

Travel in Chinese - Lesson 57 - Hutong 1

1. 雪梅: 我们今天走了这么长时间, 我都快累死了。
2. 同事: 那我们到那边坐一会儿再走吧。
3. 雪梅: 看, 我买了一本介绍中国建筑的书, 不错吧。
4. 同事: 我看看, 真不错, 还有很多图片呢。
5. 雪梅: (接过书) 你看, 四合院, 我一直对这种建筑很感兴趣, 你以前住过四合院吗?
6. 同事: 没有, 我们家以前一直住在楼房里, 不过我有朋友就住在四合院里。
7. 雪梅: 说到四合院啊, 我还想起一件有意思的事情来呢。(边说边笑)
8. 同事: 什么事情啊? 看把你乐的。
9. 雪梅: 我刚到中国的时候, 有一天闲着没事儿, 觉得闷得慌, 就顺路溜达到一个小胡同去了。
10. 同事: 那里边很窄吧?
11. 雪梅: 没错, 里边有一个院子, 开着门, 我就忍不住走进去看看。
12. 同事: 真的吗? 有人撵你吗?
13. 雪梅: 没有, 不过里边出来个人问我, 你找谁, 吓得我赶紧溜掉了。
14. 同事: 哈哈, 碰了个钉子吧。
15. 雪梅: 这我倒不在乎, 只可惜我没有机会好好看看那个院子。
16. 同事: 你这么感兴趣的话, 不如我带你去一个地方看看好了。
17. 雪梅: 那太好了。
18. 同事: 我说的地方离这儿倒不远, 要不我们现在就过去看看?
19. 雪梅: 好, 我们走吧。
20. (到参观地)
同事: 雪梅, 这就是我说的地方。
21. 雪梅: 这里的胡同可真多, 我们从哪儿开始啊? 我的导游小姐?
22. 同事: (清清嗓子) 恩, 俗话说, 这北京啊, 是有名的胡同三千六, 无名的胡同赛牛毛。
23. 雪梅: 哈哈, 你还真象这么回事儿。
24. 同事: 雪梅, 往这儿走。这些都是四合院。
25. 雪梅: 咱们走近点儿看看。哎, 这是门墩儿吗?
26. 同事: 对, 不同的门墩儿就有不同的意思, 你从门墩儿就可以知道这家人是做什么工作的。
27. 雪梅: 哦, 原来是这样的。那一个四合院里可以住四家人吗?
28. 同事: 那可不一定, 原来有钱的人是一家人住一个或者几个四合院, 没钱的人呢, 就很多家人合住一个四合院。
29. 雪梅: 那这儿的四合院还和以前一样吗?
30. 同事: 不, 已经有很大不同了, 大部分四合院的格局都已经改变了。
31. 雪梅: 你看, 那儿还有空调, 我觉得四合院的生活也变得现代化了。

32.同事: 在我看来, 这儿无论怎么变, 都是北京生活最重要的代表。

Translation:

1. Xuemei: We bought so many books today. I'm exhausted. Let's take a rest over there.
2. Colleague: OK. Let's get something to drink at the teahouse over there.
3. Xuemei: Look, I bought a book on Chinese architecture. Pretty good, huh?
4. Colleague: Let me see. It's not bad. There are lots of pictures inside.
5. Xuemei: (takes the book) Look at the square courtyard, I've always been interested in this sort of architecture. Have you lived in square courtyards before?
6. Colleague: No, we always lived in high-rise buildings, but I have friends who live in square courtyards.
7. Xuemei: Speaking of square courtyards, I just remembered something interesting. (starts laughing)
8. Colleague: What's so funny?
9. Xuemei: When I first came to China, I had nothing to do one day and was bored, so I strolled into a little hutong (narrow alley).
10. Colleague: It must have been very narrow inside, right?
11. Xuemei: That's right. There was a yard inside, with the door open. I couldn't help but go in and have a look.
12. Colleague: Really? No one came to shoo you away?
13. Xuemei: No, but somebody did come out and ask me who I was looking for. I left in a hurry.
14. Colleague: Got knocked back, huh?
15. Xuemei: That's all right. It's just a pity I didn't get to have a proper look at the courtyard.
16. Colleague: Since you're so interested, how about I take you to a place to have a look.
17. Xuemei: That would be wonderful.
18. Colleague: The place I'm talking about isn't far from here. How about we head over there now?
19. Xuemei: OK, let's go.
20. (at the site)
Colleague: Xuemei, this is the place I was talking about.
21. Xuemei: There are so many hutongs here. Where do we start, Miss Tourguide?
22. Colleague: (clears the throat) Hmm, the saying goes, Beijing has three thousand six hundred hutongs, there are more nameless hutongs than a bull has hairs.
23. Xuemei: Haha, you're really getting into the spirit.
24. Colleague: Xuemei, go this way. Look, these are all square courtyards.
25. Xuemei: Let's take a closer look. Hey, is this a doorstep?
26. Colleague: Yes, different doorstops mean different things. You can tell from the doorstep what sort of work the family did.
27. Xuemei: Oh, is that so. Does a square courtyard accommodate four families?
28. Colleague: Not necessarily. In the old days wealthy families would live in one or more square courtyards. The people who weren't so well-off shared a square courtyard.
29. Xuemei: Are the square courtyards here like the ones before?
30. Colleague: No, they're vastly different now. Most square courtyards have changed their layouts.
31. Xuemei: Look, there's even an air-conditioner. Looks like life in the square courtyards has been modernized too.
32. Colleague: To me, no matter how it changes, this is the most important part of Beijing living.

Bookmarks

1) 忍不住 can't resist

例) 烤鸭太好吃了, 虽然我害怕长胖, 但还是忍不住多吃了几口。

Roast duck tastes too good. Although I'm afraid of gaining weight, I couldn't resist having a few extra bites.

例) 看着他不懂装懂的样子, 大家都忍不住笑了起来。

When we saw how he was trying to pretend, we couldn't help laughing.

2) 碰钉子 to run into a problem

例) 求人帮忙要有礼貌, 免得碰钉子。

When you ask someone for help, you should be polite. Otherwise, you might have a problem.

例)

我今天碰了个钉子, 他明明知道小王的电话号码却不告诉我。

I ran into a problem today. He obviously knew Xiaowang's phone number, but he wouldn't tell me.

3) 或者 or

例) 你明天或者后天来都行, 我都有空儿。

You can come tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I have time either day.

例) 不管刮风或者下雨, 他每天早晨都坚持锻炼。

No matter whether it's windy or it's raining, he keeps exercising every morning.

Sign Posts

Hutong 1

Let's talk a little about hutongs in Beijing. As we explained earlier, these refer to the narrow alleyways in the older parts of Beijing. They date originally from the Yuan Dynasty, although at least one hutong can be dated back to the Liao dynasty before that, over 900 years ago. It is estimated that there were approximately 6000 hutong around 1950. Recent development has changed the face of many hutongs, but often the modern streets retain their historical name. For example, goldfish hutong 金鱼胡同 is now a wide street and home to 5 star hotels, but it still retains its name as a hutong. Some of the most significant hutongs are now protected as cultural relics, so any modern development has to preserve the nature of the hutong.

The hutongs and the courtyard homes 四合院 that they link are the foundation of traditional family life in Beijing. They also provide the structure for harmonious neighbourhoods. Often, several families would live within one hutong, so the courtyard was a public space for all to share. Other times, several courtyard homes would share public facilities like washrooms and bath houses. The family has always been the foundation of society in China, but there is a saying in Beijing that 远亲不如近邻 distant relatives are not as important as close neighbours. So these neighbourhoods were vital in providing a living space that everyone could share.

Many people nowadays prefer living in the hutongs than in modern houses and high-rise apartments, even though the hutongs often do not have modern plumbing or heating systems. After all, the hutongs and courtyard homes were built to reflect Chinese philosophy and fengshui, which is a Chinese term that is becoming more common in the west. For example, most courtyard homes have their main entrance on the south side, so that you can 坐北朝南 sit in the north and face south, just as the Emperor does in his palace. There are 门墩, as we learned in this lesson, to guard the entrance and a 屏风 screen wall just inside the entrance to deflect evil spirits. Trees are planted in the courtyard to enhance the qi or spiritual energy. Of course, these also have a practical side. The screen wall also blocks the view inside from passers-by, and trees provide shade from the summer sun. But in all, hutongs were designed as a comfortable place for families and neighbours to live, and at least some of this lifestyle still survives to this day.

Substitution and Extension

1) 在.....看来 in one's view

例) 在我看来, 到茶馆去看京剧很有意思。

In my view, watching Peking Opera at a teahouse is very interesting.

例) 在他看来, 住四合院更舒服。

In his view, it's more comfortable to live in a courtyard home.

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