

Ningbo

Tianyige Library

With a history dating back almost 7000 years to the Hemudu culture, Ningbo is one of China's oldest cities. Part of its heritage is the Tianyi Pavilion Museum which contains the Tianyige Library which is believed to be the oldest library building in China. Situated in the west of the city beside Moon Lake (Yuehu), the structure was built in 1516. The library was founded by an official called Fan Qin during the Ming Dynasty (see the dates of the various Chinese dynasties listed below). It remained in the hands of his family for over 400 years. The fact that it was a family library understandably meant that few people ever got to visit the library and appreciate its contents; it has been reported that no more than 20 visitors were recorded over a span of several hundred years. In 1982, however, the State Council was instrumental in opening up this key cultural heritage so that now it is one of the most popular attractions in Ningbo.

Fan Qin was born in 1505 during the reign of the Ming Dynasty Emperor, Jiajing, at a time when Henry VIII was on the throne in England, and young German, Martin Luther, was vowing to enter the church following a narrow escape from a lightning strike. Fan Qin successfully passed his important imperial examinations in 1526, according him the title of *jingshi*. He went on to serve as an imperial governor at various places throughout the country, building up a rich network of contacts and developing his administrative skills. Tiring of politics, he retired from his post as senior minister in the Ministry of War and returned home to Ningbo at the age of 55. He had the Pavilion built to house his collection of books and manuscripts. He was apparently inspired to have the pavilion built near the lake in response to an idea presented in the *I Ching* ("Book of Changes"), a classical Chinese text from before the 2nd century BC. - "Heaven embodied in One gives birth to water, while Earth represented in Six makes it grow". Fan Qin accordingly named his building Tianyige Pavilion, which means "Pavilion of Heaven and One". One of the central tenets propounded by the *I Ching* is the dynamic balance of opposites, part of the philosophy which underpins ancient Chinese cultural beliefs. The overall structure of the building is a physical reflection of this philosophical principle. For example, the pavilion was built adjacent to a lake. This not only offered the seclusion and environmental aesthetic conducive to study and contemplation, but meant it brought together the tensions of fire-prone parchments and books and water. The idea was not just that the water might be available to douse the flames in case the library caught fire, but that the juxtaposition of these natural opposites might preserve a harmony such that a conflagration would never happen. Similarly, the upper floor of the house comprises a single large room, while the ground floor has six rooms. This arrangement reflects the thoughts that "Heaven joined with one gives birth to water", and "Earth coupled with six makes it thrive". These numerical principles are even expressed in the construction of the bookshelves.

Fan Qin was a bibliophile throughout his life. His collecting passion was for items of local rather than national or high cultural interest; he amassed an

enormous collection of over 70,000 volumes, mostly contemporary anthologies, local annals, chronicles and records of imperial examinees or *jinshi* from the Ming Dynasty, as well as some older works (including handwritten versions of Confucian classics). With remarkable restraint, the members of the Fan family vowed that no book should be removed from the property, and no volume should be viewed as the exclusive possession of a single individual. In spite of this code of conduct, numerous books disappeared over the years. By 1808, the total had been reduced to only 53,000 volumes, and ransacking of the library by the British during the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) saw the total reduced even further, as they were passed on to French missionaries or sold to paper mills. By 1940, only 13,038 volumes remained. Fortunately, over 3000 missing books have since been traced and returned to their home. Overlooked by many contemporary collectors, the 17,000 volumes, rolls and parchments remaining from the original collection now form an invaluable resource for those researching into local, cultural and social history. In total, the library contains over 300,000 books, including 80,000 handwritten manuscripts and many examples of wood block engraving.

Currently, some 1000 ancient books and manuscripts are on display in the Library. Since only 2000 visitors can be accommodated per day, a system of evening opening has extended access. Part of the plans for expansion includes digitisation of the collections providing online access.

The Pavilion itself is two storeys high with a flush gable roof. In front is a pond, the Tianyi Sink, which, besides providing water in the event of fire, also acts aesthetically, associated with a small mound of stones which supposedly resemble nine lions and an elephant playing in the water. Fan Qin's great grandson, Fan Wenguang, extended building works in the grounds during 1665 by laying a rockery around the Moon Lake and introducing a number of kiosks and bridges amongst the newly planted gardens. A more recent addition to the complex is the Zunjing Pavilion of the Confucian Temple which was rebuilt in the grounds in 1933. A number of steles (commemorative funerary stone and wooden slabs) dating from the Song to the Qing Dynasty were also sited in the gardens, forming what is often called "The Stele Forest of Mingzhou"

Ningbo "Old Bund"

"Bund" is a term which has Urdu roots and is believed to have been brought to India by the Mughals at the beginning of the 16th century, making its way from there to China and Japan. It refers to an embankment or embanked quay. People from Shanghai claim that their famous stretch of embanked riverfront should properly be called "The" Bund, but the "Old Bund" of Ningbo was actually constructed 20 years earlier. The Ningbo Bund, also known as Ningbo Lao Waitan, is located in Ningbo City Centre near the confluence of the three main rivers which pass through the city – the Yuyao Jiang, Yong Jiang and Fenghua Jiang. Active throughout the Tang and Song dynasties as a prosperous port, the Bund is part of a 40,000 sq m area which preserves

many historical buildings and formed the hub of a developing city which now houses 1.5 million inhabitants. The Bund recently became the centre of a 7.5 million dollar investment programme intended to develop the area into four precincts to cater for rapidly changing urban and commercial needs. A centre for many creative industries, the Bund is currently attracting businesses in the fields of architectural and industrial design, film-making, TV and on-line gaming. One part of the area which is popular with tourists contains shops, restaurants and entertainment facilities. The embankment recently held its first rave and it is possible to take guided river trips from there.

Chinese Dynasties and their approximate dates:

- Xia Dynasty About 1994 BCE - 1766 BCE
- Shang Dynasty 1766 BCE - 1027 BCE
- Zhou Dynasty 1122 BCE -256 BCE
- Qin Dynasty 221 BCE - 206 BCE
- Early Han Dynasty 206 BCE - 9 AD
- Xin Dynasty 9 AD - 24 AD
- Later Han Dynasty 25 AD - 220 AD
- Three Kingdoms - Period of Disunion 220 AD - 280 AD
- Sui Dynasty 589 AD - 618 AD
- Tang Dynasty 618 AD - 907 AD
- Song Dynasty 969 AD – 1279 AD
- Yuan Dynasty 1279 AD – 1368 AD
- Ming Dynasty 1368 AD – 1644 AD
- Manchu or Qing Dynasty 1644 AD – 1912 AD

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