

Ho Wai-On

何蕙安 《園林通藝》



INTER ARTES YUANLIN

(Yuan-Lin-Tong-Yi in Chinese)

Report to the Arts Council of England

CONTENTS

Hua-yuan Journey Preliminary Information

Ho Wai-On's visit to China

London-Beijing-Ningbo-Putuoshan-Hangzhou-Suzhou-Shanghai-Canton(Guangzhou)-Hong Kong-London

Inter Artes Yuanlin (Yuan-Lin-Tong-Yi in Chinese):

The development of 'Hua-yuan Journey' and Inter Artes, influenced by Ho Wai-On's visit to China

Appendix

Acknowledgement:

The research and development of this project has been assisted by the New Collaborations Fund of the Arts Council of England, British Airways, The Gulbenkian Foundation and the Great Britain-China Centre

Part Two

Ho Wai-On's visit to China

HO WAI-ON'S VISIT TO CHINA

*London - Beijing - Ningbo - Putuosban - Hangzhou - Suzhou -
Shanghai - Canton (Guangzhou) - Hong Kong - London*

FOREWORD

The following includes my observations on my visit to China in November 1994; they may not seem directly concerned with the project, but are in some ways relevant. Due to the limitations of available funding I was the only one to visit China - so those who read the following will be able to share my experience of this visit. I feel that people who are interested in this project should be presented with as complete a picture as possible; that by a dedication to the truth - acknowledging the good and not so good aspects - one will see more clearly the reality, and thus make wiser decisions. This is especially important in cross-cultural work, for when it comes to what is regarded as another culture and race it is easy for the mind to be befuddled by falsehood, misconceptions, illusions and unrealistic expectations. The following will also help to illuminate the philosophy of Inter Artes.

NARRATION

Wednesday 2nd November - left London for Beijing

Eleven hours flight - airfare subsidized by British Airways. The flight was quite crowded. Passengers mainly of European nationalities and some Americans - quite a few seemed to have the ability to speak or understand a certain amount of Putonghua (common speech of the Chinese language) and seemed to travel to and from China regularly - all this would have been a rarity ten or fifteen years ago. There were also some overseas Chinese, and a small number of Beijing natives (in the past they seemed to travel only by Air China). All this indicates that there is quite a lot of outside interest in China, and interaction has been happening - ie more possible sources of support and an encouraging sign for this cross-cultural project.

The rest of the row where I sat was occupied by three Beijing men. Judging from the conversation amongst themselves and with a few other people from Beijing who sat nearby, I think they were delegates of some kind. I had to tell the man who sat next to me to say 'excuse me' instead of suddenly pushing me or touching me whenever he wanted to pass my seat to get to the aisle. His comrades were shocked to see me being assertive. After that, he addressed me as 'big sister'. I went through some of the notes and information concerning my China visit as I was not able to sleep or rest - the men sitting on the same row conversed loudly; the man next to me left his seat often (including in the middle of my meal); and when he was back at his seat I had to roll up the blanket and use it as a shield so as to stop his elbow from directly attacking my ribs. After living in the West for a long time I have forgotten that many Chinese have yet to learn to respect personal space; and China is a more male-oriented society than the West - my culture shock had already begun!

Thursday 3rd November - Beijing

A sunny morning - I was really looking forward to having a bird's eye view of China from the plane. In the past I have seen some amazing views while flying, such as the Himalayas from a great distance: not only did the mountain range look very small and toy-like, but also all the mountain peaks looked about the same height; and I wondered about men's trying so hard to conquer the Himalayas and Mount Everest, and many losing their lives in doing so. When the plane flew low enough for me to see the land, the view was uninteresting in shape and colour and I was disappointed because I could not find the Great Wall. I was much amused by one of

the air hostesses making announcements in Putonghua: she obviously could not speak the language, but was given the job because she was ethnic Chinese. This reminded me of another flight to Taiwan years ago - a Putonghua-speaking air hostess making announcements in English, where her pronunciation and speech rhythms made the announcements sound exactly like Putonghua. It is a fact that being of a certain race does not automatically grant one the culture associated with that race. The culture of one's ethnic origin or of another race is acquired through time, effort and one's aptitude for absorbing this. I have always felt that though public bodies well-intentionally want to help ethnic minorities in the arts it is unlikely that correct policies will be made or entrusted to the right people until more people of the majority have a substantial knowledge of the cultures associated with the ethnic minorities. I noticed that since Inter Artes was formed in 1988 some people and organizations have mistaken the organisation to be 'ethnic'; on the contrary, it is meant to encourage people, including those of ethnic majority, to cross their own cultural barriers.

I arrived at Beijing airport at 11.20am. The landing was rather spectacular - the plane was tipped to the left side for quite a long time. The captain was so pleased that he made an announcement about how skilful the landing was, and said it was due to certain peculiarity of the airport that the pilot had to land in such a way. he also asked the passengers to be patient, as China was still new to international air travel; procedures and facilities might not be what the passengers were used to. The Beijing man who sat next to me exclaimed 'Safely home!'

Passengers were told to fill in Health Declaration forms, declaring one had not contracted AIDS, skin disease or mental illness. There were big notices forbidding anyone to enter China with any of the above-named illnesses. There was no medical team, no medical examination or check on medical certificate to ensure the truthfulness of such a declaration. Well, this confirmed one of the things I had learnt from my research work - the existence of unnecessary bureaucracy.

From my research work on present-day Beijing, I have come across descriptions such as: has the best of everything in China bar the weather; the promised land among the Chinese; just like any international big city... From historical books and other references on old China and the Chinese Empire which I have read or come across since childhood, Beijing was a place of grandeur and culture - where all the best scholars and artisans and the best of everything gathered to serve the Emperor. Well, the weather was fine - sunny and warmer than London, As was the whole week I was there (I was later told by locals that it should have been much colder at this time of year). The airport lacked grandeur in comparison with those in Hong Kong and other big cities in England, Europe, the US, Japan and the Middle East, and the people who worked there made it even less gracious. Later, after staying in Beijing for a few days, I began to understand why people were usually so rude - I was getting a bit like that myself because of circumstances beyond one's control.

In order to avoid waste of time and hassles, I paid China Travel Services to look after all arrangements for my China visit. I was told to wear my name tag on arrival so that their representatives would find me and take me to the hotel. I waited for twenty minutes at the passengers' arrival gate (feeling rather silly standing there wearing a name tag) before a young lady and a driver from the agency found me. After less than a minute's driving the driver drove straight towards a crossing car, missing it by a split second as he made an emergency stop! It was about an hour's drive to the hotel. My first impression of Beijing was that it looked somewhat grey. Li, the young lady from the agency, soon showed an interest in me, for I was the only creative-artist-client she had come across and also, unlike her other clients, travelled light. From my own experience most Chinese do not really have an interest in or respect for the arts, as arts are seldom the means to achieve wealth, status or political power. Since Li showed an interest in my work and was mild-mannered, I suspected that she came from a cultured background. I was not at all surprised when she told me her father was an artist and received training at the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts (one of the top establishments for fine arts in China) but had given up because he could not make a living from his artistic work.

My hotel is situated in Wangfujing, which according to the most recent China guide book is a prestigious shopping area. I asked China Travel Services to find accommodation for me there because it is within walking distance of the Central Institute of Fine Arts and the Forbidden City, and is convenient for transport. The hotel has an impressive facade but the service was much inferior. Even with Li's help I had to wait for ages before the receptionist finally let me have the

key to my room. Though Li at this point had accomplished all her duties regarding me, I wanted to talk to her so as to obtain some local information. To my surprise, she offered to buy me a meal (maybe the fact that I had only hand luggage gave her the impression that I was much poorer than her other clients). From our conversation I learnt that though China Travel Services charged me a lot, Li was poorly paid - so I offered to buy her a meal instead, and asked her to take me to a nice place for a local meal. She took me to the MacDonaldis - I had expected my first meal in Beijing to be more exotic! The street was packed with people - many were small (even by Chinese standards), very brown and rather ugly, dirty and coarse. In the past I had often thought that (Chinese) Northerners were taller and fairer in complexion than Southerners, and that people in Beijing were rather cultured and refined. Li told me that many poor people from under-developed areas in China as well as people from everywhere in China came to live in Beijing. She herself is not a native but a Manchu. I noticed that many people on the street kept staring at me. As quite a lot of women wear Western clothes I wondered in what way they could tell that I was different. Li said that she would like to go to England to study, and asked me for advice. She seemed to believe that once she was in England she would be able to stay. I told her that the British Government does not encourage non-Europeans to live there, and that the rules were getting tougher and tougher - but Li said all the people she knew who went off to the West all managed to stay there somehow.

The Beijing MacDonaldis menu was rather basic, had less varieties than those in Hong Kong, England and the US, and was more expensive than other local fast food - but the locals seemed quite happy eating there. After our meal we walked to the Forbidden City as Li said it was better to see it then, as it was less crowded in the afternoon. On the way, Li gave me some tips on local travel, information on places I wanted to visit, and prices for certain daily necessities - so that I could avoid being cheated by the locals - I do not speak Putonghua with a Beijing accent and Li said that people could tell I was from overseas anyway. The multi-lane road leading to the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square (just opposite) is supposed to be the widest in Beijing, and Li seemed proud of it. On the way we passed some impressive looking hotels with notices forbidding the cheaper type of taxis to enter, but there were also foul smelling public conveniences. Tiananmen Gate (with the gigantic portrait of Mao) and the Square did not look as austere as in photographs or films. Li said the Gate and Square looked better at night because of coloured floodlights. There was hardly any trace or atmosphere to remind one of the event which shocked the world. When we reached the South Entrance of the Forbidden City (home to emperors of the Ming and Qing - ie Ching dynasties). Li offered to buy a local admission ticket on my behalf: people who are not Chinese subjects (including overseas Chinese) are politely addressed as Waibin (guests from outside), and the government has a policy of treating them differently - such as charging twice to ten times more than the locals for everything. A Waibin also has to pay a daily city construction tax in US dollars. Anywhere worth seeing is subject to an admission charge with a further charge once inside for seeing any part that may be of special interest. We thought with Li's help at least I would not need to pay a huge admission charge as a Waibin: but I was not able to get past the entrance because as a local I was not allowed to carry a bag - not even a handbag. I did not want to waste time going through the procedures of storing belongings, or to come back to the South Entrance to reclaim my bag since I intended to leave by the North Entrance. So Li sold my ticket to a local and I bought a Waibin ticket. We said good-bye and I entered through the more looked-after side of the entrance reserved for Waibin, carrying my shoulder bag with me.

Having read so much about the Forbidden City since childhood, it was quite a sensation to enter into it. Bertolucci's film 'The Last Emperor' shows the Forbidden City in its splendour better than its present state, but one can still use one's imagination and knowledge to picture it in its glorious days. I entered the Palace through the massive Meridian Gate (Wumen) and walked across the famous Golden Stream which is shaped to resemble a Tartar bow and is spanned by five beautifully-designed white marble bridges. The stream was rather unhealthy-looking and smelly because of thick scum. I was disappointed because quite a number of buildings and small gardens which I had planned to see were not open to the public. It was rather alarming to see live wires, lights and tall weeds on the roofs of some of the buildings - old-style Chinese roofs are delicate and catch fire easily. This reminded me of a sad Chinese poem describing a city destroyed by war - weeds started to grow on roofs of once splendid buildings. While I was walking I kept thinking of all the events I had read about in books which took place here (such as murders!). It seemed such a pity that there were misplaced present-day things here and there to spoil the original design of the Palace. There were a lot of people, mostly Chinese from

outside Beijing, looking rather poor. All this somehow gave me the impression that because of the revolution, not even the Palace has class any more.

I started to study carefully what I saw, taking photographs and making notes at the same time - for this is the place where the concept of Chinese stately gardens originates from, though the buildings now are mostly post 18th-century. The structure is: prominent buildings are centred on the north/south axis. On this axis there is a system of divided but well-constructed spaces, each independent in itself yet connected with other independent spaces. This prominent axis is flanked on east and west by similar systems of well-organised, beautifully designed and interconnected spaces. Though the structural concept seems symmetrical there are asymmetrical elements to counteract the symmetrical effects. Since the structure does not focus on just one building or a particular space, there is no dominating centre - the whole complex is one of united grandeur. Though the Forbidden City is a palace, it is assimilated into the much larger structure and planning of the city of Beijing. Though beautifully designed, everything is supposed to be functional and every element has a practical purpose. An instance of this is the element of water: ponds (especially those in front of the libraries); the moat around the palace; and beautifully designed bronze and earthenware (water) containers decorating the courtyards: apart from being pleasing to the eye, all serve the practical function of extinguishing fires.

I was delighted to see the Imperial Garden at the northern end of the Forbidden City, a classical Chinese garden of some 7,000 square metres of fine landscaping, with rockeries, walkways and pavilions. The garden occupies a square plot of land. Again, the layout is basically symmetrical but is counteracted by asymmetrical elements so that one will look at each corner with renewed interest. The variety of plants, specially some rather ancient-looking trees, asymmetrically distributed within the garden, sometimes obstructing one's view - all add further interest and atmosphere. Unfortunately, this is also a place where visitors take a breather, with snack bars and souvenir shops, of which the decor and other arrangements are so vulgar that I just wished they would go away. I found a quieter corner and sat down, hoping to drink in more of the delightful garden; but alas, the gentle breeze brought with it such a foul smell that I had to move on quickly - this favourite place for taking a breather is also where the rather primitively-equipped toilets are situated.

The palace was built on a monumental scale and my feet were starting to hurt due to all the walking. Despite bright sunlight I started to feel the effect of not having had any sleep since I boarded the plane in London - so I left the Forbidden City and walked back to the hotel. As I have mentioned earlier, the hotel is situated in Wangfujing. The name Wangfujing is derived from a 15th-century well, but the area is now a solid block of stores and a favourite haunt of locals seeking bargains. Though it is described as a prestigious shopping area, in comparison with other big cities in the world, this is more like a street market. The hotel room was unbearably hot, and adjusting the heating control had no effect at all. The thermos flask did not have water, the bathroom was not as clean as I would have liked, the view from my hotel room was grey and ugly. I was disappointed with a lot of things, even though I was warned before setting foot in Beijing not to have too high an expectation. Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I felt home-sick - I wanted to be back in London. Though I was tired, I was not able to sleep, so I telephoned a few people whom I was supposed to meet, including Li Xiangting (the guqin player and a member of staff of the Central Academy of Music) who had carried out some research work for this project. We had a meeting that evening, and he handed me the work he had done.

Friday 4th November, Beijing

Today I decided to face all less-than-satisfactory situations with resourcefulness. For a start, I cleaned the bathroom (it was quicker this way than trying to educate a cleaner lacking the concept of such cleanliness); fetched hot drinking water for the thermos flask; bought a bottle of mineral water in a local shop to replace the one in the fridge which I drank yesterday and which would have cost a bomb in the hotel; learnt the method of acquiring the use of electricity in a hotel room; and managed to switch off the heating (having learnt that room service was not always the answer and could waste a lot of time). I also ordered western cooked breakfast (though it was expensive) so that I would have the energy I needed and would not have to worry about the hygiene of eating out. Though the menu was in English the hotel staff did not comprehend the language, and I had to repeat what I wanted in Putonghua - including telling the kitchen staff how to cook scrambled egg as they did not know what it was. The result was more like egg fu yong, ie Chinese omelette.

I was pleased that the weather was a little cooler than the previous day, for I had only brought with me warm clothing, having been told that Beijing should have been colder than London. I started the day by visiting the Workers' Cultural Palace, which is in the south-east sector of the Forbidden City, with halls dating from 1462 (complete with marble balustrades and detailed gargoyles) which were used as ancestral temples under the Ming and Qing dynasties. The palace is now a park used for movies, exhibitions, performances and occasionally weddings. The park is now in a condition and atmosphere befitting workers' functions, and is hardly a tourist attraction - even the workers were scarce. I think that is why the admission fee is equivalent to less than one penny in English currency. However, the shape of the buildings and other decorative elements, the layout, and especially the trees, all suggested grandeur in its original design, and one can well imagine its solemn beauty in the past, and royal processions passing along its wide and straight paths flanked by majestic trees. Surely with some care this place could regain its splendour and would inspire much admiration and appreciation.

Since there were few people there I thought that maybe the public conveniences here would be more tolerable - but, alas, no! The design and sewage system made such places unbearable. However, it seemed silly to rush back to the hotel: remembering my resolution to be resourceful, I walked towards one of the imperial halls, now the Talents Recruiting Bureau. I was surprised to see such a bureau - from conversations with people from China I had gathered that it was dangerous to be talented, outstanding, original or innovative, for this would invite persecution for being right-wing. The consequences of this could be serious (what is described as 'reactionary' in the West is called 'left-wing' in China). Somehow I felt there must be a better luo in the Talents Recruiting Bureau. It took me a while to attract anyone's attention - there was hardly anyone volunteering their talents, and the people in the reception office were deeply involved in gambling, amidst smoking and drinking. Finally, I explained to a young lady that I had just arrived from London and was not accustomed to the style of the public loos, and asked whether I could use theirs - and the problem was solved!

I planned to see the famous Summer Palace (Yiheyuan) in the afternoon, which is about 12 km north-west of the centre of Beijing. The previous day I had seen people operating mini-buses calling out that they were going there and that the fare was only six dollars (about 50p). This seemed straight forward and economical (instead of worrying about taxi drivers' rip-offs warned by guide books), and would also give me a taste of how the locals travel. It appears that these mini-buses are a private business, and the one I boarded was run by a husband and wife team - the husband was the driver and the wife called out for customers and collected fares. The wife wanted to fill up every seat so as to get more money, so it took quite a while before the bus started the journey. Though this was only my second day in Beijing I had already noticed that the driving standard was pretty horrendous, and the traffic was often congested and chaotic. The pavements were not always walkable, due to their condition or obstructions caused by people depositing their belongings - such as bicycles and all sorts of containers and goods. So the pedestrians walked where bicycles should fare, and bicycles spilt out to where cars should be, and cars overtook the lane belonging to oncoming traffic - and on top of all this, nobody bothered to look carefully but relied on the sound of the horn to avoid accidents (I kept thinking about the horn part of one of Sibelius' Symphonies). In the mini-bus I was allocated the front seat next to the driver. Thinking about safety, I had automatically adjusted the mirror on my side for him: this seemed to arouse an interest in him because he became aware that I could drive - which I gathered was a rarity among his customers, apart from being a woman travelling on her own and looking different from the other passengers (who seemed to be mainly peasants). He started to ask all sorts of questions about me, which were none of his business. Seeing that I was not particularly keen to enter into conversation with him, he started to talk about one of the well-known student dissidents of the Tiananmen Incident, and was pleased to see me surprised by this sudden change of topic. He expressed his admiration for that student, but I thought it wiser not to respond, especially in front of all those passengers. The journey was as expected - pretty hair-raising: like most of the car journeys I experienced during my three weeks in China, accidents were only avoided by a split second. I arrived at the Summer Palace feeling in need of some lunch. I tried an eating place just outside the Palace which was full of locals. It was dirty, noisy and the service was non-existent. Beijing has a tradition of making special noodles - so I ordered some, which were dirt cheap but like shredded documents with dishwater, and not at all tasty.

I had not expected the Summer Palace to be so beautiful and majestic, and I felt it was worth it after all. This is an immense park consisting of large areas of hills and lakes with some Qing architecture, and had long been a royal garden, used as a summer residence. Three quarters of the park is taken up by the Kunming Lake - planned more for its cooling feature than for serving the practical purpose of extinguishing fire. Though the lake has been artificially deepened and expanded, one is hardly aware of this; I have never seen water looking so beautiful. The rocks (an important element in Chinese gardens) are gigantic, abundant and of unusual shapes - imperial demand made possible the gathering of such quality and quantity from other parts of China. The rocks blended in so well with the hills and buildings, fulfilling the philosophy of Chinese gardens - nature and humans in harmony.

There are many splendid imperial-styled buildings, bridges and other unusual architecture for one to admire. What impressed me most was that none seems overpowering despite its magnificence - all blended in with the vegetation, rocks, hills and water. Since childhood I have heard Chinese condemning Empress Dowager Cixi's use of money, supposedly reserved for the construction of a modern navy, to rebuild the Summer Palace in 1888. After seeing beauty and grandeur in nature on such a scale, I am not sure she was so bad. With all the corruption, weaknesses and ignorance of Western civilisation and science at that time in China, a modern navy was an unlikely achievement - nor would it have been able to get rid of European powers and save Qing's demise. And people can now enjoy such an artistic environment in the Summer Palace. I was surprised to see so many good things there because since childhood I have not heard a good word spoken of Cixi: I felt that whoever was responsible for the creation of such an environment must have had taste and talents, and I suddenly remembered coming across a painting with calligraphy by Cixi and being impressed with it. I think the Chinese cannot accept female rulers, and are harsh on women who have power and are strong and talented.

The Summer Palace is in better condition than the Forbidden City. There are ugly or vulgar present-day things which do not match the place - such as dragon-shaped pedal-boats for the visitors; loud-speakers with wires linking from tree to tree telling visitors how to behave; ugly metal railings... but they were not powerful enough to destroy such grandeur. However, the paid-conveniences were a let-down. I talked to the attendant and she let me use the only Western-styled lavatory which was reserved for the old and disabled (it was also used as a storage space and was packed with brooms, buckets and other things). From that day onwards I would not drink when I was out, so as to avoid Chinese lavatories, and drank as often as I could when I was back in the hotel. Not being a camel, this was not always satisfactory. From this day on I began to notice that I was being followed - but at least the stalker here was less frightening than those I encountered elsewhere. He also addressed me as 'Comrade' - a sign of respect (?). The Palace is so vast that it was not possible to see it all in a day; it was getting dark, so I hired a taxi to go back to the hotel. Having studied the map beforehand I knew that the driver was deliberately taking a much longer route - but I was too tired to tackle him, so I regarded it as an extra sight-seeing tour. Finally I had to say something to show the driver that I knew the roads, and thus arrived at my destination quite quickly. On the whole it was a good day, and I was a little pleased with myself.

Saturday 5th November - Beijing

In the morning I visited Grand View Garden (Daguan Yuan) which was built between 1984 and 1988 as a replica of the family gardens described in the 18th-century Chinese novel 'A Dream of the Red Chamber' by Cao Xueqin. The passage about a possible Chinese landscape garden described in the preliminary proposal of this Inter Artes project was influenced by what I remembered from this novel. Since China has the manpower, knowledge and talent required to produce a high-quality replica, I was hoping that this might be a possible venue for staging live arts events - or a source of visual material for the project. But the garden is not grand, and suffers from the same fate as the original novel: it was called 'The Story of the Stone' originally, and was written in a less florid but more truthful style. The content was challenging and unacceptable to the society then, and would have brought severe penalty (such as death) to those involved in writing, editing and keeping it. The novel was circulated among and collected by those who appreciated it. 'The Dream of the Red Chamber' was a later vulgarised version - altering the style of writing, characters and the plot, and thus becoming acceptable and popular. Many chapters of the original are still missing, and scholars still argue about what the plot should

have been. This replica garden is certainly a vulgarised version and befitting a film set - in fact, a film crew was shooting while I was there.

I then went to see Tiantan (Temple of Heaven) Park. Tiantan represents the perfection of Ming architecture and has come to symbolise Beijing. The park is huge and quite well looked after. I spent some time in the Hall of Abstinence (for the Emperor) admiring its compactness and imagining the sound from the Bell Tower nearby. I then experienced the grand feeling of walking on the bridge of Vermilion Stairway which links the Round Altar and the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests. I decided to admire this main structure of the whole complex from the outside because it was such a tourist (especially Europeans and Japanese) attraction, it cost too much, and was overcrowded inside. The buildings have recently been successfully restored - they are unique, beautiful and really worth seeing. Unlike other Imperial buildings which have amberish yellow (the Imperial colour) tiles, here the tiles are blue (the colour of Tian - the sky).

There were quite a number of young Europeans visiting China who were travelling extremely economically - and I had the feeling that they were not appreciated by the locals. I saw such a one there - his hair, style of clothing and ornaments (such as ear- and nose-rings) would hardly have attracted any attention in London. However, the locals who saw him openly said insulting things about him. Blissfully, he did not seem to understand Putonghua.

I decided to walk back to the hotel so as to see a few other places, and observe the locals lived. But the pavements were a bit of a chore and full of sudden changes: from flat to bumpy or broken; cement to uneven surfaces of sand and stones; slippery because of people spitting everywhere ... Suddenly, I lost my balance and fell flat on the ground. Nobody helped, and men just grinned. I got up quickly, brushed some of the dirt away and hired a taxi for the hotel. The taxi driver wanted to cheat me, but I was so full of dynamite because of the fall that he settled for not using the meter so that he could pocket the fare. I cleaned myself thoroughly when I reached the hotel; I had cuts and bruises on my forehead, knees and toes. But the worst was the palm on which I had landed - because of not being covered by clothing or a fringe, the wounds were the colour of dirt no matter how I cleaned them. From that day on, I suffered pain in that hand and that side of my lung. I was not able to carry things or to make certain movements, and I had trouble sleeping because of the discomfort. I thought I had only pulled some muscles and so though I had brought a course of anti-biotics with me, I did not take them. Only when I saw my GP back in London did I realise that I had contracted infections of the lung and hand all that time. That evening I felt defeated.

Sunday 6th November, Beijing

In the morning I visited Beihai Park which is the former playground of emperors. Like all imperial parks it is vast. Half of it is a lake and the Jade Islet on this is composed of the heaped earth dug to create the lake - some attribute this to the handiwork of Kublai Khan, and the site is associated with the Great Khan's palace before the creation of the Forbidden City. From the 12th-century onwards, Beihai was landscaped with artificial hills, pavilions, halls, temples and covered walkways, and is a good example of the Buddhist element in a classical garden. I ascended the Round City near the South Gate, which has a large green jade jar said to have contained the Khan's wine, and a one-and-a-half metre high white jade buddha - a gift from Burma to Empress Dowager Cixi. The main attraction is located on the Jade Islet - halls, pavilions, a Buddhist temple and a pagoda. The most striking is the White Pagoda: I have never seen anything like this before - 36-metres high, phallic with bells attached round the top which emit sounds like cow-bells and reminded me of Tibetan religious music. It is situated on some very steep stairs and can be seen from a great distance. It does not look Chinese and was put up for a visit by the Dalai Lama in the 17th-century (rebuilt in 1741).

I had lunch at the famous Fangshan Restaurant on the Islet, which is supposed to serve royal recipes with decor and service to match. I was seated at the high-class section. The price was steep, but the food, decor and service were inferior to a 3rd-rate restaurant in Hong Kong. My mouth was hurt by a small bone and I also found human hair in the food! While I was eating I heard a voice from the next table which I recognised: I looked and saw a musician-cum-high-ranking-official whom I had come across years ago at a festival, and whom I had avoided because of my dislike of his arrogant style of speech befitting high-ranking officials. Over the years many high-ranking officials in cultural establishments in China have been replaced, but he

GONGWANGFU

(see Beijing 6 November)



- ①花园正门 ②独乐峰 ③蝠池 ④安善堂
- ⑤福字碑 ⑥邀月台 ⑦蝠厅 ⑧梧桐院
- ⑨工艺品部 ⑩芭蕉院 ⑪戏楼 ⑫荷花院
- ⑬竹子院 ⑭明道斋 ⑮垂花门 ⑯书房
- ⑰棣华轩 ⑱小菜园 ⑲流杯亭 ⑳龙王庙
- ㉑狐仙庙 ㉒榆关 ㉓妙香亭 ㉔渡鹤桥
- ㉕韵花榭 ㉖湖心亭 ㉗益智斋 ㉘秋水山房

obviously was still in authority, for he was entertaining friends and relations at about £100 per head, and one of the guests presented him with a brocade flag embroidered with praises!

I then went to see Jingxinzhai - the mini-garden within Beihai and the pet project of the Emperor Qianlong. The garden may be mini for the royals but is of reasonable size. It is well situated: on its east, hills; west, Buddhist temple; south, water - all enhancing the views from outside and inside. It is divided into various inter-connected spaces and courtyards. Though there are plenty of beautifully designed buildings with wonderful furniture, they all complement the main feature which is the hills and ponds within and the views outside, so that they become part of nature. One of the ponds was designed in such a way that the water would emit a subtle sound to accompany and inspire the Emperor's guqin (ancient Chinese zither) playing. It is cosy, spiritual, calming and an ideal place for contemplation, reflection, music, poetry and painting.

In the afternoon I visited Gongwangfu (Prince Gong's Residence), which is within walking distance from Beihai Park. I had to go through several hutongs (narrow alleys) to find it. The hutongs in Beijing, which have so much character and charm could, with some repair work, certainly be a unique sight and a pleasure to visit: but what I saw on the way was poorly maintained hutongs and poverty. Gongwangfu belonged originally to Hekun, a good-looking and powerful courtier who was the Emperor Qianlong's favourite, and whose son married Qianlong's favourite daughter. He was reputed to be wealthier than the Emperor - hence the splendour of this residence. He was later executed by Qianlong's son who succeeded him, and the residence was later granted to Prince Gong. Gongwangfu was the place which most impressed me. I can well understand why it is reputed to be the model for Grand View Garden in Cao Xueqin's novel 'A dream of the Red Chamber' (a reason for the original version of this novel's being considered dangerous was that it told the story of the fall of a powerful family which involved the imperial family in some ways). The residence did not attract many tourists and is not in a very good condition. It is further vandalised by all the ugly and poorly-conditioned later and taller buildings and the tastelessly patched-up older buildings surrounding it - you can see them while you are inside the residence, thus destroying one of the important elements of Chinese gardens, namely the incorporation of the views of further beauty spots into the view of where you are. Unlike other gardens I had seen so far, this had a dominant area: a splendid building with large artificial hills on water - which is asymmetrically surrounded by twenty or so smaller areas or beauty spots all having their own special characters. The rocks I saw here I found more beautiful than those I saw in the palaces. I could well visualise 'The Dream of the Red Chamber' happening here, and I mentally assigned each area to a character in that novel. Somehow I felt that this residence was incomplete, and I was later told that some parts have already been altered and that there may be further demolition. Part of the residence is now used as a venue for exhibitions and operas, and the residence can be hired. I was thinking of the possibility of coming here again with colleagues involved in this project, to perform and capture visual images for projection. But the people supposed to work here could not be found, and I was not even able to buy any postcards.

I hired a taxi to go back to the hotel, and the driver just would not stop talking to me. Since I wanted to buy some fruit I asked him to stop in front of some fruit stalls; the moment I got out of the taxi a fruit-seller pounced on me as if I were his quarry. People nearby knew he was trying to rip me off, and just grinned and enjoyed the show. It was like a battle buying some fruit, and when I reached the hotel I felt depressed. I was tired of having to be on my guard all the time. Suddenly I understood why I found some people in Beijing ugly - greed and the intention to cheat made a face look ugly. That evening, I suffered from an eye haemorrhage.

Monday 7th November, Beijing

I had forgotten to include anti-biotic eye drops in my medical kit, so I went to a large local medicine store to get some for my eye haemorrhage. Prominent counters in the store were for medicines to enhance male sexual performance and to enlarge women's breasts. The woman who served me was a sniffing Miss Cross with dirty fingers. She impatiently showed me some orange tablets with a phial of liquid without instructions. I told her that I had just arrived from England and could not comprehend what to do with them. She became friendly and said I was to mix the tablets with the liquid and then apply to my eye. I was dubious about mixing eye drops, and was worried that I might end up with an orange eye, so I asked her whether she had any

imported eye drops. She said I would have to go to another store which sold only imported medicines, and showed me some ordinary eye drops in a low-quality plastic bottle - I was to pierce the bottle with a needle and apply. I bought a couple which cost less than one penny. I then went to the store selling imported medicine; again, prominent displays of male sexual performance enhancement and boob enlargement medicines, but no eye drops.

I then went to a post office to post back to London materials collected for this project. They first had to be inspected, then I had to pay for packaging. There was a spittoon near the counter for people to get rid of whatever they didn't want from inside their bodies, and the smell was nauseating. While I was waiting a young woman started to use the spittoon in a disgraceful manner. People in China seem to need to get rid of something from their throats or noses all the time - possibly due to perpetual infections of those parts. But by depositing such matter everywhere, not only is it a disgusting sight but also it helps to spread infection and creates a vicious circle. Most Chinese overseas do not have such habits: why can't the government and the people do something about it? When the parcels were packed I was told to take them to another counter for weighing. While the young lady was serving me a number of men kept placing their arms and legs in front of me, shouting what they wanted at the same time. The young lady frowned and tried to serve them all. Suddenly I exploded: "How come none of you has a sense of order! Even the capital of the country does not have order!" - Silence. Then the man who had inspected the materials took my parcels and asked some other member of staff who was not serving to carry out the procedure.

Meeting with Joanna Burke, British Embassy Cultural and Education Section (ie British Council, Beijing), who provided useful information and contacts.

Meeting with Mme Gong Xiaozhuang, China International Cultural Exchange Centre. She arranges overseas arts events in China, and was interested in the project and suggested a possible venue.

Both meetings took place in the Chaoyang District, not far from one of the two main embassy compounds. This part does look like just any of the international big cities, and is cleaner and more orderly. Mme Gong told me most of the buildings (skyscrapers) are new (the result of the open market policy?). I then visited a supermarket catering for Westerners. It was so relaxing not having to argue about prices - but I could still find no eye drops! Sex is still taboo in China. Are these sex and boob medicines really in demand? I didn't see anyone buying them.

Tuesday 8th November - Beijing

Central Institute of Fine Arts:

Meeting with Zhu Zhu, Director of Foreign Affairs Office - discussion on administrative matters (her areas).

Meeting with Tian Miao, General Manager of the Gallery - interested in the project and said he could see to venue, all facilities and manpower required, if there is sufficient financial backing.

Visited the Gallery and saw Exhibition of Test - oil paintings by four contemporary artists from Northeast China (Manchus).

Chinese Culture Promotion Society Division of Cultural Exchange:

Meeting with Chief Pan Young who has staged Chinese events in the UK several times, and Deputy Chief Xu Shen - both interested in the project and asked for a copy of preliminary information. Discussion of practicalities, and suggested I should consider staging it in the provinces.

Provided information about their organisation.

China Central Television:

Reception arrangements at the station completely chaotic and unpleasant, making me tired and angry.

Meeting with Ding Yuping, Foreign Language Programme Department: she is tall, beautiful, and dressed like models in Town and Country (English magazine). She is a presenter and a

smart lady from Shanghai. She was interested to interview me but by then, apart from a red eye and cuts and bruises on my forehead, my face was like sandpaper and I had other skin problems due to Beijing being so dry and dusty. I was not keen to appear on television - and there was hardly time, anyway.

I learned about possible slots for transmitting video recordings of this project, and of Ding's section's connection with the BBC.

Meeting with Peng Xiu Wen, Director of China Broadcasting Corporation Art Troupe, Principal Conductor of the China Broadcasting Traditional Orchestra, composer of Chinese traditional music - he would like to bring his orchestra and his music to the West.

Had a long telephone conversation with Lou Jiaben, an artist who incorporates Chinese myths into his paintings, whose works have been exhibited in the West. He was interested in this project and said he also intended to stage an arts event related to Chinese landscape gardens.

Wednesday 9th November - Beijing-Ningbo

Got up very early to catch a plane for Ningbo - a city near the mouth of the Yangzi River, in the smallest but prosperous province Zhejiang. Though the hotel in Beijing is listed as three stars, the staff are poorly trained. I was annoyed to discover too late, that many people I wanted to see were not able to reach me due to their not knowing my room number - the hotel staff refused to put them through or take messages, and also a fax from the British Council in Shanghai containing useful information was not passed on to me. One of the hotel staff named Wang who seemed smarter than her colleagues, volunteered to book a taxi to the airport for me, and I was surprised that she also accompanied me there. She told me her mother is Mongolian and lives in (Inner?) Mongolia. Whenever Wang feels unhappy, she just goes to look at the vast grasslands there, and feels better. She said she's too young to get married (illegal before the age of 26) and likes working in Beijing. She advised that she could make travelling arrangements for me in future. She appeared to know the driver, and I was charged one third more than if I had hired the taxi myself!

The check-in for internal flights was chaotic - though passengers did form lines, while I was being seen to, those from behind started to put their luggage on the scale, or thrust their tickets/documents forward, or ask questions. The ground hostess frowned and irritably tried to serve many passengers at the same time. I was allocated a window seat near the wing. The man who sat in the middle would not budge and expected me to climb over him. I had no wish to have physical contact with him. One week in Beijing had made me lose my mild manner, and I yelled "If you do not come out, how can I get to my seat?" As I seemed fierce and was holding up other passengers boarding the plane, he succumbed but was not pleased. I once read a story from the Ming period about a beautiful and talented girl, who got lost while escaping from war and was sold to a brothel by a neighbour. The madam got her drunk and sold her virginity to a rich man. She wanted marriage and refused clients. Another madam who came to persuade her to stay said that her beauty and talents would make her a high-class courtesan. She could then take her time to choose the right man to settle down with (most likely as a concubine) while enjoying life. But if she would not succumb to the wishes of the madam, not being a virgin, she would not be wanted as a wife, and would only end up with a man with bad breath, a foul-smelling face or worse. In the past I had not come across anyone with a foul-smelling face, but the man next to me certainly had one. To avoid the smell, I turned my face towards the window and saw a hole in the wing! I suddenly remembered a member of CST (China Travel Services) staff advising me to believe in destiny when we talked about Chinese airlines' poor safety record for internal flights. Since the hole looked as if it had been there for some time, I assumed a jet must be able to fly with a hole in its wing.

Arrived in Ningbo but no one from CTS came to meet me. The building for arrivals did not have a telephone, toilet, any facilities or staff. I walked to Departures three times to use the pay-phone, but was told each time someone had already come for me. After waiting for nearly two hours, I yelled down the phone and demanded they should send someone immediately or I would seek financial compensation. Within ten minutes, a mini bus came to collect me. The driver kept turning round to talk to me while driving. I asked him to look ahead but he said he knew the roads very well. Though the roads had prominent "Do not use horn" signs, drivers use them all the time, and the noise was unbearable. Due to the free market policy and development by investors, Ningbo was like a building site. Originally I intended to visit the

temples, but by the time I reached the hotel, it was too late, so I went to see Tianyige which was within walking distance of the hotel.

Tianyige was Fanqin's private library. He was a Ming minister whose integrity kept getting him into trouble with those in power. After his resignation, he devoted himself to Tianyige and his collection of books - including his own publications. Not only is Tianyige well-known for its collections, and the architectural design and system devised for the protection of books, it is also well-known for the dignified beauty of its buildings and garden. The main structure is a two-storey longish building in six sections, with gardens in the front and back. The mansard roofs with black tiles slant downward then curve up steeply pointing at the sky. The position of the building in relation to the sun, the windows in the front and back, and the pond surrounded by charming rocks, all serve the purposes of avoiding damp and heat, as well as to extinguish fires. The water was clear with fish swimming in it. Next to the pond, there are well-designed artificial hills with bamboos and narrow curvy lanes leading to a Chinese summer house at the top and other beauty spots below. An ancient tree adds further charm.

Bought a silk shirt covered with dust in a shop catering for tourists on my way back, as it was rather hot. The windowless-private bathroom in my hotel room has no bath but a shower without shower curtain. After having a shower, the bathroom was completely flooded. There was a lingering mouldy smell in this "bathroom" en suite, which made me feel ill and prevented me from sleeping.

Thursday 10th November, Ningbo - Putuoshan

Hired a taxi to catch the early morning boat for Putuoshan. The driver was a woman and her seat was surrounded by metal railings so it looked as if she was driving in a cage. I was glad to see a woman driver, but saddened by her cheating me by taking a much longer route than necessary. The boat journey takes five hours and I was rather looking forward to it, for I had always enjoyed boat trips in the past. Though I paid CTS for a soft-seat (i.e. first class), I was given a second class ticket and was told to pay for the difference once I was on board so as to obtain a soft-seat. However, none was available and I was stuck in a second class compartment. There were two such compartments with about two hundred seats each. Tickets were sold according to seat numbers - so a little less than two hundred passengers were crowded into one, while the other was locked. The four corners of the compartment each had a television set - all switched on to their top volume so that the sound became distorted. There were "No smoking", "Do not spit" and "Do not discard rubbish on the floor" notices, but nearly all the men smoked, everyone spat and threw whatever they did not want on the floor. The passive smoking, noise and filth were too much for me, so I went outside, but was confronted by the foul smell of the toilets, situated between the two compartments. I retreated to the deck but there was nowhere one could sit. I was travelling down a river into Hangzhou Bay towards the sea, but I had never seen water looking so ugly. Passengers on the deck smoked, spat, threw rubbish and used the river as a dustbin as well as toilet - some stood right in front of my face to perform such acts. I was aware that my anger was mounting to a dangerous point. Before I visited China, I had thought Communism was a high ideal. In less than ten days, I had come across some of the least self-respecting but most disrespectful, inconsiderate, unlaw-abiding, greedy and dishonest people that I had ever encountered in my whole life. It hurt to see Chinese behaving like this. Most of these people are under fifty - i.e. born and bred under a communist regime. In comparison with other ethnic Chinese societies such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, China is the worst managed. To avoid the maddening crowd, I went to the side of the deck facing the sun (unlike the British, most Chinese do not enjoy sun bathing) - good thing I was wearing the silk shirt I bought the day before, as it was really hot. There was a Shanghainese couple there - also trying to avoid the crowd. The wife, Qu, talked to me, and kindly offered me her improvised seat. I conversed with them gladly, as I stuck out like a sore thumb and had attracted unwanted attention - my talking to them had lessened these people's curiosity.

Putuoshan is an island in the East China Sea, just off Hangzhou Bay and below the mouth of the Yangzi. It is one of the four famous Buddhist Shans (Mounts) in China, and is well-known for its landscape, unspoilt environment, good weather, association with Buddhism, and as a retreat. It is supposed to be the China most Westerners dream about - temples, pagodas, arched bridges, narrow alleys, fishing boats and monks, and is small enough for one to reach

everywhere on foot. I was interested in this place because Buddhism is an important element in Chinese gardens, and I was also in need of peace and quiet. Unfortunately Putuoshan has become an attraction for Chinese tourists, and is not lacking in noise, filth, newly built ugly concrete buildings, arrangements for tourists such as karaoke and vulgar decoration. One pays to enter the island, different areas, every building worth seeing and every tourist spot. Even Chinese subjects are charged Construction Tax, and the taxis are the most expensive in China. I went to the CTS office to collect my soft-seat return boat ticket. The manager was watching television and very arrogant. Seeing that I had a piece of paper in my hand, he barked: "Hand over!" I told him it was not for him and asked him a couple of questions - he simply carried on watching television and completely ignored me!

The hotel is next to the well-known Universal Benefit Meditation Temple, and is a small old building with style and charm, having a centre court suitable for landscape gardening - but the whole place suffered from bad management. Underwear and other washing decorated the corridors and courtyard. There were insects in my room, the headboards of the twin-beds were dirty, and the private bathroom had obviously been used by a previous guest who did not understand how to use Western-styled toilets. The hotel staff could not comprehend my request that the bathroom should be cleaned again.

I spent the afternoon admiring the east side of the island which seemed to be less crowded. It is naturally beautiful, and the sound of the sea was music to my ears. Buddhist buildings are dotted here and there. I particularly studied the images of Guanyin - Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva presented in female form in China, who has become the powerful goddess of great mercy and compassion. When I was a child I was told Guanyin had male (i.e. unbound) feet - a reward for her saintly work and I wondered what if a woman did not bind her feet in the first place? Guanyin has not suffered from sexual discrimination in China, and it is believed that she saves all those who suffer. I have been collecting her majestic images for this project - as the basis for a performance through dance and visual art. While I was buying sutras in a temple, the monk who served me killed flies and his colleagues watched indifferently - so much for the number one Buddhism commandment: Thou shall not kill! I sat in the courtyard of the Literary Material Hall and listened to Buddhist music until closing time. As Buddhism is associated with special vegan food, I tried a local eating place specialising in this, but the food was not at all tasty. On my way back I came across Qu and her husband. She told me they were staying in a clean and expensive hotel. Since they had a three-bedded room and I was not pleased with my hotel, she invited me to spend the night with them. I good-humouredly declined the offer, saying that the police might come to inspect in the night to find out what two women and one man were doing in a hotel room, but she said I need not worry as her brother is a police chief. I explained then I had already paid and could not cancel the room. She then asked me to get in touch and offered me hospitality in Shanghai.

I decided to have an early night but had to get up because someone kept ringing my door bell. When I opened the door, three hotel staff charged in, and intended to remove the bedding of one of the beds for the use of another client. I forbade them to do so as I had paid for both beds (though neither was satisfactory - the one near the bathroom because of the smell; the one near the window because of the noise, especially the disgusting sound made by men when they spit) and might have to swap beds during the night. They left the room without apologizing for disturbing me at night, and this hotel is listed as highly recommended!

Friday 11th November, Putuoshan - Ningbo

In the morning I visited various tourist attractions: Heart-Character Stone, Delicately Balanced Rock, Two-Turtle Rock, Guanyin Cave... in an area called West Heaven. This involved climbing unending and steep stone steps winding up the mountain, and I realized how unfit I was. My heart beat violently because of the endeavour - the fact that "up West Heaven" means death in Chinese slang was a comforting thought! I was glad there was a stream of people ascending or descending, as I was stalked by a dubious character who had paid me unwanted attention on the boat the day before. For his benefit, every time I had to take a rest (which was often), I pointed the camera at something so as not to show my lack of physical strength. I was inspired by the image of the Two-Turtle Rock: two smaller rocks on a large one, looking like two turtles climbing up a rock. Legend says these two turtles were so captivated by Buddha who sat on the rock preaching, that they forgot to perform their duties for their master

Sea-Dragon-King, who in his fury made them stick on the rock. This can be the basis for a dance and visual art performance involving young people. Many temples in Putuoshan date back to the Ming and Qing dynasties, and I saw magnificent and awe-inspiring idols, with visitors kneeling in front of them asking for blessings. The old world charm of the villages brought back happy memories - I had lived in one as a child in Hong Kong, before development wiped it out.

Being in the soft-seat compartment for the return boat journey saved me from passive smoking, and no one spat there. I put cotton wool in my ears to combat the noise of the televisions. Back in the hotel in Ningbo, I demanded a bathroom with a bath, and was moved to a rather elegant bathroom en suite. I rang up CTS and told them not only had I discovered I was vastly over-charged for all arrangements in Ningbo and Putuoshan, but also that what I had been through was unacceptable, and demanded a refund. The staff handled my complaint badly, so I told them I would inform CTS in Beijing and London. I then blew my top, slammed down the phone and suffered from a sore throat as a result of my shouting. While I was having supper, two CTS staff came to see me in the restaurant and said they would charge me a few pounds less!

That evening a fax from Guo Pei Jian, Deputy Director of the China National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, was finally passed on to me - though one of the hotel staff had written on it: "Checked, no such Client!" I telephoned Hangzhou and discovered that they had been trying to contact me since I had arrived in Beijing, but I knew nothing of it as the hotel staff did not inform me or pass on the fax. Guo offered to meet me at the station. I thanked him and said I would telephone if CTS did not send someone to meet me.

Saturday 12th November, Ningbo - Hangzhou

The buffet breakfast at the hotel included a good collection of Chinese snacks and dianxin (dim sum) which pacified me somewhat. The cashier appeared to be unaccustomed to English money. During my stay in China, I gained the impression that the US dollar is the most acceptable currency there. Again, I intended to visit the temples before leaving for Hangzhou in the afternoon, but the entire morning was wasted in waiting for CTS to deliver the soft-seat ticket which I had booked before leaving London. CTS in Ningbo appears to be run by young graduates who want to make "quick bucks", but do not know how to run a business and have no concept of time. They are not a bit harsh, but they ruined my plans for Ningbo. Finally a young graduate came to the hotel to deliver the ticket. He hired a good quality taxi and even paid for the fare. He wanted to keep in touch with me in the future.

Apart from a Chinese man who kept making a disgraceful noise because of catarrh, the soft-seat compartment of the train for Hangzhou was occupied mainly by Japanese who behaved very well. They had brought with them Japanese and Chinese refreshments which were passed around regularly, and rubbish was put in the rubbish tray or collected in a bag. Most Chinese do not like Japanese because of the war, and do not appreciate the Japanese way or behaviour - but I have always felt that maybe the Chinese should look at the Japanese in the light of a people retaining and respecting some valuable ancient Chinese culture which was discarded by the Chinese. To my surprise, the Japanese included me in their sharing of refreshments (but not the catarrh man). Since I am a composer and had visited Japan some years ago, and the lady who sat opposite me had been to London and had a musical daughter, we started talking - mostly through a Japanese-Putonghua interpreter, as my Japanese is very limited. The views during the journey were uninteresting, and railtracks were covered with litter all the way.

The Surprise of Hangzhou

The minute I stepped out from the compartment on to the platform in Hangzhou, a nice young man from CTS was waiting for me. He was respectful and said they had already made good arrangements for my hotel and onward journey. The driver was respectful and drove carefully. I was booked into a nicely furnished room in the hotel I had requested. The hotel is situated just off the shore of the famous beauty spot West Lake (Xihu). I was told that, before it was changed into a hotel, this was used by high government officials. I think it is still used by a number of them, as there is a sentry box at the gate, and a soldier checks all entries. It is like a campus, with nice, unpretentious and small buildings scattered amongst a vast and charming

garden, which is enhanced by the view of the lake. It is also secluded. Here I finally found my much needed peace and quiet.

Had a meeting with Liu Ching in the impressive hotel foyer in the evening. He is a young university lecturer and journalist. I was impressed by his sincerity, friendliness and open-mindedness. We discussed the possible publicity for this project, and other matters related to the media in Hangzhou.

Sunday 13th November, The Surprise of Hangzhou

Got up early so as to admire the lake view from the hotel. The Chinese style buffet breakfast was satisfying. It was misty and I could only see a few yards ahead, but the air was fresh, and the water was as beautiful as that which I saw in the Summer Palace in Beijing - jade-like but soft and warm looking, and I just felt I could carve a chunk out of it to embrace and caress and take away with me. Then it started to rain for the first time in forty days, and it rained heavily.

Had a meeting with Guo Pei Jian, Deputy Director of Foreign Affairs, at the China National Academy of Fine Arts. This establishment has changed names several times since it was formed in 1928 by the famous aesthete and progressive educationalist Cai Yuanpei, who had studied in France and Germany (when I was at school, a teacher told us that people who had met him were amazed that he neglected his personal appearance despite a love for beauty). The Academy is known for its standard and contemporary art, is generally regarded as the best fine arts establishment in China, and has attracted a large number of foreign students as well as visitors and researchers world-wide. The campus is not particularly inspiring, but Guo is good-looking and refined. Talking to him, I suddenly realized that I was in the area called Jiangnan - literally the south of the Yangzi, but which is usually referred to as the area of northern Zhejiang (which includes Hangzhou) and southern Jiangsu provinces. The area is well known for its good-looking, refined and intelligent people. I appreciated Guo's openness in admitting that there were aspects of the project he could not comprehend, and realistically informing me of difficulties I might encounter, together with his helpful suggestions. He also showed an appreciation of me and my work. He then gave me a guided tour of the campus and the gallery nearby, which had an area suitable for staging live performances or workshops. Later I was introduced to Professor Lufang (famous for his woodcuts) who gave me a copy of a collection of his works. Afterwards I was treated to a nice lunch of seafood for which the area is famous, and was given further books and information about the Academy.

After lunch, Leung Chuan, a member of the teaching staff, showed me Hangzhou. I like his works and also him as a person. Though he is in the department of prints, his work has elements of collage and cannot be neatly pigeon-holed, and he thus encounters problems with bureaucracy from time to time. He had sympathy for my work as I also suffer from similar circumstances. Westerners probably know about Hangzhou through Marco Polo's description of it as one of the most splendid cities of the 13th century (I had attended a lecture given by Dr Frances Wood before I left for China: according to her research, Marco Polo never went to China - quite interesting, this). It is an ancient city which had risen to prominence when the Grand Canal reached it at the start of the 7th century, and later became the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty. It has experienced many wars that have almost reduced it to ashes. It is now the capital of Zhejiang, and is famous for its West Lake surrounded by hills, gardens, pavilions and temples; all of which have evoked poetry, paintings, myths; and legends for centuries. As it was still raining, Leung comforted me by reminding me that Hangzhou is worth seeing in the rain. The West lake (Xihu) is often metaphored as the great beauty Xizi (West Lady), and to see West Lake in the rain is metaphored as watching the beauty bathing. The air was fresh, Hangzhou looked clean, and maybe due to the rain, not many people were to be seen. We had an extensive tour.

Six Harmonies Pagoda and River Qiantang

A massive thirteen-storey pagoda which stands on Yuelen Hill above Qiantang near the famous and massive modern bridge. Qiantang is well-known for its tidal bore which thundered up in mid-September, and its connection with myths and historical events.

The Tea Plantation

Hangzhou is well-known for high quality tea, and I had never seen tea bushes before. The plants are not tall but mushroom-shaped. The plantation is orderly with buildings in good condition, as people in the tea business are prosperous.

A bamboo path at Clouds Linger

This was the most beautiful spot I saw in China. Unlike the complexity of most Chinese beauty spots, this is basically a wide, long and curvy stone-paved path flanked by endless, very tall but not over-crowded bamboos. The rain enhanced the green, and gave me the illusion that the leaves were dripping jade drops.

The peak that flew from afar

Legend has it that an Indian monk who saw this feature in the 3rd century said it looked exactly like one in India, and asked when it had flown to China. It is about 200 metres high, with ancient-looking trees and unusual rocks, and about 300 statues chiselled from the 10th to 14th centuries, on the rocky walls in many caves.

Temple of inspired seclusion

Built in 326 AD this temple is hidden amongst a sea of green woods and clear waters, with magnificent and ancient statues, pagodas, pavilions and halls. I was told that the locals surrounded the temple in circles during the Cultural Revolution to prevent Red Guards from destroying it - thus blissfully it does not have replicas to replace those which were destroyed by the Red Guards like other temples. Seeing such treasures that no replica can replace made me once again doubt the wisdom of those who made policies to destroy everything of the past. Though it is called "Seclusion", it was packed with people asking for blessings from magnificent idols, just as the many other temples in China.

Guo Zhuang

Tianyige in Ningbo gave me the first taste of "Yuanlin" - the style of private landscape gardens in Jiangnan (south of the Yangzi). This manor of Guo further educated me in the concept. Such gardens are often situated in inner-cities, but compactly reflecting nature as well as the spirituality of the creators, and capturing the essence of painting and poetry. My observations made me increasingly feel that the concept of Yuanlin can be successfully incorporated into this project. Guo Zhuang seemed to be a popular venue for local functions, and my observations included a Western style white wedding.

Xiling seal-engraving society

This beauty spot with unpretentious architectural designs was built in 1904 for the preservation (including collection) of the art of seal engraving. There is a mini eleven-storey pagoda, with engraving of sutras and the eighteen Luohans (visually awe-inspiring deities).

Temple of Ji Gong

The abundant anecdotes of Ji Gong, the deified eccentric and unconventional monk, can be used as the basis for a dance and visual art performance involving young people.

Yue Fei's tomb

The burial ground of this patriotic Southern Song general has trees, statues of animals and ceremonial figures in ancient style, and several buildings. The statues of Yue and his son, and murals depicting him, are in the halls. Outside are the statues of Qin Gui and his wife, kneeling and in chains, and surrounded by metal railings (for their protection? - it is known that in the past visitors sometimes spat on them, or hit them with umbrellas...). Qin, the then Southern Song premier, is believed to be responsible for framing Yue and the execution of father and son. When I was at school, I was told that an opera singer portrayed Qin so well, that he was stabbed to death by a member of the audience during a performance. His killer had a copy of "The Story of Yue Fei" which was full of holes - in his anger, he had torn out the words "Qin Gui" every time they appeared. Some present day historians consider Qin as the scape-goat and puppet of the real culprit - the then Southern Song Emperor. At that time, the Jurchen invaders occupied the northern half of Song and captured two emperors (the Southern Song Emperor's father and

brother). Yue's successes against the invaders might have freed the captives, brought complication to his reign, and affected the new capital status of the prosperous and beautiful Hangzhou which he loved. Yue symbolizes patriotism, and sometimes the hate of foreign powers. Yue wrote a very popular poem expressing his patriotic feelings, in which he extolled eating "hulurou" (foreign invaders' flesh). I was told the Chinese dish "gulurou" obtained its name from "hulurou". It seems ironic that "gulurou" is favoured by foreigners, and is known as "sweet and sour pork".

Level-lake-autumn-moon

A terrace of about 400 square metres extends into the lake and is famous for the views in Autumn, when it flushes with the surface of the mirror-like lake under a bright full moon. There is an octagonal Pavilion, a hall with views on four sides, and calligraphy by Emperor Kangxi.

The West Lake

As the boatmen had stopped working when we reached there at 4pm, we saw part of the lake on foot or by driving near the bank.

The extra excitement of the day was finding out too late that I had a counterfeit banknote (the water mark was a worker instead of Mao) in the change. A local cashier said not only would I not be compensated, but the police would mark down my passport number, and it was her duty to report me to the police for showing her a counterfeit. She did not report me, however, but advised me to keep it as a souvenir instead. Meeting with Hale Man in the evening, who handed me the research and development work carried out in Hangzhou by her and Neil McConnon. The locals said there are unpleasant people and things in Hangzhou but I just so happened not to come across them. They also said they thought that some of my experiences elsewhere had made me appreciate Hangzhou. The rain might have something to do with it - for this was the only place where it rained when I was in China, and things went well for me there. I remembered when I visited Windsor for the first time, it was rainy and misty, and it looked like fairyland. When I visited Windsor again, it was sunny and packed with tourists, and the magic was gone. However, Hangzhou made me feel more positive about China, and has influenced some of my decisions for this project.

Monday 14th November, Hangzhou - Suzhou

CTS Hangzhou had booked a soft seat on the upper deck (the most comfortable way of travelling in China) for me, and the train journey to Suzhou was pleasant. A businessman and a businesswoman from Hong Kong sat behind me. They talked about business deals of astronomical monetary figures and some of the hassles and ridiculous situations which they had encountered in China.

Suzhou is an ancient city with a history of about 2,500 years, and is known for its beautiful women, as well as being the 'Garden City, Venice of the East'. The canals I saw would have been a pleasant sight, had the locals been educated in caring for the environment. Suzhou is small, not prosperous-looking, and somewhat provincial like Putuoshan - at both places, I was questioned repeatedly by strangers about my husband; and the reasons for my eating, seeing places, and staying in a hotel on my own. I did not find the women particularly beautiful. I came here for its Yuanlin - the art of landscape gardening in Jiangnan.

I started by visiting Wangshiyuan (Garden of the Angler or Master of the Nets). This is the smallest (1.5 acres) yet the most exquisite and pleasing of all Suzhou gardens. "The Ming Hall" in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art is a miniature model of one of the halls here. This residential garden was built in the Southern Song Dynasty, and was renamed and restored by its different owners. Though it is basically divided into two parts - residential buildings and the landscape garden - each building is adorned with creepers, foliage and corners reflecting nature; and the landscape garden is adorned with beautiful buildings. Each area of water, though small, was designed so that one can see in it the much larger counterpart in nature. The poetic name for each area sharpens one's awareness of its particular beauty as well as its practical purpose. Wherever one looks, the view is that of a Chinese landscape painting; each window is like a framed painting; and when one moves, the paintings change into other equally beautiful paintings - it is like experiencing a kaleidoscope of Chinese paintings. Zhang Daqian, a famous

and successful artist of Chinese landscape painting of this century, once lived here (probably before his emigration to Brazil) - lucky devil! I was told that he was a robber as a young man - quite unique amongst famous artists!

The close-knit layout without appearing cramped; delicate workmanship such as beautiful lattice-work and pattern-paving; and most of all, the fusion of nature, architecture, poetry and painting reflecting refined taste, make this a masterpiece of "Nature in a nutshell". Wangshiyuan can serve as a blueprint for this project.

Wangshiyuan is meant for rare plants and luxuriant greenery, but the locals put in the garden rows of low quality flowerpots with flowers of clashing colours. They further decorate the buildings with coloured light bulbs and vulgar lanterns. While I was admiring a particularly beautiful pond, a man squatted down and deposited what he did not want in his nose into the water. In China, government officials are often described as the parents of the people. Why don't these parents educate their offspring? The souvenir shop also sells prints made by local wood-block artists, and books about Yuanlin. Noticing I was not impressed by the merchandise, the man who worked there - an artist who had given up because he could not make a living from his artistic work - showed me his own collection which was not on display. This included a very good book on the art of Yuanlin. I bought the book and a few other useful items for this project. He said more people came to see Wangshiyuan at night - for the coloured lights and live performances.

Tuesday 15th November, Suzhou

I visited three famous Yuanlins:

Humble Administrator's Garden (Zhuozheng Yuan)

This is the largest and considered by many to be Suzhou's second-best garden (after Wangshiyuan). It is like a large park with large lakes, and reminded me much less of nature than Wangshiyuan. One of the halls here is now "Museum of the Art of Yuanlin". I spent much time there to further educate myself the concepts of Yuanlin.

Lion Grove (Shizilin)

This was constructed in the 14th century by Buddhist monks as a memorial to their master, and is a good example of Yuan Dynasty architecture. It has an atmosphere of antiquity, is unpretentious, and famous for its rockeries that evoke leonine forms. China is not a habitat for lions, and to the Chinese, a lion is a legendary animal which looks like a large-size Pekinese (literally "lion dog"). In fact, the rocks do not look like lions or Pekinese, and that is why Lion Grove is a high quality Yuanlin - it evokes one's imagination. The area of rocks and caves with narrow winding paths is like a labyrinth in nature, and I lost my way.

Blue Wave Pavilion (Canglangting)

This was once the residence of Han Shizhong, a famous Southern Song general who married a famous, talented and courageous courtesan. Legend has it that his wife accompanied him in battles and beat the battle drums, and that her drum-beating had the effect of discouraging the invaders (the basis of a traditional operatic number). I was most aware of the element of water in this oldest garden in Suzhou (11th century). The inside has winding creeks and artificial hills, the edge of the garden merges with the canals - and you look from the pool immediately outside to the distant hills. This, a good example of creating optical illusions with the scenery both outside and inside. Unfortunately, the outside view includes many ugly later buildings (city planning?!). The luxuriant trees and other wild-looking plants enhance the illusion of natural surroundings such as forests and mountains. There is also a double corridor - i.e. a corridor divided in the middle by a thin wall with windows so that one sees different views walking along the different halves, and the view is enhanced by what one sees through the window onto the other side.

Taxi drivers in Suzhou never use the metres, and one has to establish the fare before setting out - probably because Suzhou is small, taxis are not in great demand, and this is the only way for drivers to earn enough to live. A driver told me the terror of persecution: people were encouraged to persecute and struggle against each other; one would suddenly, out of the blue, for no reason at all, be persecuted. I think a lot of the undesirable things I saw during my visit in China are the result of this destructive and unloving culture.

I intended to visit Wangshiyuan again in the night - not for the coloured lights, but for this experience of seeing live performances in a garden. First, I went to a post office which opens well into the night, to post back to London material collected for this project. The postage was about 300 dollars, but that post office only had one-dollar or two-dollar stamps. The parcel was completely covered with stamps - looking like a Christmas present, and I had to pay for the weight of the stamps as well! The young lady who served me was pretty and had the Suzhou mellifluous voice. She was gentle and helpful, but the procedures took nearly two hours. I was exhausted and decided to have an early night instead.

Wednesday 16th November, Suzhou - Shanghai

While I was waiting for the train to Shanghai, an American Chinese of Suzhou origin talked to me. He said that many Chinese had lost the art of cooking.

Apart from some improvised dwellings in an appalling condition near the rail tracks, Shanghai appears to be more prosperous and better managed than the other cities I have visited. I find Shanghainese women good-looking: tall, with fair complexions, they move with a natural grace and understand the art of fashion and make-up. The hotel, though only one year old, is already not in a good condition, and I was appalled to find human hair and skin on the carpet - the result of low-power vacuum cleaners and an all-Chinese management. I was told that hotels owned by a partnership of Chinese and non-Chinese subjects are usually better managed.

I paid a visit to the famous Mandarin Garden (Yuyuan). Despite a museum in this garden which dates back to the Ming Dynasty, there is nothing of historical interest left due to the destruction of wars. The latter-day garden and the shopping area are in very good condition. A guidebook describes the area as a Disneyland version of ancient China, but I quite enjoyed it, especially for being told off for entering a building reserved for Waibin (guests from outside China) - the only time I was mistaken for a local. The garden in its present form is often criticized for being a little pretentious. For example, wavy walls in a garden are supposed to symbolise mountains, but here, the wavy walls have become dragon walls. It is rather spectacular to see these huge wavy dragons in the garden, but this is considered to be gimmicky according to the art of Yuanlin, for there is no room for the imagination. The garden is like everywhere else in China - far too many people. A local said that Mao made the mistake of encouraging the growth of population, believing more people would accomplish more. But instead, there are now more mouths to feed, and the people suffer from poverty because of over-population.

Not far from the Mandarin garden is a temple called Chenxiang Ge which was built in the Ming Dynasty. It was a prominent temple before the Cultural Revolution. It is undergoing renovation, and will be one of the biggest temples for Buddhist nuns. The name of the temple derived from a Ming Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy and Compassion) statue of chenxiang wood, which would emit fragrance whenever it rained. The replica is not yet finished, but there are other quarters of Buddhist interest for me to see. I was entertained by Abbot Guan-Xing (literally observing human nature) who is in her eighties and rather authoritative. I was told by a guest there that the Abbot's masculine-looking disciple, the Chief Nun Chang-Jing (perpetual quietness) was once an actress. I was introduced to Guan-Xing's guest Shiweiding (Buddha alone is my calm), an eloquent and high-ranking nun from the Guanyin Temple in Taiwan.

Had a meeting at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music with the President Jiang Ming-Dun, Vice-President Wang Jian-Zhong, and Director of Foreign Affairs Zhang Xian-Ping; and was provided with information about the Conservatory. The campus has many European style buildings - relics of the International Settlement (an area once governed by the British and other European powers). While I was strolling, a local told me during the Cultural Revolution, a member of staff committed suicide here, another went mad there....

I visited the Gallery of Oriental Musical Instruments which is under the Conservatory. It has a large collection of Chinese instruments, and replicas of ancient instruments. The Curator, Lin Pei-An said that I was welcome to record the sounds of the instruments or to capture these images on film.

Thursday 17th November, Shanghai - Hong Kong

In the morning I had a meeting with Peter Grout, Regional Director of the British Council, at the Cultural and Education Section of British Consulate-General, which is in the busy and prestigious Huai Hai Zhong Lu. Peter Grout has been living in China for more than ten years and is very sympathetic towards the Chinese. He was friendly and helpful, and provided useful contacts, and other useful information and advice. He suggested my going to the top floor of the building so as to have a bird's-eye view. I did that and was enchanted by the sight of a fusion of buildings: Chinese, modern, and various charming and impressive European styles of the past (some with gardens).

In the afternoon I visited Longhua Temple which is famous for its ancient Longhua Pagoda (10th century). Maybe China is no longer a welfare state because of the free market policy - there was a crowd of beggars outside the entrance of the temple. I gave some money to one of them - a handicapped child - as Chinese society is not well-known for being kind to those who suffer from misfortune. I have always thought that the superstition that being hit by a blind person's stick will bring bad luck, was invented to protect the blind so that bullies will leave them alone. Then I remembered a story about gangsters kidnapping and maiming children, and forcing them to beg so as to make money. The temple consists of impressive buildings and some statuary of ferocious figures, and is enjoying a thriving business like all the other temples I have visited. People donate generously to the temples - in the hope of Buddhas, gods and goddesses rewarding them far more than their donations. The Abbot was not in, but Wong Yong-Ping, the First Deputy Director of the temple, showed me the Abbot's private reception hall, which is clean and pleasant, with some valuable cultural items, and some vulgar shiny paper decoration. One of the halls was packed with ling-pai (spirit tablets) - a ling-pai is a flat piece of wood with the deceased person's name on it. It is believed that the spirit dwells there - i.e. a mobile mini coffin. In Kung-Fu and ghost stories, one carries the ling-pai when setting out to avenge a death, and places it on an improvised altar (such as a desk) before killing the culprit. It was a bit hair-raising to see so many of them there. I was surprised to see one of them belonging to Dr Sun Yatsen - generally regarded as the father of democratic China.

Lin Pei-An, the Curator of the Gallery of Oriental Musical Instruments, is a Buddhist. He gave me some Buddhist literature, and introduced me to Professor Tan Derui and Tan's assistant Huang-Long (literally yellow dragon, meaning emperor), whose name would have invited death in Imperial China. Professor Tan is the Vice-Chief of the Science of Conservation and Archaeology at the Shanghai Museum. The museum has a fair collection of bronzes, ceramics and paintings. He said I was welcome to capture the images of museum exhibits with my camera.

When I arrived at the airport for my night flight to Hong Kong, the ground-hostess said my name was not on the passengers list, as I had not telephoned 72 hours prior to the flight. My ticket had been issued and confirmed before my leaving for China, and no one at CTS (China Travel Services) had ever told me to telephone. Not getting on that flight would have caused me many problems. Other passengers from Hong Kong comforted me, and I was finally allocated a stand-by seat. I had never felt so happy about going back to Hong Kong before - I felt peaceful, knowing that no more ridiculous situations would descend on me. The night view of Hong Kong from the plane was very beautiful. At last, I could relax and sleep in a familiar environment.

Friday 18th November, Hong Kong - Canton (Guangzhou) - Hong Kong

The express train between Hong Kong and Canton was comfortable. I had a meeting with Ms Yang Meiqi, Director of the Guangdong Modern Dance Company (the first professional modern dance company in China); and Mme Zhang Haiyun, wife of the province's Director of External Cultural Relations. I had met Mme Zhang when she was working at the Chinese Embassy in London, and she had made an impression on me for showing an interest in the arts.

Ms Yang was interested in this Inter Artes project, and asked me to consider involving the whole company. Later, I talked to Gao Chengming, the company's Rehearsal Master, who is also a choreographer. One of the dancers danced for me, and I also watched videos of past performances - the sound tracks for the dances were assembled by the dancers, and were not of musical interest. The company has many good dancers selected from all over China. Afterwards, I was treated to a nice meal at a five-star hotel. The interior design was a work of art, and the food was the best I had in China.

Saturday 19th November, Hong Kong

&

Sunday 20th November, Hong Kong - London

I bought some more books and collected useful information for the project, and thoroughly enjoyed Hong Kong. I have never appreciated Hong Kong so much in my whole life. It is clean, reasonably quiet, convenient, efficient and rational - people and things there make sense. People may be money-minded, but they work hard to earn money. I also realized that I had taken a lot of things for granted in the past - such as eye-drops, walkable pavements, and decent toilets. In China one is pushed from one extreme to the other. In comparison, Hong Kong seems moderate. Hong Kong has a free press, and has been the safety-valve of big-boiler China for one hundred years. What will happen to a boiler without a safety-valve? Being ethnic Chinese, I feel involved. I may comfort myself that China is not like Russia being controlled by the Mafia, and has not tried to wipe out all culture and educated people like Cambodia. When I was in China, the people seemed to enjoy a certain amount of freedom. But looking at the history of the Communist Regime, every relaxed period was followed by a period of horrendous persecution. It seems it all depends on who is going to be the next emperor. To cheer me up, my friends treated me to excellent meals with matching decor and service in "six-star" restaurants. In one of them, our pleasure was spoilt by the constant noise made by some Chinese-subjects sitting at the next table. My friends told me that there had been an increasing number of these "future masters" in Hong Kong, and they seemed to favour expensive places. My friends showed me some new Hong Kong coins. They are made of combined-metals, thus silver and gold in colour. On the coin, instead of the profile of the Queen of England, is the flower of Hong Kong - maybe this signifies the inevitability of 1997, and the locals' hope of maintaining the status quo.

I felt happy and relaxed during my flight to London.

Monday 21st November

Arrived at London at 4 o'clock in the morning. When the plane landed, I said to myself: "Safely home!"

END OF NARRATION