



HANGZHOU AT A GLANCE

Everyone has a home in Hangzhou



商務印書館
The Commercial Press



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The Peony Pavilion

There are few better ways to spend an evening in Hangzhou than in the elegant environs of Yu Le Tang, where you can enjoy some fine-dining and watch the famed Kunqu opera “The Peony Pavilion” in one of the city’s most attractive historical blocks.

Sitting unassumingly on a particularly handsome block on Zhongshan Middle Road, this elegant theater is compact, but don’t let its diminutive size put you off as, like they say, sometimes the best things come in small packages. Decked out in antique Chinese furniture and a smattering of expensive-looking ceramics, the venue’s dimly lit dining room—which the main entrance spills into—is the picture of class and mystifying grace. Surrounded by cultural artifacts and motifs from the era in which the opera is set, there is no better environment in which to immerse yourself in the Southern Song Dynasty’s unique beauty and romantic charm—and the food isn’t half bad either.

“The Peony Pavilion” was particularly popular during the Ming Dynasty and was penned by Tang Xianzu (汤显祖), who was the Ming court’s official playwright. Without spoiling the story too much, the operacenter on the 16-year-old Du Liniang’s (杜丽娘) phantasmagorical love affair with young scholar Liu Mengmei (柳梦梅). After falling in love with the young man (who she has never actually met) in a vivid dream, the maiden becomes lovesick and develops an unhealthy



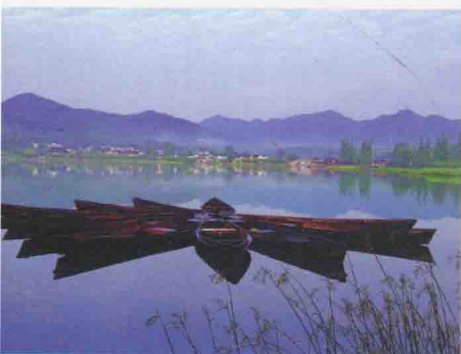
obsession with her nocturnal tryst. Falling severely ill, the girl dies from a broken heart, only to be brought back to life by the lord of the underworld after visiting and bewitching the young scholar in his dreams.



Even for the opera novices out there, it's hard not to be completely swept away by this highly intoxicating experience, and the atmosphere conjured up by the actors, the musicians, and the wonderful set design is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Each and every scene bursts with an emotional intensity that is, at times, unbearably powerful; the way the story slips between the interlocked realms of the afterlife and the living is occasionally very haunting. Handily, TV screens are installed along the theatre's aisle to translate the action into English, so each and every whisper and bellow can better penetrate your very soul. The small group of musicians who accompany the play—all dressed in traditional garb and clutching unusual looking Eastern instruments—also impress with their delicate playing and nuanced musical sensitivity. All in all, this epic tale of ethereal romance, reincarnation, and bittersweet love is something that will stay with you long after the final curtain falls.

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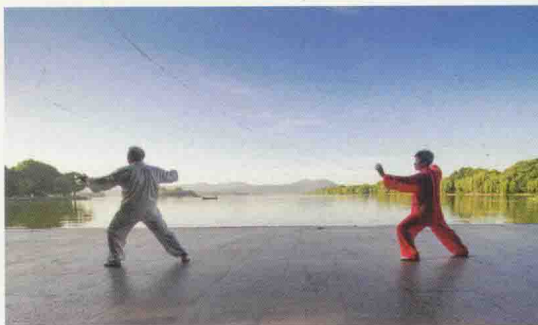
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Everyone has a home in Hangzhou

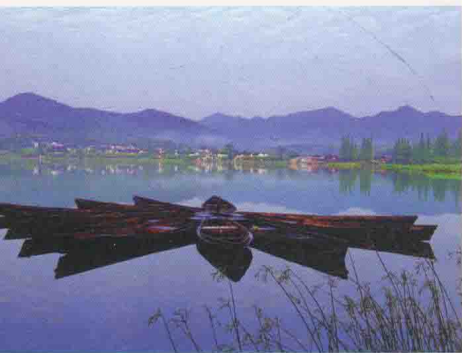


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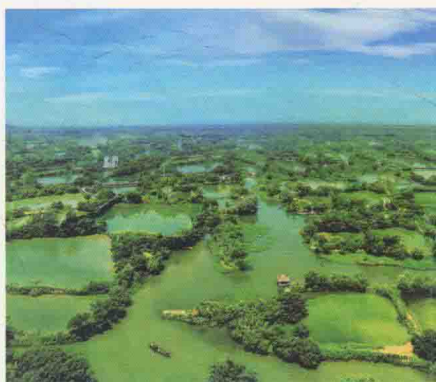
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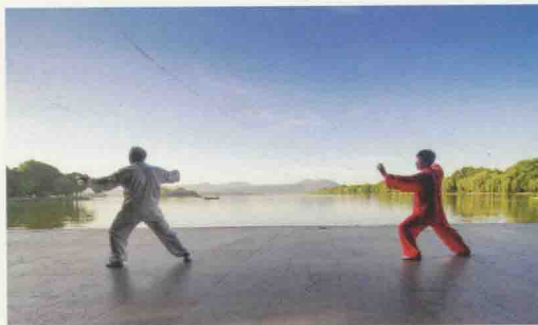
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FOREWORD

Hangzhou is a city of choices. You might find yourself strolling past the Leifeng Pagoda first built in the tenth century, possibly staring thoughtfully at the Qianjiang CBD on your way to work. You could wake one morning with the adventurous spirit of a nature lover hankering to see birds on West Lake. Or, finding a hole in your soul, you may be gripped by urge to see the sites and walk the hallowed paths of hermits and pilgrims. Perhaps you're just craving a decent cup of tea and a millennium-old view of lotus flowers. No one is just one type of person, and Hangzhou is not just one kind of city.

This guide endeavors to help travelers and residents alike find what they need for who they are, a handbook of travel stories from seasoned writers and journalists with helpful hints, listings, and locations you won't want to miss. This guide is a testament to Hangzhou's reputation as a city of stories—filled with tales of demons, kings, emperors, and the very beginning of civilization. Whether you're on a junket, a honeymoon, or staking out Hangzhou for your next business venture, this guide has the information you need.

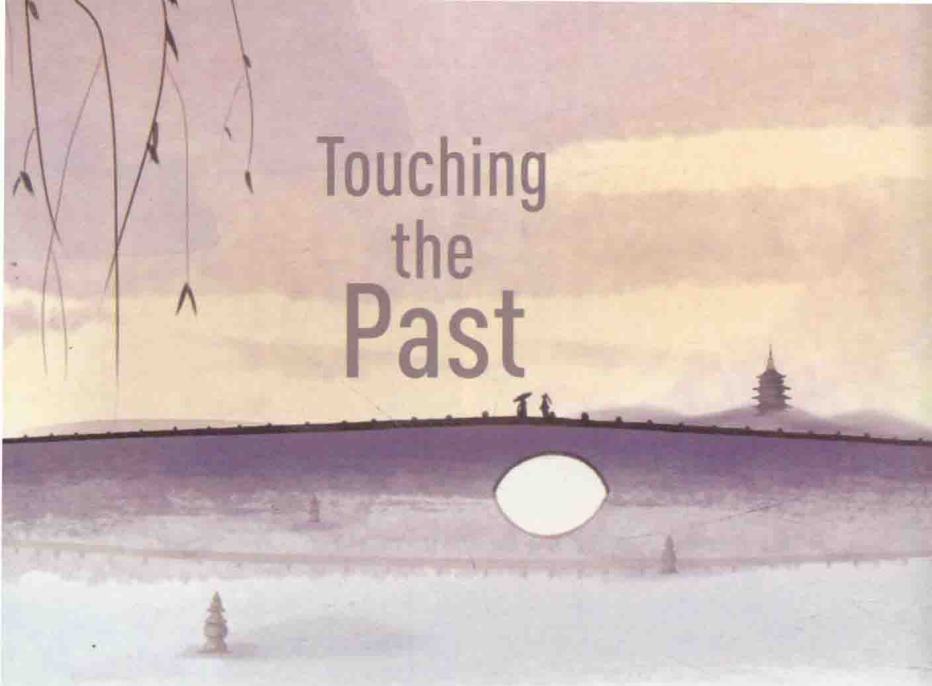
Whether you're traveling to the Xixi wetlands for a day of flower-gazing, buffing up on your history at the 1,500-year-old Grand Canal, or thinking about a mortal man and a snake demon walking along West Lake, the placid reflections of lakes, canals, and streams will follow you everywhere. Few cities can offer such a holistic holiday. From one perspective Hangzhou is the city of modernity, of Alibaba, the G20, and a booming business hub; from another, it's mountain streams, bamboo fields, and temples that have seen centuries. Poets and god-kings, entrepreneurs and travelers, refugees and philosophers—all found something in the waters of this ancient city that inspired or saved them. Hangzhou is many places to many people, but for most, Hangzhou is home.

1

HISTORIANS

A long walk through Hangzhou's history





Touching the Past

In Hangzhou, there are myths and legends, stories, and superstitions. But, the best part about history in Hangzhou is that you can touch it. Young lovers can stand on the Broken Bridge and think of the great White Snake and the demon's eternal love. Pilgrims can climb the Leifeng Pagoda and fancy themselves King of the Wuyue Kingdom. Ambitious young writers can walk the manicured trails to the mausoleum of warrior poet Yue Fei and imagine themselves fighting off the Jurchen invaders. Travelers to Hangzhou's northwest Liangzhu can look back 5,000 years to the very beginning of civilization itself. Since those ancient days of porcelain and jade, Hangzhou has been a catalyst for change, success, and the brutal vicissitudes of imperial politics—traversed by the likes of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta who saw a city so beautiful that they left it a legacy of words and brick. Rulers both brutal and benevolent trekked the shores of West Lake, empires like the Southern Song rose and fell, and travelers from across the globe came to seek their fortune only to find their home here in Hangzhou.

Liangzhu Culture: A Story Etched in Jade

3300 BCE – 2500 BCE

The claim that China has 5,000 years of history has taken on talismanic importance in mainstream discussions of Chinese history, though as with all ancient history, there are never simple answers.

But arguably the most powerful argument in favor of the claim lies in the Yuhang District (余杭区), northwest of Hangzhou, in Liangzhu (良渚). There, amid startlingly well-preserved jade relics, one can find clues to an ancient Chinese civilization.

Welcome to the heart of Liangzhu Culture, a Neolithic civilization that scholars believe existed between roughly 5,300 and 4,500 years ago, reigning in central China at the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs.

Naturally, the best way to catch a glimpse of the Liangzhu Culture is at the Liangzhu Museum (良渚博物院). But before you can get to the museum, you've got to get to Liangzhu, and it's not a short ride. There are several buses, but it will take you a few hours. Alternatively, you can hire a car and get there from West Lake in about an hour.

The centerpiece of an ongoing cultural precinct project, the museum itself is an impressive building, with overtones of brutalist architecture in the awe-inspiring limestone walls. Within the museum and around the water-feature courtyard, visitors can collect clues on this ancient culture, believed to have been the first to use jade as a marker of social status.

Viewing the exhibits, keep an eye out for info on the key relics. Without a doubt the most important and eye-catching of them all is the royal emblem. A casual observer could confuse it for a symbol from ancient Central American cultures, but the symbol is very much a Chinese one. Precisely what it portrays, however, is open to interpretation.

The emblem was found at the Fanshan (反山) site, which consists of a collection of tombs believed to house the highest-ranking aristocrats of Liangzhu society, as evidenced by the sheer quantity and quality of jade. Jade being the signifier of social status, the Fanshan site was a particularly prized find.

Some experts believe the royal emblem is a mask; others say it represents the full body of a deity, while some say it is just the face. Others say it is

a priest or king riding a tiger. Whatever the case, experts tend to agree that this emblem was held by the king of a society (which today we call Liangzhu Culture simply because of where it was found) that stretched from Sichuan in the southwest, Guangdong in the southeast, Qinghai and Gansu in the west, and Shaanxi and Shanxi in the north.

How cohesive this society was remains open to debate, but the unifying characteristics of the jade relics are rather clear. Jade *cong* and *bi* (ring-shaped bracelets and necklace beads respectively) make up the bulk of these.

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE OF LIANGZHU CULTURE

Seemingly, the seat of power for this society was the Liangzhu Ancient City, the walls of which once surrounded the lands the museum is built upon, with a number of dig sites still operating around the area. At these dig sites, pieces of pottery from thousands of years ago are still regularly found. At one site, finds are common enough for a nearby house to operate as a makeshift archeological storage and classification area.

The ancient city was about 1.9 kilometers long, from wall to wall, and 1.7 kilometers wide. The walls were thick, ranging between 40 to 60 meters, and reached as high as four meters.

Little is known of the day-to-day workings of the city. Earthen terraces indicate a likely spot for a palace, as do traces of what seem to be wooden piers. The museum's exhibits do reveal some subtle nuances

of daily life in this ancient culture. Although aristocrats were tricked out with much more jade and no doubt enjoyed certain perks in society, men were still buried with farming implements, indicating that even upper classes perhaps had to engage in farming to get by. This is understandable, in what still amounted to an early stage agricultural society. Farming played a big role in daily life, and most houses are believed to have been basic thatched mud-huts, built with logs and straw.

The broad reach of jade implements indicates that the culture had spread quite far, meaning that there was probably ongoing trade among various communities. Today we can really only speculate as to what ties were like between these communities.



A jade *bi* ornament



Kuahuqiao Site Museum is located by Xianghu Lake in Xiaoshan District

Similarly, it is not certain what became of Liangzhu Culture. There is some evidence to indicate that rising waters drove people away from their homes, while some studies looked at whether Taihu Lake was formed by a meteor impact some 10,000 years ago.

Whatever the case, the key aspect of Liangzhu Culture—its legacy of jade as an important marker of social status—has persisted throughout Chinese history, with jade a prized resource even today. So when glancing at jade items today, spare a thought for the ancient culture whence its attraction is likely to have sprung.

Kuahuqiao Culture

跨湖桥文化

Chinese historians generally point to Liangzhu Culture as the earliest form of Chinese civilization, but the Hangzhou area was home to other cultures before this time. Kuahuqiao Culture, for example, is believed to have existed as a separate culture in modern day Hangzhou's southern Xiaoshan District (萧山区) by Xianghu Lake (湘湖) around 7,700 years ago. Little is known about this culture, but some archaeologists have argued that there is strong evidence to indicate the Kuahuqiao Culture was able to cultivate paddy rice using flooding and irrigation. Here, the earliest canoe relic in China was also excavated. To learn more about the culture, visit the Kuahuqiao Site Museum (跨湖桥遗址博物馆).

Hangzhou History Begins

21ST CENTURY BCE - 220 BC

The name Hangzhou began with a legend; some 4,000 years ago, Yu the Great (大禹), who inaugurated dynastic rule in China and who was famed for controlling the flooding of the Yellow River, went by boat through the marshes and wetlands to meet with other tribal leaders on Kuaiji Hill (present day Shaoxing city, 70 kilometers southeast of Hangzhou). He disembarked somewhere in modern day Hangzhou and people later called the spot “Yu Hang”, roughly meaning “Yu’s Ferry”. Of course, modern scholars have varied interpretations of the events. Some say Yu never went there, others that the name was passed down from decedents in the north. Regardless of its mythical beginnings, the character “hang” remains in Hangzhou, a testimony to its watery past. Also, today a northwestern district of Hangzhou is named Yuhang, where you can visit the oldest civilization in the area, the Liangzhu site.

Far from the center of power, Hangzhou fell under the dominion of different states. It wasn’t until the rise of the first emperor in China, Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇), that the city had a name in 222 BCE: Qiantang County (钱唐县). That first emperor, famed for uniting China, even graced Hangzhou himself, following the footsteps of Yu the Great on the way to the Kuaiji Hill to pay his respects. Legend has it that, in order to avoid stormy weather at sea, the emperor moored his boat to a rock, which was later carved into a Buddha statue. As the waterline has gradually receded, a temple was built around this statue, found today on Baoshi Hill (宝石山) north of West Lake.

Hangzhou’s legendary body of water, West Lake, also took form during these long early centuries with sediments of the tide blocking the sea water, forming a lagoon. Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220) official Hua Xin (华信) built the first ever dam to protect against the surging tide. Hua’s method of motivating local residents to participate in this civic project was certainly creative. He claimed that anyone who delivered stone and dirt to the site would be paid a considerable amount of money, causing a delivery rush within days. He then swiftly declared that there was no payment for the latecomers. Those late to the party were angry, but what could they do but dump the stone and dirt at the site? In this way, a dam was born. With protection from the might and caprice of the sea, a city began to flourish.