

Chapter 5: The Self-so-doing *Shi* of the Door

Self-so-doing *shi* is the natural tendency of a disposition or an entity, as reflected in *Zhuangzi*. This natural tendency leads the disposition or the entity to follow of its own accord. In the context of traditional architecture, the self-so-doing *shi* of a door is to let a door to be natural so as to follow the intrinsic tendency of a door in organizing space and directing movement.

To analyze such a self-so-doing *shi* of a door, first the ancient and fundamental role of a door in dividing space and organizing circulation in the Chinese dwellings of prehistoric times is investigated, when the development of doors was at a self-so-doing stage. The position of the door in the primeval walled chambers is revealed with the function of organizing the space within the chambers, and the resulting spatial configuration led to the archetypal spatial arrangements of later traditional Chinese houses. The position of doors in the ancient Chinese courtyard house functioned to guide movements. The pathways connecting these doors were forerunner to the characteristic meandering manner of circulation in later traditional Chinese houses.

Then some of the simple yet elegant private house garden doors are investigated to study how these garden doors had been built to be natural. Their naturalness, represented by the simplicity of their forms, blends the garden doors into the garden scenes as well as amplifies their self-so-doing *shi* to organize the garden scenes and to guide the movements of the body meandering within the

scenes. Lastly, the self-so-doing *shi* of the door is further examined by studying the route of circulation arranged by the positions of the doors in the YYT house.

The Primary Capacity of a Door to Arrange Space and Circulation

Self-so-doing *shi*, as considered by *Zhuangzi*, is attained by responding in an unaffected manner to the intrinsic nature of a disposition or an entity.

According to *Zhuangzi*, the self-so-doing *shi* places one in accordance with a self-so-doing body, and does it in a manner free from the imposition of mundane customs. Since, the society mundane customs normally take away the self-so-doing *shi* of the body, the technique of “forgetting one’s physical body” was proposed to regain self-so-doing *shi*. An example in *Zhuangzi* is the story of a true artist who intentionally discards his ritual body, allowing his self-so-doing *shi* to take hold in creating artworks. The story begins as follows:

Lord Yüan of Sung wanted to have some pictures painted. The crowd of all court clerks formally gathered in his presence, received their drawing panels, and took their places in line, licking their brushes, mixing their inks. There were so many of them that there were more outside the room than inside it. There was one clerk who arrived late, sauntering in without the slightest haste. When he received his drawing panel, he did not look for a place in line, but went straight to his own quarters. The ruler sent someone to see what he was doing, and it was found that he had taken off

his robes, stretched out his legs, and was sitting there painting completely naked. “Very good,” said the ruler, “This is a true artist!”²⁶⁷

The true artist in this story does not behave in a ritualistic manner or hinder himself with mundane customs. Although seemingly inappropriate to the situation, he let his self-so-doing *shi* emerge. Unrestrained by formal attire, he can paint naturally, following the unimpeded flow of his bodily movements. His self-so-doing body thus engenders an innate efficacy that differentiates him from the others as a true artist. The technique of “forgetting one’s physical body” does not mean neglecting the physical body. Instead, the physical body is emancipated so it can return to be natural, as that of a baby.²⁶⁸ In the context of traditional Chinese architecture, the self-so-doing *shi* of a door requires a door to be built with simplicity as if the “body-image” of a door is forgotten. Through such a technique, the natural capacity of a door as organizing space and directing movement gains its fullest expressions.

The natural capacity of a door is revealed by studying the function of a door in both the ancient chambers constructed during the pre-Xia dynasty (i.e., excavated in Yangshao and Banpuo of the Xi’an Province) and in the courtyard house built in the early Shang dynasty (i.e., excavated in Erlitou of the Henan

²⁶⁷ Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, (New York, 1968), p. 228. The original Chinese text is: 宋元君将画图, 众史皆至, 受揖而立, 舐笔和墨, 在外者半. 有一史后至者, 然不趋, 受揖不立因之舍. 公使人视之, 则解衣盘礴赢. 君曰: 可矣, 是真画者也.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 252-253. According to *Zhuangzi*, the body of a baby is claimed as self-so-doing in the sense that “The baby acts without knowing what it is doing, moves without knowing where it is going.” This self-so-doing is claimed as harmonious with nature and preserving life. “The baby howls all day, yet its throat never gets hoarse – harmony at its height! The baby makes fists all day, yet its fingers never get cramped – virtue is all it holds to. The baby stares all day without blinking its eyes – it has no preference in the world of externals. To move without knowing where you are going, to sit at home without knowing what you are doing, traipsing and trailing about with other things, riding along with them on the same wave – this is the basic rule of life-preservation.”

Province). Back then, the doors not only provide the mechanism for people to enter or exit, they also play a pivotal role in organizing space and directing movement.

At the Yangshao and Banpuo archaeological site, two types of primitive dwellings were uncovered: the square-walled chamber and the circular-walled chamber.²⁶⁹ Both building types are built with a timber post-and-beam structure. Wooden posts are joined together by wattle and daub, and plastered with mud to form solid pieces of roofs or walls. Both types of dwellings reveal that the disposition of the entry door plays a critical role in organizing space within the chamber. Figure 5.1

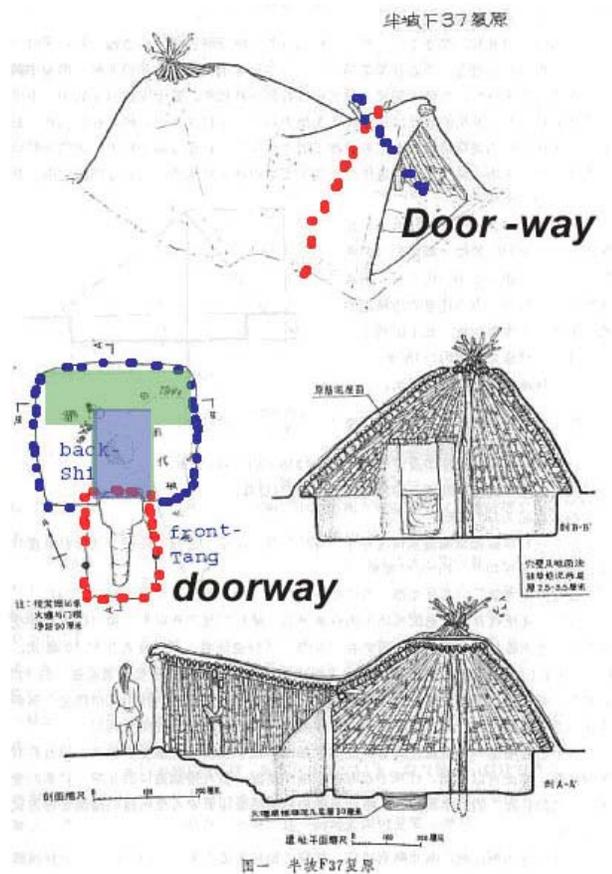


Figure 5.1. Ancient square-walled chamber in Banpuo archeological site, Yang Hongxun, *Jianzhu kaogu xue lu wen ji*, 1987, with annotations by the author.

shows a square-walled chamber, labeled F37.²⁷⁰ The entry door of F37 is situated at the south with the doorway in front of the building. At each side of the doorway, the two holes for planting wooden posts are slightly misaligned

²⁶⁹ Yang Hongxun, *Jian zhu kao gu xue lu wen ji*, (Beijing, 1987), p. 61. The term “walled chamber” comes from Robert L. Thorp, “The Architectural Heritage of the Bronze Age,” *Chinese Traditional Architecture*, (New York, 1984), pp. 61-67.

²⁷⁰ Yang Hongxun, *Jian zhu kao gu xue lu wen ji*, pp. 3-5.

with each other— indicating the doorway might have been built as a room, with the two posts tied at the top to form a tented doorway. The covered doorway room, besides giving protection to the main entrance during times of hostile weather, forms a transition space between the outside and the main chamber. At the position of the entry door, a low pounded-earth threshold takes one from the doorway room into the chamber. The space within the chamber is further divided into a small semi-public door foyer room (shaded blue in Figure 5.1) and a more private area farther from the door (shaded green in Figure 5.1).²⁷¹ The door foyer room consummates the outdoor to indoor transition initiated by the doorway.²⁷²

The square-walled chamber construction labeled as F39 reduces the size of the doorway, yet the interior door foyer space is naturally enlarged. In the square-walled chamber labeled F1, the door foyer is an individual room larger than the enclosed private rooms behind it (Figure 5.2). It has been suggested that the door foyer room is the prototype for the room called *tang* (堂) in later Chinese houses. Furthermore, the sequential spatial arrangement whereby the door foyer room is in the front and the more private rooms are farther from the door is claimed to be the archetype for the “front hall back room (*qian tang hou shi* 前堂后室)” type of arrangement found in traditional Chinese houses up to the Ming and Qing dynasties.²⁷³ Thus, the disposition of the entry door critically influences the spatial arrangement of square-walled chambers.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 34.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 84. The example of the spatial layout of *qian tang hou shi* of the later dynasties is illustrated in Liu Zhiping, *Zhongguo ju zhu jian zhu jian shi*, (Beijing, 2000), p. 141.

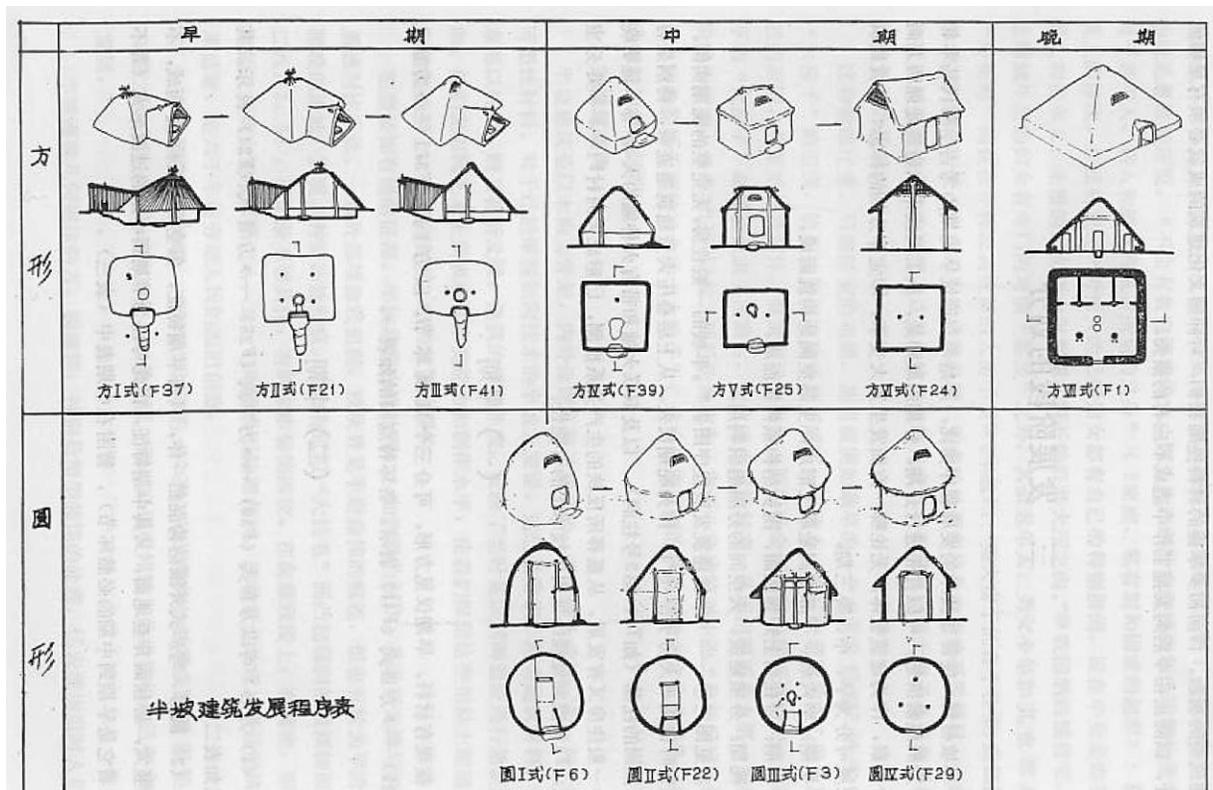


Figure 5.2. Ancient walled chambers in Banpu archeological site, Yang Hongxun, *Jianzhu kaogu xue lu wen ji*, 1987.

The plan of the circular-walled chambers at the Xi'an Banpu archeological site shows that the arrangement near the door led to the development of another fundamental spatial archetype, referred to as “one central hall flanked by two rooms (*yi ming liang an* 一明两暗),” in the traditional Chinese house. The circular-walled chamber, labeled F6 in Figure 5.3, has its entry door on a raised threshold, separating the interior and exterior spaces. Circular holes and remnants of the wooden poles are found at the threshold position, indicating the threshold likely was built at a fair height that required extra reinforcement for its lateral stability. The raised threshold again has the advantage of both preventing the entry of rain water as well as marking the

boundary of the space. Crossing the threshold, four columns are erected, encircling a hearth in the middle of the room. From the two sides of the door, two partition walls higher than the height of a person extend out, connecting the first row of the four columns with the door (see section in Figure 5.3). The two partitions channel a central space, directing the entrance toward the central



Figure 5.3. Ancient circular-walled chamber in Banpuo archeological site, Yang Hongxun, *Jianzhu kaogu xue lu wen ji*, 1987, with annotations by the author.

disposition of the door and the pair of partition walls near the door is claimed as the archetype for the “one central bright hall flanked by two rooms” layout

hearth (shaded blue in Figure 5.3). At the same time, the partitions naturally configure two subsidiary rooms—on the left and the right behind the two partition walls (shaded green in Figure 5.3)—that probably were used as sleeping quarters. This type of arrangement is present in other circular-walled chambers (Figure 5.2).²⁷⁴ The central room is brighter due to the disposition of the door. The two subsidiary rooms are darker, giving greater privacy. The tripartite spatial arrangement resulting from the

²⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

commonly used later.²⁷⁵ Just as the entry door plays a critical role in organizing space in the square-walled chamber, the doors of the ancient circular chambers also are critical in determining the organization of space.

In addition, one of the prehistoric Chinese courtyard houses dated from the early Shang dynasty, excavated at the Henan Erlitou archeological site, reveals that the location of the door directs movement and circulation. Figure 5.4 illustrates

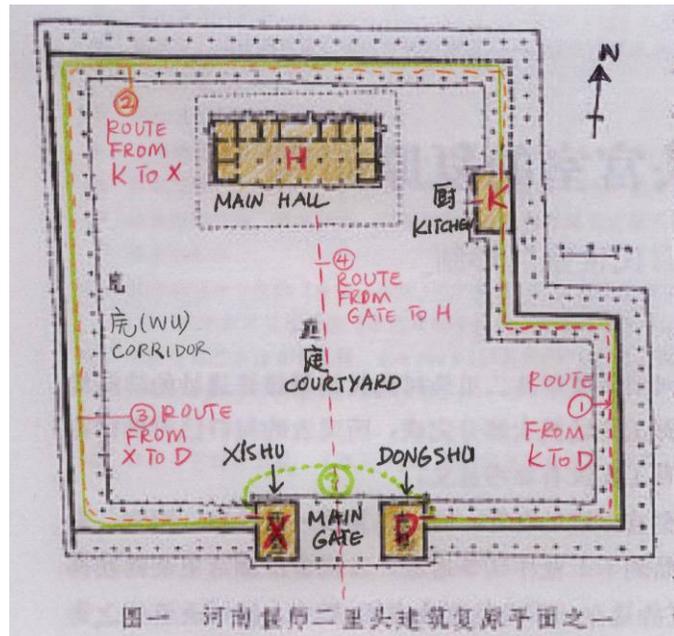


Figure 5.4. Ancient courtyard house in Erlitou archeological site, Yang Hongxun, *Jianzhu kaogu xue lu wen ji*, 1987, with annotations by the author.

the restored plan of the courtyard complex, which is composed of

(1) a principal south gate with two rooms, called *xishu* and *dongshu*,²⁷⁶ (2) a central open courtyard; (3) the *wu* (庑, a corridor-like structure, covered with a roof, with one side next to a wall and the other side open) encircling the entire perimeter of the complex; (4) an elevated main hall situated north of the compound; and (5) a kitchen at the northeast side of the courtyard.²⁷⁷ The plan

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 35. One current example of the *yi ming lian an* layout is illustrated in Liu Zhiping, *Zhongguo ju zhu jian zhu jian shi*, p. 375.

²⁷⁶ Wu Yucheng, *Zhongguo de men wen hua*, p. 16. According to *San fu huang tu* (三辅黄图) written between (502-588 AD), these two rooms are called as *dongshu* and *xishu*, in front of which the guests would step out of their carriage. Both *dongshu* and *xishu* are relatively private rooms. Later the most important function of these rooms is the private study area where the teacher would conduct classes for the young students of the family.

²⁷⁷ Yang Hongxun, *Jian zhu kao gu xue lu wen ji*, pp. 71-74.

specifies the location of the doors. The route from the *dongshu* to the kitchen is marked number 1 in the drawing. The location of the door of *dongshu* naturally directs one to the east direction, then upward to the kitchen. The route from the *xishu* to the kitchen is marked number 2, which orients the body to move westward then upwards though many turns to reach the *xishu*. The location of the door of the *xishu* and the *dongshu* guides one to encircle the whole perimeter of the complex along the *wu* to reach the other room. The *wu* connecting the

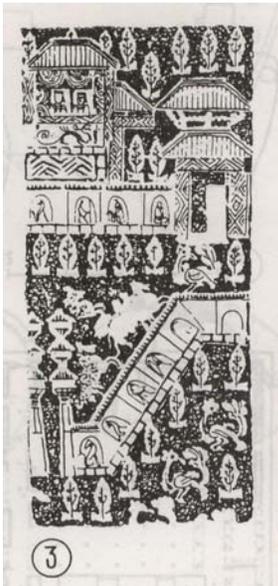


Figure 5.5. *Wu* corridor in the Han dynasty brick carvings, Liu Zhiping, *Zhongguo ju zhu jian zhu jian shi*, 2000.

doors also shapes the movement. The *wu* in this ancient dwelling not only takes a moving person from one place to another in a meandering way, it also has the function of allowing that person to pause to appreciate various activities inside the courtyard space. In the building complex in Figure 5.4, the *wu* on the west side is about six meters in width, which provides a comfortable room for various activities to be conducted.²⁷⁸ The *wu* is not just a linear passage way. The ancient ideogram of *wu* originally

was an image of a single-sloped structure *guang* (广) with an open space *wu* (无) underneath, thus conveying the meaning of *wu* as a covered room where one can be at

ease.²⁷⁹ In one of the Han dynasty brick carvings, the *wu* is a zigzagged linear room, filled with figures in various postures that show appreciation for events in

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

the courtyard or the garden (Figure 5.5). This manner of directing movement is developed into a characteristic feature in the later Chinese gardens and houses.

Therefore, in primordial times, a door naturally played a fundamental role in the arrangement of space and circulations. This self-so-doing capacity of the door finds the utmost utilization in the private house garden doors in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The garden doors were built to be self-so-doing and creatively organize various scenes and direct the passageway between the doors to enhance the aesthetic experience of the gazing wanderer.²⁸⁰

The Self-so-doing *Shi* of Garden Door

In the 17th century treatise, *The Craft of Gardens*, by Ji Cheng, the layout of the garden is discussed: “The most important element in the layout of gardens is the sitting of the main buildings, and the principle of which is to give the main buildings a fantastic view.”²⁸¹ As the buildings’ locations are fixed, a series of characteristic scenes using water and rocks as motifs is arranged, integrating the buildings into the scenes. The doors opening to each scene are designed (e.g., their shape, size, and location of the door openings), and the paths connecting the doors are organized throughout the garden to act as a “structural spine of the garden.”²⁸² The Chinese garden design thus follows a *building-scene-movement*

²⁷⁹ Xu Shen & Duan Yucai, *Suo wen jie zi zhu*, 2nd edition, (Hangzhou shi, 1999), p. 443. 虎, 堂下周屋.

²⁸⁰ Many of the garden doors have the door panels which can be closed when needed. However, most of the garden doors are just portals or openings. They are conventionally taken as “doors” since they transgress the boundaries of the landscape scenes.

²⁸¹ Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, tr., Alison Hardie, (New Haven, 1988), p. 54.

²⁸² Steward R. Johnston, *Scholar Gardens of China*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 74.

sequence.²⁸³ Two of the tree elements within this sequence—the scenes and the movements—are critically related to the construction and disposition of the garden doors. Regarding the construction of garden doors, Ji Cheng advises in *The Craft of Gardens*,

The style of molding around the opening of a doorway should be chosen according to the current fashion. Not only can a doorway give a new look to a dwelling house, it can make a garden look more elegant too. The fine work has to be done by a mason specialist, but the general arrangement needs to be directed by a person of discrimination... Absolutely avoid carvings on the door-jamb; the wall around a doorway should be polished smooth; everywhere the door should lead one to the open spaces and in all directions draw one close to the scenery. If these matters were not handed down to posterity I fear they might be lost forever so I have assembled the following design.²⁸⁴



Figure 5.6. A garden door in *Zhuo zheng yuan* garden, photograph by the author.

An analysis of Ji Cheng's account shows that the style of the garden doors needs to be simple and devoid of any extravagant or gaudy carvings (Figure 5.6). These seemingly simple and fine doors could only be crafted by special masons. The technique nowadays for building a variety of such garden doors uses a full-size

²⁸³ Ibid. Johnston used the term object-space-movement.

²⁸⁴ Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, p. 83.

wooden template called the *yaba kuang* (哑巴框, literally the muted frame). First, the *yaba kuang* is made into the desired shape of the door opening. Then it is inserted into the pre-designated location within the wall. Afterwards, wall bricks are laid around it to firmly set the template in place. The next procedure mortars the facing brick tiles onto the outer surfaces of the *yaba kuang*. Some of the facing brick tiles are custom made to flawlessly wrap the edges of the *yaba kuang* so that the appearance of the door opening is clean and elegant (Figure 5.7).²⁸⁵ Because of the careful detailing, the door openings naturally merge into the garden scenes. The minimal presence of the physical form of the garden doors is analogous with the technique of “forgetting the physical body” in order to be self-so-doing.

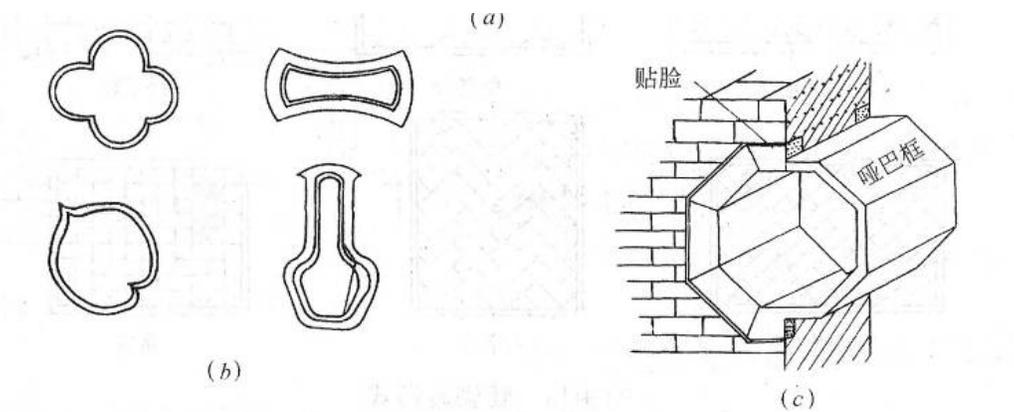


Figure 5.7. Garden door construction technique, Tian Yongfu, *Zhongguo yuan lin jian zhu shi gong ji shu*, 2002.

These simple garden doors directly affect how a scene is organized to enhance the tranquility and the leisure of the wanderer. For example, the garden door framing the approaching scene can form a sudden vista that provokes the

²⁸⁵ Tian Yongfu, *Zhongguo yuan lin jian zhu shi gong ji shu*, (Beijing, 2002), p. 186.

curiosity of the wanderer.²⁸⁶ The garden door, together with the presence of other features (e.g., a grotesque rock in front of the door), can entice the wanderer to imagine the scene on the other side of the door as a magical, divine realm.²⁸⁷

In many of the existing Ming and Qing dynasty gardens, the garden doors



Figure 5.8. A moon door in *Cang lang ting* garden, Hu Dongchu, *The Way of the Virtuous the Influence of Art and Philosophy on Chinese Garden Design*, 1991.

are built unpretentiously, naturally merging into the physical surroundings yet their capacity of organizing scenes and directing movements is fully leveraged.

Figure 5.8 shows the moon door in the *Cang lang ting* garden in Suzhou. The

masonry door jamb is built with the thin rim of finely crafted, curved brick blocks, which are joined seamlessly to form a

partial circle. Near the bottom, the door jamb is curved inward and smoothly enveloped into the masonry walls. To complete the shape of the circle, the piece of brick block for the threshold is concave. The austere yet beautiful curvilinear door opening frames the view of an elaborately carved window on the opposite wall. The curves on the door and the opposite window opening disclose an internal harmony between the door and the approaching view.

For the garden doors in the next two examples (Figure 5.9), the door jambs are omitted all together, making them pure openings. By artfully varying

²⁸⁶ Liu Qianxian, *Yuan lin shuo yi zhi*, (Changchun shi, 1998), p. 173. 触景生奇, 含情多致.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 伟石迎人, 别有一壶天地.

the sizes and shapes of the door openings in accordance with the arrangement of the garden scenes beyond, the perception of space is expanded. The opening on the left-most image in Figure 5.9 uses its plain outlook and vase-like shape to strike a contrast with the rock formations behind which is filled with light, shadow, energy, and movement. The gourd-shaped garden door opening on the right-most image in the figure artistically gives a glimpse of the approaching scene luring the person to venture into the opening by creating from afar an illusion of spatial and scenic depth. It instills a wondrous curiosity about the characteristics of the framed scene.²⁸⁸

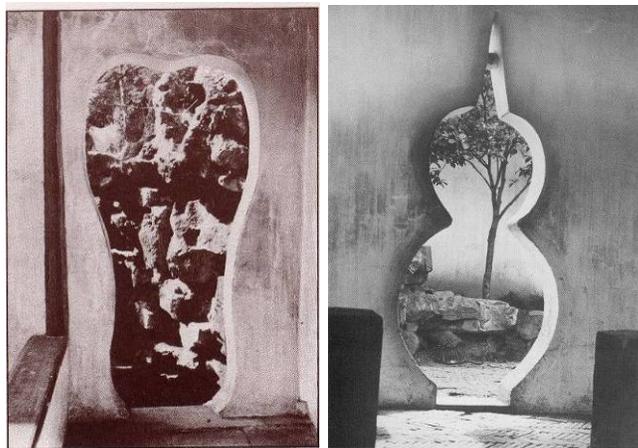


Figure 5.9. Left: Gourd-shaped garden door, Hu Dongchu, *The Way of the Virtuous the Influence of Art and Philosophy on Chinese Garden Design*, 1991. Right: Gourd-shaped garden door, David Engel, *Creating a Chinese Garden*, 1986.

The garden doors guide one's movement through carefully devised paths. In these gardens, the doors rarely are positioned on one central axis to give an open axial view, and the pathway linking two garden doors from one scene to another rarely is straight. A meandering path is always used to link the garden

²⁸⁸ David Engel, *Creating a Chinese Garden*, (London, 1986), p. 8.

doors and to thread the landscape scenes. Ji Cheng, in *The Crafts of Garden*, emphasizes the importance of creating meandering paths in a garden:

For it to be a proper path, it should be both winding and long. In ancient times, the so called “winding path” turned at right angles like a Carpenter’s Square. But the winding walkways which I build now bend like the letter S, curving with the form of the ground and bending with the lie of the land. They may curl round the middle of a hill or run down to the water’s edge, pass among flowers or cross a moat, endlessly twisting and turning.²⁸⁹

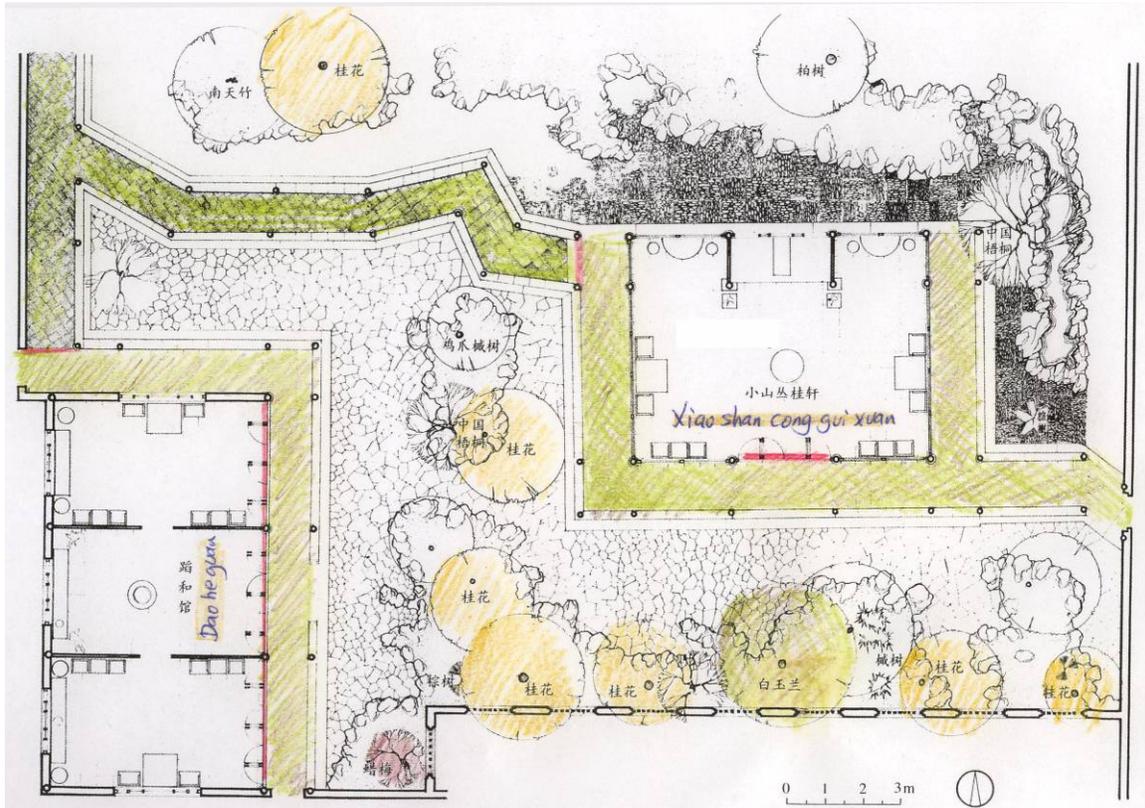


Figure 5.10. Partial plan of the Wang shi garden, Pan Guxi, *Jiang nan li jing yi shu*, 2001.

²⁸⁹ Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, p. 71.

As seen from the partial plan of the *Wangshi* garden in Figure 5.10, the locations of the doors (including the door opening) are marked red and the pathways connecting the doors are marked green. The route between the building named *Xiao shan cong gui xuan* and the building *Dao he guan* meanders from the front of the *Xiao shan cong gui xuan* to the side of the building, progresses through the twisty path, and reaches the side and then the front of the *Dao he guan*. Walking along the extended and meandering route organized by paths and doors, the wandering person is taken from one building to another and enriched by the many dynamic, constantly enticing and unfolding vistas. The door of the *Xiao shan cong gui xuan* faces a beautiful magnolia tree. Along the path, one experiences a row of sweetly scented osmanthus trees. The magnolia and the osmanthus trees blossom at different seasons, thus producing



Figure 5.11. A moon door in *Zhuo zheng yuan* garden, photograph by the author.

distinctive sensations along the path at different times of the year.

In addition, the shape of the garden doors corresponds to the directed movement. The door jamb of another moon door in the *zhuo zheng* garden is also built with a thin rim of unadorned masonry blocks (Figure 5.11). The moon door is made into a full circle, seemingly emerging out of the surface of the ground like a rising moon. Although the

threshold separates the two scenes on each side of the door, its low profile still provides a smooth and flowing progression from one scene to the next.

In contrast, when two scenes separated by a moon door are dramatically different, a variation in ground height is used in certain circumstances to interrupt the continuity of the path. In many such circumstances, the moon doors are made so the bottom threshold is replaced with plain steps, such as in the case of the *Cang lang ting* garden (left image in Figure 5.12) and the *Zhuo zheng* garden (right image in Figure 5.12). These steps naturally induce the person to pause and prepare to exit the current scene and go into the next scene. The moon door in the *Zhuo zheng yuan* is built with great depth and not only dramatically enhances the spatial perception of the pond scene beyond, but also allows the person to linger on the threshold. The width of the doors varies, so one's progression through the garden constantly alternates between the sense of constriction and of release or freedom. Furthermore, the pavement leading to and away from the door has a texture that is felt under foot and enriches one's sensation of the space. In general, the more one feels the changes and variations along the paved path, the more intense is one's experience of space and time.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ David Engel, *Creating a Chinese Garden*, p. 85.

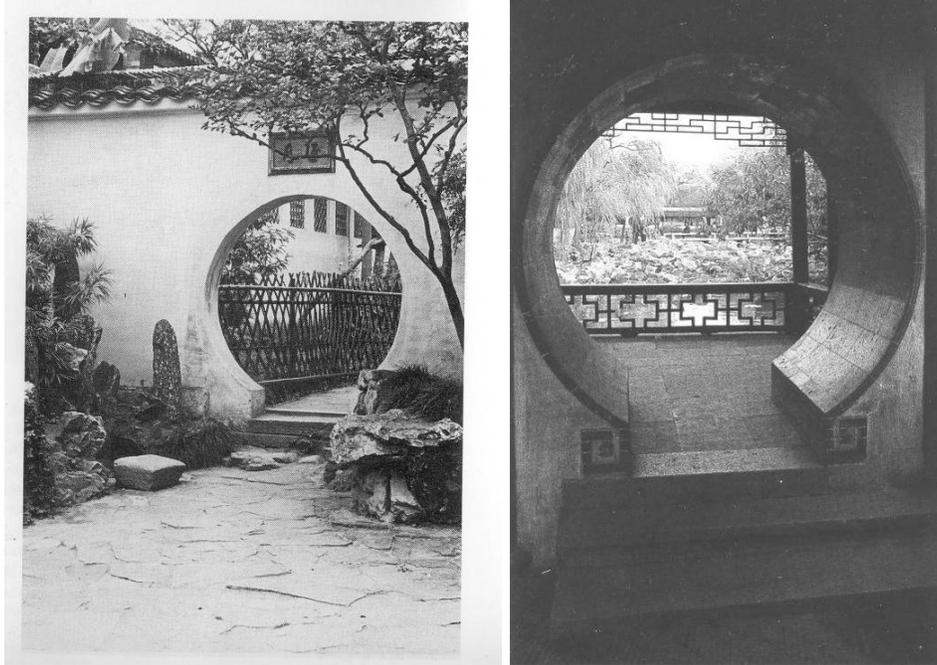


Figure 5.12. Two moon doors, David Engel, *Creating a Chinese Garden*, 1986.

The strategic door positions, variation in door shapes, and alternating qualities along the pathways to the door not only are intended to enrich the aesthetic experience of the senses, but also create delightful illusions, as described by Shen Fu, a Qing dynasty literatus who was well versed in the garden art. Shen Fu says in his *Six Records of a Floating Life*,

Here is a way to show the real amidst an illusion: Arrange the garden so that when a guest feels he has seen everything he can, then suddenly take a turn in the path and have a broad new vista open up before him, or open a door in a pavilion only to find it leads to an entirely new garden.²⁹¹

The delight and surprises created by the techniques of illusion and deception are believed by garden designers to emulate the creation of nature. In

²⁹¹ Stewart R. Johnston, *Scholar Gardens of China*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 48.

another words, the unexpected surprises one encounter along the path or going through the varied garden doors make the crafted scenes more coherent with the natural landscape which is full of amazement and variations.

The Gardens in Huizhou

A deeper understanding of the Huizhou traditional gardens has generated interest and a high level of research because the Huizhou private house gardens differ in several ways from gardens in the Jiangnan region (e.g., those discussed above).²⁹² As stated previously, merchants and craftsman in Huizhou held two distinctive cultural inclinations between the 16th and 19th centuries. On the one hand, they followed the rigid rules for everyday behavior, as defined by the neo-Confucian rites. On the other hand, their fine tastes and artistic skills gave them a deep and intuitive appreciation for nature and the beauty of simplicity. These two characteristics are reflected in their garden designs. The layout of the Huizhou gardens therefore fuses the Confucian ritualistic character that emphasizes axis and straightness, with the self-so-doing character that advocates freedom and meandering garden arrangements. This mixture is suggested by the garden layouts in the 17th century scroll printing, *Huan cui tang yuan jing tu* (The Hall Encircled with Jade), which portrays gardens in the Huizhou Xiuning county.²⁹³ One of the gardens depicted in the scroll print is of the courtyard type with the main garden in an open courtyard with bonsai arranged linearly. The central, straight path is the widest path. One end of the central path connects with the

²⁹² Yongchun Zhu, *Huizhou jian zhu*, pp. 248-245

²⁹³ www.doaks.org/LandscapeArchitecture.html.

steps leading to the half-open corridor like the *wu*; people can walk on this path and appreciate the views of the gardens. The other end connects with a bridge that crosses over a square-shaped pond at the other side of the garden; this end of the path is lined with several grotesque stones. The central path is the most prominent, with two auxiliary paths on each side. One side path is connected to the central path by two parallel, straight walkways. Bonsai are encircled by the paths and walkways. Although such a layout embodies the Confucian ritual orders and emphasizes “straightness,” the presence of the freely shaped and grotesque rocks and the miniature scenes of bonsai convey the characteristic appreciation of nature (Figure 5.13).

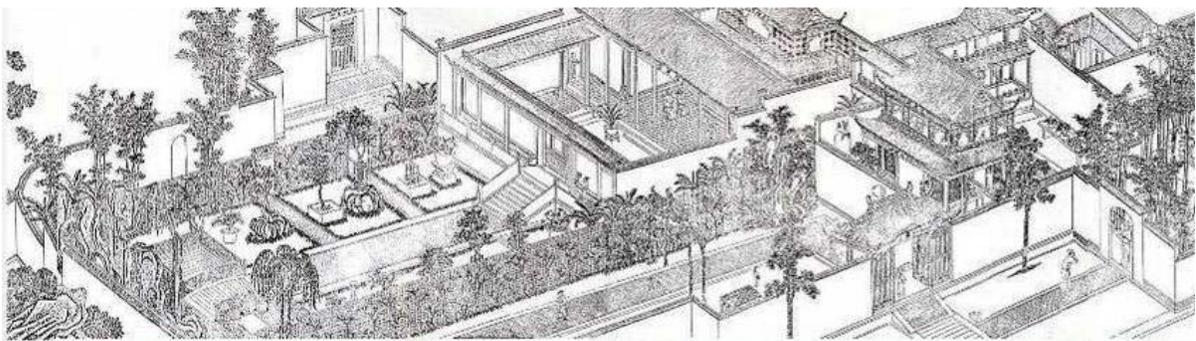


Figure 5.13. Section of the 17th century scroll print, *Huang cui tang yuan jing tu*, www.doaks.org/LandscapeArchitecture.html.

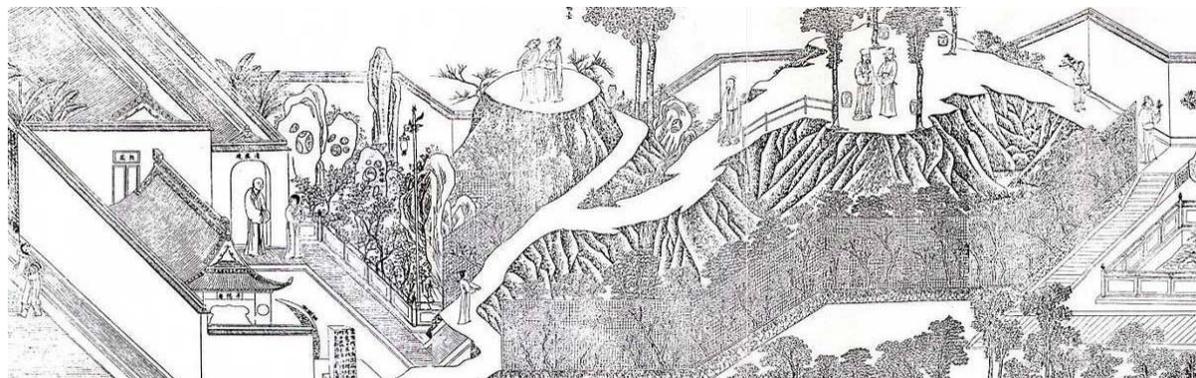


Figure 5.14. Section of the 17th century scroll print, *Huang cui tang yuan jing tu*, www.doaks.org/LandscapeArchitecture.html.

Huizhou gardens are not intended as a retreat in the same manner as the private gardens in the Jiangnan urban environment. The secluded mountainous Huizhou area itself is taken as a retreat. Therefore, the gardens in Huizhou are less focused on the natural scenes enclosed within the complex and more focused on emphasizing the elevated vista points along the path so people can appreciate both the landscape within and beyond the garden. In the scroll painting, various pavilions, including some that are multi-storied and situated on high platforms, are identified as vantage points from where the natural landscape outside the wall can admire the beautiful mountainous landscape outside the garden and surrounding the villages and estates (Figure 5.14 showing a section of the Fragrant Water Garden in Huizhou).²⁹⁴

However, within the slightly different cultural framework for gardens in the Huizhou area, the garden doors inherited a simplicity and elegance that unify them into the natural landscape. The garden doors in Huizhou are blander and have less variety in shape than those found in the Jiangnan gardens. The most



Figure 5.15. Garden door in *Xi yuan* in Huizhou, photograph by the author.

commonly used shape for the Huizhou garden door opening is an arch, as shown in Figure 5.15. The garden door shown in the figure belonged to the house estate of *Xi yuan* in the Xidi region of Huizhou. The *Xi yuan* garden was built in the Qing dynasty by the official literatus, Hu Gongzhao. This garden door is

²⁹⁴ Yongchun Zhu, *Huizhou jian zhu*, pp. 248-245

just an arched opening that marks the end of the current courtyard garden and the beginning of the view anticipated beyond. Currently, the front yard is planted with many bonsai. Going across the garden door, one reaches another courtyard

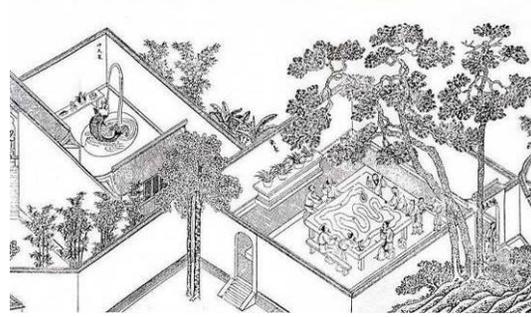


Figure 5.16. Section of the 17th century scroll print, *Huang cui tang yuan jing tu*, www.doaks.org/LandscapeArchitecture.html.

garden. Within both of the courtyard gardens are two main building complexes used for reading and entertainment. The pathway to the door is relatively straight, with few twists and turns. The simplicity of the door and the path gives a clear sense of the spatial arrangement and route of circulation. This type of door also can be seen in the long scroll wood print, where it is connected by an L-shaped pathway that frames the movement of a person walking through it (Figure 5.16).

The Arrangement of Doors in the Yin Yu Tang House



Figure 5.17. Yin Yu Tang courtyard, photograph by the author, courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum.

In the limited space of the YYT house, the self-so-doing *shi* of a door that allows a door to respond naturally to organize space and movement is not as outstanding as those in the garden setups where being natural is the primary aim. The YYT house doors carried many secular meanings to embody the ritual *shi* by having the entrance doors oriented and dimensioned according to the Confucian ritual hierarchies to enforce order to the family clan living in the house. Yet there are

still traces of the manifestation of the self-so-doing *shi* of the YYT house doors which adorns the house with a unique charm.

After entering the YYT house main entrance door, the courtyard space affords notable views of the house, which can be best appreciated from the upper corridor space (also termed the gallery) that encircles the courtyard and links all the room doors upstairs. One view is of the two fish ponds, prominently located at the right and left sides of the main axis. The other views include the various daily activities conducted in the courtyard and the changing sensations of the courtyard due to the weather. For example, on a rainy day, the rain pouring from the roof collects in the central courtyard and gives a serene atmosphere to the house.

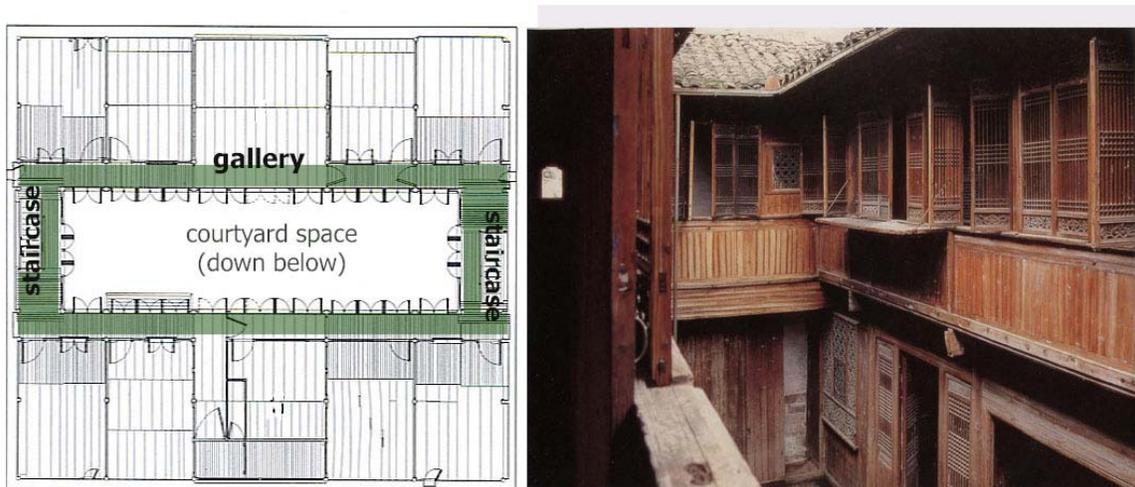


Figure 5.18. Left: Yin Yu Tang gallery plan; right: view of the Yin Yu Tang house gallery (corridor); Nancy Berliner, *Yin Yu Tang, the Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*, 2003, with annotations on the plan by the author.

Climbing up the narrow, dimly lit, and steep staircase which is about 50 degree in slope and 60cm wide, one reaches the gallery space. The upstairs

rooms of the YYT house are arranged to surround the courtyard. The gallery, about 70cm wide, provides access to the door of each room upstairs. The *zhi ling chuang* (literally, square-pattern lattice window 直棂窗) are built along the entire perimeter of the gallery to provide continuous vantage points of the courtyard (Figure 5.18). All the lattice windows of the gallery can be opened to allow light to penetrate. Light shining through draws a person moving through the gallery to pause, look out, and admire the different perspectives of the courtyard. Opening different pieces of these lattice windows also allows one to frame the various

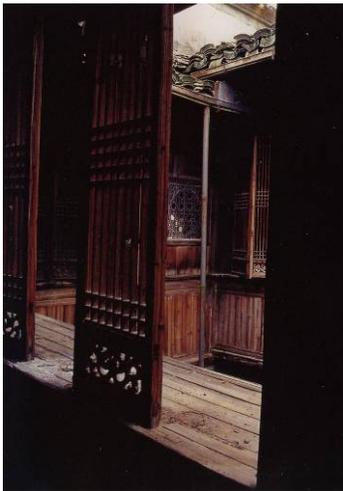


Figure 5.19. Yin Yu Tang house lattice window in the gallery, Nancy Berliner, *Yin Yu Tang, the Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*, 2003.

courtyard views which, in many ways, parallel the efficacy of the garden doors (e.g., the moon doors) in enhancing one's aesthetic experience of the spaces enclosed (see Figure 5.19). In the context of the YYT house, one's senses are more delighted and at ease especially after one toils his or her body climbing up the steep stairs to reach the gallery. The gallery is a place to linger during both sunny and rainy days. In a certain spot along the gallery, a balcony made by hinging down a small wooden board is used for drying tea leaves or placing flowers, the fragrance of which further enriches the many sensations found in this environment.

A peculiar detail related to the upper gallery of the YYT house should be noted. Instead of making the floor uniformly even, the builders incorporated several thresholds and floor height changes. The changes in floor height cause a

person circling the gallery to slow his pace. With this slowed-down motion, one can better appreciate the views through the lattice windows of the sky and the ponds below. In another beautiful Huizhou house, the gallery has benches arranged around the lattice windows to allow one to leisurely enjoy the beauty of the space enclosed within the courtyard (see Figure 5.20).



Figure 5.20. A house gallery in Qiankou, Huizhou, photograph by the author.

Summary

As discussed above, the self-so-doing *shi* of a door is prominently evident in many garden doors of the private house gardens in the Ming and Qing dynasties. These doors' simple shapes artfully organize garden scenes and the circulation route to intensify the aesthetic experience of the body wandering within the garden. Even in the limited space of the YYT house, such a self-so-doing *shi* of a door is present in arranging a unique circulation route that adds to the experience of leisure and increases the comfort of the inhabitants.

The self-so-doing *shi* of a door requires the shape, size and location of the doors to be harmonious with the context. For example the moon door in the *Zhuo zheng yuan* is built into a circular shape with a deep door rim to frame the scene beyond (i.e., a pool of water filled with lotus flowers), therefore to attract a wandering body into this scene (Figure 5.21). Similarly, in the context of the original YYT house, the doors are arranged to create a circulation route in which one needed to climb up a very narrow and steep stair case to be able to enjoy the upstairs gallery encircling the courtyard space filled with light.



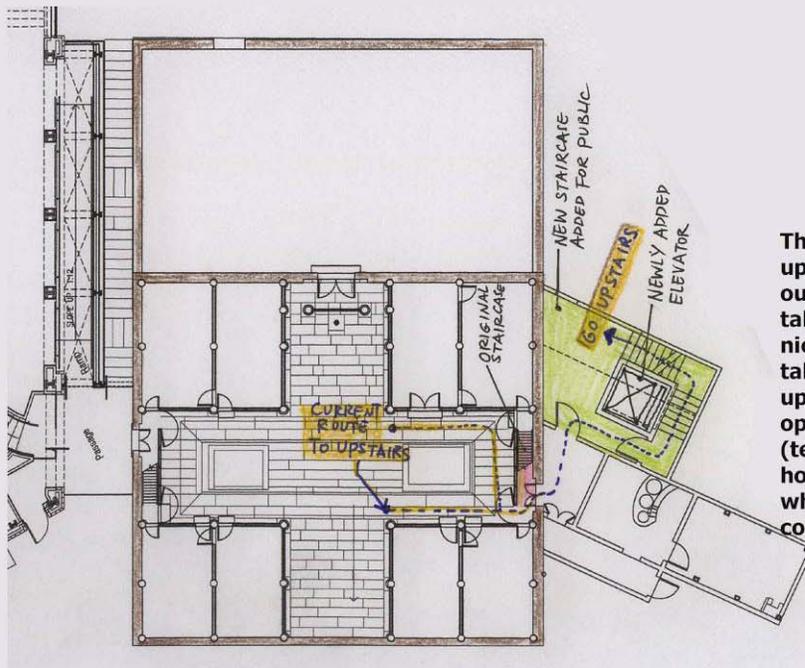
Figure 5.21. A moon door in the *Zhuo zheng yuan* garden, David Engel, *Creating a Chinese Garden*, 1986.

Would the self-so-doing *shi* of the doors remain unaltered after the relocation of the YYT house to the Peabody Essex Museum? The answer can be possibly illuminated from the essential nature of the self-so-doing *shi* as amorphous and weak adjusting according to the changes of context and transient with the flow of time. Outwardly the self-so-doing *shi* of the doors in the re-erected YYT house is still at work since the building context for these doors is mostly preserved. The doors are restored to what they are like in the original YYT house and relocated in where they were situated to faithfully preserve the original spatial layout and circulation. However, the cultural context of the original YYT house is altered because it is no longer a house rather a museum artifact. To protect the safety of the public visiting this house, the original staircase is barred

from further use by the museum. A modern staircase and elevator have been erected next to the house. The new route of going to the rooms upstairs is illustrated in the bottom image in Plate 5.1. The route takes one to exit the house at the lower level, then onto a spacious and comfortable modern staircase or to take the elevator arriving on the second floor, then to re-enter the house into the upper floor gallery. This new route alters the original circulation path and changes the effect of the YYT house door's original self-so-doing *shi*. However a new effect is engendered from the morphed self-so-doing *shi* that all the doors (including the new doors of the staircase) are naturally fulfilling their capacities of handling the needs of the egress and directing the movement of the many visitors to appreciate the courtyard views from a foreigner's perspective.



The original typical route of accessing the rooms upstairs in the traditional Huizhou houses : ascending a very steep and normally quite dim stairs to reach the corridor that opens to the courtyard space (termed as gallery in the YYT house), then go to the rooms whose doors are opened onto the corridor



The route of accessing the rooms upstairs in the current YYT: exiting out of the door at the east side to take the newly added spacious and nicely illuminated steel stairs or take the elevator to ascend to the upstairs to reach the corridor that opens to the courtyard space (termed as gallery in the YYT house), then go to the rooms whose doors are opened onto the corridor

Plate 5.1. Different routes for accessing the second floor in Huizhou houses and in the current Yin Yu Tang House, photographs of the Huizhou houses and stairs by the author, the AutoCAD drawing for the plan of the Yin Yu Tang house by John G. Waite Associates, Architects, PLLC., with annotations by the author.