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SHANGHAI

## Shanghai Gu Yi Garden Restaurant

An old, atmospheric spot to get dumplings with a lot of history behind them.

By CHRISTOPHER ST. CAVISH

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### Location

South gate of Gu Yi Garden, 218 Hu Yi Highway near Gu Yi Yuan Nan Lu, Jiading District (沪宜公路218号, 古猗园南大门)  
Shanghai, China

### What to order

pork soup dumplings (鲜肉小笼, xian rou xiao long)

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The founding myth of Shanghai soup dumplings says that they were first served at the Gu Yi Garden Restaurant in Nanxiang in the 1860s, by a man named Huang Mingxian. Nanxiang used to be a township but was eventually absorbed into greater Shanghai, and is now about a half hour away from People's Square by taxi.

The myth is bullshit, though, because there is a soup dumpling belt that stretches from Shanghai to Central Asia (at least), and several cities in this part of eastern China have their own variations that predate Mingxian. What he actually did (probably) was take the soup dumpling idea and refine it: smaller, milder, no soy sauce in the filling, less sugar. What he most likely invented was a style—and over the years, as his descendants moved

from the countryside into Shanghai's Old Town and set up shop there, the Nanxiang-style become synonymous with Shanghai in general. It's a distinction that's still very much alive within Shanghai, where there are multiple styles (Suzhou/Wuxi, Nanjing, Nanxiang).

What's cool about this restaurant is that it is genuinely old and very atmospheric, a big Chinese open-air hall with massive round pillars for support and flying eaves. It looks like how you'd want China to look, which is not usually the case in Shanghai. And it has that history, even if it's a little overblown.

The dumplings are so-so. But there are at least six other soup dumpling restaurants just outside the garden along Gu Yi Yuan Nan Lu, so a trip here, and to Nanxiang in general, is for people who want to take the hunt to the extreme. Shanghai's gotten richer and its taste more sophisticated in the last thirty years, and so have its standards for soup dumplings. The thick-skinned and soup-light dumplings you'll get out here won't make a splash in downtown anymore, but these are the roots.

**CHINA, DUMPLINGS, SHANGHAI, SOUP DUMPLINGS**

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