How many trees are there in the Chinese Garden? What’s your best guess?

For the definitive answer we consulted Mr Thomas Wong Yiu-sang, Assistant Facilities Manager of Campus Development and Facilities Office (CDFO).

“A total of 265 trees,” said Mr Wong, who leads the landscape services team under CDFO tasked with taking care of green spots at CityU, from the Chinese Garden, green rooftops and hillside trail to the green landscape in the residential quarters.

Mr Wong and his team conducted its first ever tree inventory in July, recording the biological details of every one of the 265 trees in the Chinese Garden. Each tree has been tagged with its bilingual name and identity number.

“The purpose is to give an identity to and take care of the trees,” Mr Wong said. “We keep a detailed record of the trees’ location, height, health condition, maintenance record, etc, so we will know when a particular tree last got sick or when it needs a trim.”

Next, the team is planning to collect data on more trees in other green areas on campus, conducting a visual inspection and assessment on safety and health.

(continued on next page)
Mr Wong and the landscape services team take care of the plants. All trees in the Chinese Garden are tagged with their botanical and Chinese name.

In addition to the tree inventory, Mr Wong and his team look after all the plants on campus, a rich pool of more than 80 species of trees, 120 species of shrubs and 30 species of seasonal flowers. Basic routine checks include watering, weeding, grass cutting, fertilising, trimming and pest control.

The team is also responsible for ordering seasonal flowers for special University events such as Congregation, Wellness March and Lunar New Year festivities. For the annual Congregation ceremony alone, 1,000 potted flowers are ordered.

“Our favourite flowers for decorating the stage of the Congregation are *Plumosa* and *Guzmania lingulata*, since their vivid colours and elegance suit the event’s grand atmosphere,” Mr Wong said.

From time to time, the team introduces new species, mostly those that add a splash of colour to campus. “We recently introduced *Ixora duffii* and *Tibouchina semidecandra cogn*, which are a very attractive bright orange and purple, respectively,” he added.

Sustainability is an issue that shapes much of the work carried out by Mr Wong’s team.

“We have been using eco-fertilisers on campus for over five years, and an automatic irrigation system has been installed to enhance the efficient use of water. We also shred the twigs trimmed from trees and mulch the soil to retain moisture,” Mr Wong said.

Any tips for taking care of plants? “Talk to them. Take care of them like you take care of people. It takes a gardener a lot of effort, skills and experience to grow and maintain a healthy plant,” he said.
The award-winning author Mr Justin Hill established his fiction-writing credentials with a touching tale of social upheaval in contemporary China in *The Drink and Dream Teahouse* and an elegiac account of the life of the enchanting 9th century poet Yu Xuanji in *Passing Under Heaven*.

But his latest novel, *Shieldwall*, published earlier this year, thrusts readers into the wintry world of pre-Conquest England where life is often short, harsh and cruel. What explains this dramatic shift in setting?

“Clearly the dark Saxon days of 11th-century England are a departure from my novels about China in terms of landscape,” Mr Hill explained after returning from a three-week book tour of Britain. “But in many ways I am still writing about comparable issues linked to how we interpret history and issues of national identity in times of crisis and dislocation.”

Mr Hill, Visiting Writer in the Department of English where he teaches creative writing, said his preliminary intention had been to focus on the year 1066, a pivotal year in English history, when the Normans famously defeated the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Hastings and brought England under the yoke of French rule.

“But the more I researched events around Hastings, the more I realised I had to delve back further in time to fully comprehend the political situation,” he said.

Extant contemporaneous accounts tell us that Godwin of Wessex, the chief protagonist in *Shieldwall*, was born into a country crushed by taxes levied to pay off marauding Viking invaders. Dithering King Ethelred had allowed the Danes to squeeze the oppressed English, infuriating younger noblemen keen to boot the Norsemen out. The politically savvy Godwin counsels those in power, building loyalty and straining to uphold law and order, and eventually becomes the most influential man in England.

An incentive to write the story, the first in a trilogy examining this tumultuous period, is deeply connected to the interpretation, teaching and recollection of key moments in history, Mr Hill said. While the Battle of Hastings is well-known today in England, myths and inaccuracies have sprung up, and the larger historical context, especially the influence of the Danes over England, has been forgotten.

It is an issue that resonates with Mr Hill today: “I overheard someone saying that the US invaded Iraq on 11 September 2001, and I was fascinated how historical facts can be reinvented and manipulated, and believed,” Mr Hill said. But, as one reviewer of *Shieldwall* put it, historical fiction can plug gaps in our knowledge of history and provide a sense of events and progression, adding a human face.

The novel is heavy with irony. History tells us Godwin will ultimately fail in his quest to save England from foreign interference when the Normans engulf the Anglo-Saxons at Hastings. But for a flickering moment in time, the brooding Godwin carries the hopes of an entire kingdom, the “solitary man awaiting God’s mercy”.●

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**History’s fiction**

*By Michael Gibb*
Mr Kwok Kam-hung, Instructor in the Chinese Civilisation Centre (CCIV), is the sole recipient of CityU’s Teaching Excellence Award (TEA) for 2011. He teaches Zen Buddhism and Chinese culture.

A Chinese language and literature major with a master’s degree from the Department of Chinese, Translation and Linguistics, Mr Kwok used to dream of writing high literary works, and he did publish stories while still at school. Then somehow he became a teacher but, to his satisfaction, he has stayed in his chosen field, only shifting his focus into a pleasant neighbourhood.

As part of CityU’s effort to promote Chinese civilisation, Mr Kwok has undertaken to teach “Zen-Buddhism and Chinese Culture”, an undergraduate course offered by CCIV. Despite its title, the course includes cultural exchanges between Chinese and foreign ideas, which CityU emphasises.

He told Linkage that the aim of the course is to help students reflect on their heritage, stressing its value to their lives in today’s society, and hence to help establish their cultural identity—a sense of belonging to their roots.

Culture is not Nature, but it grows out of Nature, he pointed out. For example, he said, the rumbling of rocks rolling down the hill is part of Nature, but the clinks our remote ancestors made by hitting a rock with stones became the earliest music—part of culture, which involves human action.

That is one of the analogies Mr Kwok uses in putting his points across. He puts it under the category of “instructive” method of teaching, like pointing with one’s finger to the bright object hanging high overhead in the night sky, to call others’ attention to the shining moon. Also using a “constructive” method, he urges students to explore the subject and make their own findings.

This year’s winner of the CityU Research Excellence Award is one of the world’s most respected materials scientists. Professor Andrey Rogach of the Department of Physics and Materials Science has earned an h-index of 53 through the productivity and impact of his research on light emission and harvesting with semiconductor nanocrystals.

In addition, he is ranked 51st in a list of the top materials scientists of the past decade, according to data provided by Thomson Reuters from its Essential Science Indicators for the 2000s. He is the only scientist from Hong Kong to make the list except for Professor Yeshayahu Lifshitz, who is an adjunct professor at CityU.

“CityU is very well known for its work in materials sciences,” said Professor Rogach, who has authored more than 200 peer-review papers and seven invited book chapters on the synthesis, characterisation, spectroscopy and applications of semiconductor nanocrystals.

“I am very proud that my work in this field has been recognised by CityU, and that our reputation for world-class research is growing.”

The award will be presented at the University Congregation in November.
In his address, Professor Christian Wagner, Associate Provost (Quality Assurance) and Associate Dean of the School of Creative Media, gave a sweeping description of the University’s colleges and schools and their component departments, aided by images projected on to a huge screen. In particular, he displayed the unconventional design and structure of the CMC, the venue for the reception, complete with special facilities such as the multimedia theatre and the laboratories.

Professor Wagner called on everyone to observe the superb views the building commands over Hong Kong from the wide windows, for which no image on a screen was needed.

For several years, orientation events for new faculty had been hosted by HRO, but this year the Provost and his team took the leading role. The first day featured an opening talk by the Provost himself on the topic of “Being successful at CityU”.

Professor Wagner briefed the new faculty on the “Role of Quality”, explaining the ideas of academic quality and management, while Professor Cheng Suk Han, Director of the Office of Education Development and General Education, talked to the newcomers about CityU’s teaching and learning environment and the Gateway Education courses.
Tea is phenomenally popular among the Chinese, but not everyone knows how to enjoy it. Hong Kong restaurants typically offer "Yum Cha", namely, "drink tea." However, the tea presented to the customers, ten to one, is rarely that inviting. The underlying reason is known to all: people come to restaurants chiefly for the dim sum, not the tea.

In any case, superior quality tea is as expensive as gold, so restaurateurs would sustain losses selling higher quality tea at junk prices. Top-grade teas can cost up to 1,000 yuan for just 50 grams. If you yearn for superior tea, you should buy it for yourself.

Those who prefer tea with a fresh and refined aroma and flavour may choose green teas such as Longjing or Biluochun. Those less willing to lavish money, may try brands yet to become famous but of good quality nonetheless. In addition to the regions in the south of the Yangtze River, many other places in the south of China, such as Jiangxi, Anhui, Hunan, Hubei and Sichuan, produce fine green teas as well.

In the past 20 years, I have tried various kinds of teas, not only with an inviting flavour, but also with a pleasant look. Among them are Maoxing, Hu Ming Tea, "Tongue of Golden Altar Sparrow" tea, Camellia Drive, Yangsuan Xueya tea, Zhuyeqing Tea.

Of late, I have enjoyed Ziwu Green Tea from Shaanxi, Rizhao Green Tea and especially Laoshan Green Tea from Shandong, whose lingering flavour and lasting appeal are beyond expectation, reminiscent of haze in a deep vale, which, in the mild splendor of the early sun, creates a wild and charming atmosphere.

Those who value a strong flavour may choose Oolong and Tie Guan Yin (or Iron Goddess of Mercy) produced in Taiwan and Fujian, respectively. The average imbiber may become addicted to these semi-fermented teas, and fascinated by their enchanting taste.

Those with a cold or cool bodily constitution, especially those labeled as "stomach cold" in traditional Chinese medicine, can try the fully fermented black tea or post-fermented Pu'er. Many Hongkongers are fond of Pu'er because they like the special fragrance born in the fermenting process, a rich, mellow impression like that of some old wine.

However, how tea tastes and feels varies from person to person, and you as the drinker are the best of judges.