

A Chinese House

A people's architecture, like its art, is a direct manifestation of its culture. A close examination of any recurring architectural theme can reveal a great deal about the cultural pattern of its builders.

In traditional China, the most important unit that a person belonged to was the family. The first loyalties were to the family. No virtue was more important than filial piety. The Confucian ideal—lived by only a very small percentage of the population in reality—was to have three or four generations of a single family living under the same roof. The traditional Chinese house was designed to express these beliefs.

Examining this drawing of a typical Chinese dwelling, notice the difference between the plainness of the outside and the lavishness of the interior courtyards. Each building is created to represent a hierarchical pattern—again a manifestation of traditional Chinese culture. The building facing south onto the larger courtyard houses the senior members of the family. The buildings on the east and west house married sons and their families.

Consider: *The contradiction between the sense of seclusion of such a dwelling, with its encompassing perimeter walls, and the openness of its interior.*

Photo 3-2

