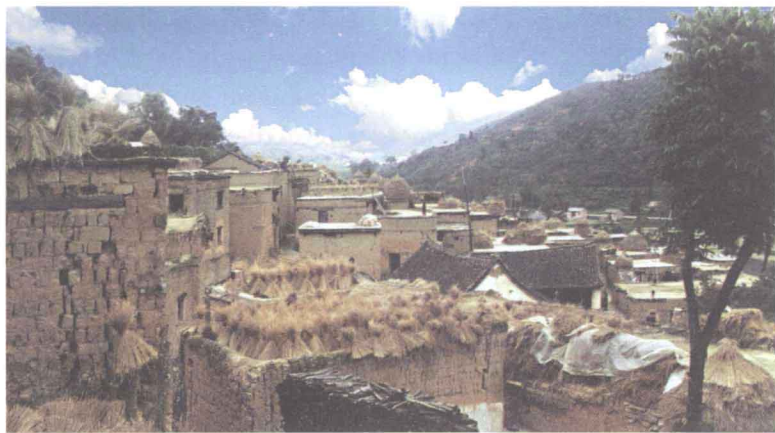


regional characteristics due to the natural local ecosystem, retaining the most primitive architectural features among all vernacular dwelling patterns. The desert in the Loess Plateau in Northwest China is the area where these specialized kinds of dwellings are most centralized.



The cave dwelling.

The most typical cave-style dwelling can be largely found in the central and western regions of China including but not limited to Henan, Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu. This also includes a kind of cave dwelling wholly built under the ground that can be found in the plains of western Henan and southern Shaanxi. Caves are dug with earth steps as entrance. This kind of dwelling is inhabited by several or a dozen of households and is still completely kept in use in Liquan County of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. The "cliff-along" cave dwelling is another kind of cave dwelling widely adopted in mountainous regions and



The clay *Zhang* dwelling village in Ailao Mountain region, Yunnan Province.

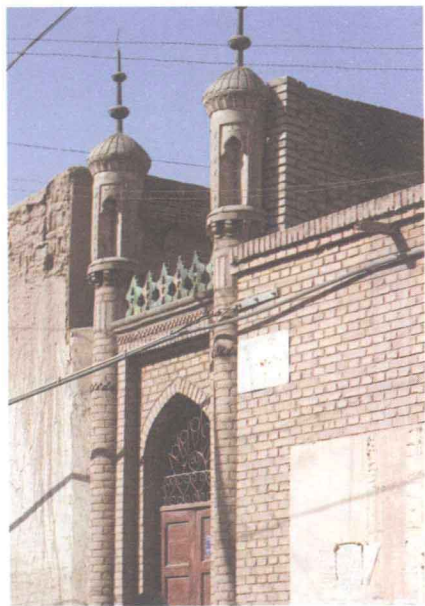
usually consists of connecting caves dug on natural hill-sides along natural contour lines and a courtyard built with adobe outside the cave. The “plugging cave dwelling” is a mixed form of dwelling that mostly appears in the middle of Shanxi



The Tibetan watchtower.

with one or two storied arched adobe or brick houses outside the cave that form a courtyard with walls, which seems more flexible

in settlement combination and richer in inner space. Also, there is a kind of semi-underground-cave dwelling found in the settlements of Atayal and Ami nationalities in Taiwan. Its shape is quite natural: generally with a rectangular flat floor covered with cobblestones and caved in about 1.5 m with wood framework as the upper structure, and using bamboo as purlin with day lily as a roofing material. The whole settlement is scattered loosely, which is believed to be caused by the long periods of encountering typhoons, earthquakes and other frequent disasters and remains to this day. Despite its limited space, there still is reserved space for sacrifices in this kind of dwelling.



The Islamic building in the old town of Kashi, Xinjiang.





The High-platform vernacular dwelling in the old town of Kashi, Xinjiang.

These types of cave dwellings, clay dwellings, or even the vernacular dwelling made of uncalcined clay or rammed earth, are scattered in the drought or desert areas of China. The *Zhuang Kuo* in the east of Qinghai Province, the watchtower of Tibetan nationality in the areas of Sichuan, Qinghai and Tibet, and even the High-platform vernacular

dwelling in Kashi (Kashgar) of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, all belong to the category of uncalcined clay dwelling.

III

The *Ganlan* post-and-tie wood building is typical among storied dwellings, which are distributed mostly in the mountains of minority nationalities in the southwest semi-tropical climes. This style has intensely developed to a high level the form and spatial structure of storied dwellings, the use of supports, suspensions and staggered floors along the hills, and the techniques of mortise and tenon. It also demonstrates rich material and spiritual civilizations in combination with the unique national and folk cultures of the minority nationalities.



The *Ganlan* wood building.



Ganlan post and tie construction

Post and tie construction is a style of wood buildings in ancient China. In such pattern, the column bears the purlin directly instead of the girder.

The traditional typical *Ganlan* wood buildings are completely constructed with wood including wood framework, wood purlin, plank walls, and bark tiles with tenon and mortise at the seams, all without the use of any iron nails or iron hooks. The outline of the house is rectangular, while the *Xuanshan*-style roof looks like a double-slope shape, and the first two to three levels have no walls. The households live closely along the hillside. In the Dai nationality autonomous counties in Xishuangbanna in the southwest of Yunnan and Dehong in the west of Yunnan, there are bamboo *Ganlan* buildings with a kind of bamboo-wood-combined structure using large amount of *mao* bamboos. Compared with the completely wooden houses, the building material of bamboo dwellings are linked mostly by coir rope and rattan; the roof is called Kongming's Hat with swallow-tailed *Qianmu* four-sloped roof. This is akin to the *Xieshan*-style roofs, where a roof is composed of two big slopes in the front and back and two small slopes at both

sides, with two flats in the shape of isosceles triangles at both sides of the roof. The Jino nationality, Jinuo nationality, Hani nationality and other minority nationalities in this area mostly adopt the bamboo dwellings. Their dwellings are alike in terms of the height of the ceiling, whether they used similar architecture materials such as adobe, day lily, the tile top, etc., and the worshiped totem except for



The drum tower at Ma'an Village, Sanjiang County, Guangxi.



slight differences. There are some other unique features of Yunnan's bamboo stockade village, such as the Dai's stockade village, each of which has a well with painstaking decorations or even with a well pavilion or guardian stone-carving beast. Another example is the fortified village gate of Hani nationality, which is always made of tree trunk and set in the entrance with fur on the cross wood and bird carvings in later years. After copious textual research, the Japanese expert Kenzaburo Torikoshi figured out that the traditional torii is derived from Yunnan. In addition, according to the building origin, fundamental framework, and space idea, the *Diaojiao* building seen in the Mount Emei area in the southwest of Sichuan, Chongqing area and Fenghuang in the west of Hunan Province are all the specific models of storied dwelling.

Xuanshan and Xieshan

Xuanshan is also called as "Tiaoshan." It is a kind of roof where the front and back sides are sloped while the purlin protrudes out of the mountain wall. The slope refers to two pieces of reverted Y-shaped roof profile.

Xieshan-style roof is composed of two big slopes at the front and back, two small slopes on both sides and two vertical isosceles triangle wall surface. The Tian'anmen gate tower in Beijing uses a *Xieshan*-style roof.



The storm-tossed bridge of the Dong nationality.

