INTRODUCTION

This decade-long research journey had an unusual beginning. I conducted my first field trip in Sichuan in 2008 and completed it only days before the Sichuan earthquake (also known as Great Wenchuan earthquake) that hit on May 12, taking more than a hundred thousand lives. It was a narrow escape for me and my husband, Jun, who had thought he was on his honeymoon. I was also lucky, because many of the sites visited during my trip became unreachable for a long time after the earthquake, and some were severely damaged. Although many sites and buildings were eventually restored or rebuilt, I was very fortunate to have been able to document the buildings before then.

The coherence of the Chinese architectural system throughout history is rare and remarkable when compared to other forms of art. From the very beginning of Chinese civilization, timber-framed architecture was dominant in projects of great political and religious significance. As an embodiment of ancient Chinese civilization, it symbolized a hierarchical society ruled by Confucian orthodoxy.

Court-enforced building codes have a history almost as old as this architecture. The *Kaogongji* 考工記 (Records of examination of craftsman), published in the late Zhou (1100–221 BCE) or early Han (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasties, recorded architectural technology, building methods, and principles of imperial city planning.[1] The edict of *Yingshanling* 營繕令 (Rules of construction and repair),[2] enacted in the Tang dynasty (618–907), demonstrated how architecture was hierarchized. During the Northern Song (960–1127), the publication of *Yingzao fashi* 營造法式 (Building standards; hereafter *YZFS*)[3] explained how architecture was completely codified and modularized in almost every detail. Generally speaking, the *Kaogongji, Yingshanling,* and *YZFS* were quite similar in respect to one principle recorded in all three: regulation of the design of architecture based on the social rank of the occupant or the audience. Both the *Kaogongji* and the *YZFS* recorded how the modular system depended on the rank of the building, and in fact the author of the *YZFS* clearly stated that his work was "strictly" and "cautiously" based on the *Kaogongji.*[4]

Throughout history, such regulation of architecture as part of political power made Chinese architecture a highly standardized and modularized system. As Nancy Steinhardt argues, "as every period of disunion has shown,

Chinese architecture . . . is an aspect of civilization, sometimes a rare aspect, that can be counted on to be Chinese."[5] Using examples of Chinese architecture during the tenth century, when China was split during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, and later into Liao (907–1125) and Song, Steinhardt has argued convincingly that architecture made by both Han Chinese and non-Han Chinese during this period of disunion was in fact monocultural.

In contrast to the tenth century when China was multicentered, between 1279 and 1368 China was "unified" by an alien dynasty for the first time. The Mongol conquerors named their dynasty "Yuan" or "Dayuan," meaning "unity" or "great unity," which suggests their intention to rule China as a whole.[6] In terms of architecture, however, the Yuan dynasty is often considered a transitional period that was short-lived and not distinctive in itself.[7] This is largely because when the Mongols conquered and "re-unified" China, the rulers, whose lifestyle was mainly nomadic, showed no intention of creating a dynastic style of their own by regulating the design and construction of architecture. Despite the large-scale palatial structures constructed in their capital of Dadu (modern Beijing),[8] whose design was intentionally based on the Bianliang model of the Northern Song, Yuan architecture outside of Dadu demonstrated regionalism and diversity rather than unity in terms of artistic presentation, technique, and use of material.[9]

The absence of a distinctive dynastic style does not necessarily suggest that Yuan architecture was merely transitional and not significant. On the contrary, the diversity of Yuan architecture that will be discussed here is demonstrated as significant in explaining a major transformation of Chinese architecture from the Song to the Ming-Qing periods. In the 1930s, Liang Sicheng defined the Song dynasty as a period of "elegance" and the Ming-Qing dynasties as a period of "rigidity." These two definitions, from a modern scholar's perspective, suggest a strong transformation in aesthetic values. As I will argue in this book, however, the transformation was in fact a result of changes in structural principles—changes that were caused by the complex social and political transitions from Song to Ming. Yuan architecture, which was diversified and regionalized, is the key to finding out why and how such a transformation happened.[10]

Because of a number of scholarly publications in English concerning the history of construction during the Yuan empire, Western audiences often are familiar with the buildings of Shangdu (Xanadu), an earlier capital of Khubilai Khan, and of Dadu, built by Khubilai Khan and his Chinese advisers.[11] Fu Xinian has tried to reconstruct the imperial palaces in Dadu based on descriptions in historical literature.[12] Fu generalizes that the "architectural style"[13] of the Yuan palaces in Dadu was based on those in Zhongdu, capital of the Jin dynasty (1115–1234), and Bianliang, capital of the Northern Song.[14]

Although no Yuan timber-framed building has been found in modern Beijing, Dening (Virtuous Tranquility) Hall 德寧殿 in the Temple to the Northern

Peak 北嶽廟 complex located in Quyang, Hebei province, about 250 kilometers west of Beijing, serves as "the closest surviving example of what architecture in Kublai Khan's imperial city should have looked like."[15] Dening Hall was built in the late 1260s under the imperial patronage of Khubilai Khan. Therefore, the structural details of the building highlight the standard that was equivalent to the imperial palaces later built in Dadu. Another article by Steinhardt, "Toward the Definition of a Yuan Dynasty Hall," further identifies features that characterize Yuan architecture. In addition to Dening Hall, examples include the architecture at Yongle (Eternal Joy) Palace 永樂宮, Guangsheng (Profound Victory) Monastery 廣勝寺, and several other Yuan buildings in north China (mainly in Shanxi and Hebei provinces). Steinhardt argues that these Yuan structures in north China follow the pre-Yuan system and "are more similar in structural details to earlier architecture . . . than to building of the Ming and Qing dynasties." In sum, English-language publications about Yuan architecture or construction projects have focused on the imperial capitals and surviving buildings located in north China.

As for Chinese scholarship on Yuan architecture, a few Chinese scholars have summarized the significance of Yuan (timber-framed) architecture in their publications. In his article published in 1979, Zhang Yuhuan suggested that Yuan timber-framed architecture developed based on Song timber-framed architecture; many of the details directly corresponded with the *YZFS.* He also admitted, however, that there were some new features in Yuan timber-framed buildings, such as the eliminated-column structure (*jianzhuzao* 減柱造) and the big-architrave style (*da'eshi* 大額式); he still acknowledged that the origins of these two features were found in Jin timber-framed architecture. Yuan timber-framed buildings were probably unique only in their building materials—many wooden pieces used in Yuan buildings were unprocessed and retained their natural shapes. Zhang was correct in pointing out these two distinctive features of Yuan timber-framed architecture, but he failed to mention any stylistic diversity among different regions.

In a volume on Yuan-Ming architecture edited by Pan Guxi and others, the differences between Yuan timber-framed architecture in north and south China were explored. According to those authors, both the skill in carpentry and the artistic presentation of this period drastically transformed the architecture, especially in the column-and-beam system and the modular measurement of the bracket components. Artistically, Chinese timber-framed architecture transformed from a luxuriant to a simplistic style during the Yuan dynasty. Such development is symbolized by the decorative members (such as the bracket sets) that originally had some structural function, then became differentiated and separated from the structural members. In general, these scholars believe that Yuan architecture in the north developed out of Jin architecture, whereas Yuan architecture in the south was based on Song architecture. In this statement, we

can see that the difference between the south and north has been considered by some scholars. Nevertheless, this does not hold true when we consider Sichuan part of south China. The situation in the south along the Yangzi (Yangtze) River is much more complicated.[16]

There have certainly been changes in Yuan (timber-framed) architecture as a whole over time. Most remarkable is the downgrading of the measurement of bracket sets, which is part of the general trend of the development of Chinese timber-framed architecture. Here, however, the focus is on regional traditions, which can be observed in the Yuan period for the first time.

This book consists of five chapters. The first two discuss Yuan architecture across dynasties and regions. Chapter 1 explores the trans-dynastic transformation of architecture from the Song to the Ming (1368–1644) dynasty. Despite the large-scale construction in the capital Dadu, the Yuan court never had the intention of regulating architecture nationwide as its predecessor, the Song, had done, or as its successor, the Ming, eventually would do. Yet, extant architecture and historical texts have verified that characteristics of the dynastic style of the Song remained in Yuan architecture and aspects of Yuan influenced Ming architecture. This chapter focuses on how the legacy of Song architecture remained in Yuan architecture, and how the diversified Yuan architecture inspired Ming builders and was later incorporated into the Ming dynastic style.

Chapter 2 offers an analysis of Yuan timber-framed architecture in three macro-regions: north China (now Hebei, Shanxi, and Shaanxi provinces), the Upper Yangzi, and the Lower Yangzi. Yuan architecture in north China has been studied comprehensively and surveyed during recent decades. In contrast to the few more than a dozen Yuan timber-framed buildings that have been found in the south, hundreds have been discovered in the north. This chapter will explain how regional traditions were generated under different pre-Yuan regimes and developed independently, without central control, during the Yuan dynasty. In addition to pictures and architectural drawings, statistical tables and charts will be used to analyze the modular system and the scale of architecture geographically and chronologically.

Chapters 3 through 5 present twenty case studies of Yuan architecture along the Yangzi River in south China. Discussions of most of these Yuan buildings have never been published in English. In chapter 3 ten Yuan buildings in the Sichuan basin of the Upper Yangzi are studied. Chapter 4 explores five examples of Yuan architecture in Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shanghai Municipality. Chapter 5 examines Yuan architecture that incorporates copper or stone. Based on textual and archaeological evidence as well as my on-site research, the construction history, religious affiliation, and architectural details of each building are examined. Textual evidence is derived predominately from local gazetteers and inscriptions found in or on the buildings, as well as a few travel logs and personal

journals. Other evidence includes photographs, drawings, measurements, and so on, many of which were collected on-site by the author.[17] A glossary of Chinese architectural terms widely used in Song and Ming-Qing literature follows the conclusion.

This book is not a survey of Yuan architecture, or of architecture and construction under the Mongols. Its purpose is as a regional study based on on-site surveys from a place and period in China where they were possible. Every building studied here has a firm Yuan date. Admittedly, the twenty buildings studied here are outnumbered by the close to two hundred Yuan buildings in north China; yet their significance should not be underrated. Their representativeness is determined by their broad geographic distribution, which spans the entire reaches of the Yangzi River, as well as by their scarcity. They are the only Yuan buildings remaining in that region.

In addition to in-depth case studies of individual buildings based on fieldwork, this book also attempts to contextualize architecture in the social and political history of the Yuan dynasty. Through examining the diversity of architecture during that time in regions other than the capital, the division of regional traditions, especially those in the south, are shown to have contributed to the transformation of dynastic styles from Song to Ming. I discuss how the traditionally defined "Han-Chinese" architecture, represented by the architecture of a dynasty such as Song and Ming, reacted to the social and political changes of the Yuan. Predominately, the traditional belief that Han-Chinese architecture was coded, uniformed, and controlled by the central government did not occur during the Yuan, when architecture built by the Han-Chinese, not by the Mongol authorities, was regionalized and diversified in terms of both the timber construction system and the building materials. The regional study conducted here will illustrate that "regional traditions" in architecture became more visible in Yuan than in any other period in China's history. Although the primary focus is on the technical evolution of surviving Yuan architecture, I hope that this book may contribute to a reevaluation of Chinese society with regard to the cultural diversity that thrived under the rule of the Mongols.