

oral and oral-connected lore, which is still largely inadequately studied within China and without.

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KNAPP, RONALD G. *China's Old Dwellings*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000. xi + 362 pages. Map, illustrations, b/w photographs, bibliography, index. Paper US\$44.95; ISBN 0-8248-2214-5.

Houses embody culture, particularly traditional vernacular houses like China's old dwellings, which embody the slow pace of civilizations and cultures that were bent on preserving, maintaining, and repeating human experience for over four thousand years. During the past two decades, China has been rapidly parting from its past, an unbroken tradition, at the highest speed and on the broadest scale in Chinese history. China's economic development and modernization has struck at the traditional culture and has changed ways of living. China's old dwellings, once a complete system, were alive in the city and countryside across China's vast lands only a couple of decades ago. Now this system is vanishing. I fear that the framework of this old dwelling system may disappear before we understand it thoroughly. To preserve and understand the valuable heritage of Chinese folk culture, systematic documentation is critical and urgent.

*China's Old Dwellings*, by Ronald G. Knapp, is a valuable volume on traditional Chinese vernacular houses. Knapp surveyed over two hundred references relevant to this topic in Chinese, most of them never translated into English and many offering valuable original research and field surveys. Knapp himself also did field investigations that make his survey more convincing. The records, with measured drawings and photographs of the old dwellings, are invaluable because they document, and thus preserve, Chinese vernacular dwellings that, once destroyed, are irreplaceable.

Owing to political isolation and cultural deference, there is a gap between Chinese scholars' publications and Western academic standards. Knapp bridges the gap by offering excellent translations, interpretations, definitions, and descriptions, and by using analogies with Western architectural elements. These efforts make this book easy to understand for a non-Chinese reader. Such a task can be done only by someone fluent in both Chinese and English, who understands both Chinese and Western cultures. Merging Chinese and Western traditions of scholarship, this work helps reveal the original research in Chinese to the world. Knapp's book is a respectful work on Chinese folk architecture.

*China's Old Dwellings* is largely descriptive, but it also stresses theoretical and analytical issues. The information it provides is valuable for professionals in architectural design and research, and also useful for scholars in other fields, e.g., anthropology, folk cultures and arts, and Asian studies. With a clear style and over five hundred illustrations and photographs, this book is accessible to students and laypeople.

The first chapter examines the history of research on Chinese vernacular houses during the twentieth century by recollecting the efforts of individuals to document existing houses and by summarizing building traditions throughout China. Few scholars, even among the Chinese, have done such surveys. This chapter helps the reader to understand the background and supplies an overview of the Chinese research on the old dwellings.

Chinese old dwellings, in general, have strong patterns that embody the Chinese model

of the cosmos, although there are a variety of forms adapted to local climates and geographic conditions. Chapter 2 describes the common set of spatial forms and building components shared by Chinese dwellings: an enclosed space with a central open area, such as a courtyard, that is framed by buildings composed with axial organization. The summary of the common organizational patterns will greatly help the reader to understand the essential nature of the variety of old Chinese dwellings. However, the author should dig further to identify the deep cultural roots of these common patterns, e.g., the influence of *feng-shui* 風水 practices embodying the Chinese ideal model of the cosmos.

A special strength of Knapp's book is its emphasis on the folk tradition of local building techniques and local skills. In particular, Knapp's field investigations explain step by step the local practices of building a tamped earth wall, and making sun-dried and kiln-dried bricks and clay tiles. These local practices still survive in the countryside but soon will vanish. Such valuable information, unfortunately, does not often appear in the Chinese architectural textbooks or research papers on Chinese housing. Chapter 3 surveys the broad range of roof structures and describes the structural configurations of Chinese dwellings, dimensioning, and the assembly of the timber framing systems. The techniques described represent wisdom transmitted from generation to generation over thousands of years.

Reflecting regional, environmental, and social conditions, old Chinese dwellings present a rich diversity of vernacular traditions. Like most research on this topic in Chinese, this book classifies the vernacular houses by using the geographic cultural region instead of social class, though it does mention the differences between the houses of the rich and the poor. Part III examines different types of houses built by China's predominant Han nationality and by minority nationalities in the three broad regions of the north, the south, and the west. The photographs taken by the author demonstrate his extensive site visits throughout China.

Part III covers many minority houses throughout the vast land of China but could have presented more house types representing the ethnic minorities in the southwest, where forty-six of fifty-six Chinese ethnic groups provide the richest diversity of cultures and vernacular houses in the whole nation. Many of the ethnic villages in particular use terrains wisely, and strongly retain their folk cultural traditions; consequently, they provide remarkable examples of houses that are integrated with their natural surroundings and with cultural values as well.

As an echo of Chapter 1, "Looking Back," the epilogue, "Looking Forward," explores the future of old Chinese dwellings under the pressure of rapid economic and social development. Knapp discusses how Chinese architects and others are trying to preserve old Chinese dwellings and the challenges they face. A tough task for many old countries is to balance social progress with the preservation of tradition. For China, this task is particularly difficult, since its tradition is old and rich, the population is large, and the pressure of development is great.

This book attempts to go beyond descriptions and documentations to offer an understanding of Chinese vernacular houses from architectural, geographical, historical, and cultural perspectives. But for a comprehensive examination of Chinese vernacular dwellings, we need a further systematic analysis that describes the integrative relationship of vernacular houses with the surrounding landscape at various scales. The organizational patterns of communities (e.g., villages) in which most old dwellings are set should be emphasized. The site selections of dwellings and villages are especially valuable. It is important to take a multilayered approach to the application of *feng-shui* by considering site selection, village organization, common patterns, building regulations, interior design and garden layout as well as ornamentation. A synthesis would help the reader gain insight into the essential cultural nature of the old houses. Nevertheless, *China's Old Dwellings* presents valuable work, and compiles diverse themes (particularly, historic, social, and cultural aspects ignored by other

scholars) into a logically organized and eminently readable volume on Chinese vernacular dwellings.

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PAPINEAU, ÉLISABETH. *Le jeu dans la Chine contemporaine: Mah-jong, jeu de go et autres loisirs*. Collection "Recherches Asiatiques." Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000. 302 pages. Bibliography. Paper 130 F; ISBN 2-7384-9210-X. (In French)

The passion of the Chinese for gambling has been noted by European travellers for so long that over the centuries it has become a character trait. The Chinese seen as inveterate gamblers is an aspect of the overall image of this civilization that has been, and still is, prevalent in the West, and, not surprisingly, also among the Chinese themselves. Élisabeth Papineau starts with introducing the illustrious line of Westerners who have remarked upon it in travel accounts and essays: from the pirate William Dampier (1698), to the Macartney Embassy's steward John Barrow (1798), to the Lazarist Father Huc (1854), the French consul Paul Claudel (1912), down to Simon Leys (1983), for whom it is symptomatic of a certain world view.

It is perhaps best to start by briefly giving an outline of the conceptual framework that innervates the notion of play in general. "Play" has a long history as an object of academic study in anthropology (Tylor, Culin, Malinowsky, Geertz), in sociology (Durkheim, Caillois) and in other branches of thought (mathematics, sociology, psychology, philosophy). Attention is drawn to a dualistic conception first developed by Schiller who understands play as the resolution of the formal and the sensible in man; two aspects that Caillois renders in terms of *ludus* and *paidia*, whereas Benedict, following Nietzsche but referring to cultures, speaks of them as Apollinian and Dionysian. Though Papineau denies that she "wants to make the Chinese say what they didn't say," she points to the coincidence with the Chinese view of phenomena as momentary aggregates of two polarized principles.

For all who propose to study "play" in contemporary Chinese society, the sociology of leisure (Veblen, Dumazedier) provides some essential conceptual tools, notably Kelly's basic insight that "leisure is negatively determined by work" (45). This is particularly evident in Marxist and materialist ideology where leisure figures as a symbol of bourgeois capitalist idleness, but can be put to positive use in restoring the labor capacity of the worker for the collective good. The moral opposition of leisure and work is indeed one of the aspects the author had to face in her study of Beijing society in the 1990s. It is also integral to official policies in the steering of "mass culture" and other ongoing phenomena like the invasion of capitalist consumerism, or the increasing individualization in the pursuit of satisfaction at the expense of the collectivity. Chinese studies in this field still being at a descriptive stage, Papineau bases her demonstration on information gained through fieldwork, which included active participation in amateur and professional circles of mahjong and go players, and interviews with these players. Nor did she neglect to take the pulse of the times by looking through the relevant reports on games and leisure in the Chinese dailies.

But before reporting on her personal experience, the author charts the semantical field of the notion of play and its related terms, comparing its usage in Western languages and in Chinese culture by following its changes through history. One of the most notable differences