

# CHINESE CULTURAL GROUP MERTON

AUTUMN 2014 ISSUE

31<sup>st</sup> OCTOBER 2014



秋

You can tell autumn is now upon us: the conker season has arrived, chestnuts are emerging in the supermarkets, Halloween and Christmas paraphernalia is out in the shops, a kaleidoscope of orange, yellow and red leaves on trees and the ground, the days are getting shorter and nights longer, the clock moved back last week, Bonfire Night, and temperatures have gone down a notch. Knuckle down and revel in for a good bumper read of our news in this issue: the invasion of the Chinese (thereby contributing to our economic growth), yellow bananas galore from a new author, keeping healthy with Human Energy exercises, an unusual auspicious first birthday party (Taiwanese style), the spread of paper-making from China, traditional Kunqu Opera, and ginkgo nut dessert recipe.

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## Word from the Chair - Sissi Wong

**T**hought you would be pleased to know that our committee members are busy finalising the first half year programme of 2015. Our priority is to provide high quality activities and cultural information, and we will endeavour to make our meetings as sociable and enjoyable as possible for our members.

For our regular exercise sessions, our Taiji teacher Leonie Tarratt is not only enthusiastic about Taiji; she is also an excellent teacher. She will gradually add more beneficial styles on top of the usual 18 styles in her sessions. We will continue to invest in our Chinese water colour painting classes.

On top of Eugene's undoubtedly quality talks, we had some wonderful talks by other members such as childhood memories in Shanghai, a recent trip to

China and the more recent talk on the group's visit of the Ming exhibition at the British Museum. I would like to encourage everyone to get involved in sharing their experiences, views and findings with our other members. Please contact Helen Marti to submit your ideas.

As Christmas is fast approaching, do please come to our Christmas celebration on 15th December and attend Leonie's Taiji session for 45 minutes followed by carol singing and nibbles. Looking ahead, the Chinese New Year of the Sheep (Wood) falls on 19th February 2015, and our celebratory lunch is planned for 3rd March at the Man's Chinese restaurant in Raynes Park. The price will remain the same as last year and booking is necessary via Ivy, our honorary treasurer, by 17th February.



Paul Hider 海德

[www.paulinchina.info](http://www.paulinchina.info)

## Life in China - Article #11

### “The Chinese are coming!”

When I first lived in China in the 1990s it took a long time to get anywhere. I mean a *really* long time. Roads were often just winding tracks in the more mountainous areas where I was working. 24 hour bus journeys were not unusual. Trains were slow, packed and often many hours late arriving. Getting a train ticket was usually a matter of “bribery” or tackling 2-3 hours of queuing. Tickets for public transport had two prices at that time – one for locals and one for foreigners. As a volunteer working in China I was supposed to be able to get local prices by waving my Residents’ Card, but often the vendors had never seen one before and insisted on the full fee. Cue a heated argument in very broken Chinese! This dual-pricing was finally banned in the early 2000s. Air travel was generally far too expensive to contemplate on a volunteer’s pocket money, meaning 2-3 day train trips instead. Indeed, for Chinese people, travelling significant distances was a luxury few could afford. Of the hundreds of students I taught at that time, I only ever met half a dozen who had travelled outside of China, and most had never left their Province.



How things have changed. Wide highways now tunnel through those same mountains and tower over the valleys, making it possible, for example, to drive from Kunming to the sub-tropical south of Yunnan in 6 hours – a car journey that used to take 2-

3 days. High speed rail tracks are being laid all across China, and ticketing systems are now computerised so you can book in advance, on the internet, and avoid any queuing. Air travel is commonplace. “Popping up” to Beijing (a 3 hour flight) is nothing unusual and my wife flies to Shenzhen (2 hours) every month on business. Kunming opened a huge new airport last year - the third largest in China – and it seems direct flights to Europe may be coming



our way soon. But perhaps the biggest change has been the ability of middle-class families to travel more widely. Most of my students have been to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Half of them have travelled abroad at some point. A quick survey of some of the more impressive destinations they visited over the recent Summer Holiday included Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Maldives, Qatar, Australia, Europe, America, Canada and Fiji! The Chinese now have the cash to go with their desire to see the world! Unfortunately, the troublesome nature of getting a UK visa means that Chinese tend to opt to visit other European countries, despite Britain being the dream destination of most (we are really missing an opportunity there!!). Meanwhile, I am saving up my RMB to be able to afford a trip back to the UK next Spring Festival with my wife and 1½ year old son (who has yet to meet his grandparents!). Somehow, I no longer seem to be the “wealthy foreigner” I thought I once was!



## PP Wong Peeling Bananas by Helen Marti

Follow PP Wong on Twitter [PP WONG@PPWONG\\_](https://twitter.com/PPWONG_)

Visit her at <http://www.ppwongauthor.com/>



PP Wong is the first British Born Chinese author to gain a publishing deal in the UK. *"The Life of a Banana"* recently received glowing reviews by The Guardian and The Daily Mail. Also, PP Wong was interviewed by BBC Radio 4 and BBC World Service. She hopes *"The Life of a Banana"* will pave the way for other British born Chinese writers to get published. PP Wong's parents are both Chinese and originally from Singapore. She experienced prejudice throughout her schooling in the UK and through *"The Life of a Banana"* she hopes that there will be more dialogue about racial bullying in the UK. PP Wong worked as an actress for six years, with her first job aged 15 when she was cast as "Screaming Vietnamese girl 105" in a James Bond film. Other work includes performing in leading roles at the Soho Theatre in Moonwalking in Chinatown and BBC Radio 4's play Avenues of Eternal Peace about the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

PP Wong is now a writer and is also editor of [www.bananawriters.com](http://www.bananawriters.com), a platform to encourage

new East Asian and South East Asian writers with thousands of readers from over 30 different countries.

*"The Life of a Banana"* is a compelling read of the complex relationship between the grand-daughter and grandma who both grappled with a clash of cultural identities, and how they dealt with racial bullying and mental health issues in their own ways. PP Wong reveals her inspirations and passions on writing with me:

### What inspired you to start writing?

Writing has always been part of my life. I wrote my first book aged five and called it *"Jill and The Thing"*. It was about a little girl and an imaginary best friend who was a shy monster. This was followed by my little sequel *"How to Look After Snails"*. Though my snail keeping was cut short when my Dad stepped on my prized snail! Later on I kept diaries and after University I completed a Post-Graduate Diploma in Journalism. However, it was only two years ago that I finally took the plunge to write the novel that was on my heart, *"The Life of a Banana"*.

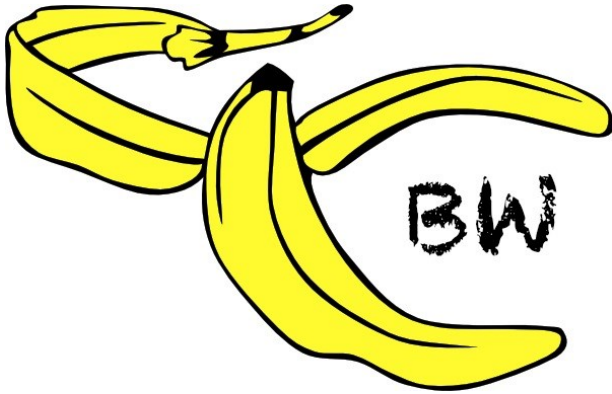
### Having been rejected by 27 publishers in the USA and UK, what is your advice for other budding authors?

Keep going and don't give up! Many best-selling authors faced rejection – Yann Martel, Paulo Coelho, Kathryn Stockett and J K Rowling are just some of many examples. Read more and learn from great authors about what makes a good story. Why does this sentence sound good? Why does this character resonate with me? Why does this paragraph flow well? I find it shocking when people say to me that they want to be an author but they hardly read. You have to read widely in order to be a good writer. Also, cut out paragraphs that you find boring. If you find the paragraph bland or out of place, why would your reader enjoy it?

*Continued on Page 4*

## PP Wong Peeling *More Bananas*

Continued from Page 3



**Like the main character, Xing Li, from your novel, *“The Life of a Banana”*, you were born in London but now travel between London and Singapore. Where do you feel most at home and why?**

I have two homes. I’m an “in-betweener” of two worlds. Having lived, studied and worked in both countries, I see both places as my home. My humour and mannerisms are very British. I obsess about the weather far too much. Also, my writing influences are from British authors. But at the same time I like working in a fast-paced and organized way

– Singaporean style. Also, I thrive on being surrounded by sunshine and good food.

**What is your favourite aspect of writing?**

Reading a sentence that I am proud of, and the excitement of finally completing a piece of work.

**Following on from *“The Life of a Banana”*, what is your next book about?**

I don’t want to say too much as aspects of the story keep evolving and changing. But it will tackle the question of lost dreams and what it means to have true freedom in society.

**What inspired you to launch [www.bananawriters.com](http://www.bananawriters.com) as a forum for other new East Asian and South East Asian writers just over a year ago?**

There really aren’t enough books being published by Asian authors at big, Western publishers. Yet, there are many talented Asian authors out there. I wanted to create a platform to showcase the work of East Asian and South East Asian writers. It is a website that is a voice for Asian writers. Quite a few of the writers that have been published on *Banana Writers* go on to write poetry anthologies, novels and articles. We try and support them in their journey as much as we can.

**Best book you've ever read?**

It would be impossible to choose one! But some books that I really love are *“The God of Small Things”* (Arundhati Roy), *“Down and Out in Paris and London”* (George Orwell) and *“The Remains of The Day”* (Kazuo Ishiguro).

**Favourite author?**

A tie between George Orwell and Kazuo Ishiguro.

**Your mantra?**

Go Bananas!

*Read Jacques K. Lee’s review of  
The Life of a Banana on page 7.*

*Isn't it a pleasure to study and practise what you have learned?*

*Confucius (551-479BC)*



## Principles of Human Energy by Austin Goh

*Austin Goh is a dedicated and well-respected energy practitioner and teacher in human energy and chi practices. His autobiography, "My Journey - Memoir of a True Master" is now available in Amazon Kindle and <http://shopsifu.com>*

[www.austingoh.com](http://www.austingoh.com)



**I**n Human Energy, the key to a long and healthy life is to learn to have a balanced lifestyle. There might be some confusion as to how to do it. People might say "I work, exercise, eat healthily. Is that not enough?"

Being healthy and disease-free is not just that; it is important to learn how to connect your body and mind. The question is how to do this? Isn't it good enough not to smoke or drink, and always live a healthy lifestyle? I would like to share with you what I mean by connecting body and mind, because through my years of training experience with my Master I realise that for a human body and mind to connect, one needs to learn to breathe properly - that is, always breathe in through your nose to receive

good oxygen, and breathe out through your mouth to release all the bad air or energy. Then you practise this regularly for some time, and then your lungs will be clear and strong. This is followed by the three vibrating hands technique to improve your circulation.

The principle of Human Energy is to learn to have a good circulation round your body and then the body will be ready to connect with the mind. You do not need to learn all about the human body in detail like all the 360 pressure points connecting to the various organs, as in my experience I find this unnecessary and confusing. The mind will not be able to absorb or remember all of this information in a short time. Therefore, the less the better.

We just need to know where our lungs, liver, kidneys, heart and stomach are in our body. This I am sure is quite simple to learn.

All these organs need to work in harmony together to make you healthy. Once you learn about them you will realise how important it is to know how these organs work within the body.

## 10 Chinese medicinal plants you can find in your garden by Sissi Wong



**I**t is well known that the Chinese use almost everything in our planet for their medicines. This information is provided to you mainly for your interest and is not intended to encourage you to try.

### 2/10 - *Duchesnea indica*

Commonly known as Mock Strawberry or Indian strawberry, *Duchesnea indica* is an evergreen perennial found in the woodlands and gardens, and provides a good ground cover. It is self-fertile,

flowers from May to October and forms into seeds. The fruits and leaves are edible. From the medicinal point of view, the whole plant is used for its anticoagulant, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, depurative and febrifuge properties. It is used for treating boils, abscesses, weeping eczema, ringworms, stomatitis, laryngitis, acute tonsillitis, snake and insect bites and traumatic injuries. An infusion of the flowers is used to activate the blood circulation.

<http://www.pfaf.org/user/Plant.aspx?LatinName=Duchesnea+indica>

## Zhuāzhōu 抓周 by I-Chen Tsai

### *How to predict you child's future career path at age one*



***Zhuā means “to pick or to grab” and zhōu means “on first birthday”.***

Whilst some traditional Chinese customs are considered outdated by the younger generation, the tradition of *Zhuāzhōu* seems to be creeping its way back into modern society and is becoming a trendy thing to do amongst young parents for their one-year olds. *Zhuāzhōu*, literally meaning “grab at one year”, is a ceremony in which parents place 12 objects on a wooden tray or a bamboo sieve in front of their birthday boy or girl. It is believed that the object the baby grabs foretells which line of work he or she will do in the future, as well as revealing his or her personality traits and interests. It is indeed like an HR aptitude test for babies.



Each object in the tray is symbolic of a career path and it is not difficult to figure out some of the symbolic meanings behind the objects. For example, an abacus indicates an accountant or businessman whilst a book suggests a scholar. A future writer will pick up a calligraphy brush pen, a doctor will choose the stethoscope and an army general the sword.

Celery and spring onions are always found in the tray as these vegetables have names with homophones of positive qualities in Chinese. Celery (芹, *qín*) means industrious (勤, *qín*) or hardworking whereas spring onion (葱, *cōng*) stands for intelligence (聪, *cōng*). What's more, a chicken drum stick is often included in the ceremony, as this suggests a good appetite and good fortune. The baby that grabs the drum stick probably doesn't need to worry about money and food throughout his or her life.

The objects used in *Zhuāzhōu* ceremonies are not always the same. Traditionally, needles, thread, rulers or a spatula were prepared for baby girls as women were expected to stay home and it's a good chance to see what they would be good at. Today, girls are offered the same objects as boys and some old items now have new meanings. For instance, a spatula shows a career in the culinary world and a ruler paves the way for an architect. Some modern items are also added to keep up with the change of times. A calculator is now often used to replace an abacus and a computer mouse means the child would find his or her place in the IT industry. Also, a ball is included for athletes whilst a microphone suggests a future in the music industry or show business. There are also objects that show desired expectations from the parents. Once a friend of mine placed a pair of her designer shoes in the tray for her daughter as she was hoping that there would be a chance that she could be a shoe designer or a model!

There are no statistics to show how accurate these predictions are in *Zhuāzhōu* ceremonies, but not many people care about this. The ceremony is fun and it's often the highlight of the birthday party. I've seen parents putting the objects around the baby's play mat and the inquisitive baby crawling to reach the items he or she wants to play with, accompanied by cheers from friends and family and the flashlights and clicking noises from a sea of cameras. The object chosen is really open to everyone's interpretation and there is often a joyful debate on what career path the baby should follow. I am sure that adults have much more fun than the baby in the ceremony.



## A Banana Novelist in Merton by Jacques K. Lee



**A** former actress has written a book, *The Life of a Banana*, thus becoming the first British born Chinese novelist to be published in the UK.

PP Wong was born and bred in London but her parents are from Singapore and she has therefore moved between the two countries since childhood. She is now a freelance journalist and writes fiction in her spare time, currently working on her second novel.

After *The Life of a Banana* was published early in September, she chose Raynes Park library as the

venue for her first talk on it. Some members of the CCGM were there to listen to her and meet her.

Why Banana? Because many Chinese like PP Wong are yellow on the outside and white on the inside. She has now started [www.bananawriters.com](http://www.bananawriters.com), which she edits. This is a global platform to help Oriental writers everywhere, particularly in the UK. As an ethnic minority community, we Chinese writers probably have the least opportunities to get published in this country, unlike say, Asians and Black writers.

It's unfortunate that we're still regarded by too many inhabitants as restaurant workers or good only to run Chinese take-aways. It was hard work for PP Wong to find a publisher and she hopes her website will prove useful to other Banana writers.

What is her debut novel about? An orphaned 12 year old girl who is bullied at school just because she is Chinese and home life with Grandma Wu is perhaps even worse. You can read reviews of Wong's novel on Amazon and follow her progress as a novelist on social networking sites.

*The Life of a Banana* is published by Legend Press, ISBN 978-1-910053-21-8. Price £7.99

## "Ming - 50 years that changed China" by Alex Roney

**T**his exhibition at the British Museum looks at China's history during this period (AD1400-1450) through the finest artefacts and works of art of the period.

It took curators 5 years to set up, choosing pieces from 10 Chinese museums, and others in the US and Europe.

The exhibition gives a picture of a developing, sophisticated China, its enormous "treasure" trading ships which navigated huge distances, much bigger than any others of the time; the establishment of Beijing as capital city, and the building of the Forbidden City.

What did I like best about the exhibition? How could one choose between the wonderful scrolls showing people playing golf and polo, the paintings by an

Emperor who was a fine artist himself, a wonderful cloisonné jar with colourful dragons, a lacquer cabinet - superbly worked; and a small, exquisite lacquer box, beautiful pieces of porcelain, a presentation sword with what looks like a crab, a Pekinese and hands all worked together, and a most uncomfortable but beautifully made pillow-end?

Which would I take home? Possibly the hanging scroll - or the little box (but then I collect boxes and paintings...).

About 10 of us went to the exhibition on 7<sup>th</sup> October, some who were British Museum members kindly taking others in as guests, and we all enjoyed it - so thank you Helen and Sissi for organising our trip!

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/exhibitions/ming.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/ming.aspx)

## A Peek at Kunqu by Kathy Hall



*'In Pursuit of the Dream' from 'The Peony Pavillion'*  
Photo by Kelde Hole

Thank you for giving me opportunities in the past few years to come to you to talk about Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera. I am performing a 23-minute piece of Kunqu Opera with musicians on Friday 14th November at 18.00-21.00 hrs at The British Museum in conjunction with their Ming Dynasty exhibition. This is fitting as Kunqu rose to its height in the Ming Dynasty, and was popular with the court, the literati and the rising merchant class looking for refined entertainment. This show is free to the public and I hope that some of you will come and share my passion for this exquisite art form.

There are two branches in Kunqu's long history of development. The Southern Tunes (nan qu), of which The Peony Pavilion is typical, is slow and melismatic. There are many notes and rather few words. This style gained prominence south of the Yellow River around the Jiangsu area. The Northern Tunes (bei qu) developed north of the river. The pace is more brisk and there are many more words in the lyrics. In flavour, it is closer to Peking Opera, which developed

out of it.

I have sung and performed a little of both styles and I am drawn to both.

Kunqu draws you in slowly, especially the Southern Tunes. You have to listen to it as if you are viewing a Chinese painting. You need to take in the delicate, yet energetic, brush-strokes, to appreciate in the blank spaces as a vital part of the composition, and be surprised by some minute images not at once obvious. The music and singing will bear you along. The thoughts, emotions and the context of the scene will unfold in many colours and layered textures before you. The principal voice-accompanying instrument, the flute, and the voice, breathe and sing as one, and that will fill whatever performing area there is. That is why some of the most memorable Kunqu scenes are solo scenes.

The fascination of Kunqu for me is the unfathomable 'perfection' that the music and the performer can reach together. It is as liberating as it is rigorously disciplined. For the actor, the strictly executed stylised voice and movements are in fact the opposite of being restrictive. They free the actor from the strictures of everyday realism, whether in real life or on the stage. The actor is free to explore and deliver the essence of complex human feelings and predicaments.



*Not to be exchanged for Spring*  
Photo by David Rowe

*Ming Late: courtly pleasures - Friday, 14th November, 18.00–21.00 British Museum takes place every second Friday of the month.*

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/events\\_calendar/event\\_detail.aspx?eventId=1675&title=Ming%20Late:%20courtly%20pleasures&eventType=Late](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/events_calendar/event_detail.aspx?eventId=1675&title=Ming%20Late:%20courtly%20pleasures&eventType=Late)



## CCGM PROGRAMME: November 2014 to May 2015

All meetings are conducted in English for anyone interested in Chinese culture at Drake House, 44 St George's Road, London SW19 4ED on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays, beginning with 45 minutes of Taiji Qigong Shibashi exercises followed by a talk or activity. £3.00 per session (Tea & refreshments included).

Leonie Tarratt will continue with Taiji Qigong exercises once a month for an hour session, and lead a specific type of Taiji for treatment or prevention of arthritis, back pain, diabetes with a special variation for over 55's. The programme is subject to change.

£5.00 for annual membership from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March. **Please note that from September 2014, the meetings will start at a new time from 3.00-5.00 pm.**

Date	Time	Programme	Speaker
4th Nov 2014	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Chinese Art	Alex Roney Dong Yang
18th Nov 2014	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Sun Yat Sen	Leonie Tarratt Eugene Byrne
2nd Dec 2014	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi The Wonders of Korea	Alex Roney Matthew Jackson
16th Dec 2014	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi - 45 minutes Christmas Celebration	Leonie Tarratt
6th January 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Chinese art painting	Alex Roney Dong Yang
20th January 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Eugene demystifies the Chinese New Year of the Sheep	Alex Roney Eugene Byrne
3rd February 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Birthday party for Chair and ex-Chair	Alex Roney Sissi Wong Eugene Byrne
17th February 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Mahjong	Leonie Tarratt Helen & Vincent Chiew
3rd March 2015	1.00-3.00 pm	Chinese New Year Banquet at Man's Chinese Restaurant-Year of the Sheep	
17th March 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Chinese art painting	Leonie Tarratt Dong Yang
7th April 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi <i>A cup of cha, anyone?</i> History of Chinese tea & teapots	Alex Roney David & Rosetta Chak
21st April 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi History of the Silk Road focusing on the Donghuang Monastery	Leonie Tarratt Eugene Byrne
5th May 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Kunqu Opera	Alex Roney Kathy Hall
19th May 2015	3.00-5.00 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Sacred Rivers with Simon Reeves- The Yangtze	Leonie Tarratt Eugene Byrne

## The Battle of Talas by Eugene Byrne



I was taken by surprise when the Radio 4 programme *In Our Time* on 9<sup>th</sup> October featured a discussion about the Battle of Talas in AD751: in all the homework on the Tang Dynasty (AD618–906) that I had done for my history talks a couple of years ago I had not encountered this, I had never heard of it. But the battle was a key moment in the decline of Chinese influence in Central Asia.

Historians apparently remember the battle mainly for the crushing defeat that it imposed on the Chinese, whose army of 10,000 suffered 2,000 casualties. But it seems that it was not the defeat itself that was so significant but its consequences, of which the main one was indirectly the sparking off of the An-Lushan rebellion (AD755–763), that

effectively brought to an end the Chinese ambitions of expansion into Central Asia via the Silk Road. It led to the gradual decline of Buddhism in that area. And also to the introduction of making paper, which the Chinese had invented centuries previously: some of the Chinese captured knew the technique, and paper began to be manufactured for the first time outside China.

It is a very complicated story, but probably the most accessible description is in the Wikipedia item about the battle.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Talas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Talas)

BBC Radio 4:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04kf8ps>

## Sweet ginkgo nuts soup with soy milk and egg 豆浆银杏鸡蛋糖水 by Sissi Wong

Serves 4 (Total cooking time: 12 minutes)

1 tin of ginkgo nuts in water (drained)

800 ml soy milk

4 tablespoons unrefined caster sugar (optional)

4 poached eggs

Method:

Poach the eggs according to your taste and set aside. In another pan, bring the soy milk to boil and simmer for 8 minutes, then add 7 ginkgo nuts and sugar. Cook for 3-4 minutes until sugar dissolves, then add the poached eggs.

Serve hot.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ginkgo\\_biloba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ginkgo_biloba)



## Chinese Cultural Group Merton

We welcome your contributions and feedback, and would love to hear from you about Chinese culture, history, food and contemporary events. Please email to [chineseculturalgroup@gmail.com](mailto:chineseculturalgroup@gmail.com) or contact Helen Marti relating to any queries on Chinese activities and programme updates.

Check <http://issuu.com/ccgm/docs> for our archive file.

**Guild House, 30/32 Worple Road**

**Wimbledon, London SW19 4EF**

**For more information, contact**

**Helen Marti, CCGM secretary**

**on 0208 946 0735 (Tues/Thurs)**