

The bridges and pagodas of Jiading District

When you climb up over the stone steps of the time-honored bridges in Jiading under a summer sun, you will see along their mottled walls the marks of history.

The silhouettes of landscapes typical of South China — pagodas, old narrow streets and traditionally structured houses — remain imbedded in the history of Jiading. Traces of that ancient past survive today. It's a delight to stroll amid some of the historic bridges and pagodas that have stood the ravages of time and often owe their existence to past generations who lovingly spent the time and money to do reconstruction and repair work on them.

Leaning over bridge railings, one can delight to the sound of rushing water below. Gazing up at ancient pagodas can transport local residents and tourists alike

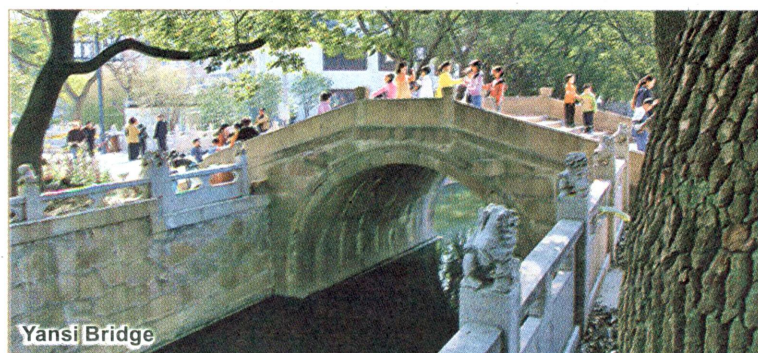
back through time.

At the beginning of the last century, there were more than 400 bridges in Jiading. Fifty-eight of them have been preserved in their original shapes.

The earliest pagoda in Jiading was built during the Five Dynasties period (AD 907-960). The most famous pagodas still standing in Jiading today include the Nanxiang Twin Towers and the Fahua Pagoda.

Today these monuments to the past are protected as cultural relics and cherished by new generations who find solace in the treasures of the past even as the modern age catapults us forward.

Let us share with you some of this special history, told in the words of both experts and ordinary people who have come to love these heritage structures.



Yansi Bridge a critical link in river trade in Anting Old Town

Xu Baoping and Wang Jie

ON Anting Historic Street, the Yansi Bridge is the only ancient stone bridge that has survived to modern times. It was built in 1374 and has stood steadfast as the area around it grew and developed into a modern urban setting.

Anting is a famous town in history. It began in the Tang Dynasty (206 BC- AD 220) as a courier station, then evolved into a village during the Tang (AD 618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties. By the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Anting was a prosperous river trading town. As its population grew, local governments built bridges across the waterways that criss-cross the area.

The location of the Yansi Bridge was especially critical because it served as a link between the Yanjin and Sijin rivers.

The markets and residential areas of Anting Old Town extended steadily outward, forming today's pattern of "one bridge plus four streets."

Standing on the bridge, one can easily slip back in time to imagine ancient eras when local people, in their hand-woven indigo clothing, came from afar to Anting to sell rice, vegetables, fruits and fabrics, and to buy wine, salt, sugar and vinegar. Lively markets operated from sunrise to dusk. The area also spawned little restaurants, inns, teahouses and fabric-dyeing workshops.

Twin towers in sunset glow

Tao Jihong and Wang Jie

THE Nanxiang Twin Towers, also known as the brick towers of the Nanxiang Temple, are located along Jiefang Street to the north end of the Baoji Bridge (commonly known as the Bridge of Fragrant Flowers) in Nanxiang Town.

Delicate, lofty and graceful, especially when bathed in the morning sun or shrouded in evening mist, the two towers used to be called the "Twin Towers in Sunset Glow."

The towers, which used to be part of the ancient Yunxiang Temple, have obscure origins. As recorded in the Annals of Nanxiang Town: "The date of creation of the twin towers is nowhere to be found, either from historical records or from inscriptions left to it by tourists."

Experts say they were probably built between AD 907 and 960.



Twin Tower in Nanxiang Town

Bridges, pagodas and people

Sang Ni

I've been working in Jiading for many years. There's nothing I enjoy more than strolling in the area after work, which has led me to a new appreciation of the role bridges and pagodas play in my district.

In a city girdled by hills and rivers, there will never be a shortage of bridges and pagodas. Are pagodas beautiful? That's not really the point. Their importance lies in their ability to withstand the tides of weather and history and remain standing, lofty and mighty. We should consider ourselves fortunate to have them as a link between the past and present. They bear silent witness to

the vicissitudes of history that have delivered us to the modern age.

Stepping into Xidajie Street in Jiading Town, you encounter the Jushan Bridge over the Lianqi River. The bridge is more than 600 years old. When it was being built, all the women living in the area generously opened the household purses to support its construction. For that reason, it was first named the Bridge of Women. Later, it was re-named Jushan Bridge, which translates in Chinese as "the cluster of goodness bridge." Many young people today like to climb onto Jushan Bridge to hear the gurgling of the Lianqi River below and to gaze far into the river's westward stretch.

A stroll along the river brings you to the Fahua Pagoda, an attraction popular with local residents taking a stroll after supper. Beside the pagoda stands the Houqiao Bridge, which offers the best view of the pagoda's beauty cast against a setting sun. The young and adventuresome can climb to the top of the pagoda via an internal staircase. Up there, a stunning bird's-eye view of Jiading awaits. Casting your gaze to the several small bridges that surround the pagoda gives one an extreme sense of pleasure. As I see it, both bridges and pagodas represent mankind's integration with nature. Each pagoda has its own story; each bridge plays a vital role in local transport.



Yansi Bridge and Fahua Pagoda are symbols of culture in Jiading District

Fanciful legends of devout fishermen, resurrected, immortals, monks and hungry fleeing emperors

Zhang Lichun and Wang Jie

MANY of the time-honored bridges in Jiading have fascinating legends attached to them. They may be purely fictitious, but that fanciful realm of imagination adds sparkle to the history of the bridges themselves.

The bridge with a homophonic name

Thousands of years ago, Jiading lay on the south banks of the Yangtze estuary. At the time that was Shanghai's earliest coastline. To the east of Waigang in Jiading lay the sea. Wangxian Town was a small fishing village in Waigang, where townsmen went to sea to feed their families, and their families gathered on a stone bridge to watch the sea and await their return.

On the piers of this bridge stood four statues of Guanyin, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. Carved in bluestone, the statues reflect the anxieties and hopes of villagers as they waited for their men folk to return safe and sound, their nets filled with fish. Hence the homophonic name of the bridge:

Wang Xian Bridge (*wang* means "expecting," and *xian* is pronounced the same for the words "immortals" and "fresh" fish).

There is also another legend about this bridge. One day, Tiegui Li, one of the eight immortals of Taoism in Chinese folklore, came to the village and was recognized by a local fisherman. Li gave the fisherman an elixir that had the power to revive dead fish. Hearing of this, villagers from that time forward would gather in the bridge, hoping that the immortal would return to improve their luck, too. Hence the name of the Wang Xian Bridge may also be translated as "expecting the immortal" bridge.

The bridge crossed by an emperor

Built in 1509, Yujia Bridge, meaning the "bridge used for the emperor to pass," used to be located in the Yunxiang Temple complex on Minzhudong Street in Nanxiang town. It was moved outside the temple when the temple was rebuilt. According to legend, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Emperor Jianwen

— or Emperor Zhen, according to another version — crossed the bridge to flee his enemies and of hunger in the Dade Temple.

Based on the creation date of the bridge, the tale must revolve around Emperor Zhengde because there was a 100-year gap between his ancestors' reigns.

It's interesting to note that neither of the emperors apparently died of hunger. Some history books say Emperor Jianwen was burned to death, others say he became a monk and died of age. As for Emperor Zhengde, the emperor's son in the famed Peking Opera Prince and the Showgirl, he fell ill and later died of illness.

The bridge built by a monk

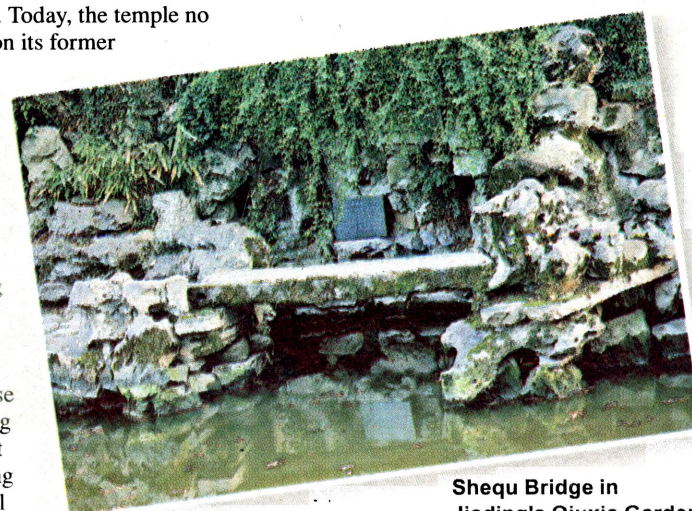
Yongning Bridge commonly known as the Bridge of Yung Temple — lies to the north of the Qiu River in Jiading Town. It is a stone bridge. To its west once stood the Yung Temple. In 1299, the temple probably received an

imperial inscription — Yuantong, written on the board, which gave rise to its name.

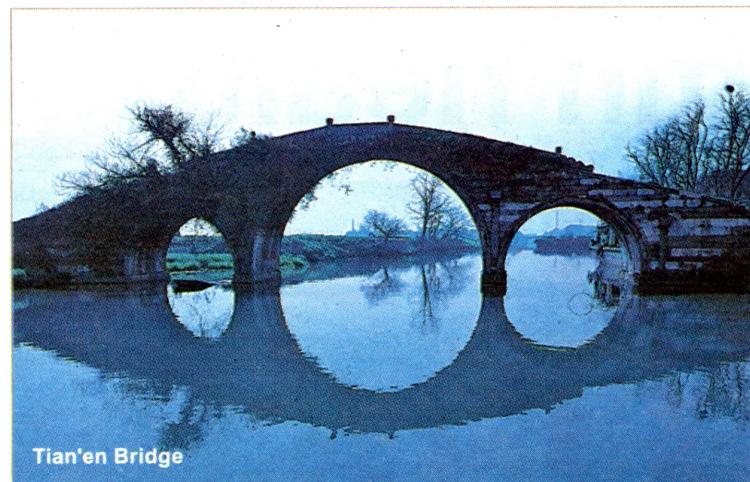
In 1302, Zhao Mengfu, a famous calligrapher, wrote the "Record of Yuantong Temple of Dabaoguo," which added to the fame of the temple. Today, the temple no longer exists, and on its former site stands the Qiu Garden.

This bridge, according to legend, is tied to Gao Yansun, the first magistrate appointed for Jiading in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). A native of a neighboring province, Gao chose to remain in Jiading after his retirement as his way of paying homage to his loyal

local people. One of his descendants chose to become a monk and took the Buddhist name Sengmingliao. He donated his entire inheritance to build the Yongning Bridge in 1363.



Shequ Bridge in Jiading's Qiu Garden



Tian'en Bridge

Spectacular spans in Nanxiang

Zhao Chunhua and Wang Jie

THE region south of the Yangtze Valley is known for its abundance of smaller feeder rivers. To cross all these numerous waterways, a network of bridges has been built.

There were once more than 130 bridges crossing the three rivers in Nanxiang Town. Before 1905, they were either wooden or arch bridges. As rickshaws, iron-wheel carts and trolleys came into use, steps leading up to the spans were removed. Then came motor vehicles, and the bridges had to be widened and reinforced with concrete. However, some of the old bridges have survived, providing a visual link to life hundreds of years ago.

In the center of Nanxiang Town stands the Taiping Bridge. Built in 1505, it runs westward to link up with the Longxing Bridge and eastward to join up with the Jili Bridge. The span has come to be commonly known as "bazi (splay-shaped) bridge."

In olden days, races were held here during the Dragon Boat Festival. The races featured a blue dragon boat and a black one from the east of town, a yellow one from the south of town, a green one from the west, a violet-gold one from the north and a white one from the town center.

Local businesses and households would provide flags and umbrellas to decorate the boats, and each part of the town would bear responsibility for the costs of its entry. Skilled boatmen would row the vessels, while musicians performed on

board. The atmosphere was one of joy and excitement. Unfortunately, all the dragon boats were destroyed during the "August 13 Battle" in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945). Dragon boat racing was over.

Another famous landmark in Nanxiang is the Xiancha Bridge, which translates as the "fairy's wooden-raft bridge."

Legend has it that in ancient times, trees growing on opposite banks of the Chapu River branched out to join each other across the waterway, allowing nimble people to actually cross by navigating the branches. In 1315, a stone arch bridge was built. During its reconstruction in 1754, the bridge was widened. Unfortunately, the bridge was destroyed in the "January 28 Battle" against Japanese aggressors in 1932.

As part of the construction of the Huyi Highway, a wooden replica of the Xiancha Bridge was built at another location. It has been upgraded with reinforced concrete. Its name, however, has remained unchanged.

The best preserved bridge in Nanxiang is the Tian'en Bridge spanning the Hengli River. It is the only three-opening arch bridge still standing in Jiading District. Engraved on both sides of the bridge are four couplets describing the landscapes of Nanxiang in all four seasons. Standing on this bridge, you gaze across a sea of green stretching far into the distance and can watch boats shuttling to and fro.

Admiring the moon at Tian'en is a unique scene in Nanxiang.

Rebirth of Golden Sand Pagoda

Ji Ming and Wang Jie

ALONG the Lianqi River toward the southern end of Zhouqiao Bridge is the Fahua Pagoda, also known as the Golden Sand Pagoda. Evening evokes magic around the pagoda, as the setting sun casts a golden glow on the river, the historic old residences along its banks and the pagoda itself.

The Fahua Pagoda was originally built during the reign of Emperor Kaixi of the Southern Song Dynasty (1205-1207) and was reconstructed in the first year of the reign of Emperor Zhida of the Yuan Dynasty (1308).

In the 300 years that followed, it slipped into decline. By the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), only one level of the pagoda remained. In the 36th year of the reign of Emperor Wanli (1608), it was rebuilt under the direction of Chen Yiyuan, Jiading's magistrate. Renovation continued periodically through the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

With the advent of the Republic of China in the last century, many people were distressed that the pagoda was once again on the verge of destruction. Trying to save it, renovation was carried out in 1919 and again in 1924. Unfortunately, the middle eaves of the pagoda were pulled down to make room for reinforced concrete bars, eliminating the original features.

The Fahua Pagoda was originally a square seven-story pagoda constructed in the style of a pavilion. It had wooden staircases connecting all floors, and from the top people enjoyed a breathtaking view of the whole of Jiading. Shrines cut into the interior sides of the pagoda used to house Buddhist statues, but they were lost during reconstruction.

A plaque was inscribed by Lou Jian, a master calligrapher of the Ming Dynasty, inside the pagoda to record the benefactor and time of its construction work. On either side of the plaque is a stele made in 1700 recording construction during the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Not far from the pagoda stands a Buddhist monastery. Atop the pagoda is a watchtower housing a large bell that served as a timepiece and a local alarm. The monastery was once used

as the barracks of a fire brigade.

When Buddhism became popular during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), Fahua Temple was built near the pagoda. Later, the temple was used for other purposes, leaving the pagoda to stand there alone.

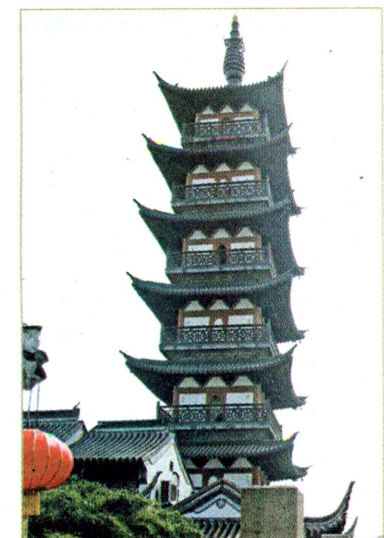
Some accounts say the pagoda was built to promote education because numerous Jiading scholars had failed local and imperial examinations. The name Fahua means "knowledgeable and intelligent as the Buddha."

Indeed, legend has it that pagoda brought fortune to Jiading. During the Qing Dynasty alone, three local candidates scored at the top in imperial exams while many others scored well on the same examinations.

Thus locals named the pagoda Wenfeng, meaning Pinnacle of Learning.

All these are folk tales, but it is true that Jiading has always been a center for educational excellence. Over its long history, the district has produced 192 successful candidates in the highest imperial examinations, more than 400 successful candidates in provincial examinations, and more than 6,000 noteworthy achievers in county-level exams.

Since 1960, the Fahua Pagoda has been recognized as a cultural relic but it fell into disrepair and became an eyesore. Reconstruction began in 1994 and excavation revealed magnificent relics from its underground hall, including bronze Buddhist statues, jade Maitreya statues, bronze eared bottles, celadon boxes and more than 50 kilograms of ancient coins.



Fahua Pagoda

Elaborate art carved in stone

Tao Jihong and Wang Jie

CARVED stone pagodas occupy a special place in Chinese heritage, and Jiading offers fine examples. In most cases, these pagodas have kept their original function — that is, to serve as tombs of eminent monks.

The Putong Stone Pagoda now in Guyi Garden used to adorn a lotus pond in Yunxiang Temple. In 1959 when the garden was renovated, the pagoda was relocated to become part of its landscaping. Rising three meters high, this hexahedral, four-level pagoda has a carved figure of Tathagata wearing a cap shaped like a lotus flower. Decorated with floral patterns, the pagoda was listed as a cultural relic protected by the district in 1960.

Another stone pagoda, the 10,000-Buddha Pagoda, was carved in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and

now adorns Huilongtan Park. This pagoda used to stand in the lane of stone pagodas at the south gate of Jiading town and was relocated to the park in 1982. Rising four meters in height, this square two-level pagoda has the figures of the Buddha carved into three of its sides, with those at the upper part standing and those lower down sitting. This pagoda was listed in 1960 as a protected relic of cultural heritage.

In 2005, a new pagoda, the Brick Pagoda of Permanent Peace, was built in the center of Anting town. The six-sided, nine-level, 57-meters high pagoda, inspires awe with its copper-covered dougong (bracket set) beam supports underpinning its columns and banisters. The pagoda has five white marble steps as its base and it faces a 1,000-year-old Mahabodhi Temple across the river, two form twin landmarks in the ancient town.