

CHINESE CULTURE / ARCHITECTURE

The symmetry of a Beijing quadrangular complex; the circular Hakka fortress; the cube-like Huizhou merchant's manse; the subterranean residences of the loessial plateau; the compact and utilitarian Mongol yurt—each of these dwellings developed under specific environmental and social conditions at different times and in different parts of China. *China's Old Dwellings* is the most comprehensive critical examination of China's folk architectural forms in any language. Together with its companion volume, *China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation*, it forms a landmark study of the environmental, historical, and social factors that influence housing forms for nearly a quarter of the world's population. Both books draw on the author's thirty years of fieldwork and extensive travel in China as well as published and unpublished material in many languages.

China's Old Dwellings begins by tracing the interest in Chinese vernacular buildings in the twentieth century. This introductory chapter emphasizes the impact of war and politics on frustrating efforts to document and contextualize building traditions across time and space. Early chapters detail common and distinctive spatial components, including the interior and exterior modular spaces that are axiomatic components of most Chinese dwellings as well as conventional structural components and building materials common in Chinese construction. The author pays special attention to the intricate framing systems and how these reflect regional differences. Later chapters examine representative housing types in the three broad cultural realms—northern, southern, and western—into which China has been divided. In addition to discussing the different types of houses built by the predominant Han nationality, who comprise ninety-four percent of China's population in each of these realms, Knapp surveys representative examples of the dwellings of many of China's fifty-five minority nationalities. He completes his survey with an exploration of China's old dwellings in the context of the rapid economic and social changes that are destroying so many of them. Among the issues he addresses in this final section are questions of how Chinese architects and others document and preserve representative building types as well as maintain and restore historic homes.

Illustrated with more than 550 photographs, drawings, and maps, *China's Old Dwellings* is an invaluable documentary record of the world's most diverse vernacular architectural tradition.

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FRONT COVER: Ming-dynasty dwellings from across the Crescent Pool. Hongcun village, Yixian, Anhui. Photograph courtesy of Olivier Laude.

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