

## Episode 41: Illegal Chinese Restaurants

### Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about the fun (and tasty) experience of going to illegal Chinese restaurants in their new home city of Lisbon, Portugal.

### Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about Chinese restaurants and, in particular, Chinese restaurants in the city where we live now, which is Lisbon, in Portugal. And this seems like a pretty boring topic, right? I mean, there's Chinese restaurants everywhere in the world.

Wendy: Yeah, but the ones here are a bit different.

Nick: They're a bit different. So they're Chinese restaurants with a twist<sup>1</sup>, umm, which we'll get into<sup>2</sup> in a minute. Umm, but there is a large Chinese community in Lisbon. Umm, and in one particular area of the old part of Lisbon, which is called the Mouraria, uhh, there ... it's the most multicultural area of Lisbon and there's a lot of Chinese shops and a lot of, umm ... you know, you see a lot of Chinese people around, things like that. And so there have been a lot of Chinese people who have immigrated here, you know, in previous generations, and now there's a new group of Chinese people who are coming to Portugal and these are the wealthy Chinese because Portugal has a golden visa program, umm, whereby<sup>3</sup> if you purchase property up to a certain amount, you can, uhh, get residency and eventually citizenship in Portugal. And since Portugal announced this plan about four or five years ago, about 80 to 85 per cent of the people who have, umm, enrolled<sup>4</sup> in the program are Chinese.

Wendy: Right, yeah. But that's a different kind of Chinese immigrant than what ... than the kind of people who immigrated in the past. So yeah, you have quite a spectrum now of people from different economic backgrounds, umm, different social backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> with a twist: with a different or unusual aspect to it

<sup>2</sup> get into (phrasal verb: to get into): talk about in more detail

<sup>3</sup> whereby: under the terms of which (referring back to the last thing that was said)

<sup>4</sup> enrolled: signed up for and been accepted into a course, program etc

Nick: And so even when you come into the airport you see ads that are in Chinese...

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: ...umm, talking to the Chinese people who are coming to Lisbon. But yeah, the sort of original area where Chinese people, perhaps poorer Chinese people, would go, is this, uhh, area called the Mouraria, which is close to Alfama, the most famous of the historic neighbourhoods in Lisbon. And, so, we were talking, or we're going to be talking, about Chinese restaurants. And there are several Chinese restaurants that we call illegal Chinese restaurants.

Wendy: Yeah, it's not just us. I mean, that's how everyone refers to them as the illegal Chinese restaurants, because they are. They don't have a legal permit to operate as a restaurant and, so, we do have legal restaurants here, legal Chinese restaurants in Lisbon as well, and those look like any other Chinese restaurant that you might see in any other part of the world. Umm, you know, you'd have just a normal shopfront and you'd probably have a menu outside. But the illegal Chinese ones are very different and they're very hidden, so you have to know where they are and ... or someone has to tell you. Actually nowadays you can look it up on the Internet too, and some of them ... people have written blogs about them, so you can find some information about them. But generally, they're in apartment buildings, so the space where the restaurant is was not built as a space for a restaurant at all. It was built as a space where people would live. And so they'll be up on maybe the second, third, fourth floor of a multi-storey building, and you would just ring the buzzer<sup>5</sup> downstairs and then they would buzz you in so that you would be able to go up the stairs and then suddenly you're in a restaurant but it still kind of looks like you're in someone's home.

Nick: Right, so the first thing is finding it as you said, and so there are, or there's at least one that you can find on Google Maps, and it says 'clandestine<sup>6</sup> Chinese restaurant'. Umm, but, yeah, as you said, so someone can ... might tell you where it is or you might be aware. But we have discovered now that there's a way you can tell sometimes, that if you're in the area where you know where they are, if you start to look up at the windows of the buildings, if you see a lot of Chinese lanterns<sup>7</sup>, then that's a good indicator that that could be one of the illegal Chinese restaurants. And so, yeah, the first time you go there, though, it's a bit unusual and you don't know exactly what to do. And you see all the buzzers, as you said. And usually, there's a

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<sup>5</sup> buzzer: anything that makes a 'buzzing' sound; in this case it's the intercom system that apartment buildings have so that people inside can let people outside into the building

<sup>6</sup> clandestine: secret

<sup>7</sup> lanterns: distinctive lights or lamps, typical in Chinese culture, where they are often red

very small indication what ... which one is the buzzer that you need to press. There's no sign, umm, but there's just, uhh, maybe a sticker or something that's a different colour next to it, umm, that just marks it out as being different from the other buzzers and you think, 'OK, maybe it's this one,' and then you just press it. And like you said, they just buzz you up. And so then you go up as though you're in any other apartment building, as though you're going to your own apartment or to your friend's house or something like that. Umm, and then you ... there'll be some Chinese writing or something on the door so you know which is the correct door, and you knock on it and they let you in.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And so we've been to a couple of different ones, I think. Umm, and one of them, they had quite a large living room which they'd turned into the main dining area of the restaurant, and so there were quite a few tables there. So they'd done a pretty good job, I think, in converting it to something that was close to a normal restaurant. But the other one wasn't like that at all.

Wendy: No, it's, uhh, just a series of very small rooms, you know, rooms that were built to be bedrooms or living rooms. Umm, but, yeah, just very small, family spaces. And so usually we're ... they seat us in a room that has, I think, two tables in it, umm, and, yeah, it's just an extremely small space and then they have a couple of other rooms with some larger tables, so if you're in a larger group they'll place you in one of those rooms. Umm, but it's a very *intimate*<sup>8</sup> atmosphere and it's a lot of fun. I love it because I get to practice my Chinese. Umm, as we've mentioned before, I studied Chinese for a number of years, and I'm pretty rusty at it now. Umm, I should practice more, but this is ... gives me one opportunity to speak to the people who are running the restaurant and to practice reading the menu in Chinese and things like that.

Nick: Right, because the menus are in Chinese and Portuguese. Umm, and, you know, we've been to China quite a few times. You've been more than me because you did a lot of study trips and things as well there. So what do you think of the menu in terms of the authenticity?

Wendy: It's very authentic, which most Chinese restaurants outside of China are not. And so that is really what sets it apart for me. I mean, it's also just a really interesting experience, you know, all of the different things that we've discussed about walking up the stairs in this apartment building and then suddenly you're in someone's home and, uhh, it's a restaurant. But besides that, what's really special to me about these restaurants is that they're actually serving real Chinese food, the food that you would eat in China. And in most Chinese restaurants where I've been,

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<sup>8</sup> *intimate*: closely personal. Often used to talk about relationships with partners, but in this case Wendy means that the customers are sitting close together in a small space.

whether it's in the United States or Australia or any of the countries where we've travelled around the world, uhh, it's been ... it's a very adapted form of Chinese cuisine, where they've learned what the local tastes are and they've adapted to those local tastes. And many of those dishes, you know, people have never heard of them in China. But in the illegal Chinese restaurants you get the authentic dishes, the ones that people in China really eat.

Nick: Yeah, and so I guess when they started them, they were probably serving the Chinese immigrant community. Umm, but now you see Portuguese people and you see other tourists who have heard of them as well, and so it's a kind of mixture of different clientele<sup>9</sup> who go to those places.

Wendy: Yeah, and I guess different people go for different reasons. I imagine that the Chinese community go because this is the food that they love, that they grew up with and, you know, it's nostalgic for them. They miss those flavours and so that's why they go, is for the food. Umm, and then for Portuguese people or expats like us who live here in Portugal or tourists who are just passing through, umm, I imagine part of the appeal is the fact that it's illegal. You know, it makes it kind of cool. Umm...

Nick: Yeah, it's exciting when you first go and you don't know exactly where it is and you're a little bit lost and you think this is the right number but there's no sign. And so you're just not really sure exactly what you're doing. So I remember, you know, that happened to us the first time that we went and then, yeah, you feel like it's a ... you're getting membership into some kind of secret club...

Wendy: Right.

Nick: ...that not everybody knows where to find these restaurants.

Wendy: So you feel like you're having an adventure and you're not just ticking off boxes<sup>10</sup> and going to the sites that your Lonely Planet guidebook told you to visit. You know, you're doing something real and different and interesting.

Nick: Yeah, and so we've had really some of the best meals that we've had in Lisbon in these illegal Chinese places.

Wendy: Yeah, absolutely, yeah the food is really good. I definitely recommend it.

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<sup>9</sup> clientele: clients or customers, referred to collectively or in a group

<sup>10</sup> ticking off boxes: marking tasks on a list as completed

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why are the Chinese restaurants illegal?
2. How do you find out about the illegal Chinese restaurants, according to Nick and Wendy?
3. What does Wendy think of the food at the illegal Chinese restaurants?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. 'How's your job?' 'I don't want to \_\_\_\_\_ it now. Can we talk about something else?'
2. I've decided to go back to university. In fact, I've already \_\_\_\_\_ for next semester.
3. During Chinese New Year, you see lots of red \_\_\_\_\_ hanging in people's windows as part of the celebrations.
4. We would like to open a new restaurant, but firstly we have to think about what kind of food to serve and what kind of \_\_\_\_\_ we want to attract.
5. There are still a lot of things we have to get done before we move house. So right now we're spending all our time \_\_\_\_\_ and hoping that we haven't forgotten anything.
6. Her \_\_\_\_\_ didn't work and my phone was dead, so I had to yell out so that she knew I was downstairs and she could let me in.
7. The rebel movement held \_\_\_\_\_ meetings for two years before the government found out where their headquarters was.
8. He would like to have a more \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with her but she's in love with someone else.
9. Speed dating is dating \_\_\_\_\_. You only talk to someone for 10 minutes before moving on to someone else.
10. We signed a contract for the house \_\_\_\_\_ we have 30 days to pay the full amount.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Do you like Chinese food? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever been to an 'illegal' restaurant or had a similar experience? What was it like?
3. Wendy says that Chinese food outside China is not usually the same as it is in China. In your opinion, is this true for other international cuisines? Which ones?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. They're illegal because the owners don't have a permit and because the restaurants are housed in apartments.
2. You can find out about them by word-of-mouth, or through blogs, or even on Google Maps.
3. She likes the food because she says it's authentic Chinese food that you find in China but not often in Chinese restaurants outside China.

### Exercises

1. get into
2. enrolled
3. lanterns
4. clientele
5. ticking off boxes
6. buzzer
7. clandestine
8. intimate
9. with a twist
10. whereby