



# Courtyard Housing in China: Chinese Quest for Harmony

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## ABSTRACT

*The Chinese have lived in single-extended-family courtyard houses in many parts of China for thousands of years. The earliest courtyard house found in China was during the Middle Neolithic period (5000-3000 BCE). The courtyard form signifies Chinese quest for harmony with nature and in social relationships. However, the 20th century was a significant turning point in the evolution of Chinese courtyard houses; this paper provides an overview of this transition. It starts by briefly introducing traditional Chinese courtyard houses and their decline since 1949, it then examines the emergence of new courtyard housing in Beijing and Suzhou since the 1990s, and then it evaluates the new development of Chinese-style courtyard garden villas in/around these two cities since the 2000s, such as Beijing Guantang and Suzhou Fuyuan villa estates. They are explorations of a new way to honor Chinese architectural history and philosophy, meanwhile, incorporating Western interior design principles to meet modern living requirements. This architectural acculturation represents Chinese sustained quest for harmony in their art of living. The paper finally proposes four designs of new courtyard garden houses for future practice.*

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is a chronological overview of the transformation of Chinese courtyard houses over the last 60 years (1950-2010). It briefly introduces traditional Chinese courtyard houses from ancient times and their decline since 1949, it then examines the rise of new courtyard housing in Beijing and Suzhou since the 1990s, and the focus is on the growth of Chinese-style courtyard garden villas in/around Beijing and Suzhou since the 2000s. The original contributions are in the discussion of the two generations of new courtyard house types

based on the author's onsite and online surveys, as well as the four designs of new courtyard garden houses for future practice.

Two historic and cultural cities in China, Beijing and Suzhou, have been chosen as the case-study sites because they have followed the city planning principles set in the *Record of Trades in Rituals of Zhou* (Zhou Li Kao Gong Ji) and Feng Shui theory. Their traditional courtyard

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