Shanghai Hongqiao has two modes of long – distance transport that I know of: High – Speed Rail and Plane. I arrived there on an earlier train from Suzhou. I will describe the railway and then share my experience.

**Anyone taking a train from this station should know that ticket – checking begins 30 minutes prior to departure in my experience (the deviation I mentioned previously) and ends 3-5 minutes prior to departure, depending on the train.**

**All single – digit and double – digit trains operating between these two cities are Fuxing.** They are roughly 4.5 hours in duration as they stop 1-3 times (mostly twice, as mine did).

In all, there’s over 40 pairs of trains going between these two cities. Ten of those are a good idea if you want to ride about two thirds of the route or ride the whole route or something in between. They sell out really fast (over a week in advance), and they’re the ones that you want to take. They’re one- or two-digit number trains (G1, G14, etc.). The rest of those are trains that you probably should try to avoid because they take too long and stop at many places. Unless you want to stop and get off at one of the small stations, but they are actually small and have passing tracks in the middle for the remainder of the trains.

Not only is time a reason to pick a different train, but the price! If you go from Shanghai Hongqiao to Beijing South, whether you like it or not, you have to pay 553 for either train. I suppose it’s ok paying the 1780 for the Business Class ride (because you have more time to sleep), but if you’re traveling in Second Class or even First Class, stick to the shorter rides.

When booking trains that originate or terminate in Hangzhou, know that a majority are operated by Hexie (I think except G20, G32, and G44 going north). Three – digit numbers (such as G123, G134) are operated by a mix of Hexie and Fuxing. They are 5-6 hours long and I don’t recommend taking those trains unless you’re getting off in the middle. I saw G134 being operated by a CR400AF-B, so that is a Fuxing – operated train as of now. Not promising though!

Trains G1, G4, G6, G9, G16, G17, and G21 are operated by a variant of Fuxing CR400AF. They are the red on grey painting (Red Dragon nickname). The rest (that are one or two digit trains) are gold on white painting (Gold Phoenix nickname).

If you’re taking a train, be aware that some trains arrive/depart from Shanghai Main Station, not Shanghai Hongqiao. As far as I’m aware, the trains are G5, G6, G12, G15, G18, and G21 arrive or depart from Shanghai Main Station.

There are also overnight trains. They are D- head trains, and are operated by sleepers. It’s a sleeper in the Fuxing series, and operate on the regular railway at 160 km/h. These are known as the CR200J.

I will be taking train G4 to Beijing South in Second Class. It will be operated by a CR400AF-B maintained by Beijing Railway Bureau. This train came in earlier today as train G1 (I think).

Buying tickets during peak season (such as the summer) is very hard from what I gather. The trains that were still available for booking when I checked two days ago made me glad I booked two weeks in advance! You’ll probably still be able to purchase a ticket on the day of travel, but it’ll likely be in an expensive class and you’ll be spending 5-6 hours on the train, making the flight trip seem a lot better. **Book as soon as possible! (but tickets don’t start selling until 30 days before.)**

I came in earlier today from Suzhou and was able to enjoy transit without re-clearing security simply by following the signs on the ground. I believe it’s only available in major stations since I did not see any of those signs in Suzhou and Wuxi, but you’d be able to transit in Beijing South (I saw signs there). Basically, you take an elevator or stairs to the departures level (in other words, you’re going the opposite direction) and someone will check the tickets of your next train. Definitely doesn’t work if you still need to purchase a ticket!

After you enter the departures level, you can buy food, water, use the bathroom, etc. Everyone lines up to board the train an hour in advance (just as the train before it finishes boarding, making everyone confused, frustrated, and cutting lines), probably to get coveted storage space for their belongings as very few people follow the guidelines set by China Railways (not that it’s enforced, as long as it goes into the baggage screener, you’ll be fine) …

I used the automatic ticket gates. It’s usable if you have a blue ticket issued by the railway, plus some third-party vendors if you pick them up at the station (check with who gives you the tickets to make sure they’re accurate). If you need assistance or have a red ticket, use the manual ticket gate.

It was downstairs to the platform, with only one side of the platform occupied (which was our train). We had platform three.

The train is a Fuxing CR400AF-B, which is 17 carriages long (8 motor and 9 trailer). The longest Hexie trains (which are also EMUs) are 16 carriages long. I put my belongings behind my seat (I had the last row), then left to grab a picture of the head. I was not the only person doing it. This is a new train, and it’s been heavily marketed (WeChat, Sina Weibo, etc.), so of course, there is a lot of fanfare.

I also measured the seat. With the addition of another row per carriage (which do not lengthen, which is also impossible with the addition of another carriage with this train), something must give. That was the seat pitch.

On a similar carriage in Hexie, there are 85 seats, so the pitch is 36 inches. The pitch in Fuxing is 33 inches (I could not believe this – I measured two seats, one ahead of the other) because there are now 90 seats, squeezed in the similar place. The seat is still better than most planes.

The width of the seat is 17 inches (17.5 inches for middles). The width of the armrests is 2 inches, which means that the width gave in favor of larger armrests.

The recline is 12 inches. It’s to the accuracy of my measuring tape. It’s so generous if you’re the person reclining, it’s a curse if the person in front reclines into you.

Windows are large and can be shut using blinds. The panel is decorated to look like wood (it’s plastic because the sound of a fingertip tapping on wood is much lower pitch than the one I found, plus the texture was overexaggerated), and I balanced a pen, no problem, during the ride.

I noticed that, except for the startup and stopping, it was quiet, even though I was on the wheels in the motor car. Little to no whirring sound on this train! When we started up and reached a certain speed (but never for the entire ride, no, it was only as we were accelerating), you could hear the motor spooling up. Whenever we slowed down to a speed in the cities, you could hear the motor spooling down. It was something noticeable, audible. I have never experienced the spooling sounds before on a Hexie or ICE train.

Due to the speed of the HSR, the train swayed a little bit when another train passed. Of course, with a 700 km/h swirling vortex, there was bound to be some type of force. At least that’s what I attributed this to.

Something that I found annoying was that the initial announcements lasted 15 minutes. There were also announcements broadcasting foods being served (“We’re going to walk around with trays of Ice Cream, or come to us in carriage 9!” “It’s dinnertime, and meals are being prepared in the catering car, we’ll walk with arms laden with food trays or you can come to us in carriage 9!” Carriage 9 is the catering car) that was mostly in Chinese.

We reached a speed of 350 km/h for at least 3.75 hours but slowed down to 300 km/h after passing Tianjin South. We would pass many stations (such as Dezhou East, Langfang, Suzhou North, Wuxi East, and Tianjin South) at high speeds, not slowing down at all.

We only stopped twice, at Nanjing South and Jinan West, which are large stations.

Drop – down tables are available for Second Class passengers. It’s by no means large, however, I did see someone using a 13” laptop. You can watch stuff on your phone (courtesy of yourself). Speaking of which…

I did not figure out how to use the Wi-Fi on the train. I used my phone number, but my connection did nothing useful, so I just read a book.

Remember to keep your tickets because they’ll be checked on the way out!