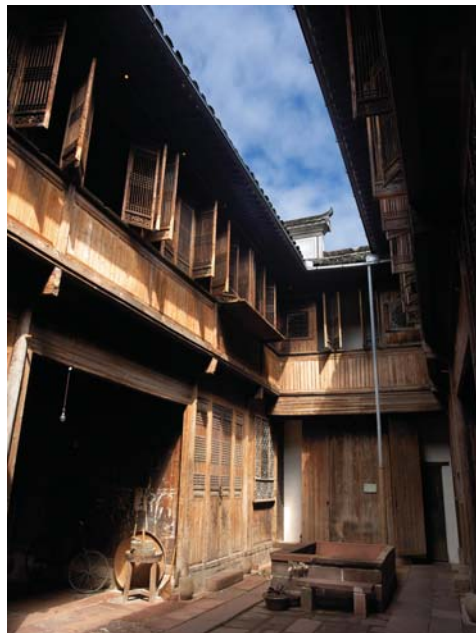




YIN YU TANG AND THE EFFECTS OF RE-CONTEXTUALIZATION ON VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

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My paper on the cultural and architectural re-contextualization of Yin Yu Tang, or Hall of Abundant Shelter, at the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) in Salem, MA, has two main goals: 1) to consider the connections between architecture, space, and the family in a traditional Chinese house; and 2) to examine how these connections are re-installed, re-presented, and re-interpreted as this building is moved from its original location in Anhui Province, China, to an American museum in New England. Although the PEM includes more than twenty pre-Civil War buildings, Yin Yu Tang is a component of the museum's collection that stands out from the rest of the architecture due to its exceptional construction, preservation, and cultural foreignness. Along with the architecture itself, Yin Yu Tang has transported its two hundred year-old history and culture of the Huang family and Anhui Province to the museum. By being moved to a new context, Yin Yu Tang's already historical identity becomes even more intricately layered than before and presents questions about the interpretation of historic environments. How has Yin Yu Tang renewed public memory of Chinese culture and transformed the house into a form of refined vernacular architecture for Western visitors? Building upon my participation at the Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies (Oct. 9-10, 2015), my research also examines the notion of "authenticity" in the process of re-contextualization. Authenticity is a consistently contested and changing idea in cultural representation that is closely connected to the history of presenting foreign cultures outside of its original context. By comparing Yin Yu Tang's approach to authenticity to that of "period rooms" in museums, my paper presents Yin Yu Tang as a unique, immersive microcosm from the past that appreciates the value of preservation and respect for culture.



Courtyard of Yin Yu Tang
(Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex
Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by
Dennis Helmar).

