

三十三

They say Hongcun village
is shaped like an ox
Reflections are magic
jade eyes of a fox
Green Destiny's message
was crystalline clear
in the pool called Fei Cui
its message, 'no fear'



Chapter 33 – Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

There are only a handful of Chinese films which have enjoyed even moderate success in the West. In 2000, Ang Lee gathered together an all-star cast including Chow Yun-fat (周潤發 Zhōu Rùn Fā), Michelle Yeou (楊紫瓊 Yáng Zǐ Qióng), and Zhang Zi Yi (章子怡 Zhāng Zǐ Yí.) In the USA, “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” was the highest grossing foreign-language film produced overseas, and it won the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film in 2001.

About 40 km from the Yellow Mountains (黃山 Huángshān) sits the village of 宏村 Hóngcūn where much of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon was filmed. When we walked through it in the early 2000’s, it was a quiet step back into a past where a village was built around a pond. I remember the amazing wood carvings surrounding the doors and windows opening into homes where villagers would invite strangers in to share a cup of tea. Small canals ran through the village emptying into a second pond.

It was in this village that Chow Yun-fat’s character journeyed to rid himself of the Green Destiny sword which he had wielded as a hero and master of martial arts. The sword, meant as a gift to an old friend (Michele Yeou), was stolen, and once again found itself to be a weapon. Chow Yun-Fat’s character tries to rid himself of the sword by throwing it into the Fei Cui pool (翡翠池 Fěicuì chí) , but Zhang Zi Yi’s character recovers it. Green Destiny emerges once more in a struggle to the death with his old nemesis, Jade Fox. Michele Yeoh and Zhang Ziyi personify both the beauty and the strength of female martial arts heroes as they beguile and subdue anyone standing in their way. Sword fights, acrobatics, and a variety of martial arts find our heroes running on the tops of the swaying leaves and forests of bamboo which cover the hills of southern Anhui, and flying on the backs of wild horses dashing through the valleys and crevasses of Xinjiang chasing down a robber who becomes Zhang Zi Yi’s lover.

Hongcun village was the village where many of the characters first came into contact. The pond in real life is just as it was in the movie and it was easy to imagine the story when walking through the village. We were told by the local people that the village was in the shape of an Ox with a nearby hill and trees forming the head and the horns. The upturned roofs on the houses of Hongcun are known as horses heads for the way the edges of the roof flow down in rivulets like the mane of a horse.

The real magic happened for us, however, when we accidentally found our way to the real Fei Cui pool in Huang Shan (the Yellow Mountains), not in the village of Hong Cun. This was the pool, we were told, where the Green Destiny sword was flung in the movie. When we arrived at the pool, on a warm, sunny day in June, there was no one there. Our kids were in shorts. There were no signs that said “no swimming”. So, for about two hours, we got to play in a crystal clear water pool at the base of Huang Shan. When a man did come by and told us that we weren’t supposed to be swimming there, I let him know that I was a lifeguard in a former life and the kids were perfectly safe. I was, once again, playing the “ask forgiveness” card, but it all worked out in the end. We had a beautiful afternoon frolicking in the waters of Fei Cui pool.

