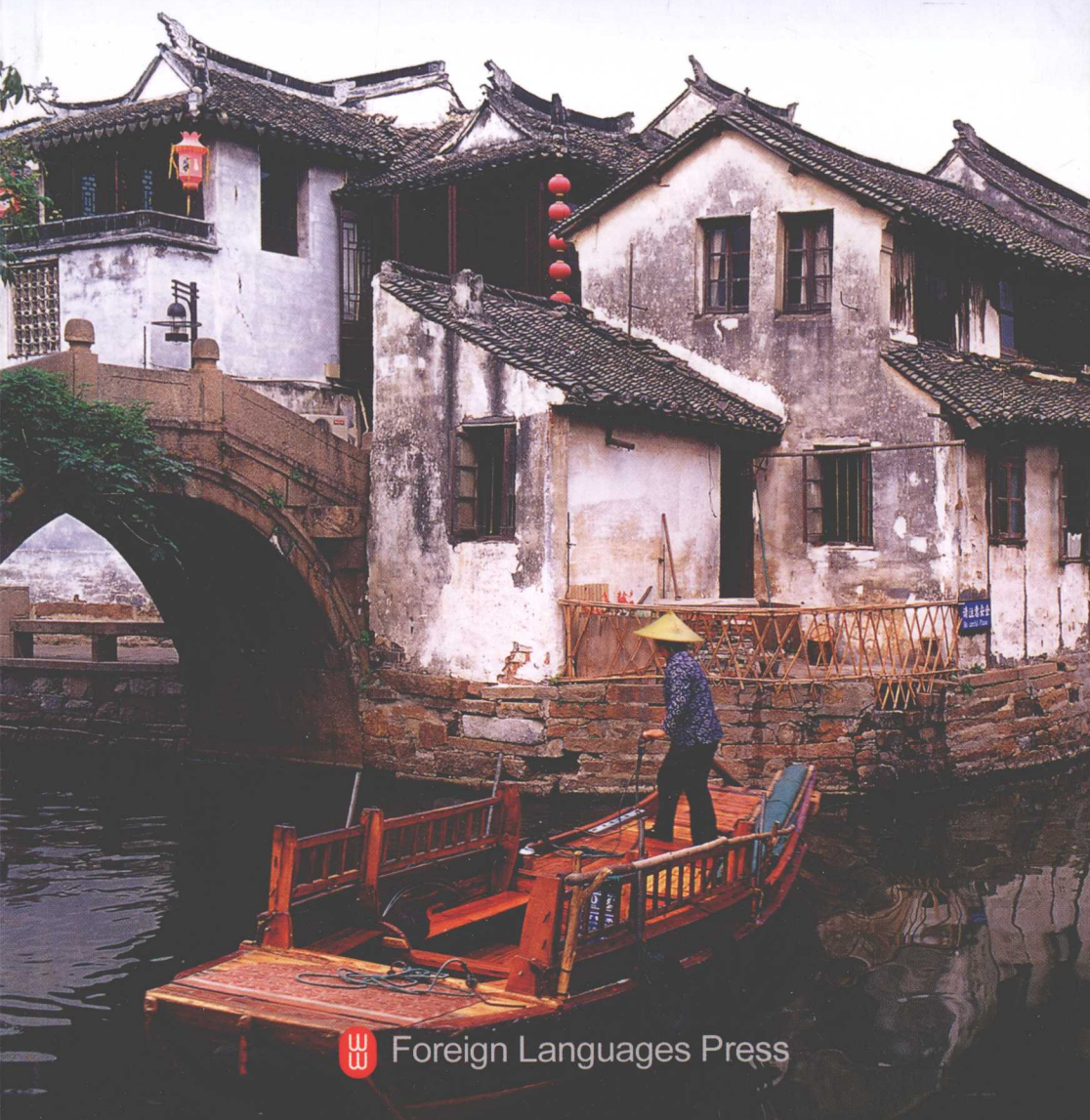


Old Townscapes of China



Foreign Languages Press

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

中国最美的古镇: 英文 / 刘彬编著. — 北京: 外文出版社, 2008

ISBN 978-7-119-05284-7

I. 中… II. 刘… III. 乡镇—简介—中国—英文… IV. K928.5

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2008) 第 016498 号

撰 稿: 刘 彬

摄 影: CFP 图片库 兰佩瑾 杜殿文等

英文翻译: 孙 雷 雨 秋 李 磊

英文审定: Sue Duncan 汪光强

责任编辑: 蔡跃蕾 兰佩瑾

装帧设计: 元 青等

印刷监制: 冯 浩

中国最美的古镇

© 外文出版社

外文出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄大街 24 号)

邮政编码: 100037

北京外文印刷厂印刷

外文出版社网页: <http://www.flp.com.cn>

外文出版社电子邮件地址: info@flp.com.cn

sales@flp.com.cn

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044

2008 年 (16 开) 第一版

2008 年第一版第一次印刷

(英文)

ISBN 978-7-119-05284-7

09600 (平)

85-E-664P



Old-Townscapes of China

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English text edited by: Sue Duncan, Wang Guangqiang

Edited by: Cai Yuelei, Lan Peijin

First Edition 2008

Old Townscapes of China

ISBN 978-7-119-05284-7

© Foreign Languages Press

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Home Page: <http://www.flp.com.cn>

E-mail Addresses: info@flp.com.cn

sales@flp.com.cn

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing, 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

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The Mu Mansion, wing building





Exquisite decoration, as in the majority of Pingyao residences



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Preface

...

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,

...

—From *Tintern Abbey* by William Wordsworth

Old China is no longer old. Cities big and small are emerging rapidly in this land. The Chinese people living in urban jungles pursue the fashions of New York and Paris, watch Hollywood movies and listen to the Beatles and Michael Jackson. Japanese comics are popular among Chinese youngsters, and Britain's Got Talent champion Paul Potts and football star Zinedine Zidane are their heroes. Dozens of years of economic boom have drawn China nearer and nearer to modern Western civilization and further and further away from her true self.

In such an era of cultural assimilation, when bulldozers nudge their way toward the increasingly fewer Beijing *hutong* and *siheyuan*, and Shanghai *linong*, it is not only the old city districts that are declining; the unique Chinese architecture, culture and lifestyle are vanishing with them.

Fortunately, the vast territory of China is still dotted with old townscapes dating back thousands of years, carrying on the continuous history and civilization of China. Zhouzhuang, Fenghuang, Hongcun, Tongli, Pingyao, Luodai, Lijiang, Dali ... these old towns enjoy their own tranquility, far from the din of the cities, and exude their own distinctive flavor and delicacy without the pompous magnificence of imperial palaces. Their names are beautiful symbols of China because of their small picturesque bridges, flowing water and local houses that have long been portrayed in Chinese ink and wash paintings, numerous exquisite brick, stone and wood carvings, arches erected to commemorate chaste widows, a welter of ethnic customs of the Han, Miao, Tibet, Bai and many other nationalities, traditional folk tales and legends....

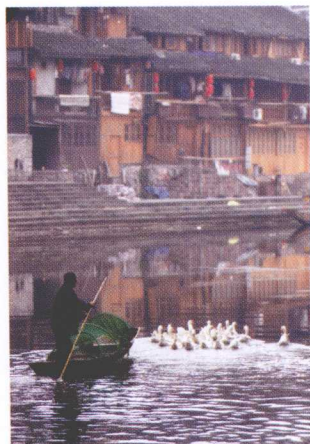
Earth has not anything to show more fair;
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty;

—From *Upon Westminster Bridge* by William Wordsworth

The old China townscapes, though not that majestic, are really worth seeing for their graceful and serene beauty.

Fenghuang

The old city of Fenghuang (Phoenix) is located in the county of the same name in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture on the western edge of Hunan Province. Its neighbors are Luxi county to the east, Mayang county to the south, Jishou city to the north and Songtao county in Guizhou Province to the west. Fenghuang takes its name from a mountain to the southwest that resembles a phoenix. Encircled by mountains and traversed by the Tuojiang River, the area has a warm, subtropical monsoon climate with four distinct seasons.



Miao villager raising geese

Scenic beauty in Miao village



The beautiful Tuojiang River running through Fenghuang



Fenghuang was a political and military strategic stronghold in the early 20th century.

The local cuisine is similar to that of adjacent eastern Sichuan Province, namely vinegary, salty and hot spiced. This is particularly true of dishes using aquatic products, preserved ham, chicken and duck. The stewed items are served in a thick, slightly sour-tasting, broth. For stir-fried dishes the meat is often boiled briefly before being sautéed. Visitors who are

Evening scene, Fenghuang



