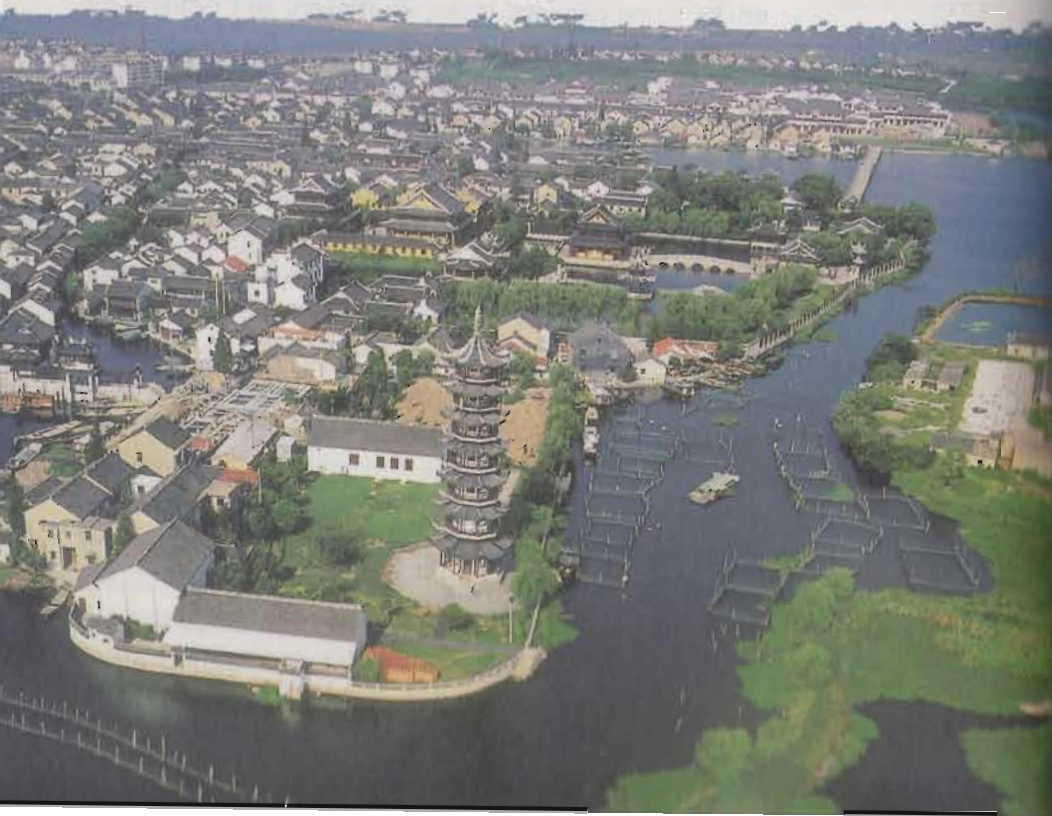


Zhouzhuang: A Town of Rivers and Lakes in Southern China

Zhouzhuang lies 38 kilometers to the southeast of the city of Suzhou, Jiangsu Province and covers an area of 0.47 square kilometers. It was known as Yaocheng in ancient times when it was the fief of the crown prince Yao and was part of the state of Wu during the Spring and Autumn Period. Zhouzhuang, also known as Zhenbanli, was founded when Zhou Digong, a local resident and fervent believer in Buddhism during the Northern Song Dynasty, contributed his residence and 200 *mu* of good agricultural land to the temple. To show

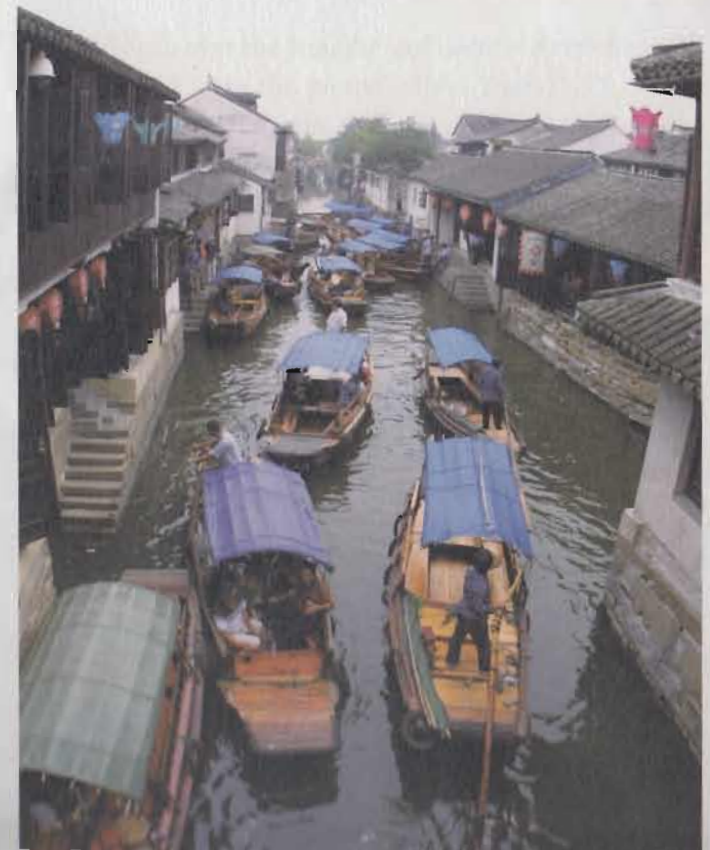
Bird's-eye view of Zhouzhuang



their gratitude, the local people changed the name to Zhouzhuang.

Zhouzhuang has been known as the "Land of Rivers and Lakes" since ancient times. Deng Lake, Baixian Lake, Dianshan Lake, and Nan Lake, as well as more than 30 rivers, are found in the vicinity and its round shape resembles a lotus leaf floating on the water. The peaceful environment of natural waters and unique and pleasing scenery and simple folk customs make it a typical southern Chinese region and an Oriental treasure. Zhouzhuang has been put on UNESCO's preliminary list of world cultural heritage sites and has been awarded the Dubai prize for the best example of a good living environment, the UN prize for outstanding achievements in the protection of the world's cultural heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region and a US government prize. It was also named as

Street market along the river



the world's most attractive region of lakes and rivers and listed among the first group of 10 towns named by the Chinese government for their historical and cultural significance.

There are four main river channels running through the town of Zhouzhuang and smaller streams crisscross the town forming a pound sign. The streets follow the course of the rivers as they crisscross the town, with the fronts of the houses facing the street and the backs to the river, thereby fully preserving the ancient flavor of the town and the old feel and flavor of an ancient town in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The town contains nearly a hundred buildings from the period of the Ming and Qing dynasties, over 60 engraved brick doorway arches and 24

Most famous scene of Zhouzhuang—Double Bridge



Street performers



stone bridges over the straight and narrow river channels (including 10 from the period of the Yuan (1271–1368), Ming, and Qing dynasties). All this forms a typical picture of southern China as in the saying, "small bridges, flowing water and homes."

Construction of the houses takes into account their watery environment. The simple unadorned houses line the rivers in the large courtyard compounds throughout the town. Each bridge, each street, each temple and every room, the azul water, blue skies, green trees, stone streets all preserve the feeling of ancient Zhouzhuang, which is the reason the town has been the delight of Chinese and foreign artists from the distant past to the present. Wu Guanzhong, a famous ancient painter, said, "Huangshan Mountain is a concentrated reflection of the beauty of the country's mountains and streams, and Zhouzhuang is a concentrated reflection of the beauty of China's regions of rivers and lakes." The houses of the town also have a great amount of cultural significance. Western Jin Dynasty, Han, and Tang Dynasty poets Liu

visited and stayed here. Contemporary Chinese painter Chen Yifei was inspired by the Double Bridge in Zhouzhuang to create the famous oil painting called, *Memories of the Hometown*, which was later featured on a UN first day cover issue. This was Zhouzhuang's road to greater fame.

The thousand-year-old town of Zhouzhuang is carrying on the poetic and picturesque feeling of beautiful southern China, and its quiet grandeur welcomes all guests who come here. Zhouzhuang has now introduced demonstrations of traditional crafts such as making textiles, iron forging, and bamboo weaving, as well as folk performances such as lion and dragon dances to help tourists better appreciate the picturesque "small bridges, running water, and homes" in southern China as well as enjoy the rich cultural attractions and unique folk customs.