



# **Courtyard Housing and Cultural Sustainability**

## **A discussion on housing redevelopment in Suzhou**

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Wednesday, May 10, 2017

5:00 PM – 6:00 PM

The Conference Center

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This presentation highlights my doctoral research findings on the new courtyard housing projects built in the inner city of Suzhou since the 1990s. It looks at the architectural, environmental, spatial, constructional, social, cultural, and behavioral aspects of the housing, to see whether it is culturally sustainable, and whether it facilitates residents' traditional cultural expressions. The study is based on empirical data collected in 2007 through a number of research methods, including field surveys, interviews, time diaries, architectural drawings, photographs, planning documents, conversation and observation notes, journals, real estate magazines, brochures, and related material. The findings suggest that communal courtyards foster social interaction and private courtyards facilitate self-cultivation. Neighborly relations are partly influenced by the form and space of the courtyard housing, and partly by a changing and polarizing society, socio-economic differences, housing tenure, modern lifestyles, community involvement, common language, cultural awareness, and the cultural background of the residents. The communal courtyards help sustain some traditional Chinese cultural activities. The primary function of a communal courtyard is to maintain health and natural healing. However, many cultural activities are much less or no longer partaken in the communal courtyards, likely due to such factors as time, climate, courtyard ownership, yard size, facilities, and so on. Moreover, community/city parks/gardens have become important places for cultural activities in China.

**Dr Donia Zhang** is an Associate at the City Institute, York University, Canada. She has over 20 years of research experience in interdisciplinary studies of architectural humanities and social sciences, in particular the interrelations of housing, health, happiness, and cultural sustainability. She has authored four scholarly books: *Courtyard Houses of Beijing: Past, Present, and Future* (2009/2010/2011), *Schoolyard Gardening as Multinaturalism: Theory, Practice, and Product* (2009), *Courtyard Housing and Cultural Sustainability: Theory, Practice, and Product* (Ashgate/Routledge, 2013/2016), and *Courtyard Housing for Health and Happiness: Architectural Multiculturalism in North America* (Ashgate/Routledge, 2015/2017). Moreover, she has contributed two chapters to the eBook, *Dialogues of Sustainable Urbanisation: Social Science Research and Transitions to Urban Contexts* (2015), as well as a dozen articles in academic journals, such as *URBAN DESIGN International* (Oxford Brookes University), *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* (University of California, Berkeley), and *International Journal of Architectural Research* (MIT), among others. She is also a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (Bloomsbury, 2018) (2nd ed). Donia is a graduate of Oxford Brookes University in the UK and Brock University in Canada. She has 10 years of teaching experience throughout Ontario colleges. The subjects she has taught include History of Art and Architecture, Interior Design, and AutoCAD, among others. In 2012, she initiated the Neoland School of Chinese Culture and designed curricula to promote cultural understanding and exchange between China and the West, and actively help advocate traditional Chinese culture through social media.

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