
"FENG-SHUI" MODELS STRUCTURED TRADITIONAL BEIJING COURTYARD HOUSES

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FENG-SHUI MODELS STRUCTURED TRADITIONAL BEIJING COURTYARD HOUSES

Ping Xu

This paper explains the influence of feng-shui models on the design of traditional Beijing courtyard houses from a historic-cultural perspective. Feng-shui principles, used to harmonize people with their environment and believed by traditional Chinese to ensure prosperity, structured the Beijing courtyard dwelling. Imitating the landforms of an ideal feng-shui site in nature, the spatial form of the Beijing courtyard dwelling embodied the ideal feng-shui habitat. Emphasizing orientations and positions, the plan arrangement of the Beijing courtyard dwelling manifested the ideal feng-shui model of arranging Qi, which was derived from the I Ching diagrams expressing Chinese cosmological beliefs such as the Luo Book, the Nine Chamber Diagram, and the Later Heaven Sequence. Through architectural symbolism, these feng-shui principles were applied in a manner that reflected and reinforced the strict stratification of traditional Chinese society and the Chinese family. Demonstrating the physical integration and manifestation of feng-shui models and principles in the design of Beijing courtyard houses, this study shows that traditional beliefs and popular rules hold great significance and power in the design of vernacular houses because they reflect cultural character, fit the house into its social and historical background, and provide symbolism shared by its dwellers.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the *feng-shui* influence on the design of traditional Beijing courtyard houses. The inspiration for this paper came from three major sources: the author's childhood experience while growing up in a Beijing courtyard house, her architectural investigations during the early 1980s, and her current research on *feng-shui*. *Feng-shui*, literally, "wind and water," is a traditional Chinese practice used to harmonize people with their environment and is believed by traditional Chinese to ensure prosperity.

The courtyard, a central opening enclosed by buildings, is a basic model for traditional Chinese built environments, including cities, houses, and gardens. The Beijing courtyard house developed over thousands of years, reaching its apogee during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), when Beijing, as the capital of China, was the political and cultural center for the country. The courtyard house was the basic unit of the city; formal city planning arranged courtyard dwellings on a grid system. Almost everyone in Beijing, from the emperor to the common people, lived in a courtyard house (Figure 1), although there were strict class distinctions among the dwellings. Serving a large family consisting of three or four generations, the typical Beijing courtyard house was a group of yards enclosed by one-story buildings (Figures 2 and 3). Some dwellings even included large gardens.

Feng-shui played a significant role in forming the space of the Beijing courtyard dwelling, both physically and socially. Developed over thousands of years, the ancient practice of *feng-shui* was intricately involved in every aspect of traditional Chinese life, from selecting a site for a house, city, grave, or temple to choosing a day to get married or a name for a child. In short, *feng-shui* was a system used for attracting good luck. The *feng-shui* concept of environment takes into account many factors, spiritual as well as physical and temporal as well as spatial, ranging from sky to earth and from human life to nature. The major goal of *feng-shui* is to find a way to live in harmony with heaven, earth, and other people. Traditional Chinese believed that the way to live is to unite nature and people as a whole. There is an old Chinese saying that "to be lucky, one must find good timing, a suitable place, and supporting people."

According to *feng-shui*, father sky fertilizes mother earth with *Qi*, thus producing the world and all life that inhabits it, including human beings. A very important *feng-shui* concept, *Qi* was considered to be the vital energy from the sky father, carried by rain and water (*shui*) and moved by wind (*feng*) (Guo, 276-324). One of the essential *feng-shui* principles in site selection is to avoid cold wind that blows *Qi* away; another is to have water that brings and accumulates *Qi*. Ancient Chinese believed that *Qi* would bring health, peace, and luck.

The application of *feng-shui* to site selection includes two major aspects: dealing with landforms and arranging *Qi*. Dealing with landforms addresses the relationship of *Qi* with mountains, surrounding



FIGURE 1. The Beijing courtyard houses.
Source: Department of Architecture, Tsinghua University, Beijing.

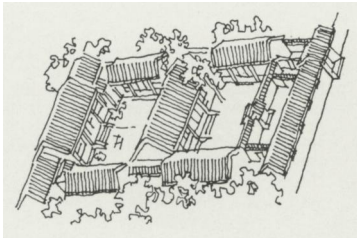


FIGURE 2. A Beijing courtyard house having three yards on the central axis.

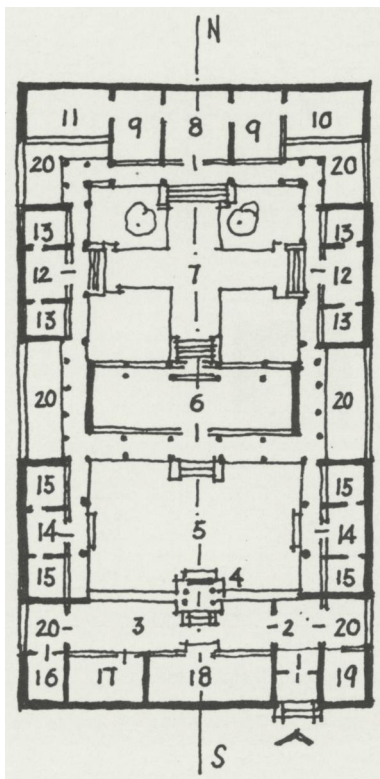


FIGURE 3. The plan of a Beijing courtyard house having three yards on the central axis.

hills, and water; arranging *Qi* emphasizes the relationship of *Qi* with orientations and positions. Both have greatly influenced the design of the Beijing courtyard dwelling.

Figure 4 shows how *feng-shui* models and principles structure the Beijing courtyard dwelling. In this framework, the input is ideal *feng-shui* models developed from the physical and social backgrounds of Chinese culture. The traditional Beijing courtyard house is the output. The program is architectural design using symbolism that follows *feng-shui* models and criteria regarding landforms, orientations, and positions. These principles were used in a way that reflected and reinforced central control within the hierarchical family. As a feedback, this space with its *feng-shui* symbolism in turn influenced its dwellers.

THE IDEAL FENG-SHUI MODEL OF LANDFORMS

According to *feng-shui*, a favorable site for a dwelling is enfolded by surrounding hills, called "tiger and dragon hills," which symbolize the mother's protection. The site faces south, with a view of a mountain peak, a symbol of ancestry, called "the facing mountain." In front of the site is an open space containing either a lake or a meandering river. In this space, living *Qi* abounds.

The ideal *feng-shui* space is also supposed to balance *Yin* and *Yang*. In general, *Yin* represents the female, the dark, the dead, and the still; *Yang* represents the male, the light, the living, and the moving. *Yin* and *Yang* together form one unit. According to ancient *feng-shui* texts, mountains are *Yin*, while water is *Yang*; the solid is *Yin* and the void is *Yang*. In an ideal *feng-shui* site, an open space (*Yang*) is enfolded by surrounding mountains (*Yin*). This balance was thought to bring prosperity to the inhabitants (Xu, 1990).

The ancient Chinese brought this model of their ideal habitat to their designs when they needed to create a man-made space, such as a house. Buildings corresponded to mountains, roads to rivers, and walls to hills (Yao, 1744). We can trace the ideal *feng-shui* model of site selection in the spatial design of traditional Chinese dwellings, particularly the Beijing courtyard house. Figure 5 shows that the spatial form of the Beijing courtyard dwelling is a physical embodiment of the ideal *feng-shui* model of landforms.

The design concept of the Beijing courtyard dwelling is a courtyard enclosed by buildings. The major rooms face south, with the two wings together forming a U shape, as a symbol of the "tiger and dragon hills." The opposite screen wall with its hanging flower gate symbolizes "the facing mountain." The yard is a symbol of the open space in the natural landscape. The entrance is located at the southeast corner of the house, the direction from which, according to *feng-shui*, the vital *Qi* comes. In the house, the courtyard (*Yang*) is enfolded by surrounding buildings (*Yin*); the balance between them symbolizes family harmony and invites happiness and prosperity.

Even though its yards and rooms are placed symmetrically, the Beijing courtyard dwelling provides a meandering sequence of access to the master rooms. The entrance, when its doors were opened, faced a wall to block a view to the inside. As a visitor passed the second gate and moved into the front yard, he would see, offset to one side, the hanging flower gate. However, inside this gate would be a screen wall that prevented a view to the major yard. To enter the major yard the visitor would

have to move around to the side. This indirect spatial sequence symbolizes a "meandering river," which serves to accumulate *Qi*. The ancient Chinese believed that favorable *Qi* passes through a meandering path, while evil *Qi* prefers a straight line.

THE IDEAL FENG-SHUI MODELS OF ARRANGING *QI* WITH RESPECT TO ORIENTATIONS AND POSITIONS

The ancient Chinese developed their courtyard dwellings to represent miniature universes. They believed that the earth took the shape of a square while the sky took the shape of a dome covering the earth. The earth below was believed to reflect the heaven above: mountains were reflections of stars, rivers a reflection of the Milky Way. Unlike some other ancient peoples, who used a solid dome over their houses to represent the celestial sphere (Malville, 1989), the ancient Chinese left open sky over their courtyards to represent heaven. The square courtyard dwelling symbolized the earth, and the central opening of the courtyard provided the family with an individual piece of sky representing heaven and giving them a place to observe the changing paths of the sun, moon, and stars.

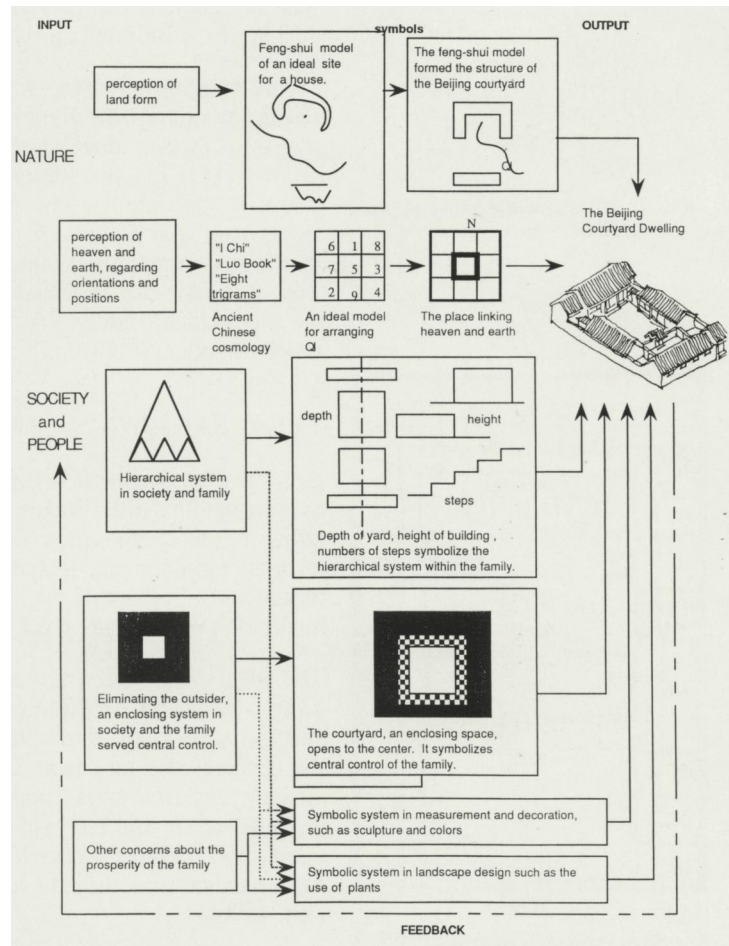


FIGURE 4. The *feng-shui* models and principles structured the Beijing courtyard dwelling.

The author believes that the design concept of the Beijing courtyard was closely linked to the *I Ching* diagrams: the Luo Book (Figure 6), the Nine Chamber Diagram (Figure 7), and the Later Heaven Sequence (Figure 8). The *I Ching* is the ancient Chinese cosmology, dating from about 3000 years ago. Representing the ancient Chinese perceptions of heaven, earth, people, time, and space, these diagrams were believed to be the ideal models indicating a harmonic relationship within the world.

In the Luo Book diagram there are nine positions, each associated with a number. The Nine Chamber Diagram shown in Figure 7 is actually an interpretation of the Luo Book. Ancient Chinese called the odd numbers *Yang* and the even numbers *Yin*. In the Luo Book, the *Yin* (even) numbers are arranged in the four corners (intercardinal points), and the *Yang* (odd) numbers on the four sides (cardinal points). The sum of the three numbers in each direction crossing this diagram is always fifteen. The sum of the two opposing numbers is always ten. Ancient Chinese believed that the number five is an "original" number: therefore this numerical "perfection" is sacred for them.

Each of the nine positions in the Luo Book diagram is also associated with an attribute derived from the five elements theory. The ancient Chinese counted five elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and soil. These elements could give birth to or destroy each other in certain sequences. In the birth

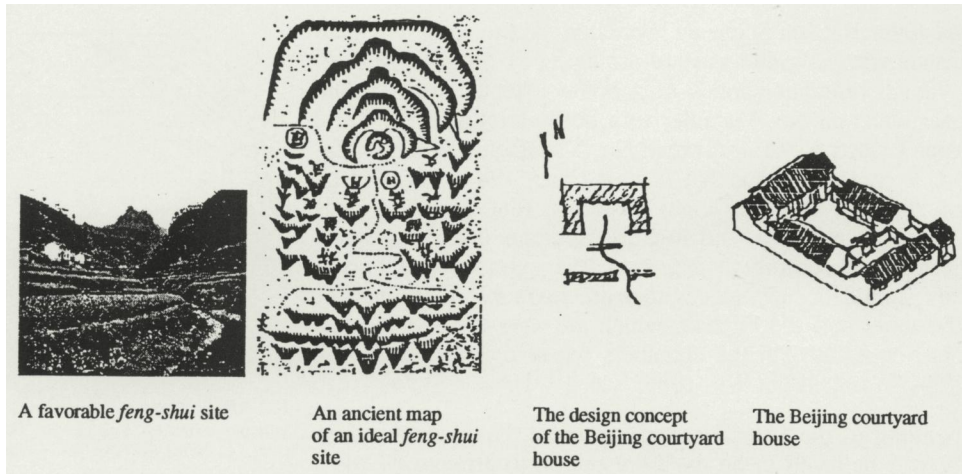


FIGURE 5. The spatial form of the Beijing courtyard dwelling is a physical embodiment of the ideal *feng-shui* model of landforms.

sequence, water produces wood, wood produces fire, fire produces soil, soil produces metal, and metal produces water. In the destruction sequence, metal cuts off wood, wood digs in soil, soil stops up water, water puts out fire, fire melts down metal. As described in the Luo Book, the north was associated with water, the east with wood, the south with fire, the west with gold or metal, and the central position with earth or soil. In the Luo Book the five elements are presented in the birth sequence.

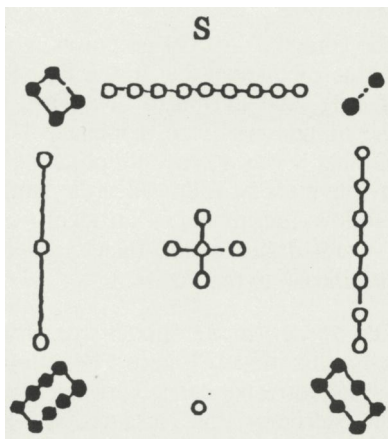


FIGURE 6.* The Luo Book.

Presenting the ancient Chinese perception of space, the Nine Chamber Diagram (Figure 7), an interpretation of the Luo Book, greatly influenced the design of Chinese built environments. In house design, the numerical "perfection" of the Luo Book symbolized harmony, cooperation, and unity in the family, while the birth sequence of the five elements presented in the Luo book was considered to be a symbol for attaining wealth and having a large, extended family. These sacred meanings in the Luo Book contributed to the Chinese comfort with a house form derived from the "nine chambers."

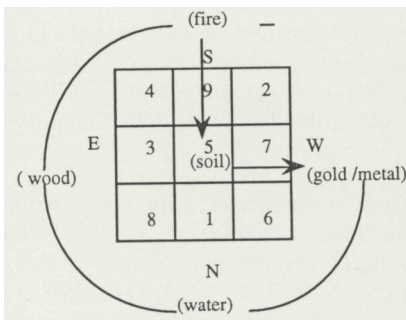


FIGURE 7.* The Nine Chamber Diagram, an interpretation of the Luo Book.

The Later Heaven Sequence (Figure 8) was derived from the Luo Book. It is a major sequence applied in the *feng-shui* practice of arranging *Qi*, which emphasizes the relationship of *Qi* with orientations and positions. In the Later Heaven Sequence there are eight trigrams, called "*Ba Gua*," making up a binary system of divination which is derived from the basic units *Yin*, broken line (--) and *Yang*, unbroken line (—) (Yao, 1744; Wang, 1968; Skinner, 1982). The eight trigrams present many meanings on different levels. The eight natural powers include heaven, earth, wind, thunder, water, fire, lake, and mountains; the eight family members include father, mother, three sons, and three daughters; the eight orientations include the four cardinal points and the four intercardinal points. Traditional Chinese used the eight trigram system to judge or divine the quality of their life.

*Note that on the diagrams and maps coming from ancient *feng-shui* books, "south" is often placed toward the top of the page.

From the Later Heaven Sequence were derived the eight *feng-shui* diagrams showing possible ways of arranging *Qi* for a house (Figure 9). Each diagram applies to a house oriented in a certain direction. Diagram No. 1 applies to a house facing north; No. 2 south; No. 3 west; No. 4 northwest; No. 5 southeast; No. 6 northeast; No. 7 southwest; and No. 8 east (Yao, 1744; Lee, 1991). For each diagram there are eight positions: four favorable ones where living *Qi* abounds, and four inauspicious ones where evil *Qi* may rise. According to *feng-shui*, the entrance and master bedrooms should occupy places that are favorable to living *Qi*, while the toilet and the kitchen, which are able to suppress evil *Qi*, should be located in the chambers where evil *Qi* might rise (Yao, 1744; Wang, 1968; Wu, 1985; Lee, 1991).

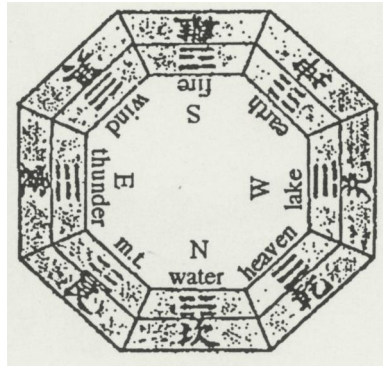


FIGURE 8. The Later Heaven Sequence. Source: Zhan Qi Yao (1744) *The feng-shui* book of the Yin House and the Yang House, Chapter 3, p. 15.

Corresponding to the Later Heaven Sequence, Diagram No. 2 in Figure 9 was believed to be the ideal option to arrange *Qi* for a house. This diagram applied to a house type called the "Kan" house ("Kan" represents north in the Later Heaven Sequence; see Figure 8). According to Diagram No. 2 interpreted in Figure 10 and Figure 11, in a Kan house the master bedrooms should occupy the north site and face south; the major entrance should occupy the southeast corner and face south (Yao, 1744; Wang, 1882; Lee, 1991).

In a house, the water was supposed to drain to the east, where the "dragon" — that is, power, good luck, worth, or treasure — resided (Wang, 1882). The ancient Chinese believed that in the East Sea (the Pacific Ocean) there was a sacred, super-powerful dragon king, and they also developed an abstract association between the dragon and the east. Since the dragon was also associated with water in the form of rivers and clouds, traditional Chinese believed that it was a heavenly principle or natural law that water should drain to the east; therefore, this principle must be followed if the family wanted to get good luck. In addition, this practice of drainage follows the model of an ideal *feng-shui* site in nature: in a site facing south and backed by hills, water drains south, then meanders southeast. (In China as a whole, most water drains either east or southeast, to the Pacific.)

The author believes that the ideal model of arranging *Qi* for a Kan house was the model structuring the plan arrangement of the Beijing courtyard dwelling. Comparing this model (Figure 11) with the plan of a typical Beijing courtyard dwelling, we can find a substantial correspondence between them. According to *feng-shui*, the positions and orientations of master bedrooms, the entrance, and the drainage exit are key factors in determining the *feng-shui* quality of the house (Yao, 1744; Wang, 1968; Wu, 1985; Lee, 1991). In a typical Beijing courtyard house, the master bedrooms, the most important place for the entire family, were placed in the north chamber and faced south. The major entrance was placed in the southeast chamber and faced south to attract the living *Qi* and good luck. To "send water to the dragon," the drainage exit was often placed at the bottom of the east wall in the front yard. Rainwater and domestic water from laundry, bathing, and cooking drained to the east, then flowed to the street in the south. It is obvious that in the Beijing courtyard dwelling, all three key elements were placed in the positions corresponding to the favorable chambers of the ideal *feng-shui* model of arranging *Qi* (Figures 11 and 12).

According to *feng-shui*, the arrangement of the kitchen could influence the health of the entire family. In the Beijing courtyard dwelling, the kitchen could be in the northeast or southwest chamber, either of which was an "evil" chamber in the *feng-shui* model of arranging *Qi* (Figure 11). However, the air intake of a kitchen wood stove must face one of the favorable orientations (Yao, 1744; Wu, 1985). In some traditional families, the kitchen was sited in the south room in the front yard, whence servers sent meals to the family. Having a huge water vat, the kitchen was also the place to store water, which either came from a well in a nearby yard or lane, or was purchased from a water wagon. Eating took place in various areas of the courtyard dwelling. Normally, each small individual family ate in its own living room. In some traditional houses, people would eat on a short dining table placed on the huge bed, which was built along the courtyard side of each bedroom. However, on

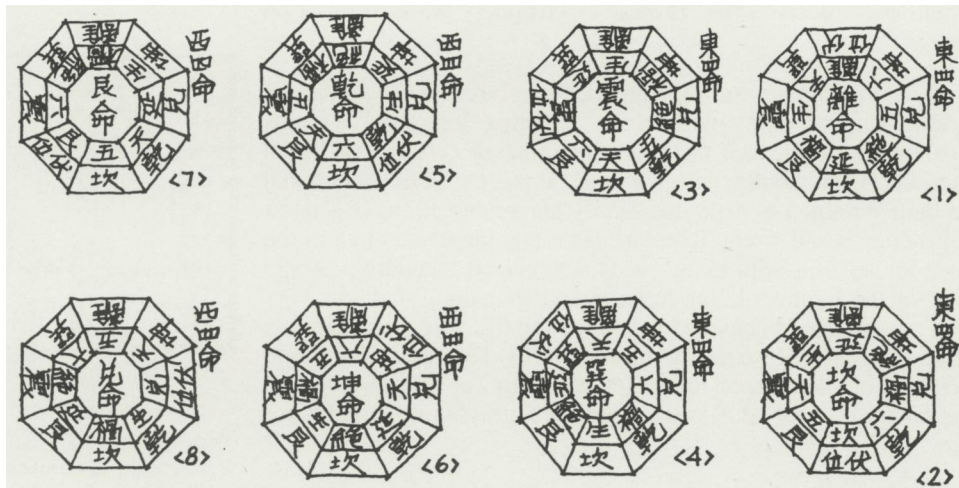


FIGURE 9. Eight diagrams of arranging *Qi*, regarding orientations and positions.
 Source: Zhan Qi Yao (1744) *The feng-shui book of the Yin house and the Yang house*, Chapter 5, p. 14.

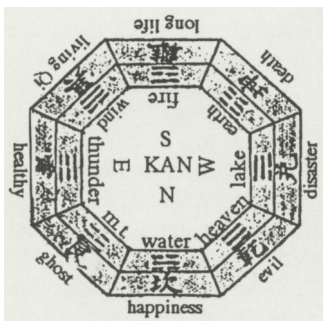


FIGURE 10. The ideal *feng-shui* model of arranging *Qi*. A trigram sequence for a Kan house, whose bedrooms and major entrance face south.

special days, for example, the new year days, the moon festival, or the grandfather's birthday, the entire family ate in the master living room or the family hall.

Corresponding to an "evil" chamber in the *feng-shui* model of arranging *Qi*, the dry toilet of a Beijing courtyard house often sat in the front yard's southwest corner. This location was convenient for cleaning out the waste without causing too much interference with family life. In the past, often before the sun rose, the courtyard's waste was collected and moved to the countryside to be used as fertilizer. The location of the dry toilet kept the master rooms away from possible smells and flies, but was a disadvantage for the servants' rooms which were near the dry toilet. The distance between master rooms and the toilet did not really inconvenience the masters, because in bedrooms or the "ear room" they had chamber pots, which were emptied to the dry toilet by servants or wives.

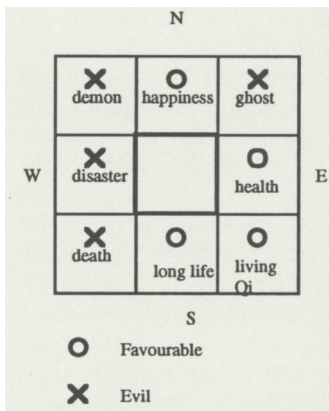


FIGURE 11. The interpretation of the ideal *feng-shui* model of arranging *Qi* for a home.

Figure 13 shows that the ideal *feng-shui* models of arranging *Qi* formed the plan arrangement of the Beijing courtyard dwelling. From the Luo Book, the Nine Chamber Diagram and the Later Heaven Sequence were derived. The two diagrams formed the spatial concept of the Beijing courtyard dwelling: a central yard enclosed by chambers arranged with the *feng-shui* symbolism.

Many design details in the Beijing courtyard dwelling also have symbolic *feng-shui* meanings. For example, the number of rooms on each side of the major yard is often three. According to *feng-shui*, the number three is best for rooms. One is a "Yang single"; two is a "Yin single." Both are too lonely. Consisting of a *Yin* and a *Yang*, the number three is a balanced and therefore lucky number (Yao, 1744). The house was also measured by a special *feng-shui* ruler, called a "Lu Ban Chi." The numbers on the ruler correlated with other elements of the divination system linking the meanings attributed by *feng-shui* to *Yin* and *Yang*, the five elements, and the eight trigrams (Yao, 1744; Cheng, 1992). Figure 14 shows a type of "Lu Ban Chi" that was used to determine the measurement of doors. The measurement chosen for a

door would correspond to the "favorable" chambers (1, 4, 5, or 8) on the ruler.

Feng-shui determined not only the architecture, but also the landscape design of the Beijing courtyard dwelling. Planting design in the courtyard was largely influenced by *feng-shui* principles, many of which were derived from traditional symbolic images. The traditional Chinese family wanted to make the family bigger and stronger generation by generation and would therefore plant a pomegranate tree in the courtyard, for its fruit with many seeds symbolized fecundity. Apple trees symbolized brothers living in harmony, something that was very important but not easily achieved in a large family. But pear and date trees were never planted together in courtyards, because the Chinese pronunciation of these trees resembles the term for "early divorce." Thus the plants in courtyards symbolized the family's expectations for its future.

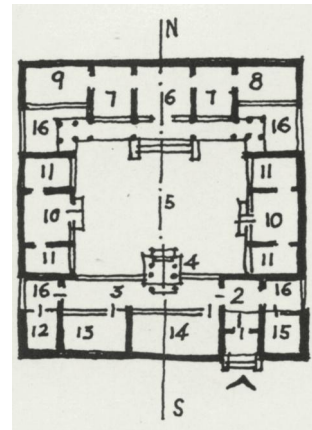


FIGURE 12. Plan of a typical Beijing courtyard house having two yards on the central axis.

SPACE AND SOCIAL CLASS: ORDER IN THE COURTYARD

The *feng-shui* symbolic system was also congruent with China's strict social class system, which attempted to capture prosperity through central control within the family. Accordingly, the Beijing courtyard dwelling was created as a space to exercise, day and night, central rule over the large family. It exemplified what Amos Rapoport (1969) has called "the idea of the house as a social control mechanism, so strong in traditional cultures."

Chinese feudal society formed an extremely strict pyramidal class system. At the top of this pyramid was the emperor as the highest commander, under whom there were various officers; at the bottom were the common people. Likewise, in the traditional Chinese family, a microcosm of the feudal society, there was also an extremely strict pyramidal structure. The grandfather or great-grandfather (if he was still living) sat atop this pyramid, with the women and servants at the bottom (Figures 15 and 16). Kinship was patrilineal, and all blood relations on the father's side shared their money with the entire family. All money was controlled by the highest authority, the grandfather. Most members of the large family had no individual freedom or privacy, particularly women, who before becoming mothers-in-law were treated very poorly.

As in the traditional Chinese society and family, in the design of the Beijing courtyard dwelling a strict class system and central control were both dominant and manifest. The grandparents always occupied the major yard, which was the largest on the central axis and was protected by one or several front yards. The inaccessibility of the central authority was designed not only for defense, but also as a symbol of his importance and the distance between him and other members of his family. Furthermore, within the major yard, the major rooms where the grandparents lived faced south and were the highest rooms with the most steps (Figures 2 and 3). Regarding orientations, positions, and drainage, the master rooms were considered to have the best *feng-shui* quality in the entire house, while the two wing rooms, symbolizing the worship of the master (Yao, 1744), occupied by the father's or uncle's families, faced east or west and were lower, with fewer steps. In the past, the master might have concubines, who with their children could occupy the wing rooms. The rooms for servants, who in many cases included daughters-in-law, faced north and were the lowest rooms, located in the narrow front yard along the street. These rooms were considered to have the worst *feng-shui* quality in the entire courtyard. Serving as guards of this social system, *feng-shui* masters often warned people that everybody in a family must follow the *feng-shui* order of the hierarchical room arrangement; otherwise an impending disaster might overcome the entire family (Yao, 1744; Wu, 1985). It is not surprising that *feng-shui* was often favored by rulers in Chinese feudal society.

The preeminence of the master rooms was reinforced by the fact that the major yard, the largest one in the house, took the shape of a rectangle with its longer axis running north and south (Figure 3). This axis controlled the strictly symmetrical composition of the major yard. Everything in the court-

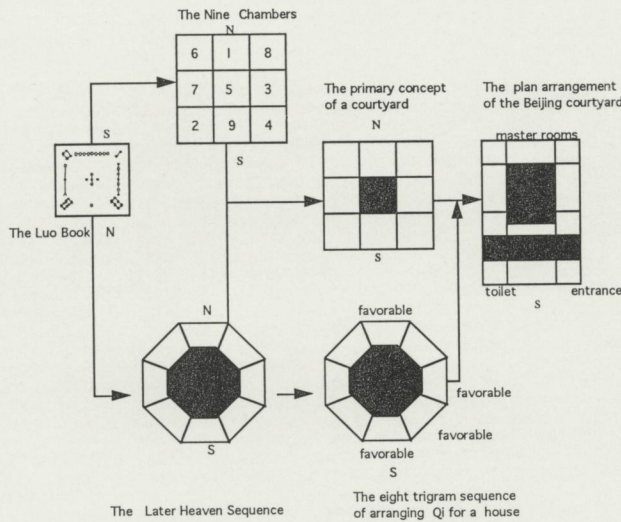


FIGURE 13. Emphasizing orientations and positions, the plan arrangement of the Beijing courtyard dwelling is a manifestation of the ideal *feng-shui* model of arranging *Qi*.

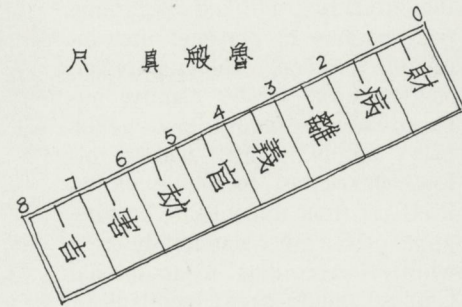


FIGURE 14. A type of *Lu Ban Chi* that was used to determine the measurement of doors.
 Source: Jianjun Cheng (1992) *Feng-shui and architecture*, p. 139.
 Original source: *Lu Ban Ying Zao Zheng Shi*.

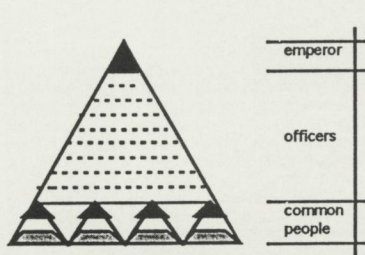


FIGURE 15. Pyramid of Chinese feudal society.

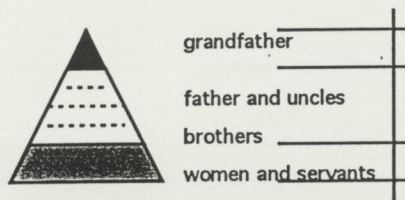


FIGURE 16. Pyramid of the traditional Chinese family.

yard seemed to focus on the master rooms, symbolizing that the entire family was united under the central power. Physical conditions reinforced culture in the sense that the grandfather was expected to be overbearing and the women and servants subservient and low.

In the Beijing courtyard dwelling, the major north-south axis was the most important element in the design of this complex. Traditionally, the depth (length) of the axis was a symbol of social position and wealth. The higher the social class, the longer the axis and the greater the number of yards. For example, the entire Beijing imperial palace, the Forbidden City, is actually a huge courtyard dwelling including many subdivisions and displaying the longest axis in the country.

Other status symbols included glazed tile, which served as a special material for the emperor; the common people could use only gray tiles in their courtyards. The royal courtyard's doors were red; the common people's were black. Symbolizing power and defense, stone lions in front of each courtyard gate were designed to correspond to the class of the dwellers. The higher the class, the bigger and more frightening were the stone lions at the front gate. Thus each family's class could be identified from the gates

of its courtyard, and parents even sought marriage partners for their children on the basis of courtyard gates indicating a class similar to or higher than their own.

INSIDE VERSUS OUTSIDE

As a symbol of the traditional Chinese family, the Beijing courtyard dwelling reflected its culture in its contrast between inside and outside. The courtyard provided the family great isolation from the outside, but little privacy inside in order to maintain social control within the family.

Most members of a traditional Chinese family had little privacy and few individual rights. It is no wonder that in Chinese there is no word for "privacy." The grandfather, the father, and even the brothers controlled everything from money to personal life, including marriage. The grandfather, as "emperor" of his family, imposed severe family law, which every family member had to follow. In contrast, the family closed itself off from the outside, keeping great privacy for the family as a whole. According to traditional Chinese family rules, members of the large family, particularly women, were forbidden to make contact individually with the outside. There was a Chinese saying that "the secrets of the family were not to be told to others."



FIGURE 17. Photo by Rixin Bai, 1983.

Reflecting these cultural characteristics, the Beijing courtyard dwelling is closed off to the outside, where it presents a cold and boring face: gray walls with small, high windows, if windows exist at all, in the side fronting the street or lane (Figure 17). The other three side walls of the dwelling adjoin either the side walls of the neighbors or a lane. They are often totally solid without any opening. Symbolically maintaining the family prosperity and keeping evil *Qi* away, the meandering spatial sequence of the courtyard dwelling also served to deter outsiders



FIGURE 18. Photo by Ping Xu, 1984.

(Figures 2 and 3). Families with high social position had several courtyards. The last courtyard was the master's yard, which was kept very private by the previous courtyards. In some dwellings, master bedrooms were also protected by a narrow back yard. To outsiders the gates with screen walls were symbols implying "stop" much more than "enter." Traditionally, Chinese knew that every time one arrived at a gate in another family's courtyard, one had to stop and ask permission to enter. The internal series of walls made the courtyard dwelling easier to defend from attack.

In contrast to its outside features, the inside face of the Beijing courtyard was open, warm, rich, and colorful (Figure 18). Corridors surrounded and opened to the courtyard. The wooden doors, screens, and gates were highly decorated and painted red, green, blue, or golden. Flowering trees, symbolizing happiness and unity, sent forth a delicate fragrance. Goldfish, a symbol of wealth and luck, swam in huge, well-designed fish tanks. Children played with their brothers, sisters, or cousins. Mothers and aunts chatted and watched their children. During festivals, the courtyard became an active place where the entire family ate and drank together to appreciate the fullest moon of the year or to set off

fireworks together to welcome the new year. The courtyard did bring the large family together in these ways.

On the other hand, the design of the openings to the inside provided little privacy. Facing the yard there were big windows in the rooms on each side (Figure 18). Here, people could watch each other. From one room to another, there was an opening with a curtain, but without an interior door. This design was convenient for the grandfather, who wanted to know everything happening in his courtyard. In addition, it implied a warning to the family members: *Watch your behavior!* The lack of individual privacy made some family members feel extremely constrained and frustrated. A traditional proverb said that "there was a tragic drama in every courtyard. The deeper the courtyard, the sadder the stories."

Humans use symbolic images to transfer cultural value to their architectural space (Rapoport, 1969). This space, as an environment imbued with cultural meaning, in turn influences its dwellers. The characteristics reflected in the Beijing courtyard dwelling may still be found in many Chinese people today: a cold outside with a warm inside; a modest surface with a proud interior; a manner that is reserved with strangers, but unrestrained, in style and content, with friends and family; and a speech that takes a meandering path. It is difficult to say whether Chinese courtyard dwellings instilled these cultural values, or whether Chinese culture formed the characteristics of Chinese courtyard houses. Perhaps culture and house are both causes and results.

CONCLUSION

Feng-shui divination held great psychological importance for traditional Chinese as a means of avoiding evil fortune and of attaining happiness, money, promotion, long life, a large family, and many children. Traditional Chinese were willing to follow *feng-shui* rules and were afraid to contravene them. In ancient times, good fortune began with responding to and accommodating nature. Imitating the landforms of an ideal *feng-shui* site with built structures, the spatial form of the Beijing courtyard dwelling embodied the ideal *feng-shui* landscape. In its emphasis on orientations and positions, the plan arrangement of the Beijing courtyard dwelling also manifested the *feng-shui* attempt to arrange vital energy. Furthermore, *feng-shui* principles were applied in a manner that reflected and reinforced the strict class system of the traditional Chinese society and family. The resulting house, a cell of ancient Beijing, symbolically attempted to capture prosperity through social control within the family rather than through allowing for individual freedom and privacy. It symbolized the traditional Chinese family, which in turn was a microcosm of China's feudal society. The Beijing courtyard dwelling with its *feng-shui* symbolism, therefore, was a physical embodiment of an ideal home, reflecting the Chinese belief that heaven, earth, and people should unite as a whole.

In Beijing courtyard houses, almost everything had a *feng-shui* meaning: yards, rooms, walls, doors, steps, drainage, orientations, positions, plants, and measurement. In short, the design of the courtyard dwelling symbolized the family's expectations for its future. The shared symbolic system made the space meaningful for its dwellers, and in turn, influenced them. This study shows that traditional beliefs and popular rules hold great significance and power in the design of vernacular houses because they reflect cultural character, fit the house into its social and historical background, and provide symbolism shared by its dwellers.

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