



THE ART OF CHINESE PAVILIONS

CHINA



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Sketch Map of the Locations of Some of the Pavilions in China



- 1 A lake pavilion on a man-made platform at the Lingering Garden in Suzhou
- 2 The "land boat" pavilion (also known as the "untied boat" pavilion) in Guangzhou—the Touching Green Pavilion
- 3 Hexitai Pavilion in the Academy of Mount Yuelu in Changsha
- 4 The Stone Well Pavilion at Huilongtan in Shanghai
- 5 Nanlao Spring Pavilion at the Jin Ancestral Temple, Taiyuan
- 6 The door pavilion on the second peak of Mount Qingcheng in Chengdu

- 7 The door pavilion at the entrance to the Dragon Pavilion in Kaifeng
- 8 The Five Assembled Pavilions arranged in a square in Tianjin
- 9 Liuyi Spring Pavilion in Hangzhou

- 10 Watching Su Pavilion, Shaanxi
- 11 The inscription at the scenic spot of Qu Yuan—Ode to the Orange, Beijing

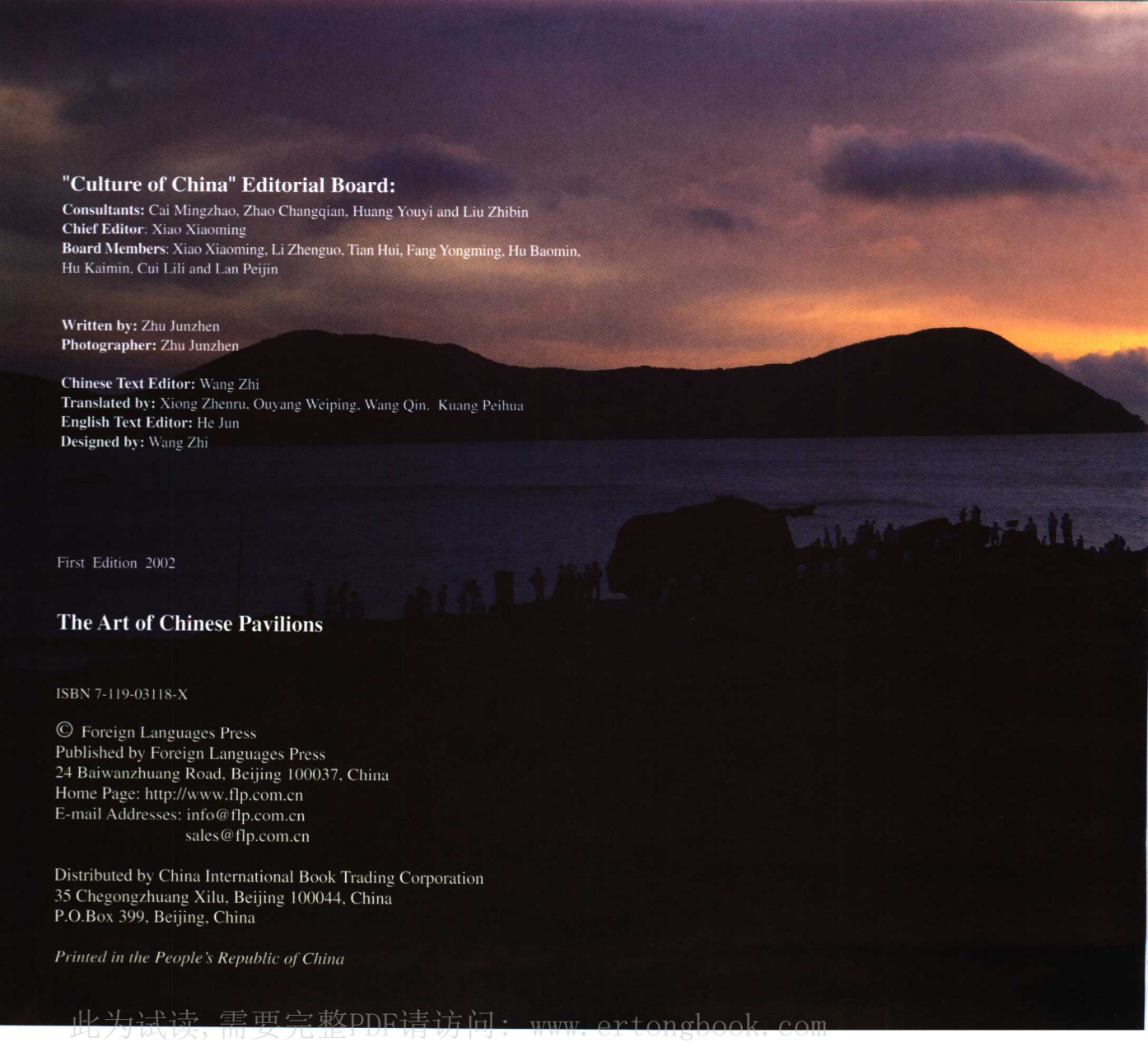


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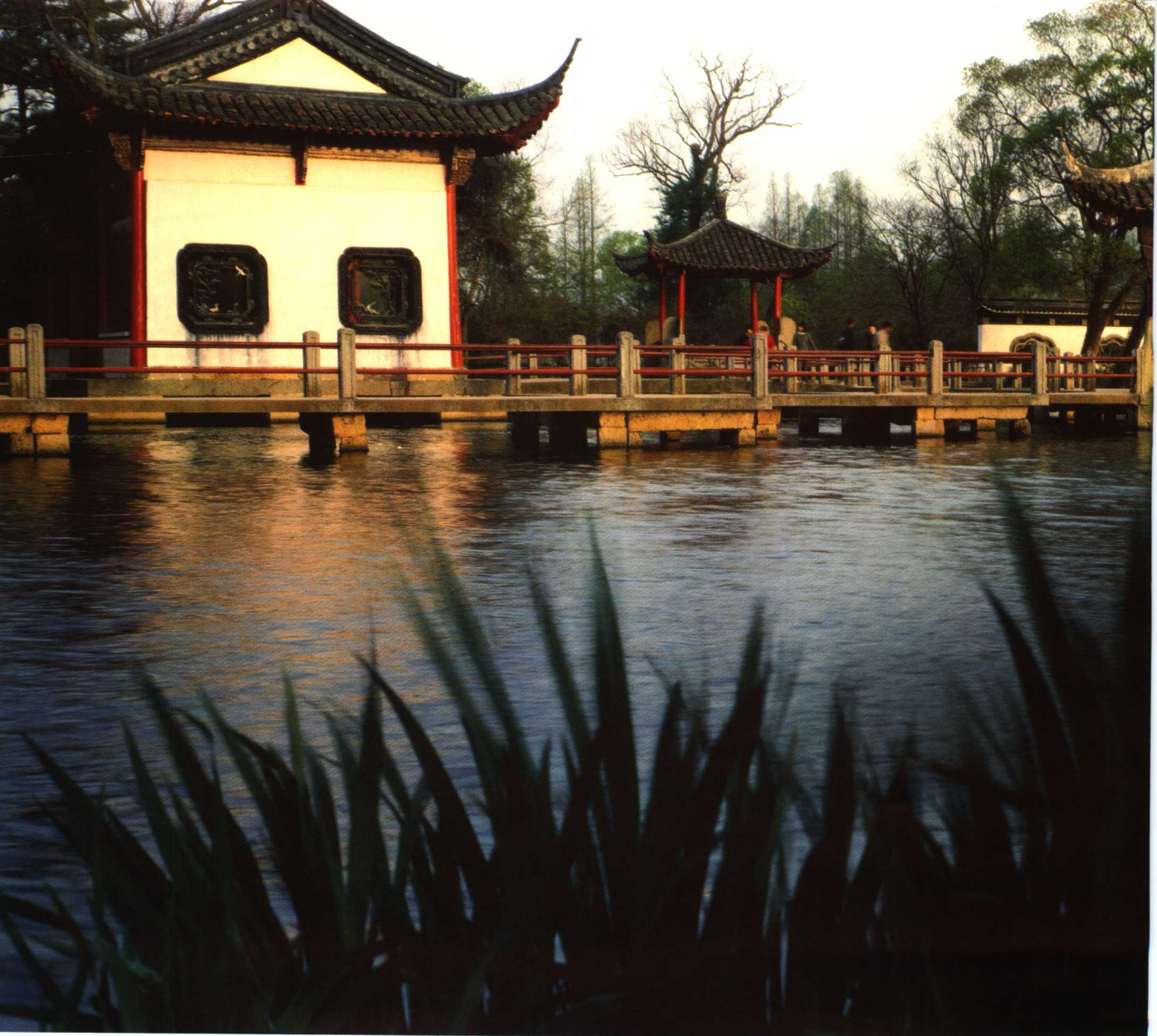


*The pillars of the road
pavilion are tree trunks.*



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A scenic photograph of a traditional Chinese pavilion with a dark tiled roof and red pillars, situated on a stone platform in a body of water. The pavilion's roof has a characteristic upturned eave. In the background, there are trees and distant mountains under a soft, hazy sky. A wooden bridge with a railing is visible in the middle ground. The foreground is dominated by the dark, out-of-focus silhouettes of reeds or grasses. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

I. A Brief Introduction to the History of Chinese Pavilions

I. A Brief Introduction to the History of Chinese Pavilions

Pavilions, seen everywhere in the vast land of China, are small buildings closely connected with people's lives in sightseeing and leisure. Pavilions have many functions and different artistic shapes, and they have become an integral feature of both natural scenic spots and man-made parks or gardens. In China, they are so ubiquitous that it is said, "There is no famous mountain without a pavilion," "no rivers or lakes without pavilions," and "no parks or gardens without pavilions." In a park or garden, other buildings might be dispensable, but not pavilions. So, from ancient times to today, pavilions have been associated with parks or gardens.

Multipurpose pavilions may serve as a place for viewing scenery or resting. Their great variety of designs and styles are a reflection of the Chinese culture. Pavilions cover very little land area and come in many styles; thus they are easy and inexpensive to build. However, the decision to build, the choice of a site, the naming of the pavilion, and the couplets hanging there, all reveal much about the spiritual world of the builder. Chinese garden architecture thus concisely captures a great deal of

meaning and charm.

Pavilions date at least back to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period two thousand years ago, when Fu Chai, the king of Wu, built Wutong and Huijing Gardens, in which "pavilions were constructed and bridges were built." In ancient times, when a garden was built, people dug ponds, made hills and built terraces and pavilions. They first built a hill or a terrace, on top of which a pavilion then was constructed. In a pavilion, one could gaze off into the distance, rest or seek shelter from the rain. The pavilions built in this period already visually resembled modern ones.

In the Qin Dynasty alone, more than 300 large and small imperial palaces were built. They were either "provisional imperial palaces and connected halls facing one another" or "building complexes with halls lying in every five paces and pavilions in every ten paces." Unfortunately, no writings have been found so far to describe such pavilions directly. The construction of imperial gardens in the Han Dynasty followed the example of the Qin. But "The List of a Hundred Officials and Town-

ships" in the book *History of Han* records: "Generally there is a 'ting' (pavilion) every ten *li*, and ten 'pavilions' form a township." Obviously, in the Han Dynasty, "pavilion" was the title of the administrative unit beneath the township. Tradition has it that Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Han Dynasty, once held the minor official post, "Head of Sishang Pavilion."

Besides, the pavilion was also used as a unit of measurement. A "far pavilion" marked every ten *li* (a unit of measurement of 500 meters) and a "near pavilion" every five *li*. Travelers or the general public used these pavilions as a place to rest, dine, lodge, or hold farewell parties. Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai nostalgically describes the pavilions:

*Jade-like stairs stand empty and quiet;
Evening birds are flying quickly in return.
Where are they returning to?
None other than distant or near pavilions.*

Pavilions continued to serve these functions through

the later dynasties. Celebrated Yuan Dynasty dramatist Wang Shifu's famous scene in his masterpiece *West Chamber* has the main character, Mistress Cui Yingying, giving an affectionate sendoff to her lover Zhang Sheng in the ten-*li* "distant pavilion."

The sendoff is a custom of the Chinese people. It was particularly popular in ancient times when, without convenient transportation, the pavilion was the natural place for people to see off their loved ones. When a farewell took place in a pavilion, scholars would often write poems to express their sorrow and sadness at parting. A very typical example was Li Bai, who wrote many poems in this vein. The following three poems of his show the close relationship between the sendoff and pavilions:

Laolao Pavilion

*The place that breaks my heart in the world
Is the pavilion called Laolao Pavilion;
Even the spring wind knows the sadness of parting,
So it is reluctant to turn willow branches green.*

In this poem the sendoff pavilion refers to the place for "expressing grief and sadness at parting". "Laolao" signifies a newly built pavilion. The last two lines of the poem tell us about the ancient custom of breaking off a willow branch to give to friends when parting in spring.

Xiexin Pavilion

*Xie Pavilion is the place to part;
Sadness rises at the sight of the scenery.
After guests are gone, only the moon hangs in the sky;
A blue river runs in solitude around the empty mountains.
The sun shines over the pond flowers in spring,
Cicadae sing at night outside the bamboo window in autumn.
The present and the past all are the same;
Deep songs are always sung for old friends.*


Xie Pavilion, located to the north of Xuancheng in present-day Anhui Province, was the place where Xie Tiao, a poet of the Southern Dynasties, sent off friends. Li Bai admired Xie Tiao's poetry, and he wrote the above poem to express the feelings he shared with Xie Tiao in sending off friends.

*At the Farewell for Du Buque and Fan Shixiang
in Autumn at Lujunyaoci Pavilion*

*... The white jade pot is filled with wine from Lu,
Golden bridles are taken off for the farewell.
Saddles, removed, rest by an ancient tree,
Bands, untied, hang on horizontal branches.
Songs and drums are heard from the pavilion by the river,
Sweet melodies are drifting fast along the wind ...*

Li Bai wrote this poem at a farewell party for two friends, conjuring up a moving scene: After dismounting from horseback, a group of people go to rest by an ancient tree. They undo their bands, hang their saddles on the tree and then come to a pavilion to play musical instruments and sing songs. The melodies they produce are so strong and powerful that they seem to give courage to those to leave and drive away the sorrows at parting. From this poem, we can see that the pavilion was also a place where people played music at farewell in ancient times.

In addition to sendoff pavilions along the roadside,



there were also sendoff pavilions built in private building compounds or courtyards, as in *Note of Lingdong Mountain House* written by a Minister of Punishments of the Ming Dynasty, the poet and scholar Wang Shizhen: "When old friends pass by my place, they usually don't wear hats but towels on their heads. They are treated with wine; tea made of spring water; and vegetables, bamboo shoots, taro, and millet grown in the fields. If they want to stay, they are put up in the chambers; if they want to leave, I give them a sendoff in the pavilion. I share my residence with my guests." When guests wanted to leave after a happy get-together at his home, the host would walk them to the courtyard. He would stop at the pavilion and would not go any farther. The pavilion referred to here was a place to send off frequent guests, not like the above-mentioned sendoff pavilions in the open countryside.

In addition to pavilions used to hold farewell for guest, pavilions were also used to express sad feelings at parting. It was a common practice to build pavilions for

cherishing special feelings in ancient times. Today, in Cangbo Township in Yongjia County of present-day Zhejiang Province there are two famous, well-preserved pavilions: "Looking Forward to Elder Brother" and "Sending off Younger Brother." The story about how the two brothers lovingly cared for each other and mutually declined modestly to inherit the family property is still very popular in the area.

In the Han Dynasty there appeared "pavilion barricades." The "Life of Wang Ju" in the *History of Eastern Han* records: "Wang Ju and Du Mao were called to build pavilion barricades by piling up stones and earth along Feigu Road for over three hundred *li*." Hence the Chinese saying: "Pavilion barricades run alongside the Yellow River." In a passage called "Soul" from the book *Strategies of the Warring States*, it says: "Soldiers were sent to do defense on four sides. Many of them went to safeguard pavilion barricades. Water transports for grain and granaries amounted to 100,000." It is clear that pavilion barricades became a kind of border fortress from the

Warring States period onward. Besides simple pavilions, there were also "pavilion forts" (ancient watchtowers) and "pavilion beacons" (beacon towers at the border).

During the Jin Dynasty, because of the influence of religion and metaphysics, there was a reemphasis on nature and the recovery of original purity and simplicity. Thus, many people began to build natural landscape parks and gardens. Consequently there emerged many temple and monastery gardens and natural scenic spots, in which pavilions became a must. Pavilions built for the purpose of drinking wine, composing poems, and playing music were called "Orchid Towers." Orchid Towers became rampant in the Jin although they were first developed in the Han. Scholars like the great writer Wang Xizhi of the Jin came to "gather at new pavilions to hold parties on fine days." They took baths and made sacrifices in the wilderness, leaving many romantic stories and adding to pavilions a strong cultural flavor.

After the Sui Dynasty unified the Northern and Southern



*I-1An imitation of an ancient Han Dynasty style
(206 B.C. - A.D.220) pavilion in Guangzhou*

Dynasties and moved the capital to Luoyang, the huge Xiyuan Park was built. The park's Xiaoyao Pavilion was unprecedented in structure and size. Perhaps this was the beginning of pavilions in imperial parks. By this time, pavilion began to play a greater role as a landscape attraction.

However, after the pavilion was regarded as a measuring unit, its function was broadened to serve as a "post." This can be verified by the ancient post tower left in Hengkuang Township near Suzhou by the side of the Grand Canal dug in the Sui Dynasty (see illustration I-2).

Located at the confluence of the Grand Canal and Suzhou's Xu River, this ancient post pavilion is connected by a dyke and a rainbow bridge. In the shape of a



I-2 An ancient post pavilion in Hengkuang Township

rectangle, it has four stone pillars and two wood pillars, six beams, nine ridges, a tiled roof and brick walls, two doors to the north and south and two windows to the east and west. The place is the site of an ancient post pavilion. Posts were used to deliver official letters, pass on information to frontier troops, or provide transportation and accommodations for passing officials. This pavilion, first built in the Ming and rebuilt in the Qing, has a couplet written on its two pillars, which reads:

Guests, upon arrival, have food, tea and lodging at this makeshift home;

Lamps, hung high to wait for the moon on the post, reflect in the distant Xu River.

This couplet not only tells the functions of the pavilion but also serves as a relic of the postal system in the two thousand years from ancient time to the Qing Period.

During the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty, the building of both imperial gardens and private gardens of the common people reached a new high point. Garden pavilions surpassed the previous dynasties both in number and variety.