



5 *Siting and Situating a Dwelling**Fengshui, House-Building Rituals, and Amulets*

Even as the popularity of *fengshui* in rural and urban China persists, the public at large and scholars elsewhere in the world have increased their interest in it. Countless *fengshui* guidebooks and manuals in Chinese as well as other languages—Bulgarian, Czech, Hebrew, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish (among others) in addition to abundant titles in English, Spanish, French, Japanese, Indonesian, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese—attest not only to global awareness of a rather abstruse set of Chinese beliefs, but also to their enduring credibility. While much attention focuses on how *fengshui* can assist people in increasing their wealth, happiness, and longevity, there also is substantial concern for pursuing “a better life,” “clearing your clutter,” “love and romance,” “well-being,” “balance and harmony,” “trouble-free remodeling,” “helping children thrive,” “improving relationships,” “healing,” “manipulating one’s destiny,” “and business success.” Yet it is important to note that the precepts of *fengshui* are fundamentally rooted in the action of siting and situating a building—that is, choosing an auspicious location, a spatial setting—rather than the mere pursuit of bliss. A spatial setting involves two fundamental geographic attributes: a “site”—the actual space occupied by the structure—and its “situation”—the location of the site in relation to its broader surroundings. Traditionally, certain sites and situations for the structures of a particular family or lineage were viewed as more favorable than others, according to basic *fengshui* axioms, and a proper choice would then influence, perhaps even control, the fortunes and general benefits that would redound to those who occupied a structure built on the site. This *self-conscious* attention to siting and situating houses—as well as palaces, temples, and graves—manifests many aspects of traditional beliefs, including aspirations and fears. Some of these actions and efforts are conspicuously apparent in the character of individual dwellings, while many others are less obvious though no less significant.

The conceptual roots of *fengshui* are found in ancient classics such as the *Shijing* [Book of songs] and the *Shujing* [Book of documents], as well as other fragmentary texts, that reach back to the Zhou period (1100–770 B.C.). Taken together, they reveal some of the cosmo-symbolic conventions and practices for locating imperial

Fig. 5.1. This page from a printed almanac dated 877 was found in a temple in Dunhuang in northwestern China. In addition to dos and don'ts in the vertical columns, the page includes a drawing of a quadrangular courtyard house, associating the main gate, well, latrine, storage, etc. to the twenty-four directions that are arrayed around it. Source: By permission of the British Library, Or.8210/P.6.



capitals and palaces. *Fengshui*'s hold on the consciousness of common Chinese as they cope with decisions to modify the environments within which they live, however, is of more recent origin.¹ It is this powerful hold of *fengshui* practices on common people, who apply them at different scales in the search for auspicious sites for houses, graves, gardens, temples, and other buildings, as well as complete settlements, that is the focus of this chapter.

Throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, popular almanacs provided points of access, a common lore, for the general public to the arcane features of divination, which was based upon correlative cosmology and of which *fengshui* was but one part (Figure 5.1). Although it is not easy to document the means by which Chinese villagers and townsfolk employed *fengshui* in the past, the results were subsequently readily observable in countless rural and urban landscapes. Traditional dwellings and villages throughout China today—in remote areas as well as in cosmopolitan centers—continue to be interpreted as having been sited via the elaborate application of *fengshui* esoterica, even if there is scant historical evidence of the actions themselves. In spite of the appealing and harmonious nature of many of these

building sites and structures, as well as even the demonstrated good fortune of the inhabitants occupying them, it is nonetheless rarely clear that *fengshui* precepts were applied contemporaneously when the sites were selected. All too often, there is evidence of an after-the-fact application of *fengshui* ideas to structures already sited and built, thus leading to statements of lore based upon retrospective *fengshui* explanations that are “more convincing than [their] prospective counterpart,” according to remarks by Freedman regarding burial sites (1966, 129). Moreover, it is important to recognize that Chinese elites and others who might have employed *fengshui*—whatever its ostensible authority over the ages—also have disdained it, even as they have used its explanatory metaphors (Xu 2000, 235). With the caveats that local practices diverge and that manuals and texts present often contradictory statements, it is still possible and useful to sketch out some of the core concepts and common applications regarding *fengshui*. With little thought to cosmological abstraction and theoretical constructs, even illiterate peasants, moreover, seem to have considered *fengshui* as they built their simple dwellings. Centuries ago, when the countryside was relatively unpopulated, the search for a suitable—even ideal—spatial setting for a house or grave often took a good deal of time. Today in China, while public interest in *fengshui* has increased significantly, even as the government has stigmatized it as “feudal superstition,” the challenges of choosing auspicious sites in heavily built up and densely populated villages and towns are clearly easier to ponder than to carry out (Bruun 1996, 47–65, 2003; Knapp 1999b, 158–171).

Literally meaning “wind and water,” *fengshui* is a modern colloquial expression of elaborated general ideas that encapsulates the more abstruse principles associated with earlier esoteric terms. *Buzhai* [divination of a house site], *kanyu* [cover and support and canopy of heaven and the chariot of earth], and *dili* [earth truth or land pattern, which is used today for the discipline of geography] are but three of a very large number of centuries-old terms employed as synonyms for *fengshui*. *Fengshui* is usually translated into English as “geomancy,” but many specialists have found this term inadequate, offering some interesting alternatives—“topomancy” (Feuchtwang 1974, 2); “astro-ecology” and “topographical siting” (Bennett 1978, 2); “siting” (Smith 1991, 131); “ecomancy” (Rossides 1982); “mystical ecology” (Knapp 1986, 108–109); and “natural science of the landscape” (Berglund 1990, 240). Whatever the benefit of any of these terms, the Chinese term *fengshui* will be used in an untranslated form in this chapter.

The essence of *fengshui* is a universe animated by the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, in which an ethereal property known as *qi* [life breath or cosmic energy;

also called *shengqi*] gives character and meaning to a place at whatever the scale—city, town, village, residence, gravesite, etc. At an elementary level, each place exemplifies either *yin* or *yang* characteristics. Yet since sites usually exhibit both traits simultaneously and both *yin* and *yang* are intrinsically positive and beneficial, neither should be found in excess or in equilibrium. *Yin* sites, which are optimal for burial, frequently fall away from the sun to the north or northwest and render the female aspect, passivity and darkness, as well as the Earth and moon. The divination of a suitable grave site or *yinzhai* [an abode for the dead] using *fengshui* idioms has a long history of bringing good fortune to those continuing to live and “comfort” to those who occupy the *yinzhai* (Ahern 1973; Freedman 1966). In addition, locating a building site for a dwelling for the living, a *yangzhai*, as well as for a settlement such as a village—in a quest for benefits for those who are alive—similarly has been defined in both popular lore and written manuals.

Approaches to fengshui

By late imperial times, two basic approaches characterized *fengshui*, one stressing cosmic patterns and principles and the other their manifestations on the surface of the Earth: the former, the Compass School, also called the Analytical School [Liqi Zong or Fangwei Zong], depended upon complicated calculations; the latter, the somewhat older Configurations School, also called the Forms School [Xingshi Zong], was visually and intuitively based and emphasized topographical landscape features. Initially the schools may have been quite distinct, but over time and in practice their individual approaches came to be blurred as intuition and theory regarding celestial and terrestrial phenomena commingled with the realities of actual landscapes. Both schools are associated with traditions and practices that originated in southern China, especially Jiangxi, Fujian, and Zhejiang provinces. Emphasis in Jiangxi province was on the character of terrain, especially mountains and watercourses, while in Fujian and Zhejiang the use of a complicated *luopan*, or “compass,” dominated. Whatever the school, the application of *fengshui* principles in very different geographic environments—the vast plains of North China, the restricted plots in the canal region of Jiangnan, the areas of rugged terrain throughout South China—led to a mélange of *fengshui* notions and conventions that sometimes defy any attempt to discern consistencies. Like various other forms of Chinese fate calculation, site selection is personalized by using eight Chinese characters, or *bazi*, consisting of one stem and one branch associated with an individ-

ual's year, month, day, and hour of birth; these are then coordinated with a specific direction. *Fengshui* shares with traditional Chinese medicine a concern for equilibrium and harmony in order to obviate misfortune and offers as well prescriptions to "treat" perceived deficiencies. In addition to the determination of the optimal spatial aspects of a building site, attention traditionally was also paid to the temporal dimension—propitious timing—of building activities by consulting almanacs (Hwangbo 2002; Smith 1991, 131–171; 1992).

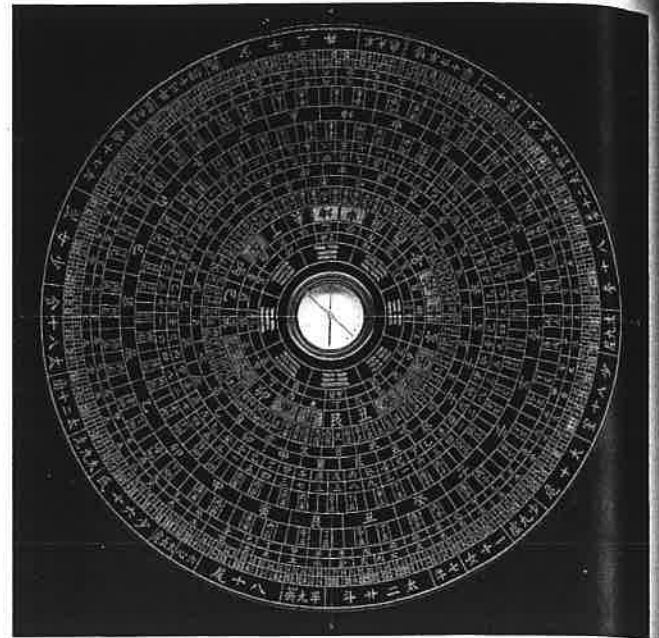
Compass School of fengshui. Utilizing his diagnostic as well as prognostic faculties, an "interpreter of wind and water" [*fengshui xiansheng*, among many other similar names]—sometimes simply called a geomancer in English and as often a professional as an amateur—provided access to this mystical ecology. As depicted in Figure 5.2, a *fengshui* practitioner in traditional China armed himself with a dishlike *luopan*, several manuals, and often a copy of the *Yijing* [Book of changes] in order to investigate the characteristics of a building site. Perambulating around the prospective building site, he approached the task with solemnity and mystery. "About all their movements there is an air of classic decorum," observed a Westerner at the end of the imperial period who disdained *fengshui* as mere superstition, "and it is no wonder, therefore, that the masses regard the geomancers as fountains of wisdom, marvels of learning, capable of fathoming all the mysteries of heaven and earth" (De Groot 1892–1910, 3:1010). Today, however, the practitioner "usually dresses in plain working clothes and lives in an unimpressive house which does not display his trade. He has the appearance of a craftsman . . . although his vocabulary contains a large number of terms that commoners do not understand" (Bruun 1996, 53). Today in China, one seeks recommendations from family and friends in order to locate suitable *fengshui xiansheng*, while in Taiwan and Hong Kong they can be found in Yellow Page telephone directories and via websites.

The *luopan*, also called *luojing*, is a saucerlike block of wood with a magnetized south-pointing needle at its center; hence the appellation "compass" (Figure 5.3). Yet the *luopan* is much more than a device for finding directions. Incorporated within it are not only the *yin-yang* symbol, but also at least a dozen—and ranging between three and nearly fifty—inscribed concentric rings, which in sum integrate the full scope of interrelating celestial and terrestrial relationships that comprise Chinese metaphysics. Among the multitude of cosmic variables embraced by the circular bands are the *taiji* symbol, the duality of *yin* and *yang*, the four seasons, the Five Phases, the Eight Trigrams [Bagua], the Nine Constellations, the Ten Heavenly



Fig. 5.2. Utilizing a luopan, or geomancer's compass, a traditional fengshui practitioner and his assistants investigate the characteristics of a building site. Source: Sun 1905, 32/2b.

Fig. 5.3. With a magnetized, south-pointing needle at its center, the saucerlike luopan has a series of inscribed concentric rings expressing the range of inter-related celestial and terrestrial relationships that comprise Chinese metaphysics. Source: Collection of Ronald G. Knapp.



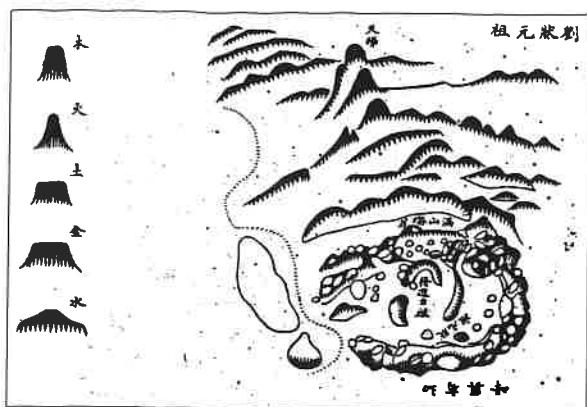
Stems, the Twelve Earthly Branches, the Duodenary and Sexagenary Cycles, and the twenty-eight constellations. Manipulating the *luopan*, practitioners of the Compass School draw upon logical associations as well as intuition in making their decisions. They manipulate the cosmological correspondences among the ring complexes, especially numerical and correlative associations, in order to divine the potentialities of building sites and avoid the adversity arising from incorrect judgments.

Forms School of fengshui. In some respects, the Forms (or Configurations) School, with its emphasis on the lay of the land, is easier to comprehend than the abstruse correlations of the Compass School. For novices as well as the initiated, there often is an aesthetic logic to many of the landscape sites chosen by practitioners of this school, with both describing sites as “comfortable” and “suitable,” in terms of the Chinese word *shufu*, and often enchantingly beautiful: “At a true site . . . there is a touch of magic light. . . . The hills are fair, the waters fine, the sun handsome, the breeze mild; and the sky has a new light: another world. Amid confusion, peace; amid peace, a festive air. Upon coming into its presence, one’s eyes are opened; if one sits or lies, one’s heart is joyful. Here the breath gathers, and the essence collects” (quoted in March 1968, 259).

Metaphorical expressions and vivid imagery are abundant in the Forms School, with manuals that emphasize the shape of hills and diagrams of a multiplicity of terrain patterns. Basic hill and water configurations that are related to the Wuxing, or Five Agents (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), are shown in Figure 5.4; by association they are related with the five planets so that "the terrestrial configurations are in agreement with the celestial order" [*xingfeng peitian*]. Because the transmutative Five Agents are capable of producing or destroying, any association is also assumed to have the same capacities, the effect of which is made complex by the fact that these capabilities wax and wane through a twelve-stage cycle, repeating itself five times, and thus resulting in an extraordinary number of permutations.

Mountains loom large in *fengshui* discourse, even when a landscape is in reality quite flat, perhaps because of an ancient veneration of mountains. *Fengshui* interpreters often begin at a macro-scale in which they attempt to link "dragon veins" [*longmai*] as they reach from the Kunlun Mountain through "grandparent" and "parent" mountains, diminishing in elevation and extent as they reach a specific local building site (Figures 5.5–5.7). Nearby topographical features, called "local eminences," or *sha*, include elevated ridges and watercourses, which are often painstakingly analyzed and distinguished. The use of the term *sha*, meaning "sand," is believed to stem from the fact that *fengshui* practitioners once shared ideas with their students by forming ridges and valleys of sand on the ground in order to model exemplary configurations. An optimal location was one in which "yin was at one's back and embraced by yang, with ridges to the back and facing water" (*fu yin bao yang, bei shan mian shui*).

Via correlative thinking, cardinal directions could be identified with one of the "four spiritual animals" [*si shen* or *si shou*] and then linked to terrain features: To the east is the azure dragon [*qinglong*] and the element wood, symbolizing spring, the rising sun, and the birth of yang. To the south is the vermilion phoenix [*zhunque*], representing the element fire, indicating summer and the period of maximum yang. To the west is the white tiger [*baihu*], associated with the element metal, symbolizing autumn and harvest and the birth of yin. Completing the cycle in the north is the black tortoise [*xuanwu*], representing the element water, winter, and maximum yin. Man was to be anchored in the soil or earth, the fifth agent/element in the center of the cosmic map. The center is considered a fifth "direction," thus resulting in the correlation of five directions with the Five Agents, which are sometimes called the Five Phases. In addition to the four cardinal directions and the center, four corner directions between sets of cardinal points are recognized and thus



◀ Fig. 5.4. The shapes of hills are related to the Five Agents, or Wuxing—wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Source: Adapted from Dixue tanyuan 1966.



Fig. 5.5a–c.

a. Schematic drawings representing (from left to right) wood, fire, earth, water, and metal are sometimes given shape in the upper gable walls, called “mountain walls,” or shan qiang, of houses in southern China.

b. This gable configuration represents wood. Shenzhen, Guangdong.

Source: Photograph by Ronald G.

Knapp 2000.

c. Metal is represented in this gable ornamentation. Taibei, Taiwan.

Source: Photograph by Ronald G.

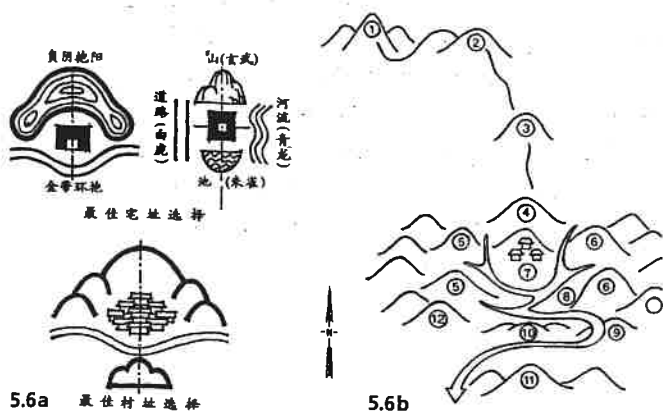
Knapp 1993.



5.5b



5.5c



5.6a 最佳村址选择

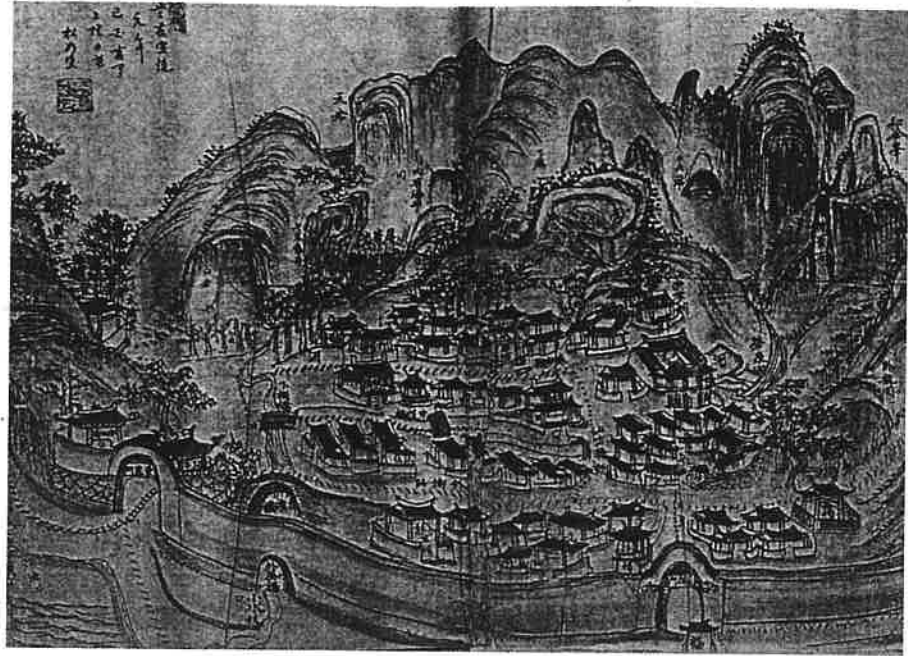
5.6b

◀ Fig. 5.6a–b. “Yin at one’s back and embraced by yang, with ridges to the back and facing water” is a shorthand expression for optimal sites at different scales.

a. Optimal sites for dwellings. Bottom left: Optimal site for a village. Source: Shang 1992, 27.

b. An ideal building site with its constituent parts: (1) Kunlun Mountain; (2) grandparent mountain; (3) parent mountain; (4) master mountain; (5) Baihu, or White Tiger Mountain; (6) Qinglong, or Green Dragon Mountain; (7) settlement site; (8) watercourse; (9) shuikou, or water inlet; (10) Anshan; (11) chaoshan; (12) luocheng. Source: Fan 1992, 40.

Fig. 5.7. Schematic drawing of a Chinese village incorporates various fengshui terrain elements. Source: Unknown.



define nine directions. The most prominent and immediate morphological markers associated with a building site are those on the left/east and right/west—that is, *qinglong* and *baihu*. Correlated with *yang* and *yin*, *qinglong* and *baihu* are not static but instead are vital, interacting, and intertwining, and they concentrate *qi* within a protected node. Naming landmarks in terms of the green dragon, vermilion phoenix, white tiger, and black tortoise creates a set of informal reference positions that have clear spatial implications. In describing bridges, gates, streets, pagodas, and temples, as well as ridges, watercourses, ponds, and groves, these terms are distinctive markers in the mental maps of many Chinese today.

Within such landscape configurations, the *fengshui* practitioner attempts to discover *xue*, a term meaning “lair,” “cave,” or “hole” and used also to describe critical acupuncture points. Usually shown on a *fengshui* schematic diagram as a small circle, the *xue* node is where *qi* concentrates. Buildings that are situated at a *xue* must be placed so as not to obstruct the movement of *qi*, since vital *qi* flows naturally from above and below. Yet a *xue* is more than a mere spot where *qi* concentrates; it is a converging point in an articulated horizontal, somewhat sloping, spatial composition that is wrapped by a serpentine chain of hills or mountains, embraced within the protective armchair-like set of lesser topographical features. At a different scale, this same armchair-like form is apparent in the shape of grave sites throughout southern China (Figures 5.8–5.9).

Fig. 5.8. An embracing landscape configuration is apparent with armchair-like grave sites found throughout southern China. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1966.

5.9 ▶



Fig. 5.9. With a number of ridges to the back and a stream across the front, it is said that a village leans against the "dragon hills." "Hills bring sons, water brings prosperity" is how villagers across the suspicious character of a site. Shang Xiaoqi village, Jiangwan township, Wuyuan county, Jiangxi. Source: Gong 2001, 3.

Sinuous mountains leading to a *xue* are metaphorically described as a "dragon," or *long*; whose body is an undulating yet interconnected organism that may be extensive and complex or rather simple. As characterized in a *fengshui* manual: "Mountain and water are male and female. . . . If the dragon curls left, the water has to curl right; if the dragon curls right, the water has to curl left; the two embrace each other, and only then does the site coalesce" (Ye 1696, *ce* 1.12b; quoted in March 1968, 258). In level areas without obvious ridgelike terrain features, a secluded location with only gentle breezes and slowly moving water must be identified in order to assure that *qi* is not dispersed. With a focus on affinities as well as oppositions, balanced and rather symmetrical sites are valued: "On a rock hill you must take an earthly site; on an earth hill you must take a rocky site. Where it is confined, take an open place; where it is open, take a confined space. On a prominence, take the flat; where it is flat, take the prominent. Where strong comes, take weak; where weak comes, take strong. Where there are many hills, emphasize water; where there is much water, emphasize hills" (Shanghai *xingxiang* 1957, 63; quoted in March 1968, 258).

Just as with ridges, hills, and mountains, meandering streams contributed to the spatial composition of a favorable site, and accumulated or ponded water was judged important. Indeed, an effort had to be made to bring the two categories into balance inasmuch as mountains were *yin* and watercourses *yang*. Phrases relating to

water are reminiscent of the language invoked in the design of Chinese gardens, as sketched in the preceding chapter by Joseph C. Wang. Following the principles of *fengshui*, an individual dwelling, as well as an assemblage of dwellings in a village, often faces south or southeast throughout China, but proper siting goes well beyond mere compass readings. A good *fengshui* site is well drained, well watered, and reasonably sheltered from cold winds and intrusive heat. Throughout many areas of southern China, *fengshui* principles have helped limit building on cultivable land, led to construction on sites at which flooding and erosion are minimized, and restrained reckless decision making.

House-Building Rituals

Once a site was chosen for a dwelling, attention then turned to the erection of the structure. Like other construction in traditional China, building a house was an endeavor that went beyond the mere amassing of raw materials and their assembly by carpenters and masons. Just as with the initial selection of the home site, timing and ritual received careful attention throughout the construction process, continuing even later for details in and about the dwelling. Furthermore, because it was generally believed that there were intrinsic "antagonisms" among those involved in a building project—the household itself, the *fengshui* master, the tradesmen such as masons and carpenters—each addressed his suspicions in different ways. In some cases, written materials in almanacs available in the market or secret manuals passed down from generation to generation could be consulted. More generally, however, awareness came from orally conveyed lore or notions considered common knowledge in a community that—even if comprehended differently—essentially corroborated the more formalized ideas held in books.

A review of written records reveals that attention was paid to the dates and hours that trees could be felled, a building lot leveled, ground broken, and a stone foundation set. Careful thought was given to how the carpenter's trestle was placed, as well as to how wood was shaped within it. Special ritual attended several critical junctures in house building, each of which was judged especially consequential and demanding of attention as the dwelling took shape: raising the columns and beams; hoisting the ridgepole; determining the slope of the roof; laying the surrounding brick or tamped-earth wall; tiling the roof; paving the floors; plastering the walls; installing the door; building a kitchen stove; sweeping the floors; digging the well; creating a cowshed, stable, pigsty, or privy; and moving in. While nineteenth- and

early-twentieth-century visitors to China observed and wrote of practices such as these and many practices seemed to have withered away over the past century, recent travelers—especially in remote areas in China's countryside, but also in its towns and thriving coastal areas—continue to encounter evidence of house-building rituals even as the twenty-first century begins.

For many Chinese, the building of a house was viewed as a lengthy project that took time to complete, a condition as true in the past as it is today. Rarely were—indeed, are—resources sufficient to construct a new house all at once; thus, building materials—wood, brick, roof tiles, stone—had to be acquired and stockpiled as money became available. Since household members, their kin, and even neighbors cooperated to make some of the building parts themselves, spare time during slack agricultural seasons provided opportunities to do the work. In some cases, timber was felled in nearby woods, then piled safely for later use, but large beams and the long ridgepole might have to be obtained from some distance away, with construction delayed until their arrival.² Where timber was especially scarce, such as in northern China, wood was scavenged from demolished buildings and made available in local markets, a practice that is still seen today (but perhaps less so than in the past).

Groundbreaking and Leveling. In many parts of central and southern China, groundbreaking [*dongtu*] and leveling the foundation [*pingji*] demanded caution since these actions had the potential of upsetting natural forces. Tutelary deities such as the Earth God Tudi Gong were offered incense and fruit with rituals accompanied by firecrackers. Chicken blood is often mentioned as being sprinkled on a new building site as a means of expelling malevolent forces stirred up by the breaking of the ground. Mysterious charms written on peachwood slips, as in Figure 5.10, are still seen in Zhejiang province, where they appeal to the guardians of each of the directions affected by the groundbreaking. Plumb lines and water levels continue to be used in order to level a foundation before rammers are employed to pound the earth until it is sufficiently firm to support columns and walls.

Raising the Ridgepole: Shangliang. While critical ritual steps in “assembling” a house include setting the foundation stones, erecting the columns, orienting the main doorframe, and shaping wooden building parts such as interior columns and beams, it was the hoisting of the ridgepole that normally received most attention. The ridgepole was not only likely to be the most costly building component, but its strength was also critical in supporting the weight of a massive roof, whether the

Fig. 5.10. Written on peachwood slips, these calligraphic charms appeal to the guardians of each of the five directions affected by a groundbreaking. Ruian county, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1988.



latter was made of clay tile or thatch. The special significance of raising the ridgepole was acknowledged by an array of festivities on an auspicious date; these included not only programmed ritual, but also a bounteous meal shared with all of the craftsmen. For larger dwellings with multiple parallel buildings and thus multiple ridgepoles, attention was paid to identifying the “favorable” ridgepoles, which should be higher than others, and thus an ongoing series of different rituals was necessary.

Shangliang rituals and festivities have been recorded all over China, differing only in minor details, with only a small number that are as complex as those stipulated in the *Lu Ban jing* (Knapp 1999b, 41–51), the now classical carpenters’ manual written by Lu Ban, the ingenious master craftsman of the fifth century B.C. and the patron of carpenters and masons. To the east of Xi’an in Shaanxi province, the raising of modern roof trusses and their securing with paired ridgepoles and associated purlins is still a community event with simplified ritual elements when compared to the more elaborate situation described above. As seen in Figure 5.11a, a *taiji* symbol and characters stating the time and date, as well as an auspicious phrase, are written directly on the interior underside of the rounded ridgepole so that they can be read from below once the pole is set in place. A relatively simple “solemn and reverential” ceremony accompanies the hoisting and setting of the main ridgepole above the inferior ones. The table of offerings, placed within the walls and beneath the roof trusses, contains only several carpenters’ tools, incense, and two candles and is set before the ridgepole itself, which has a red cloth draping over each of its ends. After tribute is made to Lu Ban, accompanied by the sound of firecrackers, the ridgepole is hoisted atop the wooden framework (Figure 5.11b). As so often is the case throughout China today, younger villagers appear to have little understanding of the specific meaning of various amulets associated with buildings, seeing them instead only as “generalized emblem[s] of good luck” (Azevedo 1991, 78).

In rural Liaoning province, in an echo of more traditional rituals, each of the principal building actions preceding the raising of the ridgepole is accompanied by the chanting of rhymed, “luck-bringing” verses, or *da xi ge*, which praise the quality of the raw materials and the skill of the carpenters and summon good fortune (Jiang 1994). On the chosen day, the rough beam that will become the ridgepole is placed on a trestle and shaped according to specific measurements. Other rituals center on a square table set in the courtyard or in the middle of the dwelling, upon which a container is filled with “the five grains” (rice, wheat, beans, and two kinds of millet, which together are a propitious symbol for a good harvest) and three sticks of incense; nearby are steamed buns, food and wine, a wine pot, plates, and chopsticks,

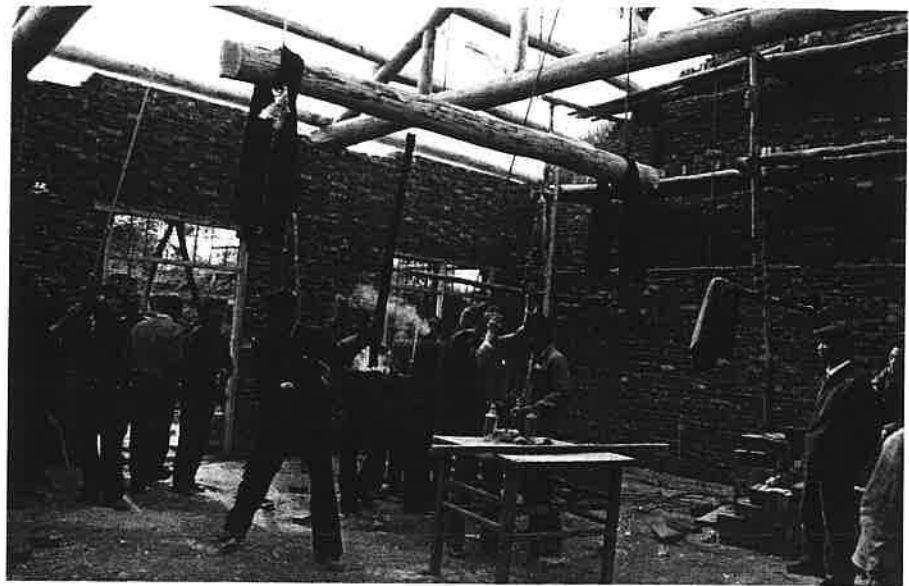


Fig. 5.11a-b.

a. Villagers examine the ridgepole just before a raising ceremony begins, viewing the red Bagua with its taiji symbol. Lantian county, Shaanxi. Source: Original photograph used with the permission of Azevedo 1990.

b. To the sound of firecrackers and draped with auspicious red hangings, the ridgepole is hoisted. Lantian county, Shaanxi. Source: Original photograph used with the permission of Azevedo 1990.

as well as a carpenter's square and an ink-line reel. Once the incense is lit, a set of rhymed verses is chanted to praise Lu Ban. The middle section of the ridgepole is ornamented with a combined *taiji* and Bagua, as antispectral charms, sometimes directly drawn on the pole but other times printed or drawn on a sheet of paper that is attached to the beam. A common pair of couplets can be observed hanging from the ridgepoles of new dwellings in many areas of China: "Jiang Taigong is here" [*Jiang Taigong zai ci*] and "All the spirits abdicate in his favor" [*Zhushen tuiwei*]. (The former invokes the power of an eleventh-century B.C. martial minister and general.) Old copper octagonal coins, called *bagua qian*, are still sometimes nailed to the ridgepole as protective amulets and accompanied by chanting:

First nail is for gold, the second for silver
 Third for the God of Wealth not leaving the gate
 Fourth for dependability in work
 Fifth for five sons passing the imperial examinations
 Sixth for matters to go smoothly
 Seventh for the seven stars to shine brightly and the family to have a
 treasure bowl even after arranged marriages for sons and daughters;
 As I place the Bagua nail, high position and great wealth for ten
 thousand springs.

According to field observations in Liaoning, wine is then poured from a wine pot from one end of the ridgepole to the other as a set of rhymes calls for a noble position for the new residents. Once this is concluded, the owner shouts, "The auspicious time has come [*Ji chen dao*!]" while the carpenter follows with, "Raise the ridgepole [*Shang liang*!]" The ridgepole is then slowly hoisted with ropes, to the accompanying sounds of exploding firecrackers, until the massive timber is seated in place, where the carpenter taps it into a secure position. Strips of auspicious red cloth are then attached to the ridgepole, and money wrapped in red paper is handed over to the craftsmen. Near the ritual climax, the master carpenter then mounts the ridgepole and "runs along the beam" [*pao liang*], chanting as he checks that it is firmly seated:

The phoenix does not light where there are no treasures.
Today it perches at the end of the ridgepole.
With one swing of my axe, the house will be solid forever.
Ten thousand years solid, ten thousand years prosperous, riches,
and position, a number one family.

To complete the ritual, the master carpenter casts out the five grains, a handful at a time, hurling each handful toward the five directions as he alludes to each of the five elements, using a metered chant of subjugation that will "vanquish the demons" [*da sha*]. After verbally and symbolically neutralizing the demons, the master carpenter casts coins and steamed bread from atop the ridgepole toward each of the five directions. As he does so, he chants that riches of all types—gold and silver, a full treasure house, horses and mules—will arrive, in addition to a long life to the age of ninety-nine for the household head.

In many areas of coastal southern China even today, a bamboo lantern, bamboo sieve, grains of rice in small sacks, bundles of red chopsticks, or trousers are suspended from the ridgepole or from the eaves overhang of a dwelling in order to invoke hopes for fertility and prosperity. Some of the homophonous associations used are evident only in the local dialects of southeastern China and are not obvious in standard Chinese. As seen in Figure 5.12, for example, a hanging lantern invokes a desire for sons and grandsons, and this is underscored with multiple auspicious phrases. Lanterns traditionally were hung above a wedding bed for the same reason so that "adding a lantern" had the meaning "adding a son." A similar play on words exists with small silver nails, or *yinding*, which were pounded into the ridgepoles in the Ningbo area of eastern Zhejiang. The square openings in a red

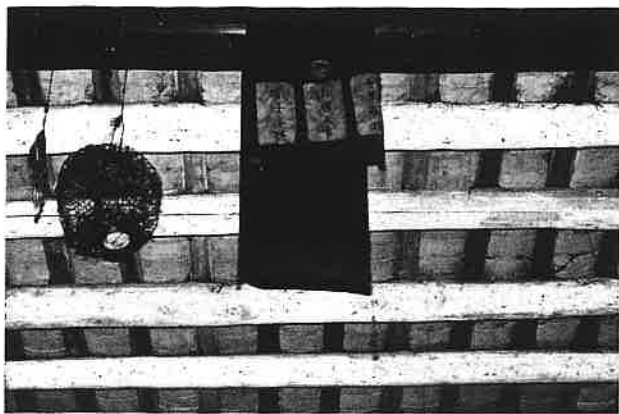


Fig. 5.12. An auspicious red cloth is wrapped around the red ridgepole. Two of the four character phrases are readable: "A hundred sons, a thousand grandsons" and "Good luck with the raising of the ridgepole" [Shangliang daji]. Hung nearby is a bamboo frame of a threadbare paper lantern [ding in Cantonese], the word for which is homophonous in Cantonese with the word for sons. Sheung Wo Hang, New Territories, Hong Kong. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1990.



Fig. 5.13. Wishes for sons are suggested by this painted bamboo sieve or hongshi, hung under the eaves, with its multiplicity of square openings that are said to represent the "mouths," or kou, in a large family. The sentiment is underscored by the attached chopsticks [kuaizi in Chinese], a punning relationship with "sons coming quickly" [kuai zi]. Yandangshan, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1990.

bamboo sieve, as seen in Figure 5.13, are said to represent the "mouths," or *kou*, in a large family, while the attached chopsticks, pronounced *kuaizi*, have a punning relationship with "sons coming quickly" [*kuai zi*]. Similarly, the word for men's trousers [*kuzi*] in some southern dialects sounds close to that of the auspicious Chinese character *fu*, meaning "riches." One late-twentieth-century observer noted: "Sometimes the trousers are merely passed around the beam during the ceremony, and I have once seen this happen with the trousers incongruously wrapped around a live chicken" (Baker 1979, 90).

According to news reports and field observations, there is an escalating popularity today of *shangliang* rituals, with their "luck-bringing songs," as the building of houses increases. In Liaoning, it has been noted that young carpenters apprentice themselves to ritual masters in order to learn the ceremonies that homeowners are demanding. Annual almanacs, which can still be bought in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and some areas of coastal China, specify the auspicious dates for the raising of a ridgepole, as they do for other building tasks such as breaking ground and digging a well, as well as installing a doorframe, stove, or bed (Figure 5.14).

Auspicious Measurements. Traditional carpenters paid special attention to fixing favorable measurements and avoiding unfavorable ones for the length, width, and height of a dwelling and the slope of the roof. Nonstructural carpentry for specific building parts, such as doors, windows, and interior partition walls, also was carried out with the same attention to appropriate measurements. Carpenters set their measurements using long as well as short rulers and a carpenter's square made of metal or wood, all of which varied in length from one area of China to another. Special rulers, called *menguang chi* and *Lu Ban chi*, were used in Taiwan and coastal

Then silver and silk will fill a thousand, nay ten thousand chests.
If the carpenter is able to understand this principle well,
Then happiness and riches will prosper in the house all by themselves.

Quoted in Ruitenbeek 1993, 170–171

Throughout China today, it is still possible to find rulers marked with auspicious and inauspicious intervals, including contemporary retractable metal tape measures for use by do-it-yourselfers.

Building Sorcery: The Use of Charms and Spells

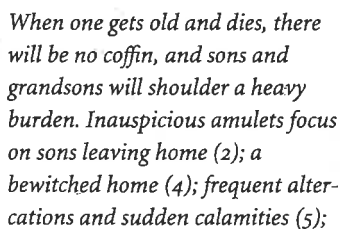
Well before an auspicious day and hour are selected for a family to move into a new house, the head of the household must consider the possibility that carpenters and masons who built the dwelling might have employed sorcery that would bring harm to the family. It is still a well-known belief that Chinese craftsmen had the ability to secrete objects during the process of building in an attempt to exact vengeance over slights, stinginess, loss of face, and general mistreatment, but it is less well known that artisans also had the ability to “reward” a family for its generosity and kindnesses. Apprentices learned about charms and spells from their masters, but measures were recounted in manuals as well. In the *Lu Ban jing*, which details the various types of charm-based actions that craftsmen might take, three-quarters of the actions avenge slights while a far smaller number deal with recompense for worthy acts. Of the twelve charms to be concealed in various hiding places that are shown in Figure 5.16, five are positive, promising wealth, righteousness, long life, high position, and general happiness.³ Among other hidden amulets, a cassia leaf—whose name in Chinese, *gui*, is synonymous with “honorable” and “of high rank”—was said to ensure a first degree in the civil service examination system when placed on top of a column, while a broken rice bowl with a single chopstick hidden in the doorframe was said to bring penury and hardship to both sons and grandsons.

Masons used similar curses to those of carpenters, but theirs often were made of clay. Eberhard (1965, 73–75) tells of “The Magic of the Mason,” a tale in which unhappy workers molded a small clay boat with a boatman and hid it on top of a column and under the eaves. Facing outward rather than inward, the vessel, it was said, would carry away the wealth of the family, leaving it destitute. With quarrels plaguing the household and nothing to eat, the family became impoverished. Many years later, providentially and unexpectedly, the master mason passed the house

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Fig. 5.16. This page from a carpenter's manual illustrates various amulets that could be used to bring fortune or misfortune to a household. Only five of the twelve shown (numbers 3, 7, 8, 9, and 11) are auspicious. Number 3 shows a gourd to be drawn at the top of a wall on a crossbeam, indicating that practitioners of every art will reside in the house. Number 7 tells that hiding two copper coins face down on the ends of the ridgepole, one to the left and one to the right, will ensure wealth and good fortune, with the husband winning fame, the son obtaining a noble rank, and titles of honor for the wife. Number 9 suggests concealing a brush and ink stick in a tie beam to guarantee wealth and high rank. Number 11 indicates that hiding a handful of rice grains in a block of the building's frame will ensure riches for the household. Number 1 shows an ox bone, which, if hidden in the principal bay of the house, will bring bitter hardship day after day.

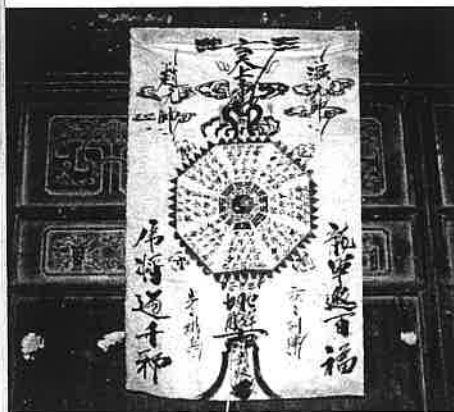


Source: *Huitu Lu Ban jing*, juan 4.



Fig. 5.17. A charm featuring the "Heavenly Master," Zhang Tianshi, is coupled with calligraphy and serves to exorcise building curses, cleanse well water, and bring good luck. Guidelines for energizing the charm are presented on the left. The lower left all-purpose charm is titled "Charm for resolving a hundred different things." Source: Collection of Ronald G. Knapp.

Fig. 5.18. This all-purpose charm, with its arcane and sometimes illegible characters, is hung on a beam at the entry to a wing of a house. Shengxian, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.



and was touched by the sincerity of the penniless widow, whereupon he climbed a ladder, turned the bow of the boat inward, and reversed the misfortunes of the household by bringing riches back toward it.

Homeowners' suspicions of the possible tricks and curses of workers led naturally to the use of neutralizing amulets to protect the family and its new home by "stabilizing the dwelling" [zhēnzhai]. Fengshui manuals usually list precautionary dos and don'ts, specifying the type, size, and color of a host of charms that could be affixed to or near a dwelling in order to shield it. Sometimes a Daoist priest or a fengshui master was necessary to energize or activate a charm made of paper, stone, or wood via a series of rituals, but often a household could simply make and place its own amulet to ward off misfortune. For paper charms, details included various paper shapes, as well as the kind of calligraphic ink that would be most efficacious. Sometimes the charm consisted of a number of twisted and irregularly formed Chinese characters that are difficult to decipher and that have written within them others that are readable. All-purpose calligraphic amulets are found in many fengshui manuals and some almanacs, and similar forms are still encountered in various parts of China. Written in cinnabar on yellow paper and attached to the ridgepole with a bit of paste, an all-purpose charm is said to be able to break a multitude of spells that might have been brought into play during house construction.⁴ In some cases, bizarre Chinese characters merely had to be "written in the air" in a running style to be effective.⁵ Annual almanacs also reproduce calligraphic charms "to stabilize," or *zhen*, the bed, stove, well, or chicken coop, among other parts of a dwelling. An image of the "Heavenly Master," Zhang Tianshi, seen in Figure 5.17, is coupled with calligraphy and serves to exorcise building curses, cleanse well water, and bring good luck.⁶ Guidelines for energizing the charm are presented on the left. Clenching his teeth three times while holding water in his mouth, the exorcist is told to face east before spitting out the water and beginning the incantation to rid the house of evil and sickness. Calligraphic charms of this type usually have elongated lines of ink that denote lightning, which is said to disrupt negative forces and strike down malevolence. A calligraphic charm is shown in the lower right-hand section of the old almanac pictured in Figure 5.1. Some charms are hung, as seen in Figure 5.18, while others are burned, with the ashes mixed with water that is sprinkled in place.

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Overcoming Situational Deficiencies

In the search for an auspicious landscape configuration according to *fengshui*, it was expected that shortcomings, imperfections, and lacunae would be encountered—since few locations were considered universally ideal—and modifications would be necessary to rebalance a site. In order to mitigate the shortages of naturally flowing water or to dampen the potentially destructive peaks of “fire” visible from a village; for example, ponds and channels of water might be dug to offset incendiary dangers (Figure 5.19). The planting of a grove of trees, sometimes even a protective line of trees, as well as dense stands of bamboo, as seen in Figure 5.20, was judged helpful in overcoming terrain deficiencies, such as the absence of a needed ridgeline. In villages and towns throughout rural China, striking *fengshui* pagodas, or *fengshui ta*, were raised to counter unsatisfactory or ominous terrain characteristics, thus improving the propitious elements of a settlement’s geomantic character (Figure 5.21). In southern China, special attention was paid to *shuikou*, the location of water inlets and outlets, as a stream coursed through a village. Associated with an outsized or odd-shaped rock, enormous camphor or banyan tree, or an extensive clump of bamboo, *shuikou* sites in many villages are viewed as numinous or sacred places. They often provide a location for a shrine to the Earth God or other local deity, as well as for ancestral halls, as seen in Figure 5.22.

Fig. 5.19. The pointed peaks in the distance are viewed as incendiary elements that must be controlled by the introduction of water into a site. As shown here in Cangpo village, Zhejiang, a pond and numerous channels of water serve this function. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.

Fig. 5.20. Terrain deficiencies around this village in Longyan county, Fujian, are countered by the planting of groves of bamboo and trees on the north and west of the village. Source: He 1990, 80.

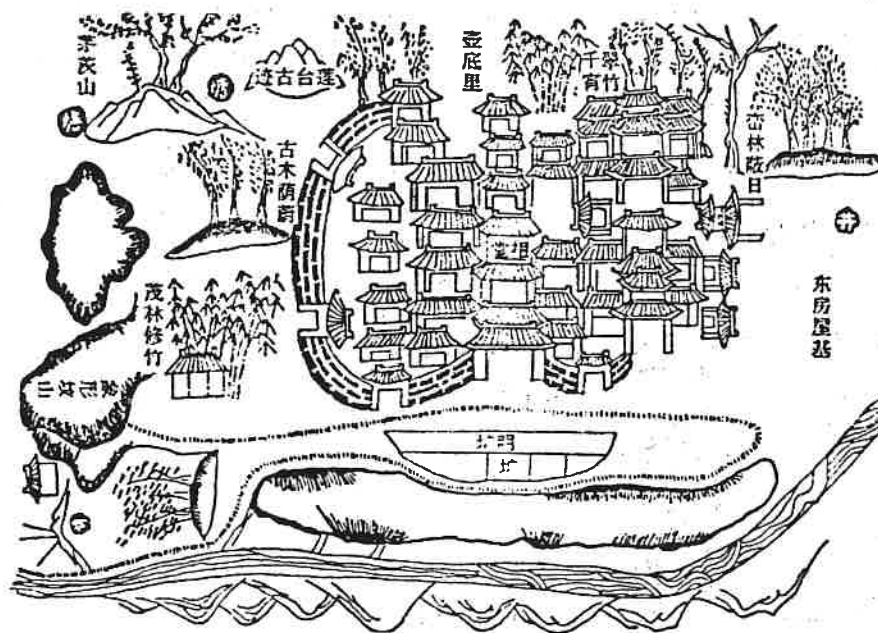




Fig. 5.21. This fengshui pagoda was raised in order to overcome negative environmental circumstances. Wuyuan county, Jiangxi. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1999.

Fig. 5.22. Nestled beneath an imposing old tree, this Earth God shrine is also adjacent to the village shuikou. Hongkeng village, Hukeng township, Yongding county, Fujian. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 2001.



Once a location for a building was determined, the first-level responsibility of the *fengshui* practitioner was completed, but the tasks necessary for securing the dwelling itself continued, as decisions were made concerning the immediate environs and even the dwelling interior. The template for an auspicious and harmonious dwelling was the shape of a body with two outstretched or embracing arms, as with analogous and broader *fengshui* configurations (Figure 5.23), as are seen in the floor plans of courtyard-style houses. In Fujian and Guangdong in southern China, a semicircular pond, called *mingtang*, or “bright or cosmic court,” sometimes was dug at the front of a village or an individual dwelling, and the dwelling was sited within the break in slope of a hill (Figures 5.24–5.25). Even a utilitarian, semicircular threshing ground-cum-courtyard might serve the same purpose as a pond. In order to compensate for deficiencies relating to directional orientation or configuration of the terrain, features of the dwelling could be manipulated. Both small and more extensive remedies might be strategically situated to “summon good fortune and keep misfortune at bay” [*qu ji bi xiong*]. Using diagrams and explanatory inscriptions, *fengshui* manuals, as well as carpenters’ handbooks such as the *Lu Ban jing*, called attention to how surrounding trees, rocks, ditches, pools, wells, watercourses, roads, and other houses might individually and cumulatively augur good or bad fortune for a household. Much advice in these manuals and handbooks centered on the pathways leading to a dwelling, with admonitions that certain lines or curvatures would open the home to calamity while others would

Fig. 5.23. Fengshui texts sometimes draw analogies between a human figure with outstretched arms and a residential courtyard dwelling: (1) yin toward the back; (2) yang at the front; (3) mingtang, or open courtyard; (4) xue, or node; (5) baihu, or "white tiger," on the west side; (6) qinglong, or "green dragon," on the east side. Both the figure and the courtyard obviously are facing south. Source: Fan 1992, 38.

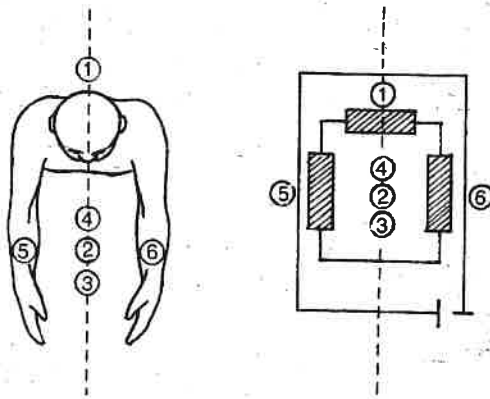


Fig. 5.24. The plan of this Kejia dwelling shows a hemispheric mingtang, while the elevation drawing calls attention to the arm-chair-like composition of the dwelling, with its wrapping upper wall. Nankou township, Meixian, Guangdong. Source: Lu and Wei 1990, 342, 343.

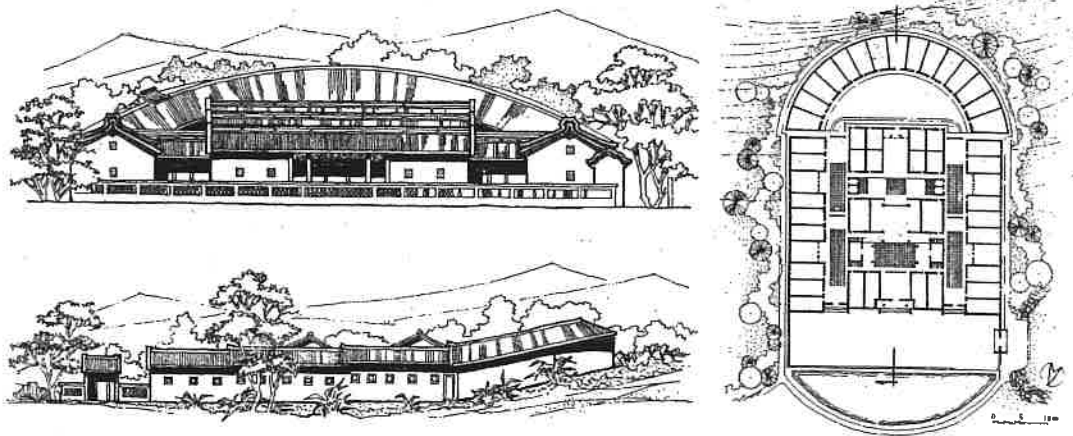


Fig. 5.25. Glimpse of the hemispheric mingtang shown in Fig. 5.24. Nankou township, Meixian, Guangdong. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 2000.



protect it and ensure prosperity. A seventeenth-century edition of the *Lu Ban jing* included seventy-one illustrated sets of such admonitions in four-line rhymes, with fifty-two of them portraying unfavorable situations (Figure 5.26).⁷ As a motivation to follow the prescriptions and thus avoid unsatisfactory layouts, the manuals promise male progeny and marital harmony and assure that wealth will increase. The alternative is to court financial disaster, with family members leaving home, escalating illness, growing strife, death of children, childless marriages, mounting bad luck, desperate poverty, quarrels between a father and his sons, and attendant family division and eventual decline. In some ways, such prescriptions heightened the awareness of cause and effect by affirming hopes, acknowledging fears, and providing simple procedures for coping with life.

Stabilizing the Dwelling. Just as with the use of amulets and charms to overcome possible curses invoked by the craftsmen and initial efforts at “stabilizing the dwelling,” additional objects and rituals often needed to be employed because of changing circumstances in the environs of a dwelling (Figure 5.27). New buildings, realigned paths and lanes, and newly dug ditches may necessitate the use of protective objects to counteract, neutralize, or exorcise potentially malignant forces. Precisely positioned on the roof or ridgepole; in the courtyard; above, in front of, or on the door or gate; and even at some distance from the dwelling, these elements give form to a concentric spatial defense system. Called *yasheng* [dominating], *yaxie* [suppressing], and *bixie* [exorcising] objects, they are deployed at critical vulnerable points and junctures to forestall intrusions and to reduce misfortune.⁸ Calligraphic or noncalligraphic charms, printed on paper, carved on tablets, or represented by actual objects, include cosmic symbols such as the Bagua, *taiji*, and *yin-yang*, as well as the Luoshu [Luo River writing] and Hetu [Yellow River chart] diagrams; weapons such as arrows, swords, axes, and mirrors; and images of ferocious animals and powerful people. Usually mounted to correct “mutually antagonistic” [*xiangchong*] situations that may arise and are considered disadvantageous, they sometimes are used well before any demonstrated need in order to provide a prophylactic defense.

Common mutually antagonistic circumstances, which emerge as new construction impinges upon older dwellings, include “a road against a house” [*luchong*], “a house against a house” [*zhaichong*], or “a pole against a house” [*zhuchong*]. A sample survey carried out in rural and urban Taiwan in 1977–1978 revealed that some 71 percent of *yasheng* objects were placed to correct problems with nearby

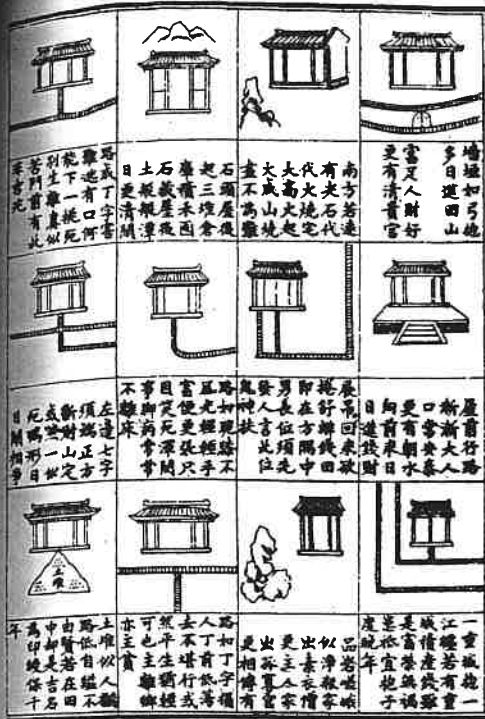


Fig. 5.26. Each consisting of a drawing and a caption, here are twelve of the many examples of auspicious and inauspicious building situations, most of which point to inauspicious or unlucky configurations.

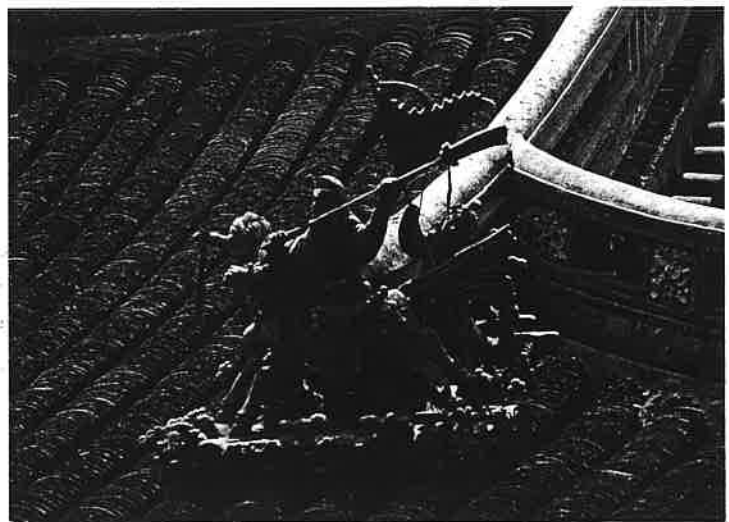


a ▶

Fig. 5.27a-b.

a. Among some of the defensive measures spelled out in the Lu Ban jing are the following: right: the "Roof-Tile General" [Wa Jiangjun], said to be able to guard against antagonistic features along the ridge of a house or at the top of a wall; top left: "Taishan resisting stones," which are to be placed at vulnerable positions such as the corners of buildings or where a lane leads directly toward a doorway; and bottom left: the "head of a monster plaque," which is to be nailed under the eaves or above a window. Source: Huitu Lu Ban jing, juan 3.

b. Standing in a defensive position, the "Roof-Tile General" guards a village home. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1985.



b ▶

houses, 17 percent to counter threatening lanes or roads, and 11 percent because of some intruding vertical element such as a chimney or pole (Dong 1988, 64–68). Whenever a new gate is installed, a building rises taller than its surrounding structures, or a lane or driveway leads directly to a doorway, vigilance must be heightened to counter the potentially antagonistic situations. Particularly significant is the main gate, which is considered critically important: “Just as the mouth and nostrils are the means by which the human body is able to live, so the main entrance is thought to be the channel through which happiness and good fortune can be absorbed” (Chen 1993, 8). Protective screens called *yingbi* or *zhaobi*, as seen in Figures 5.28 and 5.29, are used throughout China as barriers inside the gates of common as well as imperial dwellings in order to mask the view into a courtyard and effectively block any human or spectral intrusion. In some cases, as seen in Figure 5.30, large screens are positioned at the figurative entrance to a village, less to block a view than to serve a defensive *fengshui* purpose.

The *Lu Ban jing* recommends the installation of a unique type of mirror called an “inverting mirror” [*daojing*] or “tiger or white tiger mirror” [*hujing* or *baihu-jing*], in the shape of a concave plate with a higher rim and a depressed middle; it is said to be capable of overturning whatever antagonistic feature is reflected in it, just as the image itself is turned on its head.⁹ Ordinary mirrors, said to radiate *yang*, are widely regarded as potent deflectors of malevolent influences and are still commonly hung above doorways in association with other amulets (Figure 5.31). Just as the Bagua sign (usually with the *taiji* and *yin-yang* symbols incorporated into it) is affixed to the ridgepole when it is raised, Bagua are commonly found attached above the lintel of the main gate or frequently placed directly on the leaves of the gate (Figure 5.32). Additional cryptic charms such as the *Yijing*-inspired knotted cord configurations of the Hetu, a numerical representation of the natural order embodying strength and stability, are sometimes added to Bagua plaques, as shown in Figure 5.33. In some cases, as is shown in Figure 5.34, a Chinese character such as *tun*, “to devour” or “gulp down,” is written on the mirror as a further safeguarding agent. As a supplementary figurative defensive object, either a long, three-pronged trident or a pair of scissors is also hung to accompany a mirror or a Bagua plaque (Figure 5.35). A crimson rooster, or *gongji*, a propitious *yang* creature that crows as the sun rises and ascends and whose name, *daji*, is homophonous with “greatly auspicious,” serves double duty as a protective amulet with a mirror around its neck (Figure 5.36).

The head of a wild animal, a ferocious beast growling viciously while baring its



▲ Fig. 5.28. Emblazoned with an auspicious fu character for good fortune, the screen wall effectively blocks the view into the courtyard from the open gate. Wangjia manor, Lingshi county, Shanxi. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1996.

Fig. 5.29. This zhaobi, or spirit screen, with ornamentation featuring a longevity character and five encircling bats, dominates the entry to the Hall of Crimson Snowflakes, one of the imperial courtyard residences within the Forbidden City in Beijing. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1997.

Fig. 5.30. Villagers sometimes find it necessary to place a protecting zhaobi, or spirit wall, at the entry to their settlement. The spirit wall in Changle village is placed between a commemorative arch and the main village lane. The pond in front is the village's mingtang, reinforcing good fengshui while moderating temperatures and providing a place for water buffalo to cool off and women to do laundry. Lanxi city, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.



a ▼



b ▼



Fig. 5.31a-c. Radiating yang, common mirrors of many types are hung above doorways throughout China as effective deflectors of malevolent influences. Xiaoqi village, Wuyuan county, Jiangxi. Source: Photographs by Ronald G. Knapp 1999.



Fig. 5.33. This Bagua plaque is circled by cryptic charms related to the Yijing-inspired knotted cord configurations of the Hetu [Yellow River Chart], a numerical representation of the natural order embodying strength and stability. Zhanghua county, Taiwan. Source: Collection of Ronald G. Knapp 1993.

c ▲

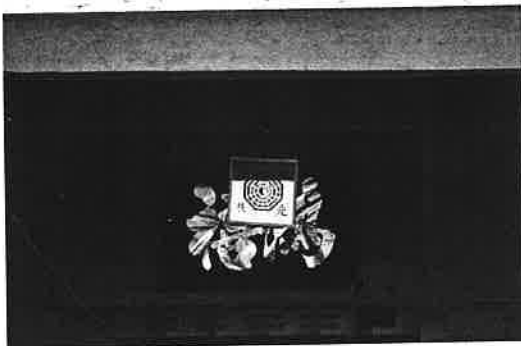


Fig. 5.32. The Eight Trigrams, or Bagua, sign with the yin-yang symbol at its core is printed here on a mirror and hung above the entryway. Behind it is the auspicious invocation hongxi, or "grand blessings," written in gold on red cloth. Meixian, Guangdong. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 2000.



Fig. 5.34. A reflecting mirror with the character tun, "to devour" or "gulp down," written on it proclaims that evil forces will be consumed. Shangchuan village, Wuyuan county, Jiangxi. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1999.



Fig. 5.36. The rooster, daji, is homophonous with "greatly auspicious" and is a propitious yang creature. Here it serves double duty as a protective amulet with a mirror in front. Nanjing county, Fujian. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 2000.



Fig. 5.35. In association with a mirror, a supplementary device such as a three-pronged trident or a pair of scissors promises a further line of defense. Shexian, Anhui. Source: Photographs by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.



Fig. 5.37. Where it is not possible to hang a "head of a monster" because the occupants of the house opposite may be relatives or friends, the Lu Ban jing recommends nailing on the wall or under the eaves a "luck-bestowing" tablet that reads Tianguan cifu, "Tianguan [the heavenly official] grants good fortune." This vertical tablet is here supplemented with other auspicious emblems. Xinxing village, Zhanghua county, Taiwan. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1991.





Fig. 5.38. Poised above Chinese characters that request, "Bring riches to me" [Dui wo sheng cai], this threatening tiger amulet serves as a guardian at the front entry of a home. Shengxian, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.

teeth—sometimes strangely appearing to smile—is hung on a window, from the lintel of a door, or low beneath the eaves. As shown above in Figure 5.27, its stated size and trapezoidal shape are clearly correlated to other cosmographic elements:

The width across the top is 8 *cun*,
corresponding to the Eight Trigrams.
The width across the bottom is 6 *cun* and 4 *fen*,
corresponding to the Sixty-four Hexagrams.¹⁰
The height is 12 *cun*,
corresponding to the Twelve Hours.
The two sides together correspond with
the Twenty-four Solar Terms.

The ferocious animal is often a tiger, a *yang* creature, with a furrowed brow that can be read as wang 王, the Chinese character for "king," although sometimes the animal appears playful, with its purpose proclaimed with Chinese characters reading, "Evil is repelled and the gods return." According to the *Lu Ban jing*, it is sometimes not possible to hang the "head of a monster" amulet because the occupants of the house opposite may be relatives or friends, and therefore a "luck-bestowing" tablet should be hung instead (Figure 5.37). In other cases, as seen in Figure 5.38, characters with the request, "Bring riches to me," complement the threatening tiger

Fig. 5.39. According to lore, villagers describe the imposing wooden Ximen, or West Gate, at the entrance into Cangpo village as the face of a ferocious tiger with its teeth bared. Yongjia county, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1990.





Fig. 5.40a–c. Calligraphic amulets with five characters proclaiming “Taishan resisting stone.”

a. The first stone shows evidence of attempts to scrape off the “feudal” characters during the Cultural Revolution. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1999.

b. A nearby stone appears not to have been damaged. Xiaxiaqi village, Wuyuan county, Jiangxi. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1999.

c. With a tiger amulet atop it, this newly carved stone replaces one destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Qiaojia Manor, Qixian, Shanxi. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 2003.

amulet. The imposing wooden gate at the entrance of Cangpo village in the Nanxijiang area of southeastern Zhejiang province is itself described in village lore as representing the face of a ferocious tiger with its teeth bared (Figure 5.39). Zoo-morphic amulets of many types were used on the doors of tombs in the past. Even today, Chinese parents continue to purchase or ornament hats, shoes, bibs, and collars in the shape of tigers as protective amulets to be given to their baby sons on the one-month anniversary of their birth.¹¹

“Resisting stones” with three or five Chinese characters inscribed on them are sometimes strategically placed at the foot of a wall, along a corner, beside a doorway, at the head of a bridge, or at a juncture as a type of defensive shield, as glimpsed above in Figure 5.27a. On the Penghu Islands between Taiwan and Fujian, there are at least 219 “resisting stones” of different shapes and configurations, about 1.7 per square kilometer. In their most basic form, each is a rectangular-shaped stele with only the three characters *shi gandang*, or “this stone dares to resist,” etched into it. Two characters—*Taishan* [Mount Tai]—are commonly added atop *shi gandang* to form an idiom meaning “The stone of Taishan dares to resist evil/danger/catastrophe” (Figure 5.40). By invoking Mount Tai, this five-character phrase augments the power of an otherwise common stone slab. Mythical and historical associations celebrate Taishan as the easternmost and most important of China’s Five Sacred Peaks, the birthplace of all creatures. Since Taishan is also the abode of



Fig. 5.41. Even without the imputed power of an actual stone, the characters *Taishan shi gandang*, here written as a pair along the entry to a village dwelling, can be viewed as a potent charm. Zhiyan village, Zhiyan township, Lanxi city, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.

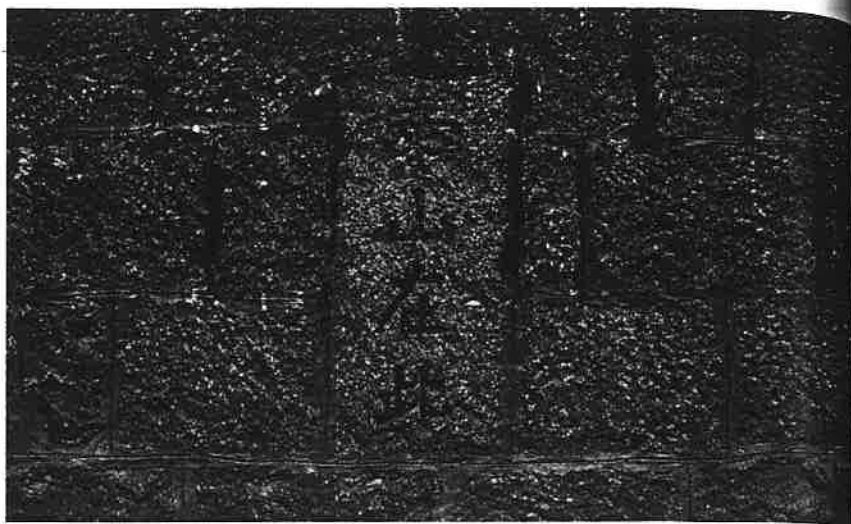


Fig. 5.42. *Taishan zai ci*, or “Taishan is here,” serves as an abbreviated amulet on stone that is conflated with another saying, *Taigong zai ci*, or “Jiang Taigong is here.” Cangpo village, Gangtou township, Yongjia county, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1990.

the Emperor of the Eastern Peak (*Dongyue Dadi*), whose responsibilities were to detain errant souls and have them escorted to the halls of judgment, it was believed that he served as a bureaucratic mediator between the realms of *yin* and *yang*. In part, Taishan “resisting stones” might be explained as metonymic representations of the “legal” authority of heaven to repel, restrain, and dispatch errant ghosts who threaten the living.¹²

Ideally, Taishan stones should have been hewn from the rock face of the mountain itself in order to be potent, but it is clear that many of the reputed Taishan stones found in villages are probably bogus, spurious imitations whose calligraphic assertion alone is believed sufficiently powerful to provide adequate defense. As seen in Figure 5.41, the five-character phrase *Taishan shi gandang* itself can be written on a wall as a simple, nonmaterial yet efficacious warning amulet. It is not uncommon to see the simpler homophonous character *tai* 太, meaning “extremely” or “highly,” incorrectly substituted for the relatively complicated accurate character. In other cases, one or another character is mistakenly left out or confused with another saying, such as when the amulet “Jiang Taigong is here”—or a variant, “Jiang Ziya is here” [*Jiang Ziya zai ci*—is conflated so as to appear as “Taishan is here” [*Taishan zai ci*] (Figure 5.42). As can be seen in Figure 5.43, multiple amulets can appear on the same plaque, such as the image of a tiger, a Bagua, and characters invoking the protection of the Taishan stone. *Zhi sha!* “Resist all demons!” is sometimes also

added. Carpenters' and general *fengshui* manuals generally prescribe clearly the size and form of Taishan "resisting stones," as well as particulars concerning when the stones should be selected and set up. A relatively massive size is specified for the Taishan "resisting stone" shown in Figure 5.27a—4 *chi* 8 *cun* high, 1 *chi* 2 *cun* wide, and 4 *cun* thick, *chi* being a Chinese "foot"—but most are much smaller, and it is recommended that the stone be carved twelve days after the winter solstice and set up in the early hours of New Year's Day.

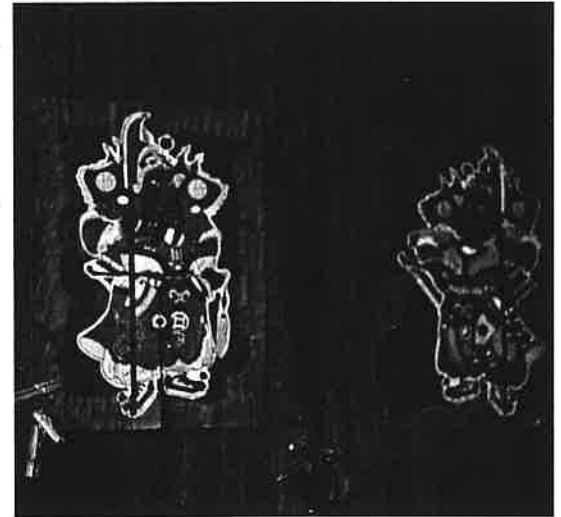
Door Gods—Protective Guardians. Door Gods or Guardians of the Gate, known as *Menshen* in Chinese, are affixed to double-leaf entrance gates at city and country homes throughout China. In villages of North China even today, the mud and brick walls lining dusty lanes are punctuated by splashes of seemingly random color at each of the gates that lead into individual dwellings. The display of color, however, is no mere ornamentation, but instead (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 14 by James Flath) comprises significant ritual objects: a pair of paper likenesses of *Menshen*—foreboding enough to repel malevolence, yet benign enough to welcome visitors. In comparison to the equally ubiquitous oversized guardians painted on the doors of Chinese temples that loom larger than life, those found on the gates of dwellings are small (Figure 5.44). Usually multicolored in reds, greens, blues, and yellows but some simply outlined in black lines, these solemn guards are renewed at

Fig. 5.43. With only four characters—*Tai shi gandang*, or "Tai stone dares to resist"—this entry-way protective amulet also includes a complex *Bagua* diagram and a snarling tiger. The trapezoidal shape of the plaque conforms to the dimensions stated in the *Lu Ban jing* measures shown in Fig. 5.27. Qianlang village, Shengxian, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.

Fig. 5.44a–b.

a. At the New Year, a gate is adorned with a vertical pair of couplets, a horizontal invocation above the lintel, hanging charms, and a pair of *Menshen*, Door Gods, in full regalia. Sheung Wo Hang, New Territories, Hong Kong. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1998.

b. Closeup of Door Gods. Ganzhou, Jiangxi. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1995.



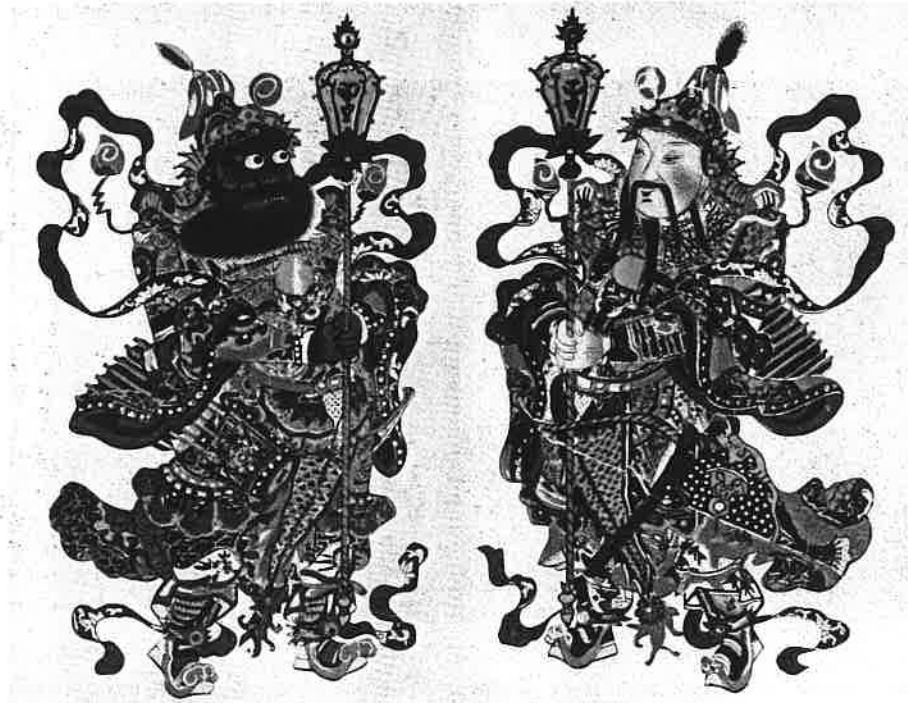


Fig. 5.45. Colored woodblock prints of Yu Lei, on the left, and Shen Tu, on the right, portray them in full battle gear. Source: Dun 1906, frontispiece.

the New Year. Gate guardians are believed capable of banishing pestilential demons, punishing ghosts, slaying wild animals, and keeping generalized malevolent and demonic forces at bay. Most images are replete with auspicious symbolic motifs, in addition to ancillary defensive objects, such as a circular object on the chest that looks like a mirror that is believed capable of repelling evil. A panoply of variant guardians of secondary gates, back gates, and gates into wing rooms and adjacent courtyards traditionally were found at critical transition points inside the dwelling.

While intense and intimidating generals usually wear body armor and a helmet and bear a sword, spear, halberd, or bow, Menshen in fact vary significantly from place to place since they represent a variety of historical or mythical figures, some broadly known but others only local heroes. In full martial regalia, two brothers, Shen Tu and Yu Lei, as seen in Figures 5.45 and 5.46, have served as gate guardians since at least the fourth century B.C. In time, they were joined by a pair of brave generals of the Tang period, Qin Shubao and Yuchi Gong (also known as Yuchi Jingde or Hu Jingde), one with a white face and the other older and darker, as well as heroic and patriotic generals of different historical periods such as Guan Gong, Yue Fei, Wen Tianxiang, and Wei Zheng.



Fig. 5.46. Low-relief carved figures of Shen Tu and Yu Lei, here armed as usual with maces, are placed in a pair of guardhouses alongside an interior doorway. Kangbaiwan manor, Gongyi city, Henan. Source: Photographs by Ronald G. Knapp 2003.

Only the wealthy could afford to engage artists to paint protective deities on their gates prior to the Song period (960–1279), while commoners used objects such as a light broom or a dark piece of coal to represent Menshen. During the Song dynasty, the popularization of woodblock printing facilitated the dissemination of cheap protective paper door prints, many of which were monochromatic and relatively crude. Advances in multiple-block color printing technology during the Ming dynasty made possible a richer artistic portrayal of figures that were accessible to most Chinese. While the poor, by necessity, obtained only rudimentary and inexpensive representations of Menshen produced by village artisans, it became customary in succeeding centuries for wealthy Chinese to invite a local artist to paint a pair of Menshen for each door in the house as the New Year approached.¹³

Lesser “soldiers,” whose power comes from homophonous associations, reinforce the martial bearing of the gate gods in northern Shaanxi:

In the Yan’an area on the last day of the year, the family elders also send children down to the river-bank to chip off lumps of ice and bring them home; the lumps of ice (*bing*) are then placed at the courtyard gate, behind the door, and in the animal pens, to serve sentry duty as troops (*bing*) in the household’s garrison. And on the tablelands south of Yan’an—in Fuxian and Luochuan counties—people take blocks of coal or charcoal, tie them up



Fig. 5.47. With a vertical row of characters proclaiming *zhen zhai*, “guarding the home,” and *pingan*, “peace,” this simple woodblock print shows Zhong Kui armed with a sword. Lingshan village, Zhouping township, Xihu district, Hangzhou city. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1987.

with rope, and hang them from the door lintel and from the corners of the walls; these serve as “black tigers” (*heihu*) warding off noxious influences. (Holm 1991, 147)

While most martial Menshen are poised standing alert and vigilant, others ride tigers or horses. Many appear like human figures in Chinese operas, with their painted faces and trappings, such as flags attached to their backs and headdresses to indicate they are high-ranking generals.

An image of Zhong Kui, not a door god but a formidable demon queller and exorcist, sometimes accompanies Menshen on the front gate of a Chinese dwelling at the lunar New Year, as discussed in Chapter 14. Zhong Kui was a Tang dynasty scholar who committed suicide after not being recognized for his achievements in the imperial examinations. The addition of Chinese characters such as *zhen zhai*, “guarding the home”; *chiling*, “imperial edict”; and the characters for Zhong Kui’s name underscores his protective function (Figure 5.47). However, unlike the prints of Menshen, which are placed only once each year and presumed to have a potency lasting until the next New Year, the image of Zhong Kui is replaced at least once in the following months, on the day of the summer solstice, which is considered especially inauspicious. Commemorated as Duanwu or Duanyang on the fifth day of the fifth month according to the lunar calendar, the summer solstice is the date when the noon sun reaches its zenith in the sky and then begins to decline day by day until six months later at the winter solstice, when its declining pattern is reversed and the days begin to lengthen. On the fifth day of the fifth month *yang* elements reach their peak, and negative *yin* elements, including “ghosts” that are responsible for disease, accidental death, and financial disaster, begin to emerge (Figure 5.48). This is a time also when the so-called five noxious or poisonous creatures, or *wudu*—the snake, centipede, scorpion, gecko, and toad or spider—are said to multiply. In fact, this time of year brings hot and wet weather, when mosquitoes, flies, poisonous spiders, and insects generally flourish. Thus, exposed to general danger, environmentally related health problems, and misfortune, villagers and townspeople alike took precautions. Since the young were especially vulnerable to disease, children received special care at Duanwu. Amulets, bracelets, and necklaces containing pungent herbs were presented to them, and children were bathed in water infused with herbal medicines in order to counter illness (Berliner 1986, 22, 77–78, 160–171).

Zhong Kui is an efficacious all-purpose expeller of malign influences and threats. Usually depicted with a martial bearing and in full combat dress, in one hand Zhong Kui waves a magical sword that is said to extinguish evil spirits, and in the



Fig. 5.48. Said to be a precaution against misfortune, *Artemisia* and the herb sweetflag are sometimes hung on the door or stuck into crevices along the doorframe at the time of the summer solstice, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. Lubu village, Shuidong township, Lishui county, Zhejiang. Source: Photograph by Ronald G. Knapp 1988.

other he holds a fan-shaped tablet with a magical inscription. Bud-shaped objects on his hat are regarded as demon-seeking devices that point to unforeseen and lurking random dangers. The bats seen circling around his head, however, are not the sinister objects of his fury, as a Westerner might suspect. Instead, to Chinese, bats represent good fortune through a punning linguistic association. Zhong Kui's foot is usually raised, as if it is about to stamp out the poisonous creatures beneath. Regarded as ugly because of his bulging eyes and messy hair, Zhong Kui radiates a fearsome image that can be likened to the faces of lions and tigers in terms of their suitability as powerful demon quellers.¹⁴ Zhong Kui has been absorbed into the Daoist pantheon, where he is viewed as a drawer of protective talismans.

Aromatic plant stalks—sweet flag [*changpucao*, *Acorus calamus*], a hardy aromatic perennial herb with sword-shaped leaves, and mugwort [*ai*, *Artemisia vulgaris*], with slender purplish leaves and said to have an offensive odor and even look like a protective tiger—are also hung on doorways to repel malignant forces on the fifth day of the fifth month. In the Minnan dialect spoken in Taiwan and Fujian, the homophonous relationship between sweet flag and *chang* [prosperous or flourishing] adds a layer of auspicious and salutary meaning. (Beyond the symbolic protection of pungent plants such as sweet flag and mugwort, they and others are decocted and drunk as folk remedies for various illnesses.) Willow and peachwood twigs also are considered capable of repelling demons. In Hunan and Hubei in central China, rattan is collected and attached to the gate for Zhong Kui to use in tying up spirits. Early in the twentieth century in Zhejiang province, Clarence Day (1940, 43–46) remarked that the peasant fear of demons was pervasive, including apprehensions concerning those believed lurking at the cornerstone of houses and capable of bruising shins and those who waited to harm women as they washed vegetables at the water's edge. Even as the entrance gate of a dwelling is protected with calligraphic and pictorial imagery, a range of other, clearly auspicious messages are also employed in order to summon good fortune to the family, a broad topic that is not covered in this chapter.¹⁵

Environmental Awareness

Chinese have a long history of manipulating landscape settings in order to occupy them successfully. Because they are attentive to both the site and the situation characteristics of a particular spatial setting, they consider and evaluate drainage, natural light, ventilation, sanitation, and access—all reasonable ingredients for a pleasant

and healthful living space. This level of environmental awareness, as well as a propensity for pragmatism, laid a foundation for the aesthetic, psychological, and philosophical merits of employing *fengshui*, amulets, and ritual.

Chinese villagers and observers generally sometimes wax poetic about the *fengshui* characteristics of places, many of which are quite generic. Protected on the northern side by interlocking mountain ranges, a building site situated on a south-facing slope is open to the sun throughout the year and protected in winter from the cold winds characteristic of much of eastern Asia's climate. Care can be taken so that no part of a dwelling will be shaded by hills or trees on the east, south, or west, thus ensuring an early sunrise and a late sunset. A phrase describing a south-facing building—*zuobei chaonan*, or "sitting north and facing south"—is a well-understood instruction for an orientation that assures abundant sun and steady wind. This concern acknowledges an understanding of the critical relationship regarding the regularity of the sun as its path varies during the year and prevailing wind directions. In areas of southern China where the sun's rays are particularly intense, the majority of villages and houses deviate from a strict southern orientation and are situated facing a direction that reduces heat buildup. Working with nature, practical and aware peasants traditionally were able to avoid marshy areas and build their dwellings on well-drained sites even though water coursed across them. From the broader context of a village and its productive environs, it is possible to postulate a relationship between *fengshui* principles and the realities of lowland rice farming. Valley bottoms and adjacent hill slopes provide landscape elements that can be reasonably modified to control the flow as well as the storage of water via weirs, channeled streams, and ponds that are necessary for the cultivation of wet rice: "water moving through the rice fields should not become stagnant, or move too quickly. A steady, gentle flow is needed. The constant flow of water helps to ensure a continuous supply of nutrients which, paralleling the life-giving *hei [qi]* of *fung shui [fengshui]* should be allowed to penetrate the soil" (Webb 1995, 42).

Attention to the siting and situating of dwellings and villages no doubt prevented some risky and ill-advised environmental decisions, in the process nurturing a tradition of responsive and sustainable building practices. Yet one must be careful not to universalize these efforts or to romanticize them since there is substantial evidence that Chinese peasants all too often seriously damaged the environment in which they lived—draining wetlands, cutting woodlands for fuel, among many other activities—even while espousing a desire to live harmoniously in nature by appropriately siting their dwellings.

1. Among the sources that focus on *fengshui* in the site selection for imperial capitals and other cities are Steinhardt (1990); Steinhardt et al. (2002, 206–207, 255–259); and Xu (2000, 208–236). Good surveys concerning the broader applications of *fengshui* to everyday decision making are Feuchtwang (1974); Huangbo (2002); March (1968); Smith (1991, 131–171); and Xu (1990, 1998).
2. The importation of wood from great distances is discussed in detail by Ruitenbeek (1993, 8–15).
3. Fifteen additional charms are illustrated in Knapp (1999b, 53; 1989, 147); a full set is in Ruitenbeek (1993, 298–305).
4. Potent antispectral charms made up of bizarre black or gold calligraphy on yellow paper were collected in the early 1900s, as seen in De Groot (1907, 1024–1061). For an all-purpose charm, see Knapp (1999b, 54).
5. Ruitenbeek (1993, 306–312) includes a selection of calligraphic amulets with details concerning their use.
6. Zhang Tianshi is described further in Chapter 14 as being employed during the fifth day of the fifth month in order to dispel the five poisons.
7. Facsimile reproductions of this and several other rare editions of the *Lu Ban jing*, as well as comparative translations, are found in Ruitenbeek (1993). A similar set of seventy-two admonitions appears in a reprint edition of the *Huitu Lu Ban jing*, published in Shanghai in the nineteenth century and reprinted regularly today in Taiwan.
8. An illustrated discussion of the full range of *yasheng* objects and rituals in Taiwan is found in Chen (1993, 5–26) and of those elsewhere in China in Knapp (1999b, 52–78).
9. An inverting mirror is illustrated in Knapp (1999b, 61).
10. A *cun* is a Chinese “inch” and equals one-third of a decimeter; a *fen* equals one-tenth of a *cun*.
11. For examples of Chinese handicrafts or folk art made to protect children, see Berliner (1986, 82–87).
12. I thank an anonymous peer reviewer for reminding me of these important associations.
13. For a representative selection of regional styles of Menshen over time, see Chen et al. (1992, 87–125); Po and Johnson (1992, 110–123); and Fong (1989, 6–24).
14. For various images of Zhong Kui, see Po and Johnson (1992, 106, 136–145); Rudova (1988, 18–19, 29).
15. While avoiding disaster and expelling evil were judged essential in pursuing a good life, Chinese traditionally believed it was equally necessary to pursue good fortune if well-being and happiness were to be assured. For a comprehensive examination of the iconographic elements involved in this activity, see Knapp (1999b, 81–157).