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Sommario/riassunto	<p>For almost three thousand years, Chinese life – from the city and the imperial palace, to the temple, the market, and the family home – was configured around the courtyard, as were the accomplishments of China's artistic, philosophical, and institutional elites. Confucius' Courtyard tells the story of how this most singular and persistent architectural form holds the key to understanding, even today, much of Chinese society and culture.</p> <p>Part architectural history, and part introduction to the cultural and philosophical history of China, the book explores the Chinese view of the world, and reveals the extent to which this is inextricably intertwined with the ancient concept of the courtyard, an architectural element and a way of life which has been almost entirely overlooked in China since 1949, and in the West for centuries. Along the way, it provides an accessible introduction to the Confucian doctrine of zhongyong ('the Middle Way'), and the Chinese principles of the virtuous good life, and shows how these can only be fully understood through the humble courtyard – a space which is grounded in the earth, yet open to the heavens.</p> <p>Erudite and poetic, Confucius' Courtyard weaves together architecture, philosophy, and cultural history to explore what lies at the very heart of</p>

Chinese civilization.

How did the most populous nation on earth manage to live a virtuous as well as pleasurable life without the blessing from awesome God? What was the moral bedrock of this largely secular civilization?

The Chinese, with a sustained interest over three millennia, desired an equilibrium: enjoying an earthly life for what it's worth while maintaining a certain awe below Heaven's arch; participating actively in society and taking responsibility for one's family while snatching a moment away to indulge in life's pleasures, or retreating to one's inner world; and staying put in the house while letting the mind and soul roam freely beyond it. They managed, somewhat nonchalantly, to do so in and about the confines of their courtyard. Pitching in the middle was not only a way of living, but also a state of mind, as preached by Confucius. The Chinese gentry, along with the populace at large, held dear this doctrine, as an art of avoiding extremes and respecting the enduring in life. Since saints and innate moral defects in humans are rare, the middle way, in the Chinese mind, is virtuous, for it represents not a compromise, but a propriety that is humanly achievable, hence reason.

Armed with this guiding principle, well established as early as 500 BCE in Confucius time, the Chinese in the next two and half millennia did not bother to change radically their view of the world. Such peculiar, and extraordinary, longevity was housed by the equally static quadrangle enclosure – the courtyard. From the house to their cosmic city, and anything in-between such as an imperial palace or a temple, market, workshop, theatre, and brothel, were all configured within the same walled compound. The Chinese saw no need to develop a bespoke building type to correspond to a special use, which the English took to an unparalleled level of specificity in the nineteenth century when work and living were separated, and assorted institutions emerged.

This book, beginning with the celestial origin of the courtyard, embarks on a search for the meanings and shapes of Chinese life that, too, have been kept in check in the courtyard, secular but not materialistic. The middle way, as a philosophy, an artistic and political doctrine, and indeed a way of living, is staged in and about the courtyard in a time span from approximately 1000 BCE through to the middle of the twentieth century. Chinese life in this book, and especially the family and cultural life of the gentry, thematic and selective, unfolds in the courtyard following a chronology. The book is a history of the architecture of the Chinese courtyard as much as the life staged by it in all its facets.
