

ZHOU ZHANG

ANCIENT TOWNS
AROUND SHANGHAI



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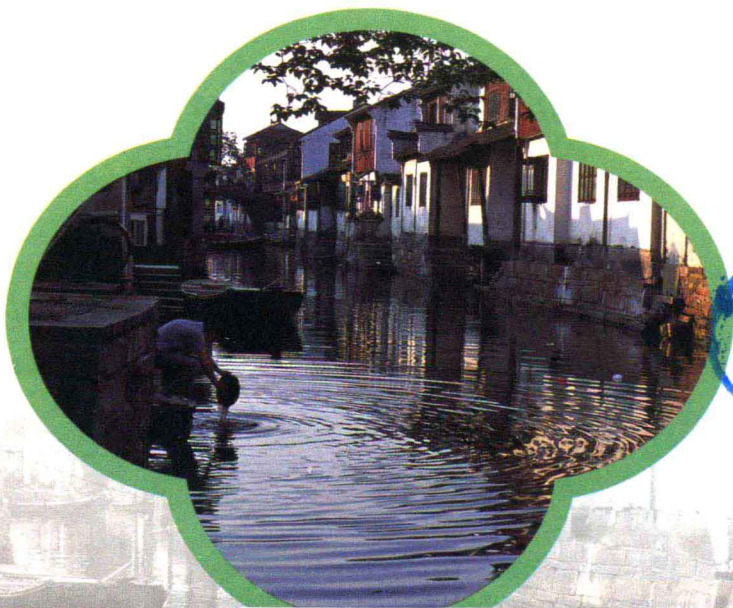
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Ancient Towns Around

Zhouzhuang

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Photography by Zhao Xing



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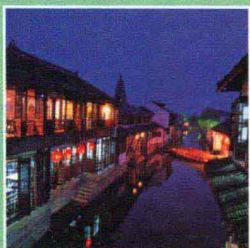
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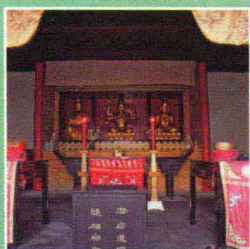
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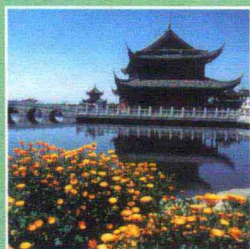
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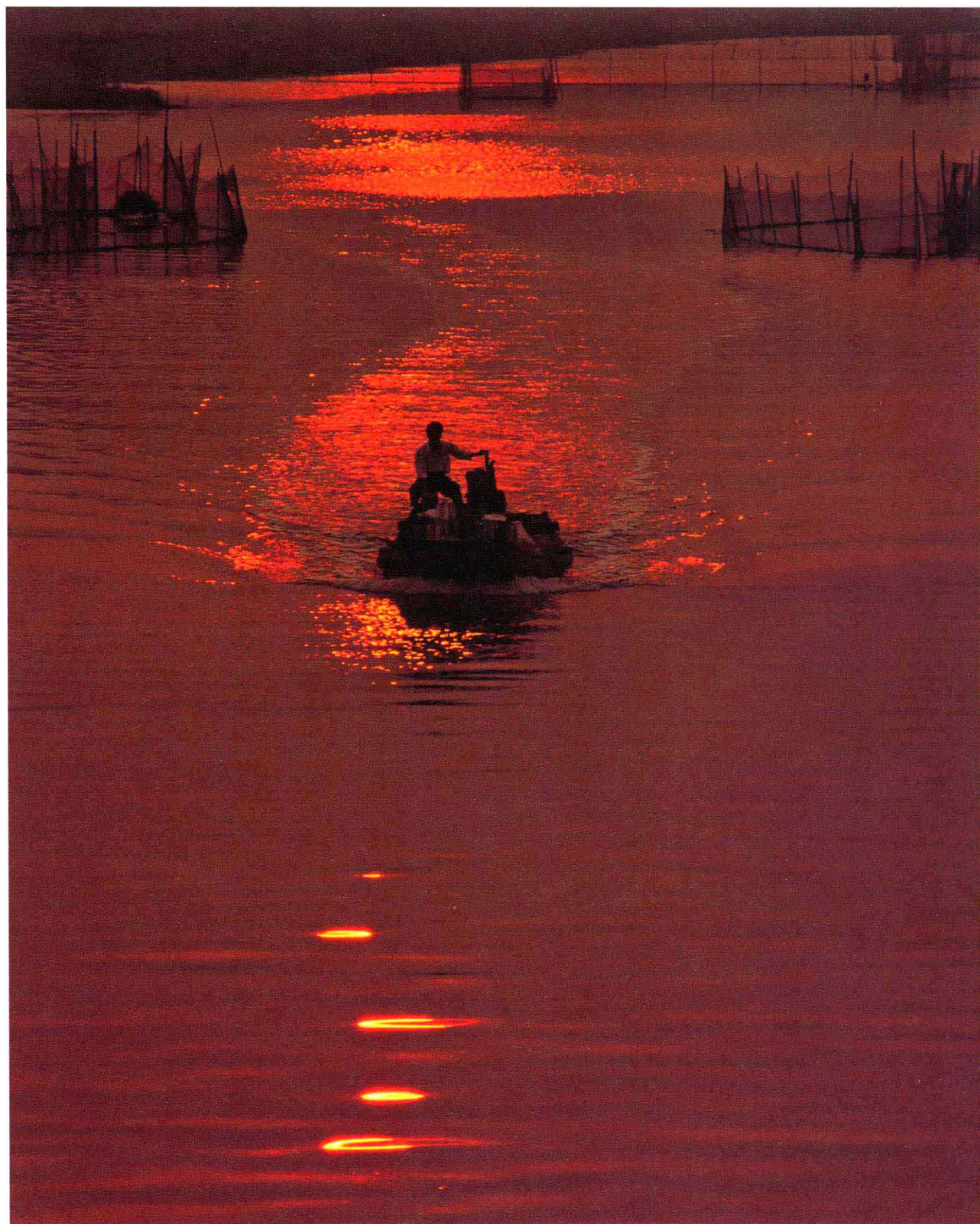


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Ancient Water Town

Many water towns were located in Yangtze River delta and around Taihu Lake, where climate is mild, rains are abundant and rivers crisscrossed. As early as 6,000 years ago, the ancient Chinese people started to live by rivers and created the Songze and Liangchu cultures. Towns in the south of Yangtze River developed based on these ancient cultures. Famous painter Wu Guanzhong (1919-) described Zhouzhuang like this: Mount Huangshan is the most beautiful among all the mountains in China, while Zhouzhuang is the best of China's water towns. With cultural relics and historical sites everywhere in the town, Zhouzhuang has its own unique folk culture which has been created in the daily lives of the local people.

Zhouzhuang is located in Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, 30 kilometers to the south of Kunshan City, bordering Qingpu District of Shanghai in the east, and 38 kilometers to the east of Suzhou City, and accessible from all directions. Since Zhouzhuang was surrounded by water, the locals had to rely on boats to enter and leave the town before the 1980s. The town was not accessible by land until Jishuigang Bridge was built in May 1989. Sim-



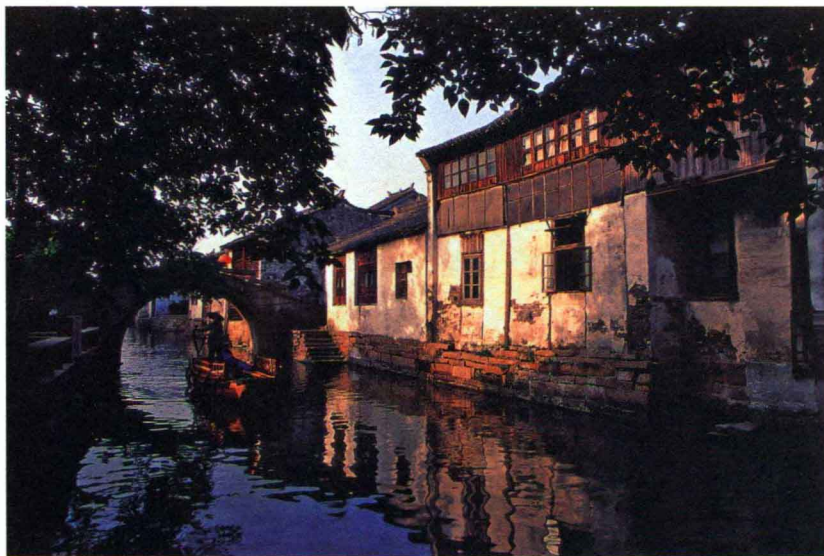
Zhouzhuang, surrounded by water, could be accessed only by boat before the 1980s.

ply because of the inconvenience of access, this ancient town could be able to maintain its culture and historical sites, and has become one of the best water towns in China.

Any place in China or in the rest of the world which has a long history would possibly have several names. Zhouzhuang is no exception. The cultural relics unearthed at Taishidian near Zhouzhuang show that there were human-beings living in this piece of land 6,000 years ago. In 500 B.C., this area was the fief of Yao, King Wu's son, so it was named Yaocheng. Later it was renamed Zhenfeng, a small village with only twenty to thirty households. In 1086, a famine hit Suzhou area. At that time, a low-ranked official named Zhou Yingxi was cultivating tideland for lease. To save the locals out of the famine, he and his wife decided to build a temple on their residence and

The characters on the archway at the gate read, "Zhenfeng Water Town". Zhenfeng was an old name of Zhouzhuang.



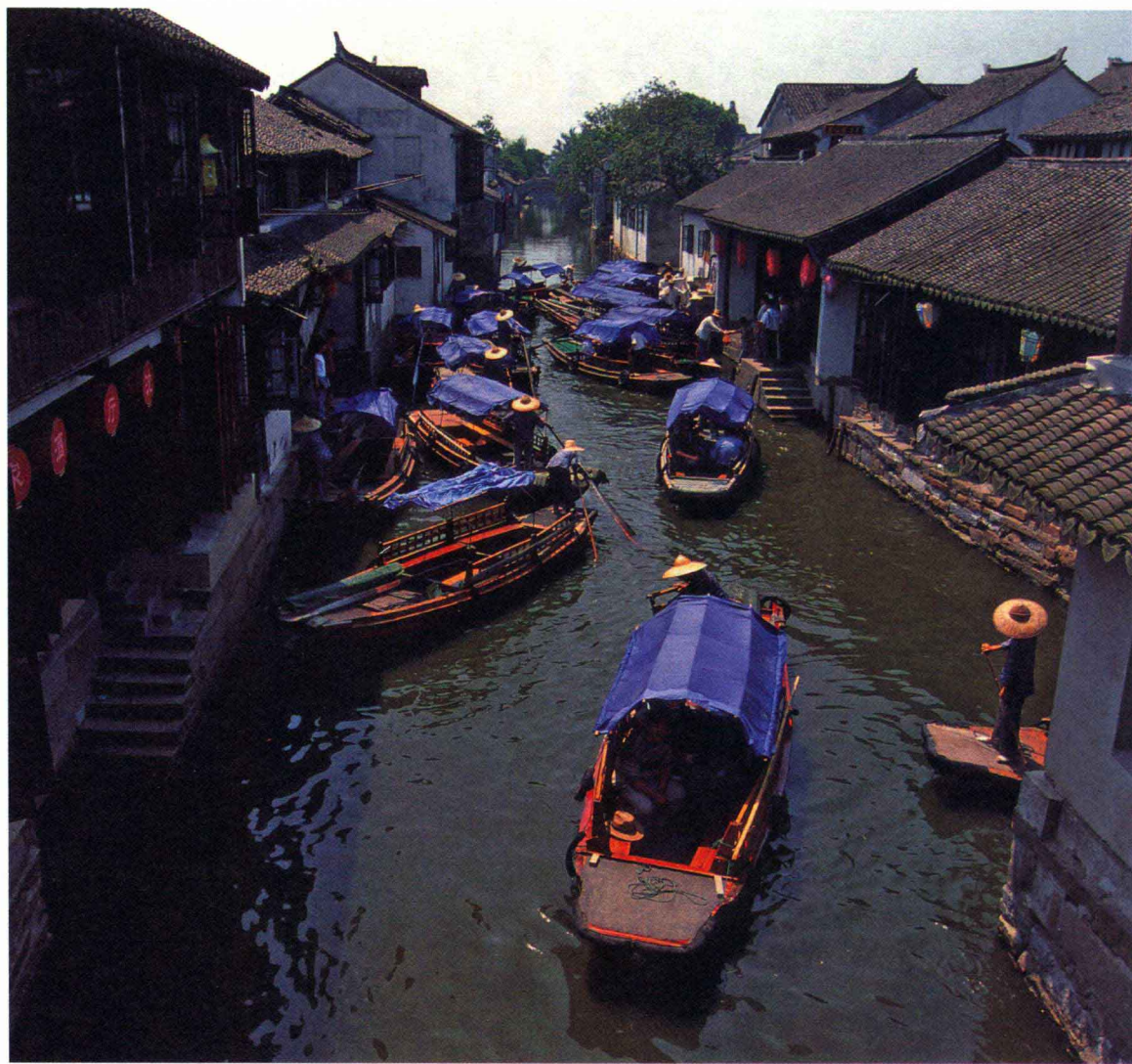


Due to its inconvenience of transportation, Zhouzhuang was able to preserve its original conditions as a water town, thus being known as "Venice in the East."

donated 13-hectare tideland as the temple property, in the hope to drive away the disasters and bless the people. The local people were moved by his kindness and thus named the town Zhouzhuang after his surname. In 1127 when the Northern Song government was defeated by the Jin troops, Song Emperor Gaozong, Zhao Gou (1127-1162), moved to the south of Yangtze River with his royal family to establish the Southern Song Dynasty. Scholar Jinshi'er was supposed to follow the emperor to Lin'an (present-day Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province), but he was attracted by Zhouzhuang, a beautiful town with abundant natural resources, when he passed by. He decided to live in the town. After that the population of the town gradually increased. In mid-Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), a man named Shen You moved his whole family from Huzhou of Zhejiang Province to the area near Zhouzhuang. His son Shen Wansan was

The ancestors of Zhouzhuang mainly lived on silk production.

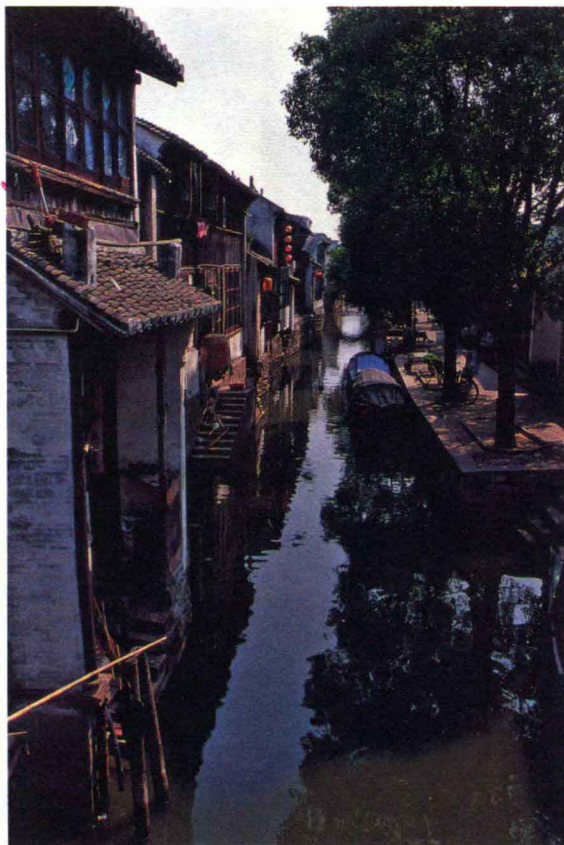




Visitors are waiting to get on board of sightseeing boats.

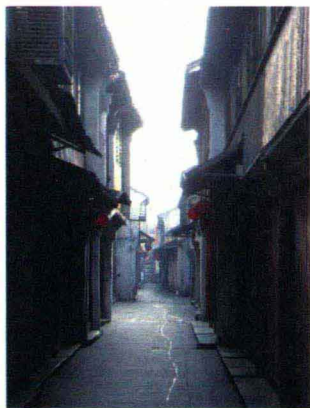
very good at business. He did overseas trading via the rivers and later became a very rich merchant. His success also boomed the development of the town which then became a trade center.

As an ancient town, Zhouzhuang blends history, culture with natural landscape in Southeast China. With Chenghu Lake, Baixian River, Dianshan Lake and Nanhu Lake around, it is like a lotus flower floating on the water. Water flows under bridges; streets and alleys wind around resident houses of white walls and grey tiles; courtyards are separated by high fire walls; and carved beams and painted pillars can be seen in resident halls. These are typical in every water town in the area, but Zhouzhuang became famous due to the legends and anecdotes about this piece of land.



Zhouzhuang is crisscrossed with rivers in the shape of a “井”, and residential houses are built along the rivers. Every household has its own ferry, convenient for fetching water and boat boarding.

Scholar Jin Shi'er of a Royal Family during the Northern Song Dynasty settled in Zhouzhuang. Since then, Zhouzhuang became prosperous.



Zhongshi Street in early morning.

Here are some true stories. During the Western Jin Dynasty, in 300, there was an official named Zhang Han who was the assistant to King Qi in Luoyang in northern China. One day, when he saw autumn wind blowing through trees, he suddenly remembered that in his hometown it was the season that delicious perch fish and fresh vegetables had been on the market. Homesick, he immediately wrote a poem on the wall of the *yamen* to quit his job and returned home for the delicious food. Zhouzhuang was his hometown, where he chose to seclude, fishing and composing poems day in and day out. About 1,000 years later, Shen Wansan made his family prosperous through trading overseas and also witnessed the conflicts between businessmen and the imperial power. The Shen family's history, from prosperity to declining, was a true reflection of the social changes at that time,

Historical records and cultural relics are displayed in Zhouzhuang Museum.



and the story also left us more to imagine. In early 20th century, Liu Yazhi, founder of an anti-Qing South Society, drank and composed poems in Milou Tower in Zhouzhuang with other members, but in fact they were making preparations for the revolution. In the spring of 1984, a young visiting American artist Chen Yifei came to visit Zhouzhuang and was astonished to see the unvarnished beauty of the water town. His oil painting, *Memory of Hometown*, with the charming Twin Bridges as the theme was highly admired by visitors to his gallery. Armand Hanmer, an American oil magnate, bought the painting at a very high price and gave it to Deng Xiaoping as a gift when he visited China. Since then, Zhouzhuang and Twin Bridges became worldwide known. Now, the painter, the purchaser and the collector have all passed away, leaving people more imaginations.

It would be hard to believe that Zhouzhuang, with a long history, rich culture and many legends, only covers an area of 0.23 square kilometers. You'd better do some preparation before setting off for Zhouzhuang, so that your pace of visiting will not be slowed down since there are so many beautiful scenes and amazing stories. Zhouzhuang, like a precious treasure, is worth for your visiting and admiration.

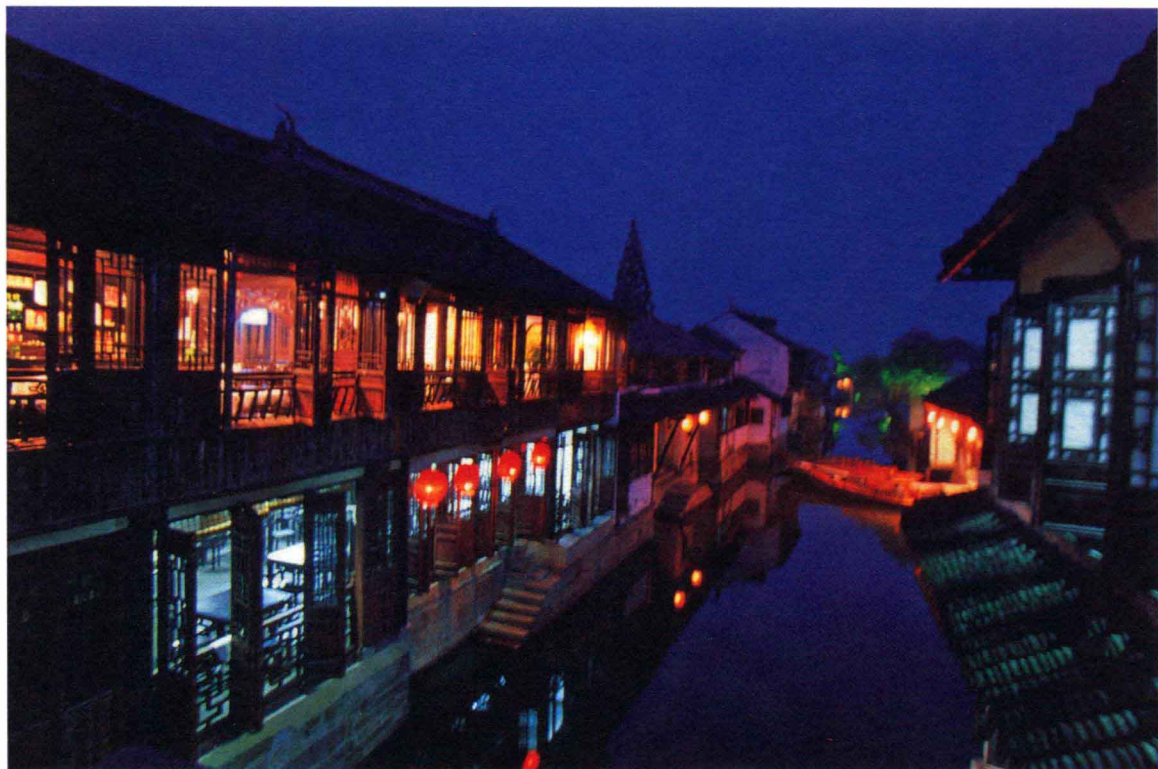


Zhang Han of Western Jin Dynasty was homesick when seeing autumn wind rose.

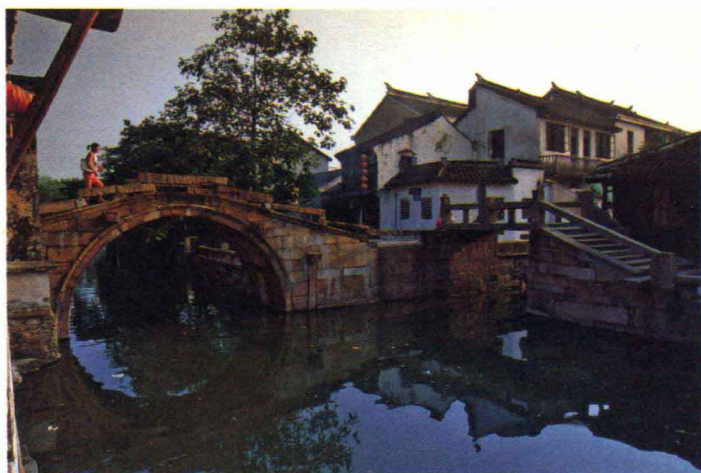
A stone base is displayed in the museum, which records part of the modern history of Zhouzhuang.



Morning in the water town.



Night scene of the water town.



The famous Twin Bridges.