

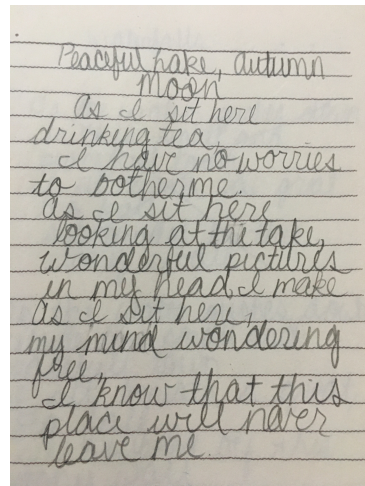
## 三十五

Our next stop, Hangzhou  
placid lake, autumn moon  
Broken Bridge, riding bikes  
took a break around noon  
paid respects to Yue Fei  
ate some zongzi for free  
like the Emperor Qian Long  
sipped Dragon Well tea



## Chapter 35 – Tales from Hangzhou

My introduction to Hangzhou was the Chinese poetry I had read as a student at the University of Montana. When I first gazed on West Lake, I couldn't wait to search out the Placid Lake Autumn Moon Tea House (平湖秋月茶馆 Píng hú Qiū yuè Chá guǎn). It was this spot on West Lake where one could watch clouds fly in, mirroring distant hills, while sipping the perfect cup of Long Jing Tea under a full Autumn moon. Visually, it was all I had hoped for. I knew the tea house would look and feel old and weather-worn, and that was perfect. Pen and notepad in hand, I sat down to compose a poem. Unfortunately, a very loud and excited member of our China tour named Bill, from the Bronx, saw me sitting alone and was really in the mood to chat. As it happened, I never did get my poem written. Thankfully, fifteen years later, my twelve year old daughter, Katie found greater success:



Nearby West Lake was the mountain crag called the “Peak Which Flew in from Afar” (飞来峰 Fēilái Fēng), which legend claims transported itself from India; the Six Harmonies Pagoda (六和塔 Liùhé Tǎ); which, for centuries served as a lighthouse on the Qiantang River, and the Broken Bridge (断桥 Duàn Qiáo), backdrop for one of China’s most famous folk tales, the Legend of the White Snake. In this story a young man named 許宣 Xǔ Xuān falls in love with a beautiful woman named 白素貞 Bái Sùzhēn, who is actually a thousand year old white snake. There are many versions of the story but all involve the Broken Bridge (where they first

met), a Buddhist Monk named 法海 Fǎ Hǎi, who tries to reveal Bai Suzhen's true identity and end their romance, and Bai Suzhen's best friend, a green snake by the name of 小青 Xiǎo Qīng.

My favorite tale, however, is about the patriot, 岳飛 Yuè Fēi. He was born into a poor, but very patriotic family. When he was young, his own mother engraved the tattoo, 盡忠報國 jìn zhōng bào guó “serve the country with the utmost loyalty”, on his back, and that message served as Yue Fei's driving force in life. Despite his unfortunate circumstances, Yue Fei managed to become both educated and a respected general in the Jin military. While fighting to recover Kaifeng, the Northern Song capital, Yue Fei was called back to Hangzhou by the Emperor Gaozong (宋高宗 Sòng Gāozōng), but failed to respond. Qín Guì (秦檜) then falsely accused Yue Fei of being a traitor to his country on trumped up charges and Yue Fei was put to death. Although later history points the finger of guilt at Emperor Gaozong, it was Qin Gui and his wife, Lady Wang, who were to ultimately be remembered – in a very unique manner – as traitors to China. One of the most popular pastries in China is called yóutiáo (油條). Some people liken youtiao to side-by-side crullers or churros without sugar. In Taiwan, we used to eat youtiao with steaming hot doujiang (soybean milk) for breakfast. In Hong Kong, people will often eat these alongside their morning chok, aka congee (粥 zhōu).

The story goes that a doughmaker and his friend were sitting around at the end of the day, disconcerted over the unjust death of Yuefei, and the despicable nature of Qin Gui and his wife. So, the doughmaker picked up a couple of pieces of remaining dough and said. “This is what I'd really like to do with those two.” He stuck two long pieces of dough together, fashioned faces for each, and dropped them into boiling oil. Take that, you traitors, you “deep-fried devils” (油炸鬼 yóuzhǎguǐ). The Cantonese term, yàuhjagwai, is still popularly used in Hong Kong for youtiao.

I would be remiss, however, if I didn't update my story to the year 2019. Hangzhou had changed enormously since the days when we went in search of the teahouse where Tang Dynasty poets drank Dragon Well Oolong Tea while watching the full moon reflect on the quiet waters of West Lake. Only a few of the low-rise buildings along West Lake itself have been preserved. 樓外樓 Lóu Wài Lóu still serves great authentic Hangzhou food. High rise, modern architecture abounds and there is a huge open air shopping mall spanning two MRT stations right on the lake. Where the Ping He Qiu Yue teahouse once stood, there is now a giant Starbucks (one of four located on or nearby West Lake.) Maybe great poems are being written there now over Caramel Macchiatos.