

YU WEI DANCE INFORMATION GUIDE

I love dance more than anything in this world, I can not imagine my life without dance. Dance is my hope, my dream and the balance of my heart; dance makes me happy and helps me forget the sadness, dance encourages me in life and makes me grow strong.

My dance partners and classmates eventually lost interest in dance and left the stage for other careers, but I never thought the world could have a better job than dance for me.

When I was a little girl my parents moved from Wu-han to the Guan-zhuang tin mine in Yi-Chan in northern Hubei province. Yi-Chan is situated in a beautiful mountain area, covered with green meadows and wildflowers and long wide valleys with crystal streams where I could watch the little fish dancing in groups, their bodies almost transparent as they moved swiftly by the egg smooth stones that were so attractive to me.

My first school day began in an old temple half way up a mountain. I sat in the classroom looking out the window, and heard the birds sing. My eyes followed the dragonflies and butterflies and my heart urged the clock to go faster until it was time to leave. The school was about 90 minutes walk from home but I always made it longer. I loved to follow the stream water in my bare feet and catch the small fish in to my little bottle, losing track of time until I heard my mother scream my name Xiao-yu... Xiao-yu... (little jewel) By then the sky had turned dark and I was alone and scared of the mountain wolves that local people said appeared at night. So I hurried home, often losing my shoes.

I was a shy girl, but when I was alone I loved to move my head and arms up and down and make turns and jumps and dance freely across the open grass. In my imagination I was a bird from a legend, or a little girl flying up to heaven.... My childhood was full of the wonder and joy of this world. I think this is the time that nature gave me the seed of dance.

China

China is one of the most interesting and beautiful countries on earth, not only because of its significant and beautiful geography, but also because of its glorious five thousand years history and culture. When you visit China the treasures of its culture are everywhere. There are so many things to see, to eat, to learn, and to feel. As a Chinese dancer I am proud to have been born and studied dance in China, and have performed throughout its vast area. I know my country and my people, it was they who gave me the love and support to carry on in my life. There are no words that can explain my feeling of love for my native country. My dream is return this love by becoming a cultural bridge between China and the world.



I was so happy to be in this world and I always had thousands of questions to ask my parents.

Chinese people love all the art forms, but especially they love dance. It is the Chinese people's tradition to respect the special talent of artists, and see them as the treasure of the nation. China has a huge population, its people need to laugh and be entertained to balance the harsh years of their long history - and dance is an activity that is both participation and entertainment. It is great fun to join or to watch during the Spring festival that lasts for fifteen days, when thousands of people gather together to support performing groups of farmers who travel from village to village. Chinese folk dance was created by the farmers and it is still the most loved art form by the majority of the Chinese people.



I wear the toe shoes in this picture taken by my father on a winter weekend day at the only place that was not covered by snow.

Chinese Folk Dance

Chinese folk dance was created by farmers to provide entertainment in celebrations of harvest, marriage and death. Folk dance and music are the art forms that best express the spirit of the hard working agricultural people through the centuries. China has many different Han people folk dances. Han people love folk dances, they occur in every village and province throughout China. In my Happiness Dance I introduce a folk dance style called the Di-yangge that I learned from my master Huang Ji-shi. In the process of learning this dance I also discovered where the dance came from and who the people were who have been dancing it for many centuries.

Di-yangge is my favorite Han folk fan dance. It is originally from eastern Hebei province and first appeared in the Yuan Dynasty more than seven hundreds years ago.

I loved the Di-yangge dance from the first time I saw it when master Huang Ji-shi showed the movement in a class where I was a young dancer. Master Huang is a famous master of Di-yangge who was invited to our Wuhan Opera and Dance Theater to teach for a month. The vivid movements of the dance expressed a fresh and rich life style that was easy to see and enjoy; but extremely difficult to learn because of its complicated choreography and breath control and conflicting time structures. Master Huang said: "Di-yangge movements are a symphony of the body, the unpredictable motion and movement is the soul of Di-yangge dance" I spent a whole day just learning one movement, but the dance style was so extremely beautiful and charming, that I could not give up, Many dancers eventually abandoned their studies, but my determination to learn the style took years of constant drill. During my tours with other companies I practiced on the train, the boat and in my room, until the fans became a part of my body and I could dance with them unconsciously. Finally I have created my 'Happiness' dance in the style of the famous Di-yangge.



Di-yangge put new energy into my dance style and soon became the soul and the roots of my dance, connecting me more deeply with my native country of China, and with the farmers in the fields of that great, warm land. As I have grown in the Di-yangge style, my feeling for dance has matured. Dance is no more just a personal skill, but it has allowed me to be part of a culture, a nation, and a people.

From studying Di-yangge I find that true dance comes from the lives of common people in the fields and villages. In school I learned skills as a dancer, but from Di-yangge I learned the soul of dance, and my dance changed from a correct technical style to one that is vividly expressive and full of life.

Folk dance master - Huang Ji-shi

A nationally known and respected Di-yangge folk dance master, he is a board member of the Directors of the China National Dance Association, and is considered a living folk dance treasure of China.

"Yu Wei has been my best student. She is one of the most actively creative and charming young dancers of China. She searches for truth in art and beauty in life. She is the daughter of dance ..."

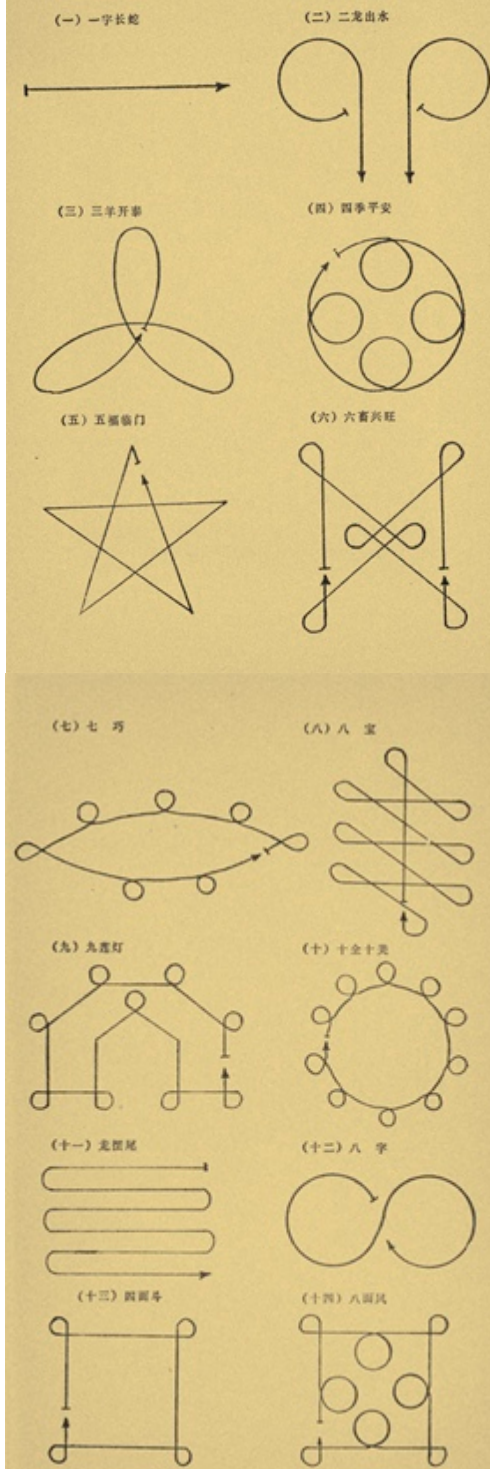
----- Huang Ji-shi





Di-yangge dancers and musicians perform in the fields, moving from one village to another and dancing all day and night with hundreds of laughing and cheerful people joining in the dances and having great fun... The performers were all farmers and were also all men. Women were not allowed to dance, and many had their feet bound. Men took the role of women and wore women's clothing. The celebrants all came from the same region, and everyone knew each other. We can only imagine how much fun it was.

五、传统大场(跑套子)队形路线图



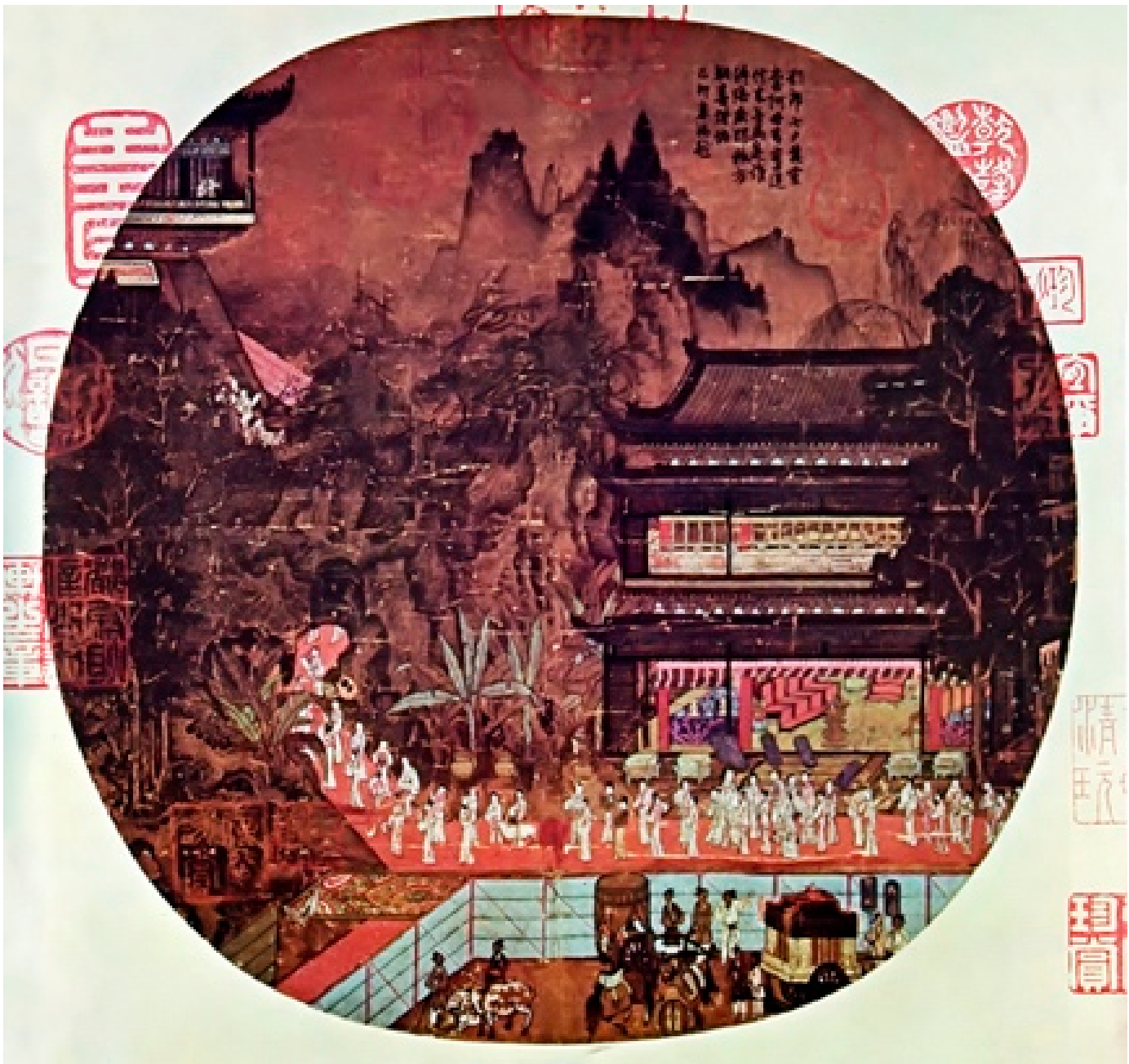
(Above left) - Sample of Di-Yangge performers dance step plot.

(Above right) - Farmers watch performance in Chinese New Year Shanxi province.



Top - Stilt walking dance in the Qing Dynasty, around 1750 AD.

Bottom - Farmers dance a local folk dance called the Yao-gu (Waist Drum) for Chinese New Year in Shanxi province.



Classical dancers and musicians ready to perform at the Palace during the Han Dynasty.

Chinese Classical Dance

Dance came from people's lives. Chinese classical dance (as well as classical music) originally developed from folk dance and music, over a period of 2000 years the best parts of the dances were selected as art entertainment by the Emperor and powerful noble families. Once in the court system the dances and music became more graceful and the costumes and music more refined to reflect the taste of the nobility. Classical dance became an integrated dance style that divided from folk dance. The dancers in the palaces were slaves who danced at their masters pleasure. After the birth of New China in 1949 classical dance returned to the common people.



In this living room, several nobles enjoy a casual party. Two rectangular tables have fruits and teapots and cups, but the people concentrate in listening to a Pipa player, and no one has touched the food. A young lady, perhaps a servant girl, stands in the left background and peers through the door. The music played must have been very beautiful.



Five young lady musicians play instruments, from left the Chinese Cymbal, Pipa, the Xiao, the Dizi, the Xianlin. Unlike today's chamber musicians they stood and wore costumes and hair dresses and moved their bodies while playing the instruments. They look so graceful and lively in this colored pottery from the Tang Dynasty,



30 唐徐悲功墓壁画女舞

31 唐对舞女俑

独舞女俑

33 两女对舞俑

The Tang Dynasty is usually considered the high point of Chinese civilization. A benevolent empire bestowed peace, relative freedom, and economic development both domestically and across the great silk road that helped pacify ethnic neighbors and reached as far as western Europe. It was a great time for the arts.

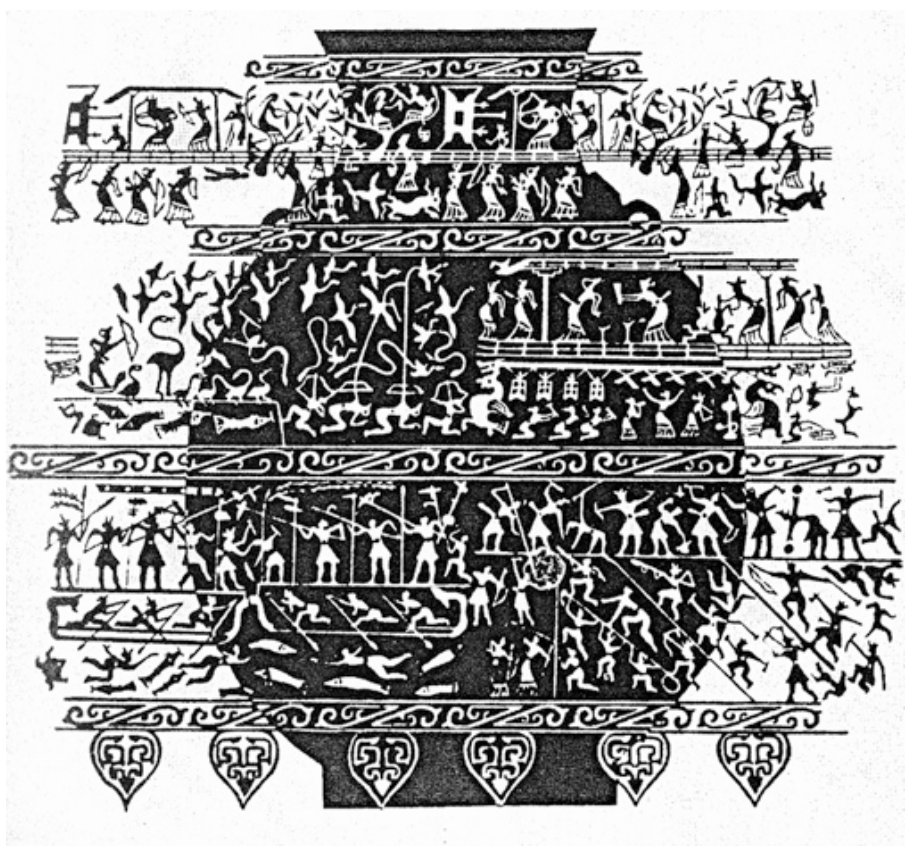
Sculptures on the grave wall of flying ladies, traveling to heaven. Ancient Chinese believed in life after death.

Singers musicians and dancers join to do the "Sleeve dance".

Ethnic Wei solo dancer and musicians,

Two dancers with musicians.

Line drawing of the decor on an Inlaid bronze wine vessel from the Warring States period depicting people engaged in such activities as warfare, hunting, boating, court rituals, music-making, and food preparation were features of the art of the late Zhou period.





We call it Bie-zhong. A 32-chime lithophone, and a 64-piece bell set (above). The zithers have from five to twenty-five strings and vary in details of their construction; they may have come from different regions and been used for performances of regional music. The bells bear inscriptions that indicate their pitches and reveal that they were gifts from the King of Chu. The precision with which the bells were cast indicates that the art of bell-making had reached a very advanced state.

Chinese Ethnic Dances

Ethnic people are beautiful, they are the natural artists, almost everyone can sing, dance and play instruments. I have been invited to dance with Ethnic dancers in Yunnan and Guangxi province where I choreographed and performed as a principle dancer in the middle 90's. It was a great chance to learn the Ethnic dances, and brought another level of richness and knowledge to my dance.





Two pictures of the famous Ethnic Song and Dance Company of Yunnan province.

Ethnic Young People of China



(clockwise from lower left)

Han girls,
Hui boy,
Yugur girl,
Tibetan girl,
Hani girl,
and Wei girls.

The long tresses in Wei tradition are a sign of unmarried young ladies.

Linguistic and ethnic diversity in China today

China has a population of more than 1.3 billion, and 56 different Ethnic peoples. The Han people represent 94% of the population. Other ethnic people have their own culture, traditions, life style, music, dances (with beautiful costumes) and language. Even in the Han population the languages are very different from north to south, and east to west. When I went to Shanghai, Guangzhou and Fujian I could not understand what people said. Even in my parents home I could not understand my grandmother who spoke in the language of Jiangxi province.



The great beauty of landscape is the mother of Chinese artists

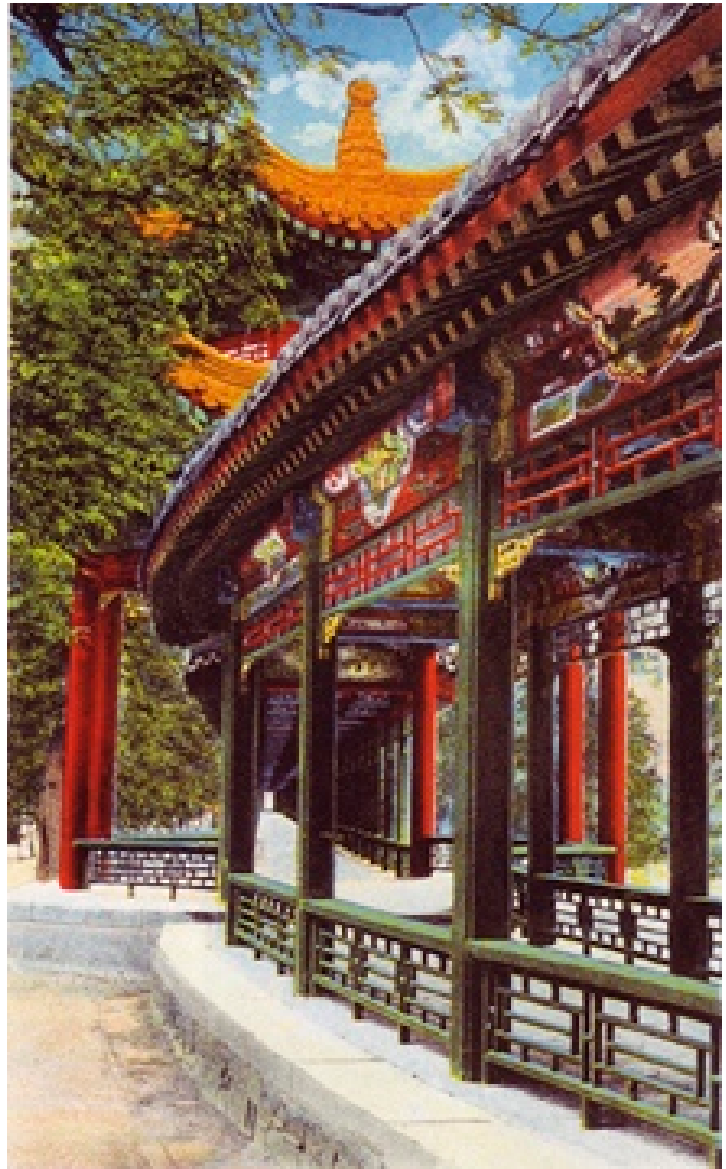
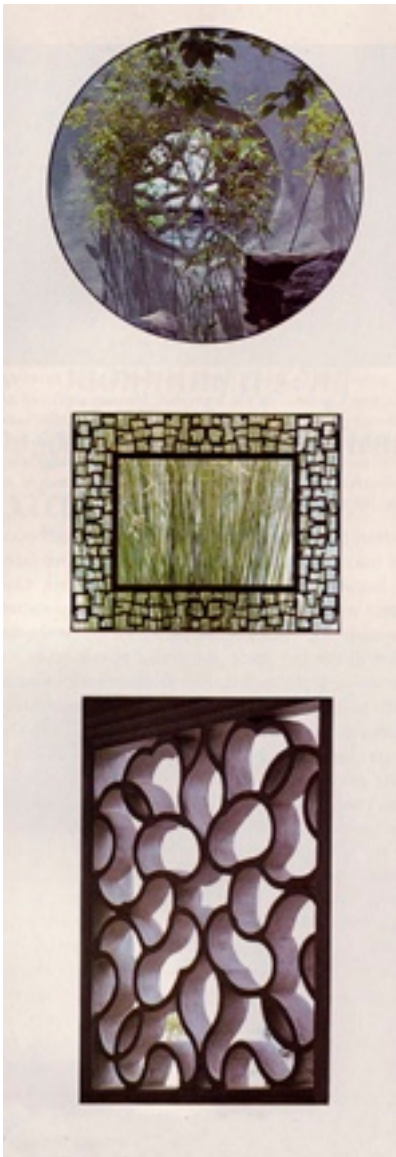


The western part of the Great Wall in the northwestern mountains of Gansu province.

Graceful mountains in the south east Guilin in Guangxi province rise above the flooded rice fields. Southern people like to eat rice, and northern people like wheat.

Chinese usually have big families. They live communally, sharing rooms and dishes, and use chopsticks.





Samples of Chinese Aesthetic tradition

Window frames of Suzhou Garden style, Jiangsu Province.

Luxurious and colorful art sculptures in the Long Corridor of The Summer Palace at Beijing.

Interesting images from Paper cutting art.





The Yangtze River is the third longest river in the world (3915 mi/6,300 km), I was born and grew up on its north bank of the river in Wuhan, Hubei province, I used to play on the rivers bank, and watch people swim in the summer days, during the rain season the river was very high and outgrew its banks. When I grew up I rode on the big boat and went to many places in China. I even performed on the boat when traveling with my company. We ate and slept on the boat and I felt like a baby sleeping in a cradle. During the day it was beautiful to look at the surrounding countryside. Every location was different; the west part of the Yangtze is famous for the Three Gorges, where the mountains rise up in giant cliffs that squeeze the river together and the water rushes dangerously downstream. In the east the river becomes wide and peaceful as it nears the ocean. My home city of Wuhan is in this part of the river.



Feng-Yu bridge was built by Dong ethnic people who are famous builders. This bridge used only wooden pegs to join - no nails or any metal. People walked in the center of the bridge, the outside was used for animals. San-jang county, Guangxi Province.



China has a lot of people, this is Nanjing Road a main shopping center road of Shanghai in a weekend summer day of the mid 1980's.

China Professional Dance Companies

I did not count how much dance companies in China but I know Chinese dance companies are in every province and big city and are supported by the dance art presentation of the government. There are also companies in smaller cities and counties as well as dance companies in each ethnic peoples autonomous regions. The governments pays a basic salary to the dancers each month that is enough for survival, and a partial addition fee



paid by the company for performances. In China a dance company is an organization that belongs to the communist party and the dancers work under the orders of the company leader.

At Left - On tour, the girl dancers of Wuhan Song and Dance Theater on a boat in Guilin, I am third from the left. We toured a few months each year and we lived and ate together. We laughed on the busses, trains and boats after each performance, and always shared the funny stories that happened to us during

the performance as we lay on our beds in the darkness before sleep. We grew up together and we shared the same dream. We were like a big family. In many ways we still are.

I have always dreamed of becoming a great dancer who is able to perform for the whole world. I came to America in the year 2000 and a new world in front of me. Now that I am a touring performing artist my dream has become true.



On a boat in Guilin, China

Master Zhang-Ke

High quality artists stand on the shoulders of their masters who teach the knowledge that is essential for every artist to learn. I have a deep gratitude to master Zhang-Ke, who is famous in the Chinese dance world for his special artistry. He was my guide-director and the compass of my dance career in Beijing from 1992-2000, He is the father of my art and I thank him with all of my life.

"Yu Wei has a mastery of the diverse disciplines of modern, traditional, folk and ballet. As a choreographer and performer her sinuous line and lyrical grace are expressed in a unique style. Her approach to dance embodies respect for the past with a breadth of imagination that reinvigorates old forms. Her art is both unique and exquisite. She is an outstanding figure of China."

-----Zhang Ke



In the winter of 2006 I visited China for the first time in six years. I went to see my Aunt who is my late father's oldest sister. She is now 95 years and living in the small village of Da sheng-zhao in Henan province on the south bank of the Yellow River. My Aunt is a quiet and kind-hearted woman, always considerate for others before her, when I was a child she occasionally lived with us in Wuhan. Every year she made shoes for my sister and I; she was so happy when we were together, and could not stop calling my nick name Xiao-Yu, Xiao-Yu, Xiao-Yu..... I love my Aunt very much. I have a strong feeling that she is the connection of my dance and I to the roots of China. In the month after returning to America, I created a new dance of "Thousand Layer Shoes" in her honor.

YU WEI:

Beauty is the air and food of the human soul. Great beauty has great power. It can touch, can move, can comfort. It helps the growth of the human heart. I want to be a dancer who looks for beauty in the world and translates it into Dance.

For many years, I have known that beauty is not a word, nor a personal physical attribute, but is the power of great artistry that contains many things and is most deeply expressed in the art of dance. For a long time I have struggled in the search for beauty...

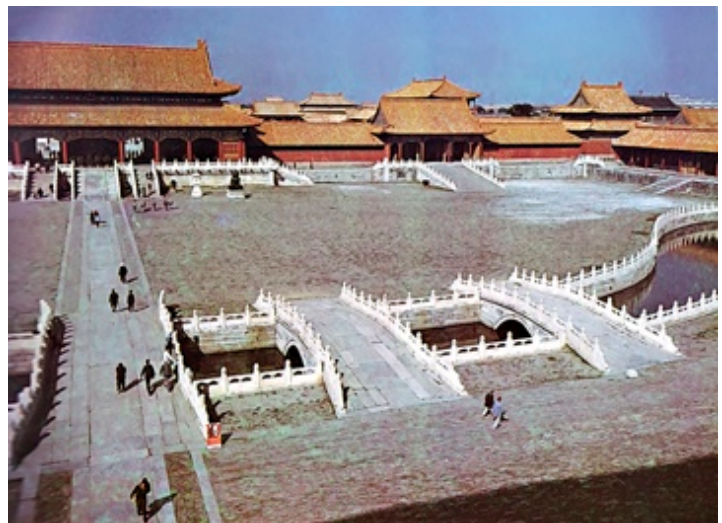
Finally I have found the beauty in my dance.

I love China, the mountains, the rivers, the great culture history and the hard work people. It is the love force to give me the endless imagination to create Chinese dance that nature gives to me and I repay it to the world.



My life for dance

Dance like a poem
Its less in words rich in meaning
Dance is the greatest art to me
Beautiful exquisite and spirit
Dance speaks by move images
Dance rooted in cultures
Dance is silent but waves in hearts
Dance is the art of purity and concise
Dance is the most depth art to me
My life is for dance.



My dear friends I hope this information booklet will introduce you to China's culture and history, and make you more interested in this great country. I also hope you will develop an interest in Dance, a most beautiful and graceful art form, that helps to bring all the world's peoples together.

YU WEI



CHINA – A Brief History

China has the world's longest continuous civilization. For more than 40 centuries its people have created a culture with strong philosophies, traditions, and values. By the start of the Han dynasty, more than 2200 years ago, the country of China was united under one empire and a long golden age in art, politics and technology had begun. Chinese people still refer to themselves as 'people of the Han'. Successive dynasties developed a system of education and military power that helped China maintain an advantage over its neighbors. The period of the Tang, the Ming and the Qing dynasties produced some of the most glorious achievements in human history. In the 19th century a long decline began for China; and the first half of the 20th century saw the fall of the last Emperor, invasion by neighbor Japan, World War II, civil war between Chinese Communist and Nationalist forces, and the formation in 1949 of the People's Republic of China (New China) – the country's present government. After a period of negative upheaval called the Cultural Revolution, China has reformed its economy and today enjoys the world's highest rate of growth. In 2003 China became the third nation, after America and Russia, to launch a manned space flight; and by the time the International Olympic committee voted Beijing to be the site of the Summer Olympics in 2008; China had resumed its place among the leading nations of the world.