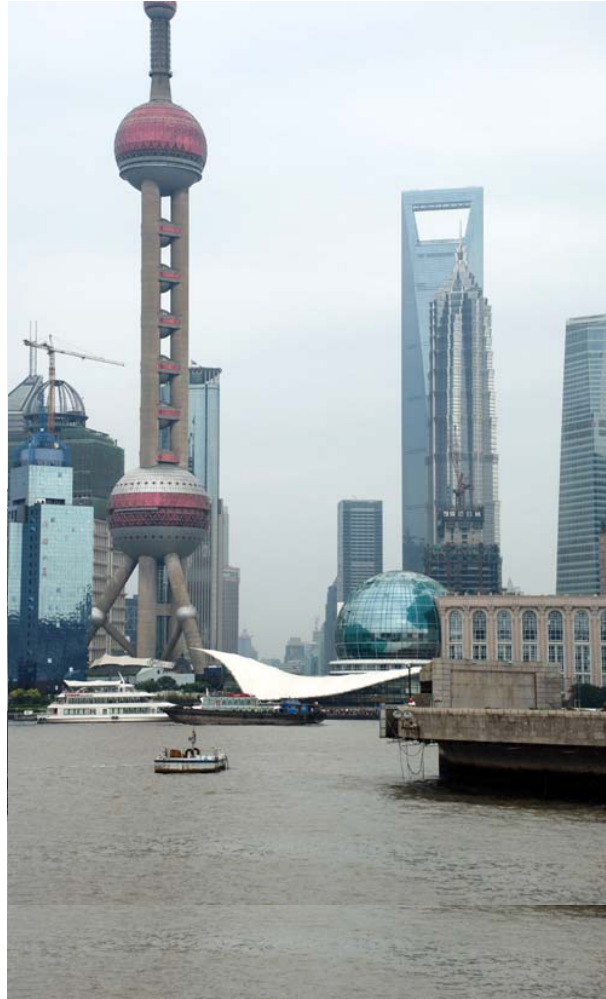


Shanghai Part 1

By Jessica Tse

Ever since my Sifu Michael Tse (who is also my husband) saw Bruce Lee walking down Nanjing Lu, one of Shanghai's most famous roads, in the film *Fist of Fury* it has been his dream to visit this modern jewel in China's crown. So it seemed a good omen that our accommodation was just a short walk from this shopping icon. The major part of it is pedestrianised and it is so long that there are little trolleys that one can board to take you from one end to the other for a mere 2 yuan (10 pence).

We arrived at Hongqiao Airport, which means Red Bridge Airport. Although it seemed more of a regional airport handling internal flights, it was by no means a quiet airport. Throngs of people were pouring both in and out of its doors and we flowed with the current towards the taxi rank, which was the only means of getting into the city aside from private car or bus.



Travelling down Nanjing Lu

speeding away to the big city.

We instantly saw that this was by far the most popular choice and we pushed our trolley into a queue of over 100 other hopefuls. We expected a long wait but we had not counted on the efficient airport traffic control. As far as the eye could see, there was a queue of taxis, and not only in single file rank, but in four parallel, jam-packed lanes. With ease and nonchalance, a uniformed airport employee directed passengers to the appropriate car and within less than ten minutes, we were

Even though it was nearing late September, it was still the rainy season in China and the weather was slightly humid. Still, it was nothing like the humid climate in south China, which we had just left. We had flown to Shanghai

from Guangzhou where we had just had two very busy days in Hong Kong and three days in Guangzhou with the six Wing Chun students whom we had taken to Grandmaster Ip Chun's 85th birthday party celebrations.

As we belted along in rush hour traffic, our taxi dodging from lane to lane and getting token honks in response, I watched the 'scenery'. I could have been in Europe from looking at the architecture. There was development after development of new apartment complexes and homes. It really did not feel like I was in China at all but it was somehow what I had expected. I knew Shanghai was very modern and so had not expected cultural overload.



Nanjing Lu

As we neared our hotel, it began to rain yet again, making us doubly glad that we had not tried to be travel martyrs and struggle with the bus system. We and our luggage would have been thoroughly drenched.

We had found a very good deal for our accommodation. For less than an equivalent standard hotel room, we could have a one bedroom flat right in the midst of the city, no more than ten minutes from People's Park and

the famous Nanjing Lu. The hotel reviews had all been excellent so we had decided to take the plunge. With bated breath we waited to see if it really was of the standard that everyone said. Luckily, they were right and the bellboy led us into a very large, spacious kitchen diner. The lounge, bedroom and bathroom all led off from here.

After checking out all the amenities, of which there were quite a few, including a DVD player, I quickly unpacked all our clothes and books. It was a relief to unload and unpack our luggage knowing we would be not be travelling to any other cities and that we had eight blissful and stationary days of relaxation and enjoyment ahead. Now it was time for a treat and I decided on a long, luxurious soak in a bubble bath. Having left Sifu perusing Chinese television, I slipped into lavender scented bubbles and sighed away the last bit of stress that might have been clinging.

I was in heaven. Soon, though, I could feel my tummy rumbling and thought it was definitely time for food. I stepped out of the bath and went into the bedroom to get dressed.

I had forgotten my slippers, though, and went back to fetch them from the bathroom but got a big surprise instead. They were not where I had left them. They were floating in two inches of water that was quickly seeping over the bathroom threshold into the kitchen (fortunately tiled) and into the bedroom (not tiled). I gave a shout to Sifu and he came running – and then

skidded to a dead stop with open mouth. "What did you do?" he asked (which is putting it kindly as it was really a bit more of a shout).

"Nothing!!!" I said vehemently, clutching at my towel whilst snatching and throwing other towels onto the floor to try and stem the flow. Sifu grabbed any bags and things lying on the floor, threw them into the lounge and then he left me to call the front desk and ask for assistance, telling them that their bath drain was blocked.

They were highly embarrassed and agreed to move us at once. Any relaxation had fled and it was a high-speed chase to get dressed and repack clothes and other odds and sods before the bellboy arrived. This accomplished we were, less than one hour later, ensconced in new digs. Gone was any enthusiasm for settling in...we were just plain hungry and going out, no matter that it was still chucking it down with rain.

The bellboy pointed us down the road to where he said were "some restaurants". Just three blocks away, we turned into the street and found that "some restaurants" was an entire long street of eateries. All kinds of food abounded:- Hong Kong style cuisine, seafood, Shanghai style dumplings, Harbin style dumplings, Muslim food and more. We decided on the Hong Kong style restaurant as one of their specialties was herbal soups steamed for many hours in clay pots. "Things are looking up again!" I thought to myself.

We took our seats and began to look through the expansive menu. I let Sifu do the ordering and was happy to see they had one of our favourite vegetables; baby pea sprouts called "Dou Miu". A larger version of it can be found sometimes in England but never the tiny alfalfa like sprouts that are infinitely more tender and sweet but still with that distinctive almost bitter aftertaste.

I let Sifu order me one of their special soups. He ordered me black-skinned chicken soup, which is good for creating blood and Qi and so is often given to ladies when they are weak or after pregnancy. It is also very good for the skin, making it very soft and pink. It was truly stunning and surprising as well. I had seen black-skinned chickens (plucked ones that were ready to eat) in Chinatown before, so it was no surprise that the skin was black but what I did not expect was that the bones are also black! In Chinese food therapy, black foods are usually good for the kidneys and so they are treasured as tonic foods.

In fact, I cannot remember the rest of the meal, as both these items were so good that they eclipsed all else. After dinner, we went back to rest and plan for the rest of the trip.

The Dating Market

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One day I went out on my own to the People's Park whilst Sifu went book shopping. He had mentioned that he had seen something very interesting there... Chinese matchmaking 21st century style. He had taken some photos to show me but these were just the appetiser. On this Sunday, I had obviously hit the market [in full entrée] (during the main course). In all manner of creative marketing, there were 'ads' galore. In fact, I can easily say there were hundreds of ads stringing for well on a quarter of a mile into the park. There were no live specimens for appraisal, only the factual, flattering, and usually glowing recommendations of the promoter.



This seemed to be Shanghai's equivalent of a dating service. Instead of personally going onto the web and creating an online profile, parents were taking things into their own hands, much like in the past when marriages were arranged. It seemed a fierce contest to find the right match and make sure their son or daughter did not leave them grandchild-less. I saw one clever mum had even listed her son's very ample salary as a commendation.

Most others were fairly standard, being hand written with the listing of physical aspects of height in centimetres, weight in kilograms and personal interests. Some had the photo of the wannabe bride or groom. One clever father had copied the photo of a fashion model from a

magazine to draw interest to his ad. He obviously had had onlookers taking photos of his display before as he had a "No photos!" sign attached above.

Always listed, however, was the progeny's date of birth, which it seems is still used to predict compatibility of partners based on their horoscope. Generally it was the mothers who were there to promote their child, though there were some fathers and many 'career' matchmakers present. As I walked through, I took some photos, managing to get told off by one gent who held up his hands in the classic "time out" position and flashing(?) on at me in Chinese, much to the amusement of the other matchmakers who all got a chuckle over his outrage.

All in all, this ingenuity of the Chinese people impressed me. I think for some it was quite a serious plan whilst for others it was just an excuse for a good chinwag amongst friends.

To be continued...

Part 2 will be featured in the Special 20th Anniversary issue of Qi Magazine.