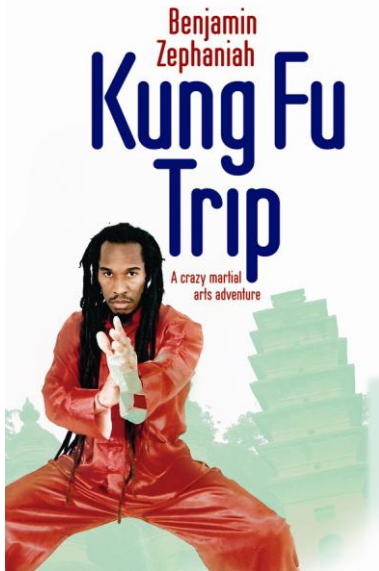


## **Kung Fu Trip by Benjamin Zephaniah**



From the moment Benjamin Zephaniah meets the 'kissy kissy' woman in his Chinese hotel, you know this isn't going to be an ordinary tourist story. Benjamin visits master Iron Breath to learn the secrets of Kung Fu – but it's not going to be easy, or cheap. Is he going to be ripped off? Would it be better to see Fat Thumb and his Smelly Finger? Why does everyone want him to sing like Eddy Grant? One thing's for sure, it's all a lot different to home.

Kung Fu Trip is a little bit daft and a whole lot of fun.

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# KUNG FU TRIP

## Chapter One

I wanted to leave London. This is why. There were too many bombs going off. After joining America in her 'war on terrorism', our Prime Minister had started his own 'war on terrorism'. Muslim houses were being raided all over the country and my Muslim friends felt as if they were under siege. I was stopped three times in one day and I don't look anything like a Muslim.

So I decided to go to China, to study kung fu at the Shaolin Temple, spiritual home of the martial arts. It would be a great trip for a kung fu fanatic like me. For all of you who do karate or judo, or any form of stick fighting, and for all of you who just watch Jackie Chan movies, this Chinese temple is where it all started.

I arrived in China at 9.30 a.m. Beijing time, of course. It was exactly the same time and date that I had arrived the year before. I went to China for the first time for the same reason I had been to Russia, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine and Israel. I was sick of hearing stories about these places that were untrue – in other words propaganda – and I wanted to see these countries for myself.

When I discovered Beijing, I fell in love with the dirty, crowded city. Television had given me the idea that the city was full of millions of poor Chinese folk on bikes. Not at all. There were more cars than bikes. There were still some bicycles, but Chinese cyclists had roads of their own, many the size of British main roads.

I can never just blend in when I walk the streets in China. There are some Africans in Beijing, but there are no Rastas, so I am a bit of a novelty. Some people faint when they see me. Others take one look and run away. Children have run up to me and stroked my legs, thinking that I was a kind of big doll. Twice men have bowed down believing that I was a god.

In hotels, though, it's not the same. People in hotels don't stare so much or react in such a big way. They just ask me where I'm from, or they tell me that they have a record by someone who looks like me.

On my first day in Beijing this time round I was changing some money in the hotel when a man came up to me. He was wearing a trilby hat and a big coat, which was strange when it was so hot.

'Where you from?' he asked.

'London,' I said.

'You speak Chinese?' he asked.

'No,' I said.

'You know Beijing?'

'Not very well,' I said.

'Your first time here?'

'No, I've been here before,' I said.

He smiled and raised his hat. 'Ah, so you like my country?'

'Yeah man, it's cool. That's why I've come back.'

He moved closer to me and spoke quietly. 'Is everything here all right for you?'

'Yes, it's all good, man, really cool. The only thing is I know I will have a hard time finding vegan food.'

'What?' he said, tilting his hat over his eyes. 'Vegan food, no problem. We will find a place for you to get very vegan food.'

He stopped for a moment and stared into the distance. Then he looked back at me like a confused schoolboy and asked, 'What is vegan?'

'Hey,' I said, jokingly punching his shoulder, 'you're telling me that you can get me vegan food and you don't even know what vegan food is?'

I explained to him that vegan meant not eating anything that has come from an animal, so no meat, fish, milk, eggs. He said, 'Yes. Buddha.' He meant that the Buddhist restaurants in China are good for vegan food. I think they are great, some of the best in the world. They are completely vegan but on the menu you will find things like 'meat-free cow' and 'Buddha Burger'. The dishes look like meat and they taste like meat and have all the protein of meat, but without the cruelty.

Then the man with the hat said, 'I have interpreter. He speak very good English. He know all places in Beijing. He will help you.'

'No,' I said, 'it's cool. I'll be OK. I can check things out on the internet. Don't worry about me.'

'I worry about you. You are guest in my country. You are vegan guest in my country. You must enjoy your vegan stay.'

I wanted to walk away, but I didn't want to offend the guy.

'Sorry, I have to change some money,' I said, handing over two fifty-pound notes to the cashier. He stepped aside but when I had finished and I was going up to

my room, the man stopped me again.

'OK,' he said. 'You talk to my friend. He give you advice if you need, or help you with some Chinese word. He very good translator. He just make sure you all right.'

'I'm all right,' I insisted. 'I've been to Beijing before. I can get around.'

'But my friend just want to help,' he said, looking as if he was about to burst into tears.

'Does he want money?' I asked.

'No. You don't pay him if you don't like. He just give you advice, make sure you all right. If you want to use him again, maybe you give him little money. If you want him guide you around city, maybe you give him little money, but if no, it's OK. He just like to meet and help foreigner.'

'*What have I got to lose?*' I thought. 'Where is he?' I said.

'Give me your room number.'

'No way,' I replied.

'Nothing to worry about,' he said. 'Give me your room number. He come up in ten minutes, talk with you and then go.'

I thought about it. I had never felt unsafe in China and I didn't think this guy was a crook. He was something else, but not a crook. I decided to give him my room number.

'Room 905, ninth floor.'

'OK. Ten minutes, he come.'

I went to my room and put my passport and other valuables in the safe. I sat down and began my usual thing of going through the television channels to see if they have the BBC, and then if they have any other English-speaking channels. No BBC, but I found CNN, and I cursed the management. I don't like CNN.

I was still cursing when there was a knock on the door. I looked through the spyhole and saw a woman. I thought it was housekeeping or room service so I opened the door. She walked straight past me and into the room.

'Hello, sir. Me interpreter, me city guide, me help you.'

'I thought you were going to be a man,' I said, trying not to show I was surprised.

'Me no man. Me very woman.'

She sat down on the bed. She was full of energy. Her eyes darted all over me, and all over the room.

'Where you from? What your name? How long you stay?' she asked me as quickly as a gangsta rapper, giving me no time to reply.

'Come here,' she shouted.

I walked towards her.

'Close the door,' she shouted.

I closed it.

'Sit down,' she shouted.

I sat down.

'Kiss me.'

'What?' I shouted. 'Are you crazy?'

'Kiss me now, please.'

I was lost for words. I looked around the room for help, as if someone was going to step out of a wardrobe and get me out of this.

'Kiss me,' she said again. 'You are slim, you look strong and you have hot blood.'

She pointed to the bed, she pointed to the table, she pointed to the chair, she pointed to the bathroom and she pointed to the floor.

'I want you to kiss me there, there, there, there and there. You can do that?'

I didn't know what to say.

I stood up. Then I had an idea. I was going to speak calmly and firmly. I was going to take control.

'Look, your friend – the man who approached me downstairs – said you too would be a man. He said you can speak good English and that you could help me. He said you would talk to me.'

She stood up. 'You kiss me first then I talk to you. You can't just come to my country and no kiss me. I am hot chick. This is my country. Now you kiss me there, there, there, there and there. We kissy kissy, then we talky talky, you stupid man.'

I didn't want to offend the woman, but this was my room. I had rights.

'What's your name?' I asked, without knowing why.

'My name is Louise.'

'What is your Chinese name?' I like to try to use people's real names. I think it shows some respect. It's not right that African and Asian people should feel they have to make their names sound western. We should learn their names just as they learn ours.

'Shut up, just shut up and give me service.' She was getting angry. I tried to get her to speak quietly but she just got louder.

'You listen to me, dark man. We kissy kissy then I take you to Tiananmen Square, and I take you to get the German food.'

I laughed.

'I don't want German food. I want vegan food.'

'My friend said you want German food.'

'No, not German, vegan. I want vegan food. How did vegan food get to be German food?'

'Never mind the food.' Now she was getting really angry. 'Look at me. You like me?'

'Yes,' I said quickly. 'You're a very nice girl.'

'So why you no kissy kissy me?'

I tried to be nice. 'I would like to get to know you first. We have only just met. You don't even know my name, and I just got off the plane. I think that if you get to know me we could be friends. I'm a poet. I have a twin sister. She's nothing like me. Do you know any kung fu?'

'Kung fu? Kung fu? Kung fu is stupid. I want kissy kissy, you stupid dark man.'

She went quiet. It was a long stretch of quiet. She just stared at me and took a couple of deep breaths. Then she said, 'If you don't kissy kissy me, I will kill you.'

'That's not fair,' I said.

'If you don't kissy kissy me, I will kill you. I not afraid of dark man. I will kill you.'

'Get out,' I said. 'Get out now. Are you mad or what? You can't just come in here and say kissy kissy me. You can't just say you will kill me. What kind of woman

are you? Just get out.'

She got up.

'I go,' she said. 'I will go now, and I don't need you, dark man.' And she walked out of my room.

## Other Resources



Skillswise is the BBC website for adults who want to improve their basic skills in reading, writing and maths. Skillswise aims to become a thriving web community of learners and tutors.

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