



Different styles of *zisha* teapots are displayed at China Yixing Zisha-ware Museum.



Do not be fooled — this football is not leather-sewn, but made of *zisha*.

sideshow. However, I was impressed by some of the eclectic modern *zisha* creations on display, such as a most realistic football.

The museum complex also comprises two exhibition halls displaying two noteworthy collections of *zisha*-ware and a gallery dedicated to the legendary maker Gu Jingzhou. A Gu teapot was sold in Hong Kong for more than 9 million yuan (US\$1.3 million) in 2013.

My favorite hall, however, is the one displaying contemporary artist Han Meilin's *zisha*-ware. Han is the artist behind Air China's logo as well as the five iconic dolls for the 2008 Beijing Olympics; he has collaborated with various local teapot makers to produce delightfully creative modern-day *zisha* teapots.

There are also plenty of natural attractions in Yixing, such as the largest bamboo grove in east China and the many solutional caves. Shanjuan Cave, Master Zhang's Cave and Linggu Cave are known as the "three wonders of Yixing." I opted for culture, however, and headed to Yixing Museum instead.

I did not expect my visit to occupy the rest of my day. Just as the *zisha*-ware and ceramic museums are twinned, Yixing Museum is also twinned with the Yixing Art Museum. Although the museum gives a good account of the city's rich history and has quite a few remarkable items on display — the most noteworthy being the stunning white marble *paifang* (a traditional Chinese archway of a memorial or decorative nature) that greets you as soon as you step into the building — it is its twin that steals the limelight.

I long knew that Wu Guanzhong, considered by some — myself included

— the greatest modern Chinese painter, was a Yixing native. I also knew that one of the greatest Chinese painters a generation before him, Xu Beihong of equine portraiture fame, hailed from the city. Little did I know, however, that Yixing has been producing countless fabulous painters and calligraphers up till the present day. Discover them for yourself, as I did.

I did not leave the city hungry. Before catching the last direct train back to Shanghai, I made a pit stop at the noted restaurant Jiu Fu Lou at 258 Renmin Road S. and had a wonderful "lion's head" (meatball) in broth — only that, unlike the common variety found in Shanghai, it is made of Chinese long-snout catfish meat rather than pork.

Oh, and delicious yellowhead catfish wontons too. Yixing prizes freshwater fish as much as any other city in Jiangnan, regions south of the lower reaches of Yangtze River.



"The Home of Tea" — a painting dedicated to the Yixing Cultural Center by Wu Guanzhong, one of the city's most famous artists

About the author

Louis Lee is an award-winning author, lecturer and radio presenter, and has visited over 70 countries and regions and toured China extensively. He is most at ease taking his students of all ages to all corners, from the historical observatories in Shanghai and Nanjing to the ancient whaling stations of the Azores. Hailing from Hong Kong, Lee has written more than 180 books as well as music reviews and essays on education, psychology and culture for China's main newspapers and periodicals. He is fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese, English and German, and has a working knowledge of Spanish and French.

