

## GEOGRAPHY

## HOUSE HOME FAMILY

*Living and Being Chinese*

RONALD G. KNAPP AND KAI-YIN LO, CO-EDITORS

TRANSLATORS: YANG HSIEN-YI (YANG XIANYI)  
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REVIEWED BY EMILY T. YEH

Outside my window, under the oppressive yellowish-gray blanket of smog laying over Beijing, are brand new high-rises in places until recently occupied by thousands of families' homes, disappearing here as elsewhere across China at breathtaking speed, making the poignancy and importance of Ronald Knapp and Kai-yin Lo's majestic edited volume all the more apparent. The sixteen-chapter book, beautifully designed and magnificently illustrated with color and black-and-white photographs, maps, prints, diagrams, drawings, and more, is a work of art in itself. The editors hope that the volume, which takes an expansive view of domestic architecture, and the "full range of elusive interconnections linking house, home, and family" (2) will foster an appreciation for vernacular heritage and promote awareness of the need to conserve buildings as embodiments of "the essence and culture of Chinese life" (xviii).

Ronald Knapp's introduction introduces several themes, including the striking geographical variation of dwelling types and forms across China, and the way the house and the family (both *jia*) mutually produce and influence each other. Following this, the first half of the book, "The House," consists of seven chapters. After Nancy Steinhardt's introduction, co-editor Knapp's "In Search of the Elusive Chinese House" discusses the short history of the study of Chinese domestic architecture, and analyzes common features across the diversity of Chinese homes, including the modular unit, or *jian*, and uncovered open spaces that take the form of both courtyards and smaller "skywells." Knapp offers a very interesting visual comparison of the typical American house lot plan and the Chinese *siheyuan*, with large interior courtyards enclosed on four sides by buildings, demonstrating the latter's much more efficient use of open space.

This is followed by Joseph Wang's "House and Garden," which focuses on the literati gardens of the Jiangnan region. Gardens have long played key roles in Chinese novels, were read as metaphysical embodiments of various ideals, and were used by scholar-gardeners as a means of self-expression. Next is Knapp's "Siting and Situating a Dwelling," which explores two schools of *feng shui*, or geomancy. Following the auspicious siting of buildings is the often lengthy process of actually building a house, which requires numerous rituals

and precautions, and sometimes processes for overcoming deficiencies to improve the geomantic character of a settlement. The chapter is lavishly illustrated with photographs of charms, amulets, screens, door gods, and other techniques used to ward off malevolent influences. Knapp also argues that buildings sited according to feng shui principles were generally environmentally functional: warm in winter, cool in summer, well drained and watered, and that the application of feng shui principles helped limit building on cultivatable land.

Cary Liu's "Chinese Architectural Aesthetics" follows with an exploration of architectural aesthetics. She argues that architecture is judged for its beauty, not only by its outward form and visual appearance, but even more importantly by its cultural symbolism, which is often embodied in the names of buildings, highlighting the importance of the written word. Kai-yin Lo's "Traditional Chinese Architecture and Furniture" reflects on furniture as a window onto broader elements of Chinese culture. For example, the cosmic view of the Middle Kingdom—the Han-centered view of the world—is reflected in the spatial layout of cities and the formal arrangement of furniture in the principal room of a house. Nancy Berliner's "Sheltering the Past" wraps up the section with a review of current preservation efforts for vernacular architecture—including laws, open air museums, and "villages of old dwellings" for tourism—in the Huizhou region of Anhui Province.

Part Two, "The Home and the Family," has eight chapters that tend to be more theoretical than those of the first section, with numerous contributions by anthropologists. Following Nancy Jervis' introductory chapter, "The Meaning of Jia," Myron Cohen's "House United, House Divided" traces the changing dynamics of family organization and development from the 1960s through 1990s in a village in Taiwan. Not only is the form and extent of a family's living arrangement intricately related to that of the family itself, but terminology often conflates rooms and the people within them. Like Yunxiang Yan's contribution about China, this one notes the striking trend in Taiwan toward smaller nuclear families, possibly spelling "the end of the *jia* as a structure of social and moral relationships" (257). Francesca Bray's "The Inner Quarters" brings gender into the discussion of household space, analyzing both the constraints and the opportunities that the gender-segregated life, and particularly the secluded domestic quarters for women of different class, age, and rank during late imperial China. While a married woman was confined to her husband's home, Bray argues that she also enjoyed certain freedoms within this space that her husband did not. The following chapter, "Between House and Home" by historian David Faure, examines the ideals of family in the Pearl River Delta, which stressed common budgets rather than co-residence or co-ownership of properties. Architect Puay-peng Ho's chapter focuses on ancestral halls—the most conspicuous buildings in village landscapes in southern China, and symbols of common patrilineal descent from a single ancestor.

Historian James Flath's "Reading the Text of the Home" uses *nianhua*, "New Year's pictures," to argue that a wider print culture tied individual households into universal understandings of what it



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meant to live in a home and be a member of a family. On the other hand, though the print world spread domestic cults such as those of household gods, it did not fully determine how the family interpreted those materials in the space of their homes. Following this, Maggie Bickford's "The Symbolic Seasonal Round in House and Palace" focuses on auspicious imagery, which plays a tremendously important role in Chinese visual culture around one particular period of time—the winter solstice and the sequence of nine, nine-day periods between the winter solstice and spring season. Images and rituals of envisioning and charting the nines, bringing warmth and good fortune, pervaded society, from ordinary people up to the emperor himself.

Yunxiang Yan's "Making Room for Intimacy" rounds out the volume, using long-term fieldwork from a village in Heilongjiang to examine how changes in housing design brought about by economic reform and other social changes have accommodated new demands for conjugal independence and privacy. The marked trend toward greater personal space and conjugal privacy breaks dramatically from traditional domestic space, which afforded little personal space and reinforced hierarchal and vertical parent-son relationships over horizontal husband-wife relationships; this is part of a larger transformation of the family from a disciplined corporate group to a private haven. Also included at the end of the book is an extensive glossary of *pinyin* terms, which provides simplified characters and definitions in English, and an extensive list of English and Chinese references.

Overall, this stunningly illustrated volume will be of interest to a wide readership of art historians, architects, curators, collectors, geographers, anthropologists, and other aficionados of Chinese history and culture. Its rather specialized contents make the book inappropriate for use as a high school or undergraduate textbook for a general survey course on China, but instructors will no doubt find its insights onto Chinese culture, spatiality, gender, and the environment, as well as explications of feng shui, lineage, and changing notions of privacy, very useful references for teaching. The remarkable illustrations can give students an unsurpassed "feel" for China as a lived place. Finally, the gorgeous prints and photographs alone are more than reason enough to want to own this volume. ■

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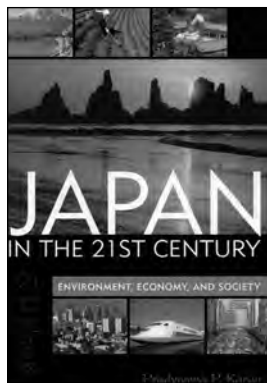
## JAPAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY *Environment, Economy, and Society*

BY PRADYUMNA P. KARAN

CARTOGRAPHY BY DICK GILBREATH

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Japan is home to one of the world's largest economies—in fact, the second or third largest, depending on the use of purchasing power parity. It is a center of technology, manufacturing, finance, and, increasingly, an exporter of culture through media such as *anime* and *manga*. Yet interestingly, relatively little has been written about Japan in the past fifteen years for use in academic environments. Remarkably lacking have been wide-ranging geographical texts on this country. With regard to recent studies of Asia, much attention has been deservedly paid to the rapid ascendance of China's economy and its accompanying rise in political influence within many regional and global spheres. It should be mentioned that the popular media and academic research exhaustively covered Japan in the not-too-distant past, especially during the booming 1980s. Still, given the global impact of Japan, this country remains important for instruction and research within a number of disciplines. In *Japan in the 21st Century: Environment, Economy, and Society*, Pradyumna Karan provides a comprehensive overview of Japan across a number of facets, including the physical, political, economic, and cultural realms.

The fourteen-chapter text covers a broad range of topics on Japan. A dominant theme concerns the myriad changes and challenges facing the country. The lead chapter sets the tone immediately by addressing these upheavals. The second chapter provides an inclusive physical geography of Japan, including how the landscape has been impacted by humans over the centuries. Chapter three provides cultural and historical settings for Japan, necessary backgrounds for any study of this country. Ensuing chapters encompass population patterns, including the study of urbanization patterns across the country, without which no study of Japan would be complete. The importance of agriculture throughout Japan's history and its continued influence on the political arena (despite scarce land and employment numbers) are addressed as well.

The last half of the book addresses the political and economic environments in Japan and their impacts. Chapter nine provides