ABSTRACT

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 museum “period rooms,” my paper presents Yin Yu Tang as a unique, immersive microcosm from the past that appreciates the value of preservation and respect for culture.
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INTRODUCTION

My research 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. The first is to consider the connections between architecture, space, and family in a traditional Chinese house, and the second is to examine how these connections are re-installed, re-presented, and re-interpreted as the building is moved from its original location in Huizhou Region, current day Anhui Province in Southeast China to an American museum in New England (Figs. 1 and 2). By building upon the work of Nancy Berliner, Carma Hinton, and Han Li, among others, my research shows that Yin Yu Tang is not only a unique space that survives as an immersive microcosm from the past, but is an artifact that also reveals ongoing dialogue between authenticity and context. Moreover, by comparing Yin Yu Tang’s representation and space to the concept of “period rooms” in museums, I propose that the re-contextualization of Yin Yu Tang shifts the value of “period rooms,” which basically construct a fantasy of “authenticity” for western consumption to another value system of “preservation” and respect for culture. In order to effectively present my research, the information is divided into three parts. Part 1 focuses on the terms and historiography necessary for understanding Yin Yu Tang. Part 2 presents the facts about Chinese vernacular architecture and the original context in relation to Yin Yu Tang. Part 3 presents the American re-contextualization of Yin Yu Tang and the resulting dialogue resulting from the change in context.¹

¹ I would like to acknowledge the many people who have helped me research and write my thesis. I would like specifically thank my thesis faculty advisor, Prof. Winston C. Kyan, who has patiently and eagerly guided me go through the entire process of writing my first extensive research paper. His knowledge and
PART I

Key Themes and Terms

Examining Yin Yu Tang presents many themes that stimulate comparisons between the original, rural, vernacular context and the re-contextualized, urban, and museological context. In order to better understand the layered identity that makes up Yin Yu Tang, some frequently used terms must be defined. The frequently used terms in this paper include vernacular architecture, cultural authenticity, cultural preservation, and period room.

Vernacular architecture refers generally to residential houses or dwellings without a named architect. In China, traditional vernacular architecture falls into three patterns: courtyard, storied, and cave-style. Yin Yu Tang’s courtyard architecture pattern is the most common and usually includes a central courtyard, a symmetrical building with an odd number of bays, a wooden column-and-beam structure, and a preference for south-facing spaces following the principles of feng shui. Furthermore, the courtyard architecture of Anhui Province matches its mountainous environment by including

experience in Asian art history has been an incredible support in completing the Honors thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Nancy Berliner, who is the current Wu Tung Curator of Chinese Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and former curator of Chinese Art at the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM). I am grateful for her cooperation and knowledge about Yin Yu Tang. Her lecture presented at the University of Utah on November 12, 2013 has become the original inspiration for this paper and the interview I had with her on July 20, 2015 has provided valuable insight into the story of Yin Yu Tang. I would also like to thank the presentation venues that have helped refine my arguments. They include the Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies (Oct. 9-10, 2015), Utah Conference on Undergraduate Research (Feb. 19, 2016), National Conference on Undergraduate Research (April 7-9, 2016), and the Undergraduate Research Symposium (April 12, 2016). I also appreciate support from the University of Utah Office of Undergraduate Research, the College of Fine Arts, and the Honors College in conducting my research.

fortress like exteriors with minimal ornamentation, sturdy beams and column bases, as well as staggered horsehead walls that are characteristic of the region. Because vernacular architecture accommodates many of society’s practical needs, such houses take into account climates, customs, time periods, and unexpected circumstances. Palace architecture, on the other hand, is an elite and rarified elaboration of vernacular architecture in terms of representation and function because it is a symbol of authority and power. Beijing’s Forbidden City is representative of pre-modern palace architecture built in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and rebuilt in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). As the home of twenty-four emperors over five centuries and the site of various ceremonies and important state affairs, it is a place of highly esteemed symbolism and imperial culture. Even if palace architecture still follows the format of humbler vernacular architecture, including courtyards and symmetrical structures, its main emphasis is on size and grandeur. In *Vernacular Architecture*, Henry Glassie proposes that although every building is a cultural fact, the study of vernacular architecture marks the transition from the “unknown” to the “known.” Vernacular architecture sheds light on an area that is often neglected, therefore accommodating cultural diversity and expanding on the depth and understanding of the “human story.”

6. Ibid., 113.
Cultural authenticity refers to different interpretations of a culture’s narrative\textsuperscript{11} and the degree to which it reflects the accurate details of the culture.\textsuperscript{12} It is important to note the subjective nature of cultural authenticity because different background knowledge and experiences affect the perspective and interpretation of an object’s authenticity in any given time, place, or viewer. One object can have many narratives that are interconnected, layered, and expand with further interpretations.\textsuperscript{13} The PEM website for Yin Yu Tang states, “Enter the Huang family ancestral home to gain a rare perspective on Chinese art, architecture, and culture.”\textsuperscript{14} The very space of Yin Yu Tang is what provides a “rare perspective on Chinese art.” Yin Yu Tang’s re-contextualized narrative is designed to share the Huang family narrative through the museum and curator’s interpretation. The statement already assumes the experience as “rare” and enlightening, promising an environment in which the majority of visitors will be presented with unfamiliar material. The degree of authenticity is impacted by the layers of interpretation and the method and angle of presentation taken by the PEM and curator.

One example of Yin Yu Tang being a “rare perspective” to the American visitor would be how the house pulls all attention to the inside, shutting family life from the outside. Because the architecture completely separates and obstructs the view of the interior from the exterior, one must enter the house to understand the family functions. This is the complete opposite of mid-century modern glass houses that are open to the outside and take in the surrounding views as part of the experience of the inhabitants.

\textsuperscript{11} Teresa Morales, “Colliding Sensibilities: Exhibition Development and the Pedagogy of Period Room Interpretation” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 4.
\textsuperscript{12} Han Li, "'Transplanting' Yin Yu Tang to America: Preservation, Value, and Cultural Heritage" Traditional Dwellings & Settlements Review 25, no. 2 (April 2014): 55.
\textsuperscript{13} Morales, “Colliding Sensibilities” 4.
These houses separate inside and outside to some extent but the boundaries remain completely visible and comprehensible. Another example of the “rare perspective” of Yin Yu Tang may be the symbolic representation of the close-knit family unit. The inclusion of the first-floor reception hall used for worshipping ancestors, bedrooms that indicate the different status of family members, and the “Death Anniversaries of the Yin Yu Tang Ancestors” plaque on the staircase of the Yin Yu Tang all indicate the strong emphasis of the family unit in traditional Chinese culture.\textsuperscript{15} The house is built on the foundation of the family, honoring ancestors of the past as well as descendants of the future.

\textit{Cultural preservation} refers to the act of recognizing, preserving, protecting, and honoring cultural heritage, which consists of tangible and intangible, movable and immovable cultural assets inherited from the past.\textsuperscript{16} Although there is great need for cultural preservation all around the world, China in particular is experiencing the obliteration of traditional vernacular architecture at a high rate.\textsuperscript{17} Unlike reverence for imperial architecture, the patrimony of vernacular architecture is not as highly valued due to perceptions of them being too ordinary, outdated, and dysfunctional to maintain. In order to protect architectural forms that represent the diversity of local traditions, they must be preserved in a way that raises awareness and recognition.\textsuperscript{18} In many cases, this means increasing contact between the local cultures of the vernacular structure with outsiders such as tourists, which is what Yin Yu Tang has done by connecting with visitors in America. However, this form of recognition and preservation works only to a

\textsuperscript{17} Ronald G. Knapp, \textit{China's Old Dwellings} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000), 326.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
certain point because the space must also be protected. Truly successful cultural preservation is dependent on protection of the site as well, which may limit the amount of contact with potential damage from visitors. This difficult balance brings up the question of whether cultural preservation for sites such as Yin Yu Tang is truly attainable. Over time, just like many other historical sites, Yin Yu Tang will experience the effects of the wear and tear from human use. Although all objects are ultimately ephemeral, this term highlights the dilemma found within preservation.

Using the above terms my paper aims to develop a methodological framework that questions whether cultural preservation and cultural authenticity can be achieved when vernacular architecture is re-contextualized. This is a question that museums have attempted to answer in some way or another, mainly through the incorporation of “period rooms.” A “period room” is a general term used to describe gallery spaces that simulate historical interiors through architectural elements and furnishing that represents “lived” life during the era represented.19 They serve as “treasure caskets” that present a selection of valuable objects from the past in a picture box format with three walls and usually no original ceilings.20 Some museums have replaced this term with “paneled rooms,” particularly if it is not the entire room that has been transplanted and represented.21 Yin Yu Tang takes the “period room” a step further by emphasizing its mix as both a form of “lived” culture of the past and the “living” culture of the present.

Previous Research

My overview of key themes and terms discussed above is also based on previous scholarship on Yin Yu Tang, including studies that focus on the process of relocation as well as the history and culture of the Huizhou Region. The most helpful sources of scholarship, which are by Nancy Berliner, Carma Hinton, and Han Li, mostly stay within the boundaries of emphasizing the value of cultural representation of Huizhou architecture and tradition, sometimes touching on the reasons and effects of the new museum context. Berliner’s book, *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of A Chinese House*, serves as the most foundational and far-reaching source in terms of Yin Yu Tang history and culture. Hinton’s film, *Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home*, shows the dismantling process of the house and the discovery of various historical layers of posters, wallpaper, and newspapers that had become a part of the architecture and were separated from the walls for the first time during the dismantling process.²² Last but not least, Han Li’s "'Transplanting' Yin Yu Tang to America: Preservation, Value, and Cultural Heritage" questions the appropriation of Chinese architectural heritage in the U.S., as well as what the aftermath, challenges, and politics involved in the process are.²³

In *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of A Chinese House*, Berliner believes that in order to understand Yin Yu Tang and its value, the “archiculture” must be considered.²⁴ “Archiculture” is the “culture inherent in the creation, the use, the

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²³ Han Li, "'Transplanting' Yin Yu Tang to America" 56.
decoration and the history of an architectural space.” This type of approach is in line with the cultural mentality of the people of Huizhou, which is historically known for having strong familial connections to the home and hometown. The dedication towards family may be a result of the merchant lifestyle of Huizhou, shown through the abundance of ancestral halls and genealogical records. Men were oftentimes away from home, traveling as merchants to carry out their duties to their families. Just as the old Chinese saying says, “If you love the house, you also love the crow on its roof.” The crow represents the surroundings, the practices, and the culture that the house was originally situated in. Accordingly, Berliner considers not only the physical features of the house, but the history and familial ties of the Huang family, therefore putting value on the entirety of the house. Her book also incorporates the motives and goals of PEM.

Other prominent sources such as Yin Yu Tang, an interactive website by Second Story, and Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home, a film created by Hinton, provide the visual aspects of the traditions as well as the contemporary lifestyle of the people who live in the village today and work in conjunction with the PEM to promote its mission. Namely, the PEM’s mission statement for Yin Yu Tang is: to re-erect and preserve the house and its history; present the house as an example of Chinese vernacular architecture and its related traditions; and to function for a diverse audience as a window into Chinese culture.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 16.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., vii.
29. Ibid.
Han Li’s text is a source that attempts to further explore Yin Yu Tang past the physical process, investigating and building upon different facets of interpretation.33 Han Li claims that Yin Yu Tang is simultaneously a “...reflection of a particular understanding of Huizhou architectural heritage and a negotiation with contemporary American culture to represent this in a new physical environment.”34 Yin Yu Tang is an example of historic preservation that has values that are contextual, conservational, and constantly changing.35

Although the PEM displays Yin Yu Tang as authentically as possible, it is clear that re-contextualization has increased its complexity to new heights. As Han Li has mentioned, Yin Yu Tang now has its “...authenticity contested, its identity refashioned, and its values pluralized.”36 It is still an ordinary house from the Huizhou region, but it has also taken on new roles as a symbolic representation of Huizhou heritage, a cultural ambassador, and the museum’s symbol of cross-cultural relationships with Asia and efforts of heritage preservation.37 Coming to Salem complicates the historical layers of Yin Yu Tang’s already intricate identity.

In sum, my own research takes the key themes and terms explored in the earlier section along with the foundational research described here into account. However, I focus more on the effects of its re-contextualization in the U.S. and how it negotiates the relationship between authenticity and preservation. The interaction of these two characteristics is clearly evident in Yin Yu Tang and makes it a unique art form in a context outside of its own origins.

33. Han Li, "Transplanting' Yin Yu Tang to America" 53-64.
34. Ibid., 56.
35. Ibid., 54.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 57.
PART II

Yin Yu Tang and Chinese Vernacular Architecture

Debates on Yin Yu Tang’s authenticity stem from its intangible and tangible characteristics; both of which are preserved and presented to visitors at the PEM. The intangible characteristics include the history and narrative of Yin Yu Tang’s development and origins. The tangible characteristics come from the material presence of the physical construction, style, and elements of Yin Yu Tang and the fact that the visitor must touch the wood of the railings and stairs to navigate the house. Both of these characteristics merge and intertwine to create one cohesive narrative of the house. It is through this narrative that different angles of the house’s identity can be observed and examined by visitors. The narrative is not only observable, but surrounds the visitor through interaction with the immersive space. In this way, individual aspects of Yin Yu Tang are representative of typical vernacular architecture in China, but its narrative as a whole binds the aspects together and gives life to Yin Yu Tang as an independently unique piece of architecture. The intangible characteristics and the tangible characteristics will be examined to present the entire identity of Yin Yu Tang.

Yin Yu Tang is a slice of the architectural culture of China, representing a fundamental format with a very specific story and experience. In order to fully be aware of this and appreciate the unique identity of Yin Yu Tang, the vastness of Chinese vernacular architecture must be introduced. Despite characteristics of Chinese architecture being found as far as Kyoto to Kashgar, it is a topic that has not been
extensively studied. Its diversity has also not been researched and is usually defined by
a few prominent sites such as the Forbidden City. However, Chinese architecture must
acknowledge the local needs of approximately fifty-six ethnic groups living in various
environments from mountainous regions to plateau regions. The various environments
and time periods have affected the people’s lifestyles and therefore their housing and
living situations. This means that there is great diversity within Chinese architecture, but
there are also some common characteristics that are found all throughout these regions
such as interlocked timber frame construction. The timber frame serves as the skeleton
of the structure and supports the foundation platform and roof. These three elements
together are combined through perfectly interlocking segments without the use of
fasteners or adhesives, creating a great amount of flexibility. This basic construction is
what has helped many Chinese buildings withstand harsh temperatures and humidity as
well as earthquakes. They are only susceptible to fires and rotting, which can be treated
by replacing parts and pieces.

Along with this basic structure, Chinese architecture has incorporated the module
system, which is one of the reasons for general consistency within styles and forms. This
module system has been carried on from the twelfth-century and constructs the rank
of a building and its inhabitants in conjunction with the size of its wooden parts. This
organized system helped to create buildings relatively easily throughout China and also

40. Ibid., 1.
41. Ibid., 1.
42. Fu and Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture*, 1.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 2.
helped it to spread outside of China.\textsuperscript{46} The system also meant that there was no need for a
great architect, but only the art of capable craftsmen to create a building.\textsuperscript{47} This is why
the Chinese term for architect and architecture is relatively new, coined within the
twentieth-century.\textsuperscript{48} This historical module system and other observations, illustrations,
and plans are all recorded in \textit{Yingzao fashi}, the oldest surviving technical manual on
Chinese architecture.\textsuperscript{49} It was compiled in 1100 and published by the Song sovereign in
1103.\textsuperscript{50}

Chinese architecture has also developed in close relation to the concept of a city. Four
millennia ago, the Chinese settlement always included a wall. This meant that a city did
not exist without a wall and a wall always meant there was a city.\textsuperscript{51} This concept became
smaller in size and evolved into the courtyards that many houses in China have.\textsuperscript{52} This
interesting evolution of one of the most prominent elements of a Chinese dwelling shows
that architecture in China historically referred to groups of structures within a defined
space.\textsuperscript{53} This also explains why there is such a strong connection between the
sociocultural elements and the architecture. Settlements were often dense groups of
people, which meant high interaction with the surrounding environment and architecture.
China indeed possesses a simple architectural style, but a diverse population affects this
architecture by adding different details and adjustments.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 188.
\textsuperscript{50} Qinghua, Guo, "Yingzao Fashi: Twelfth-Century Chinese Building Manual," \textit{Architectural History} 41
\textsuperscript{51} Fu and Steinhardt, \textit{Chinese Architecture}, 3.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Fu and Steinhardt, \textit{Chinese Architecture}, 3.
The courtyard is a common element that many residential homes in both rural and urban areas include. Historically, the number of courtyards in a home depends on the owner’s budget and social status. Therefore, the single courtyard type is the most basic form occupied by lower income families, while high-ranking officials and wealthy businessmen historically built the quadrangle composition with four or more courtyards. There are also different types of courtyards in terms of symmetry. They include the detached courtyard common in Northern China, the narrow “sky well” type courtyard in Southeastern China, and the seal style in Southwest courtyards, which is a courtyard with all the rooms connected around a single court. The size and dimension of central courtyards differ for each region. The way in which courtyards create public and personal territories, with the public area placed in front and the inner areas reserved for family use, indicates the importance of the family as the center of the home and its functions.

The centrality of the family is strongly attached to Confucianism. Practices like ancestral worship and filial piety have shaped the interaction between family members, men and women, as well as juniors and seniors. The family has been considered the primary social unit; one is subject to the family, disciplined by it, and advanced in society by it. As Jerome Silbergeld mentions in *The Family Model in Chinese Art and Culture*, the family is an “...expected source of harmony and well-regulated discipline, as the

55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 47.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 49.
60. Ibid.
assurance of a protective embrace throughout one’s life and on in to the afterlife." The Confucian family unit has therefore affected the spaces that they inhabit which is not limited to homes, but also includes temples, palaces, and tombs. In the courtyard architecture of a home, this is strongly evident through the structural focus on the family space. The belief is that the courtyard is the center of the house, which represents the center of the universe in Confucian terms. Spaces are also meant to represent a longing to anchor a person in his or her universe, which is why the courtyard design is enclosed and inward focusing, symbolically projecting the human in to heaven through the architecture. The courtyard represents unity of the house and its inhabitants. The symmetry that courtyards create is also related to the symbols of power, law, order, and rank. The social hierarchy of society designates certain auspicious spaces to the highest-ranking member of the household.

As Ronald Knapp has mentioned, a house "is more than a static vessel for daily life. As humanized space, the dwelling is symbolic of family unity and sanctuary, a public statement of status as well as a tangible expression of the family’s aspirations." It also represents the meshing of diverse elements that affect changes in each time period’s architecture. This is what Knapp calls the "internal and external dynamics" that give a dwelling its shape. A house is a “living” entity because the household’s daily life

61. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., 53.
65. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 3.
creates structure for the family’s identity. 68 This is one of the main reasons for the urgent need for preservation of traditional architecture, specifically vernacular architecture. The social, cultural, and economic forces that shaped the family and vernacular architecture change and can lead to the loss of culture that is no longer useful, efficient, or relevant in the modern population’s eyes. 69 The main forces that are thought to initiate the destruction of traditional vernacular architecture in China are the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), modernization (After 1949), urbanization (late twentieth-century), and ownership issues. 70 If the demolishing of these cultural assets continues, it will no longer be possible to experience and discover not only material and construction methods of the past, but ideologies and practices of Chinese society.

Original Context of Yin Yu Tang

Themes of architecture, family, and space are evident in Yin Yu Tang from the moment a visitor steps in to the realm of not only a foreign, but personal space formerly reserved for the Huang family and generations of their two-hundred year legacy. These connections are linked back to the origins of the home and the initial purposes of its design and architecture.

Originally built and owned by the Huang family, Yin Yu Tang’s architecture is a symbol of Anhui Province’s authentic, rural, and genuine traditions (Figs. 3 and 4). Sturdy wooden columns hold up the building, which is made of stone and plastered brick,

68. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
a common type of architecture in the region.\textsuperscript{71} The small windows and main entryway give the viewer a glimpse into the life of the Huang family. Characteristics of the exterior elicit a sense of separation and protection from the outside environment as well as potential intruders.

Once the visitor enters this fortress-like house, the diverse textures and colors of the aging stone floors, the wooden lattice windows, floral European wallpaper (Fig. 5), and dark wooden ceilings envelop the visitor and start illustrating the story that is attached to the house. They are evidence of layers of material history that build upon each other up until the 1980’s. The house’s architecture is based around a small courtyard or “sky well” that is the major source of light and air because few windows face the outside (Figs. 6, 7, 8, 9).\textsuperscript{72} All the other rooms including the reception hall and bedrooms surround the central courtyard space and not only envelop the visitor in to the space but envelop the visitor in to the Huang family legacy and their memories (Fig. 10). As Dr. Berliner, the curator in charge of bringing Yin Yu Tang to the PEM mentioned in a private interview, architecture is an extremely relatable way to understand a culture because one can get a sense of how people interacted with each other within a real space.\textsuperscript{73} This experience is consolidated by the audio tour that fills in the blank spaces through personal accounts from Huang family members, memories of their traditions linked to the house, and sensory sounds of the original surroundings, activities, and events. The audio tour serves as the glue that binds the family history to the architecture, creating a fully immersive and sensory experience of the family space.

\textsuperscript{71} Dan Monroe, Amy Tan, Nancy Berliner, Huang Zhenxin, Huang Binggen, and Huang Cui'e, "Yin Yu Tang House Audio Tour."

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Nancy Berliner, interview by the author, July 20, 2015.
The more time one spends in the house, the more details are revealed that serve as evidence of a long gone generation that is still preserved through the house. Some of the most prominent features of the space that refer to the past are Cultural Revolution posters giving allegiance to Chairman Mao (Fig. 11), and a government installed loudspeaker that broadcasted news, music, and political announcements throughout the 1960’s.\textsuperscript{74} There are also characteristics and elements of the house that are evidence of an older, refined traditional aesthetic such as the system of \textit{feng shui}, and the wooden latticework and stone carvings referencing peace and harmony within the family (Figs. 12 and 13).\textsuperscript{75} On the other hand, time spent in Yin Yu Tang reminds visitors that they are put within an interpretation of what Han Li calls “lived history,” a microcosm of family space.\textsuperscript{76}

Material Authenticity of Yin Yu Tang

As shown above, the narrative of Yin Yu Tang’s history is intertwined with its tangible material characteristics and breathes life into the physicality of the building. Although the narrative makes Yin Yu Tang unique and special, the materiality also presents valuable elements of Chinese vernacular architecture as a whole. By further examining the common characteristics, methods, styles, construction, and elements of Chinese vernacular architecture, visitors can achieve greater awareness and appreciation, one of the main goals of PEM. Yin Yu Tang was built to express the hope of one male member of the Huang family in the late eighteenth-century. As a successful pawnbroker

\textsuperscript{74} Monroe et al., “Yin Yu Tang House Audio Tour” (Audio tour transcript from Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA, 2009).
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Han Li, "Transplanting' Yin Yu Tang to America,” 56.
in the city, the man who was the seventh son of the family line built the two-story house complete with sixteen bedrooms.\textsuperscript{77} From the very inception, he desired the house to shelter many future descendants and just as he had hoped, it sheltered the next eight generations that spanned more than two hundred years.\textsuperscript{79}

In order to make his wishes become reality, the original founder of Yin Yu Tang approached a master carpenter. Together, they designed the building in the \textit{kou}-character type design, which includes two structures with a courtyard in between and covered staircases at either end.\textsuperscript{80} The \textit{kou}-character type design is also called a \textit{paomalou}, or “a building for running horses.” It means that a horse can potentially run around in a rectangle on the second floor gallery, as if on a racetrack.\textsuperscript{81} After making these structural decisions, the owner of the house most likely signed a contract with the master carpenter and either paid a fixed price for the whole project, or paid by the workday. Other individuals like the person to obtain materials, a mason, and a \textit{fengshui} master may have been hired. Before construction began, the \textit{fengshui} master would make sure that the house faced south so that not only is an abundance of sunlight and warmth provided, but also generous amounts of auspicious yang forces.\textsuperscript{82} However, Yin Yu Tang, like other houses in Huang Cun, faced north possibly due to the fact that there is a large mountain to the south as well as a waterway to the north that symbolically represents the flowing in of prosperity.\textsuperscript{83}

\begin{footnotes}
\item 79. Waite and Liberty Street, \textit{Yin Yu Tang}, 2.
\item 81. Ibid.
\item 82. Ibid., 115.
\end{footnotes}
For a Huizhou commoner’s home, formal plans of the house were not a part of the contract procedure, so sketches may have been made but would have been discarded after the house was built. After the groundbreaking ceremony, the numerous components of the house were constructed and erected piece by piece through traditional binding techniques and guidance by the owner and the master carpenter. It probably took about sixty carpenters and laborers to erect the sixty-four columns and 256 beams after months of labor by the carpenters.

Although there are differences in each time period, the fortress-like construction of Yin Yu Tang is a common form in the Huizhou region (Fig. 14). It includes stone foundations and paving, mortise-and-tenon (a strong woodwork technique of joining two pieces of wood together) timber framing, and brick walls with white lime rendering with tile details, ink designs, and paintings. The top of the house is finished off with staggered horse-head walls, or matou qiang, which prevents fires from skipping from neighboring houses (Fig. 15). With a rather plain exterior, the interior includes more ornamentation with intricate carvings in the wooden lattice window coverings, beams, and columns. Notably, the four primary materials of the house are stone, brick, wood, and clay tiles, with much of the material available locally, such as the red sandstone quarried in Huizhou and the bricks and tiles made from high-clay-content earth around Huang Cun.
Finally, one of the most important structures in the frame is the ridge beam or zheng liang. This ceremonial structure represents the spirit of the house and stabilizes the structures. It is placed east to west between the two central columns on the second floor and is raised on an auspicious day with ceremonial hammers representing a multitude of male heirs. Although the inscriptions are not visible on Yin Yu Tang ridge beam, a master carpenter traditionally writes words to imply that the family will produce sons who will become civil and military officials.

PART III
Re-contextualization of Yin Yu Tang

What makes Yin Yu Tang unexpected and unique is the fact that it is a re-contextualized home in a museum setting (Figs. 16 and 17). This brings up concepts of its original context in relation to “familiarity and the typical” and re-contextualization in relation to “foreignness and the atypical.” The visitor experience of Yin Yu Tang at the PEM is aimed to have an immersive experience where one can learn about the traditions, culture, and history of the Huang family and therefore become more familiar with the culture of Anhui Province. The audio guide, tours, films, and absence of labels are all meant to intentionally create this specific and direct experience for visitors.

Arguably, by bringing the house over to the U.S. from its original context, Yin Yu Tang is an artwork that is continuing to form, continuing its journey and adding more

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93. Ibid., 135.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
layers to its identity. Yin Yu Tang brings forth efforts to welcome visitors in to the Huang family’s familiar space, which is oftentimes an American visitor entering the re-contextualized setting. As Dr. Berliner mentioned, it is not always possible to reenact the entire identity and sensory experience of Yin Yu Tang’s original context due to preservation reasons and change in environment. But Yin Yu Tang comes close to reaching authenticity through programs such as the audio guide. The natural result of this is elevation of the vernacular, which further helps to continue the initial motives of the house; that is, to bring greater awareness of Chinese culture and historic preservation to audiences in the U.S. as well as China. Simultaneously, the re-contextualized house is still a part of an aging process, just like any other artwork or building. Through its aging process, Yin Yu Tang carefully and intricately converses with its foreign environment and inhabitants, therefore taking on a new transparent layer through which its former layers can be seen.

Dr. Berliner and her staff at the Peabody Essex Museum came in to the picture of Yin Yu Tang’s existence after decades of it being inhabited. This meant that they had the advantage of seeing the house from a fresh, new perspective, taking in not only its past as a shelter for the Huang family, but shelter for the Huang Cun culture. They also had the ability to see its material and architectural features with a foreign perspective, which often yields attention to detail that native inhabitants may not necessarily notice. They saw the connections between geographic location, environment, material, decor, and design that were molded by the original builders and Huang family patriarch. This molding process of Yin Yu Tang never ended with the inception of the house. Through

being inhabited, it continued to be molded, each generation and time period leaving a mark in the atmosphere of the home.

Dr. Berliner and her staff were able to see this gradual evolution of the house, but they also noticed the potential of its legacy to continue developing, even outside of its original context. As mentioned in John G. Waite Associates, Architects’ book titled *Yin Yu Tang: Preserving Chinese Vernacular Architecture*, Yin Yu Tang was brought to the U.S. with the belief that, “Architecture can communicate cultural values and rich traditions and inspire the ever-evolving cultures of all societies.”99 They also brought attention to Yin Yu Tang as a form of vernacular or domestic architecture that studies the structures made by empirical builders without the intervention of professional architects.100 It is an open, comprehensive concept that includes various practices such as primitive or aboriginal architecture; ancestral or traditional architecture; popular or rural architecture; and the so-called “architecture without architects.”101 It is composed of local materials and derived from local customs and techniques that have been passed on from generation to generation.102 This means that Yin Yu Tang existed at an intersection between people and their surroundings, the meeting place of practical needs and aesthetic desires.103 It was literally a “living space” that carried stories from the past that could be shared with others to understand a slice of Chinese culture and history.104 The PEM saw the hidden potential of the authentic material resting in Yin Yu Tang that could be used to communicate culture and history to a foreign audience. The more a space involves original material, the

99. Ibid., 2.
101. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
construction of authenticity is easier to reach and clearer to communicate with the
visitors. In the case of Yin Yu Tang, the entire house is an interactive, original space,
therefore making it an ideal environment to communicate with the visitors.

The only challenge was how to transport the authenticity of the material to the U.S.
Through the collaborative work of the Chinese government, cultural authorities, artisans,
and members of the Huang family, they prepared the house for its transition. Craftsmen
studied the architecture of houses in this region and worked with Chinese artisans to
understand the traditional methods of construction.\textsuperscript{105} The goal of the project was not
only to retain the history of the house, but also to preserve the character of the house,
which meant conserving it by furthering its protection and accessibility.\textsuperscript{106} Traditional
and modern techniques were combined to repair decaying or unstable parts of the house
such as the interaction of timber and condensed moisture on the masonry, which was an
ongoing condition in Huizhou. The craftsmen then finished off with the original look of
the material after preservation treatments. Yin Yu Tang was also categorized as a new
building because it had been taken apart in China and then reassembled in Salem.\textsuperscript{107} It
had to comply with life-safety and accessibility laws through new mechanical systems
and accommodation systems, simultaneously being careful to not change the original
fabric of the house too much.\textsuperscript{108} The need for modern compliance and the preservation of
the original oftentimes clashed. One example of this is the placement of the house. Yin
Yu Tang is placed in the outdoor courtyard of the PEM so that visitors can experience the
house in a setting similar to the original setting. However, this also means that the house

\begin{itemize}
\item[105.] Ibid.
\item[106.] Ibid., 5.
\item[107.] Ibid.
\item[108.] Waite and Liberty Street, \textit{Yin Yu Tang}, 5.
\end{itemize}
is exposed to the extreme temperatures of New England.\textsuperscript{109} To compensate for this, a paneled skylight system was added to cover the house in the winter.\textsuperscript{110} The construction team also went so far as to make sure the new work could be reversed so that advanced technology could be put in place in the future.\textsuperscript{111}

The process of putting together a giant puzzle included numerous obstacles, with the biggest being the efforts of stabilizing and preserving the house for future visitors along with maintaining the original and distinctive features. Further steps were taken by the creation of the preservation guidelines in collaboration with renowned preservation organizations like UNESCO, ICOMOS (the International Council of Monuments and Sites), and the U.S. National Park Service.\textsuperscript{112} This process has revealed knowledge about traditional construction, technology, methods, and material characteristics, all of which explains why Yin Yu Tang was in remarkably good shape. Dismantling the house led to discoveries of objects that had fallen through the cracks such as hairpins, ear-picks, letters, and photographs.\textsuperscript{113} It also revealed intentionally hidden objects for auspicious reasons. At the top of the two central columns and the ridge beam was a pair of chopsticks that were put there for the wish of everlasting food supply for the Huang descendants. There were also coins from the Kangxi (r. 1661-1722) and Qianlong (r. 1735-1796) periods under many of the column bases that indicated when the house was built.\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{flushright}
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., 14.
111. Ibid., 5.
114. Ibid.
\end{flushright}
In terms of keeping Yin Yu Tang culturally alive, the PEM also performed its own version of the ridge beam-raising ceremony in 2002.\textsuperscript{115} This iconic moment showed the collaborative efforts of both spirit and body in the American and Chinese craftsmen and contractors.\textsuperscript{116} By reproducing this ceremony in the new context, Han Li believes that the “PEM exhibitors symbolize an inheritance and continuation of the tradition...and borrow an aura of ‘authority’ and ‘authenticity’.\textsuperscript{117}” The film, “A Chinese Home,” depicts this ceremony as well as the farewell ceremony of Huang family members before its dismantling process. Han Li points out that it is clearly seen in the film that for the Huang family members, the value of relocation is in preserving ancestral glory. However, this is juxtaposed with the PEM’s argument for the value of cultural awareness and communication.\textsuperscript{118} Two types of goals diverge, one being a grand perspective of public cultural heritage and the other a private family perspective.\textsuperscript{119}

As the Chinese saying goes, “when all the poems and music have become silent, the architecture will continue speaking.”\textsuperscript{120} The PEM has used the architectural material of Yin Yu Tang to continue communicating its history and culture. The more there is original material, the more “authentic” the experience. I believe that Yin Yu Tang’s architecture shows the power of material to speak about a culture, but it also shows how closely connected culture and context are. Material can be used as a vessel and an essential component of experiencing authentic culture, but context is just as or even more essential. Material only goes so far as to communicating and sharing, while the context

\textsuperscript{115} Han Li, “Transplanting’ Yin Yu Tang to America,” 58.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Waite and Liberty Street, \textit{Yin Yu Tang}, 2.
creates the full immersive experience. It is important to remember in the case of re-contextualized objects and spaces that material is a medium to visualize and imagine a culture and its history, but a culture and a history that doesn’t exist in the foreign context.

Dismantling and re-erecting Yin Yu Tang has revealed valuable knowledge not just about Yin Yu Tang but also about vernacular architecture and culture in general. Arguably, the transplanting process of Yin Yu Tang is a phase that was almost required for the full history of the house to be understood, which encompasses the history of the Anhui Region. This is similar to how in any experiment, components of an object must be pulled apart and examined in order for the various functions and nature of the whole to be understood. The process of examination and further research is also not a definitive process but continues to develop.

The article titled, "Yin Yu Tang: A Moment in the Preservation Process of an Eighteenth Century Huizhou Residence," is an important source that presents the challenges, planning, and justifications for presenting Yin Yu Tang prior to its opening. It is written by significant figures whom were involved in Yin Yu Tang’s process of coming to the U.S. Nancy Berliner was the Director of Curatorial and Programming Affairs for Yin Yu Tang Project and also Curator of Chinese Art and Culture at the PEM. Jan Lewandoski is a timber framer specializing in historic preservation, and Clay Palazzo was the Project Manager and Principal with John F. Waite Associates, Architects, the firm responsible for preservation work of Yin Yu Tang in the U.S.

The article shows that from the inception of the Yin Yu Tang project, the project leaders had the mindset that architecture is a conceptual framework that provides
knowledge of the cultural and emotional rhythms of human activities.\(^{121}\) They state that just like any artwork, it is important to not only look at its final appearance but the past and future of its character. Therefore, the Yin Yu Tang project has made efforts to continually process and analyze the presentation through supplementary objects, interviews with family members, and providing an overall picture of Yin Yu Tang. Because Yin Yu Tang has gone through the process of disassembling, analyzing, conserving, and re-erection, it has a unique history that will inevitably affect its future. Preservation has become a part of Yin Yu Tang’s identity and it is what makes its authenticity more complex.

A related question would be if and how these intentions line up with that of the others involved in the project such as the Huang family or the Chinese government. Do they believe that the process of moving the house would become a part of its unique identity and “future history,” which indicates the continuation of Yin Yu Tang’s identity to evolve? Other sources such as the film, \textit{Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home}, by Carma Hinton et.al indicate that they probably do because ancestral ceremonies were held before the departure of Yin Yu Tang to send it on to its journey as well as after it erection in Salem.\(^{122}\)

\(^{122}\) Hinton et al., \textit{Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home}. 
Authenticity and Preservation in the Modern Museum Context

Through considering the connections between architecture, space, and the family, and then examining how these connections are re-installed, re-presented, and re-interpreted, I would like to build upon some of the existing ideas and argue for the following points. One of the points that I would like to argue is the meaning of authenticity and preservation seen through revival and aging. I would argue that preserving a house and its history also includes revitalizing its traditions through the inevitable aging process, which is strongly emphasized in the PEM’s efforts. When Yin Yu Tang’s method of cultural dissemination is examined alongside “period rooms” in museums, which are paneled rooms with the same objects from the time period and culture, one recognizes challenges and questions about authenticity and preservation in the presentation of heritage. In many ways, Yin Yu Tang is a one-of-a-kind installation that attempts to encompass culture, history, and lifestyle all in one piece of architecture.

“Period rooms” in American museums have attained their present state through the desire to present an array of objects from Europe, especially for those who could not travel overseas.123 The growing emphasis in museums to represent world art has led to the presentation of rooms with objects, architecture, and interior salvages from all around the world. The Astor Court and adjoining Ming Reception Room (Figs. 18 and 19) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as the Wu Family Reception Hall and Scholar’s Library and Study (Figs. 20 and 21) at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) are prominent “period rooms” of Chinese culture.

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123. Harris, Moving Rooms, 6.
The Metropolitan’s Astor Court is a reconstruction of a seventeenth-century scholar’s courtyard garden from Suzhou.\textsuperscript{124} The owner of the original courtyard garden, official Shi Zhengzhi, named it \textit{Wang Shi Yuan}, or the “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”\textsuperscript{125} because he admired the pure, humble, and uncomplicated life of fishermen.\textsuperscript{126} The garden includes a covered zigzag walkway adjacent to an indoor courtyard displaying a pavilion and eroded rocks compositionally placed like a mountain landscape. Visitors enter the courtyard from a gallery containing Chinese paintings, calligraphy, and decorative arts.\textsuperscript{127} After passing through the courtyard, they are led in to the adjoining Ming Room containing Chinese furniture. Traditional methods and styles of the Ming dynasty such as mortise-and-tenon joints, as well as materials like wood and tiles from Suzhou are incorporated in the construction of the Astor Court and Ming Room to create a realistic scene.\textsuperscript{128} Through months of extensive planning and construction by Chinese craftsmen, the two “period rooms” opened to the public in 1981.\textsuperscript{129}

The main difference between the Astor Court and Yin Yu Tang is that the Astor Court is a recreated section of highly refined form of vernacular architecture. By reforming the existing space of the second floor of the Metropolitan Museum, the Astor Court acts as a sensory experience for visitors transitioning from gallery spaces containing different types of art and craft.\textsuperscript{130} The period room’s role in the museum is to integrate two spaces and provide a setting from which many of the objects from literati society originated. The courtyard is a frame for the paintings, furniture, and other objects that are exhibited

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{129} Murck and Fong, "A Chinese Garden Court," 2-64.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 55.
around its vicinity. Genuine materials and methods are used to create this frame but the resulting sense of re-creation is still present. Due to re-creation, the sense of age and history is absent; instead, they serve more as a window to get a glimpse of what the scholar official garden must have been like.

Yin Yu Tang is also a space that displays and frames objects, serving as a context and a setting, but it is also the main focal point just as much as the objects. The house itself is an artifact that includes not only genuine materials but also a history belonging to a specific family and village. It is a space not re-created, but was actually inhabited by generations of the same family for two hundred years. The Astor Court and Ming Room are also spaces belonging to the scholar official group, who were considered close to the imperial family in terms of power, money, and status during the Ming dynasty. The original garden was a place for entertainment, poetry meeting, feasts, and drinking parties, all of which were activities that the common merchant family would not have regularly held in their homes. The incorporation of such high-class architecture and lifestyle also refers to Ronald Knapp’s observation of the rather slow development for vernacular architecture compared to the highly revered imperial architecture. Once again, the re-contextualized Yin Yu Tang sheds light on common museum practices of display in which high-culture is revered, while ignoring the reality that most people were of lower classes.

The Wu Family Reception Hall and the Scholar’s Library and Study are different from the Metropolitan “period room” in that they belonged to actual residences in China. The library, also known as “The Studio of Gratifying Discourse” is from a large Qing dynasty

131. Ibid., 4.
132. Knapp, China's Old Dwellings, 326.
(1644-1912) house from the district of Lake Tai in the village of Tangli.\textsuperscript{133} The Wu Family Reception Hall is a seventeenth-century main ceremonial hall of a traditional upper-class courtyard house, also in the Dongting Hill district of Lake Tai.\textsuperscript{134} As in Yin Yu Tang, the main hall of a large traditional Chinese home symbolized the unity of the family. It was the site of various rituals honoring the ancestors, as well as a communal space for family and visitors.\textsuperscript{135} It also represented the social status and economic power of the family through size and artistic decoration.\textsuperscript{136} Elements like the style of furniture, quality of calligraphy, paintings, and objects selected for use and display, all indicated a family’s budget and intellectual refinement.\textsuperscript{137} This specific Wu Family Reception Hall certainly depicts wealth through its large size, intricate floor pattern, ornate panels, and beams. The reception room was purchased by MIA in 1996 and according to the museum website it, “... is the first room of its kind to enter an American collection.”\textsuperscript{138} Although being a portion taken out from a real residence, it still serves as an “exhibition gallery” for furniture, which periodically alternates for installations depicting receptions and ancestor worship.\textsuperscript{139} Both installations act as exhibition galleries, providing a frame for the various artworks, furniture, and objects presented within or alongside the period rooms.

The library is considered the second most important room of an upper class home.\textsuperscript{140} It used to be a quiet sanctuary within an urban setting to spend time contemplating, reading,
writing, and painting. Libraries represent the scholar’s refined sensibilities through the compilation of decorated furniture, books, and decoration. This type of private library came to be a site where many literati scholars produced some of the most important art of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Similar to the Reception Hall, the Scholar’s Library and Study depicts the upper-class lifestyle not only through the materials, but also simply given the fact that the house included a library. The MIA’s period rooms are more similar to Yin Yu Tang because they were actually used by inhabitants of the house. However, the furniture contained in these rooms are the main focal point, while the rooms themselves serve as exhibition spaces. They are also not spaces that one enters, but spaces that are observed from the section roped out for visitors.

Both the Met and MIA “period rooms” are intended to give the visitor a taste of literati China in the seventeenth-century by providing tangible illustrations and atmospheres. However, with the use of period rooms like these come many obstacles as well. Adaptions must be made for the offered space as well as the art that they contain. This leads to many period rooms presented in the picture box format with three walls similar to “treasure caskets” in that they present valuable objects of the past through an observable but not immersive space. Even if the panels and objects are genuine, the hypothetical arrangement acts as a specific interpretation of the museum or curator, reflecting and aging with the period in which they were assembled together or created. Frozen aesthetic arrangements for display and viewing also make the actual lifestyle of the inhabitants difficult to portray realistically. These challenges highlight the main

141. Ibid.
aspects of Yin Yu Tang that make it unique. Yin Yu Tang is an entire house, not only a room that has been transported from its original location. A truly immersive experience is presented to the visitor who, even for a brief moment inside the house, is surrounded by the raw culture of a rural Chinese village. Although American construction codes have been met, most aspects of Yin Yu Tang have not been dramatically altered or updated, and one can actually walk around and up to the various rooms of the house. The presentation of Yin Yu Tang goes beyond a “period room” by trying to present the culture of Anhui Province in the most realistic way possible out of its original context.

Yin Yu Tang not only strives to depict a culture authentically, but also presents it as a reminder of the importance of heritage preservation. The re-contextualization has sparked attention to the unique architecture of Anhui Province and the valuable knowledge that vernacular architecture can provide. Furthermore, this comparison with period rooms leads to questions of Yin Yu Tang’s future and evolving role as it ages. Although it is currently in the state of being preserved by the most “authentic” presentation possible in a re-contextualized setting, its aging process is inevitable. Just like any other artwork or building, Yin Yu Tang is aging everyday and will ultimately experience the wear and tear of modern day visitors that experience the house at the PEM. The museum will continuously have to find ways to preserve the materials and memories of the house. This shows that preservation is a process that never ends or “finishes.” It comes with its own challenges of having to balance the sharing of its knowledge to the public alongside protecting for further use. There is always a certain degree of protection in preservation that will ultimately need to limit the amount of human interaction. Yin Yu Tang is currently accessible to anyone who visits the museum. However, the future may entail
stricter limitations due to protection. When that time comes, we must accept the aging process of the house and respect the need for its authenticity to evolve and change. A question that could be further investigated is whether Yin Yu Tang’s aging will eventually label it as a “period room” in the future. As authentically depicted as it is, Yin Yu Tang is ultimately an interpretation of the museum and curator. Would that therefore affect its label as a “period room” in the future and reflection of the period that it was put together? I think this will be difficult for Yin Yu Tang, as it is a large assortment of raw material that has not been heavily processed or enhanced.

CONCLUSION

By examining Yin Yu Tang in light of two spectrums, traditional architecture in-situ and museum “period rooms,” the interpretations of authenticity and its relation to context is challenged. This is because the identity of Yin Yu Tang includes a complex and layered history. It serves as a microcosm that permeates the Huang family history and culture as well as the broader representation of the past, present, and future of Chinese vernacular architecture. In one space, the visitor can immerse themselves in a re-contextualized history of a past belonging to a distant and rural Chinese village. Although pure authenticity cannot be attained without the original context, sensory and informational methods transition the visitor in to an immersive realm in which they can appreciate a culture in its most authentic shape possible.

In Yin Yu Tang, two cultures and time periods that do not have any obvious links are brought together in one place. This unity displays the notion that perhaps culture is something we must all respect, no matter where it originated from and what form it takes.
place. As defined by UNESCO, cultural heritage is “…the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained for the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.” As this quote and many other sources mention, the awareness, preservation, and protection of cultural heritage is vital because “the heritage of one civilization is the heritage of the entire world.” Despite inevitable aging, cultural heritage has the potential to communicate valuable knowledge about the various practices, beliefs, and lifestyles of people, which in essence is human history. Yin Yu Tang is a prominent example and ambassador of cultural heritage that links the “old” identity to the “modern” identity and serves as an interpretation of Huizhou architecture, culture, and history.

147. Glassie, Vernacular Architecture, 22.
Fig. 1: Map of Huizhou region in the southeastern corner of Anhui Province. In one of the Huizhou counties, Xiuning, is where the small village of Huang Cun is (Berliner, 2003, p. xiv).
Fig. 2: The route taken to transfer Yin Yu Tang (Second Story, 2002, Preservation: Scene 4).
Fig. 3: Huang Cun in 1900. The entrance to Yin Yu Tang is visible on the far left of the photograph (Berliner, 2003, p. 29, Fig. 34).

Fig. 4: Yin Yu Tang house in Huang Cun (Berliner, 2003, p. 32, Fig. 37).
Fig. 5: In 1926, this bedroom was decorated with imported European wallpaper for an eldest son’s marriage (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).
Fig. 6: Courtyard or “sky well” (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).
Fig. 7: Courtyard or “sky well” (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).
Fig. 8: The “sky well” of Yin Yu Tang from the second floor (Berliner, 2003, p. 112, Fig. 111).

Fig. 9: Shutters looking across the courtyard from the second-floor corridor (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).
Fig. 10: The reception hall is the brightest room on the first floor for both formal and informal family gatherings and receiving guests (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).

Fig. 11: A Mao poster hangs over a finely carved and lacquered eighteenth-century bed (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).
Fig. 12: Carved latticework of first-floor bedrooms, creating a luxurious interior surround for the courtyard (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).

Fig. 13: Stone column base with floral design (Berliner, 2003, p. 157, Fig. 194).
Fig. 14: Orientation and main entrance of Yin Yu Tang (Second Story, 2002, Ornamentation: Scene 1).

Fig. 15: *Matou qiang* roof, which translates to "horsehead wall" (Yin Yu Tang, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Dennis Helmar).

Fig. 17: Exterior of Yin Yu Tang at the Peabody Essex Museum, MA (Photo by the Author).
Fig. 18: Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Metropolitan Museum of Art website, 2016, “Gallery 217 and 218- Chinese Courtyard in the Style of the Ming Dynasty”).

Fig. 19: Reception Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Metropolitan Museum of Art website, 2016, “Gallery 217 and 218- Chinese Courtyard in the Style of the Ming Dynasty”).
Fig. 20: Wu Family Reception Hall. Originally part of seventeenth-century courtyard house of Dongshan (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The Art of Asia website, 2016, “Architecture: Wu Family Reception Hall”).

Fig. 21: The Scholar’s Library and Study (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The Art of Asia website, 2016, “Architecture: Scholar’s Library and Study”).


Berliner, Nancy. Interview by the author, July 20, 2015, transcript.


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