

## Preface

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*House Home Family: Living and Being Chinese* is the outcome of a multifaceted effort to expand the view of China's domestic architecture by going beyond the buildings themselves to include the families who live within the walls and who infuse their courtyards with life. In early 2001, an exhibition entitled *Living Heritage—Vernacular Environment in China*, which was guest curated by Kai-Yin Lo—brought to New York City's China Institute a rich collection of photographs and objects on this underappreciated and not very well known subject. Inspired by the exhibition's novel approach to the subject matter, the China Institute, in collaboration with the Asia Society, organized the "House Home Family: Living and Being" symposium to complement the exhibition. The symposium brought together scholars and experts in the fields of art, architecture, anthropology, cultural geography, and history to discuss the concept of the house and home, as well as issues of identity in traditional and contemporary Chinese culture. These scholars then transformed their contributions into the rich collection comprising this book. While Tu Wei-ming and Klaas Ruitenbeek participated in the symposium, their schedules did not permit them to contribute to the book. David Faure, James Flath, and Puay-peng Ho were invited to contribute new chapters that fill gaps and make as comprehensive as possible this multidisciplinary book on a range of subjects so far not addressed under one framework. The contributing authors share the editors' belief that a multidisciplinary approach not only elucidates but also stimulates multidimensional explorations and exchanges.

From a layman's enthusiasm derived from collecting Chinese furniture, Kai-Yin Lo's interest has moved beyond the functional, aesthetic, and structural aspects of furniture to its spiritual and symbolic value, its interrelatedness and synergies with the house, architecture, and people in the scheme of the living environment. This book represents another phase in her journey of understanding her heritage and identity.

After documenting China's traditional houses for forty years, Ronald G. Knapp similarly has moved toward explorations of the extraordinarily complex interrelationships of structures and space, the families who create and live in them, and the meaning of related symbols and folklore.

As editors, it is our joint hope that this volume, which offers a macro view of a dynamic and important topic that hitherto has not been addressed, yields a deeper and wider understanding of how Chinese families are organized and why the Chinese construct their living spaces the way they do—what “living and being Chinese” means. It is our intent that by advancing an understanding and appreciation of the vernacular heritage of China, this volume will promote a greater awareness of the need to conserve the buildings and environments that embody the essence and culture of Chinese life. This effort should lead us all to think differently about the complex subject of the “architecture of Chineseness” and provoke a cascade of further questions for future cooperative interdisciplinary exchanges.