

XITANG

西塘

ANCIENT TOWNS
AROUND SHANGHAI



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

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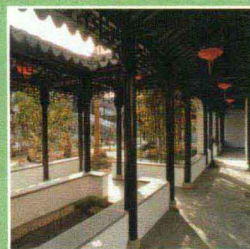
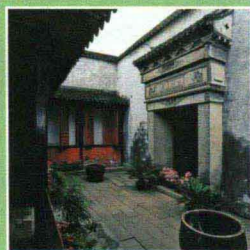
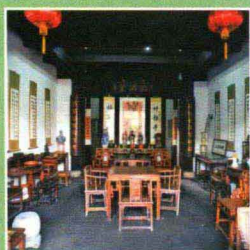
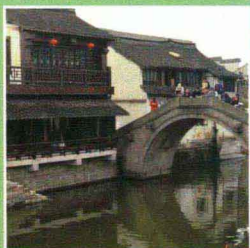
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A Vibrant 1,000-year-old Town

Xitang, located in a triangular zone between Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai, is in Jiashan County, Zhejiang Province. During the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), Xitang was at the border between the Wu and Yue kingdoms. Legend has it that Wu Zixu (also known as Wu Yun), a famous general of the Wu Kingdom, had water channels dug and built there for the purpose of transporting soldiers. That was how Xitang took its rudimentary form, in the past known as “Xutang” or “Xietang.” Owing to its transport convenience by land and water, during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) Xitang developed into a large marketplace and in the mid-17th century became an important commercial town, attracting a great many traders from other parts of the country. Many merchants settled there and had large residences built, thus leaving numerous architectural structures from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911). These residences, well preserved until now, still give a vivid reflection of people’s lives back then.

Xitang, covering an area of less than 2 sq km, has nine rivers crisscrossing the town, dividing it into eight parts. Linked by dozens of old bridges, these parts form a pic-



Crisscrossing waterways and crowded residential dwellings.

Meiren kao (literally “beauty leaning”), providing convenience to tourists sitting down to appreciate the beautiful views. ➤

turesque whole, known in the past as “Jiu Long Peng Zhu” (Nine Dragons Frolicking a Pearl) or “Ba Mian Lai Feng” (Wind Coming from Eight Directions). Other attractive views are found in Liren Waterway, Incense-Burning Waterway, and Yanta (Goose Tower) Bay.

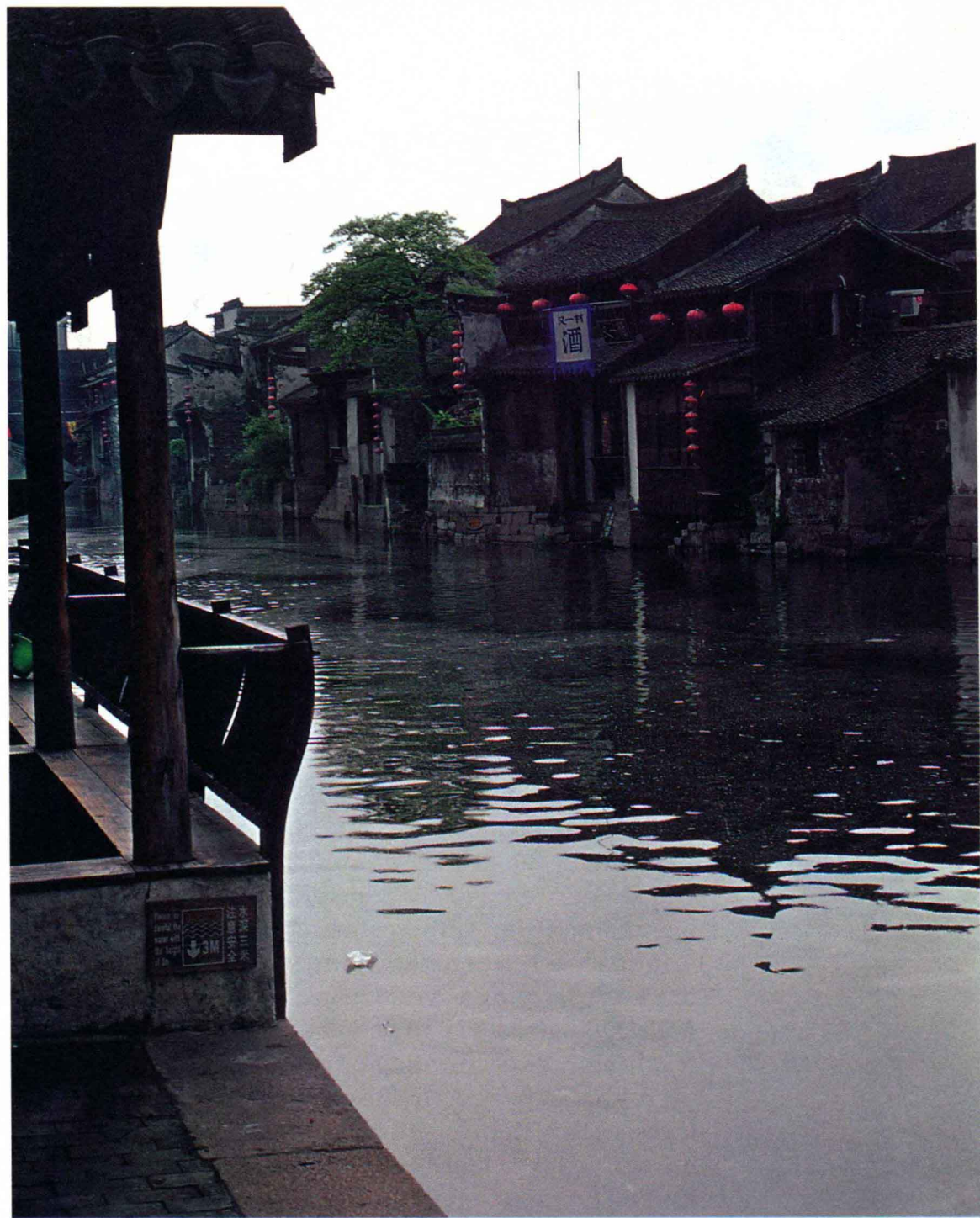
Where there is water, there are bridges. Xitang has a long history of bridges, with the oldest built in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), and others mostly from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Xitang’s ancient bridges are in different styles, manifesting diverse architectures and aesthetic perceptions from different times. For example, Wangxian Bridge stresses simplicity, Wolong Bridge emphasizes complexity and ingenuity, and Songzi Laifeng Bridge focuses on unique

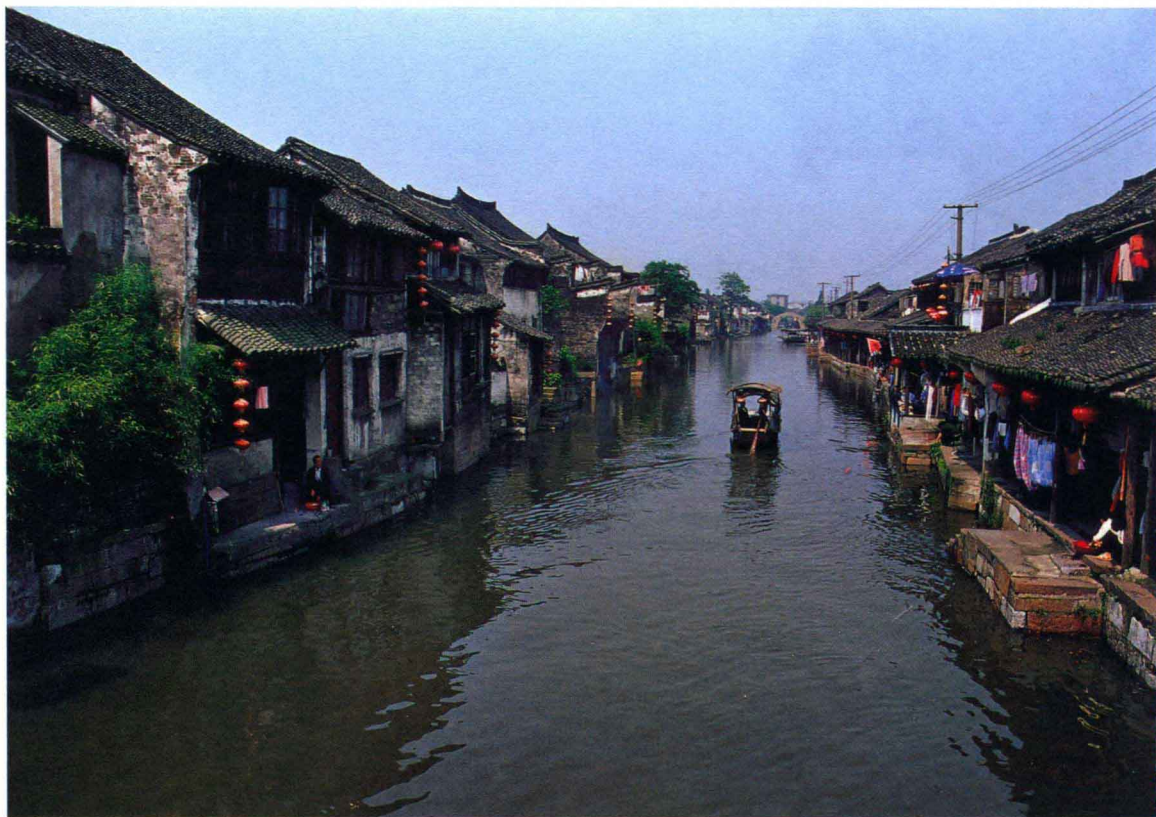


People in a picturesque scene.



The 1,000-m-long covered corridor, a unique feature of Xitang.





Houses lining the waterway.

structure. After hundreds of years, these bridges still play an important role in local life. Entering the old town, one will certainly notice the quaint bridges, flowing waters and passing boats.

Owing to the dense waterways, the town's residences and streets were mostly built alongside the rivers. Many merchants from Anhui came to Xitang and built their Anhui-style residences, characterized by white walls, black tiles, flying eaves, curved roof corners, and fire walls. Xitang had a large population but insufficient land, resulting in overcrowding of residences, with only long narrow lanes in between for passage. There are over 120 lanes, each with different use and unique features. Walking through the lanes is like traveling in a time tunnel, leading you into a remote past.

Early spring at Incense-burning Waterway.



Verandas and piers provide great convenience to residents living along the rivers.



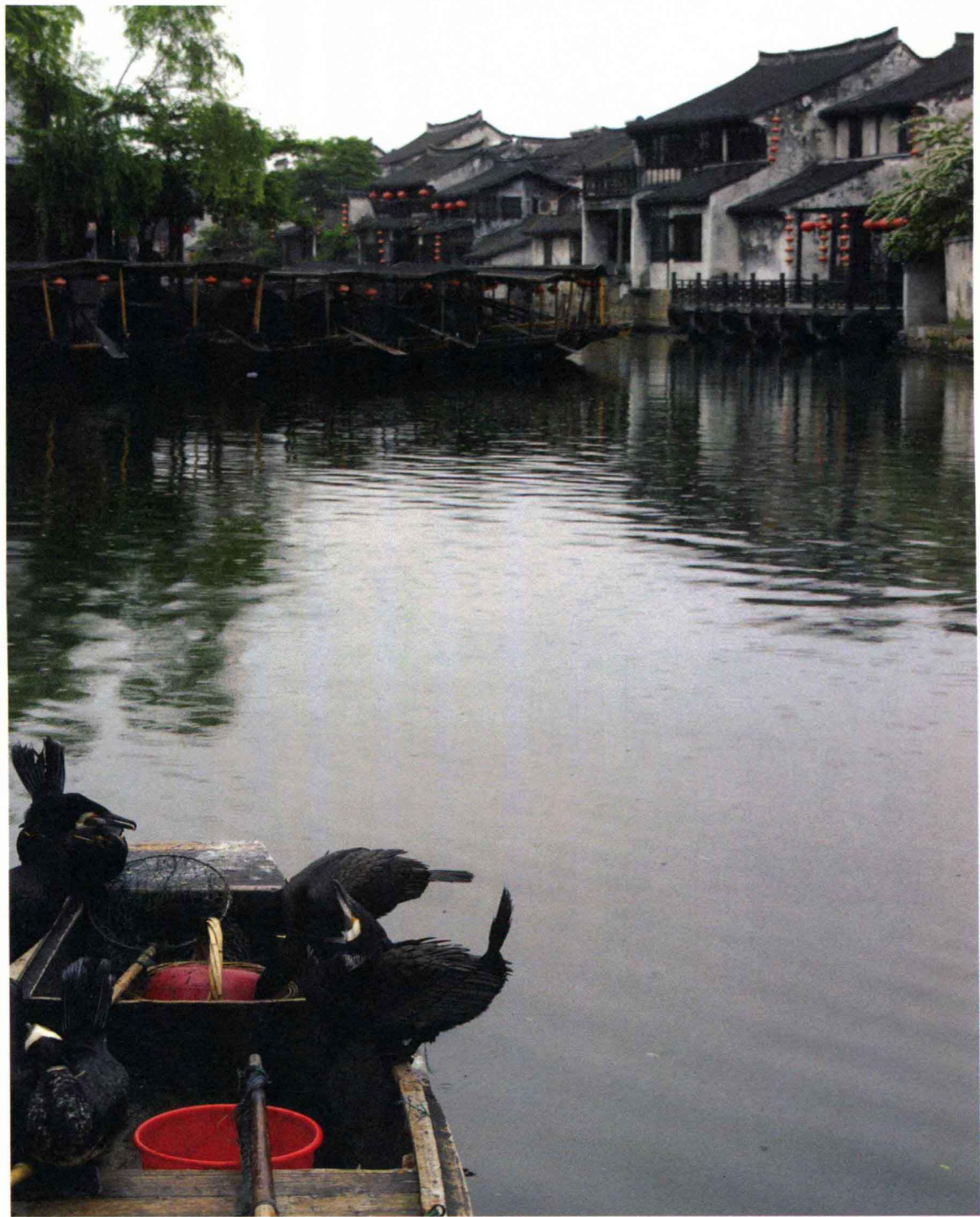
Raindrops fall on the surface of the river, constantly varying the ripples, over green trees, red lanterns, waiting leisure boats, and bathing ospreys on fishing boats. ▷

Since ancient times, Xitang has boasted bustling commerce. You can find well-preserved ancient streets and lanes everywhere, with a great number of brick and wood-constructed shops. Smooth, narrow slate-paved streets have many wine banners hanging outside stores and inns giving an air of antiquity.

In addition to bridges and lanes, Xitang boasts a great number of corridors. The corridors built along the rivers extend and connect the eaves of residences that have roof tiles above and support columns below, as well as red lanterns hanging between the columns. In the evening, red lanterns are lit, casting shadows in the rivers, transforming Xitang into a panorama of overflowing light and color. Xitang's corridors total over 1,300, reaching nearly every corner of the town. Some corridors are as long as 1,000 meters, while others are as short as several meters. All provide shelter from the sun and rain, giving conve-



The life of Xitang's old residences, streets and lanes center around its flowing water, which runs calmly by these old residences.





Early morning at Xitang, a river town in southeast China.



nience to residents. Some have stone railings and stools, so visitors can rest by leaning against a type of railing as a backrest, nicknamed as *meiren kao* (beauty leaning).

In addition to its splendid scenery, Xitang is also famed for numerous cultural sites. Many scholars and calligraphers visited the town in the past, leaving behind great numbers of elegant poems. Liu Yazi (1887-1958), a modern poet, along with other members of the literary society “Nan She” (South Society) frequently gathered in Xitang, writing poems while drinking wine. Xitang has a long folk culture history, characterized by its handicrafts industry. The town’s commercial streets are lined with



A bridge with covered corridors, linking two blocks.

The author lingering by Xitang’s scenery, in quest of ancient historical sites.

