Writing Transcultural Memoir: *Ganyu*—Moving Encounters in Early Post-Mao China

Jennifer Marion Anderson

BA Hons Chinese

Masters Applied Linguistics

A thesis submitted for the degree of (*Doctor of Philosophy*) at

Monash University in 2017

School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics

Copyright notice

Abstract

Transcultural engagement is life changing. Encounters with people, places and events influence the sojourner student in unexpected and enduring ways. This doctoral project explores self-transformation captured in a creative memoir about my experiences as a young Australian woman at Nanjing University in early post-Mao China, 1979-1981 and 1983. The semi-chronological stories, reflective essays and poems, written in stages since 2002, deal with multilingual encounters (in Chinese and English) that have had lasting emotional and cognitive influences on my experience of the world. The dissertation component explores key literary features of this creative memoir.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

Print Name: Jennifer M. Anderson

Date: 20 November 2017

Publications during enrolment

Anderson. J. (2017). 'The Art of Travel'. Creative paper. *Authorised Theft: Writing, Scholarship, Collaboration*. Refereed proceedings of the 21st Conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, 2016, Canberra AUS ISBN: 978-0-9876305-0-7.

Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks go to supervisor Professor Professor Gloria Davies for her inspirational engagement with me on this PhD project, and her tireless and exacting feedback. I'm known for loving the process over the product, so it is due almost entirely to her that this PhD has been completed. Given its personal nature, I could not have had a more sympathetic adviser. Thanks also to second supervisor Associate Professor Chandani Lokuge for her useful comments.

To all the people who are represented as 'characters' in this creative work, those whose real names are used and those whose identities are masked, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the impacts you have had in shaping my 'Chinese sensibility'. Special thanks to Liao Kaifei, Theresa (Tee) Munford, Wang Ruigang, Yu Shen, Liu Dan, Xiao Jia, Zhang Yanhua, Ding Hao, André Kneib, Elizabeth Wichmann, 'Bai Ma', and long time 'fellow travellers' Jane Orton and Torrey Orton.

I offer gratitude and love to my two writing groups. Helena Spyrou, Elizabeth Suda, Vivienne Wiles and Christine Dew have supported the writing of the memoir from its inception in the early 2000s. Helena and Liz have also been instrumental in guiding the exegetical component, and Helena gave up valuable time to proofread the final draft of the memoir. I am indebted to them both. Monash University Creative Writing 'study buddies' Angela Savage, Rosemary Chang and Kate Brabon have also been generous with their critical comments and emotional support since we met in 2014.

I also wish to thank fellow Melbourne University alumni Anne Gunn and Christopher Nailer for their invaluable feedback on a memoir draft in 2016.

My memories have been further sparked by participation in the Facebook group Foreign Students in China 1974-1979. Thanks in particular to McComas Taylor and Erna Marcus for 'steering' the group.

My dear Rye friends Marieke Brugman and Peter Quinn have walked me and fed me, and taken me out of my scholar's cell to enjoy all of the beauty the Mornington Peninsula has to offer. I can't thank you both enough.

I would not have been able to manage this adventure without the support of sister Sue Joslin and her partner Graeme. Their generous hospitality and loving kindness to me (and Mr. Wilson the mutt) has made it possible to survive these three and a half years of city-seaside commuting with equanimity.

My darling mother Marg has been living and breathing the thesis with me, especially these last few months. She feels as though it is as much her endeavour as it is mine. I thank her for her enduring love and friendship, and generous financial support. You can now relax, Mags.

A final word of gratitude must go to beloved friend Julie Wells, who impressed upon me the importance of doing the PhD full time so that I could fully immerse myself in the joys of scholarship. You were right, dear Jules. I just wish you were still here so I could thank you in person.

21 November 2017

Foreword

感遇 Ganyu "Moved by Things Encountered"

On the wall above my desk hangs a framed work of calligraphy. I am ashamed to confess that when teacher Ding Hao presented it to my mother Margaret as a memento of her visit to Nanjing in 1981, my translation was slapdash. I knew it was a Tang Dynasty poem by Chen Zi'ang, but Chen was not one of the celebrities of the Tang poetry pantheon for foreign language students, probably because his work can be read at multiple levels.

I recall that Ding Hao was charming to Marg, and made her a confidante by way of reference to their advancing years. In this context, when young Jen scanned the text and saw the character for 'frost' she thought 'silver-grey' hair; she saw 'sunset' and thought 'twilight years'; she saw 'solitude' and thought 'final countdown' and she saw 'peace and tranquility' and thought 'the end'. And this is how my younger self translated it for Marg.

Now whenever I look at it, I enjoy tracing the fall and spread of the characters and the spaces in and between them. Ding Hao's elegant cursive script is running in restrained downward elongated strokes, inexorably drawing the text to its end. The jaunty edginess that inhabits the script creates a memory of his fine-boned loose wrist. The ink has been absorbed cleanly, passion contained. At the end of the cascade of text-images, the attribution, the signature and the chop mark in cinnabar give the work aesthetic unity.

It was only in 2012 that I felt compelled to translate the poem. Because I could not identify all the characters in the work, I went online and found the poem in a Chen Zi'ang collection named *Ganyu*. I translated the characters so that they reflected my remembered feelings about Ding Hao's meeting with Marg. By close dictionary use and loose construing, I

bent the lines I did not understand to my will. My 'bent' translation is on the left, contrasted with Richard Ho's peer reviewed version, bent to *his* particular inclinations on the right:

Chen Zi'ang Poem	**My translation**	**Richard Ho's translation**[1]
微霜知歲晏	Signs of frost tell of twilight years,	*The slight frost signifies the approaching end of the year*
斧柯始青青。	Only a hard prune can bring on green shoots.	*What will be the handle of an axe is merely a green shoot*
況乃金天夕	Now that the golden days are over	*How much more so, when in an autumn evening*
浩露沾羣英。	heavy dew soaks the flowers.	*Numerous dewdrops are moistening the flowers*
登山望宇宙	I climb the mountain to gaze over time and space,	*I ascend a mountain and regard the universe*
白日已西暝。	the sun is already setting in the west.	*The sun has been obscured in the west*
雲海方蕩漪	A sea of clouds swirls all about,	*The cloud-reflecting sea is rough*
孤鱗安得寧。	Alone or in the crowd, peace can bring repose.	*How can a lone scaly creature be safe?*

Chen Zi'ang, *Ganyu*, poem 22. http://baike.baidu.com/view/13725536.htm

Ho's translation is accompanied with notes on the allegories hinted at in the text. He suggests that the axe-handle signifies stability, so the poet Chen is describing a political situation that is fragile. An emperor's reign is under threat, so shrouded in shadows. The sun is hidden and cannot offer clear guidance, the clouds obscure the future, and "there in the depths of the sea the deposed and exiled dragon Chong Cong can find no peace".[2]

---

1 Richard Ho, *Chen Zi'ang Ganyu Shijian* (Hong Kong: Xuejin, 1978).

2 Ibid.

Who is this lone emperor without a throne? Zhong Zong[3] was the third son of Empress Wu Zetian, sent into exile and placed under house arrest for fourteen years so that his mother could put the younger and more malleable brother upon the throne. But she tired of this son and deposed him as well, and took over the throne until she decided to call back Zhong Zong from exile and make him emperor. He lasted five years before his wife Empress Wei allegedly poisoned him. His story reflects the violent machinations of imperial palace life.

During this turbulent period, Chen Zi'ang was court poet. Ho and others believe that Chen needed to conceal his deeper anxieties about the imperial household by contriving poems that could also be read at a 'popular' surface level,[4] such as those in the genre of landscape poetry (*shan shui shi*) that deal with the complex relationship between the scholar and the natural world, contemplations on seasons, and the general tides of human life. In fact, Chen was eventually charged with 'political idealism' and sent to prison where he died at the age of forty-one.[5]

When I read Ho's translation, I'm humiliated by my shallow attempt. I send both interpretations to Tee Munford, my classical Chinese adviser, and co-translator of the book of of short stories by women writers of the 1920s and '30s.[6] She comments in a letter: "Who can say which is better? All that allegory nonsense is perhaps less truthful than your version."[7]

---

[3] Note that Chong Cong and Zhong Zong are homophonous and refer to the same person in Wade Giles and *pinyin* romanised forms respectively.

[4] Ho, Chen Zi'Ang.

[5] Jonathan Stalling, Poetics of Emptiness: Transformation of Asian Thought in American Poetry (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 150.

[6] Jennifer Anderson and Theresa Munford, *Chinese Women Writers of the 1920s and 1930s*. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1985).

[7] Theresa Munford to Jennifer Anderson, Melbourne Australia, November 2012.

Other scholars argue that not all of Chen's poems are allegorical. Among his works are Buddhist meditations and landscape poems.[8] Prior to his stint at court, Chen had been a wandering Daoist spending much time in seclusion, reflecting on the mysteries of the dark and the hidden, the forces of *yin* and *yang*, and ways of beholding "different dimensions of reality".[9]

The poem rendered in Ding Hao's calligraphy is vivid in its depiction of the natural world and of a life nearing its end, and yet I'm also sympathetic to Ho's view that Chen worried about dynastic chaos, because I believe that Ding Hao felt similarly about China and Chinese Communist Party direction in 1981, and may well have been prompted to give this calligraphic expression. The arrest and trial of the Gang of Four could do only a little to assuage the pain and suffering experienced during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The permanent bruise on Ding Hao's temple was one of his most obvious 'souvenirs'. Many people were exhausted. They slept badly, haunted by memories and ghosts of the past two decades. They parroted party propaganda in a half-hearted way. The green shoots of a new start were vulnerable indeed.

Like Chen Zi'ang, Ding too had withdrawn from society. He did not have the freedom of classical scholars or disappointed literati to retreat into the mountains to reflect, bound as he was by his work unit (*danwei*) and his residence permit (*hukou*), but he did spend a great deal of time in seclusion at home reading poetry, and writing and teaching calligraphy. I can't say what he thought of Daoist principles in guiding his creative practice, but his calligraphic style demonstrates a dynamic engagement with 'the Way' (*Dao*), at least to me.

The title of Chen Zi'ang's poetry collection, *Ganyu,* is also open to interpretation. Among them, "indignation at the turn of political events", the Daoist meaning of "inspirational and

---

[8] Tim Chan, "The "*Ganyu*" of Chen Ziang: Questions on the Formation of a Poetic Genre", in *T'oung Pao*, 2001, 87 (1), 14-42.

[9] Stalling, Poetics of Emptiness, 148.

interactive encounters" that lead to transformation and change,[10] and the literal meaning preferred by more recent translators "moved by things encountered"[11] all resonate, not only with this calligraphic work but with my overall feelings about the period I spent in China.

Ganyu makes an apposite title for this transcultural memoir, a collection of stories narrated in the voice of young Jen about transformative encounters as a young Australian student at Nanjing University in the early post-Mao years between 1979 and 1984. Punctuating the stories are poems termed Bridges to Future Past. Drawn from haunting memory fragments thats emerged in early 2001, they are bridges cast back to a formative period I seek to reclaim after 'forgetting' in the wake of the June Fourth massacre of 1989, bridges that allow access to essential messages for the present.

Jennifer Anderson
21 November 2017.

---

[10] Chan, The "*Ganyu*", 29-42.

[11] Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness,* 148; Jie Cui and Zong-qi Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2012).

PART 1

Creative Component

感遇

Ganyu: Moving Encounters in Early Post-Mao China

Jennifer Anderson

Table of Contents

My trouble is that I cannot forget completely, and these stories have resulted from what I have been unable to erase from my memory.

Lu Xun

Chapter 1 I think I'm Turning China Red

It’s 1976, my second year at Melbourne University. In a clean, light classroom facing the manicured lawns, the Communist Political Theory class is warming up. A wispy-bearded 19-year-old raises a finger and says, “Yeah, wow! Gramsci is right. Total alienation of the working class *is* a capitalist plot. And Ford represents the worst capitalist oppressor. Let's rise up! What do you say ... Comrades?”

He unravels his legs, and jumps up onto the table we're all sitting around, urging us on in the worker's salute.

There's a bit of half-hearted “Right, man”, as arms rise around the table. Our hairy-faced lecturer with the Gramsci specs looks on with avuncular pleasure—it's sort of like communist kindergarten: *There's a hammer in there, and a sickle as well, workers unite, and doctrine to yell, open wide, come inside, it's revolution.*

I slouch down in my chair and wish I were somewhere else, somewhere less middle-class, less posturing, more real. Don't get me wrong, I am as middle-class as the rest of them in the room, and I am as passionate about Gramsci as the next would-be revolutionary—he's so good-looking in that 'I am about to die for my art' kind of way and I have similar John Lennon style specs to him. And of course, alienation of the masses from the mode of production sounds right too. I lasted one day in a Brunswick alternator factory stamping wires, and ran in terror from kind-hearted workers telling me I'd settle in and even get to like the boss after ten years or so.

But I'm wondering why the women I clean motel rooms with are so proud of the work their men folk do on the assembly line in the Broadmeadows Ford factory. Is

there something worse than capitalist-style alienation? I wince at the possibility that this thought could be marked as 'capitalist imperialist running doggist'.

I'm keen to learn more about the Chinese revolution, an agrarian revolution fuelled by the promise of land reform and relief from rapacious gentry bureaucrats and the pillage of warlord bands; and I'm even more keen because our unjustly-ousted prime minister, Gough Whitlam, has opened the way for normalisation of relations between Australia and China, just as I happen to be studying Chinese language, literature and history at university; and I need to get my head around 'dialectical materialism', because Mao keeps using the term in his writings, and for some reason the meaning just won't stick.

I last as long in the Communist Political Theory class as I did in the alternator wire factory —alienation from the mode of ideology production, I guess. But then my cosmopolitan classmate Jane tells me she was Wilfred Burchett's typist in Paris. A love affair with Burchett begins. He's an Australian without a passport, rejected as *persona non grata* because of his communist leanings and his penchant for exposing lies told by western governments about their clandestine activities in Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. When I read *China's Feet Unbound*, *Furtive War*, and *Passport: an autobiography*, I want to become rejected too. Add to this Edgar Snow's account of slipping behind Chinese Nationalist lines and joining Mao and his Eighth Route Army after their Long March to Yan'an,[1] and William Hinton's descriptions of land reform in *Fan Shen*, and I am hooked on China-red—hammer, sickle, torch, star, flag, blood, Mao and all.

English-language accounts of China are my primary sources of information, because learning Chinese is bum-numbingly slow. In the first year program, we have

[1] Red Star Over China.

to learn thirty-five Chinese characters a week and some of their combinations, and employ them in sentences designed for learning grammar. This approach would be tedious, except that I get enormous pleasure ruminating on the interweaving of concept and graphic representation within the characters themselves. I find myself capable of sitting for long periods forming the strokes of each character in the prescribed order and sounding them out, even as I marvel that the character made by placing a woman under a roof means ‘peace’; the pig under a roof means ‘home’ or ‘family’; and the field with the sickle cutting a swathe through it means ‘male/man’. This compound character defines man as a means of production, so convenient for a Marxist interpretation! And the feminist in me is satisfied that the character for female/woman is a prime character or radical that acts as a foundation for other concepts—proof, my dorm friend Tee will say, of China's matriarchal roots. In the character combination that means 'gender', *nannü*, you can see her marching exit right with her big belly, her back to the bloke who looks like he's striding off into the fields to harvest the wheat or rice. But if you put the woman in front of the man, she's marching right into the fields and into his tool for harvesting, her belly big with promise. She's a multiple mode of production.

男女　女男

Figure 1 Nan Nü, male-female, and the reverse.

In my first year of Chinese, Professor Jin (Robert King) gave me my Chinese name. If you didn't know he was a classical historian and a member of the Manchu royal family that ruled China from the 17th Century to 1912, you might guess by the name he gave me in his pebbles-in-the-mouth northern Mandarin accent: *Zhenni*,

Precious slave-girl. I love my Chinese name. My surname Anderson has been truncated to An, that woman under the roof, Peace.

By second-year university, the sarongs and long blonde hair that had been my signature identifiers on the hippy trail from London to Melbourne no longer suit my new allegiances. The spiky haircut fits my dramatic debut as Io in *Prometheus Bound*, a goddess-turned-cow who is driven demented by tsetse flies let loose upon her by her enraged immortal ex. In that performance I am no longer 'acting' being oppressed by power and circumstance. I really do feel like the slave-girl and none too precious.

This haircut and the overalls from Richmond Dimmeys also suit the weekly task of woman-ing the phone of the newly established Women's Centre. As I listen to callers spill tales of physical and psychological abuse, fear and sorrow I can barely imagine as real, I feel like a fraud. What do I know of violence, of suffering, of being trapped? Well, I know lots from reading Chinese literature and history: girl babies dismissed as a waste of resources and treated like chattel until they can be sold off to son-seeking men, never to see their own families again; girls forced to live out their lives hobbled by bound feet and hidden in the back courtyard behind high walls; and young wives treated as slaves by their jealous mothers-in-law.

My spiky hair is less suited, however, to my part as girlfriend to a rock n' rolling bass player whose band members are partnered by chic-ly tousled, leggy sex workers who bring along their knitting and talk about recipes and cosmetic products. And 'dialectic materialism' means?

My aesthetic tastes are evolving in other ways as well. With some reluctance I've tossed out the poster of the pre-Raphaelite brunette with her long curling hair and luscious down-turned lips. I'm tiring of the primary squares of Mondrian, and Miro's

mathematical mysteries with bird; and Dali's melting clocks and Bosch's *Babel* make me yawn. Chinese revolutionary poster art with its colourful naïve renditions of struggle and subsequent plenty or victory is the new fascination: a fearless woman straps herself to a power pole in a typhoon to keep the lines of communication open; or the portly cult figure Mao Zedong raises his arm to salute the Red Guards in Tian'anmen, as flags and banners fly in a wild wash of crimson and madder lake. There is certainty here: the future belongs to the people, seen circling in a holding pattern around their leaders. In this second year of Chinese at University, my heroes Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou both die. The bland unknown Hua Guofeng becomes paramount leader, Premier and Chairman of the Communist Party, but for me he'll never take the place of Mao.

"Hai Yan here. We've got a situation!"

Figure 2 "This is Haiyan"《我是海鸥》Revolutionary poster art

I live in a shared house in Lygon Street Carlton within pool cue distance of the Astor Hotel. My housemates and I cook a lot of *ratatouille* and fried something or other that always tastes like *ratatouille*. We have regular household meetings, but we are such a compliant collective that there is little to gripe about, and since we are

uniform in our political leanings —some of us more conspiracy-minded than others perhaps—the meetings turn into gentle *ratatouille* dinners, with shared wine casks and joints, and talk of police surveillance and the evil antics of Liberal PM Malcolm Fraser the grazier.

Secretly, consciousness-raising groups, chillum sessions included, leave me cold. I believe in the collective, and yet I get scratchy at any whiff of dogmatism that might squash my individual style. On top of that, hanging around and waiting for higher orders drives me crackers. The dope dealer gets to wank on and on about whatever he wants while the acolytes sit around him nodding and 'yeahing' and hoping that he'll make them the second in line for a toke. The consciousness raising women's group leader tells the rape victim that it's all a patriarchal plot, that she needs to build her rage and take up Taikwondo, in a women-only class of course; meanwhile the other women in the circle choof on Bank rollies, nodding and 'yeahing' and hoping that she'll make them second-in-line to echo her ideas.

What I prefer are intense everyday encounters outside my realm of experience. That's why the Hardiman's Hotel in Kensington, local watering hole for the abattoir workers and the residents of the commission flats, is a good place for me to pour beers. The blokes I serve in the bar are a friendly and protective mob, once I have gone through trial by sexual harassment: “Hey, gimme a couple of pots and you can suck my dick for free.”

“Yeah,” I reply nonchalantly with my stomach twisted in a knot, "Sounds good, so long as I can bite yer cock off.”

The women, with babies in prams and Winfields between lips, hang out in the lounge, single mums my age having a beer with their mums. I shudder at the

containment of their world, even as I delight in the novelty of it all. The blokes wander between bar and lounge, between arguing footy tips with the lads and having a counter meal with the ladies. One night I stupidly refuse to get John a beer because he is already legless, and he pulls a gun on me. Without a thought, I drop to the beer-soaked floor and let the Irish manager take over. The next day John is back to his sunny old self, and I have to listen to professional barmaid Mary say, “I told you so, love. Never get too cosy with the customers.” For Mary, ‘cosy’ means listening to their life stories.

But that's really what I like about the job. It beats consciousness-raising sessions any day. And one day I will learn what 'dialectic' means, probably in China.

Chapter 2 Long Live the People's Republic of China

September 1979. Rosie and I are on our way! We've got Foreign Affairs Department scholarships to study in China for two years. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has been keen to continue Gough Whitlam's work of normalising relations with China, and he set up this program in 1974. It's hard to be gracious about Malcolm. He had Gough sacked in 1975, and I'm still in high dudgeon about it four years later. That doesn't mean I shouldn't think of this scholarship as the best thing that's ever happened to me. I've deferred my diploma of education and have been working two jobs for the last five months to save money for the trip.

It's my fault that we miss our flight to Beijing. As the more seasoned traveller, I tell Rosie we can take an extra hour in our cosy Ambassador Hotel beds before we leave for Kai Tak Airport. We're tired out by Hong Kong. The day before we rushed around the city buying cassette players, cameras, light filters, blank tapes, batteries, and all the rest. Despite the joy of shopping, I feel the weight of the colonial present in this city. I sense that the locals are tired of people like me. Everyone is unfailingly polite, but the light never comes to their eyes. At the ferry entrance on the Hong Kong side, rickshaw pullers loll about in their festive red vehicles waiting for international tourists. I turn away in horror, revisiting images of the rickshaw puller in Lao She's 1938 novel, *Lucky Camel Boy*, who is destined to live in poverty and near starvation, humiliated by those who 'own' him or 'use' him, and yet insistent that self-reliance is the way to a better life. Another hour in bed before we take the big step into mainland China can't hurt.

We are rerouted through Tokyo, and in the transit lounge there I have my first sight of amazing new technology: suspended colour TV monitors, but they're

screening a dull cooking show that might as well be in black and white. 'New' takes on another meaning once I step into the China Airlines plane, the threshold to mainland China itself. The flight attendant comrades are wearing roomy blue cotton trousers and white long-sleeved shirts with white Chesty Bond style singlets underneath. They have their hair tied back in two plaits that sit on their shoulder blades. I'm beginning to understand that mainland China is going to be very different to Taiwan where I spent 1977, a Western and Japanese influenced society with their version of *guoyu*, the national language, emphasising the mannered and the sentimental, and the cheongsam still in vogue for day and evening wear. By the look of these air hosties, there won't be any of those side-slit hip-hugging cheongsams in 'the real' China.

Rosie and I raise eyebrows as fold-up chairs appear in the aisle and the extra passengers take their seats. The flight attendant comrade in charge of our safety demonstration holds up a grubby inflatable jacket. As she simulates blowing into the rubber tube, a passenger sitting on a fold-up chair behind me asks in Chinese: "How come it's not inflating?"

With a furrowed brow she says shortly, "It's broken."

We giggle nervously. The same passenger sighs and says, "No wonder, it's made in Soviet Russia," and sure enough, red Cyrillic script marches along the edge of the jacket.

Directing a filthy look at her laughing passengers, our comrade attendant marches in big trouser-freeing strides to the front of the cabin and disappears with the 'faulty' item behind the curtain. At lunch, a military-style tin box is dumped on each of our trays, but when the lid is opened, the fragrant smell of unpolished rice and tea-

infused egg wafts up and I relish every mouthful of this simple fare. The noisy eaters around me also delight—this is my kind of etiquette.

At Beijing Airport in the dusk, the plane taxis to a stop before Mao's huge pastel-tinted portrait hanging above the entrance of a severe Soviet-style building. My heart soars. The welcoming committee from the Beijing Languages Institute (BLI) has waited in vain for us and gone. The airport staffers insist the institute must return to take charge of us. Our attempts to contact them by phone are not successful. My heart takes a bit of a plummet as the damp begins to rise in the concrete shell of the arrivals lounge and the wooden bench turns to cold rock under my bum. I wish my suitcase had arrived with me. Rosie has hers, so where is mine? My big battered brown vinyl suitcase is stuffed with clothes for all seasons, two years' supply of tampons, medicines, toiletries, shoes, dictionaries and books, not to mention my grandmother's fur coat and my father's wool-lined 'flying boots'. It’s bound together with sturdy tape, because just as the ground staff in Melbourne announced I'd have to pay for an extra 20 kilos, it split its seams. My mum and my sister had said goodbye to me, carrying half my belongings in their arms, and giggling at the high drama of my departure. Where is it now? All those tampons ... at least the Hong Kong purchases are with me.

By the time we are collected some hours later I can barely speak English let alone Chinese. The white-painted tree trunks lining the roads flash by in the dark. For a second I think they are agile skunks racing the car. And when I’m welcomed at my destination by an urbane Foreign Office official in a perfectly tailored navy Zhongshan suit, I say in my best Chinese syntax, "Arrive at Taibei Languages Institute extremely happy."

It is the slight lift of one eyebrow that alerts me to my serious diplomatic error. The official corrects me with a gentle emphasis on *Beijing* and on the *People's* Republic. I am too tired to blush, but I carry the lumpy dampness of mortification to bed with me and plummet headlong into arrival slumber.

The following day, we are marched from one end of the Institute to the other to pick up our meal tickets, scholarship money, and the little necessities of life: a face-washer, a padlock, cups, writing paper and so on. Then we're escorted around the corner from the Institute to purchase Flying Pigeon bicycles. This is the moment I start to feel I really belong. I am about to join the cycling city! After our oral exams to determine the university we'll be allocated to, Rosie and I ride one and a half hours into the city to register our bikes, asking people for directions as we go. Everyone is helpful and we get there without having to retrace our steps. I know this is because Rosie is guiding us, and she is formidably organised, a real leader. At the registry office we are given tin number plates to put on our mudguards, and bicycle licenses in bright red plastic covers emblazoned with China's golden logo. Our Flying Pigeons are as precious as any fancy foreign car.

Beijing Languages Institute is both interesting and stifling. The international students are all studying Chinese spoken and written language while the local students are studying foreign languages for different purposes, mainly to be tour guides or teachers. Between classes, the 'world' mills around in the spacious courtyard: an international roll call of guys are playing basketball; a band of Italians talk excitedly to a couple of Chinese students; a contingent from countries I've barely heard of—Guinea, Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire and Togo—attempt to hijack the basketball court; the North Korean students, civil but distant, move as one in their identical neat black suits with Kim Il Sung badges pinned to their lapels, hair cut to regulation short

back and sides. I wonder, "What if one of them broke away? Stepped out of line? What then?" I meet a lovely Chinese student who is going to be a teacher. She is clear browed and confident in her use of English. I come to believe I'll meet lots and lots of young women just like her. And maybe one day I'll speak Chinese with that kind of confidence.

It’s easy to find the other Australian students: they’re the ones sharing rooms with the Scandinavians, because our Chinese hosts have found this combination to be a match made in Heaven. I can't vouch for the other Australians, but it certainly works for me. My roommate, Marit, is head of the Communist Youth League in her college in Norway. I am impressed. She is very direct, and more than willing to help in any way she can such as offering me her clothes to wear until mine turn up. She has been at BLI for nearly a year and is busy attending classes and hanging out with friends. I am not so keen on meeting new people because I know I won't be here for long, and because I am getting my head around simplified characters, which I am not so good at reading and which I cannot yet write. The Chinese Department at Melbourne University was divided in its loyalties, and given its interest in classical and republican China, continued to teach the complified forms. I know that the word for vehicle, literally 'cart', is 車 (*che*) in complified form. I love this character because it is an ideograph of the chassis —the two shafts at either end holding the wheels on, and the body in the middle with the axle driving through the centre. I am horrified to see something so concrete reduced to the abstract and accident-prone 车 in its simplified form.

In order to learn the simplified forms, I read a children's comic. The story, set in the bad old days, is about a folk singer called Liu San Jie who helps the peasants rise up against the rotten landlords. She has a singing competition with the landlord

—songs consisting of rhyming riddles —and guess who wins? I also read an English translation of Ba Jin's tragic novel *Family* written in the 1930s. The translation is in stilted English with archaic and modern terms from American and British English all intermingled, but the story is really moving, about a well-to-do family caught in the transition between traditional Confucian codes and modern ideas of freedom and revolution. Poor cowardly Big Brother Jue Xin and the love of his life, Mei, never realise their dreams of a sedan chair and fire cracker wedding because their horoscopes don't match and the mothers-in-law have a tiff over *mahjong*. Younger brother Jue Hui finds love with the servant girl Ming Feng who suicides rather than be forced into concubinage with old man Feng. The family is crippled by superstition. It's a modern version of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, but more gothic in its relentless horrors.

The Languages Institute is not far from the Old Summer Palace (*Yuanmingyuan*), a cycle away through fields of corn and cabbages. Since we are awaiting allocation to a university, we have no classes, so Rosie and I visit as often as we can. On our second ride, a young man joins us on his bike.

"Hello. Where are you from? Can I practice my English with you? Let me show you the world famous *Yuanmingyuan*, the Garden of Perfect Bright".

In Chinglish we revisit the history we learned at university. This is the site of what was once a magnificent pleasure palace expanded and redesigned by successive imperial households. Then in 1860 it was ransacked and burned to the ground by Anglo-French forces during the second Opium War, a sample of high-handed gunboat diplomacy in which the drug cartels such as the British-owned East India Trading Company were backed by sovereign armies to force China to accept opium from India

as an exchange commodity. The only remains are of the non-flammable marble palace with floral carved lintels and elaborate arches in the baroque European style.

The autumn sun warms our backs as we perch upon a fallen pillar and wonder at the hubris and brutality of our Anglo ancestors. I find the place incredibly moving, not just because the huge fragments lie where they have toppled, their glorious carvings a testimony to the wealth of the patron and the skill of the artisan; and not just because it justifies the humiliation and outrage that continues to be felt by the people of China towards the 'barbarous' Europeans, the British in particular; it's also moving because the grounds have merged with the local commune. What were once lakes for pleasure cruising have been converted into fields and, on this afternoon, farmers are stripping corn and catching frogs in an irrigation ditch. A crisscross of paths wend through a thicket of trees planted by the edge of the fields, creating a breathtaking pastoral scene that makes BLI with its high brick walls and Soviet style buildings seem very far away.

Bridge to Future Past: Nanjing Madwoman

In traffic churn
outside the People's Bank
—monument to imperialist power—
a spectre looms,
grey hair storming
a ravaged face.

She screams,
above the ringing bells
and honking horns:

Riben guizi! Wo hensi ni!
Ni shale wo erzi, wo dasi ni!
Huan wo erzi de ming![2]

Her pointing finger
spools
newsreel in sepia:

bayonets in bellies—sad bodies in careless piles—the glistening sword raised high—neat soldiers cocking guns into heads —a gashed infant stiff upon his mother's breast—mouths in *rictus* screams

Her fury
thrusts into me,
jerks me around
like a floppy doll.

Dasi ni!
Gun kai!
Zasi ni!
Gun kai![3]

Forced to replay
the Rape of Nanking[4]

---

[2] "Japanese devil. I hate you! You murdered my son, I beat you to death! Give me back my son!"

[3] "Beat you to death. Fuck off! Crush you to death. Fuck off!"

she is heartbroken.
Nationality be damned:
any foreigner the invader
the murderer
the torturer
the thief.

That's what her story tells her to
tell me.

Two hands
cradle her belly
protect the foetus
but it's futile.
He's already taken.

I never see her again
only in phantom form
reminding me
of my birth-wrongs.

---

[4] Nanking and Nanjing are the same places; Nanking is the pre-liberation English translation of Nanjing. Similarly, Beijing was once referred to as Peking, and the opera from the capital is still known in English as 'Peking opera'.

Chapter 3 Nanjing University: *Danwei*

Only a couple of weeks after the university placement exam, I have been allocated a university. The rarefied climes of the capital city, with its rounded vowels and monumental airs, are not to be mine. Let Rosie have Beijing University, with its hallowed reputation and status. Just as much as I hate formality, I hate snow and cold. Nanjing University is to be my new *danwei*. My bedding, Flying Pigeon bicycle, enamel bowl and thermos accompany me on a southbound train. The phenomenal Yangtse River is traversed by the Nanjing Big Bridge, and the train takes an age to cross it. This geographical separation from the north compounds the feeling I am now somewhere completely different, in another 'China'.

In the warm autumnal air of October, outside an office that overlooks a sunny courtyard between two imposing grey brick dormitories, a reedy man in an over-large blue Zhongshan suit talks in southern-clipped Mandarin. I translate in my head as quickly as I can: "Come Nanjing University something hot welcome. I am Teacher Zhang. I am *waiban* ruler (O*r responsible leader?*). All foreign student something matters are here something. Something something something (*Aargh!*). We hope you will become three good students: study good, body good, spirit good (W*hy spirit? Like religious? Surely not!*). Now please in office come in order to increase watches (*No, fill forms! Haha, fill forms!*). About something, each month start something something *renminbi* (*Hah! That's the local currency!*). Buy (S*ell?*) something tickets at Western canteen Chinese student canteen two places all can. I give you an

introduction something down (*Huh?*). This is Wang *laoshi*. Something dormitory something, see her in 9 Building first something office. For travel something and other something want, please to *waiban* here come."

I have a *danwei*. I belong! This is the world inside a world. My economic, social and political needs are all catered for here. The *danwei* constitutes my family. I feel looked after, safe. I can relax. If I'm not sure what to do, someone will show me. If I make a mistake, someone will correct me. If I don't know what to say, someone will put the words in my mouth. The *danwei* will feed me although I must pay. If I am sick, they will look after me at the *danwei* clinic. The *danwei* will arrange my class schedules and monitor my participation. They will organise examinations and qualification certificates. The *danwei* will give me a university badge and an identity card in red plastic as evidence of my belonging.

The *danwei* will encourage my participation in sporting activities and will organise international evenings to share songs and dances and thereby encourage feelings of unity and solidarity among the nations that make up China's 'friends'. The *danwei* will decide which cultural events benefit my growth and will allocate tickets accordingly. I will go with other 'invited' students and staff, often with only one or two hours' notice. I don't need more notice because where else would I be? The *danwei* will organise historical tours of places of interest for my educational and spiritual cultivation, accompanied by its history teachers and other party stalwarts who can model right behaviour. The *danwei* will approve my request to travel to Shanghai to buy educational resources or to Beijing to visit the Australian embassy. They will approve a request to allow my mother to come and stay. The *danwei* will ensure my security within the dormitory by asking all Chinese nationals to sign in and out at the Foreign Office. Now that's being looked after.

My *danwei* is two worlds inside the world of Nanjing. The outer world is Nanjing University itself, constructed over two large blocks of land and intersected by Hankou Road. On the south side, multiple rows of three-storey dormitories are allocated for local students, and for foreign students and single 'expert' scholars. There are five-storey apartments for teachers and experts with families. There are canteens, the clinic, and a small shop that sells soap and plastic everyday *yongpin*. Just near the gatehouse on Hankou Road is a hole-in-the-wall noodle house serving cheap and tasty meals all day. Of an evening, the low-watt bulbs hide the hosts' indifference to decoration and hygiene, and help the eater to focus on the steaming glossy noodles in a robust stock. That gatehouse is our point of entry after dancing past midnight with our mates at the Hydraulics Institute: we wheel our bikes past the sleeping form of the watchman, who always has his sandshoes on.

On the north side is the official entrance to the university. On the columns and plinth, the university's name is proclaimed in Mao's vigorous grass script. At the east entrance a small shop does a roaring trade in student textbooks, magazines, newspapers and basic stationery items. A wide avenue leads past the library on the right with its uninviting closed stacks, and bifurcates around the grounds of the Assembly Hall where *taijiquan* classes are held some evenings after class.

Figure 3 Nanjing University Official Entrance (image of the author)

Classrooms occupy the grey soviet-style buildings situated around the Hall, damp echoing concrete rooms off a wide verandah. As a latecomer in the semester, I join about fifteen other foreign students in one of these for spoken Chinese classes. Winter's approach makes the seven o'clock start chilly, but teacher Zhang is enthusiastic. His printed notes have several pages on alternative ways to use the diminutive but diabolically elusive -*le*, (了). Most of my fellow students appear to be relaxed and happy chorusing dialogues and vying to be the grammar *gaoshou*.[5] In the dim grey light it's difficult to see the chalk scratchings on the warped board. I desperately search for a bit of colour to stimulate. All of us are in jackets of green or navy blue. We could be limpets clinging to rocks in an underwater cavern.

Behind the classrooms is the oval, but I visit there only once to watch part of an inter-varsity football game, attracted by the sound of firecrackers and the crowd chanting "*Jiayou! Jiayou! Jiayou!* Add fuel!" On the left side of the oval are more teaching buildings and the university garages where the *danwei* fleet of black cars and buses are parked.

The inner world of the *danwei* is the walled compound of the foreign student dormitories that are unprepossessingly called *jiulou* and *shilou* (Buildings 9 and 10). In 1979, the front entrances to these are open, with a courtyard between, and flanked at the front with the single-storey *waiban* offices. By 1981 these entrances have been permanently locked and a wall has been built to create a compound with a single gatehouse entry, where non-residents must sign in and out.

---

[5] *gaoshou,* lit. 'high hand', means 'the top', 'the most talented'.

Our dormitories take the prize for architectural merit, their up-curving tiled roofs referencing oriental splendour. In both buildings, wide staircases with perfectly spaced steps sweep up between the floors. On the ground floor are offices for the cadres and *shifu* whose job it is to look after our welfare. Here are also rooms for single ‘experts', and the communal shower rooms. By 1980 a group of us has convinced the *waiban* to set aside one of the ground floor rooms in Building 9 as a mini-lounge for socialising. Male foreign students and their Chinese roommates inhabit the second floor, and the female students are on the top floor. This gendered layering makes Nanjing University comparatively liberal, although this policy does not extend to the dormitory buildings for Chinese students.

My dormitory room is beautiful. After the gloomy ground floor cell I shared with Marit in BLI, Room 306 in Building 10 is light and spacious. The door to the room is opposite the stairwell. Like all the other rooms it has a wooden floor painted dark brown. My neighbours Jin Lei and Katie show me how a regular mopping gives the floor a warm luminescence. Two wooden cupboards lean against the corridor wall, one for my Chinese roommate-to-be and one for me. Two iron-framed single beds nudge the walls on each side of the room. I choose the bed furthest away from the door on the 'first come, first served' principle, and cover the thin padded mattress with the narrow sheet and cotton padded quilt, and place a towel over the husk pillow. I put my enamel washbasin on the floor at the end of the bed and sit the flowered thermos flask inside it.

Between the beds are two wooden desks side by side. Behind these desks is a water heater. At prescribed times of morning, noon and night between prescribed dates that signal winter, water from the boiler on the ground floor is cycled through pipes running between the dormitory rooms, providing a comfortable ambient heat.

The tall casement windows swing out on latches and when I pull open the blue cotton curtains, my view is of the now almost bare branches of French plane trees in a paved courtyard. Beyond them is the high wall that runs the circumference of the south side of the university. I am looking forward to sharing the delights of this room with my Chinese roommate, who may become my best friend in China.

The urgency to settle drives me to paste up three propaganda posters I've brought from Beijing: they promote agricultural development, health, and the thirtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China. Beside them I pin up a favourite sarong depicting powerful batik *garudas* in twisting flight. The local stationery store provides me with gold and fluoro pink paper, from which I cut out shapes to create an abstract 'fresco' on the wall by my bed. From the tourist shop at Xuanwu Lake just north of the university I buy a bonsai tree with tiny orange-red fruits to sit on a corner of the desk. Now I feel at home.

Each dormitory room on the women's floor is stamped with the personalities of its occupants: the brooding ascetics have a blank door; roommate unity is expressed bilingually as 林抗美和瑞茉莉的房间 Lin Kangmei and Rui Zhuli's room, or represented in a poster of two cutesy cartoon girls in pink skirts, one with blonde pigtails, the other with black; Gallic pride is suggested by an image of the Eiffel Tower accompanied by the words *Bienvenue*; and the long-termers show their flair with wooden beaded curtains or minority embroidered baby slings hanging over the doorway. The rooms on the men's floor favour the undecorated look.

Each of these dorm floors has a large communal washroom in unpainted concrete lined with concrete sinks for washing clothes, cleaning teeth and rinsing out food bowls or chopsticks. The water that comes out of the taps is potable and I think this is fantastic. Other students are more cautious, believing the rumour that the water

has been laced with bromide to dampen libidos, thereby ensuring total focus on becoming a 'three-good student'. My libido is already damp, I figure, so a bit of bromide can't hurt. A room off the washroom has a row of step-up squat toilets, precious privacy afforded by swinging green doors.

The communal shower entrance, at the far end of the corridor on the ground floor, is covered with large padded blue curtains to keep in the heat and steam. There is a dressing room with benches on three sides and then the shower room, an open space with about ten giant shower roses hanging out over the concrete floor and ten taps locked into exposed pipes that feed through the wall from the boiler room. The roses emit strong jets of hot water that massage the neck and shoulders. The room fills with steam, and bodies in all shapes and colours celebrate: she of the tiny waist and large hips and bum, her back and chest randomly dotted with tiny moles, soaps up her stomach, arches her head into the falling water, and sends an inane melody vibrating between her teeth; she of the tiny perfectly proportioned body is shrouded in a curtain of water, breasts standing up to the roof, and random strands of dark pubic hair straining water to the floor; she with little bum bouncing treads water, and dances out a line of chatter; and me of no hips or waist, perm creating corrugations for the running rivulets of water, watching the scene and spouting jets of water out of my mouth like a dolphin in a kitsch fountain.

Heavy padded curtains hang over the windows too, but that doesn't stop the male students from voyeuristic pursuits, no doubt testing the bromide theory. The girls scream and shout their outrage, even as they giggle and coo, and strut their stuff. In a room nearby, the *shifu* keep rows of thermos flasks filled with boiling water. If you don’t have your own electric ring and thermos, you contribute your flask to the communal set and take hot water as you need it. I love this system, although given my

nearness to the stairwell, it is not unusual to hear the silver coated glass shells splintering as flasks fall from numb hands onto the concrete stairs.

More than the classrooms and the dormitories, the canteens are the places where we go to meet others and make friends. I have two to choose from, the western canteen for foreign students and experts, or the Chinese student canteen. If I need meat or yoghurt or want to hang out for a while without rush, and I want to talk about China, I eat in the western canteen. It's in a clean, light-filled annexe off a larger hall used for occasional entertainment evenings. The small coterie of foreign students at *Nanda*[6] in October 1979 are mostly from Western Europe, Canada, the United States and Australia-New Zealand, but there are a few Japanese students, the first to come to Nanjing since Japan's invasion and massacre of civilians in 1937-1938. The wildly varied global village of BLI has its pale diminished cousin here at *Nanda.*

My fellow students are studious sinologists in the main. Many are doing postgraduate research in language, literature, history or the arts, and in 1980, economics will be offered as well. I quickly work out that we have different allegiances to China: many of the friends I make are also fascinated by the ideas and literature that flourished in the May Fourth period and the revolution. Some of us are communist leaning but have romantic attachments to Daoist philosophy, classical poetry with non-martial themes, and the wonderful novels and story-telling narratives from the Ming and Qing dynasties. André and Steve are classicists through and through, closing their curtains to the world of the Four Modernisations outside, and immersing themselves in the worlds of the calligraphic masters in André's case, or the Tang poets in Steve's. Elizabeth is spending most of her time with the Nanjing opera troupe learning everything she can about the practice and performance of Peking

---

[6] *Nanda*: the abbreviated version of *Nanjing Daxue*, or Nanjing University.

opera. Barry is satisfying his passion for historical remnants with frequent forays through Nanjing city and surrounds to locate and record them. His energy is daunting. Mary Beth, Linda and Katie are also absorbed in their doctoral studies.

Eating at the Chinese canteen reminds me of the collectivisation movement of the late 1950s, when kitchens were constructed to ensure that China's workers and peasants spent as little time as possible on the non-productive and inefficient pursuits of domestic cooking and eating. At 11.10, I join the army of students marching their enamel food bowls through a flamboyantly carved entrance painted in gold and blue into a stark open space that steals all body warmth and renders the occupants inconsequential. The air smells of old vegetable wilt and damp concrete, the smell of hunger. I buy a few *mao*[7] of tickets, and line up to choose something from the huge enamel basins laid out on the white tiled counter. The cooks in their grubby coats are too busy to be hospitable. They are not here to please; they are here to get as many people fed on as little money as possible and as quickly as possible while attracting as few formal complaints as possible. Bodies are pressing in on all sides demanding I choose quickly and let them get their portion while it's still hot. I choose some broken rice, *bai cai* dribbled with a little vegetable stock and some tofu with a touch of spring onion. I find a stool at a table with three other women students. I think we might get chatting and that would be nice, to make friends, to talk. But my cheery opening gambit "大家好！吃得怎么样"[8] is rejected. One of the group gives me a warning look with her eyes as she slurps up clear soup from her raised bowl. The look says "Enough, foreign friend. This is silent time. We're eating!" Stupid me —how can I not remember that food and talk don't go together?

---

[7] One *mao* is similar to ten cents.

[8] “Hi everyone. How’s the food?”

As I clean out my bowl and rinse my chopsticks in the bucket at the entrance, a student walking past says to his mates what I think is: "*Neige laowai dao zheli lai chi fan gan me? Dagai yao xiang renmin qunzhong xuexile.*"[9]

Yeah, right, learn from the masses, but learn what? To be silent when I'm eating shitty food?

One of them replies: "*Huozhe ta zhen xihuan chi cu fan*."[10]

I worry over my translation as I stomp back to the dormitory. Did he really wonder if I preferred to eat crap food? Did he read my mind? Truth is, I feel guilty that I have the choice of eating at the local student canteen or the foreign student canteen, and even guiltier that the food for the foreign students is so much more lovingly prepared and more protein-rich, and more expensive, and I can afford it. And I'm feeling rejected too.

I wake from a nap to a silent room and a silent dormitory. I've overslept, again. I'm overwhelmed by what I don't know. But then teacher Zhang's handmade Chinese language textbook beckons me.

"Come on", it says, "You've got language to learn."

The book of contemporary short stories also invites attention: "A quick story about fate, sacrifice and lost hope will lift your spirits."

The dictionary says: "Searching for new words will calm you down, give you direction."

So that's what I do, memorise and translate, study and ruminate, immerse myself in text and forget who I am or am not, who I may or may not be becoming.

---

[9] "What's the foreigner doing coming to eat here? Maybe she wants to learn from the masses."

[10] "Or maybe she likes eating poor food."

Figure 4 Ubiquitous Mao (image of author)

Chapter 4 Un-making Revolution: Early Lessons

Long live the Proletarian Revolution! Long live our Great Helmsman Chairman Mao! Long live Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Thought! *Wansui! Wansui! Wansui*![11] It's so easy for me to get caught up in the passion play of the civil war and the Long March that brought Mao and his Eighth Route Army to victory: the struggle for hearts and minds; the incredible journey through rugged terrain; the overthrow of the evil landlords and land returned to the peasants; the humiliation of the powerful Nationalist Army and its American allies; the shifting allegiances that led to daredevil warlord Zhang Xueliang's kidnap of his ally Generalissimo Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and the creation of a united front against the Japanese invasion. And then victory against all odds, a victory built on an understanding of the role the peasants play in giving and taking away the Heavenly Mandate of the ruler. Mao is the new emperor! *Wansui*!

The revolutionary scholar who contributed to victory is now called an intellectual. He draws his inspiration from Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought. He believes in the leadership of the masses. He accepts the sacred role of ensuring universal literacy, of increasing agricultural and industrial production. He is a socialist-realist, a pragmatist, or is he I wonder? While the posters from the early fifties show our intellectual in a white shirt and western-style trousers tinkering with test-tubes and finicky calculations, by the mid-sixties and the era of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution he has become indistinguishable from the industrial worker solving a problem in the vast processing plant, or the builder constructing the massive dam and the bridge, or the peasant monitoring water flow into a rice field.

[11] Lit. '10,000 years'

The invisible scholar has developed muscles and a steely look of determination. And sometimes he is even a she. *Wansui*! Some are political cadres leading by example—it's usually a he in the blue Zhongshan suit holding up Mao's red book. He's saying, "Sacrifice is everything; give your all for a new China." All the faces look up to him expectantly as he announces another miracle of ideological endeavour. The scholar has become Renaissance Person! But in real life, what must it be like to play these contradictory roles?

Lately my faith in the revolution has been taken a beating by the ideological excesses of the Cultural Revolution. I'm reeling from the realisation that I've been sold a crock of lies. People are 'speaking bitterness' in literature and in person. One short story depicting 'ideological excess' has an engineer insist that the dam is breaking only to find herself publicly abused and assaulted by her own students. Her round-framed glasses are knocked from her face and ground into the concrete, and we see her myopic fear. This literary device to portray anti-intellectual behaviour gets me fumbling at my own spectacles every time.

My new People's Liberation Army friend Xiao Jia confesses to participating in the immolation of her high school teacher. Forced by our growing intimacy to demur, I say, "But it wasn't you who poured the petrol over her. You didn't light the match. You didn't *guyide* kill your teacher. Not deliberately."

"I was chanting slogans as my classmates poured petrol onto her. We forced her to kneel on the concrete in the schoolyard. We surrounded her. I watched her catch fire, and I shouted and swore at her until her screaming stopped. She was good to the students, a bit weak but *xin haishi henhao, zhende*."[12]

---

[12] "She did have a good heart, truly."

Others like to recall the heady days when they felt truly liberated. Art School graduate Bai Ma tells me: "When the schools closed down in 1966, I jumped on a train and headed for Tian'anmen to see the greatest teacher of all, Chairman Mao. I was twelve years old. Incredible, you know? I didn't tell my parents I was going. I was in the street and someone said, 'Come with us', and so I just went. I had no money, no extra clothes, no toothbrush, ha ha, just me and my Little Red Book."

He has never felt so free, he says. Older kids looked after him, kept him warm, found him food, let him tag along to the officially sanctioned Chinese Woodstock. I hear in his voice the reverence and excitement he felt "standing in that square with hundreds of thousands of others like me, all young, all new and fresh and powerful, unforgettable! And then after, we travelled the country with no rules. I'd never been on a train before, never been a night without my parents. *Zhenshi liaobuqi!*"[13] I think that for Bai Ma, this experience was the realisation and the end of innocence. He lives his life in a state of freewheeling detachment, sort of like he's a hippy on the dole taking life one day at a time.

Yu Shen, the *waiban*-approved tailor to the foreign students, doesn't speak of liberation or of nightmares. For him the Cultural Revolution happened on the edges, or if it didn't, he's not telling. Even though his life must have been interrupted by the waves of political campaigns, as a member of the peasant class it was still possible to have some continuity. He says matter-of-factly, "If you were smart you nodded your head and agreed with everything, but went about your own business in secret." His older brother is the keeper of the book of genealogy, passed down to first sons in the direct male line. These books were considered 'poisonous' because they represented ancestor worship in a time when there could be but one ideology.

---

[13] "Truly amazing!"

"He buried the book along with the Kitchen God and some ancestral photos," Yu Shen said, folding a square of grey silk and placing it into his bag, "and we dug them up last New Year. We had a few deaths to record and a lot of new names to add, including my son's".

Jiegufengjin: 借古讽今 'Borrow from the past to critique the present'

While most of my teachers are close-lipped about the past, the classical literary history teacher Liao can only make sense of the recent past by looking to historical records. In this sense he's a real thinking Chinese intellectual. One afternoon, when we were discussing the upcoming trial of Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four, he told me about his role in supporting their public denunciation. Just after the Gang were arrested in 1976, only a week after Mao died, Liao was invited to Party Central in Zhongnanhai, next to the Forbidden City to write an essay comparing Jiang Qing to the evil empress Lü Hou, the cruel and ambitious concubine of Han dynasty founder Liu Bang. As top party leaders wined and dined him, he wrote as requested: "... after the great leader Chairman Mao passed away, the Gang of Four organized a team of people to dash off essays boasting that after the death of Liu Bang, when Lü Hou took power, she followed Liu Bang's wishes and continued the implementation of the legalist line", just as Jiang Qing had pretended to continue Mao's legacy. I smile to think that this statement reflects Liao's own weeklong trip to Beijing where he joined a team of historians to "dash off essays" vilifying Jiang Qing. His style mimics the erudition and crudity of Mao, every sentence about Lü Hou-Jiang Qing containing a derogatory epithet: "power-grabbing", "evil", "wild maniac", "villainous", "underhand", "cruel-hearted", "diabolical", and "causing chaos under Heaven".

According to Liao, Lü Hou "poisoned the prince Ru Yi and cut off the limbs of his male relatives, gouged out their eyes, burned off their ears, cut out their

tongues, placed them in pig pens and called them 'human swine'". Was this same level of brutality meted out to intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution, 'the stinking old ninth' imprisoned in 'cow pens' and forced to endure daily public beatings and struggle sessions? In the conclusion, Liao interprets Jiang Qing's quote, "Future rulers of the country may well be women", to claim this as evidence of her “wolf-hearted ambition to be empress". What can I say? He’s probably not a feminist.

Liao *laoshi* shows mixed emotions about this act of vilification—despite his disillusionment with the 'waste' he witnessed at top party levels, his eyes widen with the memory of all that luxury and the power that permitted it. He can't help it. It must have been agony to lose his precious library to a Red Guard pyre, but he's more interested in relating it to earlier book burnings such as the one orchestrated by the paranoid Emperor Qin Shi Huang, another who understood that the pen could be mightier than the sword. And when I raise the 'theft' by the nationalists of China's art treasures and their relocation to Taiwan in 1949, he tells how he rescued a favourite statue from Red Guard hammers: "After a few glasses of rice spirit, one of my close friends and I got angry. To lose our heritage through thoughtless destruction by our own people is a terrible thing. It is foolish to believe that the past can be erased by ‘smashing the old’, when our ways of governing and thinking remain anchored in tradition. So late that night, we hitched the statue to an army truck and dragged it into the lake. It’s probably still there."

Learning through *jianzheng*

I am a member of the 'intellectual' class. In the China of 1979, that means I have at least a secondary education. The classification sounds pompous to the Australian ear, like it's got tickets on itself; or worse, it sounds as if some really serious thinking and research *should be* associated with my scholarship. It makes me feel like a dilettante,

a dumb one at that, playing on the surf break of culture, literature and meaning. And I'm not the only one unsure of my status here at *Nanda*—everyone involved with education is treading on eggshells. Returning to their chalkboards after years of re-education in remote villages, many of the teachers still bear the scars of torture at the hands of their former students, or their colleagues who even now sit nodding and smiling beside them in staff meetings. The National Party Congress of 1978 has wholeheartedly endorsed a return to formal education within the framework of the Four Modernisations, but you can't blame the teachers for feeling cautious.

It is my heartfelt ambition to study Chinese drama while in China. For a while, I believe it'll happen, that I'll be transferred from *Nanda* to the Shanghai Theatre School. I want to study *huaju* or spoken drama, rather than *jingju*, Peking opera. One of my fellow dorm mates, Elizabeth, is doing her PhD on Peking opera, and she is attached to the *danwei* of the Nanjing Provincial Opera School. Unlike her, though, I don't have specific academic ambitions. I just want to study Chinese stagecraft. This is not enough, it seems. I'm allocated to Modern Chinese Literature (1900-1949) and Classical Chinese Literary History classes instead. At least literature is close to drama. Chinese students are hardly ever lucky enough to get their first study preferences, and are often allocated to courses as distant from their interests as medicine is to music or political studies.

The modern Chinese literature class taught by Wang *laoshi* focuses on fiction written in the vernacular, which has its roots in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Its themes deal with the tumultuous events changing the culture of Chinese political and social institutions, interconnected with events occurring simultaneously in nations all over the world. Our classroom on the ground floor of the dormitory wears a veil of chalk dust that damps down the echo and makes words take on more intimacy than

perhaps intended. Only two of us turn up regularly to the classes held twice a week; my *tongban*[14] Monique speaks Chinese with a lilting Aix en Provence accent that challenges my comprehension skills but not those of our teacher. How come I can understand standard Chinese spoken by Chinese citizens but not by foreigners?

Wang *laoshi* is an intellectual in the lower cadre ranks. He has a round face, high arched eyebrows and full lips. He has a glorious humming voice with a smoky edge to match the stains on his fingers. He ranges up and down in front of the blackboard with a spring in his step. Wang would be cool and professional if he didn't look so hunted when Monique or I make rude remarks about authoritarian regimes or ridiculous propaganda. We stop teasing him once we realise he is actually in love with his subject.

Of course Lu Xun is on the syllabus, but the textbook we use to analyse his works was written and published during the Cultural Revolution, and its writer has pitched a circus-tent of arguments to suggest that Lu Xun was an ardent red social-realist party hardliner. Wang says, "The Education Ministry is striving to publish new textbooks to reflect the new direction set by the Eighth Party Congress, but they won't be ready for another year or more. As a result, we'll refer to this existing textbook."

The mismatch between the textbook interpretations and our own is confusing at first, then irritating, and finally amusing. Wang *laoshi* stands before us reading passages from stories like *Medicine* and *The True Story of Ah Q*, and then explains the meaning according to the textbook. All the while he has a pleading look on his face, and his bushy arched eyebrows almost reach his hairline, as if he is about to be tortured. He has to rely on us for a 'wrong-headed' critique in order to relieve his pain.

---

[14] Classmate.

Once we understand the role assigned to us, that of scholar-officials undertaking *jianzheng* (admonition) in the audience of the emperor, we come to really enjoy the sessions with Wang. His adherence to an out-of-date position is the provocation we need to stage an argument. With our impoverished language and still-nascent knowledge of appropriate conceptual frameworks, we struggle to convince him that the textbook is a clumsy attempt at rewriting history.

His eyes dance as he says, "Well if we follow your capitalist roader argument, then Lu Xun was condemnatory, not only of the corrupt feudal order of Confucianism, but of any system that feeds on ignorance and fear."

We nod in affirmation; and he smiles as if in congratulation, but shakes his head at the same time and says, "Well, you see, you are wrong, because the textbook says quite specifically that he wanted to smash the four olds: old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits."

In the last weeks of our time with him, we are able to laugh aloud at his protestations, and watch his facial muscles remain rigid while his eyes sparkle. His self-discipline is remarkable; he's an excellent example of *li*.[15] Meanwhile, we can be as brash as we like, because we stand outside the Chinese academy, outside China.

I am so lucky to be at university with the last intake of the *gongnongbing*, the worker-peasant-soldier students who have been the first to be offered scholarship places with the reopening of schools and universities. Sent to production brigades in rural areas or to industrial work units in other cities for ten years, they've returned with a huge desire to understand their experiences. They're easy to pick out in the student body. While they're neat enough in their blue trousers and jackets, they wear

[15] *li*: Confucian decorum, rules of propriety.

their clothes carelessly. Their skin looks leathery and suntanned, and their eyes are often questing and solemn. They study alone first, and then come together to discuss ideas and share readings. They are gluttons for books on history, poetry, geography, science; books by approved foreign novelists, or about artists and musicians. They weave all this information together in their talk. It's more like a French intellectual milieu than an Australian one, except that debates are rare. It's like a group of people dropping stones into a pond, one after the other, creating a crosshatched ripple effect that is absorbed by the group. But what is absorbed remains a mystery to me.

While the student-teacher dynamic in my class can be plagued with misunderstandings, hampered as it is by our halting knowledge of the language, the dynamic between some teachers and their *gongnongbing* students is incendiary! I pop into a history class in the main teaching building one morning and watch the teacher use the same provocative approach as Wang. In the guise of eliminating specious thinking, both students and teachers test out ideas, creating intricate layers of dialogue as if building a tower with live grenades. Then they finish the session with a mutual ritual acknowledgement of the out-of-date party line in the textbooks. The more complex the dance, the more rewarding the learning; and the more dangerous too, for should anyone slip, there is the risk that an ambitious class monitor will make a damning report to the Party on campus.

Through the window of another classroom I see an old man, with wisps of white hair and liver spots on his pate, bowed over the textbook and reading verbatim without inflection. I can feel his exhaustion brought about by years of fear and humiliation. While he won't deter the *gongnongbing* students from teasing out the key ideas and discussing them in their informal study groups, he hopes they'll be careful to separate the knowledge that they value from the knowledge that will be tested in

their oral exams. Any divergence from the key political message or any analysis that goes beyond received party wisdom will reflect badly on the teacher. Both students and teacher are being examined, so collusion is necessary to save collective face.

Wisely, Wang does not trust our ability to perform to a high oral standard, so he gives us three questions to answer in a timed written exam. One question is based on an analysis of Lu Xun's *Story of Ah Q*. I dash to the library and search the catalogue for a literary commentary written in the same period as my textbook. The librarian takes the call number through the partition behind the counter to find the text in the vast rows of shelves hidden from student view. I imagine a Borges or Escher-inspired library of infinite levels with endless spiral staircases. Back in my room, I copy out relevant slabs and then construct a piece of plagiarism that would have me ejected from any university in Australia. I memorise the text as best I can and then regurgitate it in the exam, framing it with an introduction and conclusion written in my fractured Chinese. The teacher is delighted with me. I have honoured and protected him, and I am awarded a high distinction for hiding the knowledge we have gained in our classes together.

Soon after, Wang *laoshi* invites me to his campus apartment for a New Year's lunch. I'm not sure if this is my reward for our successful collaboration or if the *waiban* has noted my presence in the dormitory and has pressed this obligation upon him. This is the first time I've been inside a teacher's home and I'm excited. He and his wife force-feed me with delectable slimy green hundred-year-old eggs: "*Ni chi, ni chi, ni chi*".[16]

I torture them by gobbling up their stock of this precious New Year fare because I don't know how to say "Enough, Enough, Enough" in a way that will be

[16] "Eat eat eat!" Most polite exhortations are offered in threes.

accepted! Other teachers drop in and we have a wonderful relaxing afternoon. I'm not invited again, but I feel so lucky to have been able to witness the joy they get from their infant son and from the new private toilet they've just had installed in their flat.

There's rhetoric and then there's reality

One afternoon at the Drum Tower fruit shop, I bump into Mamadou, a foreign student from Guinea who's studying at the Hydraulics Institute. We greet each other with a nod as we look dispiritedly over the wrinkled apples and bitter green oranges for sale, desperately seeking vitamins in edible form. The *fuwuyuan*, wearing dust sleeves over her jacket, is lounging in a recliner reading the *Nanjing Daily.* Above her head is the ubiquitous shop store sign written with Mao's calligraphy brush: *Wei renmin fuwu.* Serve the people. Nanjing citizens start to crowd around the doorway, and compare our skin colour, height, fatness, health, and level of civilisation. Mamadou is wincing. He goes up to the counter and says in clear Mandarin: 麻烦您，买一斤萍果.'[17] The *fuwuyuan* does not move. A woman walks up to the counter and says '买一斤萍果.' The *fuwuyuan* makes a show of folding up her paper and hauling herself out of the chair, then picking carefully through the apples for the edible ones, which she wraps in newspaper and binds with string. After bypassing Mamadou three more times, she visibly sneers at him, picks out the most bruised apples, and thumps them heavily onto the newspaper on the counter so that they bruise some more. She forces him to put the money down so that she does not have to touch him. He leaves quietly, but his eyes show pain and rage.

Furious, I point to Mao's exhortation, "你要为人民服怎么那么不礼貌?"[18]

---

[17] Lit. "Trouble you (polite). Buy a *jin* of apples". A *jin* is the equivalent of half a kilo.
[18] "You're meant to serve the people. How can you be so rude?"

She snaps back, "That thing is not a person."

下乡劳动 Learning from the peasants is a farce

It's autumn harvest, so we're sent down to the countryside for a day of manual labour. The idea that urban students should learn from the masses has persisted, though barely. For the foreign students it's a bittersweet experience. We're excited to break our study routines for a day in the countryside. It's beautiful mid-autumn weather, and some of us are looking forward to meeting real farmers, the source of inspiration for the revolution, and the ones who fill the national food bowl. Instead we have no contact with anyone from the production brigade. The threshing ground has been turned into our playground. We are not to learn anything about peasant life, except that what they do is physically arduous. The teachers cannot help but show how superior they are. While they turn up their noses as if to avoid some invisible stench, they talk a lot of gratuitous political rubbish. It sets my teeth on edge just as it does when they talk about the national minorities as if they're primary school children who love to sing and dance, and therefore have no intellectual capacity. If I hear one more comment that peasants are *meiyou wenhua*, uncivilized, I'll scream.

The work *is* arduous, but also, as it turns out, heart-wrenchingly gratuitous. We're presented with a huge pile of rice straw. Our task is to move it two metres. For a couple of hours we revel in the physical exercise, the heat of the sun, getting up a sweat, the fresh air, the body looking for a rhythm. We joke around in the haystack, and take photos. All too slowly we realise what a burden we've been. As our bus leaves the compound to return us to our urban intellectual lives, we witness three peasants returning the haystack to its previous location. My high expectations of participation in authentic tasks in communication with the farmers turned into a

lesson in humiliation, a parodic exercise in mutual distancing. The message: "Foreigners are useless. Look what they have cost you in time and energy!"

Or was it more like "This policy is a tired one and reaching the end of its use-by date, but it must be obeyed. The door is opening, though, so who can be fucked making it look authentic?"

Figure 5 Jen, Anthony and Tee, *Laodong*, Oct. 1979 (Image of the author)

Chapter 5 Divorce

势不两立 *Shibuliangli* 'Irreconcilable'[19]

My mother and I look up the steps of the Nanjing University Assembly Hall, and there is a young woman in a striped flared skirt laughing with delight into a camera lens. Suddenly, she looks across at me and a smile of recognition suffuses her face, melting the iceberg of fear and guilt that has gripped me. She runs lightly down the stairs, takes my hands in hers and says in Chinese, "How nice to bump into you again. Please introduce me to your mother."

I say to mum, "Mum, this is Zhang Yanhua, my former roommate".

Maggie smiles at her and says, "Hello, dear. You are a very brave woman to share with my girl. I hope she wasn't too much trouble." Red in the face and stumbling over the phrasing, I translate what will be an apology from me through the kind heart of my mother.

One afternoon, I come running up the stairs after an hour with Tee, who is teaching me the secret code to the Guardian cryptic crossword, and fling open my door. Standing in the centre of the room with her hands behind her back is a very serious, very young looking woman in a blue Zhongshan suit. She has a basin haircut and small still features, and she is tiny beside my bulk. I can't help making comparisons:

---

[19] This expression has its origins in *The Warring States Strategies,* "Chu State strategy 1": "The states of Qin and Chu can never both be dominant: when Chu is strong, Qin is weak; when Chu is weak Qin is strong. It's a case where **power cannot be shared by both (*shi bu liang li*)**."

she is a social-realist portrait while I am a cubist figure in stop-frame motion. Or to put it another way, she is writ in clean calligraphic form while I am bohemian ink-spatter.

I guess the silent battle for control over my wayward individuality begins from this moment. When I see her eyes run the length of me and take in my over-decorated side of the room, I can tell we are not going to be kindred spirits. She announces in the rhetoric of a Young Pioneer: "Hello. My name is Zhang Yanhua. I am a second year Chinese language student and I am from Guangdong City. My father is a political propagandist with the Communist Party. I hope you will be able to work hard and stay healthy."

"*Xiao Zhang? Ni hao. Wo hen gaoxing jiandao ni. Wo shi Zhenni. An Zhenni*.'[20]

In very clear Mandarin, she says, "*Wo bi ni da liangsui. Yinggai jiao wo Zhang dajie.*[21] That is your bed and your cupboard and your desk and chair? So these…", and with her hand she conveys the borders of her own domain, "are for me to use". It's clear she's happy with its size and comfort.

That first night we attempt to talk with each other. I make an effort to express something about my background in halting Chinese and to ask her about herself, but with each grammatical or tonal error she interrupts to correct me, reducing me to the linguistic incontinence of early infancy. I am being punished. That smile on her face that does not quite reach her eyes makes me beg for my own silence! By eight o'clock I'm exhausted and, as soon as my head hits the rice husk pillow, I'm asleep.

---

[20] "Xiao Zhang? Hello. I'm so happy to meet you. I'm Zhenni. An Zhenni."
[21] "I'm older than you by two years. You should call me big sister Zhang."

At five o'clock the next morning, the loudspeaker sputters into life and roars out the national anthem followed by Mao's eight-point exercise regime. 'Healthy mind, healthy body, healthy spirit'—this is the Chairman's holistic approach to collective service of the nation. At the very first notes, Zhang *dajie* silently arises (conveniently attired in two layers of undergarments) and is dressed in tracksuit and runners within seconds. She appears directly above my face.

I translate her quiet firm instruction as "Get up now. It's time to exercise. You must run around the oval. Let's go."

I slur in Chinese what I think means: "I don't want to. I'm too tired. You go ahead.""But you are fat, and if you don't exercise you will be unhealthy. If you are unhealthy you cannot study. And if you cannot study well, you cannot serve your country well."

"My country doesn't care."

She looks at me with tight lips and I can see that my resistance confirms that here is a representative of western decadence and selfish individuality. I of course am charmed by this potential perception —I really *would* like to be seen as a hybrid Maoist-Surrealist-Bohemian-Feminist-Freak. And fat? I thought 'fat' symbolises wealth in China? But she said it like she meant it literally. Isn't it bad manners to say it out loud? Our relationship is doomed!

The subjects I am taking are exciting and frustrating by turns. In the conversation class for foreign students, my skills put me in the middle of the class and I am able to keep up. Even at seven in the morning the teacher, an enthusiastic proponent of communicative methods, keeps up a fast pace. In the lectures on classical literary history, however, I am a fish out of water. The lecturer, Liao *laoshi*,

has a Shanghai accent you can cut with a knife and I cannot understand a word he says, even though the other foreign students hang on his every utterance and copy down extensive notes from the board. To me his grass script[22] is illegible, made worse by the powdery chalk that barely sticks to the blackboard; nor can I comprehend the readings in the textbook. I think, "Hmm, this is going to take a while. How much do I *really* want this?" The shock of the new is padded by my retreat into the rice paper leaves of the dictionaries and the painstaking process of translation.

A couple of weeks after Zhang *dajie* has taken up residence, I come back to the room after lunch to find her in bed with a girl. For a second I wonder if I should tiptoe out and leave them to it, whatever *it* is, but then Zhang looks around the end of the bed and smiles a welcome. I am introduced to Nan'nan who quickly becomes a fixture of afternoon naptime. I wonder how these two could fit so comfortably in the very narrow iron-frame bed, but they cuddle up together, one spooned around the back of the other and within minutes they are asleep, two glossy black heads lying on the fluorescent pink satin pillow case that Zhang *dajie* has brought with her from her home in the south.

Later I understand that Nan'nan is seeking refuge from her billet in the twelve-bed dormitory, and at the same time she is providing comfort and support to Zhang, who probably feels lonely and threatened in our spacious abode with only me, the 'stuttering foreign devil', for company. Now, though, I begin to feel both imposed upon and locked out. The two of them whisper together and completely ignore my presence. Virtually all conversation has ceased between us within three weeks of her arrival. It appears that I am a necessary pest.

---

[22] Grass script is a flowing calligraphic style used for purposes of economy and speed.

Zhang *dajie* and I just can't get our timing right. I want to play music and read a little before a nap, but she and Nan'nan like to go sleep immediately after they return from lunch. Then I fall asleep, only to be woken by them leaving for afternoon classes and political sessions. My timetable is less strenuous, and in these early weeks the stress of dealing with a new city and new people in a different language pushes me deep into sleep from which I awaken disoriented and grumpy. Then later at night, Zhang has her radio on listening to what I call socialist-trash-agitprop-pop while I attempt to struggle with homework and readings that are way beyond my comprehension.

Just who are these women? They don't appear to be interested in current affairs or curious about the shape of the world. For them their place is fixed and they are satisfied by the structure provided. They have made it to a prestigious university and study is just what you do in order to graduate. Zhang *dajie* is two years older than me, but it could be twenty for all that we share in common. I feel myself in a kind of intellectual vacuum, and am forced by my own needs to make contact more broadly, with other foreign students who are always questioning and comparing their opinions with prevailing Chinese ones, and with the older *gongnongbing* students. Unlike the Yanhuas and Nan'nans, their Cultural Revolution experiences have left them hungry to seek out and question any knowledge on offer. Having already faced 'the devil' in the form of rural China, they are more inclined to look for similarities in perspective among the foreign student cohort, rather than dwell on difference and dissonance.

Zhang *dajie*'s interactions with me can be characterised as a list of admonishments:

- You should drink less coffee.
- You should put on another layer of clothing. It has rained again.

- You should wear more clothes to bed.
- You should stop smoking.
- You should do more exercise.
- You should study the works of Marx, Lenin and Mao.
- You should you should you should!

My silent response to each and every 'should' reflects my Western individualist streak: "Yeah, and you should mind your own fucking business."

I cannot believe she can be so rude and BOSSY. And I wish she did not have such a low opinion of me. It feels as though every time I open my mouth to say something in Chinese she says, '*budong*',[23] which is designed to make my stuttering explanation even more incomprehensible. I've come to think of this as basketball diplomacy —*budong, budong, budong.*

The week before I take the train to Shanghai for Christmas, there is a rapprochement. Nan'nan is conspicuously absent, and Zhang says they are all busy studying for the exams. She takes little breaks every now and then, and we talk about everyday stuff. I make attempts to steer the conversation into political realms, seeking her opinions on Democracy Wall, the one-child family policy or Nixon's visit to China the month before, but she won't bite.

She asks me to buy her a thick woollen sweater in Shanghai. While I'm there I look all over but can't find a thick sweater in her size. Rather than return empty-handed, I buy her a light ply burgundy wool jumper, embroidered with flowers with black beaded centres. I can't bear the thought of her paying for a jumper she hasn't asked for, so I present it to her as a gift. A year passes before I understand that the design and colour are the height of fashion for grandmothers. In return she and

[23] "I don't understand".

Nan'nan present me with three gifts: a handkerchief with a picture of a *waiguoren*[24] on it, all blonde curls, cupid bow lips and flowers; a good luck money box in the shape of an old man; and a small plastic basket containing a plastic pink rose nestled among plastic fernery. I am touched by their generosity, but I really don't get their taste. In letters home I describe them as 'cute' and 'ever so sweet', and I know my family and friends will read this as 'kitsch, uncool, girly, juvenile'.

One afternoon as I'm riding up to the post office to send a couple of letters, a man in army green swerves his bike in front of me and clips my front wheel, sending me in a spectacular somersault over the handlebars and onto my back. I am so well-padded in my layers of winter wear that I don't feel a thing when I hit the bitumen, and the joyful feeling of weightlessness combined with surprise stirs up a shout of laughter. This sign of life cheers the culprit, for he steps hard on the pedals and sprints down the road as far away from the *yang guizi*[25] as he can get, and well he might think I'm a ghost what with this ghastly new perm that has made a frizzy orange mop of my hair.

Zhang *dajie* is indignant: "Did you chase him? No? Well you should have. He should pay for the repair of the bike."

I say in my best Chinese, "He was probably afraid. So many people watch the accident. Perhaps he has no money. Perhaps he believes I say I am injured."

She is adamant, "Well, it is his mistake. You should make him responsible." Should, should, should.

---

[24] Lit. 'outside country person', meaning 'foreigner'.

[25] *Yang guizi* means 'foreign devil/ghost', a term used in general observations of 'foreigners' in the street.

Over Chinese New Year, Zhang *dajie* goes home to Guangdong, and I travel with about fifteen foreign students on a *waiban*-organised trip to Yunnan where I revel in the delights of a wild cracker-fuelled New Year among the multicultural swirl of the far west, and am treated to a magnificent total eclipse of the sun. When we meet up in our dorm room again, we are both relaxed and happy. I am presented with two boxes of candy, two stalks of sugar cane and several bright bouncing balloons. My gift to her is a book of foreign short stories in Chinese. My response to her gift was effervescent outpourings; her response to mine was close-lipped disappointment.

Our truce lasts a short time. The final straw is broken when I invite Picasso to the room to drink tea one Saturday evening. Zhang usually hangs out with her friends in the Chinese student dormitory, so I think it's a good time to bring the handsomest black man in China into our room. Picasso is a student at the nearby Hydraulics Institute. He has a scholarship from Benin, and studies alongside 'brothers' from many socialist-bloc countries in Africa. I met him at one of their monthly dances. We were both showing off on the dance floor and our egos fell in love with each other. Our single night of passion, dampened for me by *Abba's Greatest Hits,* has been followed up with a lacklustre excursion to Mohu Lake, where we rowed out to a pavilion and back again with a couple of his mates.

Now we're sitting side by side on my bed, teapot and cups balanced on a chair. We're talking about our studies and what we've been doing during the week. Our common language is Chinese, and herein sits the seed of our separation. For him, there are complications about talking to a friend in a language that is used to vilify and insult him. For me, I wonder that our attempts to understand each other, the boy from Benin and the sheila from Australia, are being filtered through a language that carries a third culture that neither of us understands all that well; and it is a culture I

firmly intend to understand better. Suddenly Zhang *dajie* is in the room, and the displeasure on her face is unmistakable. It's as though the blackness of Picasso's skin has somehow tinged her own. When I introduce them to each other, Picasso is polite but she is barely civil.

Rigid with disapproval, she sets about making noisy preparations for bed even though it's still early. When this has no effect on us, she turns on her radio and swivels the dial to between stations so that the static hiss gives unmistakable voice to her mood. I indicate to Zhang to locate a clearer broadcast signal. She deliberately misinterprets this sign, and turns up the volume. The air is now stuttering with tension. Picasso finishes his tea and bids us both good night.

Fuelled by self-righteousness indignation, I say through tight lips, "You are not polite. That person is a friend of mine. You treated him very badly. And you treated me badly."

"He is a black person. He has no culture."

"He has more than you. The Party says that the friends of China are all over the world, and that includes African friends."

"Males are not allowed in these rooms."

"You never use the rule before."

"The rule is the rule."

"The *waiban* allows him to visit me."

"It is late. I want to go to bed."

"You usually go to bed at 11.00. If you want to go to bed early, you can tell me, and I will understand", I say, though I don't have an understanding bone in my body.

After the Picasso incident, my feeling of alienation persists and tolerance is frayed. I am studying less and spending more time in the rooms of others so I don't have to be with Zhang and Nan'nan as they listen like dumb brunettes to songs about good behaviour and the joys of being socialist youths harnessed to the state. The approved foreign hit of the year is 'Doe, a Deer' out of *The Sound of Music*, and Zhang likes it. Enough said.

It is a fellow foreign student from Quebec, Claude, who suggests that I could ask Zhang to leave. If I paid for additional board out of my allowance, I could have the room to myself. I had not thought this possible and I had not wanted to give up the hope of forming a strong friendship with my Chinese roommate. But another week of silent treatment sends me to Wang *mama* in the *waiban*. She listens patiently as I describe the dilemma of sharing with someone who does not have the same interests or priorities as me.

"Please consider a moment. What will happen to Zhang if she has to leave? She will return to a crowded dormitory. What will people think of her? She will lose face."

"No no. Not right. She is without blame. It's like, like divorce. Husband and wife agree they *hebulai*.[26]"

Wang *mama* smiles and says, "Ah well, in China we discourage divorce. The Neighbourhood Committee will counsel the couple. When they understand that it is

[26] *Hebulai:* "unable to get on together".

bourgeois to consider individual wants above the collective needs of the family and the state, they usually stay together. Furthermore, An Zhenni, only you want a divorce, not both of you."

It's crazy to feel so happy at this serious juncture in our talk but I can't help it. I'm just so impressed with my ability to share this conversation in Chinese. I've not long before learned the expression *hebulai* and I feel myself fizz with excitement when Wang *mama* accepts this as the right word for the situation. The excitement builds as I consciously realise I'm understanding exactly what she's saying, and that it is exactly what I've learned from literature about the function of the Neighbourhood Committees. Life is imitating Art! Damn! What's she saying? All that excitement has wrong-footed me!

"*Duibuqi. Ni ganggang shuo shenme?*"[27]

She looks at me very carefully and says, "Write a report. The *waiban* will consider your request."

Over the next two days I formulate a report in my best Chinese. On paper bumpy with unprocessed rice husk I choose my favourite Hero fountain pen to outline the reasons for my wanting a room to myself: my selfish need to have more room so that I can study when I want (true); my inability to share with others given that I am an only child (big lie); the age difference (all of two years); my disturbing habits (too true). I sign off: 敬, respect.

Two weeks later when I come back from class, Zhang is standing arms akimbo in the middle of our room, her brow furrowed and her bottom lip trembling: "How dare you push me out! How dare you use your foreign privileges to send me

[27] "Sorry. What did you say?"

away! I have been very polite to you even though you have bad manners and bad habits. I have tried to be a friend to you and to teach you the right way but you will not learn. And now you have the power, just like your imperialist ancestors, to do what you alone want."

Actually I have only an inkling of what she said, because I'm so agitated, and for the first time she's speaking at passionate pace. But this is what I think she's saying, *should* be saying.

"Zhang *dajie*, please forgive me. I want to be the first to tell you. We are not getting on, *hebulai*. I have the power to say please go. It makes me ashamed. But I must survive (I think I used the word 'exist'), and I cannot learn when you are here."

"Traitor!" she spat as she gathered up her meagre belongings and stepped through the door. At least I think that's what "*yuan* something" means, but much later when I look it up in the dictionary, I think she was saying something like "unjust". It makes me cringe. My guilt over the truth of her words is somewhat assuaged by the relief I feel at losing 'the mocking judge' and her silent friend. I love my own company and I love the opportunity to invite people to come and argue language and culture and politics. I love the way the other Chinese roommates are now more open with me. Teachers are able to visit and give tutorial support, to discuss art and culture across countries and eras, and my language and understanding begins to blossom.

I don't see Zhang *dajie* again until the meeting on the steps of the assembly hall a year later. She looks as though she has had a joy transfusion, and there does not appear to be any animosity seeping from her; in fact she converses with great ease and fluency

for the first time. For the first time she tells me something about her family and her studies, which are going well. She says, “Like the dress? It's for an international music night. I get to be the Mexican *senorita*.” She swirls around and the skirt billows and sways. I wonder if she ever did read the book of foreign short stories I gave her.

It dawns on me then that when she left that day, of course she was hurt and angry, and rightfully so, but she may also have thought that my report of her behaviour was damning and that she would be open to serious criticism, virtual character assassination. She must have been relieved to find that the report cast no shadow on her reputation. I also come to the realisation that it had not been her choice to be the dormitory spy for the university authorities, although I know why they picked her. It took some time after her departure before the other students explained Zhang's role as 'minder for the State'. Apparently she had gone about her duty of minding everyone else’s business with the same sour determination she had shown towards me. Perhaps this explains her lack of friends in the dorm and her need to bring Nan’nan in from outside. Zhang *dajie* had been doing her duty and it had not been easy for her.

We are not in touch. But I hope we are reconciled. Still, at those times when I’m castigating myself for past and present sins, panic and guilt can still seize me, because I used my powers of foreign privilege to be rid of a pest.

Bridge to Future Past: Culture Shock/Paranoia

七上八下 (qishang baxia lit. 7-up, 8-down)

i knock into things.

i lose balance.

my gait is too wide

too fast

too slow.

i stop and people bump into me.

i start forward and step on heels.

the significant and the trifling

are both terribly important

in this meaningless chaos.

i feel the press

of the masses,

millions upon millions

thinking thoughts and speaking them,

or even worse,

thinking thoughts and speaking otherwise.

i can't stop

interpreting myself

to myself

as viewed through the eyes of others:

she’s a carnival come to town,

freak in the sideshow of street life.

she snarls *kan shenme*?[28]

we sway together,

avert our gaze, say

mei shenme. nothing.

when she moves away,

we slip around her,

water ahead of the breaststroke.

with no relationships to bind her

she has no status

less than *taren*[29]

she is persona gratuitous,

superfluous as feet painted on a snake.

i am not-me.

i am, of course, not me.

i am a parody:

a Comintern technical adviser,

fleshy, blonde, a wide stride

fur lined boots and fur coat,

a scowl as deep as the Volga;

a man,

the boots tell all—go no further

but if you do,

the short hair confirms it;

a peddler of bourgeois liberalism

she steals *qingnian*[30] from the Party.

---

[28] "What are you looking at?"

[29] Person.

she dances in freeform,

she says 'Don't be like me: forget celibacy!';

a ghost

the pallor of skin and hair,

body parts moving at once,

legs—arms—mouth—eyes—brows,

wode tian a![31]

an animal:

a running dog,

a dog fart,

a paper tiger,

a stupid laughing horse,

the hen flown the coop, left her eggs to break.

an ox-ghost snake-spirit

class enemy.

more than what I am,

is what I'm not.

i'm not Chinese

i can never belong.

---

[30] Youth.

[31] "My Heaven!"

Chapter 6 International Women's Day

三八 (3.8) San Ba, coll. Mad woman

March 8 is International Women's Day—a day to remember Mao's dictum that 'women hold up half the sky'. My Western feminist comrades in the dormitory are excited that the day is acknowledged, but think a half-day off work could be celebrated in ways more cheerful than attending compulsory meetings to acknowledge the sacrifices women have made for country, Party and family. Ordinarily we're not invited to these meetings to declare solidarity with our Chinese sisters, but today Xiao Jia has invited Tee and me to the meeting organised by the Women's Union at the university. When she extended the invitation she said as she waved goodbye, "Oh, and don't forget to bring along a packet of tampons."

Xiao Jia is a woman warrior. Her father is a retired general in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and, in the absence of any male offspring, he has nurtured his daughter to become a general too. She is in the PLA, but she spends a lot of time at the university. I'm not sure I've ever known why. I just accept her as a part of university life. She's a firm believer in the Four Modernisations policy that promotes developments in agriculture, industry, science and technology, and the military. At twenty-eight, Xiao Jia is still single, but unlike so many of my university acquaintances who have returned to a viciously competitive marriage market after ten years in the countryside 'learning from the peasants', she does not appear to be panicked by the fact that she is a mere two years off permanent spinsterhood. Her slight wiry body stands erect in green army trousers and jacket. Her hair is a mess of unruly permed curls, framing a lean face. Her eyes radiate a passion and

determination that melt the frostiest of cynics who might otherwise label her 'a quack'. She barks out her ideas at a rapid no-nonsense pace, fracturing the air around her. But all attempts to stereotype her get confused by a beautiful set of red bow lips begging for attentions of a non-martial nature.

Xiao Jia is a feminist, but not my idea of a feminist. When I go to Hong Kong to meet up with my mum, Xiao *dajie* asks me to bring back "a scientific bra", by which she means a cross-your-heart underwire bra, preferably in pale pink or blue, preferably in lace. On one of the few occasions she comes to visit me in my dormitory room, she scoffs at my romantic view of Chinese women as portrayed in the Cultural Revolution posters stuck on my walls. Not all women want to be engineers or car mechanics, or electricians fixing the lines in wild storms in the middle of a typhoon; they don't want to look like men; they don't wear the grime on their faces and the calluses on their hands as marks of pride. She says, "Women want to be women *and* be equal with men. They don't want to *be* men." She tosses her springy curls and purses her red bow lips and scowls provocatively.

I blush and insist that I like the posters for artistic reasons, which is true. I don't want her to think that I'm naive. I've learned that here in China work and study positions are allocated for reasons other than expressed preference or even talent; that means that many of the women who work at jobs they still consider as being for men must have ‘black’ political backgrounds. I tell Xiao Jia about the group of British Labor feminists Tee met at the Nanjing Foreign Guesthouse a few weeks earlier. They had come to China to confirm the existence of the heroic communist poster girl only to find that the look was about as deep as it got. Decked out in their T-shirts and overalls pinned all over with socialist badges, the UK sisters had complained that most of the women workers they had met not only bemoaned their sullied

complexions but also insisted that they would never have taken on 'male' jobs were it not for being forced to think of the good of the country. A feisty Scottish sister had spluttered, "You should have seen the Red Flag auto-detailers with their hair all permed, and some even smothered in lipstick and that scary white mercury face cream."

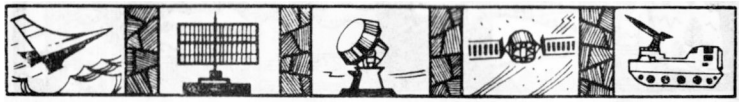
"You know," Xiao Jia says, "the term *san ba* or March 8 is International Women's Day? It symbolises the contribution of women to China? Well, it's also slang for a woman who is hysterical, a woman who cannot control her temper."

I say self-righteously, “Well, I'm sure that slang was created by dissatisfied men. In Australia men say, um, you know like how before your period you have um pressure, you feel um a little bit like crazy? Those men say, ‘What's your problem? You are so *san ba*!’"

Xiao Jia stares at me, which sends me into a spin: is she rejecting the possibility of patriarchal oppression? Is there a cultural reference in there that does not work? How much of what I actually say translates? Or maybe she can't understand why I’m so upset that the word for Women's Day has become a derogatory slur.

Or maybe she just thinks I'm digressing, because she says: "They can think I'm *san ba* all they like. I tell you, those army men have no idea what bravery means! What women soldiers have to put up with, and for no good reason! Like getting your period on a forced march. The layers of rags between our legs chafe and rub away the skin, so that when we get back to the dorms our inner thighs are blistered and bleeding. And we never have time to stop and change, so it's always stressful, what with worrying about hygiene and, you know." We both wrinkle our noses in mutual discomfort.

"There is no sympathy for us, no allowances made. We must pretend we're fine. For hygiene's sake, we need to hang out the washed rags in the fresh air. At home my mother used to hook them over the branches of the *wutong* tree that grew over our balcony, concealing them beneath its leaves, but in the army barracks there are few trees, and the only other place where we might hang them is the exercise yard. But the men are always there. So what happens? We hang them in the damp dark bathrooms, with the toilets nearby. Ugh. We can never get the damned things dry. Can you imagine what it's like to put a damp cloth in your underpants and then march all day? We women smell … not very clean. Lots of us get infections. There's got to be a better way; a more hygienic way; a more *scientific* way."



Now we're sitting in the university auditorium along with hundreds of other women. A big party official stands up to open the meeting and he is no woman. He goes on and on about the importance of women's participation in the realisation of the Four Modernisations, of the need for them to work hard in order to raise China's productivity, and to support the one-child family policy. I'm bored, thinking, "Yeah yeah, say something we don't already know", so I concentrate on his Zhongshan suit. While it looks similar to everyone else's, it isn't. The finer woollen fabric, its custom tailoring that flatters his impressive girth, the extra pockets, even the way he *inhabits* his suit—all of these indicate a party man of some standing. I wonder which of the twenty-six levels of cadre he belongs to. I wish I could see the shoes he's wearing. I want to test the theory that 'footwear indicates status'. I reckon that Chinese pedestrians cannot reconcile the plimsolls or gumboots on my feet with my Western features, my even white teeth, my soft hands and well-fed body. This man would not

be wearing the scuffed fake leather shoes I see on Yu Shen the tailor's feet; he most certainly would not be wearing gumboots.

The predominantly female audience is silent throughout his talk, and when I look around at the rows of people behind me, I realise that few are listening. Some have pulled out knitting (balls of wool in shades of beige, grey and navy), and their lips work furiously as they slip stitches onto cable needles to create elaborate diamond patterns. Others have closed their eyes, and I imagine them planning the menu for the family lunch based on knowledge of market limitations, or fretting about their future with a daughter as the only offspring.

That sets me to thinking about the tension visible on people's faces when the One-Child Family policy is mentioned. Only yesterday I bumped into one of my teachers in the street near the department store. A weak spring sun was fitfully stabbing through the mist, catching the silver spokes of the serried ranks of black bicycles leaning tipsily on their rests along the pavement. A mass of people in navy blue, grey, and khaki moved in and out of the store. Many of these stopped to stare as I marched towards the entrance. Their open-mouthed curiosity is unsettling, like being in a paddock surrounded by steers. Having resolutely failed to shut my mind to the attention and getting grumpier by the minute, I was startled to see my teacher's face acknowledging me.

He was carrying his infant daughter on his back and his wife was by his side. He introduced me to their Little Treasure, dressed up in her tiny blue padded coat and blue trousers with the slit in the back for easy toilet training. A crowd formed an instant audience around us, as he proclaimed, "The One Child Policy is very important for China's modernisation drive and everyone must make sacrifices. We

have made a sacrifice, but in this new China our daughter can have the same opportunities as a boy. She will study hard and become a teacher like her father."

Brushing back the little girl's head of springy dark hair with her fingers, his wife looked up at me with eyes chasing shadows, and said, "What else can be done?" I looked quickly into the face of the little girl-boy to catch any reflection there of her parents' disappointment. The solemn dark eyes that stared back were clear of guilt.

The crowd became a Greek chorus. A woman in pink spectacles piped up, "Does she speak Chinese?"

A man in a leather cap with earflaps said, "Is she a Soviet?"

As my teacher answered these questions, an old man mumbled through weathered teeth to the sky, "I'm glad I've had my children. Three sons and all in the army now."

A young girl ducked between arms and legs and bobbed up in front of me. She said "*Su su su su su su*" and giggled, and the crowd giggled and sputtered and bobbed along with her.

My teacher said, "She thinks she's speaking English. That's what it sounds like to people who don't know the language."

The woman in the pink specs nudged the teacher and said, "Go on, ask her to say something in Chinese."

He said, "They want you to say something in Chinese."

"我是南大的一个留学生. 到中国来很高兴因为按照中国共产党的宣传 '中国的朋友遍天下.'"[32]

The crowd stared at me as if I'd said "*Su su su su su su su*". Then one of them urges the teacher, "Now ask her to say something in English."

"*Su su su su su su su*" burst out of me through pinched lips.

My teacher looked at me with disappointment. I am a disappointment to myself. Why can't I control this terrible feeling of being *outside*?

The inevitable question is raised. I said loudly, and in my very best Chinese, "I am twenty-four years old, and I do not want to get married."

Everyone turned to the teacher for a translation. He said what I said, and sounds of laughter and "*Aiya*!" rose from the crowd.

The lady in the pink specs said "Teacher, you tell her. Whether you want it or not, it is your duty to your family and your country!"

A man in khaki with a PLA badge pinned to the peak of his cap announced to the crowd, "Hmm, she could probably have as many children as her family chooses. In her country there is no one-child policy."

I said in Chinese, "Strange, isn't it? I don't want children and I can have twenty; you want more children, but you're not allowed. Maybe I should become Chinese and you should become Australian."

They turn as one to my teacher for his translation: "In Australia, families are small and people are rich."

---

[32] "I'm a foreign student at Nanjing University. I am very happy to be in China because according to party propaganda, 'China has friends all over the world.'"

I look at him with surprise and newfound respect. He has saved my face, and he has told a truism that works also as support for the one-child policy.

Figure 6 It's best to have only one child, signboard, 1983 (image of the author)

When I return to the present, the head of the Women's Union is giving a rundown of recent work in counteracting some of the more negative effects of the One Child Policy. Not that she says it straight like this. She mentions the importance of educating others to recognise girl children as of equal value to boys. Xiao Jia nods at Tee and I. We've seen the reports in the *People's Daily* about a growing imbalance in male-female birth ratios in some provinces. The information about what happens to baby girls comes through the grapevine: the mother waddles out of the village after her waters break. She finds a place out of sight to deliver the infant she has carried for nine months. She moans with disappointment, smothering the daughter lying there on her belly. Then she cuts the cord and buries her where they have lain together for that brief moment. A movie scene might make the mother shed tears and curse the system that allowed this to happen, but my woman of the land is more resigned, more pragmatic.

As the meeting draws to a close, Xiao Jia whispers, "Can you stay for a half-hour or so? I've invited some of the Women's Union officials to discuss tampons with us."

The hall empties within minutes until only eight women are left to draw their chairs together in a circle, close to the window to allow for a brighter, more convivial mood. Tea is poured and White Rabbit milk chews are passed around. Xiao Jia instructs me to pull out a packet of tampons to show the women.

She says to the gathering, "These tampons are one way to help Chinese women participate actively in the Four Modernisations. They can increase women's involvement in all fields because they are hygienic and preserve modesty."

A woman with large buckteeth and a Mao mole on her upper lip says, "What is it? Some kind of pill?"

I gulp down the laughter that wells at an instant recollection of my brother's mate yelling at my sister, who's discreetly pulling a tampon out of its box inside her bedside drawer, "I'll have one of whatever *you're* gunna eat!" She had carelessly tossed it to him and he had only cottoned on when he caught sight of the string. The way his freckles had stood out as his cheeks reddened was priceless.

Xiao Jia explains what they are and how they're inserted. She unwraps a tampon and dunks it into my teacup. The women bend forward, heads almost touching, and a collective sigh goes up as they watch the cotton swell. She then asks Tee to unwrap a tampon with a plastic applicator while she explains how it's used. I've always hated applicators, just more junk to throw away in my opinion, and the plastic isn't any way as smooth as a finger. The women, however, seem far more interested in this version. Perhaps all the extra wrapping paper denotes hygiene and consumer advancement, in addition to the fact that no index finger need be inserted in the Shadowy Path, the way of the *Yin*.

A woman whose spectacles are held together with electrical tape raises the inevitable question of virginity. Smiling gently she says, "I don't think these are suitable for unmarried women. If there was any danger of the loss of the hymen, even innocently, well, that would be terrible for the whole family."

Xiao Jia turns to me and says, "You're a single woman. Tell them." I stumble around in my memory bank looking for the right language. They're all looking at me doubtfully. My clumsiness is hurting the cause. I get their attention when I say in Chinese, "It wasn't tampons that broke my hymen".

Grabbing back what's left of the argument, Xiao Jia intervenes: "Women's Federation Comrades, there is a possibility that these tampons may not be suitable for young girls, and that is something we need to discuss. But can you see how hygienic and comfortable they could be? How much suffering they could avoid?"

There is mutual agreement. Through sips of tea and the milky sweetness of the White Rabbits, the women begin to share stories: the discomfort caused by using rags as pads; young girls accused of being sluts on their wedding night because of a missing membrane; hymen restoration surgery now on the rise in Hong Kong and Taiwan, maybe even Shanghai.

Xiao Jia then calls everyone together for a final assault. Pointing to the swollen tampon that has consumed all the tea in my cup, she announces, "These Western tampons are too expensive. Even for the Western woman they are considered expensive. We need to produce our own cheap and hygienic Chinese brand for the Chinese woman. I have even thought up a name: *Bao Bei*."

The women clap their hands together and giggle. They exclaim, "So clever" and "Excellent!"

When Xiao Jia first raised the brand name with me I thought it was a bit on the shallow side: "precious object" was discreet, but hardly clever. And she had looked at me with that bright-eyed intelligence, waiting for me to catch onto something I was too dumb to notice. Meanwhile, over beer and fried dumplings at the local hole in the wall, a few of us *dabizi*[33] brainstormed other possible brand names for Chinese tampons: Red Ram was awarded first prize; Red Torch came second; and Big Bridge got third prize. It took another of my Chinese friends to explain: Xiao Jia's choice of *Bao* and *Bei* alluded to qualities such as its cotton layering, its ability to swell, and its practical and protective attributes. Brilliant.

"Comrades, I hope you will give this project your careful consideration. We can only move forward with the full cooperation of the Party and the Women's Union. And here ...", she grabs a handful of tampons and passes them around, "try them for yourselves." And so I lost a packet of tampons to a greater cause.

Xiao Jia threads her arms between Tee's and mine as we walk down the path away from the meeting hall: "Thank you for coming today."

I protest. "But why did you want us there? You didn't really need us. I think they would have been more comfortable with just you to talk to."

"In this regard, China is not as advanced as the West. You are the foreign representatives, the ones with expert experience. I had to pretend that I have not used them before because it is not yet approved as a customary practice. Your role was very important."

"I got my grammar wrong and told them I wasn't a virgin. They must think I'm a ... *zenme shuo* 'slut'? You know, like a bad girl."

---

[33] Lit. 'big noses'.

"Silly, they're not fools. They know to be tactful about such issues. That is why I called only a small group together. And you can be sure a few of them were virgins with missing hymens when they got married."

"Xiao *dajie*! They are surely all good party women!"

"They are all women. That's the truth."

Chapter 7 Souvenir: Icon Fantasies

In my bedside table in Melbourne there's a Shanghai Great World[34] cigarette tin, and in that tin is a collection of Mao badges in moulded enamelled metal. Among them are the Chairman's head in gold on a red satin cushion, and the Great Helmsman with his arm raised over Tian'anmen as the sky glows crimson. Every now and then the magpie in me opens the lid and pulls them out, to stroke and admire. I think it's the rhythm of my touch that pushes me into this spiral of sweet-sour memory.

It is 1980. I'm in the foreign dormitory at Nanjing University, reading Zhang Jie's *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*. It's caused quite a stir among the students because it's a clarion call to women of our age to remain single until they meet someone who'll be a genuine companion. It resonates most strongly with those students who've returned to city life after years in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Many of the women students are close to thirty years old, demarcated as the last year before inevitable spinsterhood. The narrator tells us that despite the deep love between them, her mother and a party cadre both marry others out of misguided senses of responsibility. Theirs is a love that can never be realised, and it reminds me of the repressed frustration and claustrophobia that characterise a Chekhov play, or Jane Eyre's overwhelming desire to be 'true to herself' and so forsake her spiritual equal, the polygamy-inclined Master of Thornfield. As for me, I'm all for being single, especially if that means living an independent and adventurous life.

My thoughts and dictionary page-turning are interrupted by urgent raps on the door. A student in standard navy trousers and jacket is standing there grinning like a

---

[34] Shanghai Great World (*dashijie*) is the name of an amusement complex built in the European baroque style, opened in 1917. In 1979 it was renamed the Youth Palace.

loon, panting with the exertion of having mounted the stairs in a rush. In his hands is a grey cloth, which he opens up to reveal a treasure trove of Mao badges, testaments to loyalty and love. He says, “Do you want these?”

“What are they?”

“Huh! You can see what they are. Do you want them?”

“How much?”

“No, no. *Gei ni.*”[35]

“I can't. They're too beautiful. They are yours. Why do you want to give them to me?”

Then I notice that all along the corridor students from other dormitories and other floors are offering up their prized possessions. The order has come down from on high. An official collection drive is underway, and rather than give Mao up to the flames, students are giving him over for safekeeping. Who better to preserve Mao than foreign acolytes! I take a few, my magpie eyes glittering with lust. For him, the cult of Mao is over, but I am still partially in its thrall.

I’m very open about my love for Mao icons. To any guests who come to my room, I point with pride to the white ceramic Mao statuette on my desk. On the dormitory floor below, fellow student Fritz is wary of the deep envy I cannot hide for his rubber Mao bust: he watches as I rush up to this squashy icon of beauty, barely giving its owner the time of day. I push the Chairman's head into his body, and watch it emerge again, sometimes slowly, sometimes with a magical 'pop'. My squeals of pleasure are also the squeals of a besotted fan. Of course, I only do this in the

[35] “For you.”

company of Fritz. None of the Chinese roommates would be able to entertain the idea of 'playing with Mao'.

My next-door neighbour, Jin Lei, is curious about my reverence for these icons. She can see that for me, they're more than just kitsch—they hold the mystical traces of history and of belief. That's why on this same day she marches into my room, her two hands holding before her a picture mounted on board and covered in glass. In a voice made brittle by determination, she raps out, "Here, for you. A souvenir."

Figure 7 A Mao badge given to the author in late 1979-early 1980 (image of the author)

The hands that touch mine in the moment of exchange are cold, dry and a bit shaky. The mass-produced print is pressed between heavy plywood and glass. I am holding the teenage heartthrob version of Mao the Great Leader. He's a young man striding along a mountain ridge above An Yuan, his scholar's gown flapping in the breeze as streets of stratocumulus clouds march over his head. Under his right arm is a red lacquered umbrella, and his left hand is clenched in the universal gesture of revolutionary struggle.

"It's wonderful!" I say, "But, um, should I hang it on the wall?"

“Whatever. I wore this around my neck every day for a year, before I was sent to the countryside. Party history tells us that An Yuan is the place where Mao first lit the fires of the revolution.”

“But it would have been as big as you! And it's so heavy!” Holding the picture up against her narrow chest, her body becomes the blank wall for an icon.

“The bigger and heavier the better.” The two-tone sound of her voice evokes triumph and bitterness, worship and disillusionment.

“Size matters, you know. The depth of our love for our Chairman was measured by the sacrifices we were prepared to make. I was so proud that my *Ba* gave this to me. The other students at my school were jealous.” She touched the glass briefly.

“You know the story, right? As soon as we awoke in the morning, the family would gather to worship the rising sun of the revolution. We all wore our Mao treasures and held the Little Red Book, and *Ba* would lead us in a rousing chant from one of the Chairman's sayings. We didn't need to read. We knew them all by heart. That's all we read for months and months, at home and at school.”

“ You hold onto it. It is an important part of your hist...”

“The past is the past. Now it is yours.”

“Thank you so much, Jin Lei. He is so good-looking in this picture. No wonder you were happy to look at it every day.”

With a curious look on her face and a shake of her head, she steps neatly from the room. I think to hang it on the wall, and then I put it in the wardrobe with my socks. I want to keep it private.

Figure 8 Jin Lei's gift without its heavy frame (image of the author)

The same night, or one thereafter, when the lights are out and my body is horizontal, my memory spools out this short film:

A girl of twelve takes her place between her mother and brother in the unadorned pews of the Glenbervie Baptist Church. Simple pastel squares of stained glass set around the white cross shimmer above the baptismal bath, and she and her brother giggle as they sing "It's pink and blue and primrose too", a TV jingle for toilet paper made into a mock hymn to holy pastel light. She is expecting the usual Sunday morning service. The minister, gentle and familiar, introduces the man who will take the sermon, and all is calm.

But it isn't. This is no minister to the flock, among which the young nubile is an innocent lamb. He is a violent force that threatens hell and damnation unless ... and at the climax of his bullying rant, she rises on shivering shanks and, sheep-like, follows the aisle towards him. But by the time she gets to the pulpit, he has disappeared, and in his place is the familiar minister, who holds out his arms to her. With tears raining down upon his shoulder, she begs, "How did I get here?" And the answer is, "You heard the

call of God." And she wails, "So why am I so afraid?" And the answer is, "Be happy, the Lord has called you. You have received his Grace."

And then, even as she shudders with the horror of disembodiment, she is introduced to an old woman with a hairy chin and faded blue eyes who will lead her in Bible study towards Baptism. Before it is even begun, she feels the dull weight of disillusionment.

It is this girl who loves Mao. He went to the countryside to seek the mandate of Heaven. He reclaimed China as a unified force, a powerful entity that could stand alone, that resisted the sanctions and impositions of other nations. He stood there on his mountaintop, and harnessed the winds of change. I just wish he had been a slightly less brutal conductor of transformation. The after-effects can be seen in the faces and the body language of his followers, his people. Not that they blame Mao entirely, not yet anyway; fault lies with others greedy for power, with his wife Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four, and the stupid venal party officials at the brigade level who distorted his vision. And I can't quite blame him either. When I make fun of the icons and the silly cultism, I have a little knee-jerk reaction, much the same as when I looked upon the JESUS SAVES poster that hung in a boyfriend's kitchen, showing a hairy Jesus hunched greedily over a pile of coins.

Tee and I have a thing about the Nanjing Big Bridge. Lots of us foreign students do. As the ultimate symbol of north-south unity, we revere and scorn it in equal amounts. It is a Big Bridge, big enough to span one of the widest and longest rivers in the world. The Yangtse (Long River or *Chang Jiang* in Chinese) is an understatement for such a phenomenal body of water that flows from Tibet to the East China Sea. They could just as well call it the Wide River —I've never seen a river so vast, and so treacherous. The first time I travelled across the bridge on the train from

Beijing, it took about 20 minutes —unbelievable. How long does it take to cross the piddling Murray that separates Victoria from NSW? Ridiculous!

And then, it is the first major engineering work that the Chinese built without support from any foreign power. A serious ideological blue with the Soviet Comintern in the early sixties had resulted in a walkout by all key Russian technocrats, and the blueprints for the bridge disappeared with them. So the Bridge has become a testament to the determination of a nation to prove that it could be self-reliant, that it could compete against the big boys.

We commie-pinko consumers love the Big Bridge because it has celebrity status in our city of Nanjing. Its image is everywhere: as a backdrop in photographic studios; on teacups, tea towels and envelopes; in enamel basins; and on cigarette packets. My classical literary history teacher smokes non-filter Big Bridge Cigarettes. He also smokes Great Walls, but I reckon they're gifts because they're quite expensive.

My Big Bridge cup is a very special find, because on the other side of the picture of the bridge are two lines from Mao's poem *Swimming*, written in his own calligraphy, praising Man Beats Nature endeavours: *A bridge will fly to span the north and south, turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare.*[36] Tee and I wonder what it must have been like before 1968 when there was only a ferry for transport across this great river. That was just ten years ago! We suddenly understand why the river is such a powerful demarcation for language, culture and politics. A simple example: because Nanjing city is on the south side of the river it is deemed by the central

[36] Mao Zedong's poem *Swimming* (1956) commemorates his swim across the Yangtse River, an act mimicking the bridges being constructed to span the river, and the perseverance required to develop a powerful communist nation. URL: http://baike.baidu.com/view/328822.htm.

government in Beijing to be temperate enough to miss out on regulated heating in winter, even though it snows here.

We use the Big Bridge to commemorate friendships, and to alleviate boredom. I've only ridden to the bridge twice because the imagined pleasant outing becomes a tortured pilgrimage as our fragile bikes compete with inter-provincial trucks and buses that screech, air-horn and grind their way up the ramp onto the bridge, turning the air blue with exhaust. An amble to the photographic studio is a more relaxed way to acknowledge the majesty of the Big Bridge and the joy of friendship. Whether it be a souvenir to record Tee's and my translation collaboration or the Nanjing Nymphettes Christmas card, the Big Bridge makes the perfect backdrop.

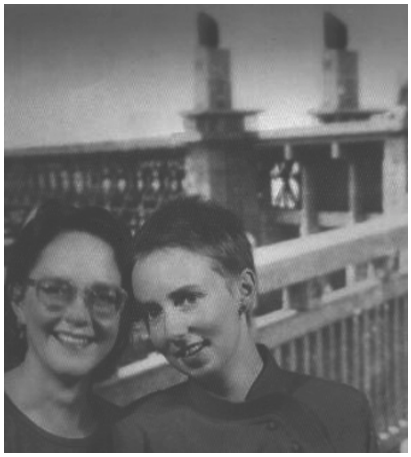


Figure 9 Jen and Tee with the Nanjing Big Bridge backdrop, 1983 (studio image)

Our Chairman swam across the Yangtse near Wuhan in 1966 in almost record time. For a man in his seventies and rumoured to be ill, it was an incredible feat that had a few of us making up stories about how he managed it. Was there a submerged cage under him or men with aqualungs dragging him along? Was he riding a huge golden carp? When Nanjing people tell you about the swim, they conveniently leave out the location—to all intents and purposes he swam across the river 'just down

there'. For them it's not so important that he did it, but what it signified: man could beat nature, China could compete with western powers on its own terms, and Mao himself would not to be deterred from his plan to turn China's youth into a political cudgel to defeat his enemies. This was the river Bai Ma crossed on a ferry to board the free train to Beijing and Tian'anmen Square and join a million others in the Cultfest for their idol Mao.

Brought up in the no-frills Baptist Church and being a drama queen of sorts, I've always had a cosmetic hankering for the robes, the censers, the chants and the Latin of high mass. Imagine, then, my joy upon meeting Mahayana Buddhism in China. Each city has its array of temples, pagodas and shrines in varying states of disarray. Revolutionary China turned its back on religion and so the temples lost the financial and spiritual support of the once faithful. It was not much fun being a Buddhist acolyte after 1950 or thereabouts, and especially life-threatening during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. The violence committed against religious personnel and artefacts appeared random and frenzied.

In October 1979, a few weeks after I arrive at *Nanda*, friends Jane and Torrey and their Foreign Office 'minder' Professor Fu invite me to Hangzhou, a classical 'gem' in nearby Zhejiang province. We visit *Lingyin Si,* Soul's Retreat temple. In the first hall the Heavenly Kings are imposing with their fierce black and red faces and wide-legged stance, but somehow cheerful as well. In a hall behind them, I stand tiny and inconsequential before *Sakyamuni*, carved out of camphor wood sitting atop a giant lotus, and glowing golden in the light filtering through the doorway. Incense drifts and dust motes play upon the planes of his body and in the blue coils of his hair. He is glorious, so un-communist. I'm moved, and surprised that I am. In the room behind this Buddha are the veteran enlightened ones, the *luohan* or *arhat*. They're all

male, all old, all ugly, all too human, all skin and bone sitting in lotus position in their dark, dusty, worm-riddled ranks. They just make me feel young and glad I can walk away from them.

Across the path from the temple is the *Feilai Feng*, a hillside carved into grottoes containing statues of the Buddha in all his forms. Most of the faces have been bludgeoned off the statues by a band of virtuous Red Guards bent on getting rid of the Four Olds.[37] It's shocking, like coming across a scene of human carnage. I don't want to look. I feel hollow, and guilty by association. I don't want to acknowledge the damage committed by brainwashed young dickheads. I could so easily have been one of them.

My other passion is for revolutionary propaganda posters. No matter what city I'm in, I go to bookstores as often as the stipend allows and my first stop is to examine the poster collection displayed on a wall behind the counter. I pass over the fat babies riding giant carp and rockets—they are too deeply Freudian for my liking, and I'm just not into kids. Instead I go for the communist ideological narratives. Here are some of my favourites:

[37] The Four Olds: Old customs, Old culture, Old habits, Old ideas.

Uphold the Four Modernisations

A young girl looks up from a collection of herbs, her eyes shining. Behind her, the universe is ordered in scientific formulae and clearly defined star systems. Wow! No wonder her eyes are gleaming. Of course, I know what it's like. You think you've found the secret to the universe only to discover that you've uncovered another 50,000 mysteries *ad infinitum*, just like those fiddly ivory or fishbone orbs within orbs that have been intricately carved by some obsessive maniac. Actually what I like about socialist realist art is its lack of pretension. No over-treatment in execution, only in the message, and the message is truly EXTRAvagant.

Revolution is not a dinner party

Mao is by the seaside. It's a grey day. Turbulent black clouds roil above him, and the seas lash the shore. He's in his grey greatcoat, not a hair out of place. He has one arm up in salute to the sea. In contrast to King Canute who demonstrates that he has no power over the elements, Mao seems to have rustled up the storm with his godlike powers. Of course Mao did have the power to turn the political and economic tide of China. He was uncomfortable with stasis. He loved a damned good storm. It unsettled his opposition, put them at a disadvantage.

Learn from Dazhai[38]

The hills are alive with the sound of an irrigation pump powered by a diesel generator. As far as the eye can see, there is food, glorious food growing in neat fields, growing on two legs and four legs in clean pens, hanging from the eaves of the farm house in golden cobs. Even the rude-cheeked chubby farm girl with her pigtails flying and her cheery pink Mao jacket looks good enough to eat. It's a Chinese

[38] Dazhai was the model agricultural commune used to portray an agrarian communist utopia.

version of *Oklahoma:* “Chicks and ducks and geese take a hike, when I take you out on my bike, when I take you out on my bike with the bell giving hell.”

Learn from Lei Feng

We see his head and torso in the centre of the poster. Bushy eyebrows, sparkling eyes, lovely even white teeth, a leather cap with jaunty earflaps arcing the breeze, and his army uniform with the gold stars on his red lapels. Around the edges are scenes of his good deeds: carrying water for an old lady, sandbagging the banks of a river in flood; teaching children to read. By the time I get to *Nanda*, Lei Feng is a bit of a joke. The students think that the Party has gone too far making an impossible Mr Perfect out of a simple soldier. He's so perfect he's turned into Mr Nerd. Lots of jokes about him course through the dormitory corridors. There's even a rumour that he got run over by an army truck because his soldier mates were so irritated by him.

One holiday, the cleaners in the dorm don't turn up for work for one week. At the same time, no water fills the cisterns to clean the toilets, and they're getting stinky. I decide to do what I'd do at home and take hygiene matters into my own hands. I clean the eight or so toilet stalls in the women's toilets and the eight in the men's. I clean soap scum from the long stone sinks that run down the centre of the rooms. I scrub and bucket and sweat my way through four hours of manual labour, feeling increasingly satisfied. All afternoon I encounter about six other students. As each one comes upon me in the bathroom they ask, "What are you doing?"

"I'm cleaning."

"Why?"

"The toilets stink. They're not hygienic."

"Ha ha. You're learning from Lei Feng! Ha ha ha!"

And they sail out of the bathroom leaving me to it. Yeah right, that's me, learning from Lei Feng. Are you one of the people who always pushes down the paper towel in the bins in public bathrooms. Are you likely to take used coffee cups back to the counter in a cafe? Do you pick up rubbish in public places to put in the bins? Do you notice when someone needs help and help them out? Nerd! Lei Feng nerd!

Zhou Enlai loves the masses

Is that Zhou Enlai sitting there in a circle of farmers with that sweet smile on his face as a farmer expounds on his love of the Party? Glossy black heads lean into the story and there's laughter and warmth in the group as if they are all working in harmony. Around the circle, the rooster and his hens are pecking at grains and the chillies hanging from the drying frame are glossy and full of fire. One evening, I chanced upon just such a moment in Jin Lei and Katie's room. Katie had requested chairs from nearby dorm rooms, including mine. When I dropped the chairs off, they were included in a circle of six students, all in their grey or dark blue trousers and jackets. They leaned into each other, glossy black heads bobbing as they discussed with increasing vigour and laughter an issue pertaining to Qing history —way beyond my linguistic proficiency. But what was easy to understand was the camaraderie to be had by forming a close circle. I wanted to sit there too.

Long Live the Chinese Communist Party

A sea of red on a grey background: red flags, red banners, little red books, red ribbons, red lanterns. Grey clothing. We're at Tian'anmen, and the energy is electrifying. Celebrate the Party, Celebrate the Party. Band moll hysteria.

By 1983, however, it's becoming uncool to love Chairman Mao in public. His name is now evoked for specific theoretical or policy reasons, and the speaker has a tendency to look uncomfortable as opposed to radiant. On a summer trip to the quiet Buddhist retreat of Jiu Hua Shan, friend Susie Q and I are changing buses in the terminal at the base of the mountain when a man standing in the centre of the compound demands our attention. His posture is ramrod straight, but his hands wave around jerkily, controlled by an invisible puppeteer. His blue Mao jacket and trousers are dirty and ragged, but he wears them with dignity. On the left lapel of his jacket are two big shiny Mao badges.

In a singsong voice he orates: "I love Chairman Mao. He is our great leader!"

Then he sings the national anthem *The East is Red*: "China brought forth a Mao Zedong, who seeks happiness for his people. Hooray, he is our saviour!"

His arms describe wide arcs of inclusivity, and he points to his own nose and says, "He made our life good. We peasants have learned the lessons from the great agricultural experiments in Dazhai. We have done away with all pests. We have ..."

"Hey, idiot! Shut up, okay? Enough of that rubbish," says a passenger, quietly, as if calming a hysteric.

"... done away with the evil revisionists and ..."

“*Sha gua!* Melonhead! Shut your mouth! That's all in the past.” The small crowd is shuffling their feet and muttering.

“... we are taking a Great Leap Forward, letting a Hundred Flowers Bloom, and a Thousand Schools of Thought ...”

“Oy! That's enough! Hey! You shouldn't be wearing those badges. They're forbidden.”

The performer's face scrunches up in horror. He shakes his head in disbelief. Fingering the objects of worship, he declaims loudly, “Chairman Mao is my sun. He is the sun that shines on our fields and gives us a bumper harvest.”

At the tooting of the horn that heralds the start of the bus journey up the mountain, the crowd disperses, leaving our comrade standing with a blissful smile upon his face. As we board, one passenger behind me says to another, “Crazy man, can't advise him.”

The driver leans on the horn as if the noise alone might winch us up to Jiu Hua Village. I am still thinking about the puppet man who resists fashion to assert his loyalty to Mao and to every failed political movement since the founding of the People's Republic. Where lies sanity?

Bridge to Future Past: *Meiyou Wenhua*[39]

The farmers: *meiyou wenhua*

The Uighurs: *meiyou wenhua*

The workers: *meiyou wenhua*

Fuwuyuan: *meiyou wenhua*

Who's got it, who has *wenhua?*

Big city types, party cadres

Writers and intellectuals,

Han groupies, history lovers.

Rich people? Open to question.

Meiyou wenhua: don't look at me

Meiyou wenhua: butt of my jokes

Meiyou wenhua: it's your own fault

You wenhua: you can get fucked

You wenhua: turn up your nose

You wenhua: I wanna bruise you

You wenhua: always so right

You wenhua: with your overbite

[39] *Meiyou wenhua*: lit. without 'patternization', uncivilized. *You wenhua*: opposite meaning.

Chapter 8 Strife inside and out

内外交困 ***Neiwai jiao kun***

The stillness of today -

snowfall and white light.

When the heavier snow comes

I'll be able to walk through drifts

and feel more totally alone

than ever before in this place.

Jen's journal, December 1980

In my luxurious dormitory room for one, I awaken to a yellow-white light that signals snowfall. The water pipes gurgle and groan with their load of hot water. All of an instant, the joy of a new day is splintered by anxiety.

I'm lonely, really lonely, and it's the last thing I want to confess to myself, to anyone. I can't complain about my single state because I choose it as a preference. But this month I'm not sure why I've chosen this path, why it is I don't allow myself to fall in love, have a boyfriend, a lover, a partner or more? Sure, I've been hurt in the past, who hasn't? But I'm luckier than most. My first boyfriend is partnered up with a woman I adore. Their mutual pact creates a dynamic congenial environment that they share generously with me. I dream of him, and of her. I also dream of the rock 'n' roll boyfriend who parted ways with me when I went to Taiwan in 1977. He's now living with a woman who presses my envy buttons. Since then there's been no one, my choice. I am mooning around stuffed full of frustrated longing.

I know the signs. It happens every year. My women friends and I talk about the biological clock, the hormonal shifts and changes. We shrug and some of us wait for the longing to pass while others of us cheerfully sally forth to have our needs sated. Here at *Nanda* my longing has found subjects in three foreign students. One is a music buff whose taste for punk and rock and King Crimson matches mine—he's just like friends back home. Since John Lennon was killed last month he's been wearing a black armband in his honour. One is married to a fellow student, a man so beautiful in my eyes with his spun gold hair, roman features, a body forever testing its own kinaesthesia, and his aura of serious trouble. And one irritates me not only because he has conservative views but because whenever I am in the vicinity of his Australian drover-style lankiness, the pheromonal mule kicks me in the chakras and I become wet with longing and furious with contempt.

My room has become the bitching salon for my women friends to vent frustration and longing. The effect of us all being in the same state at the same time creates a maelstrom of impotent fury that makes me feel unstable, hysteria-light. Here's an example: Brook and I seem to have become caught in a cycle of men bashing. “You know, Jen, you should never ever learn to type. I’m telling you, as soon as any of the guys in your workplace know that you can type, you'll become their secretary. It happened to me at university in Toronto. Somehow there was an expectation that I'd type up this guy's essays just because he was a friend. No, don't ever learn to type. Get your own secretary.” Brook's dark curls bob around her head and her green eyes pop with indignation.

I confess to Brook my interest in the music buff. She shakes her curls, and leans forward, placing her hands in prayer position between her legs: “Well, Jen, you

know what guys are like. As soon as you give a sign that you like them, they run a mile. Is it really worth it? And him? Seriously?"

I shrug. I know I'll never do anything about it, not now, not ever.

"I mean, what have guys got that women need in this day and age? Seriously, if you don't intend to have kids—and who would bother having them with a man anyway—what's the point of them? Dicks on legs? Yeah, well that's about it, isn't it, because you could never trust a guy as far as you could throw him, and hey, how far is that! We've got the ability to support ourselves economically. We don't need to be controlled, for fuck's sake."

Brook is right. Of course she is. It's just that the vehemence makes me hyperventilate. Do I really think men are a waste of space? Does Brook really think it? Surely we're just angry and hurt and lonely? Surely?

The Gang of Six are gathered in my room to celebrate Christmas 1980: Brook, Erline, Shelley, Serena, Maurelle and me. We decide we'll go to the local photography studio for a New Year Women's Solidarity portrait. I accompany Brook across the quadrangle to her dorm room so she can pick up a coat. Xiao Liu, her roommate, is sitting at her desk muttering lines from an economics textbook. Her shiny black hair is contained in two tidy plaits that sit on her shoulder blades.

Our conversation starts innocently enough: "Xiao Liu, have you got a boyfriend?" I ask.

"I do not think about male-female relationships. I am still a student."

"But having a boyfriend, this is a normal activity of university students, isn't it? A part of youth!" I know different but I'm baiting her, and in turgid Chinese.

“My study is more important. I need to get a good job so that I can make a productive contribution to China.”

“Well good luck. And after you graduate I hope you find a husband who does not exploit you.”

“What do you mean?”

I repeat myself, stumbling over the syntax and wondering if the verb I'm using for 'exploitation' can be used for more than just the workers. When she says nothing, I hurry on, “It's very clear! Chinese women are exploited. The propaganda 'Women hold up half the sky' isn't true, is it? In fact, women still must go to the street to buy the food for the family. They must do the housework activities and raise the children. Also at the same time they are working and the men are working and the hours of working are the same. Really, the propaganda should say, ‘Women hold up most of the sky.’”

My linguistic resources have been stretched to the limit. Brook takes up the mantle and says firmly, “*Jiushi. Ta shuode dui*!”[40]

With flushed cheeks and pinched lips, Xiao Liu rises up and turns to us. Her plaits stand to attention on her back. There is that poster girl revolutionary spirit of determination shining through. She knows a class enemy when she sees one, not to mention an imperialist running dog.

“In western countries, women are exploited for their labour but not in China. Here women, just like men, have to make sacrifices for the nation so that we can achieve our final goal. Now I might agree that women are not yet equal to men, but

[40] “Exactly. That’s right.”

they are certainly not exploited. And when we have created a true communist society, then all of us will be equal."

"Do you believe ..." and I mentally congratulate myself on using the verb that suggests the belief is mistaken, "... that Chinese men cannot exploit women because women are not a class, like the proletariat?"

"No, I mean that the goal of a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolution is to create a society in which all people are equal. This is our intention and our mission, so there can be no exploitation in its fulfilment."

"But Deng Xiaoping has a market economy policy, so what will happen? What about the Special Economic Zones like Shenzhen? Do you think that women and men will have the experience of equality in these places? If industry develops, most of the workers in those factories certainly will be women, and they will be exploited."

"You cannot understand. Your individualist point of view prevents you from understanding collective endeavour."

I want to be able to remonstrate more with her, but I just don't have the language or the stomach to go on. Somehow I feel she has an entire nation behind her. The moral majority is overwhelming me.

Brook says *"Suanle. Women zou ba*."[41] Xiao Liu looks back at the desk as if we've disturbed her. We sail out of the room, our mouths curled down and self-righteous frustration etched into our foreheads, Brook the single deep crease, me the double whammy.

"Life's a bitch, Jen, it surely is."

---

[41] "Forget it. Let's go."

"Do you mean Xiao Liu? Too right! Here you've got a perfectly nice person talking bullshit and believing she's not even allowed to think about sex, or guys, or women if that's what she wants to fantasise about. Jeesus. Talk about mind control!" But I feel like *my* mind is being controlled too, by a tight band of negativity.

I slouch along the street in the frozen air with my female comrades-in-arms, wearing my black plastic *liumang*[42] jacket and my dad's flying boots. When we arrive at the studio, just the right props are waiting for us: guns, a telephone and the Nanjing Big Bridge as a backdrop. In the photo we're feminists defending our cause. Fed up with patriarchal domination, we're going to fight for equality and resist exploitation. Or are we comrades, 'friends of China', defending the Nanjing Big Bridge from traitors and class enemies? I like to think we're both, but there's a voice inside me shouting, "Down with the Gang of Six!"

After Brook has gone to Hong Kong and most of the other foreign students have scattered for the Christmas-New Year break, I settle down to translating short stories Tee has mailed me from England for our collection of modern women writers of the twenties and thirties. This was a watershed period in Chinese literature, when writers of both genders started to use *baihua* or plain-spoken language to write barely masked autobiographical narratives or essays attacking Confucian morality as moribund, and promoting Western imports of science and democracy as keys to a reconstructed, re-energised China. We're interested in exploring the women writers and their tentative entry into the external world of men and politics. *The Journey* by Chinese literature teacher and scholar Feng Yuanjun is written from the first-person perspective of a female student who goes away on a romantic ten-day holiday with a fellow student. They're in love, but the reader learns that he already has a wife, and

[42] Hooligan or thug.

we assume it’s an arranged marriage. In order to keep up appearances, they rent two adjoining rooms in a guesthouse that is chosen for being about right for their status, meaning they will not attract more undue attention than necessary. I translate their first night together and the narrator's thoughts on 'pure’ love:

I sat on the edge of the bed for well over a quarter of an hour with my head bowed. He unbuttoned my clothes for me, but when he reached the innermost layer he softly spoke my name and said, "This I cannot take off". It was as though he were under solemn sacred supervision, and like a believer praying to God to bless him with good fortune, he reverently left my side and stood at a distance from me. I was moved by the same emotion. I believe that this feeling is the highest expression of our souls, an expression of the purest love. The proof is in the trembling heart and the tears sliding onto one's collar. When he held me close to his chest my blood seemed to be boiling, my head a whirlpool of jumbled thoughts.

Our love in its physical expression was limited to close embraces, smiles, whispered words and sweet burning kisses. I know that no one will believe this, no matter who they are. It is human instinct to eat, drink and make love. Everyone has marvelled at the self-control shown by Liuxia Hui when the temptress sat on his lap and caressed him. But what is that compared to those who share the same quilt, the same pillow, the whole night through, sleeping in each other's arms? The people who can't believe this aren't being deliberately contemptuous. It's just that they haven't experienced pure love. They don't realise that love can make a man hold back from doing something his beloved does not sanction, regardless of the power of his yearning.

As the meaning emerges and English words spool out from my fountain pen, I find myself muttering, “Oh, save me from this patriarchal bullshit!” I am catapulted

out of my chair by frustration, and propelled over to the shelf that holds the thermos flask and the Turkish coffee.

“Why all the torture? Fucking 'hymen' rituals. Fuck his longing. What about yours, Feng! And then all that pure love bullshit. What a pathetic excuse.”

The recently boiled water hits the coffee grounds and the luxurious fragrance of black Bosphorus gold rises out of the mug. Doling out tobacco threads into a paper, and rolling it between my fingers, I am forced to recall my own refusal to 'sacrifice' my virginity at thirteen because sexual penetration was inseparable from the solemn pact of true love, and how could I know what true love was at such a young age? My mother would have been proud of herself for hooking me on that particular line! I fended off the desire until a couple of weeks into my sixteenth year when I could, without guilt, tap into the joys of legal, vigorous, playful and happy sex. Shame it hasn’t lasted.

What is quaint in the story about their trip away together is that both of them continue to study like the good novice scholars they are. I feel like knocking on Xiao Liu's door and saying, “See, even back then in the 1920s, students fell in love and challenged the Confucian moral code. They could be in love AND study for national construction.” Also curious to me is that the protagonists go to a town where they know lots of people. An endless stream of relatives and friends visit. So much for a private romantic holiday!

There are other signs in the story that Feng Yuanjun finds it uncomfortable to attack outright social customs and mores. She does not give her student protagonists names, and their love affair is a secret. That’s why I think this is a true story and Feng has had to mask her involvement by calling it fiction. Then there's the stigma of

having a relationship with a married man. And how come *he* goes out and has evenings of fun and revelry with his mates while *she's* stuck at home waiting for him? She can pretend she has freedom going to another town with her bloke, but in reality she is stuck inside as women always have been. There is no liberation, and perhaps not a huge understanding of what that might even look like. Xiao Liu's lot as a post-Mao university student is starting to look a lot more attractive now I think about it.

One of the things I've always hated about relationships with blokes is the waiting around, and that clutch in my guts when I guess what they're up to and can't un-know the treachery exposed. Even my hero Helen Garner, who was so cool around the Carlton-Fitzroy scene and seemed to be able to focus her energies to write when pressures were all around to drop out, chill out and shoot up, confessed to getting caught in the waiting game with Javo in *Monkey Grip*. Why was *I* caught waiting? Well I was studying, wasn't I, or cooking indifferent meals, or working in the bar, or memorising lines for a play, or in the darkroom in the back shed printing black and white shots of friends cavorting at the Lygon Festa. I was busy, but I was waiting ... for a call, a visit, a word of longing. Now I prefer not having to wait for anyone.

The Journey is not so easy to translate because there are references to Chinese classical and world literature I know nothing about. Actually, it amazes me how much world literature has been read in translation in China. Everyone comes across like they are pure 'Chinese', but they soon reveal that they've read lots of stuff, the officially acceptable reading list and the underground reading list. Books and magazines seem to circulate with all the facility of air. Names I've not read like Jack London, Sir Walter Scott, Jules Verne, and Rabindranath Tagore are huge in China. I feel humbled. My reading of Chinese literature and the non-Western canon is scrappy at best.

There's nothing I can do but consult Liao *laoshi*, my classical Chinese and literary history teacher. Fortunately he is around over the New Year break, and after dinner he drops by for a chat about Western art and aesthetics and about his adventures as a Fudan graduate[43] of Chinese classical history and literature. Patient in the face of my ignorance, he explains some of the more opaque four-character phrases. For example, Feng writes "I had always been totally opposed to men who fall in love with other women and abandon their wives without a thought, leaving them to 'go up the mountain to pick wild herbs'". I pour Liao a little earthenware cup of whisky and pass the ashtray over to him. Then I hand him the Chinese version.

"So what does this mean? Does she really go up the mountain to collect wild herbs? I mean, if a husband leaves a woman, is it a custom for her to go to the mountain and pick herbs? Or is this ah ... um ... um ...you know ... like a story that has another meaning?"

"*Biyu*?"

"Ah, *biyu* - metaphor! Is this a metaphor? I don't get it, *bu da liaojie*."

Liao places his smoking Big Bridge cigarette into the lip of the glass ashtray, clears his voice and recites by heart the Han dynasty poem from which this line is drawn. He then translates it into colloquial Chinese, which I write in English as follows:

I went up the mountain to pick wild herbs.

As I came down I met my former husband.

I bowed politely before him and asked,

'What do you think of your new wife?'

---

[43] Fudan University in Shanghai was higher in prestige than Nanjing University. Liao evinced envy at *Nanda*.

'The new wife speaks sweetly, but

She has none of your charm.

She is as pretty as you

But she does not have your usefulness.'

'When the new one entered your gate

I left your chamber.'

'The new wife weaves fine silk;

You used to weave it raw.

She can only weave four inches a day;

You could weave five feet.

To compare her silks to your weavings,

The new wife is no match for you.'

I say, “Well, I think the meaning of the poem does not match what Feng says about men. I mean it's a poem about regret, isn't it? And we read the line about going to the mountain to pick wild herbs as though this is a hardship. But you know, the wife in the Han dynasty poem is a hard-working woman and I reckon she often goes up the mountain to pick wild herbs, married or not.”

Liao stubs out the cigarette and says the aim of the poem is to emphasise man's false and temporary fascination for the young and the new.

“Be content with what you've got is the message”, says Liao, “a message that works for us now when we think of socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, party leadership, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.”

His eyes are lively and he's smiling in that slow sweet way of his.

Well, I feel like going up the mountain to pick wild herbs right now. Deng Xiaoping's latest cry is *'anding tuanjie,* stability and unity', a call to support the Four

Modernisations while resisting bourgeois liberalisation. Talk about an exercise in futility. Liao is right: “Be content with what you've got” so long as you want what the Party wants of you. What this means for me and my Chinese friends is that everything is okay until it's not. Only three months ago, the *waiban* closed off the front doors to each of the foreign dormitories and built a new gatehouse between them so there is now a single point of entry. All Chinese visitors must sign in. Even before the outer wall was built, the *shifu* supervising our dorms would often tell visitors we weren't in when we were and neglect to pass on phone and handwritten messages. The fear that the *shifu* will find the extra distance from the dormitories an excuse not to call us to come down and meet our guests or answer the phone is a reasonable one under these circumstances.

Our delegation to remonstrate with the *waiban* over this decision is met with firm but kind words. The new system of security is “for your own protection”, “for your convenience”. The new Australian Ambassador Hugh Dunn just dropped in to praise the overseas study program at *Nanda* and the Australian student contingent were bored into submission at a banquet with lengthy speeches, thereby demonstrating the power of diplomatic discourse. Naturally, we never had a chance to tell him of our concerns.

Most of the Nanjing locals appear to have welcomed Deng's ban on big character protest posters, because it means that a few dissidents cannot cause havoc and bring about widespread unrest. But now the locals are not even free to talk and go about normally. Their privacy is threatened, and they feel uncertain about just getting on with living. I really sympathise with them. I can understand their desire to remain uninvolved, unnoticed. I mean, what's the point of participating in a political

discussion that requires you to sanction and never criticise? Observing this process of constant social-political-economic change is mind contorting.

Then just to test our sense of immortality, fellow student Jacques is hospitalised with a burst appendix. He's operated on without the A negative blood he needs. We are told Han Chinese do not have rhesus negative blood, so there are no reserves for him in the local blood bank. I'm B negative so I can't help. Most of the foreign students are away on holiday, so there's no blood for him. He's sewn up and an abscess forms. The hospital surgeons open him up again to clean out the infection but within a few days he's turning the nasty yellow-grey that I equate with a low red blood cell count. The few compatriots hanging around the university take shifts to sleep beside him. It’s scary trying to comfort a frightened young man who’s fading fast, and there's little comfort from the French embassy in distant Beijing. At last, news arrives that a French naval vessel is docking in Shanghai, bound for Japan. Jacques is put on a train to Shanghai and then onto the ship where he's operated on in transit, gifted with negative type blood from a few sailors on board. He lives to write to us that the bill for the surgery, accommodation on the ship, and recuperation in Japan comes to over one million dollars. We laugh incredulously. No one has that kind of money.

Meanwhile, tensions are running high for one of two Chinese friends who are seeking to marry foreign students living on *Nanda* campus. For Bai Ma, things are not so bad. He's the son of a retired high-level army officer and seems relatively untouchable. For Elizabeth’s lover Liu Dan, however, the situation is much more serious. There is strong pressure for him to give up on his plans to marry her. He's resistant but not immune to nightmares that conjure up the worst scenes of pitched battles in the Cultural Revolution when he was a runner for one of the Red Guard

factions. He is holed up with Elizabeth in her ex-husband's apartment, too afraid to go home or to his arts college where he fears he will be detained. Forays out to complete marriage paperwork are dangerous. They return with wild stories about the jeep that almost ran them down, or the casual threat of an acid attack on the lips of a provincial cadre. Rage, sadness and fear mingled with the heady excitement of forbidden love and the power of self-righteous resistance are making dreadful marks upon him.

I don't know what to do with *my* feelings about this situation. I wonder if this love, and this desire to be one's own artist are really worth it. I'm frightened by the unruliness of their actions. My cleaving to what is good and right about China and the Communist Party throws confusion around what should be simple feelings of outrage. Friends are getting hurt. That is bad. But I can't seem to take any one side. I've committed myself to being here, to learning Chinese, to loving it all—it causes me enormous stress. In a letter home to girlfriend Jules I write, "I've always been afraid of boredom, but now I'm also very afraid of spinning out. Losing it. It's happened three times in the last two months—a weird kind of nauseating emptiness in my stomach that whooshes up into my head and causes havoc up there. The only way to restore order is to lie down and read a totally ineffectual book. I've never had that sensation before. It's the closest I've come to feeling what it must be like to go mad. But then you see, I don't seem to get eczema rashes any more, nor herpes, nor bad yeast infections, so how else can my tension come out, manifest itself? Hmm. I think I prefer the rash. No, well ..."

It's all too much. I can't survive *and* be negative all the time. Something's gotta give. I spend a week drifting around Shanghai with Maurelle (even my favourite city has no charm) and Brook turns up on her way back from Hong Kong. She asks us to stay on for a few days with her so we can help with her luggage on the trip back to

Nanjing. It's not a good plan. Every time Brook's brow folds in disgust and she says, “What a bitch!” I go cold. I turn away. I'm unable to tell her why I'm so uncommunicative and indifferent. I behave badly. I hurt her feelings. Back in Nanjing, I distance myself from the Gang. Maurelle feels hurt too. She had said with Gallic authority only a month ago, “Jen, I think I will make you my friend.” Now she sniffs when I say “Hi” in the corridor. These now distanced friendships limp on until I leave China at the end of September.

It's not that I devote my time to less stressful pursuits, however. Instead I’m sucked into the world of the star-crossed lovers and the man with spun-gold hair, and that is trouble enough, but it feels more like 'Chinese' trouble, trouble spoken in Chinese and Chinglish, trouble enacted as theatre of the absurd.

Cracks in the ice puddle
make its thin sheath colder,
more miserable.
All it needs is a little pressure
for striated lines
to crawl out from the centre
of impact,
reach the outer rim
then buckle inwards,
revealing
dead water
beneath.

Adapted from Jen’s journal: January 1981

Chapter 9 *Aiya Mama*

Journal entry*:*

Right now it's very important that someone from 'home' gets to see a little of what my life has been in the past 18 months. Strange thing, this time business.

Unsmiling suited office workers dash along the streets. A sudden rain shower breaks the rhythm and everyone seeks shelter under shop and bus stop awnings. For a few minutes the sidewalks are quiet, but the instant the rain eases, commuter pace revs up to syncopated top gear. Fragrant Harbour! Honkers! Now April 1981, it's been eighteen months since I transited through this entrepôt and I find it pumping with the usual capitalist vigour, all Seiko watch advertisements and towering glass edifices.

I feel assaulted, shocked out of my wits. A visit to a supermarket to buy cheese and coffee for *tongxuemen* in *Nanda* makes me hyperventilate. Beyond the aisles stuffed with choice, my greatest anxiety is the plastic bag. In China there are no plastic bags. I love the ways the *fuwuyuan* create custom-fit parcels with old newspapers and bits of string. I love scanning the headlines and photos on the wrapping. In the New Year break when a group of us from *Nanda* went to Kunming, the dried persimmons I bought were wrapped in a *People's Daily* article from 1965 extolling the virtues of Liu Shaoqi, the then President of the PRC, whose fall from grace in 1968 resulted in the removal of his image from all official propaganda. This 'spot the missing person' game is a favourite pastime.

Even though I do not miss the plastic bag, my mainland friends are forever listing its amazing qualities: it is water and dust proof, strong, light, 'hygienic' and re-usable, and it's rare as hen's teeth. In Hong Kong its ubiquity infuriates me. Instead of

cheerfully collecting bags to take back to Nanjing, I announce in loud Mandarin to the checkout *xiaojie*:[44] "I do not need a bag. To hand out so many plastic bags is very wasteful. You should think about the cost." Her muttered response in Cantonese probably means something like "Fuck off, big-nose nutter". I stagger out of the shop under the weight of my shoulder bag stuffed with cheeses and ground coffee, the blood zinging through tightened arteries.

I'm in Hong Kong to meet my mum Margaret-Marg-Maggie. My dad died nine years ago, when I was fourteen. Older sister Sue was in London then, so Maggie and I became pretty close. She's the kind of mother who still manages to smile after a horde of mates turn up and eat all her cheese and drain her cask of Coolabah riesling (her cigarettes are safe because she smokes menthol), all the while accusing her of being a bourgeois capitalist. She's feisty, and holds her own. She's returned to work as a pathology nurse for a community hospital in Brunswick. We've been planning her trip to China via letter for some time. I got a formal invitation sent from the Australian Embassy in Beijing so she could get a visa to enter the country as an individual, and permission from the *waiban* at the University for her to stay in my room.

At Kai Tak airport I shrink at the sight of her silver hair, her orchid pink bouclé tracksuit, and the obvious show of affection. I'm so happy to see her! I just wish she wasn't so outstanding. We catch the ferry from Kowloon to the island and visit the peak. We wander through Kowloon markets. I buy a "scientific cross-your-heart bra" for Xiao Jia—size XXXS—rolls of slide and print film, packets of Drum and papers, blank cassette tapes, latest Hong Kong pop, and *Time Magazine* and *The*

---

[44] A term that means 'Miss' (denoting an unmarried woman), it is now used colloquially in mainland China to mean 'prostitute'.

Far Eastern Economic Review. It will be a relief to read magazines free from the mainland censor's thick black lines. I've also found the latest issues of banned publications *Chengming* and *Chaoliu*, and know they'll have multiple readings back at *Nanda*. Everyone loves to find out what the non-dominant factions in the Party are thinking.

Hong Kong food is fantastic! We eat in homely noisy restaurants under flickering neon lighting, squeezed between huge bamboo steamers and live fish in tanks. After mainland austerity, I swoon over delicate crab and tomato hotpot, soothing Hainan chicken and rice, silky eel claypot, and sticky sweet barbecue pork, accompanied by bottles of San Miguel beer or milky tea. Mags is up for anything—she's brimming with the joys of travel. Day trips to Macao and Lantau afford us dreamy harbour views and humid strolls through other people's lives.

Back in Nanjing, I should be relieved to have escaped the chaos of false choice and capitalist frenzy in Hong Kong, but I find myself fighting the old anxieties of fishbowl life in the university. Maggie is delighted with my room, loves the dear little husk pillow and sparse mattress ("I slept like a log last night!"), delights in the noises of the dormitory, and does her version of Pollyanna tolerating the shower room: "Dear, it's just like I'd imagine the Belsen gas chambers to be, but those shower roses are so generous with the water. Lovely!"

She delights in the friends who cram into my room to coo and cry over cheese and salami and dried biscuits, and wonders at our constant talk about food. I make a welcome dinner using vegetables from an entrepreneurial farmer selling tiny tomatoes, spinach and capsicums at the back gate of the official state market, which seems to sell only wilted *baicai* and pigs' heads. Maggie's eyes pop to see us salivate over such simple fare. All her delight is exhausting, especially as it meets head to

head with my deepening disillusionment and cynicism. And all her questions require interpreting, in Chinese or in English. And yet, here is an outsider who perhaps can reveal to us how we are faring.

Zhang *laoshi* and Wang *mama* of the *waiban* are happy to meet one of their students' parents and they express concern that she won't be able to do well in the rough 'backward' conditions of China.

"You must preserve your mother's health", they say to me and wait patiently while I translate. Their eyebrows furrow with perplexity at the silver of her hair that bespeaks infirmity, and the obvious vigour of her physical condition as she laughs out loud and says "What are you going to do, I wonder? Wrap me up in cotton wool?"

I laugh too, and thank Wang *mama* for her concern on behalf of my mum: *"Wo diyi ge Mama shuo, 'Xiexie nimen de guanxin"*'.[45]

Wang *mama* giggles: *"Aiyo! Tai haole! Wo jiushi ni di erge mama, shi ba*?"[46]

"Dui. Ni shi wo Nanjing mama."

I turn to Maggie: "I'm just telling Wang she's my second mum."

Wang says to Mags: *"Nide nüer zhen haowan*."[47]

Mags is wry: "Yes, she's a veritable clown."

"Margaret, please!" I admonish, "You're making it hard to translate!"

She just laughs as I struggle for a line that shows my mum is a good Chinese style mum who cares about my study regime:

"Mama shuo wo yinggai duo nuli, duo renzhen de xuexi."[48]

---

[45] "My first mum says 'Thank you for your concern.'"

[46] "Aha! That's a good one! So I'm you're second mum, right?"

[47] "Your daughter is a lot of fun."

Wang *mama* is pleased with the game we're playing. She appears satisfied with my cultural and spiritual development.

My teachers are all keen to meet Marg. I find this curious. Who wants to spend time with an elderly woman who knows nothing about China? I mean, she's my mother! Ding Hao, André's calligraphy teacher, comes to pay his respects on an afternoon meet and greet I've organised in my room. Despite the fact that they do not share a common language, they relax in each other's company. There's a kind of sympathetic, gentle deference I've not seen him use before. There's a moment when I see them both looking upon us young ones as we carry on—being extreme about nothing much—and I'm reminded of a scene in *101 Dalmatians* where the adult dogs look with indulgent affection over their roly-poly brood.

My favourite teacher, Liao *laoshi*, invites us to his home for lunch. This is a rare honour. His son escorts us by bus to a military compound in the south of the city, Liao's wife's *danwei*. They have two rooms, and share kitchen and toilet facilities with the seven other families living on the same floor of their apartment block. If mum thought our shower room was grim, their collective kitchen is worse: it's filthy, barely furnished, and unloved. There are no refrigerators or electrical appliances, just a couple of holes over coal burners where you can place a wok, a low sink for washing, and a couple of untreated concrete benches. A single bulb casts a dim yellow light onto windows smeared with dust and oil.

Liao's wife is horrified that I have borne witness to this communal nightmare. She shoos me out: *"Bu bu bu! Ni shi keren! Lai lai lai, gei ni mama dang fanyi zhe*".[49] Back in the living room, which also serves as Liao's study and the boys' bedroom,

---

[48] "Mum says I should be more determined and study with greater sincerity."
[49] "No, no, no! You're a guest! Go on now, be your mum's interpreter."

Liao is making use of the table to write a poem for Maggie on the soft ink-loving *xuan* paper.

He says, “I want to commemorate this visit with a Han dynasty poem in the Yue Fu style called ‘After Rain’. And does your mother have a Chinese name? Not yet? Allow me to give you a name, An Zhenni's *mama*."

His calligraphy is vigorous and bold. Maggie is standing behind his shoulder watching the graceful stab and stroke of the brush. I translate as the characters reveal themselves: “After rain, the forest is slick. The moonlight through the pines surprises me. I laugh and think of home, a foreign guest in a foreign place.”[50] She's impressed. And when it comes to the line of commemoration, we see her name emerge: An Meiling, which literally means ‘the eyebrows of age’, which isn't as sexy as Chiang Kai-shek's famous wife's name, Meiling, 'beautiful age'.

I'm in love with this moment: the deep sentimentality expressed through family ties, the room itself with its big windows looking out over a treed garden, the calming green and cream tiles on the floors, and the shelves of books on classical literature and history. When I express my appreciation, Liao says, opening up a fresh pack of *Great Wall* cigarettes and pulling out one for Maggie and one for me: "My entire collection of books were tossed out of that window in 1967 by Red Guards and burned there under the trees. I was forced to watch. It was a very unhappy day ... but look, I've managed to replace many of them. There is some advantage to being a scholar who works with the classics. They are always in publication, and while the original texts remain the same, the annotations change with the times."

---

[50] *Yue Fu* or ‘ballad’, *After Rains*: 雨后树林润, 松间月惊心笑脸思故园, 异客在异乡.

Another Pollyanna, I think. Maggie says, “Well, if we don't look on the bright side, where would we be?”

I interpret with aplomb, turning Maggie's phrasing into “We must be optimistic”, and Liao smiles in affirmation, but I can't help being a bit annoyed by their complacency. Surely indignation is a better response?

Liao's wife returns from the kitchen with fried snails, stir-fried beef and spring onion, braised egg and mushroom, and a simple soup. Even the memory of the kitchen cannot lessen the love and gratitude that pours out of me when I see that food, cooked with integrity and with genuine affection towards us. We drink a little wine with our lunch. The snails are succulent and salty on our tongues. Maggie is so happy, wrestling cheerfully with her chopsticks and showing appreciation for the dishes before her.

After lunch, Liao and his wife shepherd us through drizzling rain to a section of the Purple Mountains Park that's new to me. Liao's wife is holding Maggie's handbag with the fervour of a presidential guard.

She says firmly: “I will look after this. Your mother needs to be careful.”

Marg and I are warm from the wine and the bonhomie. We all step off the path to walk through the trees in search of an ancient stele that Liao wants to show us. He stops and points through the gloom. My journal takes up the story:

Catching sight of a large antiquarian tortoise sitting silent in the undergrowth, Maggie involuntarily caught her breath and plunged forward. She was concentrating through the top half of her bifocals so didn’t notice the treacherous root protruding from the slick earth. To say she tripped and fell does not describe the full ballet. Feelings of surprise, resignation and

determination flashed across her face. A spindly sapling wobbled gently before her, 'Here I am. Use me!' Maggie's arms stretched out to grasp its emaciated trunk. It groaned and bent low beneath her weight, but her own momentum swung her around and over the grubby bog to the dry side of the tree where she came to rest gracefully and gratefully in a swish of black raincoat and white hair.

Our hooting laughter rang through the mist, challenging its attempts to muffle us. The actions were so perfectly executed it could have been part of a performance by a famous clown. Dear Liao and his wife, however, were obligated to take the compassionate 'How disastrous!' approach. They looked upon me with horror as I—oh unfilial daughter—doubled up with laughter and succumbed to tears of delight. They saw Maggie's laughter as hysterical embarrassment rather than the pure enjoyment of having performed such a magnificent and comical feat. Mags never seems to hurt herself when she falls, which is often. It's the Practice Makes Perfect model she adheres to. At these times I become my mum—we are so close in laughter, especially when directed at each other, ourselves.

Figure 10 Maggie with Liao's wife at Purple-Gold Mountain Park, April 1981 (image of the author)

The mental picture of the Fall was as amusing as the Act itself. Our hosts continued to puzzle over our mutual hysteria, our doubled-over merriment. Or so I thought until Liao said dryly: "I see your mother has a sense of the artistic." I translated this to Maggie, and we were once again sharing the delights of Clownhood, Sculpture in action, the Still Life Broken into Artistic Ballistics. Such joy is exhausting when it dissipates. It leaves the audience and the actor parched dry and isolated in thoughts that hold a kind of numb intimacy. Our parting of ways at the bus stop was muted but also satisfactory.

As we are trying to get off the bus at the other end, a man sticks his bald head into my stomach and pushes hard to board. I am pushing back, yelling *"Xiache! Xiache! Xiaoxinba*!"[51], but he's too busy burrowing into my belly. I hit him on the shoulder with my fist.

He lifts his head and says, *"Aiyo! Ni da wo gan me?*"[52]

This gives us just enough time to edge past him down the stairs and off the bus, me shouting back at him, *"Zhi yao xiache. Ni zenme mei rangbu*?"[53]

Suddenly I laugh up at him with pleasure, with gratitude even. I understood what he was saying! The doors close on a man who is not amused.

I suggest to Maggie that we visit the sacred mountain of Jiu Hua Shan a few hours to the southwest of Nanjing by train and bus. I loved it so much the time we went on a school trip there, and I know mum would love hiking in the mountains and staying in the Buddhist monastery. Perhaps I'll get another chance to see the moon

---

[51] "Getting off! Getting off! Be careful!"
[52] "Hey! What are you hitting me for?"
[53] "I just want to get off. How come you wouldn't make way?"

rise above the mountain ridge and hover like a luminous pearl in the clasp of the upturned roof of the pavilion up there. I'm still not sure if it really happened or if I was so stoned that I imagined it.

The *waiban* arranges for the necessary permission and is solicitous with travel advice. We catch a five o'clock bus, and it rolls into the Qingyang County bus station for a toilet break at about ten. This is the same place where I later saw the mad guy sing Mao's praises to an unsettled audience. I'm impressed at the aplomb with which Maggie circumnavigates the faeces soiling the earth at the entrance of the toilet, no doubt left there by more desperate bus passengers. The next part of her experience is more difficult. While she finds it possible to urinate with an audience of twenty crowding into the toilets to watch a little elderly foreign action, defecation is another matter altogether.

'Oh Jenny, my sphincter has just frozen. Can't you do something? Tell them to wait a minute outside!'

"Wo mama yao nimen deng zai cesuo waimian. Nimen dajia dengzhe ta, buneng dabian!"[54]

"Well ...?"

"They have no idea what I'm saying. Might as well be talking gobbledygook."

"It's no good. I give up. Just stand in front of me while I dry myself with the tissue."

Twenty necks stretch to left and right trying to get a peek of Marg hooking up her corset over her underpants and adjusting her trousers.

"They're just interested in your undergarments."

[54] "My mum needs you to wait outside. She can't defecate while you're staring at her."

"There's plenty to be interested in, that's for sure." She laughs self-consciously, and tippy-toes through the muck out the door, saying "Excuse me, Excuse me", as she squeezes through the throng.

While we wait for the driver of the hire car, a boy of about twelve or thirteen dances around us, trying to find the courage to say something. He says, "Where ... *ni shi naguo ren?*"[55]

"Women liangge shi hongxing gui."[56]

"Hongxing zai nali?"[57]

"Hongxing shi diqiu gebi de."[58]

"Diqiu gebi shi shenme difang?"[59]

Maggie says, "Why don't you stop harassing him and tell him what he wants to know?"

"Because he doesn't want to know anything. He just wants to practice his English and he doesn't give a shit what he's saying or who he's talking to. None of it is real for him. I told him we're devils from Mars. That's probably what he thinks, anyway."

"Ooh, you are cynical."

"Well, if you'd had this same conversation ten thousand times before like I have, you'd be cynical too."

---

55 "What nationality are you?"
56 "We're devils from Mars."
57 "Where is Mars?"
58 "Next to Earth."
59 "What's this next to Earth place?"

"Just remind me why practicing English is something you don't want be a part of? Aren't you just practicing your Chinese on him?"

"It's just that I want to have a meaningful exchange, you know, a conversation. I'm not just a talking dummy!"

Maggie smiles that tolerant motherly smile. Irritation simmers.

The black sedan arrives and we board, me in anticipation of a comfortable dreamy ride up the mountain. Some fifteen minutes later the car comes to a rolling halt. The driver checks the carburettor, the battery leads, the spark plug. We wander around in the light rain enjoying the stillness. There in the field below us, a farmer is pushing a wooden plough behind a water buffalo. The water in the fields is shimmering like galvanised iron. Beyond him a field of rapeseed glows as if illuminated in heavenly golden light. I am reminded of renaissance paintings that document seasonal farming activities. I'm worried about the farmer's feet. They must be wet and freezing.

An old lady wearing a black cap and faded cotton clothes emerges from a dim lean-to. Her watery eyes explore Maggie and me, and she says, "*Che huaile. You xiayule. Qing jinlai zuo yi zuo. Qing he cha.*"[60]

"Mags, we're invited to come in and have tea."

"Lovely, it's bit damp out here."

We bend our heads to get in under the low roofline and into the gloom. There are two tiny stools by the range. The old lady pours two chipped ceramic cups of hot water and offers them to us with two hands. We take hold of the cups, and sip.

---

[60] "The car has broken down. And it's raining. Please come in and sit down. Come and drink tea."

"Looks like she can't afford tea," I say.

"Looks like she can't afford anything much. It's amazing how little we need to live, isn't it?"

What *would* it be like to do with so little? I shudder with the bleakness of the surroundings, made worse by the glowering skies.

"*Ayi, ni zhangfu, haizimen zai nar*?"[61] I ask, interested to know if the man ploughing the adjacent field is her family, and if she has any children.

"*Lao* something something something something, *laoda zai* something something, *nüer jiehunle* something something something something."

"Well, she's got a husband and at least one son, and a daughter who's married, but I have no idea what else she's saying."

I smile apologetically at the woman, and curse myself for not being able to decode her accent. Outside, there's the sputter of an engine followed by high revving. The driver has tinkered the engine into life. We take leave of our host, hop into the car and head on up the mountain. Both Marg and I are touched by the woman's concern and goodwill. And I'm curious. I've never before been invited into a stranger's home. Maggie's white hair seems to be the key that unlocks doors.

On the monastery roof
a single blue tile
in a ceramic yellow wave
spells magic.
The temple below
in shifting mist
through needling pine
is burnished gold.

---

[61] "Aunty, where are your husband and children?"

Meditation hour
chanting, rushing water, gong.
Still and silent speaks the heart
on Jiu Hua Shan.

We are welcomed into the monastery hostel, and climb the old wooden stairs to a simple bedroom. The wooden framed windows are wide open to a misty view over ploughed rice terraces to the mountain beyond. A small cloud sails towards us, enters through the window, and precipitates on the beds. It's like a gift. I point out the magical moon-clasping shrine on the hill just as it is enveloped in a cloud of its own. And that night we sleep deeply under the weight of damp quilts in the water clogged air, senses stilled by simple food, low watt lights and the meditative quiet of the monastery.

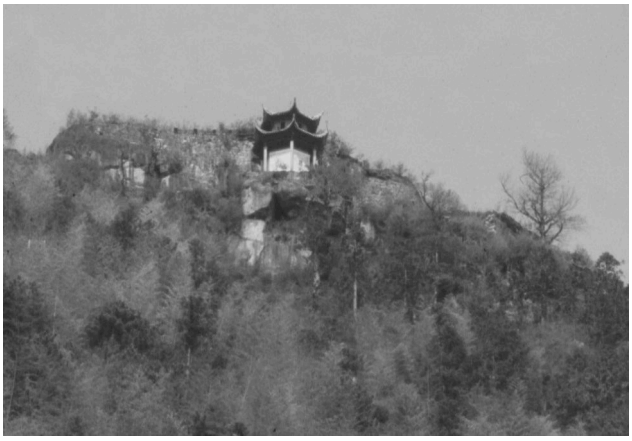


Figure 11 Pavilion at Jiu Hua Shan, 1979 (image of the author)

In the dawn light I flick through my journal. Of course, there's so much Maggie doesn't know, so much I can't tell her, since I dare not tell myself. I do not mention his name even though I think about him too much. He's triple trouble—just

ex-married *and* gay *and* definitely unhinged. Is it because of, or despite, all of these risks that I love spending time with him, intense talk and physical proximity both alluring? He never says what I expect. Two journal entries from the winter holidays catch my attention:

Entry 1

How dare this room be too small for comfort!
How dare I be bored with my solitude!
How dare I become obsessed
about such a mystery as that one!
What's the big idea?
Jen?

Entry 2

If I said I had a crush on you
What exactly would you do?
Call me silly, smile wide and slow?
Turn your back, say you don't wanna know?
Yeah I'm silly
Can't find the brake on this juggernaut
Yeah I'm silly
Can't think logic, can't be taught.

When I wrote these, he'd disappeared for a month, and returned with divorce papers in hand, paving the way for his ex to marry her Chinese boyfriend. Now the three of them are holed up in the relative security and privacy of the foreign expert's apartment on campus, only surfacing to complete the duties necessary to ensure the continued tolerance of the *waiban*, and to fill their enamel bowls with food.

Maggie has met him. She's met everyone. She says, "Good looking man."

Yeah, he's that as well. I groan inwardly, pull the wet quilt over my head, and drift off to the sound of bells in the valley and chanting monks in the hall.

After breakfast—noodles from the drying rack in the village square softened in an oily tepid vegetable stock, and astringent green tea—Maggie and I brace ourselves for the climb up to the highest peak, a walk of 10,000 steps (I'm using this number in the Chinese sense of a huge number designed for maximum spiritual endeavour). How such a pilgrimage can foster holy contemplation is beyond me. I've done the walk before and am pretty sure I won't make it a second time, but I keep my doubts to myself. The early stages of the walk take us over a ridge into a narrow valley where there are a few stone houses, terraced rice fields and a huge black sow in a bamboo pigpen. This time the magnolia tree shading the pen is a mass of white blooms, and sunlight glints off the worn cobblestones on the path. We stop for tea and take in the sun like old dogs.

Maggie sighs, "Your father would have loved this."

I say, "Yeah, he would. But one of us should be wearing red. Do you remember he'd always insist on a red jumper for contrast in scenic photographs?"

We both laughed, and let out minds go fuzzy.

We stop at a number of shrines along the way, murmuring greetings to the ancient monks. All wear grey shirts over trousers tucked into grey leggings. With their wizened faces and bald pates, they look just like the *luohan* at the Temple of the Soul's Retreat (*Ling Yinsi*) near Hangzhou.

Maggie asks, "Where are the young ones, do you think?"

"I'm not even sure the monks are allowed to train new acolytes yet, mum. I imagine some of them have returned only recently to resume spiritual duties. It must

have been hell for them during the Cultural Revolution. I bet the Red Guards had a field day up here. I mean, for a mountain that's been sacred for hundreds of years, there's not much left standing, is there? Just the odd temple and shrine here and there? And none of it looks that well cared for."

"Yes, it has a particular charming decay, doesn't it?"

"Sure does. If Buddhism starts to flourish again, you can expect these mountains will sprout gold temples and there'll be thousands of people walking these paths instead of just you and me, and the odd local."

We don't make it to the top. Maggie's left knee gets sore. She's disappointed because I've told her how amazing the view is from Tiantai peak, which is named after the first "native" Chinese school of Buddhism, but also means Heavenly Terrace, and that's how it feels at the top. You can see across the mountain ridge to the village and then 1200 metres down to the valley below. I've got a photo of me up there, lounging against the parapet wearing my *garuda*-patterned batik sarong and carrying a found walking stick. Only 14 months later I shudder at such inappropriate attire.

The trip back is excruciating, every step down a jolt to the spine and the knees. We're limping down sideways when a woman not much younger than Marg comes sashaying up the steps carrying two baskets of food balanced on a pole across one shoulder. The bamboo pole is flexing up and down in time with her steps, and I can tell the load she's carrying is weighty.

As she edges past us, she frowns at me and says, "*Zenme bu shoufu nide muqin? Zenme name buxiao*!"

How can she possibly speak *and* climb at the same time? I retort, lurching down another step, "*Ni ziji shoufu ta hao ma?*"

Without breaking stride she shoots me a backward look of deep reproach. I'm tickled pink. I just responded without thinking and I did it in Chinese! I laugh incredulously, and Maggie looks at me curiously.

"That woman just said, 'Why don't you support your mother down the steps?' She called me unfilial!"

"Hah! I'd like to see you try," says Maggie, laughing.

"And then I told her she should support you herself. That's why she gave me that dirty look."

Maggie laughs, "Oh you didn't, Jenny. That was a bit rude."

"I know, I just wasn't thinking. I mean, I can barely get down the stairs myself let alone support you as well, especially a you who would really hate to be helped."

I grab her arm and say solicitously, "Now slow down, *qin'ai de mama*.[62] Let me help you."

Maggie breaks into a giggle and shoves me off. "Get your hands off me, you filial daughter, you."

And so we retrace our 10,000 steps. The comfort of a damp bed calls.

---

[62] "Beloved mum."

Figure 12 View of Jiu Hua Shan village, 1981 (image of the author)

Maggie's ebullience is threatening to unhinge me. It doesn't matter what happens—everything is perfect, ordained to entertain. Take the bus journey down the mountain to Wuhu where we plan to catch a boat for Nanjing along the Yangtse. We're both excited. I tell Maggie I've always wanted to go to this riverside town since Tee announced that the 1930s' Hollywood film *International House* was set in this unassuming town, probably so that W.C. Fields could lean out of his plane and wave to the hotel below, calling "Wuhu!" in place of "Yoohoo!" This is a Chinglish joke. Hilarious.

It's still raining on the walk to the bus stop. The young conductor is hoisting luggage onto the roof rack of the bus, when a heavy sack falls out of his grasp against the back windscreen, smashing the glass. Maggie laughs when we all get on, and the farmers in the back seat open up their umbrellas to screen out the rain, all the while nursing chickens cooped in deftly-woven bamboo baskets. The ride down the mountain on bald tyres in slippery conditions thrills her so that her cheeks match her boucle tracksuit. She smiles with joy at all the passengers who are wondering how old she is in that getup, and where she comes from, and why she's emoting so much.

Once we reach the flat, the bus barrels along the narrow road between the slick muddy fields on the right and shanties blurred and insubstantial in the sleeting rain.

We all see the rusty red truck speeding towards us. We hear both air horns screaming until the two vehicles collide. Both drivers have had the perspicacity to slow at the last minute and to make contact in a way that does not threaten lives. They dismount and shout blame at each other before retreating into sullen silence, a standoff. The passengers dismount and look at the damage. Dented fenders, and a few more scratches to add to the already scrappy appearance of the truck.

Maggie says to me in the voice of the mother who's fixed a thousand such minor incidents, "Jenny, this is ridiculous. All this waiting around serves no purpose. The damage is minimal. Just tell them to reverse and then both vehicles can be on their way."

"I don't think they'd appreciate that advice, somehow. There's a reason this is taking so long. Believe me, they'd follow your suggestion if it was in their interests to do it."

"Well what's stopping them?"

"Buggered if I know."

It could be any number of things. They've been playing chicken and neither can bear to lose face by acceding blame? There's some outstanding grudge between them that's being played out on this byway?

Maggie is getting wet, but she's also finding the whole guns at twenty paces thing fascinating. She's got to within a metre of the arguing drivers, and she summons me over, "Come here, Jen, and translate for me. Right then, hello. I'm Margaret and I see you've had an accident. Fortunately, no one was hurt, and the damage is so small. Why don't you both reverse at the same time, and then no one will lose face? And, we passengers will be grateful to you both for getting us to Wuhu in time for the boat."

Both drivers look at Margaret slack-jawed. As soon as she finishes they turn back to each other, and go another round of "不是我的错".[63]

Marg looks at me with disappointment: "You could have backed me up a little."

"Sorry, Mum. They just have to sort it out for themselves."

They do, finally. We miss the boat. We catch the train instead, for a quiet evening ride in an almost empty carriage. When we alight at Nanjing Station, and move towards the exit, we bump into Keita.

"Salut, Jenni. Comment ça va?"

"Ça va bien, merci. Et toi?"

"Comme ci, comme ça".

"你是从哪里来的? 也是旅游回来的吗?"[64]

"不 不. 我是来火车站送朋友回北京."[65]

"不错. Keita, 我给你介绍一下. 这是我妈妈, Maggie.[66] Mags, this is Keita, one of my mates from the Hydraulics Institute."

"C'est fantastique. Votre mere? Enchanté, Maggie."

"Moi aussi. Vous êtes l'ami de ma fille?"

"Mais oui, bien sûr. Jenni est une amie très très sympathique."

"Oui, je suis d'accord."

---

63 "Not my fault."
64 "Where have you come from? Are you just back from a trip away too?"
65 "No no. I've come to see off a friend who's going back to Beijing."
66 "Great. Keita, let me introduce you. This is my mum Maggie."

“Marg, I didn’t know you spoke such good French.”

“你妈妈讲的法语并不错.”[67]

“真没想到！我们在九华山呆了三天刚刚回来了. 一直下雨了, 但还是很好玩.”[68]

“九华山? 没听说过. 离黄山近吗?”[69]

“不算太远.”[70]

Maggie is staring at us both with that same slack-jawed look the warring drivers gave her only a few hours earlier.

“What’s with you?”

“I just can’t get over that I’m listening to an African and an Australian chatting together in Chinese on a train platform in Nanjing.”

I laugh, and translate for Keita. He smiles that lovely sweet smile of his, and shrugs. “Il le faut.”

“什么意思?”

Mum translates for Keita, “Needs must”.

In bed that night I explain to mum what it’s like for the African students in China. Their allowances are too small and their study schedules too tight for regular travel. If they do go anywhere, it will be to friends at another university where they hang out in another dormitory listening to African beats, sharing stories and drinking

---

67 “Your mum speaks good French.”

68 “I had no idea. We’ve just spent three days at Jiu Hua Shan. It rained all the time but it was still fun.”

69 “Jiu Hua Shan? Never heard of it. Is it near Huang Shan?”

70 “Not too far from there.”

sugared tea. The racism they have to deflect would make a trip to Jiu Hua Shan torture, even if they could find the time and money.

"It's good you have each other to care for," she says, and then laughs, "I'm never going to forget the two of you nattering on in Chinese, two of the least likely looking people."

"The sad part is, when we speak Chinese together, I feel like I'm using the language that oppresses him. Most African students say they speak Chinese as a last resort. I don't like being a last resort, but there you are."

We fly to Beijing for a few nights at the Friendship Hotel near the Beijing Languages Institute. I've always wanted to stay in these gracious grey buildings set in a nice garden because this is where the foreign expert Friends of China hung out between the 1950s and the 1970s, people like Isabel and David Crook, Jan Myrdal, and Rewi Alley.

We have the Forbidden City virtually to ourselves, and for a day we wander through the courtyards, the public halls and the private inner chambers, and wonder about a life that must have been claustrophobic, if only because almost every moment is performed in the role of a public royal figure-figurine. It is the women we feel sorriest for, quarantined in the back quarters to bitch and backstab for favours among themselves, and get caught up in battles for attention and power, surrounded by ambitious or resentful eunuchs. Here there is less room between the dwellings, and less light. The mighty grandeur created by buildings of monumental proportion in wide-open spaces has been reduced to something more intimate, or more asphyxiating. What would it be like to leave these hidden quarters only at the rare discretion of the Emperor? What would it be like to have the love of your family

dependent upon your success at producing a male heir for the emperor? No, being a woman sucks. Thank heavens I was born to parents who wish for only the life I make for myself. For some reason, all the photos I take that day are outstanding. In fact, Maggie must have acted as a kind of photographer's mascot, because many of the photos of her time in China are truly lovely.

But these gifts of hers don't stop me from getting rid of her a week earlier than she anticipates. One night as we're planning the next leg of our journey to the Yungang Grottoes for a bit of Buddhist high art, a random glance at Maggie's plane ticket reveals she's booked on a flight the following day. Neither of us knows how this happened since she's always planned to stay three weeks, and I have permission to be away from *Nanda* for another week. The following day we go to the airport early. I'm tasked with changing the flight, but when one of the ground staff declares there is 没办法,[71] I don't even argue.

I say to Maggie, "I've tried but they say there's no way. All the flights are full."

She tilts her head and blinks at me, her mouth setting in a line of disappointment. She can see I'm relieved about her imminent departure. I *am* relieved. All the talk, the organising and the interpreting, and remaining upbeat is killing me. But I feel guilty too, especially when the light goes out of her face.

Hugging me tenderly, she says, "Well, then. I guess it's time to go. Thanks for a wonderful time. I'll never forget it. I've loved seeing China with you."

And she's gone.

---

[71] "No way."

And now I'm free to feel depressed. Rosie finds me work painting the toilet cubicles at the Australian Embassy, which suits my mood. I stay on the couch in a journalist's apartment nearby but I never see her. I wander through the antique market at *Liulichang* and admire the ink rubbings of calligraphic works and portraits of Confucius, and the Han General Cao Cao with his fierce beard and companion bat. I marvel at the elaborately carved ink tablets and embossed ink sticks, and huge calligraphy brushes made of the best weasel hair. My mood lifts as I find my way back to the Temple of Heaven. I swear magical properties have been invested in the elaborate no-nail design of the structure, for those heavy wooden beams lift me up to the circular roof, and I am floating there in all that blue and gold, momentarily released from earthly anxieties.

Bridge to Future Past: *Yuanwang* 怨望

Figure 13: *Yuanwang.* André Kneib. (Image of the author)

贈 André Kneib
your gift to me
this *yuanwang*:
"resent/hate" and "long for",
two characters squatting there—
pugilistic,
ready to launch into the blank space,
trample all over its
spotlessness
with their grubby ink-stained boots—
a squall of passion,
impotent rage
and love that
can't be forgotten.
Slighted, you are
in your blue
dog-fur lined
scholar's gown
stained with calligraphy ink,
hunched over a tea,
cigarette ash falling,
contemptuous,
red-eyed
wild.
The climate is poisonous.

Deng's anti-bourgeois
liberalisation campaign
shuts us up,
paralyses.
Trapped in collective inertia
we gorge on
each other's neuroses.
Gossip circulates up and
down stairs,
rises with the steam
in the shower rooms
falls with the flush
of the cisterns
swills around
in the sinks
sweeps into our rooms
on the inrush of air
and scuttles out
into the corridors
before the bristles
of our brooms:

Lan Lan and Ting Ting are sleeping together and not just sleeping Ramesh has gone to live in the Chinese dormitory and the seven other students he shares with all think he's a foreign spy some cadre in the *waiban* has been caught *in flagrante delicto* with the wife of one of the politics teachers in the bus shelter at the back of the university was Jiang Qing screaming 冤枉 revenge as she was dragged from the court or was it 革命万岁 long live the revolution or was it 革命无罪 revolution is blameless Dieter is having an affair with the spunky Miss Song who had an affair with that vacuous Italian last year she looks very pleased with the arrangement except when you catch her unawares and then she just looks frightened or sad Tim has blockaded himself in his room he is seeking the Daoist path of "non-action" in a literal way his girlfriend has replaced laughter with a hippy half-smile that under better circumstances suggests enlightenment but could be terror Wei Wei and Carlotta have taken to singing Chinese anthems at five in the morning Carlotta is looking more and more like Wei Wei every day dyed her hair black and trimmed it to mimic Wei Wei's rice-bowl cut stilled her facial muscles and her body so that the two of them look like little China comrade dolls in their new-style drip-dry trousers and matching nylon scarves they walk in lockstep to the economics class Hong Jun's worker mate got arrested last week for posting up an anti-Deng small character poster and it looks like labour camp for him and that An Zhenni her love affair with the beauteous Picasso is dead before it's begun it is the sinuous and sensuous Maurelle who is now dancing with him to Fela Kuti and his African Beats it is she who can touch the dot painting of scarification on his legs in the dark she who can sit and drink the strong sweet green tea of Mali with the boys from the Hydraulics Institute she says he is a wonderful lover why couldn't Zhenni tolerate making love rhythms to Abba's *Waterloo* why did the lost battle to have their black and white merging illuminated by the green plastic pagoda light leave her so half-hearted why wasn't it wonderful for her what does it say about her capacity to love to make love and why is she now infatuated with another impossible catch - *merde*

The full force of
your rapier wit
leaves us zombies
laughing while our cuts bleed.
I am full of longing
for a gay man
I can’t have
You are full of longing
for a straight banana
you can’t have
We are poisonous fruits
of longing.
Yuanwang.

Chapter 10 House Arrest

I've just had a visit from my dear teacher Liao Kaifei, who's helping out with the translations of modern fiction by women writers that Tee and I are working on. He accepted a cup of tea and I asked him to explain for me a reference in the story "The Lucky One" by Ling Shuhua. In this story, the matriarch of the family is considered by all to be a person of great fortune. First, the male members of her family are abundant—her husband is still alive, her four sons are married, she has eight grandsons, and she's expecting a great grandson any minute. Second, her daughters have all married to good families in other towns and have borne lots of children. The Matriarch doesn't know how many exactly because she can't read the letters that arrive announcing the births, and her husband might or might not remember to tell her, but that's his prerogative and she's lucky to have him. And third, the matriarch has never needed for anything. All the women in her circle envy her clothes and jewellery. Her table displays the staggering wealth of past times—antique porcelain bowls "worth over two thousand silver *yuan*",[72] and ivory chopsticks, one set of which is "engraved with the Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup, such as He Zhizhang on horseback crazy with drink, or Li Taibai inebriated in a boat."

"So, Liao *laoshi*, I understand that the immortals of the wine cup all liked to drink. I guess I'm a 'mortal of the wine cup'."

"Ha ha. Perhaps I am too."

[72] *Yuan*: Chinese unit of currency.

"But who are these Eight Immortals? I've never heard of He Zhizhang. I think Li Taibai is Li Bo, the famous Tang poet, is that right? He wrote that poem: Umm … 什么什么 ... 举头看月亮 ..."[73]

"低头思故乡".[74] Liao smiles as he offers the last line, "You're right. So the Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup are Tang dynasty poets who knew each other and loved to write poetry when they got drunk."

"Do you know the names of all of them?"

"Of course. They are Li Bo, He Zhizhang, Li Shizhi, Wang Jin, Cui Zongzhi, Su Jin, Zhang Xu and Jiao Sui."

"Sorry, Liao *laoshi*, but I can't write these names down. I don't know the Chinese characters, and I'm afraid sometimes I don't understand your accent."

"行. 给你写下来, 好吧".[75]

As Liao takes the lid off his fountain pen, and writes the names of the poets in his handsome script, I tell him more about the story.

"The author of 'The Lucky One' seems to criticise all of China's traditions and practices, especially the idea of *zhong nan, qing nü*, extolling males and belittling females. The story, how do you say, tells you the old lady's luck is good but really she is not lucky; she is "backward" and conservative?"

"啊, 你的意思大概是 <反话> 或者 <讽刺>."[76]

---

[73] "Something something raise head look at moonlight…" This is, in fact, a mistranslation although the meaning is similar. The line is "举头望明月 raise head gaze at clear/bright moon"

[74] "Lower head and think of home"

[75] "Very well, I'll write them down for you."

[76] "Ah, you probably mean *fanhua* 'irony' or *fengci* 'sarcasm'."

"Oh, *fengci,* sarcasm, irony. But I feel uncomfortable when I read it, because the writer thinks that Western things are all wonderful, but Chinese things are bad. It's just too excessive. I mean, I oppose the idea of *zhong nan qing nü*, but must Chinese people like Western-style white tablecloths if white is the traditional colour of funerals. Surely that's not appropriate?"

"Ah, but this writer is influenced by the May Fourth Movement. You probably know that some groups in this movement were really radical. They wanted to find a solution to China's weakness, and they believed that the West had the answers. Confucian thinking must be destroyed, totally destroyed."

"Well, white tablecloths are not a solution, are they?"

"No? Perhaps they are a symbol. Perhaps the traditions relating to the Chinese funeral are also being criticised: ancestor worship and the existence of an afterlife, the expectation that after their husbands die, wives will never marry again ..."

"Ah, you're right. I am such a melon head!"

"No, no. Not so silly as that!"

"Ha ha. You're using irony!"

Liao turns to his list of poets, and says, "You know it was the poet Du Fu who praised these poets in his ode to the *Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup*? This one, He Zhizhang, he was a great statesman in the time of emperor Xuan Zong. According to history, he was also known as "Crazy Zhang". Du Fu writes that he was riding his horse home after many bowls of wine, when he fell off into a water hole, and stayed there until he woke up hours later."

"I remember you told me you and your friend got drunk and pushed that statue into the lake."

“A Mortal of the Wine Cup as you say. You probably know He Zhizhang’s poem on returning home? I’ll write it down here for you”:

回鄉偶書

少小離家老大回， 鄉音無改鬢毛衰；

兒童相見不相識， 笑問客從何處來。

I translate it to get a rough meaning:

I left home when I was small, and now return an old man

My country twang hasn’t changed, but my hair has grown thin

The children greet me but we don’t recognise each other.

They ask, laughing: “Where does our guest come from?”

“It’s really easy to read. Unbelievable! But it’s very sad. Not like it’s written by a horse-riding crazy drunkard.”

“Well, he spent many years in the capital serving the emperor, and retired at about the age of eighty-five. How could anyone remember him when he came home?”

“I forget that leaving home is a common event for scholars in every period of Chinese history. Even now, so many Chinese people live far from their husbands and wives. It’s very lonely and sad for family members.”

“What about in Australia?”

“No, if a couple had to spend many years apart, they would probably divorce.”

“Ah, no patience.”

“No capacity for deep sorrow and solitude”.

"You understand us well."

"Thank you for your teaching. I am studying hard."

But really, I'm just scratching the surface, and he knows it. It's nice of him to encourage me, though.

Liao looks at his watch, and frowns. "该走。 下楼的一个学生在等着我".[77]

As I open the door, he turns and says, "Next time you write to your mother Meiling, please send my regards."

"好, 好. 谢谢你的教导, 廖老师. 下次见".[78]

Before bed, as I'm taking the used teacups and my toilet bag into the bathroom, I wonder which student he is visiting downstairs? We're all so discreet. I would never dare to ask.

At the start of the summer holidays, I receive a rare visit from the head of the *waiban*, Zhang *laoshi*.

"*Zhang laoshi, shi ni a! Jinlai! Jinlai! Qing he yibei Longjing cha*."[79]

Zhang waves his hand in a gesture of refusal. "Thank you, *xiao* An. Mmm. Are you comfortable here? I hope that you are studying hard, and staying healthy."

"Thank you, Zhang *laoshi*, I am very comfortable. I am studying hard. The teachers are helping me to study literature and I am learning a lot."

"I see, one teacher in particular it seems."

---

[77] "I must go. There's a student downstairs waiting for me."
[78] "I will. Thank you for your instruction, teacher Liao. See you next time."
[79] "Teacher Zhang! It's you! Come in! Come in! Have a cup of Longjing tea."

"You are speaking of Liao *laoshi*, is that right? He has sacrificed time to help me understand 1930s' Shanghai, and classical history. You probably know, Meng Rongxian and I have been translating stories by women writers from the 1920s and 1930s. In the short stories, the writers describe objects, but I have never seen them and do not know what they are. They use proverbs, and I do not understand what they mean."

"Liao *laoshi* is a very skilled teacher, one of the best classical literary historians to graduate from Fudan University in the 1950s. However, the 1930s is not his period. Wang *laoshi* should be teaching you."

"Thank you for your concern and your suggestion. I'm afraid that Wang *laoshi* is very busy with his classes and he has a young son. I do not dare to trouble him."

"It is no trouble, *xiao* An. In fact, you do not need to contact Teacher Liao again. *Ni mingbai ma?"*[80]

"Please forgive me. *Wo bu mingbai*.[81] Please speak frankly, Zhang *laoshi*."

"Liao *laoshi* has been withdrawn from teaching duties. It seems he has taken advantage of his position to engage in bad practices."

"Together with me? Absolutely not! Our relations are sincere and correct. He is an excellent teacher and a good person."

"Calm yourself, *xiao* An. You are not implicated in this problem."

"If not me, then who?"

"That is not your business. I must go. If you want to contact Teacher Wang, just let us know. Oh, and the pictures on the wall in the stairwell? We appreciate

---

[80] "Is that clear?"

[81] "I'm not really sure."

western art of course, but some of the young female students here are ... young, and also ..."

"But Zhang *laoshi,* the pictures are from an art book I bought at the New China Bookshop."

"Everything has a proper place, *xiao* An, isn't that right? Yes, it is. And the postcards too. Please put them in your room, somewhere no one can see them. Thank you for your cooperation. All right then. I'm going."

"好好, Zhang *laoshi*.[82] See you next time."

I bang the door behind him a little too loudly. Fuck him! Fuck the lot of them.

I open my door and stomp down the stairs and make my way back up, step by step, removing the pictures in my Stairway to Heaven Gallery. Farewell Russian nudes. Farewell Marilyn Monroe with her white dress billowing over Tian'anmen. Farewell Mickey Mao. I know I've been provocative, but what I was really hoping for was more of the conversations I've had with Liao about art and its function. He's curious to understand how a western woman like me 'ticks', and his questions challenge me to give expression to largely unconscious thoughts. He's keen to understand, for example, my apparent interest in the nude female form. Pointing to a postcard on my desk of *Nude Bathed in Sunlight* by Emanuel Phillips Fox, he asks something like "What do you like about that painting? What feelings does it evoke?" I don't take his curiosity as prurient so much as intellectual.

What *do* I like about it? Well, there's plenty to like. The woman is turned away from the artist. She's propped up on one hand in a rumpled bed with the late spring sunlight yet to gain direct entry through the gauze curtains. Her red hair is

---

[82] "Very well, teacher Zhang."

pinned up loosely and she's gazing down at what I believe is a book hidden from view, but it could just as well be a kitten. Her hips are broad and her calf muscles are strong. She displays supremely enviable traits: sexually sated, cheerfully naked, and within cooee of intense Australian light filtered through the dappled multiple greens of an Australian-European garden that smells of eucalyptus and rose. Reading a book in that room is a care-less, languorous pleasure.

I manage to give Liao a string of adjectives and mood words, and say a little about Australian light compared to the more muted yellow-grey light of Nanjing. He appears interested in this answer. Bloody hell. Everything comes back to Liao. I'm so agitated I can't sit still, and my breathing is stringy. What has happened to him? Who has been meddling with him? Whatever is going on, he will not be responsible.

A couple of days later, I learn from Liao's younger son that his father is under house arrest. A student from Singapore on the floor below mine in room 204 has laid a charge of corruption against him.

"Can you visit him on my father's behalf? Can you beg him to drop the charge, to show understanding?"

Now I know the identity of the mystery student on the floor below. Johnny is an anomaly in the dormitory. He doesn't attend classes, and he didn't get a scholarship to come here. He didn't go through the Beijing Languages Institute and get allocated a university. He's a wild boy from a rich Singapore Chinese family, that same family that has built the thirty-five-storey Jinling Hotel on the corner at Xin Jiekou. We've watched the hotel go up so that it towers over the other buildings that are no more than five floors in height, a planning restriction that does away with the need for elevators. Since it opened, we've had tepid sticky drinks in the revolving bar

on the top of the hotel, with its purple and black spotted carpet and its wondrous views over the Ming walls and the Huai and Yangtse Rivers, the lakes and Purple-Gold Mountain, and the muted greys and mud red hues of the city itself. We hate that hotel. We love that hotel. We dress up to go there. We're always disappointed. Once the view has been taken in, it's just a reminder of the ways in which a city becomes divided from itself, and how we are once again putting ourselves in a position of privilege and exclusivity. It's pointless and boring, really.

No one knows Johnny. Few have seen him. Sometimes when I'm climbing the stairs to my room, I've observed a cadre in a pressed Zhongshan suit accompanied by men in black western suits entering or leaving his room. They're not from the university. They have clout. Their clothes tell all. It's time to meet Mystery Man! I march down the stairs to his dorm room, and am smouldering with self-righteous indignation when he opens the door and I see what a mess he's got himself and Liao into. Black paper covers the windows. I see and hear where he got his English name from—bottles of Black Label fill the bin, and the bass chords of a punk rock anthem vibrate in the wooden floorboards. Johnny's face is polite and distant—beyond the known universe distant. I point to the sound system and he presses Pause.

I introduce myself in Chinese, and Johnny says in Oxford English, "And?"

My rage boils over. "What have you done? Liao is a great teacher and you've got him arrested. There is no way he has corrupted you! Look at yourself!"

"Hey, I like Liao. He's cool. But I've been drinking a lot, you see, and Liao has been drinking with me."

He waves a hand around his room. "My uncle's business partners came unexpectedly, and ..." he shrugs his shoulders, "They didn't like what they saw. They

decided Liao must be responsible. They told the university we'd been playing cards for money and I kept losing. That's why I have no allowance left."

"That's bullshit. You drank it all."

"That may be true, but they kept telling me it was Liao's fault. They said he was a gambler and a drinker and was adopting bad Western ways. He was corrupting me. I had to agree."

"Well it's time you took responsibility for your own behaviour. I want you to go the *waiban* and tell them it was you who started the whole thing."

Johnny raises an eyebrow slowly, at hangover speed: "Yairs, well, Liao *is* my teacher. He's responsible for *me*. You know how it works."

"You're a fucking useless coward, you know that? How can you destroy someone's life like this?"

"You should go now." He lies down on the bed, leans over and presses "Pause", and, with his arms folded behind his head, lets the drum solo bounce off the walls of his room and into his brain cavity.

The feeling of impotence is overwhelming. I go to see Wang *mama*. Perhaps she will be able to convince Zhang *laoshi* that Liao is not to blame.

After the required pleasantries and the offer to sit, I launch into my plea, "Wang *mama*, you understand this man, this teacher. He is a knowledgeable person. He is a classical literature scholar. The foreign students all admire him and rely on him. I rely on him. I know he is not a modern literature teacher, but he has knowledge of Shanghai and the classics that Wang *laoshi* does not have."

Wang *mama* nods in agreement, “我们都知道”.[83]

Her smile is sad and her eyes show that the *waiban* has no part to play in Liao’s fall from grace. His fate is not in the hands of the university. The provincial government is in control of this particular slime campaign.

My distress is deep. I feel responsible. Somewhere in this series of events is a moment when I have done something wrong. My request for his extracurricular support has compromised him. Even though everyone is saying otherwise, I want to take blame. I can’t bear that Liao is under house arrest because of his association with ‘foreign’ students, and his kind and open nature. I must go and tell him how I feel. He needs to know. I find my way without incident to the military apartment complex, and give my name and my request for entry at the guardhouse. Liao opens the door to his light-filled room, the place where Marg and I had such a wonderful lunch only a few months ago.

How can such a short time pass and so much go wrong? In the maelstrom of indignation and apology I whip up, Liao is quiet, his lips forming a thin tight line over his non-filter cigarette. He indicates a chair, and prepares a pot of green tea. Silence fills the room, and the wind goes out of me. He pours me a cup, and takes a seat by his desk.

In susurrating Shanghai Mandarin, he says, “Zhenni, calm yourself. This situation, like all the others, will pass. This is what history tells us. I will not take the blame for what happened, but I should recognise that I was careless. Johnny, poor boy, is the son of a princeling. That young man’s power and mine are not enough to resist his father.”

---

[83] “We all know.”

"But he lied to save himself. And he damaged your reputation."

"He lied to save his family's reputation. Mine is not so important."

"But it's not fair! What should I do? Tell me what I should do."

"It's not your business. You can't pull any *guanxi* to negotiate with the Mayor of Nanjing and his Singapore relatives, isn't that right?"

"I feel like it's my fault."

"No, no. Don't worry. When young Johnny goes home, I will be permitted to return to work. Such is a scholar's life! In the meantime, it's best you do not contact me. Patience, remember?"

He smiles dryly. "I have a gift for your mother. You're leaving soon and I want to be sure you take this tea set to her. Let me find some newspaper to wrap it up."

My heart sinks as I see the four cups and saucers, the teapot and the ceramic tray painted in floral pink and green, yet another heavy gift to get onto the boat to Hong Kong and the plane to Australia. But I am also touched by his generosity. Suddenly I see my dear departed dad in him: quiet and thoughtful, with an acute sense of the absurd. I take my leave, the gift wrapped in a paper with headlines denouncing bourgeois liberalism. I am heartbroken. He is one of my best friends in Nanjing, a bright light in my life.

It's 1991. I come back to Melbourne from two years in Cambodia to find a letter from Liao waiting at Maggie's house. He requests that I sponsor his younger son to study in Australia. I'm culture shocked (again), and feeling unable to look after myself let alone a young man from China. I'm also unable to guarantee I'll even be in Australia for very long before going off to work somewhere else in Southeast Asia. I

cry and protest to myself for days. Every 'but' feels like a poor excuse, a betrayal. My attempts to write to Liao in Chinese are frustrated by my lack of clarity, less the choice of words than ambivalence about what I really feel and want to say. In the end I don't write at all. Time passes and I never get back in touch with him.

The guilt stays with me still, that I may have been in a position to support his family and I did not. In 1981 I took some photos of the Liao family. They're standing on a Ming carved stone bridge, and when I process them in my ersatz darkroom, they are revealed as blurred figures streaked with chemicals. I am destined never to have them in focus again. On a visit to Nanjing in 2016 I learned from Wang *mama* that dear Liao had died. She was unclear about the details, suggesting there had been little or no contact with him for years. I wonder if he ever got out from under Johnny's cloud.

Figure 14 *In memoriam*: Liao Kaifei in 1980. Image of the author.

Bridge to Future Past: Leaving Shanghai

Journal 18 July 1981

I'm alone and I'm in love
with Shanghai by the sea
its heady blend of east with west
brings history close to me.
Smell the sweat, the brine, the water in the air,
the thought of leaving all of this
is more than I can bear.

People's Park has its charms:
a boy perched on a bin
reads a graphic novel,
hand propping up his chin;
Tanned men in singlets huddle round the game,
slapping down the cards so fast
I'm happy that I came.

Couples on the bridge align
girl-boygirl-boygirl-boy
looking down on lapping water
pressed against their secret joy.
Now on board, and still alone, leaving fills the air
The blasting ship horn only makes
me want to stay right where

the squish of plastic sandals
on the steamy sidewalk wakes
summer desires, reckless thoughts.
Shanghai throbs, vibrates.

1983

Bridge to Future Past: Half an expert

The *waiban* ponders on my role:
Half a teacher, half a student?
Half an expert, *ban'ge zhuanjia*.
"In a dormitory room
The expert has a sofa chair.
We've looked here, and we've looked there,
But can't find half a chair anywhere!
Oh lookie here! In grubby apricot brocade
with broken arm, a little worn for wear,
Half an expert chair!"
I'm *ban'ge zhuanjia*.
It's witty and it suits me well, for
my Chinese friends think all is fair
when they see me in that wonky chair.
Confucius would be proud:
he'd see the chair and say aloud,
"The *waiban's* choice is proper and true,
Bi ye zhengming hu."[1]

[1] Confucian Analects 13.3: It is essential to rectify names (ensure that people's behavior and actions accord with their assigned roles)《论语》13·3: 子路曰："卫君①待子而为政，子将奚②先？"子曰："必也正名乎③！子路曰："有是哉，子之迂④也！奚其正？"子曰："野哉，由也！君子于其所不知，盖阙⑤如也。名不正，则言不顺；言不顺，则事不成；事不成，则礼乐不兴；礼乐不兴，则刑罚不中⑥；刑罚不中，则民无所措手足。故君子名之必可言也，言之必可行也。君子于其言，无所苟⑦而已矣。

【注释】

①卫君：卫出公，名辄，卫灵公之孙。其父蒯聩被卫灵公驱逐出国，卫灵公死后，蒯辄继位。蒯聩要回国争夺君位，遭到蒯辄拒绝。这里，孔子对此事提出了自己的看法。

②奚（xī）：什么。

③正名：正名分。

④迂：迂腐。

⑤阙：同"缺"，存疑的意思。

⑥中：得当。

⑦苟：苟且，马马虎虎。

【译文】

子路（对孔子）说："卫国国君要您去治理国家，您打算先从哪些事情做起呢？"孔子说："首先必须正名分。"子路说："有这样做的吗？您想得太不合时宜了。这名怎么正呢？"孔子说："仲由，真粗野啊。君子对于他所不知道的事情，总是采取存疑的态度。名分不正，说起话来就不顺当合理，说话不顺当合理，事情就办不成。事情办不成，礼乐也就不能兴盛。礼乐不能兴盛，刑罚的执行就不会得当。刑罚不得当，百姓就不知怎么办好。所以，君子一定要定下一个名分，必须能够说得明白，说出来一定能够行得通。君子对于自己的言行，是从不马马虎虎对待的。"

【评析】

以上三章所讲的中心问题都是如何从政。前两章讲当政者应当以身作则。要求百姓做的事情，当政者首先要告诉百姓，使百姓能够搞清楚国家的政策，即孔子所讲的引导百姓。但在这三章中讲得最重要的问题是"正名"。"正名"是孔子"礼"的思想的组成部分。正名的具体内容就是"君君、臣臣、父父、子子"，只有"名正"才可以做到"言顺"，接下来的事情就迎刃而解了。

http://baike.baidu.com/view/5012230.htm

Chapter 11 Learning through Performance

You sheng you se《有声有色》[1]

I can't believe it's happened. Here I am in February 1983, back in Nanjing, back in China, fresh out of a year at teacher's college and on a Teacher-Scholar exchange with the Victorian Department of Education and their sister Department in Jiangsu. To be honest I've been filled with trepidation about returning, and initially rejected the offer using an imaginary grandmother's illness as an excuse. My friends Tee, Liu Dan, Jin Lei, Claude, Elizabeth, and the man with the gold spun hair won't be around. Liao *laoshi* is probably still *persona non grata* and Wang *laoshi*, well, that was a teacher-student relationship that ended when our classes together ended. But then I thought that I'd still know the *waiban* cadres, and suddenly the excitement of another year of language learning and research in China took hold, and so here I am.

My farewells to Melbourne friends took place in sweltering February heat with smoke blowing off the raging fires on Mt. Macedon and the Dandenong Ranges. Dave Stranger and I were throwing down a few cold pots at the Espy when "Jeez will you get a load of that!"—a massive cloud of red dust from the drought-stricken Mallee rolled over Williamstown and the bay, turning everything orange and giving that beer an extra kick. On the ferry from Cheung Chau Island to Hong Kong, I heard a radio report that Aireys Inlet had just been razed to the ground in a fire fanned by one hundred kilometre-per-hour winds. I called home and Maggie confirmed that the

[1] A four character phrase *you sheng you se*, 'have sound, have colour', which describes a vibrant speech or performance.

beach house built only eight years before with dad's 'death money' was gone. She's already planning to rebuild.

As I set about buying a video camera and TV monitor in Kowloon, I had a good talking to myself: "This time, Jen, you're going to be professional. You'll not spend too much time with people who go up against the Chinese system. You'll live an 'exemplary' life, and focus on the positive and the good. There'll be no more romantic distractions and you'll avoid the empty foment of dormitory politics. You'll stop being so resistant and fit in. All of your energy will be aimed at creating rich and interesting language and culture-based video resources for your future classes back in Australia, and at teaching interesting and engaging classes in Nanjing. And you'll make sure to remain centred so that when you come back to Melbourne your friends will recognise you and not worry about you, and you will not feel so ripped apart and confused about who you are. Release your frustrated thespian and hone your performance skills so that "right" behaviours become automatic. Okay then! Get cracking!"

Perfect pitch

First I put into effect Elizabeth's voice technique. Known in the dorms as Wei Lisha, our resident American scholar of Peking opera taught me how to achieve 'perfect pitch' in 1981, but 'the girl who wouldn't be taught' refused to comply. Here's how I learned the lesson.

In a pre-computer age, the letter written on fine rice paper is my preferred medium of communication with loved ones at home. I write letters to family and friends at the desk in my dorm room, filling up six to eight pages with wry observations, self-deprecating remarks or whinges about food or health. These letters

are self-censored, not only to avoid attention from Chinese internal security but also to keep family and friends assured of my ability to manage under difficult circumstances. As I write I'm already anticipating a return letter with news from home. The short ride to the Post Office along Zhongshan Lu is pleasant enough, but most times I return fuming at poor treatment I've received from the *fuwuyuan*—they ignore me, or treat me with peremptory gruffness.

What's going on? I mean, I'm polite: "同志您好. 我想寄信好吗?"[2]

The comrade ignores me. She addresses the farmer standing next to me who has dumped a squawking burlap sack on the counter: "What did you put in the sack, uncle?"

"A gift for my mother-in-law."

"Is it a living gift, an animal?"

"It's a chicken."

"Well you can't send live animals in the mail."

"Why not? I haven't got time to take it to her. And do you know the cost of a train ticket to Suzhou!"

"Once it falls under a ton of mail, it'll be dead by the time your sister gets it, and it will really stink."

"What, you want me to put it in a box?

"Listen uncle ..."

I switch my attention to a younger woman who's wearing navy sleeve protectors over her blue jacket: "打扰您, 请帮我寄这封信到澳大利亚去."[3]

---

[2] "Hello comrade. I'd like to send a letter. Is that agreeable?"

She snatches it from my hands, weighs it, tears off three beautiful stamps commemorating the national romance with chrysanthemums, and thrusts them at me, snapping "一块五".[4] I pass over the money and thank her, but she sneers at me as if I've insulted her.

I can't work out if there's something wrong with me, or with them. When I tell other students in the dormitories, they say "Bummer", "Yeah", "Really?", "*Zhen qiguai*"[5], or "What do you expect from *fuwuyuan*? Serve the people—what a joke!"

One afternoon, I go to see Wei Lisha. The Nanjing opera troupe has given her an understudy role as Yang Guifei, the famous concubine of Tang Emperor Xuan Zong in the opera *Guifei Zui Jiu*, 'Guifei Gets Drunk'. Watching her play a tipsy concubine is a highlight in my operatic store of memories. It's weird to see an American dressed in robes of imperial splendour, and now I understand how foreigners are called *da bizi* or "big noses". Elizabeth's nose is not at all large, but the strong contrast make-up emphasises its aquilinity. She's great in the part, witty and tuneful. Months of practicing hand gestures and head movements, and learning to walk with that swaying drunken gait has paid off.

Elizabeth has promised to show me how to sing Peking opera style. As I follow her instructions and close off my gullet, lift my back palette and find the falsetto pitch, I'm delighted by the coquettish and shrill cadences I produce—the swallow dives from ultra-high to high and then the swoop back up again.

---

[3] "Sorry to bother you. Can you help me send this letter to Australia?"
[4] "One-fifty."
[5] "Strange."

"Lisha, why do you reckon the women sing and talk in these falsetto tones?"

"It's not all the women. Only the unmarried and desirable young maidens."

"So is it the high voice that makes them desirable?"

"I think it represents innocence and purity."

"Yeah, well I must sound like a been-there-done-that cynic, way beyond my prime."

"Funny, isn't it, how we set store by voice pitch? Would you say that educated women in Australia have lower voices than less educated women? I'd say it's true in the States."

"Do you think that's my problem? I'm having so much trouble at the post office. No one wants to serve me."

"Have you tried raising the pitch a little? It will make you sound more humble, more in need of their services. And it will better reflect your age and unmarried status."

I flutter my eyelids and sing in opera falsetto, "Comrade, darling. Please help me to send this letter to my dear sick grandmother in Australia."

Lisha grins: "Not bad. Maybe bring it down a couple of notes. Go for naturally unnatural, if you know what I mean. And lower that chin of yours. Try a sidelong glance, like this." And there is the concubine flirting with the emperor that I saw on stage. Fancy having to do all this for a *fuwuyuan* at the post office!

Lisha's wise advice is not easy to follow. I love my low voice. I think it suggests independence, intelligence, thoughtfulness, emotional range, and sexual languor. I equate high-pitched voices with shallow, unconfident or patronising women. Why would I want to turn myself into one of them? Fuck them at the post

office. I'm not changing. Why should I? There are some things a feminist won't change. They'll just have to get used to me.

But they didn't get used to me. Nothing changed, except that my scratchy temper worsened and I began to be crass and unconfident in public. I could hear myself becoming a snide boor, and it was clear my attempts at sarcasm were being lost in translation. Well, now I'm back after a year away and it's time to get over myself. I am ready now to practice the voice of respect and conciliation, the voice to match my status.

On my first trip to the post office, I say with girlish brightness, "Good morning, Comrade aunty. I would like to send a letter to my mother. Please help me!"

"Ah, you speak Chinese very well. And you are sending the letter where? Oh, Australia. Your Han characters are also written very clearly."

"No no, comrade aunty. My character writing is very poor, like a little child's."

"No no, very good, for a foreigner."

"You are treating me well, comrade aunty."

"Don't be polite."

Despite the initial squirmy feeling that accompanies this small talk, pretty soon it becomes addictive, and I miss it when it doesn't happen. Wow, I really am changing. My capacity to endure formulaic repetitions is growing with my capacity to use them. I am modelling being a perfect citizen. I could become poster girl for the

Five Stresses and Four Beautifuls Campaign,[6] Miss Civil Politeness herself.[7] But seriously, it's a relief.

A taste for sentimentality

The first opera I heard-saw in Nanjing was written in 1977 after the fall of the Gang of Four. Called *Pipa Lei* or *Tears of the Lute*, it's set in the tumultuous period of the Cultural Revolution. It opens with the reunion of a famous *pipa* player with his oldest daughter after he's released from prison. The fiend who denounced him is an ex-pupil who has formed a romantic liaison with the *pipa* player's second daughter. Things go from bad to worse when the Gang of Four changes political trend and the *pipa* player is denounced yet again. Meanwhile, when the second daughter discovers she is pregnant, the evil former pupil kicks her out of his place, and she poisons herself. In a way it's lucky she doesn't live to see the unrequited object of her affection order his thugs to break her father's *pipa* playing arms. Defeated in spirit, our musician drowns himself.

Sentimental? Fatalistic? It's so melodramatic and saccharine it makes my teeth ache, and yet the grief I feel for the family is real. I wonder how much the daughter's suicide had to do with reputation (unmarried and pregnant), with humiliation and loss of face (falling for a brutal manipulator), or with a broken heart. Her mother says to her dying daughter, "This isn't your fault," but I'm trained in women's suicide stories to assume that death is the only response to such terrible deceit. I'm disappointed that

---

[6] *Wujiang simei sanre'ai yundong* (五讲四美三热爱运动) was begun in 1981 to 'reinvigorate' a unified national spirit after the disintegration of idealism caused by the Cultural Revolution. It stressed decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals; beauty in language, behaviour and the environment; and love of the motherland, socialism and the Chinese Communist Party.

[7] *Wenming Limao Yue* or Civic Virtues Month has been held every March since 1982. During this month, hygiene campaigns are conducted in schools, workplaces and public facilities.

attitudes to women have not changed since Liberation. I'm also wondering what the audience is feeling. Are they overwhelmed by memories of terror in the Cultural Revolution? I know I can't help thinking about that dark decade.

Do I believe in fate? Hell no. And yet fate is everywhere in the guise of determined social hierarchies, class divisions and political categories. I am fated to be a foreign unmarried woman of tenuous status, half a scholar with no insider *guanxi*.[8]

Beauty, age and status

My first encounter with the character of the young scholar-lover in Peking opera is disappointing. In his shimmering silk gown of pastel pink and green with its water sleeves flowing down to his wedge-heeled boots, he totters onto the stage. His long hair is tied at the nape, and his eyebrows are arched and finely drawn. Through siren-red lips a high voice flutes, nearly as reed thin and nasal as those of the young women. He appears indecisive, insubstantial, devoid of vital *qi*. I suspect I will even find it hard to love him for his mind. Then I think about the weedy intellectuals I encountered at Melbourne University, and can't identify more than a handful with any *qi* in them either. Looks like it's a vocational hazard.

How does this unrealised being turn into the high-flying scholar-official with responsibility for wise government? Here he comes onto the stage in a stiff voluminous gown richly embroidered in sombre shades. His walk is energetic and commanding, and he strokes and parts his long beard in gestures expressing the complex workings of a mind trained to the rigorous application of *li*, the rituals of office. He embodies political power and its machinations, its unholy dance. His voice is lower, and carries a yelping quality I associate with 'trained to rule'. In a session of

---

[8] *Guanxi* refers to the network of mutually binding relationships that support social and economic status.

jianzheng (remonstration and admonition) with the Emperor, he delicately lays out a critique of the emperor's plan for war. His beard is getting attention as he struggles to formulate his advice in a way that will not lose him his head or get him exiled to one of those lonely border reaches. The sparse ritualised movements reflect strict adherence to formal rules of behaviour. It is left to orchestral themes to highlight the psychological tensions, the physical responses beneath those heavy magisterial gowns: the crescendo of cymbals and drums, the mournful wail of the two-stringed *erhu* and the trumpeting of the *laba*.

The female *huadan* or 'flower' role speaks to me of the oppression of women through performance of the worst stereotypes: the silk embroidered robes that attract dirt unless the wearer does absolutely nothing, the giant tinkling head ornaments and the swaying tottering walk implying ultra-fragility and restriction of movement, and that incessant coo-ing voice pitched to lift the tops off the audience's heads. They're cute, yes, but who wants to be cute? The only females that attracts are the women in drag. The *Women Generals of the Yang Family* lead the Northern Song army to avenge the deaths of their father, brothers and husbands. In their spectacular pompom-fringed headdresses sprouting pheasant feathers, they command the stage performing swashbuckling sword dances, their fierce brows forecasting victory. They remind me of another soldier, Xiao Jia, who uses those brows to excellent effect in her campaign to have tampons produced in China.

Western style drama, known as 'spoken drama', reinforces revolutionary stereotypes. The determined worker holds the pose of heroic warrior, fists clenched by his side, his chest pushed forward and his jaw jutting fit to dislocate itself. The young farm girl in her pigtails and pyjama trousers comes on stage holding two pails, puts them down, and theatrically wipes the sweat off her brow, her face showing

endurance. The counterrevolutionary sneers and binds the restraints even tighter, or else he sneaks up on the unsuspecting farm girl ('He's behind you!'). There's no tension in it, even for someone as sentimental as myself. But perhaps the intention is Brechtian: theatre should educate, not be an opiate.

More like a turtle than a dove

In 1980, the film crew of the movie *Xi'an Shibian (The Xi'an Incident*) comes to Nanjing to film scenes depicting the bourgeois corruption and strategic shortsightedness of the nationalist government under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The movie is set in 1932 when the nationalist army was attacking the Chinese Communist Party and their forces on all fronts. Meanwhile up in Manchuria, warlord Zhang Xueliang was attempting to counter the advance of the Japanese army. Unable to convince the nationalists to form a united front with the communists to repel the imperialist invasion, Zhang kidnaps Chiang from Xi'an and imprisons him at a scenic hot springs in the vicinity, coincidentally the site where the Emperor Xuan Zong is said to have spent passionate moments with his concubine Yang Guifei, that woman of drunken beauty. While there, Chiang agrees to stop fighting the Red Army and cooperate in the repulsion of the Japanese forces.

The foreign students at *Nanda* are invited to be the western imperialist running dog extras, cavorting in lascivious play with the general and his American-educated wife, Song Meiling. My shorter, thinner friends get to wear beautiful 1930s frocks found in wardrobe. All they can find for me is a worsted skirt and a brown nylon shirt so I look like a missionary librarian, which prompts the hairdresser to create a hairdo to match. The set is a large art deco style room with standard lamps and Johnny Walker whisky bottles (filled with tea) lining the mantelpiece. We are partnered up for a waltz, the music starts to play, the Take One board is clapped, and then there's

mayhem. Not one of us western students knows how to waltz, and the floor is a shambolic chaos of jerky limbs and stepped-on toes. The film crew is confused. Director Cheng Yin is aghast: "How come none of you know how to waltz? It's a western dance!"

Filming is delayed for an hour as he and his cameraman teach us the one-two-three sweep around the floor. Cheng is light on his feet and a great leader, and another kind of light ignites between us as we fly around the room. I've 'given myself to him' and he recognises it in my weightless, almost flawless motion. The movie comes out after I leave China in 1981. I'm so happy to hear Cheng won Best Director for the film at the Red Rooster Awards. When I finally get to see it, I catch a millisecond glimpse of a missionary librarian being swept out of shot.

Maospeak and alienation

The *waiban* has not forgotten my abiding interest in the limelight, not to mention my shameless performance at a Harmony Gathering in the Western canteen a couple of weeks after my arrival in Nanjing in 1979. In addition to the Commonwealth contingent singing Monty Python's *He's a Lumberjack* led with verve by Barry, our Canadian adventure-seeker of historic relics, I followed up with an American blues number, *Nobody knows you when you're down and out*, backed up by doowop *a cappella* sisters Tee and Claire.

Zhang *laoshi* says, 'An Zhenni, I remember you are interested in drama, and you are not so busy as others because you do not have exams this year. This will be a valuable experience for you."

The radio play *Tangmu* (*Tom*) is a party-commissioned script with a message that aims to counter the upsurge of popular interest in western 'freedoms'. Now in

1983, the year of the water pig, it's important to curb overreaching desire for material gain by pointing to values of proper behaviour and fortitude. I am to play the role of an American English language teacher who is an ineffectual mother to Tom, a fifteen year-old with the makings of a selfish and egotistical *liumang*.[9] The part of Tom is to be read by Donatella, an unflappable Italian student with boyish good looks. The hero of the piece is Tom's Chinese teacher, played by a woman whose name I've wiped from my memory bank. She is on good terms with the director whose name I've wiped from my memory bank.

It's torture learning the script, and not just because it's in Chinese and it's trashy propaganda. It's because I've absorbed the message that if Tom's mum is corrupt at heart, then I am too. The more I rehearse the play, the more corrupt I feel. Our smug fellow radio star says, "As you know, *woguo*[10] is forging ahead with the Four Modernisations, using Deng Xiaoping's market economy with socialist characteristics as a foundation. We Chinese love the Party and love socialism and love Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought. We should not adopt Western bourgeois practices. They are not appropriate."

Donatella and I nod and say with ever so slightly curled lips, "*Dangranle*."[11] Whatever you say.

I detest these pronouncements. It's as if she's performing for a hidden camera, talking empty Mao-speak and gesturing with Madam Mao model revolutionary opera accuracy. The director says, "Now, you should study the script and prepare well for

---

[9] Hooligan, lit. 'floating lost person', suggesting someone 'choosing' ostracism from 'right' social networks.

[10] In mainland China, '*woguo*' literally means 'I country', a term created by the party-state to bind the individual to the nation. It has come to mean 'China', even for those who have become citizens of other countries.

[11] "Of course."

next week's recording. It will not be difficult for you both. I know you are very sincere and hardworking students, isn't that right?"

Mr and Mrs Should remind me of my ex-roommate, and we know how resistant I became with her. They don't want to know anything about me and they're not going to tell me anything real about themselves. I want real attention. I don't get it, so I sulk. I've become the spitting image of *liumang* Tom *and* his wishy-washy mother. The director must be satisfied that he has cast me so well and that the play holds true to its contention. Donatella, however, is impervious to their lack of charm. She smiles and nods, and keeps herself to herself. Sensible woman.

In the recording studio, we do two run-throughs. As Chinese versions of Westerners, I reckon Donatella and I sound pretty weird speaking lines we'd never actually say, and you'd never pick us as stereotypical card-carrying Americans. But none of that is important, because the only voice that needs to be heeded is the voice of Mrs Should.

One morning, perhaps a week after we've finished recording, there's a knock on my dormitory door, and when I open it in my sarong, the director and the actor are standing there smiling their political smiles: "*An Zhenni xiaojie. Ni hao! O, yijing kuai badian zhong zenme hai mei chuanzhuo yifule!*"[12]

"Na shi yinwei jintian zaoshang meiyou shenme yuding de shi a!"[13]

That'll tell 'em. I'm so annoyed that they call me *xiaojie*—Little Miss. Whatever happened to good old egalitarian 'comrade'? I'm so annoyed that they've given me no prior warning of their visit. And it should be illegal to visit before eight

---

[12] "Miss An Zhenni. Hello! Oh, it's nearly eight o'clock and you still haven't dressed!"
[13] "That's because I don't have any plans for this morning."

a.m. No wonder I'm still in my sarong. I simply refuse to accept the local premise that my time is not for me to decide how it's spent.

"Put on something Western-style," they instruct, "Something pretty".

They step out of the room to allow me to dress. I feel the pressure in my temples. One minute I'm told to dress like the locals, and the next minute they want me to tart myself up and be the foreign *xiaojie*.

Through the door, the radio star calls in her schoolteacher voice, "Hurry now. The photographer is waiting."

Fuckin' hell. A photographer. That just takes the cake. When Donatella enters, her wry smile and arched eyebrow acknowledge my tight cotton dress and the pinched look of rage on my face. She's seen that look before, all through recording, and through the photographs taken with cutesy-woodsy Young Pioneers at the studio. We are arranged around the "Half a scholar" sofa chair—Donatella and I are given the arms, and Goody Two Shoes gets the seat. Mr Director takes us in hand, backs us up, as a good director should. I'm disappointed with myself, of course. My determination not to feel railroaded by communist cadres has led to naught. This is the place where acting careens into real life.

Figure 17 The director and cast of radio play *Tangmu* (Tom), 1983 (press photo)

After the show is broadcast, and I don't ever learn when that is, I get one letter from a fan. I laugh because he's from Shandong, and everyone says we Australians speak with a Shandong accent. He says he likes me and he'd like to go to America. I feel like writing back and saying, "So would I", but not because I'm missing that man with the spun gold hair who's hightailed it to Hawaii with his new hybrid family. Not because.

Fracturing repertoire

It's been a long haul through 1981 and any distraction is welcome, but this one is truly exciting. It's not every day I'm invited to a banquet with the Premier of my home state of Victoria and high-level provincial officials. Especially when my Melbourne university mate, Ian, is interpreting for Dick Hamer as he negotiates the establishment of sister-province relations. Especially when the banquet is in a fancy government compound up on Purple-Gold Mountain behind high gates. Especially when the food and wine will be as impressive as the company. I am seated next to a high-level official of generous girth in a Zhongshan suit of fine wool. He barely turns his head to talk with me, although his aura is pleasant in a polished diplomatic way.

As the *ganbei*[14] bouts alternating wine with brandy continue, however, my Chinese tongue starts to flap, and he and I share information about education in China and Australia. I'm feeling warm and loved, comfortable with my new friends, SPECIAL. So when I hear my new friend say that thanks to the Chinese Communist Party, ninety-nine percent literacy has been achieved among the population, I respond

[14] Lit. "Dry the cup", it's a call to drain the glass, as in "Bottoms up".

with a resounding "*Fangpi!*", which translates as "You're talking through your bum."[15]

All talk stops. All heads turn. My new best friend resumes the bearing of a high-level official. His eyebrows rise. After what seems an age, he bursts into laughter and everyone else follows. My face is the colour of duck blood pudding and my heart is racing. I apologise profusely and say dorky things in Chinese like, "I really sorry; I really no can speak Chinese enough fluent, really no wish towards you say bad language."

He placates me, and the evening proceeds to its stately conclusion.

I love Dick Hamer. He's quiet and humane, like my dad. He invites us Australian students to his guesthouse, which is Chairman Mao's old quarters. The bathroom is the size of the living room. We find this strange because there is only a bath in there. None of us can contemplate an alternative life of hedonism for the Great Helmsman. The living room is carpeted in peach-hued embroidered silk. On a huge desk of glorious dark polished wood is a stand with a round frame in which sits an embroidered silk cat. Yuk, I think, kitsch. Wow, I think, incredible craftswomanship. I love Mao's apartment. Despite the bathroom, it speaks of quiet reflection. The very next day our Premier is called back to Melbourne—there's been grumblings in the Liberal Party that he's a left-wing radical, and he resigns soon after.

Calligraphy and Compliance

Many of us students love the complex art of Chinese calligraphy. The intimate link between words as message and their artistic expression in ink or stone makes them akin to concrete poetry in English, but far more sophisticated and vital. One of our

[15] Lit. "Release the anus" or "to fart".

favourites is the rubbing version of 难得糊涂 (*nande hutu*), which translates as "It's difficult to be muddle-headed".[16] Actually, I'm not sure why the others love it, because I'm too muddle-headed to understand. What I love is that the script is sort of naive and the accompanying poem is written in this messy way to suggest that it's easier to be *hutu* than you'd think.

Calligraphy teacher Ding Hao finally takes pity on me one evening when my friend Annabelle, who's training students at the local teacher's college and is a close friend of Ding and his student André, invites me to join her at his home for soup and rice. He explains that this four-character phrase bemoans the difficulty for an intelligent person to behave in a stupid way.

"I understood this deeply during the Cultural Revolution. My colleagues and neighbours were shouting slogans and finding reason in the most irrational acts, but I just couldn't follow. I could not curse the drooping willow tree or the chicken pecking at seed on the ground as evil anti-communist symbols. They're simply not. But ...", he shrugs and pointedly moves his glass to the left of his bowl, "It's so much safer for a body and spirit to act muddle-headed with the rest of them. My punishment was severe."

He stroked the permanent dark bruise at his temple, and his smile was rueful and sardonic all at once. Perhaps it was that very smile that incited his *Nanda* colleagues to denounce him and beat him into a state of chronic epilepsy.

So the poem goes: "聪明难, 糊涂难, 由聪明而转入糊涂更难. 放一著, 退一步, 当下心安, 非图后来福报也". I translate this as, "It's not easy to be smart; it's not

[16] Qing Dynasty calligrapher and literatus Zheng Banqiao coined this phrase. It has been translated as "Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise". http://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%9A%BE%E5%BE%97%E7%B3%8A%E6%B6%82/3534990.

easy to be stupid; it's even more difficult to become stupid from a state of intelligence. Let go, retreat a step, and your heart will find instant peace; once you no longer seek, you will receive your karmic rewards."

Well, just wondering whose karma needs extra greasing—Ding Hao or the toady coward who beat him. Really, it is so easy to be *hutu*, especially in this complex layered culture where politics is everything. Perhaps the trick is to perform the act as if one is *hutu* and reap the rewards.

Figure 18 *Nande hutu* ink rubbing (author copy)

This expression brings to mind the story called "A Madman's Diary", written in 1918 by the amazing Lu Xun. The mood is chilling, because through the madman's eyes we see a society that is literally eating itself alive. This has become an allegory for modern China, marked by ceaseless catastrophic wars and political movements. I would like to perform this as a monologue. I could even do it in Chinese, the language is so simple and clear. The opening paragraph reads like a poem:

Tonight the moon is very bright.
I have not seen it for more than 30 years.
Today when I saw it
my spirits soared.
Now I realise for the past 30 years
I've been living in the dark;
but I must be very careful;

otherwise
why should the Zhaos' dog
look at me twice?
I have reason for my fear.

Not easy to be crazy? Not easy to be fearful? *Nande hutu.*

Chapter 12 Diving into the sea: reform and opening up

Once a fortnight, Yu Shen the tailor comes to my dormitory room to set up shop. He is the source of much needed entertainment; the foreign students turn up in their droves to have their fashion dreams realised. They enter carrying sample clothing and swathes of material, and hover around the tailor as he does his brand of magic. My longevity at *Nanda* has made my room the obvious location and it has become my job to translate: "Like this but wider"; "What about a belt from the same material?"; "You haven't got enough material for a long skirt". After two hours of clamour, it's become routine for Yu to stay for tea and a chat.

As the hot water from the peony-patterned thermos gurgles into the pot I ask him, "*Yu* 大哥, 你喜欢读中国诗歌吗?"[17]

"Sure, who doesn't? Especially the Tang poets." He gently folds a length of yellow and blue-striped silk over his nicotine-stained fingers.

"There's not much time for reading. My wife and I are working eighteen hours a day. But, while we're cutting and hemming, we sometimes recite our favourite poem to our little son." He clears his throat, and chants through infected sinuses.

I fetch a collection of Tang poems from the shelf, and find the English translation of *A Poor Girl* by Qin Taoyu:

Living under a thatch roof, never wearing fragrant silk,
she longs to arrange a marriage, but how could she dare?
Who would know her simple face the loveliest of them all
when we choose for worldliness, not for worth?
Her fingers embroider beyond compare,

[17] "Big brother Yu, do you like reading Chinese poetry?"

but she cannot vie with painted brows;
and year after year she has sewn gold thread
on bridal robes for other girls.

Pouring out the tea into two ceramic cups, I pass one to him saying: "That poem is appropriate for you, and it's very beautiful and sad. Why recite this one to your son?"

Placing the teacup on the edge of the desk, he sits in the sofa chair, lights up a filterless cigarette and crosses his long grey-trousered legs. Navy blue nylon socks peep out of brown fake leather shoes. Squinting as the smoke curls up over his face, he says: "Well, my wife likes to tell my son that when I chose her, I put more value on her skills than on her beauty. We make a good team working for the future of our family. We want our son to do the same."

I first met Yu Shen in the dorm room of Québécoise student Claude in early 1980. The door had opened to reveal a tall lean man, the still eye in a storm of silks and cottons and women. Undraping the trusty tape measure from around his shoulders and sliding it between his fingers, he took our measurements with the cool detachment of a doctor, writing the numbers neatly in a small notebook. Despite his care, however, when we came to try on our new outfits, the waist could be too high, the sleeves too short, or the material would pull across the breasts. I imagine his wife doubting the existence of such ill-proportioned people, and thinking something like: "Old Yu must have made a mistake. No woman could be 100 centimetres around the chest! I'll just cut the cloth a bit narrower ... save on material ... there, that's better."

In mid-1980 we nearly lost him when an American businessman's wife living at the Shuangmen Lou government guesthouse accused him of taking two hundred

dollars from her room. Yu Shen was much more delicate in his wording: “She thought maybe the money accidentally got mixed up with the overcoats I was making for her”.

He sat in jail for nine days while the police investigated: “They ransacked my home three times. They pulled the quilts apart. They went through all the half-made clothes. They looked in the wardrobe, under the floorboards, in the windowsills and found nothing. They finally released me. A few days later they arrested one of the service people in the hotel.”

A couple of months after his release, he returned to the foreign student dormitories, exhibiting the same calm, careful professionalism as before. He no longer went to the guesthouse, and many of us were so incensed on his behalf that we didn’t go there again either.

Yu is from Wuxi, about halfway along the railway line between here and Shanghai. Last year, he and his wife bought some land near his father’s farm plot, and built a single storey house with two rooms. The plan is to put on an extra storey once they’ve saved up enough. Meanwhile, there’s not enough work for him in Wuxi, so he’s come back to Nanjing where he’s making uniforms for work units and acting as *waiban*-approved tailor to the foreign students. In fact, he has so much work of late that his wife and son have come to join him. They’ve installed two sewing machines in their single-roomed apartment.

It’s been a long and anxious wait for a business permit. Yu has a mate in Wuxi pulling strings for him: “If you apply in writing but don’t know anyone in the office, you’ll never get a license. You always have to work through other people—it’s the only way. I just got a telegram that says I have a pretty good chance of getting this

business permit so I'm going to Wuxi for a week. My wife and son will come too. She's going to leave our boy with her parents. We're just too busy to look after him."

He takes the orange offered, and with long fingernails pries away the tart-smelling skin from the flesh, a performance in economy and grace. Everyone else I know belongs to a work unit, apart from my friend Bai Ma who has graduated from art school and is painting at home until his marriage plans to Shelley are finalised; but I know that unemployment numbers are rising dramatically and that high school leavers and some university graduates are having trouble finding work. I can also understand Yu Shen's concern about working in Nanjing without official permission. He's a new-style entrepreneur, taking the early opportunity to 'dive into the sea' of the fledgling free market. When I ask him if he has to attend any political study sessions, he shrugs his shoulders, and his metallic front tooth glitters: "No one takes any notice of me."

Placing a segment of orange into his mouth, he chews carefully and swallows, "Well, politically they don't take any notice, but I have to make sure I pay my taxes up front. Private income earners like me have to pay thirty *yuan* for every thousand *yuan* of estimated earnings for the coming year."

I'm confused. "But how do you know how much you're going to earn?"

"Ha, well, it's actually quite tricky, since so much is done here using favours. For some people I charge standard prices, but for others I charge a bit less because they've been useful to me in the past. So you just have to make a guess. Business in China is not so straightforward as it is for you in the West, you know ... but if you make more than estimated, say about five hundred *yuan* more, then it's best to tell the authorities."

He peels off another segment and eats it carefully, placing the rest of the orange on the table near his teacup.

"How would they know if you didn't tell them?" I ask.

"Well, you know China. Everyone knows everyone else's business. People come into my house, they see the TV, the stacks of clothes I'm making, and they do the calculations."

I sip my tea and wonder aloud if his Nanjing neighbours aren't a bit jealous of him. He's doing so well, and he's independent. Others who are tied to work units wouldn't be making half as much money as him, wouldn't be able to afford the luxuries he can now accumulate.

His eyes light up: "Yeah, I reckon lots of people want to steal my cassette recorder. It's top of the range, Sony brand. The old guy next door told me there are always people prowling around at night. That's when I work, so they don't get a chance to steal it. Actually, I keep all the materials and clothes I make up for the foreigners right next to the window, because no one would want to steal them. They couldn't sell them 'cause none of us like the prints you choose, and well, the sizes are too big."

I laugh, "Hey Yu, you remember those trousers I asked you to make for me out of the wedding quilt cover material—the bright coloured chrysanthemums? When I explained what I wanted your eyes were as big and round as plates!"

"Yeah, you foreigners have some funny ideas about fashion, but it makes for good security at home." We laugh.

Yu and his wife are working hard outside the *danwei* system, so he's critical of the *iron rice bowl*[18] and the slack attitudes it encourages. His neighbour in Wuxi recently died when the boat he was travelling on sank. I show concern for the man's wife and children, "How will they support themselves?"

"They'll be fine. The boat was government-owned, so the wife will get her husband's salary until her retirement. The government might investigate for negligence, but they probably won't bring charges. The *iron rice bowl*, you know. No one cares too much, and ... the government has a lot of money."

And when we were talking about the terrible telephone system, he said, "It's faster to cycle over to visit someone than waste time hanging on the end of a phone. I mean, it's all right for government workers—they can pretend to be making a call all day and no one gets suspicious that they're being lazy. But self-employed people like me have deadlines. A telegram is cheaper, quicker and more reliable."

Yu Shen is the first person I've met who doesn't want a university education for his son: "It can be a road to a dead end, especially if you live somewhere civilised like Shanghai. Lots of young people there are choosing not to go to university because they know there's every chance of being allocated a job somewhere like Gansu or Xinjiang, and no Shanghai person wants to live in such backward places. Why would they, hey? It's much better to go to the Railway College or the Post Office College. People who work on the trains get big bonuses. For a two-night journey, the bonus can equal the wage they get! The Post Office is the same. Both units make huge profits so there's plenty of cash for the workers."

---

[18] The 'iron rice bowl' refers to an assured base salary and food coupons regardless of work performance.

"Ah, no wonder the workers on the trains are so cheerful and efficient! I've often wondered about their working conditions."

Yu lights up another cigarette and unfolds his long thin legs. Standing up, he reaches for the grey suit coat hanging neatly across the back of the sofa, and as he slips it over his new cobalt blue sweatshirt, he says: "You know, I hear that our leader Deng Xiaoping visited Wuxi not so long ago and someone tried to kill him. It made him really angry. So when he got back to Beijing he decided to hold a big campaign against criminals. I dunno, it sounds a bit far-fetched."

"Well it makes sense to me! There's certainly a big crackdown on crime. The papers and TV news—it's all about economic crime and other crimes."

"And much closer to home than the TV, I can tell you. Down the road from me here in Nanjing, a man just got the bullet for rape. We all knew him. His wife is a bit of a *sanba*, always shouting at him, and that girl who accused him, well ... who knows, eh? This was his second try, and she didn't squeal on him the first time. And an old man in the next street, he got the bullet for killing a crazy. Poor old guy."

Out in the streets of late, there's been a rash of poster-sized public announcements of executions. The name of each accused is given, along with a description of the crimes and the official sentence. A box slashed with a big red tick marks the imminent end of life. Now one poster is holding up to four big red ticks, and they're appearing so regularly as to be turning into a weekly event. Only last week our foreign student minder Wang *mama* was passing out tickets to the 'show' to be held that afternoon at Wutai stadium. There was a hum of excitement in her office as her favoured female colleagues discussed their big afternoon out.

After they had cleared the room, I voiced my concerns: “Don’t you think the death sentence is too harsh? Is it proper to celebrate the killing of another person?”

Looking at me with the mixture of pity and impatience you see on the faces of harassed mothers with their three-year-olds, Wang *mama* lectured: “These people are monsters. They do not have the right to be treated as human. My neighbour’s daughter was raped last week returning home from night school. She is a good girl, studying hard to get a good job and serve the country. Who has the right to damage such a person? These young hooligans wandering the streets with nothing to do and no work unit deserve to be punished severely. They have destroyed this girl’s reputation, not to mention the reputations of their own parents and their brothers and sisters. They have no respect for right social behaviour and deserve to die. Their executions will be a warning to others. So I am going to the stadium, and I am going to cheer as each sentence is passed.”

Wang *mama’*s lesson in ‘proper thinking’ has put the brakes on my desire to weigh into a moral argument with Yu Shen about the rights of young girls or of ‘crazies’. Anyway, I’m already exhausted from the hours of interpreting for other students and talking with him and, despite our ethical differences, I like him a lot.

Yu Shen has stubbed out his cigarette and hefted the two heavy bags of materials onto his shoulders. I walk along the corridor and out the main door to see him off. Leaning his bike against himself to stabilise the weight of the bags now tied onto the rack, he wheels his caravan of textiles out of the compound and into the quieter streets of evening. I hug myself because I can’t hug him. I love it that he lets me into his world without censorship or censure. From him I learn the important bits that make up a real life, one lived outside the rarefied atmosphere of a university. It’s

his real life, but by extension it's *my* China life. Time to go back to my room and make a record of our conversation.

As I wander back into the compound, I find myself rehearsing what I would have said about equal rights and capital punishment if only I had the skill, teasing out Chinese characters and their sounds from the memory bank and arranging them into skeins of flowing rhetoric. The study lamps and neon lights in the dormitory rooms shine golden and matte white through the blue cotton curtains. In the communal shower, someone is singing the Talking Heads stuttering chorus "Psycho killer, qu'est que c'est? Fa-fa fa-faa fah, fa-fa fa-faa fah, better run run run, run run away."

Figure 17 Yu Shen and Jen, 1983 (image of the author)

Bridge to Future Past: Pro-lapse

Pink like the inside of a mouth

Misplaced, dislocated.

Slipped out, slippery.

Weighty.

Fallen foetal nest.

Clean organ meets

coal dust, earth, spittle, truck exhaust.

Our childhood garage

was an archive

of reproductive parts

in formaldehyde—

pink flesh turned grey,

drifting suspended like

seaweed in a rock pool.

Slideshows of vacations

were disrupted:

Blue Mountains and the Three Sisters

Mrs C's cancerous cervix

Mrs D's uterine fibroid

Mrs M's ovarian cyst,

Gynaecological landscapes.

At this dusty intersection

I'm seeking truth from fact:

Who arranged the woman here?

Why not the hospital?

Is it her choice?

Is this even a question?

It should be, but is it?

Where is the son? Why a son?

I don't know but 'filial' is the mantra,

Xiao, 孝, 可笑.[19]

That's a laugh.

At 29,

the same age as mum's first conception,

I have my first abortion.

My beloved says:

"Any child but mine,

Note my schizophrenic sister

and those voices I drown with whiskey."

A domestic vacuuming chore

and a curette, a 'little baby cure',

leave my uterus free

of the fruits of sexual labor.

At 31,

the same age as mum's second conception,

I have a second abortion.

This beloved is indifferent to commitment.

I mimic his indifference,

I silence his voice.

---

[19] *Xiao* in the fourth tone can mean both 'laugh' and 'filial'. 可笑 *kexiao* means 'laughable'.

At 47,

the same age as mum's menopause,

that same man says

of our failed re-attachment,

"You should have had that baby.

Then we we'd have something

to keep us together."

Her body is turned inside out,

shocking, real.

Unlike the bleeding heart of Jesus

pumping redemption

from his chest,

her uterus is inert,

disappointing.

Privacy aborted, inner self exposed,

the beggar beckons:

"You recognize me, don't you?

Take pity on us both."

Chapter 13 Travel China scholar style

It's National Day holiday, and Annabelle has invited me to come to Tai Shan in the company of Ding Hao, the urbane semi-retired calligraphy teacher. I think Annabelle wants me to come so I can interpret for them both, and because it 'looks better' if there are two *laowai* accompanying their teacher. I'm not proud, anything for a break from the dormitory.

Tai Shan is a sacred mountain in Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian traditions in Shandong province. As the bus lumbers through the twists and turns of the narrow road, I press my face against the window and feel the cool mountain air on the glass. The old women I've just seen hobbling up the steep stairs on their bound feet from the foot of the mountain are still in my mind's eye. I'm in awe of them, walking on top of their broken toes wedged beneath the soles of their feet. The bus draws into the parking bay at Centre Gate, and Ding Hao looks up at the vertiginously winding stairs.

"Ah, you two young people will enjoy climbing together", he says, "See you at the summit", and with a gleeful grin he steps back onto the bus.

I'm well-travelled enough to know that along the path to the summit I'll encounter sutras, poems and single characters carved into the rocks and highlighted with red or white paint. I first came across this custom in early 1980 on a winter school trip to the Stone Forest, a geological marvel of karst outcrops in far western Yunnan province, and I was horrified. People with oversized egos had carved their names into the rocks and destroyed everyone else's communion with pure nature. It made no difference to learn that the carvings were performed by craftsmen upon the

instructions of famous calligraphers, poets and emperors, and that their intention was to be read as high-culture responses to the natural environment. How dare they!

Our history teachers, however, were delighted with each and every literary allusion. They identified the reference on the rock and quoted poems in their entirety, laughing aloud with excitement and appreciation. I thought they were nuts. I didn't understand a thing, except I could see they just loved their forebears. Here they were sharing in a joke that had been dug into rock centuries earlier. What a lark! They were reading the landscape, literally. Stuck as I was with my preference for untrammelled wilderness —the Australian outback aesthetic—I found this abhorrent, beyond kitsch. If you want to read, stay at home with a good book. That's what I was thinking.

The Stone Forest trip was also exhausting because of the tendency of our guides to perform history by numbers in thrilled cadences:

> *The Stone Forest is recorded in Ming Dynasty accounts between 1368 and 1644! It is a massive landscape of karst formations up to 40 metres tall!! They are over 270 million years old!! They cover an area of about 350 square kilometres!! Seven main parts!! Long Lake is a karst lake 3 km long but only 300 metres wide!! The lake features underwater stalagmites and stalactites!! From 8 month to 11 Month, gales lasting 2-3 minutes sweep out of Strange Wind Cave every 30 minutes!!*

My next least favourite treatment of landscape is to anthropomorphise everything in it. I don't mind occasionally making up my own similes, but I'd rather not have them imposed upon me. The Stone Forest turned out to resemble everything but itself. Our history teacher Chen *laoshi* carolled: "Ah, everyone pay attention. The rock over there in the pond is the beautiful Yi woman, Ashima, legendary protector of

her people and a symbol of free marriage choice for women! That's 'Phoenix bird adjusting its feathers.' Doesn't that look exactly like 'Rhinoceroses watching the moon?' Oh, An Zhenni, you were born in the year of the Monkey, so this is your rock of greatest interest! This is called 'Monkey on the elephant back.' Haha!"

'Mother and son', 'teeth of the dragon', 'the Great Mogul', the naming went on and on, interminable torture.

"Look over there, that rock looks like a mushroom, and that one looks like a pyramid."

Spare me. Look at you! You look like a history teacher or a poor party cadre on holiday! Look at me! I look like a grumpy Australian student on an organised tour!

Well, now that this is my third year in China, I'm prepared to have my version of spiritual connection with nature challenged. Annabelle and I take our time. While I've climbed the pernicious narrow and unevenly graded steps to the summit of Jiu Hua Shan and know better now how to pace myself, Annabelle is a natural at slow travel. There are few others taking the ascent, so we indulge in our version of 'communing with nature'. I take photos of twisted pines leaning out into the void, their roots clinging to the rocky precipices. We stop to gaze meditatively into the valley below. We wonder at the agility of the young men shouldering bags of cement up the mountain, and wonder why they don't bring them up on trucks. Annabelle says suddenly, "Ha! I know why! They must be doing repairs at one of the little shrines along the path. Hey, can we stop at the next stall for a *rekaishui*.[20] I'm thirsty."

We stop and ask for hot water. Annabelle has convinced me of the health properties of *rekaishui*, at least for her particular physiognomy: "I'm cold and wet in

[20] Lit. 'hot boiled water'.

Chinese medical parlance", she says, "and that's why I get stomach aches. I should drink warm drinks and keep away from ice-cream."

"We're made for each other, *yin* and *yang*," I say, "because I'm hot and windy."

She screws up her face and says: "That's an understatement!" My laughter echoes in the air spiked with the fragrance of antiseptic pine.

Figure 18 Tai Shan pine, 1983 (image of the author)

The light is failing as we get to the summit. Ding Hao *laoshi* appears at the top of the stairs like a welcoming spirit. Once the simple dinner of noodle soup is over, he disappears around the side of the building, heading for that mysterious place where Chinese guides and hosts go to seek repose. We understand this separation to mean that foreign guests are rich and can pay more money for 'superior accommodation'. I've even heard it said that the Chinese citizens like to have shared accommodation so they don't feel so lonely. I think this is an excuse.

I shudder for our teacher when I see what our high-class foreigner accommodation has to offer. It's a grim room with three wooden framed beds and

whitewashed walls marked with years of dirt and grime. There are gaping holes where pipes protrude from the plaster. Some are plugged with grey felt. I draw the grimy dark green curtain across the filthy windowpane, my fingers shrinking from the dust of ages. Not particularly fastidious at the best of times, even I am reluctant to enter the bathroom with its leaking taps, rust stains, and cracked tiles. Perhaps it's because I have my period and am feeling bloated and a bit sooky. At least the inevitable pimple on my chin can only be seen as a blur in the bathroom mirror. For comfort, I wear my new Friendship Store maroon cashmere sweater beneath the bedcovers, while Annabelle folds her new white one at the foot of her bed.

At 5 a.m. there's a knock on the door and voices calling "起来！起来！"[21] It's time to dress and head for the dawn-viewing rock where we hope to see the sun rising up through the cloud sea that sweeps between the mountain peaks. A sharp cry from Annabelle brings me to full wakefulness.

"Just look at my sweater! Oh, that is so disgusting!"

Two huge ragged holes have appeared in her spotless furry jumper. We both imagine a gigantic rat entering through a hole in the wall, scaling the leg of Annabelle's bed and ripping silently into the sweater while we both sleep. When did it happen? Just a minute ago? Was it disturbed by the knocking? I look at my sweater, which has kept me cosy and quiet all night. Ugh!

"What is it with rats and cashmere?" I ask. "Is it a matter of taste?"

Annabelle giggles, a little hysterically, "You mean a gourmand rat with a Michelin-starred hat!"

---

[21] "Get up! Get up!"

The feeling of violation is soon swept aside by the irritation of sharing the dawn-viewing rock with cheerful students who shout and giggle and jostle each other as they quote poems about Mount Tai. The leader screeches into her megaphone, "Attention everybody. Our Chairman Mao came to Mount Tai and said 'The East is Red'. We're standing right where he stood. 咋们唱吧!"[22]

The group breaks into a rousing rendition of the national anthem, which, like all anthems, has high notes no one can reach. I cannot stand the group 'fun' thing. And I cannot stand these outbursts of patriotism. I know, I know. It's cultural or something. It just annoys the shit out of me. Yes, I know I've got my period.

I have a flash memory of a guided tour I took in the summer of 1980 to Inner Mongolia. Out there in the boundless sea of grass we stopped at a hut. I was surprised, expecting to visit a yurt. A mother and her daughter offered us tea and fed us their cured goats cheese. The guide insulted their home, their way of life, their eating habits, their open hearth. There I was, sitting on the warm *kang* with sunlight streaming through the window, wanting to stay indefinitely, and there was the guide egging on my fellow tourists from Hong Kong to respond, "Yes, haha, barbarians."

I inferred that my hosts accepted the racism as a legitimate response to their poverty, their minority status. I wished it were otherwise, that they would plot revenge—at the very least feed the tour guide with their dried goat cheese trailed through shit. All that open space beckoning a wide and open state of mind, and I ended up being herded like a goat.

---

[22] "Let's sing!"

I'm feeling as grumpy about travel as I did on the grasslands. I'm almost pleased that the rising sun is obscured by grey cloud. There'll be no magical performance in a rainbow of colours today. "Suffer!" I mutter to myself.

Annabelle smiles sweetly into my pinched face. "A bit of breakfast will do us the world of good." And she's right. You can't beat a good egg for comfort and the rebalancing of *yin-yang* and the five elements. Ding Hao arches an eyebrow at me as I offer my first smile of the day. His behaviour is calm and restrained, so different from when we're at his place eating rice together with a couple of stiff shots of *baijiu*.[23] Then his sardonic wit and demonstrative gestures are given free rein. Of course, he's in public with a couple of foreign women, and that's reason enough to be cautious.

We wander around the shrines in the courtyard of the Bi Xia Si, which I translate literally as Jade Rosy Clouds Temple. I watch women in cloth shoes and badly cut mushroom pink jackets bow their greying heads and earnestly *baibai*[24] their sticks of incense before the icons in the shrines. I make assumptions that sons, educational prowess, good health, financial plenitude and family harmony must be big on the wish list. I read unhappiness and desperation in their devotion. I understand little about the diversity of religious practices in China, because it's so damned complicated. I just can't distinguish between Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist and other folk practices, because in many temples or shrines all are represented with equal enthusiasm.

Ding Hao sheds some light, and I translate for Annabelle whose Chinese language is limited: "Many emperors have visited the mountain early in their reign, seeking the Heavenly mandate to rule. You saw that temple at the top, dedicated to

---

[23] White spirit often made from sorghum.

[24] The act of holding incense sticks with two hands and waving them in prayer.

the Jade Emperor? Over there is the Confucius temple. But the name of this temple, Bi Xia Si, indicates that it's not Confucian or Buddhist. It's Daoist."

I think, "Yeah. Funky, colourful—Jade Rosy Clouds—a bit hippy crazy."

I continue to translate: "The temple is umm maybe dedicated to Bi Xia somebody, a Daoist female goddess. She's also called Tai Shan Sacred Mother. She's special to women and children, and it's said she'll give whatever you ask for. Ding says that the shrine over there belongs to Eyesight *niangniang*, and he recommends I offer her some incense and maybe I can throw away my specs; and over there is the shrine of Songzi *niangniang* who manages fertility and female problems. Maybe we'd never have to use contraception again."

"You wish."

"No, *you* wish. I'm celibate, remember! Ding *laoshi*, 娘娘是什么意思？是老婆的意思吗？

"娘娘是旧社会老百姓对皇后或妃嫔表示尊敬的称呼, 比如那位最有名的杨贵妃可以被称为娘娘, 明白吗？"

"明白."

"有些女神也被叫做娘娘, 象这两位."

"What are you talking about?" Annabelle asks.

"I was asking Ding about the meaning of *niangniang*. He says it's a polite way of referring to an empress or a concubine or in this case, these two handy guardian spirits for women. Funny, 'cause I was thinking *niangniang* sounds like a homely woman with slippers on and a pair of knitting needles clacking away on a fat ball of wool."

"Eating something sticky." We grin. Annabelle sighs. "Just wait another year for the market economy to gear up and these simple statues will be smothered in gilt with fancy head-dresses or haloes. There's already quite a few people here putting money into the collection boxes."

"Hmm, I know, so different from only two years ago. The 'opium of the masses' is back on the market!" I say, "It's sad, isn't it, watching these women mumbling desperate prayers before inanimate objects?"

"Oh, I don't know. No sadder than sitting at home and sighing. At least it's halfway proactive."

Figure 19 Bloated, sheepish Jen with acquaintances, Taishan 1983 (Image of the author)

Ding Hao urges us away. We wander down to examine the rock inscriptions. In our teacher's company, my irritation with what I tend to see as the wanton destruction of natural phenomena has turned into a grudging admiration. I'm impressed with the fortitude it has taken to carve huge slabs of rock with beautiful examples of calligraphy. I watch how Ding interacts with the mountain and its messages. I imagine him simultaneously processing multiple symbols to create a cosmographic collage of the natural world, classical philosophy, history, poetry,

calligraphy and art. My own interpretations are limited because I know so little, but I give it a go anyway: the pines growing out of the rock suggest longevity, evergreen success, and jade's durability. And I'm sure Ding can't forget the Party borrowed the pine as its symbol of rectitude and upward progress towards the sun, the same party that condoned his beating.

He suddenly turns, his arms folded behind his back, like some gowned scholar appreciating nature in a Song dynasty painting and quotes: "*Songshu qiannian zhongshi xiu, jinhua yiri ziwei rong*."

I translate: "The pine tree year before last finally corrupt, some kind of flower one day for itself glorious."

Annabelle looks at me curiously. Ding's ears have pricked up at my translation, and he corrects me, drawing the correct character on his palm, "不是前年而是千年."

"Sorry, Annabelle. I mean *one thousand* years, not *the year before last*. Ding Hao, 给我们解释好吗!"[25]

"你妈妈肯定会了解这两行诗。我还记得她说她虽然和你爸爸在一起时间不长，但是你爸爸还是给了你妈妈一辈子的幸福了."

My eyes widen with admiration: "He says my mum would understand the metaphor. He remembers she said that even though the time with my dad was short, it has given her a lifetime of happiness."

[25] "Ding Hao, could you explain it for us?"

Ding has recalled a conversation with my mum that took place two years ago, a single moment in an action-packed afternoon. I'm really touched that he has linked this moment to that memory.

Annabelle says, "Ah, that's so lovely. So death is inevitable; but while the pine might take a long time to die, the flower's one day of luminescence suits it just as well."

We three smile at each other in mutual admiration: we've just enhanced both the poetry *and* mother Maggie's life lived in comfortable solitude.

As we wander toward the gallery of carved inscriptions, I'm thinking: "Dear Ding, how does that line resonate with you personally? Your love life has hardly been charmed, married off to your calligraphy teacher's daughter, and savage to each other until the divorce. That terrible beating you received from a colleague during the Cultural Revolution. Who has given *you* a day of happiness?"

Our teacher meanwhile is pointing at Emperor Kangxi's simple and eloquent carving of two characters, 果然 *guoran*, meaning "Just so". He's asking us to notice that many of the inscriptions are a response to a summons we may or may not be privy to. So I stare at the two lovely characters, and my facetious spirit conjures up the Emperor's statesman briefing him on his upcoming trip to Tai Shan: "Wow, Son of Heaven, it's like mind-expanding! There's this amazing temple on the summit, private entry to Your Magnificence only. From there the Emperor can gaze upon all under Heaven. Early prayers will allow The Totally Unifying Personage to observe the sun rising through a sea of clouds making them blush in a swirl of red and rose. It's like a paradise for poetry and meditation, for understanding the workings of Heaven and Earth and Man in between. Yeah. It's a must-do thing."

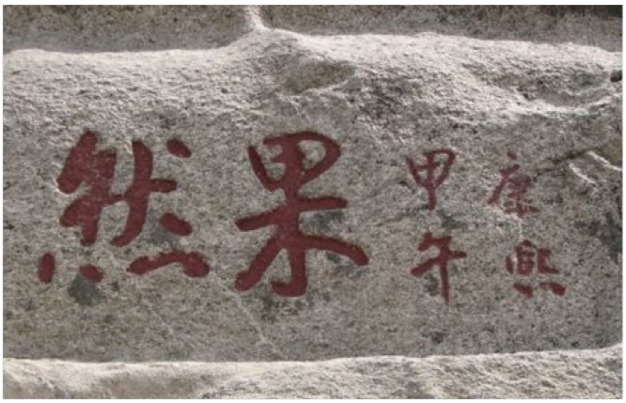


Figure 20 Emperor Kangxi's calligraphy *Guoran* on Tai Shan (image of the author)

I'm exhausted after these lessons. I feel as though each one consumes at least five hours worth of energy. And on top of that, random characters in the inscriptions also compete for attention: "Read *me*; *understand* me," they wheedle, but so much is out of my reach. This happens with the second character 嶽 in the four-character "五嶽獨尊", which claims Tai Shan as 'Supreme among the five highest peaks'. I stand there deconstructing it. On the top is the character for mountain—seems rational. In the middle is the radical for 'speech/voice/language'—lovely to think of the mountain as a sacred place of entreaty that listens and speaks to the human heart. But what are the 'dog' representations doing on both sides of the speech radical? Two dogs discoursing under a mountain? Not a bad way to remember the character, but why dogs? Are they like guardians of the mountain, or guardians of the sacred conversation? But wouldn't they be the dog-lions with a different ideographic representation? Do dogs have a sacred function in Chinese, like Cerberus in Greek mythology?

"Ding *laoshi*", I call, and catch up to him and Annabelle, "Um, Ding ...", but their heads are leaning towards each other in deep communion, Ding's signature long

fringe falling over his face and Annabelle's signature beatific smile in place, and so I put on hold the curiosity, let it pass. I might remember that character, but the chances of me ever needing to use it again are slim. I chide myself for wasting time, "You could have chosen something more useful to deconstruct, Jen!"

But it's not entirely up to this 'me', it seems. Another inner me yells, "You are *so* bloody cerebral. Why does everything have to *mean* something?"

That afternoon we descend the mountain and go to nearby Qufu, site of the Kong family seat and their most famous ancestor, Confucius, a celebrity with a reputation as open to change and transformation as the *yin-yang* symbol. At the Confucius Temple I am lulled by the fragrance of ancient pines in mid-autumn warmth, the absence of visitors, and the rundown look of the place. I leave Annabelle and Ding Hao to wander together in the temple's interior. That stroppy inner voice tells me I don't want to be contained. I don't want to be told anything. I don't want to hear what anything means. I don't want to translate. I don't want to get in the way. I just want to feel the gentle expiration of the pines in the warm spring sunshine and take some photos. I want to notice how the wall that surrounds the enclosure and the striated silver-grey of the pine trunks create a perfect image of meditative seclusion.

I come across a group of young women university students standing before a commemorative stele perched on the back of a tortoise. One of them says in northern-inflected Mandarin: "What does this say? I can't read this writing!"

Another says, "That's the old style. We only know the simplified form."

I walk over to them and say: “我可以给你们读一下, 好吧?”[26] They look at me with surprise.

"I learned complified characters in Australia."

"好, 你读吧!”[27]

I read down the tablet in the stentorian tone of the scholar I’ve heard my teachers use. In truth I don’t have a clue what this arcane language actually means, and they do not choose to enlighten me, if they know themselves.

They say “哦! 你真是聪明啊!"

And despite the fact I’m completely in the dark, I *feel* clever.

In another compound in the park, my only competition for solitude is a little girl who clambers up onto a concrete tortoise and sits with her back against the stele, soaking up the radiant heat. I’m charmed by the look of avuncular pleasure the tortoise is giving, turning its head up to welcome her aboard. I love that her little flesh and blood body is in contact with a posthumous commemoration of the great deeds of great Confucian men. *Guoran!*

I’ve been a good student of the May Fourth movement and of Mao, and am a total supporter of the movement to overthrow a Confucian-dominated culture. As a feminist and a person who believes in equal opportunity for all, how can I not? But here in the Kong family seat, his endeavours to instil in people a love and respect for lifelong education and a moral code that minimises rules and regulations resonate with me somehow. Confucius felt compelled to journey between the kingdoms all vying for dominance, and to talk up ideals of good government and virtue that would

---

[26] “I can read them for you, okay?”
[27] “Okay. Read away.”

result in unity and peace for the people. How often had he been homesick for this patch of quiet earth surrounded by people with the same surname? I remember what

Figure 21 *Kongzi Miao* (Confucius Temple), Qufu, Shandong, Oct. 1983 (image of the author)

Li Bo says in his famous *Quiet Night Thought* poem: 举头望明月, 低头思故乡："I lift my head and gaze at the clear moon; I lower my head and think of home". What would Confucius have said? Something like, "Think of home but not at the expense of duty." That's what Mao would say too, or something more like, "Your country *is* your home. Think of your country."

Chapter 14 Green and clean?

It seems as though Party activities in 1983 can be summed up in two words: Green and Clean. The campaign introduced in 1981 called The Five Stresses, the Four Beautifuls and the Three Loves has been ramped up: the masses are exhorted to stress decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals; we should practice beauty of the mind-spirit, beauty of language, beauty of behaviour and beauty in the environment; and finally we should love the motherland, socialism and the Chinese Communist Party. The campaign name is so long that we drop all reference to the love bits. And anyway, most of us no longer love the Party. We just refer to it as *wujiang simei* and usually with a wry grin or grimace, depending on context.

One of the associated programs is *Wenming limao* Month of March, during which public behaviour is targeted for close inspection. Down at the public toilet on the corner of Zhujiang and Zhongshan Roads, women in white coats, caps and masks hand out rough brown paper at one *fen*[28] a piece. The paper squares are so small I figure I need to buy at least five to get adequate coverage, but when I ask for five, I'm given one as if my request is lacking in decorum.

A woman behind me in cloth shoes and a black velvet coat raises a hand to reject the toilet paper: "只要小便不要大便."[29]

But the bosomy lady in white knows the rules: whatever the motion, number one or number two, paper is a must: "小便大便都要买不可. 那是规定."[30]

---

[28] One 'fen', smallest unit of currency, as in 'one cent'.

[29] "I only want to urinate, not defecate."

[30] "You have to buy regardless of what you want to do. That's the rule."

Once inside, the toilets are as smelly as ever, and everyone does exactly as they've always done, which is to use their hand and wash it off with water after. They stuff the unused toilet paper in their trouser pockets or their little black bags. And they're wise as it turns out because the paper scratches on contact with skin, and then dissolves into a pulpy mess with a drop of urine.

Signs are everywhere exhorting the masses to refrain from spitting on the pavement. This is a difficult habit to give up when you've been trained from birth that it's better out than in, and spittoons are in every office and waiting room (also used for tea dregs and for extinguishing cigarettes). But now there are street police wearing red armbands that read 卫生队[31] who fine people for expectorating. It's causing quite a stir. Around this time, in a casual conversation with one of the professors from the university, the habit of spitting comes up. In Oxford-inflected English he muses, "We all have our interesting habits, don't we? On a recent trip to Paris, I found it unusual that the people in the city allow their pet dogs to do their business on the footpaths."

I have a sudden shock of recognition. We let that happen in Melbourne too. There's unremarked dog shit everywhere and yet we all hate wearing it into the house on our shoes. I look up at him and say, "You're quite right. This is also a habit in Australia. I really never thought about it before."

On the university gate a handmade poster in English appears. It's a riff on Beauty in the Environment. It asks, "Have you thanked green plant today?" We Western students are fond of the sign because the word 'green' is written in blue and points to the confusion in Chinese over the shade of *qing*, which can mean blue, green

[31] Hygiene Brigade.

or black (we surmise it's because indigo dye can take on any of these hues). We also love the sign because it begs an answer.

Figure 22 Have you thanked green today? September 1983 (Image of the author)

Annabelle has been invited to visit a kindergarten attached to her teacher's college, and I tag along. We observe a socialising singalong around the piano.

"Children. Do you like to go to the park?"

"Like."

"And in the park can you see the pretty flowers?"

"Can."

"And can you pick the pretty flowers?" The kids watch the teacher's finger wag backwards and forwards and a frown form on her face.

"No can!" the most observant of them shout.

She smiles triumphantly. "We're going to make a play about this now. You and you and you", she points to the children who have been primed for the parts, "Let's sing the song and do the actions."

The teacher at the piano strikes the first notes and the three children jump up. They form a line and prance past the row of pot plants beside the piano. In unison

they bend over a flowerpot, and reach out little grasping hands. The teacher announces, "公园里的花真好看. 只要看, 不要摘."[32]

The trio turns to the audience. They shake their heads and wag their fingers in the “Don’t be naughty” gesture. Then they stand up and raise their arms to the sky and beam at us.

I understand that you can’t have a billion people picking the flowers in the parks just because they like them, so I’m feeling a bit sheepish that my mum has initiated me in a tradition handed down from her mother: if you see a lovely plant in the Botanical Gardens or one straggling over your neighbour’s fence, one that will grow from a cutting (a ballerina fuchsia or a rich-hued salvia), break off a little woody piece, stick it in a pot and voila! Thank green today! I’ve got a feeling that every time I fulfil the family tradition from now on, I’ll have those children wagging their fingers at me and the line *zhiyao kan, buyao zhai* will pop into my head. Perhaps it will make the act even sweeter!

Figure 23 Tee and the municipal flower truck, autumn 1983 (image of the author)

[32] “The flowers in the park are really pretty. Just look, don’t pick.”

Everyone loves plants in Nanjing, not least the municipal government that trucks tray loads of hardy flowering plants around the city, and even mature trees with their roots trimmed and bound in woven hemp. There are chrysanthemum festivals in autumn and bonsai exhibitions, and hardy jasmine plants in shops and homes at New Year. I get the feeling that this is a post-Cultural Revolution flowering.

Meanwhile Mary says: "You want to make educational videos for your students and I'm here to collect information on Nanjing's environment for my vocational students back in Brisbane. Let's join forces and make a video together. I'll be the reporter and you can be the camerawoman and interpreter."

Within a few days we've started videoing. She's been introduced to a famous Nanjing geographer who lives across the road from the university. He's an old-style 1930s intellectual with baggy grey trousers and an oversized Zhongshan jacket, a haircut that makes him look like a soft grey brush, round tortoise shell glasses and higgledy-piggledy teeth set in a narrow jaw. His portly spry wife has her hair dyed black. She favours a dark green home-knitted cardigan. I can't get enough of sitting in their huge living room, graced with a grand piano in the corner. It would be a great room for a dance.

I play the role of interpreter: "Our daughter is a concert pianist. She lives in Beijing and plays with the symphony orchestra. We are lucky to look after her daughter."

"Oh, can't your granddaughter live with her parents?" Mary asks.

"Well, her father is in Shenzhen working on the development of the New Economic Zone. And her mother is often on tour."

"That's really sad."

"Hm. It's all for development. We go where we are needed. Of course, now I am retired, I do not travel so much, but I am still involved in the planning scheme for Nanjing. Here, I'll show you."

He shuffles into the next room, and emerges after I've taken several sips of astringent *Tie Guanyin* tea, which I always think of as Iron Maiden tea (Run for the Hills!) instead of Iron Goddess of Mercy tea, which sounds like an oxymoron.

He passes the report to me, and gives a brief summary of the plan. First he lists all of Nanjing's advantages, which are many: ancient capital, raw materials, market potential, transport hub, specialised research centres and so on.

"But the city also has some problems: development is restricted by the surrounding mountain and river embankments; many of the building are very old; the city area has swelled; pollution is heavy and traffic is congested. The housing shortage is quite serious. I am recommending that the city's development be planned as a series of concentric rings, with the central business district in the middle surrounded by a green belt for market gardens, recreation and sightseeing, then by the satellite industrial towns along the river and the agricultural belt. Nanjing will become an advanced city in Jiangsu and the region south of the Yangtze."

It's refreshing to be with experts who engage with policy in a practical way. We take leave to video some of the key features of the city identified in the geographer's plan. It's the first time I've climbed up to the site of the old Taiping Palace. Laid out before us is the city enclosed by its Ming walls and the Huai River, with the mighty Yangtse a glittering line of silver in the west. It's just as the geographer described.

Mary says, "God, it's so polluted!"

"You reckon?" Suddenly I'm looking with Mary's eyes. It's summer so the coal burners that keep every household and business warm are not in use, but the air is hazy and smells acrid. Below us the Huai River is a choked and rancid waterway. Once the site of romantic moonlit boat rides with giggly singsong girls, the city has been using it as a drain. I'm sensitive to this because cleanup has begun on the Yarra River in Melbourne, and I swam in it a lot this last summer. Wouldn't it be great to be able to swim down there?

Figure 24 Jen and her camera, summer 1983 (Image of the author)

Pollution is choking the Party ranks too, as more and more cadres are charged with taking corrupt advantage of the new open door policy and the dismantling of state-owned industries. I have a *People's Daily* article from May 1982, called "Strike Against Economic Crimes, Run Better Commune Enterprises". It notes that village communes attempting to join the market economy by expanding into industry have left the doors wide open for "hooligans to slip into the inner office...and in the name of the commune perform illegal acts of speculation, graft, embezzlement and bribery."

The article gives the example of Chen Deyuan, purchasing agent at the Red Flag Brigade Clothing Factory, who sold stock at inflated prices, making 180,000 *yuan* for the company and 17,000 for himself: "Such criminal behaviour disrupts the socialist economic order, and encourages wrong social tendencies. Cadres and commune members will be punished for such criminal acts in accordance with the law. If commune enterprises undertake to punish criminal activity and rectify unhealthy tendencies, they will gain the people's trust."

I'm beginning to see that the punishment of those who perform criminal acts at the commune level is dependent on commune whistleblowers. But if the perpetrators are well connected, who will dare lag on them? Interestingly, the article advises investigators to tread carefully: "Do NOT start mass movements, but walk the mass line, and make a thorough investigation of problems." Any action that recalls Cultural Revolution behaviour is likely to further damage party credentials.

It ends with a demand that enterprises bow to central authority: "This year some enterprises have ignored the national centralised allocation of goods and are trading privately...Some communes are profiting from planting crops not specified in the state plan. People must accept the fine balance between decentralisation and state central planning." Fine balance, indeed.

It's not only economic crime that's on the rise. The Wang Brothers have captured of public imagination with their Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid antics. The rumour is that one of them, furious that he didn't get an army promotion, plundered the arms store, found his brother and went on a hospital hold-up spree across the country, evading the police on bicycles, engaging them in shootouts, and staying one step ahead on a wild chase across half the country. They're probably evil

bastards, but what we all love is that they are defying capture, defying the state. It really suits the mood of the time.

What's distressing me is the frequency with which those execution posters keep appearing around the city. The mostly young men have been convicted of rape, murder or robbery, but I can't bear that they'll lose their lives. I hate hearing the roar of the crowd from the stadium as another young person is sentenced to death. I feel indignant and sad to see the pathetic boys with shaven heads and manacled hands paraded in open jeeps through the city to the execution ground on the edge of town. Surely the social system must bear responsibility? All this decentralisation has left too many people without a *danwei*. How are they expected to live?

Bridge to Future Past: Permission to Speak

It's an autumn weeknight in the dormitory: an orchestra of chairs scraping on the wooden floors, Haydn from next door, voices in multiple languages reverberating through the corridors below, and a lusty version of *Mingtian*[33] sung in the echo chamber of the shower on the ground floor. I'm doing the usual in my room, writing a letter home, translating the daily papers, listening to King Crimson's *Elephant Talk* and Bai Guang's *Dengzhe ni huilai*[34], and wondering what activity I should prepare for the English teachers at the Medical College.

There's a knock on the door. I call "*Jinlai*". A man about my age or a bit younger, dressed in uniform blue trousers and white shirt, pushes aside the door hanging and enters, swiftly closing the wooden door behind him.

"我好像不认识你,"I say, standing and looking pointedly at the door.[35]

"你说的对. 我是因为你不认识我而来的."[36]

"Um, sorry，对不起 ... 你大概要找 ..."[37]

"I've come to the right place. I just need to talk." His Chinese is easy to understand but flat. He sounds exhausted.

"Okay, 好吧. 请坐请坐. Umm ... 请喝茶 ..."[38] I place some leaves in a cup and pour over hot water from the thermos.

---

[33] The chorus is "Tomorrow, Tomorrow, Tomorrow will be sweeter than honey".
[34] "I'm waiting for your return".
[35] "I don't think I know you."
[36] "You're right. It's because you don't know me that I've come."
[37] "Sorry. Maybe you're looking for …"
[38] "Okay. Please take a seat. Have some tea."

He refuses the sofa with its broken arm, and places himself on a wooden chair next to the desk set up as a shrine to my ceramic Mao.

"My friend told me you would listen and not tell anyone."

"Your friend ...?" I take the cup over and sit it beside Mao.

"You don't need to know."

"Ah. So ..." I move my desk chair over to sit near him.

"So ..." he talked and I listened.

What he said was:

I'm lonely, and I'm anxious and I can't tell anyone. I've finished senior high and I didn't do well enough to go to university. Now I can't find a job. There are millions of us all searching for nothing. Without a job I haven't got a danwei *and without a* danwei *I don't exist. I do not serve the people and in turn I am not served—no health protection, no rice or oil coupons, no marriage or travel permission, no identity card, nothing. Now when my parents notice me, I am just another irritating obstacle in their way, an expense they can't afford. They keep on at me even though they know there's nothing I can do. The head of the Neighbourhood Committee is harassing me, calling me an evil element. If she doesn't see me in the street, she comes to the apartment and tells me in front of my parents that the Party disapproves of my behaviour. Like I have a choice! And then I think, what if this is all there is? What if the Party decides that I have no value and throws me away? Will the Party be right? Will this be* my *special sacrifice to the nation—that I do not get to fulfil any of my hopes, my goals?*

I do have goals, to write and play music that makes me feel something, and to have the support of family and friends. But none of it is simple. The music I want to

play is banned. I've been told to give it up or else. It's not just the lyrics they don't like, it's the whole thing—according to them, the rhythms are too western hippy. And as for my brother or friends, well, nobody I care for can be trusted to listen to my confusion and disappointment. I feel sad I cannot trust them. They're not evil, and would never want to hurt me, but there's always someone more important to protect, such as themselves. So I meet up with my friends, but we never talk about what's in our hearts, never. My brother… I would never put him in danger. It's killing me. The silence is killing me.

His hands stop smoothing the invisible creases in his trouser legs. He stands up and slips out the door. He's gone. The room looks exactly as it was before he arrived. He's left no physical trace, yet it feels as if all the air has been sucked out of the room, and the colours have drained to greys. I'm tired and depressed. The moment is already slipping away from me.

I go downstairs to interrupt Steve's study of Ming maritime trade: "Can you believe it? A perfect stranger just walked into my room and told me their sad life story. Then they walked out again. *Pouff!*"

"And left you holding a bag of shit. Yeah, well it's not surprising is it, in this climate?"

Of course it should not be surprising. I'm familiar with China's historical penchant for closely monitoring its 'subjects'. I've immersed myself in accounts of fear and betrayal in the Cultural Revolution. And I know there's at least one party 'spy' on every dormitory floor and in every class. And I've witnessed or heard about many other incidents of political interference in everyday life. With each passing month I can feel the pressure growing against Chinese-Western interaction, and party

tirades against so-called polluted Western style dress and behaviour are daily news features.

Actually, I didn't think of this event until nearly twenty years later. Then the bubble of avoidance burst. Every time I put pen to paper, this simple story emerged. I could not escape it. My writer's group listened like captive birds to a series of drafts that attempted to encapsulate this moment and others pointing to the disappearance of thousands of unemployed youth from Nanjing in the summer of 1983, and the Anti-Spiritual Pollution campaign that followed. They said, “Jen, where are *you* in the story? What were *you* doing, thinking, feeling?”

Me? I was hiding from acknowledging the guilt of buckling to party pressure and avoiding contact with teachers and friends for fear that our connectedness could be used as a weapon against them. It terrified me to think that I could adversely change the course of another person's life, and bring them sorrow even as they have brought me happiness. I was hiding from the sense that I had been complicit in the rewriting of history that silenced the voices of the disappeared and the dispossessed. I was hiding from disappointment that I had failed in my project to become bilingual and bicultural. And I had lost my voice because for so many years, my own friends and family had unwittingly silenced me. China was too exotic, too *other* to be palatable, and I was unable to serve byte-sized pieces at the dinner table.

Shit happens everywhere. So how did this stranger come to affect me so deeply? I think it was that seminal moment when I realised that each and every one of us is alone, even in a crowd of like-minded citizens, even in a peer group that parties to the same music, even in a family that swears fealty on the bones of its ancestors, even as the face of the beloved dips to mine and I open up to receive the blessings, even then. And I think his visit was so simple and quiet as to become the eye of the

typhoon of political and social events that were smashing my blind attachments to ideology, to paternalistic rule, to symbols of nation. It's a 'rite of passage' event that leads through the rest of my life to now. Finally, this stranger has become me. He has touched the core of my fear that life is fundamentally without higher purpose or meaning, and that all relationships are intensely political and politicised and so cannot be trusted. He has tested the belief that if I'm a good person I'll be rewarded.

Over the years, advice of own devising keeps playing to me in the voices of my Chinese friends and teachers: "Is this your story to tell? It's yours as much as it is ours. It's yours to tell with the voice of the person you've become. Do you think you need to protect us still, after all these years? What value is silence? Do you believe you have a right to speak of the past for the present? But be careful. There is reason to be afraid."

Bridge to Future Past: *Fenpei* with a twist[39]

In imitation of Du Fu's *Dream of Li Bai, No. 1*[40]

My grief not for you

but for your leaving,

disappeared northwest[41]

your fate forgotten

'til you came last night

in a dream, and now

I can't stop thinking

of you, every year.

Victim of party mood,

your *hukou*[42] transferred,

your spirit doomed to

wander Zhongshan Ling.[43]

In the moonlit pane,

Your image flickers:

A boy on a bike,

humming the other Deng,[44]

---

[39] *Fenpei* was the system of government assigned job allocations to work units for graduating students at all levels of education. Those without *guanxi* or connections with high level government officials could find themselves in remote parts of the country with no legal means of returning home.

[40] Tang poet Du Fu wrote this poem after fellow poet Li Bai was exiled to the remote southwest province of Guizhou as punishment for backing the wrong prince in the An Lu Shan rebellion of 756.

[41] Where the labour camps were located, in Qinghai and Xinjiang provinces.

[42] The residence permit determined where a citizen could live. In the late 1970s, those sent to remote areas in the late 1950s as 'rightists' or in the Cultural Revolution's 'intellectuals learn from the peasants' campaign, needed to apply for a change of *hukou*. Success depended on 'pulling the right *guanxi*'.

[43] The grand memorial to Sun Yatsen, father of China's putative democracy (1911). It is situated in the wooded hills of Zi Jin (Purple-Gold) Mountain on the eastern side of Nanjing.

"I really don't know why

Melancholy surrounds me,

Each day I pray and pray

The Three Loves'[45] hurt

will go away".

---

[44] Deng Lijun (Teresa Teng) was a Taiwanese pop star whose fame in the early 1980s almost surpassed that of China's leader and progenitor of the four Modernizations, Deng Xiaoping. It was old Deng who called for the Crackdown on Crime in 1983 and imposed a contract quota system that resulted in innocent young people being sent away to labour camps for seven years. One of Deng Lijun's songs has the lyrics "*Bu zhidao weiliao shenmo/ youchou ta weiraozhe wo/ wo meitian dou zai qidao/ kuai ganzou ai di jimo." I don't know why/melancholy surrounds me/Each day I pray and pray/love's loneliness will go away."*

[45] "The Three Loves" were part of the 'Spiritual Civilization' campaign begun in 1981 and still active in 1983. See endnote 20. The idea of socialist spiritual civilization has been reframed in successive presidencies. Most recently in 2012, Xi Jinping used the concept of *wenming* to promote bureaucratic frugality. See Geremie Barmé's "Introduction to the China Story Yearbook", 2013, https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2013/introduction-engineering-chinese-civilisation/, accessed 12 Nov. 2016.

Chapter 15 Magnetic disturbances

"My lord, you've never seen Qinghai's far borderlands,

Where the bleached bones of ancestors lie uncollected,

Where young spirits fret, and old spirits weep

Tear-strained cries in rainfall from darkening skies."

君不见青海头
古来白骨无人收
新鬼烦冤旧鬼哭
天阴雨湿声啾啾

Du Fu, 兵车行 *Journey of the Army Carts*, final stanza.

Nanjing is hailed as one of the 'Stoves of China' and this July is so hot that everyone sleeps out on the streets. There's been flooding along the Huai River near the confluence with the Yangtse, so the residents relax in bamboo easy chairs on their roofs, waving big round woven fans against the heat and the mosquitoes.

During the day wizened icy pole sellers set up their white boxes on wheels in the shade. Beating their wooden clappers, they cry a plaintive "*Bing bang*!" The panting cyclist releases the bicycle bell lever and brakes long enough to reach out for a cooling ice—will it be chocolate, red bean, milk, pink something or tea flavoured? The seller raises the wooden lid, pushes aside the padded quilt and pulls out a square of chilly Heaven.

At the central branch of the Bank of China, my transaction is interrupted by the *bing bang* delivery. Work slows to allow the fifty-plus staff a few minutes to slurp and lap at baby-pink *bing bang*. A woman on the phone makes monosyllabic *'ngs'* as

she licks at hers until she puts the receiver down with a bang and returns to the more important *bing* at hand. Another plops her *bing bang* into a tea jar to sort through papers. The vaulted roof resounds with giggles and exclamations as this *bing bang* falls off its stick onto the tiled floor and that one melts onto a pile of invoices.

By midday the *bing bang* grannies are slumped over their boxes as the heat softens the bitumen and excites the crickets. At the sound of bicycle tyres on wet tar they tap listlessly at their boxes without raising their heads. I love Nanjing.

Women are looking fresh and light in pastel skirts and dresses. I love the gauzy bobby socks in black or beige, worn with heeled sandals. Talking of sandals, this afternoon I find myself walking behind a couple of young men in shorts and T-shirts, striding along in high block-heeled sandals, their arms across each other's shoulders as male friends do. Their glossy black hair bounces on their shoulders and they're teasing each other with adolescent insouciance while tossing off comments to passing pedestrians. Are these the marauding hooligans I keep reading about in the *People's Daily,* youths who have shrugged off the Party's moral guidance to follow Western bourgeois ways? They veer into a new shop selling cakes and expensive ice-cream, so much less palatable than the traditional *bing bang*. I giggle as I imagine them leaning over the counter and saying with a hooligan sneer, "Hey, give us a milk and a fairy cake!" I love Nanjing.

Perhaps they've learned their dress sense from one of the strangest concerts I've just witnessed at the Nanjing Theatre. In a night of light entertainment, male dancers in embroidered vests and teeny white shorts performed disco-ethnic dance moves on top of big drums. The crowd went wild. My university companions praised its innovative spirit, so Four Modernisations. I loved it too, as an astonishing experiment in socialist high camp, Mel Brooks style. I love China.

The semester is over. The dormitories are all but empty. I'm waiting for Susie Q to fly over from Darwin so we can visit Jiu Hua Shan, Yan'an and Xi'an before she goes north to Beijing for an audiologist's meeting. On June 4, I organise a luncheon in the compound between the dormitories to celebrate my birthday. In the enervating heat, the few of us remaining eat the salads I've made and drink warm wine and beer. The last to leave is a beefy American soldier whose politics I despise. He doesn't seem to care that I'm unattractive in that polka dot frock with the waistband made too high by our tailor Yu Shen, and I don't care enough about him to care that I'm not attractive. We make anaesthetised love on the single iron-framed bed in his dorm room. We are kind to each other, and yet I steal away before light and prying eyes can confirm that it has been a huge mistake.

Despite my loneliness and my wayward body's response, my brain rejects his further advances a few days later when he comes into my room and finds me on a mattress on the floor in a heat and marijuana-fuelled trance that leaves me without the wit to hear or speak. He is there standing above me one minute, and gone the next. Paranoia sours the single next encounter with him in the foreign student canteen. I go seeking normalisation of relations, or is my body tricking my brain into negotiating another sweaty encounter? Convinced that I am the target of the *ho ho hos* and *heh heh heh*s that erupt from his bloke-group, I do a u-turn and march out. Lucky, I say to myself. And anyway, the canteen is no longer a regular haunt. It's full of summer school students I'm not interested in getting to know. Lucky, I insist.

Meanwhile dear friend Annabelle is immersed in her clandestine affair with Bai Ma. At one level I'm happy because she looks scintillating, consumed. At another level I'm disturbed because Bai Ma is married to Shelley who's gone home to arrange his China exit. At yet another level, I'm envious of the heat that's generated in her,

and even more envious of her slight frame and black bob that allows her to fit right in here. I've tested myself with the thought that I might also be longing for the attention of Bai Ma. But it's not about him, sweet and funny and talented as he is. I might be lonely, but I'm relieved it's not me having a 'secret' romance. It's too suffocating, and anyway, it's too hot. In a way this affair expresses deep *ennui*—what else are we going to do? How else can we express ourselves freely? And, well, unlike Annabelle I can't just enjoy the moment for what it is. The soldier is testament to that. So is the persistent memory of that man with the gold-spun hair in Hawaii with his ex and her new Chinese husband. Trouble. They're all just trouble, distractions from immersing myself in Chinese life.

Soon enough, Bai Ma feels trapped by the summer, by living at home with no work to do, and most of all by the waiting to see which of the two plates he has spinning in the air will fall into his hands first: the scholarship to the Paris art school or the visa papers to his wife's home in far Gaspe on the Gulf of St Lawrence. I know which he'd prefer. Who wouldn't? Thinking this might be the last time to visit parts of China he's only imagined, he heads for the remote edge of Sichuan province in the foothills of the Himalayas, carrying little else but paper, ink and brushes.

One afternoon after a nap that has left me heavy-lidded and sweaty, I ride my bike towards Annabelle's apartment, located in the back lot of the nearby Teachers College. The cicadas are screaming their message of terror (ever since that summer afternoon in Beijing in 1980 when I'd come back from the swimming pool having taught myself to do back flips off the edge of the pool and had smoked a joint and got 'the jangles', the mass call of the cicadas has sounded like 'I'm scared! I'm scared!'). As I reach the T-intersection before the college gates, two jeeps pull up on the other side of the road, closely followed by an army truck. Four soldiers in People's

Liberation Army uniform jump out of one jeep and draw their Kalashnikov rifles, covering all directions at the intersection. Time slows. I've never seen the army in action and I can't imagine what they are doing at this sleepy intersection in the heat of a Nanjing afternoon. Through the shadows cast by the overhanging plane trees a young man in a standard white shirt and blue trousers pedals casually towards us. He's freewheeling with his arms folded nonchalantly over his chest. He can see me, but he can't see the soldiers.

He turns the corner into the waiting trap. One soldier yanks him off his bike and pushes him sprawling to the ground.

He jumps up protesting, "哎呀, 你干什么 ...",[46] but a gun butt jammed into his chest knocks the wind out of him.

The soldier is shouting, demanding work unit or registration ID. I can't really hear what he's saying. I'm struck deaf. The boy trembles and pulls a piece of paper from his pocket. The soldier grabs it and throws it to the ground. Another soldier picks up the bike and wheels it to the waiting PLA truck, its tray already piled high with others just like it.

"自行车是我姐姐的, 你 ...?".[47]

The poor guy's skin is tight over his face and pale, and his body is jerky like he can't control it. A soldier grabs his arm from behind and drags him to the jeep. Both of them disappear beneath the green canvas flap. The other soldiers leap back into the other jeep, and away they speed followed by the truck with its plunder of

---

[46] "Hey, what are you doing?"

[47] "The bike is my older sister's, you…"

bicycles. And all the while the cicadas are thrumming their legs together, "I'm scared! I'm scared!"

I stand at the intersection, playing the scene over and over. It's like a video I've not chosen to watch. That guy seemed to have no worries in the world until in an instant a prized asset is snatched from him. That's what mesmerises me. He wasn't thinking about himself. For him the worst thing is the confiscation of his sister's bike. Did he notice the truck piled higgledy-piggledy in a chaos of wheels and spokes, pedals and handlebars? Did he understand that this translates into scores of riders taken? I don't understand. What's going on and why? And all the shambling boy soldiers in their green uniforms and lace-free plimsolls I see around the city. How have they been transformed into stormtroopers?

That night, Annabelle and I hear about others who have gone missing, female and male acquaintances we've met hanging around *Nanda* or the dances at the Hydraulics Institute, or friends of friends. Their mothers are frantic. The police are close-mouthed. A rumour starts to circulate that they are being kept in railway sheds somewhere to the southwest of the city. The numbers are large—everyone seems to know someone who has disappeared. Wang *mama* just shrugs. There's nothing broadcast through the loudspeakers, nothing on TV, and nothing in the papers the following day or any day, nothing. A few days later, a foreign student returning from a trip to Beijing late one night witnesses a convoy of trains with countless carriages rolling north through Nanjing station. Their windows have been blacked out and they have no visible destination. The Shanghai grapevine informs us that thousands of young people have gone missing from that metropolis too. The thinking is that they're being taken to the notorious 'northwest', where most of the Labour Reform camps are located. Someone says the government needs free labour to build infrastructure in

Qinghai and Xinjiang. Someone else wonders if they are part of the push to populate the region with Han Chinese in order to dilute the threat of an uprising by disaffected Uighur nationalists, or Muslims in general.

It all sounds plausible, but I still don't understand. These people have done nothing wrong, so why must they be punished? What can I do to help them? It's outrageous, appalling. There must be something I can do! But as the days pass by, nothing comes to mind, and since no one talks about it, it starts to feel like a dream. The event fades as others take over. The youth are no longer lost; they just never existed.

As summer gives way to autumn, a new project is devised to keep me busy. Lawrence is on the same fellowship program, but he's teaching English in a model high school in Nanjing's east. He wants to make a video of the school to show to colleagues and students back in Melbourne. We get approval from the principal and prepare a list of shots: a Chinese language class; eye-relieving exercises; Lawrence's English class; exercises on the oval; an interview with the administration. The principal also suggests we film the school choir's rendition of the school anthem, "I am a seagull". I'm excited.

One afternoon as I'm wandering across the road between the dormitories and the teaching campus to buy a magazine, an Australian-inflected voice calls out, "Hey, are you Jen?"

"I am. And you are?"

"That's amazing. You're the first foreign person I see and the one I'm looking for! Oh, I'm Janis, a friend of Dave Stranger. I've just been to Japan and thought I'd drop in to China for a week or so. I'm staying at the Nanjing Hotel."

A miracle. Janis turns out to be a teacher of video. Now I can interview the principal and Janis can control the camera, and there might even be a chance that the final tape will be watchable.

I love Lawrence's teaching style. He was one of my supervising teachers on observation rounds at a high school in Melbourne's multicultural west last year, and I hope I can teach like him one day. He's a fan of the Silent Way, spare with instructions and rapid in English delivery, but his consistency means that students know what he's saying and respond with alacrity. The English of the students is impressive in its fluency and vigour, and I attribute this in part to the dynamically paced sessions. He attributes it to their model school entrance exam marks. His outlook is serious, formal, and expectant. He corrects only when he can see a student is ready to learn from it, usually by repeating what the student has said in the form of a comment:

"Yes, it *is* important for students to *participate* - *par/ti/ci/pate* in the Four Modernisations, Wang Xiaoling. And what about you, Li Huang?"

Li Huang stands up ramrod straight with his arms at his sides. Pale with the effort and embarrassment of potential failure, he says flatly, "Under guidance of China Communist Party we make great strides."

Lawrence places his thumb and first finger together, demonstrating that he wants the student to include a little word. Another eager pink-cheeked student, with her plaits so tight they stick out from her head, raises her hand and says "Under **the** guidance of **the** Chinese Communist Party."

And that's how he gets 'the' happening with his students.

Janis has a steady camera hand and captures lovely visuals that show the school in its best light, while also preserving the aspects of education that will be curious to an Australian audience. The only botch-up has been mine. I ask the principal how many male and female students are at the school. He says fifty per cent are male, so when I ask him how many are female, he snaps, "I've already told you fifty per cent are male, so it's obvious how many are female, isn't that right?"

I blush and stutter "对不起, 都是我的错",[48] and continue asking questions. Later Janis decides we can't delete this blooper without mucking up continuity, so my mistake is there for me to curse for as long as VCR technology lasts.

There's one scene in the video I come back to again: Janis has taken close-ups of the junior school students doing their mid-morning eye exercises to the eight-point directives used for early morning body exercises. As they work the pressure points along their eyebrows, their sinuses and the bone cavity under their eyes, they relax into the moment, and as I watch I too breathe deeply and release my shoulders.

This innocence is special because we're gearing up for another nasty political campaign. The papers are filled with barking slogans denouncing spiritual pollution, which is meant as an assault on China's corruption by western bourgeois liberalism: 'yellow' porn movies, sexual experimentation out of marriage, lack of civility to elders, hooligan behaviour that threatens neighbourhood security, flared jeans (cutely called *laba kuzi* or 'trumpet pants'), long or permed hair, heeled shoes, rock music and Taiwan pop, or any public sneering at party propaganda. The deputy editor of the *People's Daily*, Wang Ruoshui, has been sacked for publishing some inspiring articles

[48] "I'm sorry, my mistake."

on alienation and humanism. We are all tense, waiting to see whether this will spiral into another period of ideology-fuelled chaos.

In the midst of all this anxiety, Bai Ma returns from the Himalayan foothills with a portfolio of ink paintings reflecting the wild beauty of his encounter with Tibetan families. As he lays them out for me to look at, he says in his lovely two-tone voice, "Anti-spiritual pollution! *Pei!* Another *tamade* party policy interfering with our freedom.[49] If they think they can stop youth enjoying themselves, they're wrong. Only last night I took a walk around the stadium and there are couples lying side by side all the way around it, barely any space between them, and they are all fucking."

"Like rabbits? That's the Australian expression," I say in Chinese, laughing.

He laughs too, "*Xiang tuzi, dui*!"

I have a moment of sorrow for them that they can't find somewhere more private, especially as autumn might chill their naked *pigu*, but I'm reminded of my own penchant for public sex at a young age—in a car stopped outside the hospital where I worked in the laundry canteen, up a tree in the local park, or on the low brick fence around the corner from my house. When passion takes over, who cares if others can see or not?

But then I panic for the girls: won't they get pregnant and bring down a torrent of punishment on themselves and their families?

Bai Ma assures me, "不会. 为了避免怀孕她们都有办法."[50]

But how? I've heard that condoms are doled out to those with a marriage certificate, and that other forms of contraception are also strictly monitored.

---

[49] Lit. "His mother's…", approximate in temperature to "fucking" as an expletive.
[50] "No. They've all got ways to stop pregnancy."

"这一代有大姐大哥, 反正有志者事竟成."[51]

Of course he's right, there's always a way when people put their minds to it. This is the last generation who can go to their siblings for a condom, but if the policy continues other avenues will open up.

Bai Ma makes me wonder at my timidity around Chinese rules and regulations. Why do I believe the Party knows everything? Why can I not see the flexibility in the system? Still, the facts remain: young men executed for rape, some of them protecting their girlfriends from labour camp, others accused by their terrified girlfriends. There is reason to be scared, isn't there? Not all people are strategic thinkers with solid *guanxi.* Not everyone is like Bai Ma who seems to be able to travel to Sichuan without a travel permit. He doesn't have a *danwei,* just like those young people who "disappeared". It's not the Western connections that are saving him; his dad really must be high up in the PLA. He's strangely dismissive of his family; my attempts to find out more have been rebuffed.

Bai Ma's new ink brush paintings are fantastic. I buy four of them with US dollars that will come in handy when he leaves China. There's the painting I've 'commissioned', a Dun Huang beauty with flowing teal green robes and pale Tang-style chubby cheeks. Then there's the one with two Tibetans dancing, their hair flying wild about their heads as they give themselves up to the rhythm of the dance. I've chosen this one because it encapsulates Bai Ma's search for freedom. There's also one of a bare-chested monk with hands pressed together in prayer, sitting on a mat before an incense censer. I'm surprised that Bai Ma has chosen to paint a 'holy' image.

[51] "This generation has sisters and brothers, and, anyway, where there's a will there's a way."

When I raise it with him, he says, "按我自己的思想, 不管是画画的行动还是画画的结果, 艺术都是招出神圣的表现".[52]

It's romantic to say art is the evocation of the sacred in action and in result but that doesn't help me to understand why he chose to paint this subject. I like it because I sense a contradiction in the monk's meditative pose—a duality of opposites, the sacred and the profane. My final choice and my favourite is a huge ink painting in taupes and greys set some time in the classical past. The wine jars have been knocked over and the inebriated guests are in various states of transport towards depression, sleep or ecstasy. Bai Ma's inscription down the left side of the painting says it was painted in Beijing earlier in the year. His writing is messy. One character has been blotted over with ink, a mistake. He tells me he painted it at the tail end of an evening of drunken debauch with mates. He couldn't sleep so his brush captured the mood. I love it. It reveals the vulnerability of the human condition, and I'm thrilled with the writing mistake. Bai Ma shrugs, "记字文不是我的特长, 尤其喝醉的时候".[53] Maybe because I'm a language *mi*[54], remembering characters and spelling *is* my strong point, but on one thing we agree: it's hard to write when you're as pissed as a proverbial parrot, or as the Chinese would say, 'swollen red'.

When Bai Ma visits, I feel warm inside. In fact, I'm feeling warm inside a lot these days. The English language teachers at the Nanjing Western Medical College are responsible for a large part of it. Every week during semester I've been spending a few hours with them. Having only just completed a Dip Ed., I don't have the skill or authority to teach, especially those who've been teaching for decades. From the first

---

[52] "In my way of thinking, whether it's the act of painting or the result, art is all about expressing the sacred."

[53] "Remembering characters is not my strong suit, especially when I'm drunk."

[54] Fan or enthusiast.

session, we‘ve dispensed with formality and chat about whatever comes to mind. I feel truly grateful that they include me in the open affection they have for each other. They tease each other about their idiosyncrasies, and very soon they’re teasing me too. There’s to be no crushing Mao-speak here.

I have a crush on one of them, Yue *laoshi*. He belongs to the Yi ethnic group from China’s far southwest, a lively witty man in his late forties.

He says, "I had the good fortune to receive English training at the Nanjing Normal University when it was located in Kunming during the civil war."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, when the Nationalists were being pushed out of Nanjing, the university staff packed up their books and valuable equipment, and relocated themselves far from the fighting in order to keep teaching and writing."

"Wow, I never heard of this! That’s amazing!"

"Amazing for me, yes. Because I was just a young Yi man with little education. And my horizons were broadened. After Liberation, I returned with the university to Nanjing as a teacher. And soon after, I was transferred here to the Medical College."

One day we’re talking about mental illness, and I’m attempting to pull out little used or understood vocabulary from my head and write it on the board. Yue tells me *he* has a mental illness. Tang, a colleague with thick black-rimmed glasses and eyebrows to match nods and says, "Yes, sometimes Old Yue is very happy and talks all the time and very fast."

"Yes," says Shi, a sweet shambling woman with lanky hair, "and sometimes he is very sad and sleepy. It is as though he cannot find the sun in the sky. Isn't that right, Yue old friend?"

"Yes, that's right." His smile includes all his friends at the table.

"I haven't noticed, Mr Yue," I say, "Although I do think you are very lively and I wondered if this is because you are not Han, not so reserved."

There's a side discussion on the meaning of 'reserved' before it passes inspection as indicative of the Han intellectual in a public setting. What I don't say is that I've noticed his skin, which is sometimes greasy and looks a bit too tight over his cheekbones.

"I take medication every day," he says, "unless I forget."

Everyone laughs.

Zhu, a northerner with a broad open face and beautiful bow lips, says "Sometimes, Brother Yue, I think you, how you say, deliberate not take medicine. You like *happy* time."

They all laugh along with Zhu, and Yue smiles and winks.

I'm impressed. We don't talk about mental illness in Australia much, certainly not so freely as this. And here are Yue's colleagues being kind to him, not bullying or deriding him for being 'abnormal', like I feared they would. Judgements of *bu zhengchang*[55] are as common here in Nanjing as they are in Melbourne.

Talking of *bu zhengchang*, in a skin-crawling propaganda stunt, the Party has rolled out paraplegic Zhang Haidi to tell the masses she is human *and* that she too can

[55] Not normal.

learn foreign languages and make a contribution to her country. She's touted as a modern-day hero following in the footsteps of Lei Feng. I know it's an attempt to counter social stigma, but her interviewers are so patronising that we see her as 'special', a form of 're-stigmatisation'. But just yesterday on TV, she gave a great speech, arguing against suicide as a way out for young people. I felt she was talking to everyone, not only those who had lost the use of limbs or sight or hearing. She said something like, "When you feel life is not worth living, that it's pointless ... I know this feeling. I too have wanted to end my life. But then I think that there's more I can do, and I keep going. I *zhichi*."[56] I wonder if her message will save lives?

One afternoon as a special farewell treat, the teachers take me to a museum of medical specimens up on the fourth floor of the medical college. A row of shelves hold glass jars brimming with formaldehyde, and in the slanting rays of the sun their contents are lit up as on a stage: Siamese twins, diseased brains, feet with seven toes, and cysts growing baby monsters made of hair and tissue, one with a roving eye. I'm deeply moved by the mutations a human body can produce. In a way, it's a spiritual experience and my hosts appear to share the solemnity of the moment. It's the same feeling I had when I saw women's diseased cervixes reflected on the lounge room wall, mixed among our holiday slides.

Dad would not miss a beat: "There's Jenny looking out over the canyon at Katoomba. There's Mrs Giotto's cervix with some nasty lesions."

In the last few weeks of life in Nanjing, a swarm of young people find me. They want to be friends. They're workers in factories or martial arts trainers, but they're also learning calligraphy or painting or music. They're Renaissance *laobaixing*. They talk freely with me, although there's a slight tendency to treat me as

[56] "I endure": an expression used by the Party to denote sacrifice for the nation.

an exotic Westerner, as though I'm somehow more interesting because I'm not Chinese. I know this feeling. I've had it in reverse.

I hold them back. I say, "It's not safe right now to spend time with me. Spiritual pollution, *ni mingbai ma*?"[57]

But they don't care. They offer me their paintings. They invite me to come and watch them kick box and perform drunken kungfu. They suggest we go to Purple-Gold Mountain for a picnic. I feel overwhelmed by this sudden change in attitude. Life almost feels 'normal', except for the persistent feeling that I'm a bourgeois pollutant and a threat to others. The anti-spiritual pollution campaign is being ignored by everyone I know it seems, except me.

As the date for departure looms, there are farewell dinners with Wang *mama*, her husband and fellow students, with the teachers at the medical college, and with Jin Lei and her family. Jin *dajie* now has a great job as a historian with the Nanjing TV broadcaster, and she's met a charming young man with similar interests in history and art. I'm thrilled that she's no longer subjected to the humiliating matchmaking scene for the 'thirty something' women returned from a decade in the countryside. I'm swamped with gifts and good wishes, and I'm overflowing with love. I tell everyone I'll be back soon. I really believe it. How could I stay away, now that I belong?

[57] "You get what I mean?"

Chapter 16 Limbo: Return to Oz

无言独上西楼月如钩

寂寞梧桐深院锁清秋

剪不断理还乱是离愁

别是以般滋味在心头

I climb the western tower in silence
The moon is like a sickle
Clear autumn locked in the deep courtyard
Where a lonely wutong tree stands
Sorrowful parting has hurt but not broken our ties
I'm so unsettled
I can taste the separation in my heart-head.[58]

I disembark at Tullamarine at dawn. As I enter the passageway leading to the terminal, the rush of crisp cold air tinged with eucalyptus enters my lungs. Sweet. Bittersweet.

The immigration hall has been renovated in fresh neutral-tone laminate. The official lounges in his swivel chair. He could be watching TV. He smiles at me from the corner of his mouth as he flips through the passport.

"Been to China, eh?"

I am standing alert and playing the part of a good girl. The stamp descends.

"Welcome home."

[58] A poem by Li Yu (937-978), ruler of the Southern Tang dynasty who lost his throne after being conquered by the Song. His poems are tinged with nostalgia and 'unfinished business'.

I smile stiffly at the word “home”. He is a good ole Aussie bloke, broad-shouldered, fair hair turning dull, eyes that don’t really engage, with a good-natured grin on his big face.

"Go through the red door at Customs, yeah?"

"Thanks."

The trolley wheels me into the Customs Hall, and my shoes are taken from me to be sprayed. The wood of the scrolls and other artefacts in my cases are examined for alien worms and bugs before I am declared ready to re-enter home territory.

Something is wrong with my ears. Perhaps I have gone deaf on the plane. Voices and vowels are muted. Bodily functions—coughing, spitting, yawning—are absent. No one is shouting or gesticulating. No one is pushing or shoving for space and attention. The officials model right behaviour: passive, non-committal, compliant. The low luggage inspection benches, so smooth and unpitted, are metres away from each other and there are only about fifteen people in the brightly lit room. Where are all the people?

Coming through the doors into Melbourne, there is no one there to greet me. My mum lives near the airport. I’ll get a taxi home, so much easier, especially when Customs can take so long. But I feel stricken as others are rushed upon by delirious relatives who have been waiting so long to touch their loved ones. In the midst of all the “halloos” and sacred name-callings, and shrieks and moans, I mutter "Beam me down, Scotty," and with shoulders squared against disappointment, push the trolley out to the taxi stand.

The taxi driver slips out of his cab to help me load the luggage in the boot. He’s the silent type, listens for the address, trips the meter, and makes a smooth

entrance into the flow of airport traffic. The solid Ford does not feel as though its wheels are touching the road. Sound is muted; vibration is minimal. There are no car horns blasting. Melbourne is silent. My panic ratchets up a notch. What has happened here? Where are all the people? As we drive along the freeway I feel trapped inside a two-dimensional movie set. Nothing appears solid or real. Perhaps everyone is dead, except for the few who travel the highway in a rush of air. Or maybe I am still outside the membrane that delineates Melbourne from the other world, the world that has given me up. I do feel as though I am on the other side. There is a ringing in my ears.

The light is so bright and shadow-free I wonder if I am taking one of those near-death journeys. The high contrast is both exhilarating and disturbing. I am not ready to enter this other life, this other death. Just three days earlier, in Shanghai's French quarter in the early morning, the park was crowded with old men walking their caged birds and squadrons of seniors performing *taijiquan* in serried ranks. The sun of deep autumn lit up the dust on the leaves of the trees, the faded blues of the old men's caps, the golden lacquer of the cage bars, the gentle arcing of arms and legs in unison. An urban orchestra dissected: birdsong, shoe-shuffle, jazz riffing truck horns, bicycle bells, and a crescendo of throat-clearing, all undercut by the loudspeaker anthem: *Dongfang hong, taiyang sheng ...The East is Red, the Sun is Rising* ...That light, that symphony, the motion of that early morning is brought into stark relief by this white light silence.

The cabbie twiddles the radio dial as we whoosh towards the metropolis swathed in its ochre veil upon the horizon. These cars are transported in their own bubbles of motion. There is minimum lane switching, no tailgating. There are no open-backed trucks, no buses, no pigs on bicycles, no oxen or horse-drawn carts, no Soviet tractors or motorbikes. A semi-trailer slides by on the other side of the

freeway, the door of its canary yellow cab decorated with a big-breasted, Farrah Fawcett-haired woman lying on her back with one knee raised. The cab is hauling a sleek silver tube of gas and the flammable sign is jaunty in red on its flank.

The cab swings off the freeway at the Essendon turn-off and we skim the surface of the white tarmac that signals the start of Mt Alexander Road. The front yards of the houses are neat, and useless. Everywhere are signs of beautification—money lavished on renovations and decorative gardens.

The cab drops me at mother Maggie's house. I gaze at the red brick of the garden wall and the red brick of her townhouse and marvel at its solidity, at the clean white grouting between the bricks. Ugly as sin. One week before I left for China in '79, mum left the family home and moved here. On the outside it holds no memories, but once the door is flung open and I am in her arms, I feel very much at home. Inside hang the paintings from the old house and I am enormously comforted. I drop my cases on the floor, and we open the duty-free whiskey, never mind it is only two o'clock. She has taken the day off work, a rarity for her.

When I open the suitcases, the clothes are damp and musty. Those clothes that I enjoyed so much in China look poorly made in this sharp light. Even as I shake them out and hang them, I know that I will not be wearing them here in Melbourne. There is something shameful about them. And yet how can I know, because I have no idea what my friends are wearing, what the latest alternative fashions dictate—more cause for anxiety.

Over a few hours, Mum tells me the family news. Her '*a*'s are flat-footed and I smile because she always reminded us to round our vowels when we were kids.

"Jamie is living in Cairns. He's got a lovely new girlfriend."

I raise my eyebrows, and point to my ring finger.

She giggles: "No, you naughty girl, he hasn't gone as far as an engagement. I think he might be over that craze. He's working on the tourist boats that go out to the reef. I keep asking him when he's going to buy a house. He's not getting any younger. He should be saving now for the future. But you know him. Probably resists just to spite his mother.

"Sue is good. She's enjoying married life. They're living in a little house in South Yarra. You haven't been there? It's so close to Toorak Road and Chapel Street —I gather they eat out nearly every night. No, no babies yet, but if I know my girl it won't be long. You know she's in her thirties now ...

"Peter and Pauline are good. You'll get to meet baby Kate in the next few days I guess. I think they're coming down this weekend to see you. Or maybe we'll go up there? What do you think? It might be nice for you to get a bit of country air, and Daylesford is very pretty."

"Where is Daylesford? Is it near Castlemaine?"

"More or less ... sort of between Castlemaine and Ballarat. And they've got a new dog. An Airedale."

"What's an Airedale?"

I am lost in a welter of unfamiliar details. The news that they have a giant terrier does not amuse. But I am looking forward to meeting my niece.

At the sound of the whistle I go out to the letterbox and wander into the street. No one there, not even the postie. No cars parked in the street, just a stretch of bitumen flanked on both sides by parallel lines of kerb, grassy verge, clean pathway and straight fence line. The sky is a swatch of washed out blue upon which huge

fluffy clouds, lit up from within, sail before winds that do not reach the ground. Far away up on the hill near the railway track, a giant eucalypt dangles scented streamers from outstretched silver grey limbs. The red brick church squatting nearby glows smug and staunch. I shudder as the goose walks over my grave.

Standing there in the middle of the road, I'm as insubstantial as the air that's moving through the suburbs without picking up any of the odours that might evidence the acts and consequences of living. This air smells free of relationships, free of connections to distant and more recent past. It is fresh, quick, unencumbered, lung cracking. It is Great. It is terrifying.

I am spirited back inside Jin Lei's cramped dwelling in a courtyard off the main drag in Nanjing. Five of us are squeezed around the kitchen table, everyone wearing thick jumpers and scarves. One side of the kitchen is open to the outside where the cooking is done on coal burners. A wan sunbeam filters into the room. Jin Lei is filling up the teapot from the thermos flask. Her sister is stemming the greens and washing them in an enamel bowl of water. Her brother-in-law is frying the beancurd, and her mother is cleaning the rice.

I'm talking to Jin Lei's boyfriend about our favourite western artists. He's a fan of Pablo Picasso. I don't have any one favourite, but we discover that we both love Pierre Bonnard's work. In that moment the stained unpainted concrete walls of the kitchen take on the straw gold, the lustrous burnt orange, the marvellous pastel blues and pinks of a Bonnard rustic interior. I swear that we can both see it, and we can see too the beauty of the scene wreathed in steam, the family members' faces calm in the performance of culinary theatre.

Back in mum's house, the whiskey has numbed my nerve ends. My eye takes in the comfortable furnishings of couch and armchairs, the paintings on the wall: a farm near Romsey; the Doge's palace in Venice; boy in a wheat field; Balinese dancers; eagles wheeling over the desert; cloudscape; nude hugging herself on a wintry bay beach. This is home.

By the next morning I feel keenly the gap between my old life and the new one about to start. Friends are calling, eager to see me. My week fills up with dinner here and lunch there. Other friends are gone on adventures to Europe, to Darwin, to South America. I'm keen to re-establish myself in my own culture. I head off to each venue with high expectations. I am the adventurer returned, the China scholar with stories to tell, the person whose identity is here *and* there. But the reality only serves to highlight the differences between us.

"Hey Jen, come on in. Great to see you. This is Colin. He's been with me ... Hey Col, it's our six month anniversary this week. Ha Ha who would have thunk! Col, this is Jen, you know the girlfriend I was telling you about who's been in China."

"Hey, Jen. Shaz, where's the screwdriver? I gotta get this left speaker pulled apart. It's farting something chronic."

"Okay. Okay. I'll go look in the shed. Come on Jen. So how was it? I can't wait to hear all your stories. Look at the mess out here will you? Col is obsessed with pulling things apart but somehow he loses interest in putting the stuff back together again? Need any spare parts for a bike? A TV? Now where will I find the bloody screwdriver?"

Back in the kitchen, Shaz gets the rice boiling and we cut the veggies together. The champers I bought is fizzing in the glasses. I have started to tell her about life in

the dormitory, but I keep bumping into in-house jokes that somehow translate into banalities out of context.

I have no way of telling a story without getting mired in detail, and as I'm trying to set the scene, Shaz looks over her shoulder and yells: "Hey Col, wouldn't mind a bit of music. You know that great tape you just bought. What is it again? The Divinyls, yeah. They're great. You know Chrissie Amphlett? She is grouse! We saw them play at the pub last weekend and they were so good that Col got the tape. We can copy one for you if you like."

"Give a bloke a break, Shaz. Life wasn't meant to be easy, ya know."

"Stop quoting Malcolm and get that speaker working, would ya? You were saying, Jen?"

"Um, nothing. So tell me, how's the teaching?"

"What do they say, school would be great without the students? I've got some doozies in Year 9 English. There's one little fella ..."

"Hey tell her about the grafitti on the dunny walls."

"Ha ha, you're gunna love this. We've got this history teacher, Roger Canning, who's really up himself. He's really *really* straight and he says to the students—you know our school is in a really economically depressed area, right? Well, he comes to school in his navy suit and old school tie, can you believe it! Well anyway, he says in his toffy voice: 'Now, students, there's to be no bad language. Just think what your parents would say if they knew you used bad language. It's *your* responsibility to raise the standards of this school.' Blah blah blah. Well one of the girls arced up. She's in my English class, right, and she told me he implied her mother set a bad example because she spent her money on all the wrong things, you know,

like on *food* instead of a set of encyclopedias or some such crap? Anyway, last week, this graffiti in girly writing appears on the dunny block walls, about one metre high. And it says: *Mr Canning sucks dogs' dicks and cats' cunts*. Isn't that a priceless bit of alliteration! I'm tempted to give her full marks for English! What a winner. Anyway I managed to take a photo of it before it got cleaned off the wall. So cute, isn't it? Dogs' dicks and cats' cunts. Ha ha—priceless!"

It *is* priceless. *And* quaint. I want to tell her something equally quaint, like the guy chasing his bicycle-driven shadow along a dimly lit Nanjing street in the wee hours of the morning, hands deep in his trousers pulling himself off and shouting "*Wo laile! Wo laile!* I'm coming! I'm coming!" while still managing to keep his bike on course with his knees. It's not my story, it's Liu Dan's, but it's a good one.

I self-monitor: "It's good, Jen. It can be told in two seconds, but how will you manage the translation?"

It doesn't matter anyway because the Divinyls are cranked up, and Col and Shaz are bopping around the kitchen singing cheerfully flat harmonies: "I must've been desperate, I must've been pretty low ..." and I'm left thinking: "Yeah, good music. Shame about the story. Give it up, Jen. There's always a next time."

But somehow there never is. The truth is, for most of my friends I have no stories I can share. No stories they really want to hear. What they want is a tourist version of a trip to the exotic. I don't have any stories like that.

I inspect the world Shaz and Col have created. They've got a house full of stuff, and they're so cosy dwelling amongst it. What have I got? Not one white good to my name, and not much brown either, not even a bed. I've got a bag full of Chinese

scrolls with paintings by my mates and a few bamboo boxes. Oh yeah, and a crate full of dictionaries—so much for the doughty scholar.

The supermarket is enraging. I have become completely comfortable with the lack of material choice in China—one kind of soap powder, one kind of towel, one kind of basin, a choice of three kinds of kitchen knives, and the expensive soap or the cheap soap. The rows and rows of shelving taken up with the same item packaged in different colours and sporting different logos is contemptible. Spoilt for choice? Damned more like it. Made demented by it. I fall back on the labels of my childhood. At the checkout, multiple plastic bags are offered.

I splutter that everything can fit in one instead of five: "Save them," I say, "Save them for the next customer!"

The girl on check-out looks at me as if *I'm* demented. I say, "Look, in China people covet plastic bags. They're as rare as hen's teeth. They wrap almost everything in old newsprint."

She says carefully, looking at the cash register, "Well, they're not rare here, as you can see. And ... they're clean."

The Ministry of Education has forgotten about me, I'm told, but they'll find me a position soon enough. In the meantime I can stand in for the Year 10 English teacher at the local high school. I've never taught straight English, never taught in a high school, and I am unprepared for the boy-men who squirm and flex, jump up, jump out the window, vault back in again, all the while yelling at each other and at me in cracked voices with two alternate inflexions: I'm bored I'm bored I'm bored I'm bored; and I'm jumping OUT-OF-MY-SKIN. They wriggle around inside of their clothes like snakes, trying to slough them off. The girls blink slowly as they examine

me from top to toe, and then turn to each other and giggle in a gaggle. Clearly, my traditional Chinese shirt and baggy trousers are vile, as is the desperate look of goodwill on my face. After two days of mutual loathing, and fear from my side alone, I find myself swimming lengths of the Essendon pool, visualising over and over the act of athletically throwing a schoolboy through a plate glass window and watching the glass splinter, slice and stain red.

I have relationships here that I believe bind me and regulate the conditions of my existence; but I've forgotten the rules of social engagement. I'm an outsider. I am *persona grating*. I am Jen who's come back a bit native. I am not-me. I am, of course, not me. I am a simulacrum of a hybrid race. The gaze determines the role I will be given to perform:

I am a brave traveler
I am a linguist
I am a cultural relativist
I am a prude
I am a ghost of my former self
I am a bit dull
But what am I not?
I am not here, or there.
Where am I?"
The way stretches endless ahead;
I'm doomed to keep searching high and low."
路漫漫其修远兮, 吾将上下而求索. [59]

[59] Line 97 of the *Li Sao* (*Encountering Sorrow*) by Qu Yuan (340-278 B.C.) spoke to Lu Xun's state of mind in 1920s China. See his short story collection 《彷徨》*Pang Huang* (*Prevarication*) (Beijing: *Beixin Shuju*, 1926).

Citations

Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound.* I no longer remember which translation was used for the performance in 1976.

Anon. "I went up the mountain to pick wild herbs", titled "Old and New" from the *Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing*). First century A.D.

Anon. 《雨后》*After Rain*. Yue Fu ballad. Han Dynasty. URL: https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%B9%90%E5%BA%9C. Accessed 4 November 2017

Ba Jin. *Jia* (*Family*). First serialised in 1931-32; trans. Sidney Shapiro. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958. I probably read the 3rd Edition, published in 1978.

Bai Guang. "*Wo dengzhi ni huilai*". Originally on tape, now lost. Bai Kwong 百代一中国时代曲名典 20. Pathe. Music download.

Bai Juyi. 《放言五首》Fifth poem, *Free the Voice*. Two lines quoted in Chapter 13: 松树千年终是朽，槿花一日自为荣. See https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%94%BE%E8%A8%80%E4%BA%94%E9%A6%96. Accessed 4 November 2017.

Burchett, W. *China's Feet Unbound.* Melbourne: World Unity Publications, 1952.

Burchett, W. *The Furtive War: The United States in Vietnam and Laos*. New York: International Publishers, 1963.

Burchett, W. *Passport: an autobiography*. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1965.

Cao Xuejin. *Hong Lou Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*). Semi-autobiographical account of the rise and decline of a powerful family in 18th Century China. A superb translation in five volumes by David Hawkes and John Minford is titled *The Story of the Stone*. London, New York: Penguin, 1973-1986.

Chen Zi'ang. *Ganyu,* poem 22. http://baike.baidu.com/view/13725536.html

Du Fu. *Ballad of the Army Carts*. Final stanza. Trans. Stephen Owen. http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat2/4sub9/entry-5602.html

Du Fu: *Dream of Li Bai No. 1* https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%A2%A6%E6%9D%8E%E7%99%BD%C2%B7%E5%85%B6%E4%B8%80. Accessed 4 November 2017.

Feng Yuanjun. "The Journey". A short story belonging to her early 'problem fiction', which focused on ideas of free love and attempts to break with traditional practices of 'filial piety', issues prevalent for women writers in the May 4 movement of 1919-1930s. In Jennifer Anderson and Theresa Munford (Eds and Trans.), *Chinese Women Writers of the 1920s and 1930s*. HK: Joint Publishing, 1985

Garner, H. *Monkey Grip*. Melbourne: McPhee-Gribble, 1977.

He Zhizhang. "*Hui Xiang Ou Shu*" (Encounter on Returning Home). http://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%9B%9E%E4%B9%A1%E5%81%B6%E4%B9%A

6%E4%BA%8C%E9%A6%96/4262349?fromtitle=%E5%9B%9E%E4%B9%A1%E5%81%B6%E4%B9%A6&fromid=2797811. Accessed 4 November 2017.

Hinton, W. Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966.

Lao She. *Luotuo Xiangzi* (*Lucky Camel Boy,* also titled *Rickshaw* and Rickshaw Boy). Originally published as a serial in the magazine *Yuzhou Feng* in 1937, translated by Foreign Languages Press in 1954.

Li Yu. 《无言独上西楼》 "I climb the Western tower in silence". https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%97%A0%E8%A8%80%E7%8B%AC%E4%B8%8A%E8%A5%BF%E6%A5%BC/54798. Accessed 4 November 2017.

Liao Kaifei. "*Jiang Qing chui peng de Lü Hou shi hedeng renwu*". *Ping Jiang Qing de nü huang meng* (*Critique of Jian Qing's Empress Fantasies*). Shanghai People's Publishing, 1977. http://trove.nla.gov.au/version/38263531.

Ling Shuhua. "The Lucky One". In Jennifer Anderson and Theresa Munford (Eds and Trans.), *Chinese Women Writers of the 1920s and 1930s*. HK: Joint Publishing, 1985.

Lu Xun.《吶喊》*Na Han* (*Call to Arms*). A collection of short stories and reminiscences written between 1918 and 1922, among them *A Madman's Diary* (19-53), *Medicine* (71-97), and *The True Story of Ah Q* (201-339). I have a bilingual edition with translations by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, published by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing in 2000.

Lu Xun. 《彷徨》*Pang Huang* (Prevarication). Beijing: Beixin Shuju, 1926.

Mao Zedong. *Swimming* (1956). http://baike.baidu.com/view/328822.htm. Accessed 4 November 2017.

Qin Tao Yu. *A Poor Girl*. Translation found in author's China journal. Also see

http://wengu.tartarie.com/wg/wengu.php?l=Tangshi&no=222. This translation by Witter Bynner, *Jade Mountain* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), reprinted by University of Virginia library as electronic version: https://www.aoi.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:ffffffff-c059-cfbc-0000-007065080a/TangPoems.pdf.

Snow, E. *Red Star Over China*. London: V. Gollancz, 1937.

Zhang Jie. "*Ai, shi buneng wangji de*" ("Love Must Not Be Forgotten"). *Beijing Wenxue*, Nov.1979. Trans. Gladys Yang, Beijing: Panda Books, 1987.

Figures

Note: Dinkus images scanned from Demin Wang, *Huabiantu Anji*（花边图案集）(Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Publishing, 1982).

All images of Mao badges from the author's collection.

Music References

Performer	Song	Album
Talking Heads	'Psycho Killer'	*Talking Heads: 77*, 1977
Iron Maiden	'Run for the Hills'	*The Number of the Beast*, 1982
Chrissy Amphlett and the Divinyls	'Boys in Town'	*Monkey Grip*, 1982 *Desperate*, 1983
Bai Guang	'Wo dengzhe ni huilai', 1948	*Tribute to Bai Guang*
Deng Lijun (Teresa Teng)	'Qian Yan Wan Yu'	1970
Instrumental	'Doe, a Deer'	Originally from *The Sound of Music*
Monty Python	'He's a Lumberjack'	*Live at Drury Lane*, 1974
Spencer Davis Group with Steve Winwood	Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out	*Autumn '66*.
King Crimson	'Elephant Talk'	*Discipline*, 1981
Guan Guimin (singer)	'Women de mingtian bi mi tian'	Song from the 1979 film *Tianmi de shiye: Honey sweet business*
Chinese national anthem	*Dongfang hong, taiyang sheng*	

Glossary

Romanised form: *pinyin*

Expression	Meaning	Comment
Aiya!	My God! My goodness!	
Aiyo!	Hey!	
anding tuanjie	stability and unity	Propaganda marking the end of the Cultural Revolution and the transition to a socialist market economy.
baibai	wave incense in worship	
baicai	Chinese cabbage	
baijiu	Lit. white spirit	Usually distilled from sorghum or maize
ban'ge zhuanjia	half an expert	
bing bang	icy pole; lit. 'ice stick'	
biyu	metaphor	
budong	don't understand	
bu zhengchang	not normal	
Chaoliu Yuekan 潮流月刊	*'Tide' Monthly*	Monthly magazine published in Hong Kong that attracted Chinese dissident voices
Chengming 争鸣月刊	*'Contention' Monthly*	Monthly magazine published in Hong Kong from 1977, which focused on Communist Party leadership.
dabizi	'big nose'; foreigner	
dajie	big older sister.	
dangranle	naturally	
danwei	work unit	
dui	That's correct. That's right.	
erhu	two-stringed bowed instrument, plaintive in tone	
fangpi	Lit. 'release wind' informal: 'nonsense, shit, rubbish'	
fanhua	irony	
fanshen	Lit. 'turn the body over'; free oneself, stand up.	The title of William Hinton's account of emancipation from serfdom in a Chinese village.
fen	smallest unit of currency,	

	'cent'	
fengci	sarcasm	
fuwuyuan	'service staff'; a communist version of a retail assistant	
Ganbei	Lit. 'dry the cup'; the call to 'bottoms up' or 'skoll'	
gaoshou	Lit. 'high hand', referring to someone with outstanding skills	
garuda	bird of Hindu mythological origins, part eagle, part human.	Name of Indonesia's national airline
Gei ni	Lit. give you. 'Here, for you.'	
gongnongbing	worker-peasant-soldier	
guanxi	connections, relationships	A system of reciprocal relationships required for individual and family economic and social security
'la guanxi'	Lit. 'to pull connections' or 'to pull strings' in English.	
gui	Lit. 'ghost'	
guimen	'boudoir door'	young vivacious unmarried female role in Peking opera
guoran	just so	
hebulai	not getting on	
huaju	spoken drama	
hukou	residence permit	
iron rice bowl	the term used to denote a centralised economy in which people get paid a wage regardless.	During the post-cultural revolution period, there was criticism that this system lowered productivity because there were no incentives to work hard.
jiayou	Lit. 'add fuel'; it's an exhortation used to spur on a team, such as 'Come on!' or 'Go!' in English	
jingju	Peking opera	
jinlai	Come in.	
jiushi!	Exactly right.	
kaishui	boiling water; boiled water	
kang	a platform made of bricks, used for sleeping and sitting.	It has space for a fire to be lit underneath in winter months.
laba	popular name for *suona*, a kind of trumpet.	*laba kuzi*: flared jeans
laobaixing	Lit. 'old hundred surnames', refers to the 'ordinary people'.	

laodong	labour	
laoshi	teacher	
laowai	Lit. 'old outsider', foreigner	Informal use
Li *礼*	a Confucian principle of acting in accordance with the rites appropriate to a given role	
Liulichang	District in Beijing that sells art and art materials	
liumang	hooligan, Lit. 'a floating lost person', suggesting the 'choice' of ostracism over 'right' social networks.	A 'criminal' category introduced in the Severe Crackdown on Crime in 1983.
luohan	Chinese term for Sanskrit 'arhat', the enlightened ones who have reached 'nirvana'.	
mafan	'hassle'; trouble, bother	
mama	mum.	
mao	ten fen; like the American dime.	
meiyou wenhua	'uncivilised'	
mi	fan, enthusiast	
mingtian	tomorrow	
Nanda	short for Nanjing Daxue or Nanjing University	
nande hutu	"It's difficult to be muddled"	Where ignorance is bliss, it's folly to be wise" http://baike.baidu.com/item难得糊涂/3534990
Ni chi	Eat!	
ni mingbai ma?	Has the sense of 'You get what I mean?'	
niangniang	spirit guardian	
Pei!	Lit. to spit; 'bullshit'	
pigu	bottom, bum	
pipa	plucked string instrument with a fretted keyboard.	Often referred to as 'a lute' in English. *Pipa Lei*: *Pipa* tears, modern Chinese opera 1978.
qi	Lit. 'air' or 'breath', refers to vital energy of life.	
qingse	An ambiguous shade – black, green or deep blue	
renminbi	'the people's currency'	
sanba	March 8; colloquial for 'annoying woman'	International Women's Day and a derogatory term for women all in one.

shagua	'melonhead'; idiot	
shifu	Skilled worker.	Term of address for the staff who worked in the dormitories
shilou	Building 10	
"Songshu qiannian zhongshi xiu, jinhua yiri ziwei rong."	"After 1000 years the pine tree finally withers, while the hibiscus flower has only one day of glory."	See Chapter 13, "Travel China Scholar Style"
Suanle!	Forget it!	
taijiquan	Usually referred to in English as Tai Chi	
tamade	Lit. 'his mother's…'; translates as an expletive like 'fucking'	
tie guanyin	Lit. 'iron guanyin' is a type of green tea	Guanyin is the Buddhist goddess of mercy
tongban	classmate	
tongxuemen	fellow students	
xiao	In the fourth tone, xiao can mean 'filial' or 'laugh'	*kexiao*: laughable
waiban	Foreign office	
waiguoren	Lit. outside country/nation person = 'foreigner'	
wansui	Lit. 10,000 years, meaning 'Long Live…'	
wei renmin fuwu	Serve the People	
wenhua	Usually referred to as 'culture', or 'civilised'	Literally, 'become patterned' or 'scripted'.
Wenming limao	Civil Politeness	
Wo bu mingbai	I don't understand	
woguo	Lit. 'I country', it has come to mean 'China'.	A term created by the party-state to bind the individual to the nation.
Women zouba!	Let's go!	
Wujiang Simei Sanre'ai	Five Stresses, Four Beautifuls, Three Loves	
wutong	Chinese parasol tree, *paulownia*	Also called the tung oil tree.
xiao	Reference to someone junior.	*xiao* + family name. Zhang *laoshi* calls Jen *xiao* An
xiaojie	Miss, Lit. 'little big sister'	Was revived post Cultural Revolution to replace the ubiquitous 'comrade'; it now means 'prostitute'.
Xiache!	Dismount (from car, bus or train)	
xiang tuzi	like a rabbit	

xuan	High quality paper good for Chinese traditional painting and calligraphy	Made in Xuancheng in Anhui province
yang guizi	Foreign devil	
yin and yang	yin = dark, passive, yielding; yang = light, active, strong	A 'complementarity of opposites' that characterize the cosmos, forever dynamic and transforming one into the other.
yin dao	Lit. 'dark way'; vagina	See Chapter 6, "Sanba"
yongpin	Lit. 'useful items'	
you sheng you se	Lit. 'Have sound, have colour'	A four character phrase describing a vibrant speech or performance.
yuan	standard unit of Chinese currency (like the dollar)	
Yuanming Yuan	Old Summer Palace	
yuanwang （冤枉）	to treat unjustly; to wrong	I believe this is what my roommate proclaimed I had done to her.
zenme shuo?	How do you say…?	
zhengchang	normal, ordinary	
zhen qiguai	really strange	
zhichi	hold on, endure	
zhong nan qing nü	Lit. 'weighty man, light woman'. Means 'Regard men as superior to women'	
zhuanjia	expert	

PART 2

Exegesis

Writing Transcultural Memoir: "*Ganyu*"

Jennifer Anderson

Table of Contents

Introduction

My memories of China are bilingual. I recall events and their emotional 'cast' in a mixture of English and Chinese and with a sense of unfinished business. "*Ganyu:* Moving Encounters in Early Post-Mao China" (hereafter referred to as "*Ganyu*"), was developed over sixteen years, and is one of an expanding number of Anglophone memoirs[1] recounting experiences of mainland China in the role of foreign student, teacher or expatriate professional. The period of this memoir, the mid-1970s to early 1980s, heralded the end of the ideology-driven Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (CR) and the beginning of a 'socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics'.[2] The memoir, set mainly in Nanjing where I lived for different periods between 1979 and 1983, is a series of stories that illuminate the enchantments and conflicts experienced by young narrator Jen in interaction with people (nationals and 'foreign') and the environment, impacted on by the process of learning Mandarin Chinese through conversation, and through literature and art.

These stories are interspersed with poems that make use of critical memory fragments in order to explore their 'time-travelling significance'. To write a 'creative' memoir is to encounter the elusive nature of memories and their interpretability in the hands of the memoirist. As a consequence, these memory fragments from my life in Nanjing have been interpreted in the light of larger forces that impact on being-becoming: patriarchy, authority, and reproductive tyranny.

---

[1] I use the term memoir to include those books in which the author makes use of diaries or journals, and recollection to give a personal perspective on mainland China. These will be explored in detail in Chapter Two.

[2] This is Deng Xiaoping's description of the new economic model driving China's Four Modernisations.

To memorialise is to exercise the right to write, to put words into the mouths of 'real' people and often to present scenes from their lives without their permission, as if the claim that one was giving testimony provided sufficient reason. In writing this memoir, I found myself wrestling with self-censorship as I questioned the ethics of manipulating the life stories of others in order to highlight my own journey of linguistic and cultural transformation, and feared attracting adverse reactions to any implied or direct criticism of the party-state, even though these encounters occurred decades ago. In particular, I have been concerned about misrepresenting people whose language and culture is not my own. These concerns have had a significant impact on the authorial perspective given to young narrator Jen.

I have called it a "transcultural"[3] memoir as I have sought to shed light on the impacts of living in two languages in a formative period of my life. Transcultural transformation is the inevitable outcome of prolonged personal engagement with Chinese language, history and literature, and immersion in the everyday life of Nanjing. Years later, it has proven to be a continuous process that takes place regardless of where I'm living. The moving encounters that have travelled through time to find their place in the memoir "*Ganyu*" invite me to turn to Chinese concepts of *xing* (evocation) and *ganying* (resonance). I also make frequent references to literary and artistic works from classic and modern canons, less in acknowledgement of the scholar's duty to engage with the past as to celebrate their contribution to my life. The memoir also raises the complex tensions I found in Chinese and Western interactions between the greater 'I' (*dawo*), a 'subject' of national and collective

[3] The term "transculturality" was first coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1965 to describe an Americas-hemispheric identity, in *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*, eds Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

allegiance, and the lesser 'I' (*xiaowo*) of the individual 'subject'.[4]

In explaining the activism inherent in his work, dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has commented: "Everything is art; everything is politics".[5] Any participant in everyday life in China is aware, directly and indirectly, of the power of the Chinese Communist Party (henceforth called 'the Party'), and this awareness was arguably more intense in 1979 than now. I arrived in China just three years after the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong and the arrest of the Gang of Four. The end of the CR was an intense period during which people sought to 'speak bitterness' and the Party sought to distance itself from collective responsibility by scapegoating the few. In this context, the authorial self who wrote the memoir is narrating a recollection of young Jen as an outsider who, as she witnessed the political swings and roundabouts that marked China's transition to a market economy, became increasingly aware that the personal narratives she heard in Nanjing expressed post-CR personal and collective trauma.

Background context

The memoir is divided into two time blocks. The first is from 1979 to 1981 when I studied at Nanjing University as a graduate student on an Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs scholarship. I had completed a BA Hons in Chinese at Melbourne University the year before, and was keen for an immersion experience in mainland China, this country I admired for its communist undertaking. My arrival coincided

---

[4] Claire Kramsch defines the subject as "a symbolic entity constituted and maintained through symbolic systems such as language…consciously constructed against the backdrop of natural and social forces that both bring it into being and threaten to destroy its freedom and autonomy…", in *The Multilingual Subject* (Oxford and NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 17.

[5] This quote appears on the back of his very own 'Little Red Book', *Weiwei-isms: Ai Weiwei*, ed. Larry Warsh (Princeton University Press, 2012).

with the return to the cities of the educated youth (*zhiqing*) who had been sent to the countryside a decade earlier to 'learn from the masses'. The centralised economy was beleaguered by poor productivity and pervasive corruption. There was relief that the ideological irrationalities of the CR were over, but the future remained uncertain. Hua Guofeng was Chairman Mao's successor, but his leadership was soon challenged by twice-rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping, a pragmatist whose mission was to create a market economy controlled by the party-state.

At Beijing Languages Institute, I sat a university entrance exam and was allocated to Nanjing University in Jiangsu Province, which had opened to foreign exchange students in 1977. In the first two years, I went through a period of disillusionment in ways somewhat similar to that of fellow Chinese students at the universities and colleges in Nanjing. During the CR, while many Chinese citizens were experiencing (and inflicting) suffering as harsh ideological conflicts ripped their society apart, in Australia my fellow students and I believed the propaganda and celebrated a joyful China working as one towards a new proletarian society. I did not heed the warning signs (and there were plenty),[6] until the horrors witnessed and performed by students, teachers and random citizens were described to me in China, and I was forced to recognise the terrible consequences inherent in a utopian mission. At this time, the Reform and Opening Up policy instituted by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 released a wave

[6] In the early 1970s, Australian academic Pierre Ryckmans (writing as Simon Leys) was a single voice of opposition against Mao and his revolution. We dismissed his grumblings as 'rightist' and 'elitist'. See Ian Buruma's lovely account "The Man Who Got it Right", *New York Review of Books*, August 15, 2013. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/08/15/simon-leys-man-who-got-it-right/, accessed July 1, 2016. I also blocked out the discomfort engendered by Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, in which he insisted that freedom of expression be sacrificed to the greater cause of dissemination of party-determined narratives. And third, why could I not see what American Sinologist Cyril Birch saw so clearly, that Lao She's 1959 'paean' to collectivised living, *Quan Jiafu*, was a flagrant propaganda piece, more than likely written under duress? I took it quite literally, at my BA Hons Chinese translation project presentation, 1978.

of intellectual criticism[7] that, by 1981, resulted in a party shutdown of freedom of expression and an attack on Western individualist and bourgeois thinking. I became an unwitting and sometimes unwilling witness: the arrest of a teacher and fellow students on the charge of corrupting behaviours; the overt racism against African students by Nanjing citizens; barriers placed between Chinese people and African and Western students;[8] desperation about marriage prospects for the thirty-year old female *zhiqing*, and from the male *zhiqing* who could not afford inflated dowries in a status-driven marriage market; housing shortages and job allocations to 'backward' places far from urban 'civilisation'; and distress caused by the one-child family policy.

As I learned more language, I became a more 'reliable' witness. The contemporary 'wound' (*shanghen*) literature I read reflected the disillusionment and sorrow of the people around me who told me their stories. However, the protagonists in this genre also brimmed with heroic spirit and hope for the future, to reflect party dictates that art should serve the Party's socialist vision. Party-censored media exhorted the people to devote their energies to the Four Modernisations. Classical and May Fourth literature have also offered up narrative tropes useful for reflection on these more recent experiences. My memoir documents the effects of these on my transcultural development.

The second block of time covers the year 1983 when I returned to Nanjing as a teacher-scholar on a Jiangsu-Victoria Teacher Exchange Fellowship, an offshoot of

---

[7] This felt similar to the Hundred Flowers Movement of 1959 when the party called on intellectuals to raise their criticisms of party direction. In this case, however, intellectuals felt called upon to make suggestions about the best way forward to achieve the Four Modernisations.

[8] As 'Third World' neighbours, the North Koreans, Vietnamese and Cambodian students were treated much like Chinese nationals. Similarly, Indian national Vikram Seth was allowed to live in the Chinese male dormitories at Nanjing University in 1980 even though he had applied to come to China from Stanford.

the establishment of sister-province relations in 1981.[9] I was determined to limit contact with Westerners and focus on developing a Chinese sensibility. The Four Modernisations policy was in full swing, marked by a new materialism and entrepreneurial spirit expressed through the free markets that sprang up across the city. Apartment stores were stacked with China-brand TVs and refrigerators. In addition to the standard *renminbi*, the *waihui* currency was introduced for foreigners and party cadres to purchase 'foreign goods' in the Friendship Stores.

Foreign students at Nanjing University had trebled. Unlike earlier cohorts they were less ideologically motivated, and keen to have fun. Affairs between foreign and Chinese students became more commonplace and the number of unemployed youth desperate to leave China grew. Chinese graduates missed out on university tenure because too many retired professors were still receiving salaries. Newspaper articles celebrating the new 'class' of millionaire farmers caused grumbles of dissatisfaction among the lowly paid intellectual 'class'. A conflict over morals flared: the Party obsessed about pornography and moral depravity while young people celebrated casual sexual experiences, despite the risk of being charged with rape or 'hooliganism' and sent to labour camps.[10]

In part I avoided losing equilibrium, as had occurred in 1981, by engaging in a welter of activities, which had become possible because my fluency in Chinese was

---

[9] Victorian Premier Dick Hamer and his Jiangsu counterpart established sister-state relations in 1981. See Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, *Expanding Our Horizons: Forty years of Australia-China collaboration and exchange in education, science and research*. Commonwealth of Australia, 2013. https://internationaleducation.gov.au/International-network/china/publications/Documents/Expanding%20Our%20Horizons.pdf.

[10] Untruthful allegations of rape, which were the result of making sexual encounters illegal outside marriage, also appalled Vera Schwarcz, whose memoir *Long Road Home: a China Journal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) will be discussed in some detail in Chapter Two.

developing, and I was becoming more 'recognisable' as a friend and colleague. In late summer Deng Xiaoping instituted a contract-based Severe Crackdown on Crime (*yanda*).[11] Population was on the rise, and hundreds of thousands of young people were graduating from high school with little chance of employment. As state-owned enterprises began to collapse, so too did the *danwei* (work unit) system, which could no longer employ young people. In addition to the increase in economic crime (as party cadres stripped factories of their assets), street crime also increased. Hooliganism, a young person's crime that seemed to be defined loosely as hanging around with Westerners, adopting Western fashions, or simply not having a work unit, attracted seven years of reform through labour. Over a few days in August 1983, tens of thousands of young people without a *danwei* or the requisite *guanxi* were cleared out of the cities on the eastern seaboard. The ruthless way in which this roundup was conducted and the subsequent 'cone of silence' that descended before the week had passed later appeared to have little impact upon me until almost twenty years later.[12]

In 1985 and 1987 I made two failed attempts to return to China to teach. In the first, my application was rejected by an acquaintance in the Chinese embassy in Canberra who was punishing me for criticising the Party in his presence at a social gathering two years earlier. By 1987 a Masters degree was needed, so I duly enrolled in Applied Linguistics and completed a year and a half before deferring to take up a teaching

---

[11] *Yanda* or the 'Severe Crackdown on Crime' has been criticised for its use of a contract system that gave bonuses for the target number of arrests, which resulted in the execution and imprisonment of people innocent of crime, or charged for ambiguous crimes such as 'hooliganism'. See Michael Dutton, "The End of the (Mass) Line?: Chinese Policing in the Era of the Contract", *Social Justice*, 2000, 27(2), 61-105.

[12] Murray Scott Tanner noted that Deng described *yanda* as the mass campaign "we simply will not call a campaign", in "Campaign-Style Policing in China and its Critics", in *Crime, Punishment and Policing in China*, ed. Børge Bakken (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005). Also see *Criminal Justice in Post-Mao China: Analysis and Documents*, eds Shao-Chuan Leng and Hungdah Chiu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985); and Susan Trevaskes, *Policing Serious Crime in China: From 'Strike hard' to 'Kill Fewer'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

position in Cambodia. The June Fourth massacre of 1989 occurred in the same week I had the job interview for Cambodia, so I was relieved to create distance between myself and China, becoming a Southeast Asian observer as opposed to a China-centric one. In all, I spent eight years between 1989 and 2000 in Cambodia and Vietnam working in bilateral and NGO programs, most of them education-focused. Oftentimes I perceived myself as a stalker skulking close to China's southern border and examining it from the perspective of its smaller neighbours. I observed how my time in China had become the yardstick by which I 'measured' all subsequent encounters in Southeast Asia; that is to say, I tended to read communicative intention from a Chinese perspective, and then make adjustments accordingly.

Of course, teaching English language and literacy in Melbourne Australia has also contributed to my transcultural identity: by the time I began writing first drafts of the memoir in the 2000s, I had taught English and Chinese language to secondary students from East Timor, Cambodia, Vietnam, Italy, Turkey, Greece, and Eastern Europe; English literacy to retrenched textile, clothing and footwear workers and to railway cleaners; and what were called Teaching English as A Second or Other Language (TESOL) courses at Masters level. As with my overseas experiences, these transcultural interactions with their focus on language and meaning have wrought significant changes upon me.

Writing the self: a process

This memoir began to write itself in 2001, when four memory fragments from my time as a young student in mainland China some twenty years earlier emerged and demanded attention. These have been transformed over successive drafts into Nanjing Madwoman, Pro-lapse, Permission to Speak and *Fenpei* with a Twist. Three of these

have become poems because this medium is more effective at capturing the entanglements of my personal encounter with the historical and political acts of violence these memories reference. I refer to them as Bridges to Future Past because the memories span the decades as "living links that connect me to my ever unfolding present",[13] or as China scholar Vera Schwarcz reflects on the role of memory for Jews post-Holocaust and mainland Chinese after the CR wrote: "Memory is the raw material that allows us to make time concrete, a bridge we cast backward to connect with those who went before us."[14] This bridge "hangs in a delicate balance between visual images of nature and contrived meanings of culture, between the dementing havoc of history and sense-making schemes of historical narrative."[15]

My memory bridges are the product of the 'demented' life writer who strives to make sense of these violent moments witnessed by her younger self in those years in China.

Some of the 'bridges' borrow from art, calligraphy and earlier poetic works, and I've used them in the Chinese sense of *xing,* an evocation or summons to 'join' or interact with the works and their makers. Thus these poems cajole me as writer to cross the divides between my well-formed Australian and less well-formed Chinese senses of self, and between the 'sense-making' memories and narratives that have accumulated over my life. As creations of the 'futuring past', they can be read as metaphors of being and becoming, as a personal *yuyan* or proverb, literally 'an abode for words'.

By 2004, concurrent with these four memory iterations, I was writing remembered fragments from the period involving people and objects that had left lasting impressions upon me: my fractious relationship with roommate Zhang *dajie*, friend

---

[13] See Chen Ran's *A Private Life* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2004), 73.

[14] Vera Schwarcz, *Bridge Across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 21.

[15] Ban Wang, *Illuminations From the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 101.

Xiao Jia's mission to have tampons manufactured and socially accepted in China, and objects of veneration such as the Mao badge and the Nanjing Big Bridge teacup. Between 2007 and 2009 I wrote drafts of the chapters I Think I'm Turning China Red, Jumping into the Sea: Opening Up and Reform, and Limbo: Return to Oz,[16] and Bridges such as Culture Shock. I began to include Tang poetry and May Fourth literature (1920s-1930s) in the stories to ground my experience in both the daily acts of translation that were part of my student life, and to reflect my characters' commonplace referencing of history or the classics to comment on present events or feelings. In effect I was emulating the Chinese literary practice of attaching myself to the narrated experiences of earlier writers and adding my own evocations (*xing*).

After I began research on the PhD in 2014, I read and transcribed the China letters returned to me by family and friends, and the infrequent journal entries I had made. This prompted the writing of three more chapters: *Aiya Mama*, House Arrest, and Strife Inside and Out. Then on a study trip to China and England in 2016, I met with three 'characters' in the memoir and our shared reminiscences released some of the emotional barriers to writing the 'difficult' stuff. In Nanjing, my reunion with *waiban* minder Wang *mama* was tearful and intimate. I felt strongly the pull of the past and regret at distancing myself from this period in my life. In Beijing, friend and artist Liu Dan gave me permission to write my version of his story, whatever was in my heart. I was filled with the joy of proximity to his person and his work, and committed a scholarly act of resonance by writing a poem upon viewing one of his episodic ink brush landscapes. In England, Theresa Munford (my co-translator of the stories by Chinese women writers of the 1920s and 1930s) 'unearthed' a cache of letters I'd

[16] Several stories begun in this period have been removed to meet thesis length requirements.

written to her in 1980-1981 that revealed valuable forgotten fragments.[17] I returned with the momentum to write 'missing' chapters and revise others, such as Travel Scholar-style, Green and Clean?, and Magnetic Disturbances.

"*Ganyu*" coalesces around particular events, some momentary, others extended over days or months. Time is a regulating fiction whose wholeness is realised only as I range back and forth between these different moments across decades. As a narration of selected lived experiences, the more striking memories may be detailed over many pages of text, while an entire 'uneventful' month may be glossed in a single line; this treatment accords with the rhythms of the lived life.[18] While the diurnal rhythms of student life in a Nanjing University dormitory were routine and unremarkable, the everyday was nonetheless intensely political, marked by successive propaganda campaigns and historical commemorations[19] that caused frequent fluctuations in this rhythm of an 'uneventful' life. These campaigns have imposed their chronology on the memoir as has the process of 'enculturation' I underwent. With increasing linguistic and cultural proficiency, I experienced and noticed more things from a Sinophone perspective.[20]

---

[17] Interestingly, none of the letters I wrote to friends and family in 1983 have resurfaced.

[18] David Malouf, for example, describes 'our' historical experience of Australia as barely visible because there are almost "no significant events", only "happenings so small…so ordinary…so endlessly repeatable that they draw no attention to themselves…" in *A First Place* (North Sydney: Knopf, 2014), 101.

[19] Some of the key policies promoted through pervasive propaganda campaigns between 1979 and 1983 included: The Four Modernisations in Industry, Defence, Agriculture, and Science and Technology; the One-Child Family policy; The Five Stresses, Four Beautifuls and Three Beloveds campaign to reinforce the party's role as moral and political guide; the inauguration of a new criminal code; the establishment of special economic zones; Public Civility Month; the Severe Crackdown on Crime; the Anti-Spiritual Pollution campaign; establishment of a 'free market'; the agricultural household responsibility system.

[20] In *Worrying About China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry*, Gloria Davies uses Sinophone to refer to the standard written language derived from the modern Chinese vernacular in 1920, which was based on the establishment of guoyu, 'the national language', modelled on the Beijing dialect, in 1913 (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 2007), 5.

Written over sixteen years in iterative engagement with objects and memories 'located' some three decades earlier, the project involves a dynamic interplay between analepsis and prolepsis as I zoom in to play the subject who is part of the unfolding drama, and then pan out "to be the spectator from afar with the wisdom of hindsight, [which is] the discoverer's sketchy map and torch".[21] This process is most evident in the Bridges to Future Past.

Transcultural memoir

This creative work is one in the vast field of life writing, or life narrative as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson refer to it.[22] As with other reflective life narratives, "*Ganyu*" is an incomplete "recognition quest, a journey towards greater awareness, realization [and] understanding"[23] that feeds into my life-plan.[24] I have called it a memoir to indicate that it focuses on a particular theme, that of language and culture acquisition, and in a contained period of time and space in my life trajectory. I ascribe the work to the genre of transcultural memoir because I seek to account for the three years I spent at Nanjing University *rehearsing* or *performing* linguistic turns and a 'Chinese' identity— "make believe"—until I "made belief" by absorbing "everyday life

---

[21] Thanks to Gloria Davies for this wonderful metaphor, personal communication with the author, 2014.

[22] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide For Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 6.

[23] For example, Richard Freadman reads Peter Rose's *Rose Boys* as an autobiographical account of recognition in "Recognition and Autobiography", *Partial Answers* 3(1), 2005,136.

[24] Charles Taylor defines a life-plan as "the expression and development of one's own opinions, the definition of one's own life conception" in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 25. Paul John Eakin refers to the life-plan as giving a "sense of direction and meaning in our lives" marking an inextricable link between identity and morality that makes ethics intrinsic to life writing as a practice, in *The Ethics of Life Writing* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 4. In my conscious examination of the memoir, I understand the need to revisit experience in order to challenge 'unconscious' and fossilised life narratives. I may be replacing one set of 'myths' with another set, but sincerely hope to develop a "critical historical consciousness" in the vein of Lu Xun and Ban Wang (see his brilliant *Illuminations From the Past*, 2004).

performativity", resulting in a shift in identity.[25]

Most life narratives dubbed 'transcultural' describe the impacts of immigration to a country that is globally or linguistically more dominant: for example, Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in A New Language* mourns her loss of Polish language as she settles into English-Canadian life; Esmerelda Santiago documents her process of 'Americanisation' in *When I Was Puerto Rican;* and Xiaolu Guo describes her struggle to understand 'the relative 'weight' of words as she negotiates a love affair in London, in *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*. My creative memoir belongs to the sub-genre of Anglophone memoirs of immersion in a foreign language, described by Australian scholar Mary Besemeres as occupying an "ambiguous position", because while they are written by "representatives or carriers of the dominant language and culture of contemporary experience", they may also be seen as "part of a wider resistance to the ascendancy of English, because they willingly traverse…its borders to explore other ways of being-in-the-world".[26] Among these, Besemeres identifies those of us who describe "learning another language as a foreigner and cultural outsider and translating the self in the process".[27] Whether the relocation is permanent or temporary, the narratives are likely to describe a self who is "fragmented, provisional, multiple, in process…influencing and being influenced by a process of transculturation".[28] Such memoirs include Peter Hessler's *River*

---

[25] See Bettina Hofmann and Monika Mueller's introduction to *Performing Ethnicity, Performing Gender: Transcultural Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 11. They borrow the distinction between 'performance' and 'performativity' from Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), and the importance of "'space' as an identity constituting category" from Lawrence Grossberg's "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is that All there Is?" In *Questions of Cultural Identity,* eds Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 87-107.

[26] Mary Besemeres, "Anglos Abroad: Memoirs of Immersion in a Foreign Language", *Biography* 28(1), 2005, 27.

[27] Ibid, 28.

[28] Rosalía Baena, "Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing", *Prose Studies,*

Town: Two Years on the Yangtse, Gillian Bouras's *A Foreign Wife*, Sarah Turnbull's *Almost French: A New Life in Paris* and John Mateer's *Semar's Cave: An Indonesian Journal*.

While writing (and re-writing) "*Ganyu*" I was conscious of wanting to evoke the ways in which I became aware of difference between 'Chinese' and 'foreign' and I have sought to elaborate how I resisted, reinforced, transcended, blurred, or embraced such difference. That is, the memoir describes the self-conscious testing of linguistic patterns, intense wondering about the origins and functions of unfamiliar cultural practices, feelings of disorientation and disillusionment caused in part by disruptions to familiar discourses, the enchantments of connection with others in a new language, and the joyful sense of becoming 'more layered' in both interactional and self-reflexive settings.[29]

"*Ganyu*" seeks to give voice to this writer's quest to develop her 'Chinese being' through recognising the importance to Chinese people of "being Chinese".[30] The stories are textual spectacles[31] that magnify relational anomalies in unfamiliar settings, and reveal some of the hidden rules, conventions and protocols that shaped the Nanjing I knew. As a student in the past and writer-narrator in the present, I am, however, calling on a limited mediated knowledge of Chinese literature and history to fill in my gaps, to intuit what many of my interlocutors meant. As educated Chinese

---

2005, 27(3), 211. Accessed 25 August 2017.

[29] Moya Cannon says, "The encounter with a new literature is an encounter with an alienated aspect of oneself", in "Reassembling the Broken Jar", *New Hibernia Review*, 2011,15(1), 11.

[30] 'Being Chinese' has at its core the sensibility of "China as a powerful metaphysical presence – the object of inquiry and perfection – which is then tacitly assigned the status of a transcendental signified (like History, Being, Truth or God)." It is not 'fixed' so much as the destination of a quest to understand and realise its quintessence. See Davies, *Worrying About China*, 23, 57.

[31] Janet Ng, *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003). This term evokes not only the fairground attraction of storytelling, but also the act of 'peering' at certain selected moments through selected lens.

they made use of aphorisms and idioms that carry complex historical and contemporary connotations I could and can only guess at. Interestingly, I have found this predicament productive, because the search for layered meanings activates my cultural and intercultural schema,[32] creating possibilities and potentialities that can only be found in these spaces of transcultural 'exploration'.[33]

The idea of writing memory as "re-membering"[34] makes sense to me, because it not only suggests the act of shaping memory bits and pieces to reconstruct 'a body' of the past; it also offers a way for my writing self to reconnect with a past life, to resume *liuxuesheng*[35] membership of Nanjing University. I can see that I activate "mnemonic imagination"[36] to animate a cast of players (including versions of myself) and objects that perform the theatre of transcultural intersubjectivity, as memory, imagination and emotion are called upon to re-create moments during which differing cultural norms and moral codes are insisted upon or 'tampered with', for good or for ill. In so doing I discover more about this period's impact on my "fragmented subjectivity".[37]

In what ways are my memories and imaginings bilingual? The visual-spatial-temporal

---

[32] I use the term 'intercultural schema' here as a corollary to 'interlanguage', an applied linguistics term signifying the in-between stage in language acquisition, when the two language and cultural systems are both drawn on to create meaning and produce utterances.

[33] This is what Kramsch refers to as "symbolic competence": "…the symbolic self of a multilingual does not merely abide by the symbolic order of the Other. It retains an 'outsideness' that enables it to play with various objective and subjective meanings". See *Multilingual Subject*, 189.

[34] Eakin says that given "…our sense of continuous identity is…the primary fiction of all self-narration, then a hyphenated 're-membering' more accurately describes the process", in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 94. For me, it also shows how I'm re-instating myself as a member of the Anglophone-Sinophone transcultural community.

[35] *Liuxuesheng*: 'foreign student studying in China'.

[36] Emily Keightly and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering As Creative Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[37] David Parker uses this term to describe bicultural life writers, in "Locating the Self in Moral Space: Globalisation and Autobiography". In *Selves Crossing Cultures: Autobiography and Globalisation,* ed. Rosemary Dalziell (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002), 3-21.

framing of involuntary recollections is performed in English because this is my first and more dominant language of thought; my interpretations of these fragments takes place in one or both languages and 'cultural frames', as do voluntary recollections, depending on topic or theme. Some memories have been sparked by Chinese-English translation, aptly described by Kornelia Slavova and Ann Phoenix as "not simply a linguistic movement of words and texts from one language into another but a movement of selves in/through language to other places, cultures, selves and positions".[38]

In addition to embodied affective responses, my experience is translated and interpreted through Chinese and English discourses (heteroglossia) and the processing of information or knowledge of everyday 'interactions',[39] which inform my construction of the identities and voices of characters in "*Ganyu*".[40] Cultural interanimation is further enhanced by employment of "parodic travestying" devices[41] (self-parody in the main) to depict the sometimes funny, sometimes excruciating process of other-language acquisition. Two dominant discourses are used daily in mainland China: *putonghua* or 'ordinary language', and the language of the Chinese

---

[38] Kornelia Slavova and Ann Phoenix, "Living in Translation: Voicing and Inscribing Women's Lives and Practices", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2011, 18(4), 331.

[39] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 32. Also see Mikhail Bakhtin on heteroglossia, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by MM Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 67. These discourse types with their own 'rules' (linguistic and ideological) have shaped my thinking, speaking and writing self. In exposing myself to and reflecting on differences in new discourses, I catch glimpses of my own 'internalised' discourses.

[40] As Stuart Hall notes, "identity is always in process and always constituted within, not outside representation", in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392.

[41] Of this technique, Mikhail Bakhtin says, "Parodic-travestying literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter…the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly too contradictory and heteroglot to be fit into a high and straightforward genre". See "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" in *The Dialogic Imagination,* 55.

party-state, or what Geremie Barmé has dubbed 'New China Newspeak.[42] The language form 'chosen' for characters in the memoir reflects their allegiance in a given moment: political affiliation to state and party, or social affiliation to daily-practiced identities.

The memoir "*Ganyu*" reveals elements of Chinese poetics at structural and textual levels. In its fictionalised but historically factual form, the 'creative' memoir can be seen as an unofficial history or *xiaoshuo.* This translates as 'fiction' but it more literally references quotidian exchanges among the 'masses', a polyphony of opinionated, emotion-driven utterances that could pose a threat to officially sanctioned discourse.[43] I use this term in emulation of Chinese Women writers in the May Fourth period such as Xiao Hong (1911-1942) and Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing, 1920-1995) who wrote *xiaoshuo* as thinly veiled autobiographies about their struggle to develop a new way of being a woman in the modern world, freed from Confucian family constraints but still marginalised by revolutionary men.[44] This memoir is a thinly veiled *xiaoshuo* about a young Australian woman in China in the late 1970s wrestling with a new way of being a woman in the globalising world, and acutely aware of and frustrated by the patriarchal constraints that have tainted her worldview.

---

[42] Geremie Barmé's term encapsulates the development and dissemination of party discourse through the party-controlled New China News Agency. See 'New China Newspeak', *China Heritage Quarterly*, no.29 March 2012. http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/glossary.php?searchterm=029_xinhua.inc&issue=029, accessed 30 Jan 2015.

[43] Hsiao-peng Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality: the Chinese Poetics of Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 163. The classic novel Cao Xuejin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, believed to be semi-autobiographical, opens with the comment: "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real". Mikhail Bakhtin in "Discourse in the Novel", *Dialogic Imagination* (259), and Janet Ng in *Experience of Modernity* (1) both argue that any literary form reflects a worldview and an ideology.

[44] See Janet Ng's doctoral dissertation "Autobiography in Modern Chinese Literature (1911-1950): Forms of Literary Expression of the Self in Society", Columbia University, 1993. Proquest, 9412820.

The Western contemporary memoir offers a further challenge to formalism: its 'instability' of form and content reflects the writer's intention to get at the essence of things, and to challenge prevailing 'normative' discourses.

"*Ganyu*" references Chinese auto/biographical literature in other ways: it deals with the fallout from the CR, a period that could easily be characterised as indicative of 'dynastic decline', and it captures Chinese friends and scholars reflecting upon their ascribed social roles and the meaning of their lives.[45] Some of the stories in the memoir reveal alienation and disillusionment with the party-state, and periods of travel are not unlike self-imposed exile from the suffocating hothouse of politicised everyday life inside the dormitory and beyond. Further, like the literati biographies of old, it clearly identifies itself as an account of self-cultivation (*xiushen*), albeit one told by a 'nobody'[46] in a semi-chronological, non-hagiographic form. The memoir plays with ideas of double voice or self-imitation, and the interweaving of different sources past and present.[47]

Beyond wanting to reveal a process of transcultural transformation, I would like this memoir to be seen as embracing a humanist, cosmopolitan view: one that emphasises and celebrates shared diversity and unshared particularity in a globalised world.[48] I

---

[45] Between 1979 and 1983 a new generation of 'life writers' penned their disillusionment with the violence and ultimate ideological pointlessness of the CR in acts of resistance to party-directed uniformity and empty performances of political correctness, and a search for spiritual healing, often in the Buddhist and Taoist traditions. See the accounts of self-exile through remote areas of China in dissident artist Ma Jian's account *Red Dust: A Path Through China* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), and Gao Xingjian's Nobel Prize-winning travelogue *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (New York: Perennial, 2001).

[46] A term coined by Lorraine Adams, "Almost Famous: The Rise of the 'Nobody Memoir.'" *Washington Post*, 10 April 2002.

[47] See features of Chinese poetics identified by Nicholas Williams in *Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics*. Brill DOI: 10.1163/9789004282452, http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/9789004282452, 2014, 19.

[48] Diversity is often understood as "You be you and I'll be me"; I prefer "We're all in this together in our different ways". See Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Contamination", *The New York Times*, 1 Jan, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/magazine/the-case-

have written it as an alternative *pu* that liberates me from the conflicting codes of *zhongwen* (China 'patterns' that insist on being 'inside') and, as it were, *aodaliyawen* (Australia 'patterns' relegated to the 'outside').[49] Rather than reliance on a single code or canon (*kaopu*), I can engage in the outrageous act of *lipu*, of leaving the codes behind.[50]

The unwitting result of the Chinese party-state's bringing people from across the world to 'learn from China' was the creation of a transcultural hotspot that has resulted in significant personal transformations for many of those involved. Enduring and deep friendships have been made across national and cultural boundaries; lost friendships have since been recovered as many of us move into the late phase of our careers and seek to reconnect with people we have met and been influenced by along the way; and new friendships are formed through China-focus social media groups. The students who studied together in Chinese universities in the late 1970s and early 1980s are now located all over the globe: some of our Chinese friends and acquaintances have since moved to Europe, the U.S and Australia while some of our 'foreign' friends have spent their lives in China.

In 2017, mainland China has a huge global presence; its economic success is essential to the economies of many other nations, including Australia. The second-generation children of mainland Chinese students who sought asylum in Australia after the June Fourth massacre in 1989 provide a powerful contrast in views with many more recent

---

for-contamination.html, 1-17.

[49] *Pu* (谱) are texts that 'teach' how to do something correctly: a primer, musical score, model or genre. As such it lays out the 'code for communication'. The character *wen* (文) refers to writing, but at its root it means 'patterning', which can also mean 'codifying'. The terms 'inside' (*nei* 内) and 'outside' (*wai* 外) are used frequently in mainland Chinese to denote belonging, inclusivity, us-ness in contrast to 'beyond recognition', exclusion, and other-ness.

[50] The term *kaopu* (靠谱) is a frequently used collocation meaning to rely on or follow the code; its opposite *lipu* (离谱) has the literal meaning 'to leave the code', but is usually translated as 'outrageous'.

international students and tourists from mainland China whose political positions reflect those of the party-state. Contemporary Australians are struggling to come to terms with China's economic dominance and its effective use of soft power, which has the potential to influence Australia's domestic policy and practice.[51] Meanwhile in China, there is an underground movement afoot, sponsored by the magazine *Remembrance,*[52] to offer people a chance to voice their sorrow and regret about perpetrating violent acts against parents, teachers, colleagues and other classes or labels during the CR. The Party monitors this closely, and silences those with intimate connections to high-level cadres. Xi Jinping, who is President, General Secretary of the CCP, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, or "Chairman of Everything" (COE) as Barmé has dubbed him, is clamping down on corruption in the Party's ranks, banning any talk of 'liberalism' and promoting nationalism, even reportedly promoting state-owned enterprises and a strong party leadership with himself elevated to a Mao-like status.[53] At the recent 19th National Party Congress (18-25 October 2017), Xi's performance confirmed this trend. Candid accounts of the past and critical engagement with history become less likely *and* more important than ever, not only in China but everywhere.

---

[51] See ABC *Four Corners* report "The Chinese Communist Party's Power and Influence in Australia", 5 June 2017. http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-04/the-chinese-communist-partys-power-and-influence-in-australia/8584270, accessed 2 September 2017.

[52] *Remembrance*《记忆》is an online journal established in 2008. Its original mission to publish research on the Cultural Revolution has since been broadened in 2012 to include any research on literature and history, although most of the articles are about the CR. Issues from 2008 to 2016 can be found at www.prchistory.org/remembrance.

[53] Cited in Greg Sheridan, "Xi Jinping: China's Emperor at the Crossroads", *The Australian*, 16 July 2016. http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/greg-sheridan/xi-jinping-chinas-emperor-at-the-crossroads/news-story/9f2d5d7b34a0d6b746e63ff49d0057ff, accessed 24 August 2016.

Chapter One[54] of the exegesis explores transcultural memoir's expression of relationality and resonance, the representation of self and others, and the implied reader's engagement. Chapter Two investigates six Anglophone memoirs set in the late CR and early post-Mao periods, and argues that "*Ganyu*" is unique in highlighting the role of transcultural interactions in the author's self-transformation. The literary techniques and poetics I have drawn on to produce this memoir are discussed in Chapter Three.

[54] Note that for purposes of contrast, exegesis chapter numbers are spelt out while memoir chapters are referred to using numeric symbols.

Chapter 1 On Writing Transcultural Memoir

The highest morality is not to feel at home in one's own home.
Theodor Adorno[1]

In writing "*Ganyu*" I found a way of articulating my 'being-becoming' through experiences of *moving encounters* in early post-Mao China. Over the memoir's sixteen-year development, the feelings of guilt about my incapacity to protect Nanjing friends and acquaintances from Chinese state interventions or, indeed, from myself, became merged with a larger pursuit of self-discovery, or *xiushen* ('self-cultivation') as the activity is called in Chinese.[2] Yet unlike the acts of *xiushen* of the Chinese scholars I admire, mine did not have the nation's improvement in mind so much as a desire to understand what it was about my China experience that was both haunting *and* sustaining me.

The stories in the memoir reveal different aspects of transcultural intersubjectivity: first, as I wrote the memoir, I was struck by the extent to which being a second language learner influenced my experiences; then I became aware that my use of language, both then and now, reflects influences from Western and Chinese vernacular and literary forms; third, I noticed that I was seeking to describe the emotional impact of relating to local and international students, teachers, and the wider community around Nanjing University, as well as authors and characters in Chinese literature; and finally, I was driven to pinpoint the 'hidden meanings' behind

---

[1] Theodor Adorno, "Fragment No. 18", *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* [1951], translated and edited by E.F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978).

[2] Karyn Lai explains *xiushen* as: "…a complex process of self-definition…[that] shatters the theoretical dichotomy of self and society commonly assumed and unquestioned in western traditions." In *Learning From Chinese Philosophies: Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualised Self* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), 13-14.

specific memories, to view them as challenges to the narratives I had internalised about 'how life works'.

In writing these stories, I have been acutely aware that I cannot give an accurate account of experiences thirty years after their occurrence. While these experiences certainly occurred, my memories of them are necessarily faulty, not least because many of them are built upon limited linguistic proficiency reflecting patchy cultural and symbolic capital. Cultural capital, after all, is dependent on language proficiency acquired through institutions of family and education,[3] and similarly, symbolic capital is required to fully comprehend performative utterances that are dependent on their sociological context as 'institutional' acts.[4]

My recollections have been further complicated by the psychological frame of the writing "I", who witnessed in her youth but did not fully appreciate the suffering of many who would now be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the incomprehensible violence and social disruption that characterised the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (CR).[5] In recreating my encounters with these people and others, surely I am compelling them to 'fit' with how I want to present my life narrative? Can I justify this act?

The following subsections attempt to locate the transcultural memoir "*Ganyu*" in the context of writing about intersubjectivity. In "Relationality", I explore the internalised dilemma of belonging/not-belonging for the multilingual subject, further complicated by social and political constraints on relationship-making between Chinese and foreign students in China during this period. In "Resonance" I explore the meaningful relationships I formed with my Chinese teachers and fellow-students using the

---

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 61-62.
[4] Ibid., 72-76.
[5] Wang, *Illuminations from the Past*.

Bakhtinian notion of exotopy in contrast to empathy, and Chinese concepts of *xing* and *ganying*, in order to explain how people come together despite their different worldviews, or make a serious attempt to see themselves as others see them. In "Representation", I investigate the multiple positions of the writer-narrator, and address the right to re-create the stories of others, to share their misfortunes and their achievements, and to do it using constructed dialogue. I suggest that the border between appropriation and 'permission' is best defined by attempts to achieve exotopy with each character, either directly through young Jen the narrator, or through her older writing 'other/self'.

1.1 Relationality

These remembered encounters from long ago are important to me because they are life-forming, and because the relationships were cut short after I left China in 1983. In consequence I construct my writing and narrating self in relationship to these others through textual "webs of interlocution".[6] Transcultural immersion memoirs reveal the impacts of encounters with those who inhabit an unfamiliar political and cultural context, and I believe these are best given expression through dialogic exchanges and observations of behaviour or conduct. Central to the experience is the memoirist's endeavour to learn language, to confront cultural preconceptions (one's own and those of others) and to accommodate new identities that emerge as a result. My experience of this is described in "*Ganyu*" as a seesaw of affective positioning, between acceptance and resistance, resonance and dissonance, joy and sorrow, revelation and discombobulation.

---

[6] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 36. Also see Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 52; and Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 86: "One's story is bound up with that of another".

The foreign language learner and 'strangerhood'

"*Ganyu*" shares the discourse features of foreign language learning testimonials gathered by applied linguists.[7] From the outset, young Jen the narrator is figured as an outsider in Melbourne with "a predisposition for separation…a desire to escape from the ordinary".[8] The memoir can also be read as a series of turning points that announce steps towards achieving insider status in an unfamiliar place, an "idealized image of myself"[9], through thick description of subjective responses to dialogic encounters that mark key moments of belonging and not belonging.[10] Note that this is not a one-way journey toward 'insider status'. Sometimes young Jen gets access to and/or takes advantage of the "material and symbolic resources"[11] necessary to approximate 'being Chinese'. Sometimes the resources are not available to her; and there are times when Jen does not or cannot make use of them because she is overwhelmed by the threat to her own "integrity as a subject".[12] She imposes alienation upon herself, revealing the persistent "psychological disposition of the foreigner-stranger…caught in a dialectic between erecting and dissolving 'the clear cut boundaries between same and others'".[13] Thus the foreign language context not only decentres the language learner (as Kramsch argues, "the experience of the

---

[7] See Simon Coffey's excellent analysis in "Strangerhood and Intercultural Subjectivity", *Intercultural Communication*, 2013, 13 (3), 274, which builds on ideas in Kramsch's *Multilingual Subject*.

[8] Coffey, ibid., 271.The foreign language learner experiences this feeling of being 'strange' at home, and desires to "escape the limits of one's skin". Claire Kramsch's embodied description accords with my own remembered 'performative' desire to experience being 'other'. See *Multilingual Subject,* 61. Also see S. Coffey and B. Street, "Narrative and Identity in the Language Learning Project", *Modern Language Journal*, 2008, 92(3), 452-464.

[9] Kramsch, *Multilingual Subject*, 15.

[10] Coffey, "Strangerhood", 276.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Kramsch, *Multilingual Subject*, 15.

[13] Coffey cites Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. L.S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 147. I am convinced by Kristeva's view that to be human is to be 'foreign': "…we are our own foreigners, we are divided", 181.

foreign always implies a reconsideration of the familiar");[14] the learner's strangeness to others also impacts on interactions. This two-way decentring is explicitly described in Peter Hessler's *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtse*.[15] Categorised by life writing scholar Mary Besemeres as a "dialogic" language travel memoir, Hessler observes how his teachers and students interpret his words and behaviours in ways that challenge his "unexamined Anglophone preconceptions and prejudices", such that he is "reoriented…by the experience".[16] So too in "*Ganyu*", the reader observes young Jen consciously engaging with heteroglossia, which "ruptures the mythological relationship to language, showing the gap between words and their meanings".[17]

This memoir also describes the persistence of strangerhood upon the foreign language learner's return 'home': in the final chapter, the expectation of a seamless re-entry into joyful familiarity is shattered by the encounter with a home that feels not quite like home. Young Jen describes returning to Melbourne as a foreigner "from nowhere, from everywhere, citizen of the world, cosmopolitan,"[18] whose recent experiences and the friendships she's made are 'untranslatable'. This is not a uniquely Australian experience, and yet one cannot help but agree with Brian Castro that in this island nation, "hybridity or its shadow, miscegenation, has always been viewed…with a kind of embarrassment or puzzlement."[19] And yet, it is this very sense of discomfort

---

[14] Claire Kramsch, *Multilingual Subject*, 5.

[15] Peter Hessler, *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtse* (London: Harper Collins, 2001).

[16] See Besemeres' "Anglos Abroad" and David Parker's introduction "Inhabiting Multiple Worlds: Auto/Biography in an (Anti-) Global Age", *Biography* 28(1), 2005, ix. Accessed 8 June 2015.

[17] Andrew Robinson, "Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia", *Ceasefire Magazine*, July 29, 2011, 5. http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk /in-theory-bakhtin-1/, accessed 30 May 2017.

[18] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers,* 30.

[19] Brian Castro, "Writing Asia", in *Writing Asia and Auto/biography: Two Lectures* (Canberra: University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, 1995), 7.

in familiarity that challenges "parochial loyalties"[20] and the idea of a fixed cultural identity, offering opportunities for a much more encompassing view of the human condition, as Adorno's quote about home in the epigraph to this chapter suggests.[21]

Jen wavers between defiance—"Do not send [me] back to [my] origins"[22]—and the melancholy of being an exile all over again, with a different but equally "ambivalent and unsatisfactory yearning"[23] to belong. There is no choosing between one or other state. It is how it is. What remains is the emotional tenor of having been "sliced into fragments and episodes"[24] as dictated by the social groups I seek to attach myself to, and this memoir is an attempt to use the wisdom of hindsight to create narrative about this experience.

Intersubjective relationality

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest that intersubjective relationality in life narratives can be classified based on the relative distance accorded the 'characters' by the writer/narrator: historical others, contingent others and significant others.[25] According to this system, my writing self should be seen as engaging in 'historical' relations with almost everyone: I have had no contact with most of the characters in the memoir since 1983, and in fact many were 'forgotten' until they bobbed up like Virginia Woolf's corks[26] in 2001-2002. Curiously, from my writing self's perspective, the most significant psychological relationships are with those four distant strangers

---

[20] Ibid.

[21] Also see Martha Nussbaum's review of Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, "The End of Orthodoxy", in *The New York Times on the Web,* 18 February, 2001, para 1. http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/02/18/reviews/010218.18nussbat.html, accessed 30 October 2017.

[22] Kristeva, *Strangers,* 30.

[23] Coffey, "Strangerhood", 277-278.

[24] Zygmunt Bauman cited in ibid., 273.

[25] *Reading Autobiography*, 88-89.

[26] See the Introduction to this exegesis.

whose hauntings have led to the writing of the memoir, and with the re-figured important others who feature in the stories.

Young Jen's historical others include Chinese classical scholars, painters and poets and their works, May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun and Feng Yuanjun, communist leaders Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, Western sinophone writers and scholars such as William Hinton and Edgar Snow, the countless nameless Red Guards and 'stinking ninth' intellectuals of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and revolutionary poster boy Lei Feng.

Contingent others include many of the African and Western students living in university dormitories around Nanjing, whose roles in this memoir are to 'highlight' relationality with China and Chinese others. For example, the African student experience of China is described as very different to the Western experience: while Westerners are framed as useful to modernisation though threatening to China's moral fabric, the African students are framed as needing China's help *and* as beneath civility. The evident racism against the African students results in their reluctance to use Mandarin Chinese except as a study tool. Likewise, young Jen's relations with these students are constrained by the different treatment they receive, by their relative economic poverty and by the absence of a shared mutually 'agreeable' language. Young Jen's relations with Western student 'characters' highlight the prevailing issues of the time such as party surveillance, feminist critiques of gender equality, sexual exploration, or shared linguistic and cultural tips for 'fitting in'. I have changed the names and distinguishing features of many of these 'supporting characters' because of the secondary roles they play.

Contingent others also include the Chinese people in the towns and cities of Eastern China during this early post-Mao period. They are represented as displaying a

‘unified’ attitude to the presence of non-Chinese people in their ‘land’. Conversations initiated by passing Chinese interlocutors are described as formulaic and conducted in terms of ‘practicing English’, a motivation young Jen found offensive to her sense of self as a willing conversationalist. Many of the interactions initiated in Mandarin by young Jen did not meet Chinese expectations and so were rarely understood. Her assumption, therefore, that her audience cannot imagine a foreigner who can speak Chinese is only partly true.[27] A common Western complaint was that of being made to feel like ‘an alien’, ‘an ape’ or ‘a Martian’.[28] These instances of stimulus-response that resisted nuanced interpretation were triggered by unexpected reactions, which, from the Western ‘dominant’ perspective, were intensely uncomfortable. At the same time Western students suffered from being privileged, and from guilt for ‘the sins of our forefathers’, reflecting Claire Conceison’s observation regarding her early interactions in China at the turn of this century, that being foreign tended to make her “complicit in my own ‘victimization’, unwittingly contributing to discrimination against myself”.[29]

Significant others can be read as the key players in the memoir stories, those Chinese teachers, friends and acquaintances whose relationship-building with young Jen aided in her ‘transcultural transformation’. While all of these had official permission to engage with Jen, some are described as inviting her into friendships based on sharing ‘hybrid’ ways of thinking and seeing, and of encouraging her in ‘cosmopolitan

---

[27] In Tani Barlow and Donald Lowe’s account of their experience at a Shanghai teacher’s college in 1983-84, Tani suggests that Westerners in the street were assumed to have no *danwei*, so as an ‘outsider’ with no relations to create a social connection, they were ‘unrelatable’. This also rings true. See *Teaching China’s Lost Generation: Foreign Experts in the PRC* (San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals, 1987), 26.

[28] Julia Kristeva, “About Chinese Women”, cited in Claire Conceison, *Significant Other: Staging the American in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 1. They are the descriptors we used in 1979-1981.

[29] Claire Conceison, *Significant Other*, 4.

intellectual' knowledge sharing, which served to mutually shape their different understandings. Some are shown as seeking connection in order to speak what was in their heart, or *shuo xin hua*. These are the people who found in Jen, as she found in them, that intuitive spark of recognition.

Young Jen was surprised to find that educated Chinese exhibited more 'cosmopolitan hybrid' influences than the Anglo-Saxon 'counterparts' she knew in Australia at the time. Marxist-Leninist ideology had been transmitted to China via Russian and Japanese translations, and many people were familiar with Russian, Indian, and Western European classical literature, music and art.[30] Inevitably, interpretation of these cultural artefacts took on a Chinese sheen as determined by cultural and linguistic non-equivalence and ideological intentions.[31] The acknowledgement of our shared 'contamination', however, did not mean either side desired the demise of local difference. Globalisation was not yet a buzzword, so there was no desire to create a "universal history…to loosen the individual's local allegiance in favour of universal standards".[32] Jen and her friends were, in fact, acknowledging and celebrating culturally mediated difference.

I visited China at a time when Mao Zedong was still a powerful symbol of revolution, still publicly validated by many Chinese citizens and party officials as the leader who liberated China to establish a communist nation, and privately discussed among Western, African and Chinese acquaintances as an impressive political and military

---

[30] Even in the CR, banned books were shared, as described in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (New York: Random House, 2000).

[31] Shaobo Xie, "Displacement, Transformation, Hybridization: Translation and Chinese Modernity", *Neohelicon, 2007,* XXXIV (2), 61-76. Also see Qiuxia Jiang and Xiaohui Quan, "Ideological Impacts on Literary Translation – A Descriptive Study of Translated Literature in 1910-1981 and 1979-1999 in China", *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies,* 2015, 2(3).

[32] Wang, *Illuminations From the Past*, 2.

strategist and theoretician. Most of us were more than willing to condemn his wife Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four for the violence of the CR, and tried not to ponder his involvement in the anti-rightist movement of the late 1950s or the famine of the early 1960s. By 1983, however, the cracks in our consciousness and consciences were too wide to sustain Mao's squeaky-clean reputation. Despite this, I continue to be reserved in my condemnation of Mao. In the chapter Icon fantasies: Souvenir, I've written for young Jen: "I just wish he had been *a slightly less brutal* conductor of transformation."[33]

The Chinese Communist Party is another complicated symbol that shaped the relationships I formed. For example, my memoir shows how Chinese-Western relationships were 'regulated' by reactions to official party discourse regarding China's progress towards the Four Modernisations and related campaigns. It shows how this linguistic and ideological 'patterning' (*wen*) was reinforced through literature and art, and how my teachers were forced to self-censor to avoid party retribution, or else engage with ideas indirectly in the hope that responsive readers or listeners might apprehend "the letting out of a regretful sigh".[34]

My conflicted feelings about the over-weaning authority of the Party and its propensity to take away the freedom of citizens who do not or cannot bend to its will is no doubt familiar to my Chinese friends and acquaintances, in part because it was developed in interaction with them. I recall swinging, and perhaps still swing, between condemnation and over-compensation. For example, the memoir records

---

[33] It was my PhD supervisor, Professor Gloria Davies, who wondered aloud about this wording, thereby casting a spotlight on the internalised position I appear to hold.

[34] Lu Xun had to self-censor during the Nationalist Government period around 1927. He continues: "The sighing of slaves might well be harmless, but the master will feel nervous all the same". See Gloria Davies, *Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence* (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 2013), 67.

with some diffidence how young Jen witnessed the violent detainment of a young man who came to represent the tens of thousands of unemployed youth arrested along with alleged criminals and *liumang*[35] in the Severe Crackdown on Crime, and their transport to labor camps in China's far northwest in the summer of 1983. Twenty years after the event, I have used this memory to represent resistance to collective amnesia.[36] This is contrary to the motive of some life writers, to put difficult past experiences 'out there' so they can be forgotten. Instead, I seek to make it part of my "ongoing narrative, actively transformed by the present process of recollection".[37]

In 2014, I came across these two statements by Margalit: "The source of the obligation to remember…comes from the effort of radical evil forces to undermine morality itself by, among other means, rewriting the past and controlling collective memory"; and "…many potential witnesses are blackmailed into silence not by direct threats to themselves personally but by threats directed to their relatives and friends."[38] It shocks me to note that even as I give myself permission to speak in the present, I balk at calling the Party's whitewashing revisionism 'radical' or 'evil'. Even my use of jargon such as 'whitewashing revisionism' recalls New China Newspeak, which strips the criticism of its essential emotional weight. I appear to

---

[35] During this period, *liumang* was a political and legal term for anyone who did not 'fit into the system': unemployed young people who were cheeky to others, who had casual sex, who wore Western fashions, who listened to pop music, or who were petty thieves. In contrast to this view, my Western dorm mates viewed them as an "embryonic alternative culture" akin to the 1960s' Beat generation. Apolitical, unemployed and disillusioned, they struck a powerful counterpoint to the Party's promotion of 'spiritual civilisation'. See John Minford, "Picking up the Pieces", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 August 1985, 30-32.

[36] Walter Benjamin in *Berlin Childhood Around 1900,* says, "Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre", trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge MASS and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 27.

[37] See Michael Sheringham, "Autobiographical Turning Points: Remembering and Forgetting", *Literator*, 36(2), 2015, 1-8. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v36i2.1229, accessed 3 May 2017.

[38] Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge MASS: Harvard University Press, 2002), 83 and 150.

have been ideologically "hailed", as Louis Althusser might say.[39] On the other hand, my ambivalence could in fact reflect that I was never totally in the thrall of Mao and the ideological utopian mission of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (CR); my reaction is mild in comparison to Chinese-Canadian Jan Wong's flip from rabid 'red' to rabid anti-Communist,[40] for instance.

From a citizen's point of view, a powerful force demanding compliance is likely to be met with resistance,[41] the manifestation of which is creative, energising, and often romantic in the sense that many of these acts of resistance, while being too small to change the status quo, make life tolerable. Liao's 'rescue drowning' of an antique statue during the CR is such as act. While condemned as counter-revolutionary at the time, it might have been applauded as heroic after 1978, and yet Liao does not publicise the act, perhaps because he knows the limits of his own *guanxi* and the arbitrary nature of the Party's power.[42] In a sense, this memoir is also an act of resistance to my internalised tendencies to be silent, to be compliant.

1.2 Resonance

One undergoes 'becoming' or maturation by selectively assimilating others' perspectives.
Andrew Robinson[43]

The many internally and externally imposed hindrances to relationship-making that I

---

[39] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation", trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press), 1971. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm, accessed 2 September 2017.

[40] Jan Wong's memoir *Red China Blues: My March from Mao to Now* (Moorbank, NSW: Doubleday, 1996) will be discussed in Chapter Two.

[41] Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of a Prison* (London, Penguin, 1991); Mikhail Bakhtin in *Dialogic Imagination*, 1981; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 1994; and Jørge Bakken on China, in *The Exemplary Society,* 2000.

[42] See Anderson, Chapter 4 Unmaking Revolution: Early Lessons, "*Ganyu*".

[43] Robinson, "Bakhtin: Polyphony", Part 1", 5.

remember and describe in "*Ganyu*" are countered by memories that arrive as intense emotional 'refrains' that sing to the relationships young Jen did manage to form with significant Chinese interlocutors. This response is aptly expressed in the Chinese literary concept of *xing*, a technique of evocation that seeks to capture for the reader an image or moment in the first line of a poem "in the hope of arriving intuitively at associations comparable to the writer's own. In this way every comprehension of the poem becomes an occasion for the meeting of the minds between the reader and the writer."[44] I use it to refer to those remembered moments in which I felt (feel) myself drawn beyond an Anglophone frame and into another symbolic realm. I deliberately use the word 'refrain' to emphasise that in remembering these encounters I experience a resonant music and rhythm, which activates my imagination and the memoirist's desire to *shuo xin hua*, to create an interpretation of the intense cognitive and affective experience that constitutes relationship with others in Chinese.

The term 'resonance' is usually used in life writing to refer to the reader's response to the narrative subject and her story. Two terms explored in relation to life narratives and the novel that suggest resonance in relationship, however, are *empathy,* which assumes that a *complete* 'I' exists outside a dialogical relationship to another, and *exotopy,* as demonstrated by placing the characters and their feelings at the centre of the experience, and attempting to "see the world through the other's values."[45]

I have found it useful to see the encounters I narrate in "*Ganyu*" as either empathetic or exotopic, or as shifting between these two states. In my mind, empathy is the starting point for exotopy. For example, the imagined act of slipping into the roles of

---

[44] Nicholas Williams, *Imitations of the Self*, 2014.

[45] Exotopy is contrasted with empathy in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 164. The quotation comes from M. Bakhtin's "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, eds Michael Holquist and Viadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 78.

others is driven by a desire to know what it would be like in another's 'headspace'. Exotopy is more evident in older writer Jen's recollection of dormitory friend Jin Lei's gifting young Jen with the image of Mao she had worn during the CR. Jin is understood to have offered it so it would not be 'lost' in the official drive to divest the population of Mao memorabilia, and because she knows Jen has a genuine interest in the messages in CR propaganda poster art. While Jin gives her permission to do with it as she likes, Jen senses that this treasure is not for public consumption, perceiving it as a deeply personal symbol of a rapidly receding cult of Maoism.

In the semester exams, young Jen honours her teacher Wang *laoshi* by penning an essay on Lu Xun's "Story of Ah Q" using key points memorised from the party-approved textbook, and keeping secret their more nuanced analysis; and when Jen is described as attempting to understand how Ding Hao is experiencing the sacred mountain of Tai Shan, she is seeing him as "a co-subject: one to whom [she] listens when he speaks, whom [she] speaks to, whose words [she] includes in [her] own speech…[she is] involved in a real encounter with the other person in terms of his own self-understanding".[46]

"*Ganyu*" shows young Jen forming relationships with the memoir's host of 'characters' while older writer Jen reflects on the complex legacies of these relationships. Young Jen's broken relationship with roommate Zhang *dajie*[47] is a case in point: Jen meets Zhang's attempts to 'acculturate' her with sullen resistance, and the more she resists, the more Zhang becomes hidden, unknowable. She does not respect 'big sister' Zhang as age seniority dictates; she just wants Zhang to like her

---

[46] Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri, "The Acting Subject of Bakhtin", in *Bakhtin and His Others: (Inter)subjectivity, Chronotope, Dialogism*, eds Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2013), xxi.

[47] *Dajie* means 'elder sister', hierarchically senior. See Chapter 5 Divorce, "*Ganyu*".

‘as she is’. Zhang triggers in Jen the contradictory desires of the ‘stranger’: to assert her independent otherness and to belong. There is empathy between Zhang and young Jen on the odd occasion, but it takes time after the ‘divorce’ for Jen to experience ‘exotopically’ what Zhang must have been going through.

My representation of tampon crusader Xiao Jia offers an example of mutually operating exotopy. Mutual intention, that “match between what is happening and what the brain is primed to anticipate,”[48] which in this case relates to the experience of being a woman, allows communication to flow. Rather than pass judgment on Jen’s poor Mandarin abilities, Xiao Jia facilitates understanding by modifying her language and offering comprehensible words and phrases that allow them to interact on the topic of shared interest.

As with Xiao Jia, Liao Kaifei and young Jen indicate interest in understanding each other’s perspectives. I was conscious that my Chinese teacher was trying to find out what made me culturally Australian and I wanted to know as much as he could tell me about Chinese literary history. I recall that I felt frustrated by my inability to express my thoughts in this other language, Chinese. In writing the memoir, however, I became aware that those limitations also allowed me to engage in a relatively content-free conversation in which I learned something about the Chinese way to say what’s in one’s heart. Young Jen’s communications with Liao *laoshi* provide key examples of transcultural resonance in the memoir. These meetings were seminal to my understanding of what made me ‘Australian’, and of ‘becoming Chinese’; for Liao, they were possibly moments free of the political constraints of his intellectual’s life, moments when he could recall a Shanghai childhood and its domestic scenes in order

---

[48] Louise Sundararajan, “The Art of Intimacy”, in *Understanding Emotion on Chinese Culture*, International and Cultural Psychology Series (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 102. DO1 10.1007/978-3-319-18221-6_6.

to offer his Australian student a detailed backdrop of the fiction she's translating.

Exotopy, then, produces shared humanity, however momentarily. The Chinese concept of resonance, *ganying,* encapsulates these intimacies of shared purpose and intention, in particular in more 'ritualistic' scholarly exchanges. *Gan* means 'to sense' or 'to feel', and 'to be affected' medically as in catching a cold (*ganmao*) or emotionally as in being 'touched' or 'moved' (*gandong*). Its classical roots, however, relate to an affective and ritualised (or intentional) call and response.[49] This *ganying* implies a moral inclination toward a universe that operates as 'a unity or harmony of opposites', exemplified in the cosmological principle of *yin* and *yang*, opposites intertwined and 'contaminated' with the other in a constant cycle of transformation. In Chinese cosmology, this is the natural state of things: interaction produces dynamic change.[50] I feel this now so clearly, in particular when I recall Ding Hao and Liao *laoshi* discoursing on calligraphy or poetry. I understand their communication as part of a 'solemn' invitation to see the connections between all things. As a callow novice, young Jen could only glimpse, 'side on' as it were, the ritualistic nature of these conversations with their deliberate construction of layered meaning and association.

Mutual intention and resonance are of course fostered through nonlinguistic as much as linguistic cues; otherwise, how could that clumsy young conversationalist, young Jen's *alter ego* An Zhenni, have encountered any moments of resonance in Chinese at all? Where do shared fascination and curiosity, which lead to mutual admiration and friendship, come from? The heart wants what the heart wants; it likes what it likes. The music we make may be produced in two different scales but we attend each to the

---

[49] See Xinhua Jia, "From Human Resonance to Correlative Modes: The Shaping of Chinese Correlative Thinking", *Philosophy East and West*, 2016, 66(2), 449-474, DOI: 10.1353/pew.2016.0040.

[50] See Lai, *Learning From Chinese Philosophies*, 90-91.

other in seeking harmony. We are open to each other. We recognise something of our selves in each other, for all our untranslatable differences.

1.3 Representation

My subject position in this life narrative is auto and bio-graphical, because I am "writing from internalized and externalized points of view…as both subject and object...", and choosing "subjective and idiosyncratic" transformative encounters to memorialise.[51] That is, in the process of writing I draw not only on the self I think others see, but also my inner self who views my memories, not as if driving a car,[52] but standing stock still in a virtual replica of place, sometimes in the body of a child whose short white socks, sensible shoes, blue skirt and bobbed haircut flicker at the edge of vision.

The multiple subject perspectives observable in "*Ganyu*" include young Nanjing University student subject/observer/narrator Jen/An Zhenni, the middle-aged narratorial observer-commentator in the stories, and the young-old subjects and observers-interpreters of the poems in the Bridges to Future Past. Their heteroglossic representations make explicit the unstable relativities and time scoping that impact on the analysis of this writer/narrator's transformation.

The writing "I" is authorial older Jen who selects and shapes my memories around the protagonist "I", young Jen/An Zhenni, to borrow from Jorge Luis Borge's account of a tripartite self.[53] Clearly there is an ontological gap between the Jen who lived in

---

[51] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 5, 6.

[52] Stephen Spender, "Confessions and Autobiography", in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 115-123.

[53] Jorge Luis Borges, "Borges and I", in *Dreamtigers*, eds A. Frasconi, M. Boyer, and H. Morland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964).

China in the seventies and the writer's version of her as narrator,[54] in particular given the passing of so many years between experience of the events and the writing of their affective and memory traces.[55] This offers encouragement to join those women writers who "blur the lines of non-fiction and fiction, lived experience and creative expression" and cross "generic, linguistic and national" boundaries.[56]

As older writer Jen, I exploit three types of memories: the involuntary memories termed 'Bridges to Future Past', which appear to insist that I am responsible for past actions I did not commit;[57] the memories recalled through revisiting Chinese literature, letters to family and friends, historical documents, and photographs, music and video tapes from the period; and those recollected through "the developmental process that creates a seamless narrative of the past as a way of 'reliving' it",[58] using the writer's 'auteur of coherence', the imagination. This gleaning and creating process is encapsulated in the hyphenation of 're-membering' if read as the induction of a past fragment into the present-future club of interpreted experience. Thus the Jen/An Zhenni revealed is a representation of the multiple subject whose roles serve to highlight the process of transculturation.

Unreliable witness: the foreign language learner

If all autobiographical writing engages with "estrangement" caused by that

---

[54] Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 29.

[55] Micaela Maftei, *The Fiction of Autobiography: Reading and Writing Identity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 3.

[56] Sobeira Latorre, "Creative Memories: Genre, Gender and Language in Latina Autobiographies", *Life Writing*, 2006, 3(1), 61-79. DOI: 10.1080/10408340308518305, accessed 28 September 2017.

[57] Patrick Pinkerton quotes Derrida in "Remembering the Future: The Ethics of Absolute Beginning", *Political Perspectives*, 2008, 3(1). http://www.politicalperspectives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Vol3-1-2009-2.pdf, accessed 17 August 2016.

[58] Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 45-47.

ontological gap between the self "writing about an other…who is the self",[59] this is further emphasised in the representation of young Jen as a becoming-bilingual subject who learns who she is through the mirror of others, by understanding herself as other.[60] In her attempts to interpret her environment in another language, we see a "decentred, historically and socially contingent…subject that defines itself and is defined in interaction with other contingent subjects".[61] As with the language memoir testimonies summarised by Claire Kramsch in her research, we see young Jen caught in the dilemma of wanting to be mistaken for the Other whilst fearing the loss of her identity.[62] This results in mixed feelings of belonging and alienation, of being a "subject-in-process" that produces a multiplicity of subject positions, similar to those identified by Kramsch in her analysis of a paragraph from Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*: Polish immigrant Eva first congratulates herself on sounding colloquial enough to pass for a Canadian; then she berates herself for being a sham; finally she feels hysteria rise because thoughts about never fitting in have brought on a bout of speechlessness.[63] Further, instead of giving the reader surefooted cultural interpretations of every interaction, Jen the narrator sometimes confesses to limited linguistic competence, and is therefore unable to assure the reader that they are in 'safe hands'. This is an 'authentic' representation of the breaks in communicative understanding that occur in transcultural encounters.

In reading what I've written about young Jen's relationship-building in the China

---

[59] Mary Cappello, "Wending Artifice: Creative Non-Fiction", *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 244. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/10.1017/CCO9781139235686, accessed 3 October 2017.

[60] Kramsch, *Multilingual Subject*, 18.

[61] Ibid., 20.

[62] Ibid., 78.

[63] Ibid., 98. Also see Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Minerva, 1991), 218.

setting, I see reflected a middle class white Australian woman with an internalised worldview "steeped in ideology",[64] one which frames independence, solitary pursuits, curiosity for knowledge, spontaneous self-expression, social justice, and equality as positive values, imperialism and patriarchal values as to be resisted, and intimacy as problematic. The frequent use of the first person, the value placed on privacy, deductive reasoning, and the assertive voice all point to a strong individualist 'cast/e' associated with Western (Australian) 'first-world' positioning. Her resistance to new cultural practices can be read as fear of 'complicating' this sense of self, which is already being revealed as inherently unstable. The memoir shows how, over time, regular encounters with different others and participation in routines of everyday life quietly alter her 'ways of seeing' to the degree that on occasion she experiences "integration of difference".[65]

Memory and the Angel of History

Daniel Schachter reminds us: "Memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves".[66] This 'experience' of events is not static; shifts in time and circumstance result in shifts in emotional cast, and with it a desire to make sense of their import. For example, I have been seeking to understand why those early memory fragments, now framed as Bridges to Future Past, were the ones to haunt me. Why not the thousands of others that might be judged of greater significance? As with the phenomenon of narrative encounters in general, in my

---

[64] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 76, in reference to Althusser and 'interpellation'.

[65] Milton J. Bennett, *A Developmental Model For Intercultural Sensitivity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2011). http://www.library.wisc.edu/EDVRC/docs/public/pdfs/SEEDReadings/intCulSens.pdf., accessed 3 February 2012.

[66] Daniel L. Schachter, *Searching for Memory: the Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 6.

experiencing these fragments, the "relations of provocation, call and response … precede decision and understanding, with consciousness arriving late, after the assumption or imposition of intersubjective ties…"[67] Conscious attention to the question, therefore, suggests a number of possible reasons. In a general sense, these 'China fragments' are the siren call to return to the Sinophone fold, to acknowledge and reacquaint myself with my 'Chinese side'. In subject matter, however, each of these memories is horrible in some way, violent and de-humanising. In each case, the protagonist is stripped of social agency or function. As I bear witness to them in a past-present spin-cycle of memory fragments, these "dazzling and blinding image[s]" suggest that I too am caught, as Walter Benjamin interpreted Klee's *Angelus Novus* to be, in "the moment between past and future, looking back and frozen uncomprehending of the piled wreckage and mayhem" I see.[68] As such, their significance defies neat explanation in a straight narrative. The writing to and about these memories has acted as a form of *scriptotherapy*[69] in which my narrated self "emerges though an interplay with substitutive tropes, images or extensions that are reflective and sometimes deflective…objects of identification".[70] The feelings these memories evoke are consistent in emotional tenor, such that I can't help giving them significance beyond that particular period in Chinese history, and beyond the strictly personal. For example, I see that they challenge my beliefs: in development and

---

[67] Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1995), 13.

[68] Ban Wang cites Walter Benjamin in addressing the experience of trauma and memory on the telling of history in twentieth century China, in *Illuminations from the Past*, 96. In *Colors of Veracity: A Quest for Truth in China and Beyond* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 1124-1136, e-Publication, Vera Schwarcz evokes Benjamin's identification with Angelus Novus to pose a question for the honest historian: Am I willing to speak despite the attractions of speechlessness?"

[69] Coined by S.A. Henke to refer to a practice emerging from the women's movement of the 1970s, in *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998).

[70] Miriam Fuchs, *The Text is Myself: Women's Life Writing and Catastrophe* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 13.

progress; in the ability of a nation-state to provide a utopia for its citizens; and in my own ability as a woman to challenge the patriarchal status quo and make a difference. This is more than a personal struggle; it is also political in the sense that I am resisting the "authorized forgettings"[71] of the Chinese party-state. In their literary construction, I find myself addressing an ideal reader—a *zhiyin*, one who literally 'knows the sound'—hoping that my words will strike a deep resonance with another.

Mimetic memoir: the dialogic encounter

This memoir is driven by dialogue because it is the linguistic exchange of meaning that prompts self-reflexivity and brings about change. In addition to my 'intimate strangers', most of the contingent characters in "*Ganyu*" are represented in dialogue with young Jen as possessing and demonstrating practices and beliefs that challenge her understanding and her values. In some dialogues Jen cannot translate the language or the experience, so she 'gives up', leaving the reader to also face a breakdown of meaning; in others a 'meeting of minds' is revealed through the explication of difference.

The use of dialogue subverts the memoir genre by challenging its validity.[72] This clear rebuttal of the reliability and trustworthiness of the account is not appreciated by life writing scholars such as Thomas Couser.[73] Rita Felski, however, argues that given that

> [t]he world against which we measure the truth claims of the literary text is … already mediated via stories, images, myths, jokes, commonsense

---

[71] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 24.

[72] Patrick Madden, "The New Memoir", in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 229.

[73] Thomas Couser, *Memoir: an Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67-68.

> assumptions, scraps of scientific knowledge, religious beliefs, popular aphorisms... it makes no sense to conjure up some notion of things as they really are—some higher altitude stripped bare of all symbolization and sense-making—against which we could measure the truth claims of the literary work.[74]

For the purposes of my memoir, dialogue allows the characters to reveal the particular *qi* or *jingshen* I see as representing all of 'us' in relationship. *Qi* is the vital force in all living and non-living things, often expressed in its duality as *yin-yang*. Along with an approximation of appropriate discourses, the fulfillment of different functions in daily life requires different balances of *yin* and *yang,* of *qi*. The term *jingshen* is used in both New China Newspeak and in colloquial language to means one's spirit or essence, made evident in attitude, behaviour and manner. It involves commitment, will and determination in its political sense; in its more everyday use, it means 'pep' or 'get up and go'. *Qi* and *jingshen* are influenced by the particular role one is performing using the 'appropriate' voice. My Chinese characters represent four distinct yet overlapping social groups with their particular 'voices': the Party cadre/member, the intellectual, the *laobaixing*,[75] and the disaffected youth or *liumang*. Of course it is a limited 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia' I present, because my interlocutors were restricted in their usual code switching behaviour by my limited proficiency and reliance on *putonghua* rather than the varieties and registers of Chinese language and dialects at their disposal.

Dialogue is the means by which the reader can distinguish between significant others.

---

[74] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 84-85.

[75] *Laobaixing* or 'old hundred surnames' is the term used to refer to 'ordinary people, the person in the street'.

For example, my characters constitute ineffectual identikits with only 'sketchy' behaviours and features (in some cases their photographs fill the gaps). Likewise the city of Nanjing is rendered with patchy attention to landmarks, and once the chapter describing the university is completed, it too fades into the background, leaving young Jen's dormitory room in high relief. These places serve as simple stage settings for dialogic interactions. The annual festivals that mark a year's passing barely get a mention unless they provide context for other valued encounters. Emotional resonance is therefore achieved not through gazing upon the face of the loved one in a specific setting, but in 'listening to them speak', 'hearing their words', and being heard.

Representing others: ethics

As noted earlier, I have deliberately used creative dialogue as a means of demonstrating cultural-linguistic transformation. In this endeavour, however, can I justify the 'imagined' representation of real characters and the appropriation of their stories? Have I reified them for my own benefit? Life writing necessarily involves intense wondering whether one's relationships to others have been ethically described.[76] For example, do I have the right to depict those four strangers encountered in the earliest memory fragments as victims of 'violence' attracting different modes of young Jen's attention: 'problematising' (the beggar woman in Pro-lapse); 'witnessing' (the young man's arrest in *Fenpei* with a Twist); and 'receiving' (the wrath of the Nanjing Madwoman, and the testimonial of the unemployed youth in Permission to Speak). In each case I recall that as these unexpected shocking encounters unfolded, my emotional response was accompanied by a scramble to create 'a back story' from my knowledge of China, crisscrossed with moral and

[76] See, for example, Eakin's *Ethics of Life Writing* and Newton's *Narrative Ethics*.

ethical questions regarding my place as a witness to these events. In seeking to accord these memories with the solemnity they deserve, I represent them figuratively (the recollection of what I saw and heard and the way I interpreted or 'worried' the moment), and metaphorically.

Hannah McGregor references Judith Butler and Smaro Kamboureli to argue that writers who draw on the lives of 'foreign' others, especially those experiencing trauma and suffering, should reflect a certain "aesthetic failure", involving "the unendurability of witnessing, the untranslatability of the other's experience, and the incommensurability of inside and outside".[77] In so doing, the reader is unable to take on the role of voyeur to the suffering of distant others. Of Karen Connelly's three publications about her travels in Burma, McGregor concludes that *The Border Surrounds Us* exemplifies this aesthetic failure, because Connelly's poetic representations of her encounters on the often-violent Thai-Burmese border "reject the possibility of imaginatively 'becoming other'".[78] Writing herself as an anxious and imperfect outsider witness, Connelly punctures her visions of horror with distancing lines on the uselessness of language to convey the impacts of this violence on these people, their lives, her seeing. In "Prison Entrance", for example, she writes herself as a distant third person:

Sometimes their voices, their shouts,
were so clear. So clear she wondered
about the secrets behind
the high grey walls, the worlds
she could not fathom, with freedom
wrapped around her like a cape

---

[77] Hannah McGregor, "'What is there to say?' Witnessing Anxiety in Karen Connelly's Burmese Trilogy", *Canadian Literature,* 2014, 222, 3. Academic OneFile, accessed 31 July 2017.

[78] Ibid., 2-3. Also see Karen Connelly, *The Border Surrounds Us* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Publishing, 2000).

she could never pull off.[79]

In the case of "*Ganyu*", the difficulty I've had attempting to express the emotional impact of these experiences and their retrospective visitations attests to their untranslatability, unendurability and incommensurability. As such, I have sought to make them resistant to easy interpretation. In the act of memorialising them as symbolic of something larger, I hope I have not erased 'the particular' in the process. That is to say, I cannot justify using others' stories on the empathic grounds of "we are the other and the other is us"[80] unless I interpret this expression to mean that we "value…*particular* human lives, which means taking an interest in practices and beliefs that lend *them* significance" (my italics).[81] This returns us to the Bakhtinian notion of *exotopy*.

This ethical consideration also applies to the significant others in "*Ganyu*", my teachers, roommate and friends. As writer, I am seeking to understand the enduring legacy of particular encounters with these people in the particular historical and cultural context, and framed by the language learning experience, in which the multiple 'I's "honour alterity without assuming it is somehow easily translatable or appropriable".[82] Further, my early concerns that using real names or other identifying features might bring my Chinese 'characters' to the negative attention of the Party

---

[79] Connelly, *The Border*, 25.

[80] In "We Are The Other, The Other Is Us", Kim Echlin justifies incorporating stories told to her by 'strangers' about the Pol Pot years, gathered on a short trip to Cambodia, and incorporated in a novel. In interview with Smaro Kamboureli and Hannah McGregor, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 2013, 82(2), 132-149.

[81] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), xiii.

[82] Gail Jones, in Michael McCrea, "The Interview: Gail Jones", in *Wetink: The Magazine of New Writing*, 2006, 1(3), 28. http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=105215684118942;res=IELLCC> ISSN: 1832-682X.

have been assuaged because of the more than two decades that have passed since the events, and because I did not give my characters words or actions that target identifiable party officials. The relative 'ordinariness' of the encounters keeps my characters safe.

The implied reader

Over the course of writing "*Ganyu*", I felt myself writing to the self who had forgotten, who had put China out of her mind; more recently, I am also writing to those who had 'silenced' my younger self through lack of interest, whether from an Australian discomfort with hybridity, from a lack of knowledge that inhibits interest, or perhaps from an expectation that it is up to returning travellers to fit in at 'home'; and I am writing to those significant others whom I never thanked—I lost them, and I want them back, alas too late. It is also addressed to fellow international students in China, each of whom has their own perspective regarding their transcultural experiences in the early post-Mao period. I want to make public my interpretation for their reflection.

How will readers respond to my representations of selves and others? I hope that the intimate dialogic nature of reading will produce flashes of intense recognition, and moments that trigger a sense of a limit to knowledge or a recognition that something can only be known by distorting it to one's own way of seeing.[83] Those with a limited knowledge of China must trust in young Jen, 'the unstable' guide, to interpret the transcultural experience for them. Will they respond to the characters in the way I intend, to recognise and celebrate their role in my transformation? When my readers engage in self-reflexive moral inquiry, will they, as Eakin describes it, "encounter a

[83] Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 29-30.

perspective that makes us judge ourselves, help us to reevaluate our moral practice or ideals?"[84]

In 2014 I posted a draft of Chapter 5, Divorce, in the Facebook Group *Foreign Students in China 1974-1979*. Reactions varied according to attitudes to the Chinese party-state. For example, some read the story as an account of my awkward process of enculturation, and others as confirmation of the 'insidious' practice of party surveillance. These latter readers had no empathy for my roommate, even though I portrayed Young Jen as prickly and difficult and, in the final paragraphs, invited the reader to acknowledge the political pressure Zhang *dajie* had suffered. My intention to "promote 'healing' and provide avenues for empathy across circuits of difference", in this case, was scuttled by some readers "reducing difference to sameness",[85] perhaps because for them certain narrative tropes about the period are firmly entrenched.

In summary, writing "*Ganyu*" has been an emotionally charged search to understand my link to China. The retrieval of involuntary and voluntary memories has produced poems, stories and lyric essays, most of which are constructed using imagined dialogic encounters. This process has revealed the unstable relativities inherent in an investigation of the multilingual self in relationship with historical, contingent and significant others. In writing the Bridges to Future Past, I feel, as Gail Jones has described it, "the peculiar charge of peripheral histories, the ways in which tangential relations might be real relations, and deeply affecting".[86] In writing the lives of others

---

[84] Eakin, *Ethics of Life Writing*, 5.

[85] Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: the Ethics of Recognition* (Proquest Ebook Central: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 6-7, accessed 2 August 2017.

[86] Gail Jones, in "David Haworth Interviews Gail Jones", *Readings Blog*, 30 July 2015. https://www.readings.com.au/news/david-haworth-interviews-gail-jones, accessed 1

I've been forced to address ethical questions regarding appropriation and 'calamity voyeurism'. From a personal perspective, the unlocking of my voice (I feel it as a throat constriction in English, and as a cry "*Bu gan shuo,* I dare not speak*"* in Chinese) offers me the chance to create remembered moments of resonance—those "recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition"[87]—that will sustain me as I continue to meddle with my transcultural life-plan in these final decades of life.

September 2017.

[87] Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, 12.

Chapter 2 China re-membered: Anglophone memoirs

Anglophone recollections of China in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (CR) and early post-Mao periods reflect the deep impact the party-state and its people, and to a lesser degree, the Chinese language and its cultural representations, have had on the writers' senses of self as observers and participants. As of early 2017, Anglophone book-length 'memoirs' set in China between 1972 and 1983 number at least the following nine, each with its own different "structuring mode of self-inquiry"[1]: In *Long Road Home: A China Journal*,[2] Vera Schwarcz ponders how her own 'situatedness' interacts with her experience of China; Tani Barlow and Donald Lowe's *Teaching China's Lost Generation: Foreign Experts in the PRC*[3] deals with how the authors experienced and 'managed' the cultural differences they encountered; Charles Hadfield and Jill Hadfield's *Watching the Dragon: Letters from China*[4] is a shallow inquiry into difference; Helene Chung's *Shouting from China*[5] is at best a reflection on coping with the challenges of early post-Mao China as an Australian-born ethnic Chinese foreign correspondent; in *Red China Blues: My March from Mao to Now*[6], Jan Wong examines the conditions and consequences of her 'ideological conversion'; John Pomfret's *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of New China*[7] can be read as his reflection on the ways in which China translated for him

---

1 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 99.

2 Vera Scwarcz, *Long Road Home*.

3 Tani Barlow and Donald Lowe, *Teaching China's Lost Generation: Foreign Experts in the PRC*, 2nd Edition (San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals, 1987).

4 Charles Hadfield and Jill Hadfield, *Watching the Dragon: Letters from China, 1983-1985* (London: Impact, 1986).

5 Helene Chung, *Shouting from China* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988).

6 Jan Wong, *Red China Blues*.

7 John Pomfret, *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of New China* (Melbourne:

into friendships, and how these friends, as significant others, shaped his experience of China; Gail Pellett's *Forbidden Fruit: 1980 Beijing—A Memoir*[8] investigates the ways in which her Beijing experience was 'untranslatable' and alienating; Richard Kirkby's *Intruder in Mao's Realm: An Englishman's Eyewitness Account of 1970s China*[9] is an 'exposé' of the challenges to his becoming an active participant in China's socialist drive; and Ragnar Baldursson's *Nineteen Seventy-Six*[10] unpacks the political events that occurred during his student days in Beijing in 1976, with the knowledge of hindsight.

This chapter will investigate how six of these Anglophone memoirs deal with themes of transcultural self-transformation. Two texts not dealt with are: Chung's expatriate view of China, which tells us little about her relationships with others; and the edited letters of English language teachers Charles and Jill Hadfield, which offer a polite, distanced view of the 'China experience', perhaps because they were protecting an established reputation as English as a Foreign Language textbook writers, or because of the censorship imposed on them as World Bank contractors, or both. One text referred to briefly is Icelandic diplomat Baldursson's slim account of the momentous year of the Dragon that 'informed' the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, the fall of the Gang of Four at the end of the CR, and the disastrous Tang Shan earthquake. His intention is to offer a reading between the lines of the party press to unveil 'what really happened'. This account could only be written forty years after the event, he suggests, because it has taken this long to uncover what was going on behind the

---

Scribe, 2007).

[8] Gail Pellett, *Forbidden Fruit: 1980 Beijing—A Memoir* (New York: VanDam Publishing, 2016).

[9] Richard Kirkby, *Intruder in Mao's Realm: An Englishman's Eyewitness Account of 1970s China* (Hong Kong: Farnshaw Books, 2016).

[10] Ragnar Baldursson, *Nineteen Seventy-Six* (Australia: Penguin Group, 2016).

scenes.[11] In many respects, this is the most 'classically Chinese' of all the memoirs, a discreet account that avoids the personal, is tinged with a light irony, and respects all 'characters', while making connections between human actions and the workings of the cosmos. It is also the work of a professional diplomat: the reader is privy to little of the inner musings of the young socialist who came to China seeking a communist model that might suit Iceland.

2.1 Auto/biography and narrative intention

The six other publications offer narrative themes that fit to varying degrees on either side of the slash in auto/biography. Sinologist Vera Schwarcz uses diary and journal entries to construct a chronology of 'life' questions posed as a graduate student at Beijing University in 1979-1980 where she conducted interviews with surviving May Fourth intellectuals. In the process she explores her multiple identities as Ukrainian refugee to the U.S., daughter of holocaust Jewish parents, scholar of May Fourth China, and U.S. citizen. She offers this publication to her Chinese and American friends as "an attempt, retrospectively, to make more mutual a process which was often marked by lack of mutuality, and not infrequently marred by misunderstanding,"[12] to cross the divide between those who look only inwards to their own culture (mainland Chinese) and those "'foreign devils'…who force others to live according to their own values"[13] (that is, Westerners, specifically those in the U.S.). The journal Schwarcz kept was conceived as a conversation with friends on topics of interest: the nature of relationships between Chinese people; ideological and institutional impacts on intellectuals as compared to their U.S. counterparts; and the

[11] Ibid., 6.
[12] Schwarcz, *Long Road Home*, xxii.
[13] Ibid., xxiii.

role of May Fourth literature in critiquing contemporary political and social problems. While chapter titles indicate the months in question, sub-titles 'measure' her progress in belonging: Chapter 3, for example, is titled *No longer on horseback,* a Chinese aphorism (*xia ma kan hua,* lit. 'dismount to look at the flowers') that suggests getting up close and personal with China, and Chapter 7 is called *Slowly ripening intimacies.* The narrative is diegetic, focused mainly on firsthand reflections with no dialogue.

Her proficiency in Chinese language and the trust that grows between Schwarcz and her ageing research participants appear to create an affective 'grounding in place' less evident in the other memoirs. Schwarcz explains that it had taken a decade of study to develop this capacity—'the long road' of the title—but that the process had been ameliorated by her childhood in socialist Romania, which gave her a frame for understanding the Chinese socialist system, and by her multilingual experiences that had honed the skill to "look for meaning between the words" in another language.[14]

American foreign 'experts' Tani Barlow and Donald Lowe,[15] volunteer teachers at a Shanghai teacher's college in 1983, documented their attempts to understand their students' preoccupations with love, existentialism and what it means to be human in a post-CR period. In the process, Anglo-American Barlow and Chinese-American Lowe identify key challenges to their cultural expectations as they seek to adopt the social skills necessary to 'fit in'. Compiled from letters 'home' into a publishable manuscript two years after their sojourn, they note that they deliberately preserved the sense of discovery "even at the expense of naiveté in hindsight".[16] The two writers become melded into a 1970s-style communal consciousness-raising voice that refers to 'we' and to the other in the couple, but never to the first person, thereby both

---

[14] Ibid., xiv.
[15] Barlow and Lowe, *Teaching China's Lost Generation*, 1985.
[16] Ibid., Preface, xvi.

collectivizing and distancing their experiences. Their intention is to share their version of how they and their students struggled with conflicting cultural expectations and how they "came to terms with each other".[17] At the core of the book, however, is the search for the keys that will unlock the gate to 'inner' China. They include extracts from *China Daily* articles and student essays to shine a light on political and cultural points of difference.[18]

The first half of Canadian Jan Wong's *Red China Blues: My March from Mao to Now* records her student experiences at Beijing University from 1972 to 1978, a period during which she is transformed from a fierce unthinking ideologue into a critic of the party-state.[19] Basing her writing on detailed diaries she kept at the time, Wong uses self-deprecating humour (and some horror) to write a mimetic narrative that demonstrates her naïve ideological commitment and desperate desire to become accepted as a member of China's proletariat. Her enthusiasm for manual labour and for reading Marxist-Leninist-Maoist texts even exceeded that of her classmates, and the desire to belong led her to commit "unforgivable" acts of betrayal against 'innocent' people. Her intention in writing the book is to warn readers against accepting dogma "in any form", or "anything that's too theoretically tidy; too black and white", and to show how both she and China have changed by the mid-1990s.[20] Wong's transformation is the journey from ultra-Red youth to Western 'democrat' adult.

---

[17] Ibid., xvi.

[18] Quotations from student essays are also used by Peter Hessler to highlight differences in perspective in his 2002 memoir, *River Town*.

[19] The second half describes Jan Wong's return as a correspondent with the Globe and Mail and the June Fourth massacre of 1989.

[20] Wong, *Red China Blues*, 390.

American journalist John Pomfret's *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of New China* also describes a nation in change by tracing the lives of Nanjing University classmates he boarded or studied with in 1982. As with Wong, who imagined herself in the role of future journalist, Pomfret made detailed notes during his time as a student. These were then supplemented with recorded and translated interviews with these 'significant others' in 2004 and fashioned into storied narratives that show how their lives have turned out for better and worse under party-state control, and the personal connections or *guanxi* on which they relied to get ahead or simply to get things done. Pomfret presents the cast of 'characters' as representative of a cross-section of China's citizens, and documents their lifelong struggles to 'make good', from stressful childhoods during the CR until their more affluent but still stressful *fuzao* middle age.[21] Their stories are interwoven with his own experiences in China, from the first year in the Chinese student dormitories at Nanjing University when he had a love affair with 'Fay' (unemployed daughter of a PLA general seeking a passport to the U.S.) until the final year in Beijing as a foreign correspondent with a Chinese wife and family. By injecting himself into the book in a relatively discreet way, he subverts the traditional journalistic approach to demonstrate his attachment to and curiosity about 'China', and his enduring disapproval of its authoritarian party-state system.

Richard Kirkby spent about six years between 1974 and 1980 as a foreign expert teaching English at Nanjing and Shandong Universities, but his scholarly interest was in China's urban development and the policies implemented in the transition to a socialist market economy. His claim that he is not writing an account of the third

---

[21] Pomfret uses this word to describe the atmosphere of "apprehension tinged with a titillating sense of opportunity" that pervaded Chinese society in 2005, in *Chinese Lessons*, 299.

decade under Chinese Communist Party rule, but rather one of "alien survival, weird happenings, and eccentric individuals observed from my unique perch within the forbidding, intriguing landscape…",[22] is contested by his detailed descriptions of political events. His work reveals an unstated quest: to understand China through the lens of the international socialist, and to participate in its development. Though not proficient in Chinese language, his politics motivated him to take copious notes of translated 'pronouncements' from party cadres in his *danwei* (work unit) and various guesthouses, and to record any news he could garner from the press and from Sinophone English speakers. His assumed comradeship inflected his relationships, and his 'politicised' persona appears to have drawn him into menacing political intrigues. He frequently quotes from his journals, and uses dialogue to emphasise official cadre rhetoric and its distancing effects.

Canadian-American Gail Pellett's *Forbidden Fruit* is a personal account of working and residing at Radio Beijing in 1980-81, during which she felt keenly the social taboos of being a thirty-seven-year-old single woman. Her desires to be accepted as a creative journalist, a free thinking feminist and a generous lover were frustrated at almost every turn. In keeping with her profession as a documentary maker, she kept a detailed journal and cycled all over the city making observations with her camera and her pen, seeking to ground herself in an 'impenetrable' city. Pellett wrote her memoir as a testimonial to personal transformation that was seeded in Beijing where she "was compelled to excavate deeply into my past, my soul, …my yearnings for the future".[23] As with Kirkby, time has offered a different perspective of her colleagues. They are no longer mean-spirited ideologues but "living ghosts of the Cultural Revolution and

---

[22] Richard Kirkby, *Intruder*, 2016, xiv.
[23] Pellett, *Forbidden Fruit*, 6895 of 7116.

those earlier movements."[24] Extracts from Pellett's journals act as epigraphs for chapter scenes. She quotes from Lu Xun among other Chinese writers and political commentators on China such as Simon Leys and Fox Butterfield, and uses Western cultural references from architecture, film and music to reflect her 'heart-mind' perspective. She too makes use of dialogue to highlight moments of cultural dissonance and alienation.

In these auto/biographical works, self-transformation is triggered by transcultural interactions in the interconnected spheres of the political and social-cultural. Leftist political leanings and anti-establishment viewpoints sparked an interest in Communist China. Most authors note how "the West's own cultural revolution of the 1960s predisposed a whole generation to being 'sympathizers' of Chinese communism".[25] Wong's enthusiasm about distancing herself from mainstream Western culture is directly echoed by Kirkby, Baldursson and Pellet. Schwarcz felt herself to be distanced from the Western mainstream by her immigrant experience, but also by her resistance to American involvement in the Vietnam War.[26] This same war had motivated Barlow to study Chinese history.[27] Her middle-aged partner Lowe was a Marxist historian with a focus on China and the Third World. All acknowledged that they had been swayed by China's CR propaganda to believe in its ability to deliver an egalitarian utopia for its population, with the exception of Pomfret, a twenty-one-year-old undergraduate with no history of activism when he arrived in China as an exchange student to observe at first hand its reemergence onto the world scene after

---

[24] Ibid., 6820.
[25] Wong, *Red China Blues*, 15.
[26] Schwarcz, *Long Road Home*, xiv-xv.
[27] Barlow and Lowe, *Teaching China's Lost Generation*, xv.

forty years of "self-imposed isolation".[28] In contrast, he notes how his journalist father taught him to believe that any "government is not to be trusted and revolutions inevitably crush their own".[29]

A terrible awakening was inevitable at some time during these writers' sojourns in China, and Wong's was the most extreme. By 1974 she had become adept at criticising herself in political meetings and praising China's communist path. The fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, however, made her realise what many of her classmates, teachers and relatives already knew but feared to reveal: she had been "living inside a real-life propaganda movie...the sets were fake and people were just speaking their lines with less and less conviction".[30]

Like Schwarcz,[31] Barlow and Lowe show remorse for celebrating the CR back in America, while behind the veil of propaganda so many people were suffering under political persecution:

> We feel almost responsible for the tragedy in a minor way, by our previous misunderstanding of its nature. It was very hard for us to accept the aftermath of Jiang Qing's arrest. It's doubly difficult to be reminded daily of the difference between how we saw the GPCR then and what the experience was like for people here.[32]

---

[28] Ibid., 5.

[29] Pomfret, *Chinese Lessons*, 5.

[30] Wong, *Red China Blues*, 185-186.

[31] Schwarcz notes: "I feel as though I too collaborated in the ravage of that event (the CR) by negating the rumours of violence that were coming out of China...That feeling of being an accomplice, however negative, is my only concrete connection to China's recent history." *Long Road Home*, 111.

[32] Barlow and Lowe, *Teaching China's Lost Generation*, 15.

Their students' repeated and ambiguous accounts of the violence and abuse inflicted during this period led them to wonder, "What is memory and what is confession?"[33] Could their students distinguish between the roles they played as witnesses, victims and perpetrators?[34] In contrast, Pomfret found that the stories his classmates told him about rural persecution in the CR challenged his understanding: "Their experiences were totally foreign to me. As a city kid, I knew nothing of the countryside." It was only on a 2002 visit to the North Korean border where he met refugees who were "malnourished, sickly and scared" that he could get a glimpse of what people had experienced.[35]

2.2 Western responses to party containment of Western influence

Government policies in the Reform and Opening Up period after the death of Mao had a significant impact on the ways in which the writers saw their 'Western' selves. The invitation to come to China as exchange students, teachers or foreign experts was an opportunity to participate in China's push towards socialist-led modernisation. In Edward Said's sense of the term,[36] many of us were unconscious orientalists who imagined ourselves as friends of the poorer and less advantaged Chinese. As these Chinese memoirs indicate, their authors (and I include myself here) believed they would engage in 'equalising' acts of mutual benefit. Instead the life writers in this selection experienced a powerful sense of alienation caused by the Party's response to what they perceived as the threat of Western influence on the masses. All the authors railed against being contained through privilege (higher salaries or emoluments,

---

[33] Ibid., 80.

[34] Kirkby also ponders his students' apparent "innocence" given their horrendous experiences, *Intruder*, 262.

[35] Pomfret, *Chinese Lessons*, 51.

[36] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

separate dining rooms, better food and accommodation, hot water, heating, a driver for the foreign experts), surveillance (registration to enter people's homes or other cities, Chinese roommates who monitored dormitory exchanges, and 'shadows' or 'minders' who reported on our conduct and movements), linguistic ignorance (for foreign experts it was often difficult to get permission to learn Chinese),[37] official order (refusal to leave hotels after dark when travelling, for example) and anti-foreign propaganda, all of which had the effect of constraining interactions and distorting any nascent relationships.

In the early months at Beijing Languages Institute, Pomfret wrote to his parents that the enforced distance evoked in him "a weird almost uncontrollable rage…that makes me want to break up restaurants, push people, scream and yell, smack into people on my bicycle as they cross the street with their heads down."[38] The close-mouthed formalism of her colleagues at Radio Beijing, party interference in her romantic and amicable relationships with Chinese men, and the total lack of privacy sent Pellett into bouts of paranoia and sparked embarrassing temper tantrums.[39] Kirkby rails against the claustrophobia of living in a gated, guarded compound with other foreign experts,[40] and appears to delight in harassing the Foreign Experts Bureau with complaints about surveillance and 'incarceration', and dogging his party minders with questions he knows they are not allowed to answer. His refusal to let pass a geographical error by a provincial party head led to a loss of face, and the 'rotating ideological door' that forced an apology to Kirkby from the Nanjing Public Security Bureau for taking photos of April 15 demonstrations after the death of Zhou Enlai set

---

[37] Gail Pellett, *Forbidden Fruit;* and Richard Kirkby, *Intruder*.
[38] Pomfret, *Chinese Lessons*, 13.
[39] Pellett, *Forbidden Fruit*, 4176-4208.
[40] Kirkby, *Intruder*, 100-102.

in train a political plot to have him deported. The reader comes to feel that Kirkby's 'bloody-mindedness' is caused by the mistrust he feels from those who should celebrate him as a comrade-in-arms. He repeatedly wishes he had a real 'human being' to talk to, indicating the alienation he felt when party cadres insisted on using New China Newspeak. His deep hurt and indignation that he is not regarded as a trusted friend gives his narration a sardonic edge. In the foreword, he notes a friend's concern that an earlier draft was "…too harsh on the Chinese, in danger even of being racist", and insists that "…what I wish to convey is the harshness of the *times*", expressed in the party-state's "xenophobic" codification of foreign residents.[41] He does offer one example in which this codification contributes to 'good works': Kirkby and wife Jo's 'minder' Duan exploited their Western 'privilege' to announce to the higher echelons in Beijing 'on their behalf' that they had observed corrupt officials partying in a Luoyang Hotel when they should have been overseeing flood relief for the Henan disaster.[42] In this way Duan is able to act without danger of punishment.

Schwarcz focuses on the suppression of her Chinese intellectual friends. After the crackdown on Democracy Wall demonstrations in early 1979, she empathises with their rueful recognition that they are "beneficiaries of a privileged status they do not control".[43] When she does record moments of fury, as when her application to participate in the national conference on the May Fourth Movement trapped her in a bureaucratic "cycle of promises and disappointments", she wonders whether her "impotent rage" is what everyone encounters as a lived experience of communist

---

[41] Ibid., xi.

[42] The Henan floods are described by both Baldurrsson and Kirkby in some detail. A media freeze ensured that its severity was kept a secret. I can see how the Party's response to the floods is an Ah-ha moment as mine is the handling of The Crackdown on Crime.

[43] Schwarcz, *Long Road Home*, 63.

bureaucracy.[44] That is, in contrast to the other memoirists, she elides herself with, rather than separates herself from, the *laobaixing* or local experience.

Then there is resistance, refusal to comply with orders to stay in the hotel (Kirkby) or not to visit Democracy Wall (Baldursson), or not to ride around the city at night (Pellett). There are clandestine meetings with lovers (Pomfret and Pellett) and unregistered travel (Pomfret), arguments with party cadres (Kirkby and Pellett) and triumphant heart-warming get-togethers with 'defiant' teachers, dissident Chinese artists, and workers (all). The defiance on both sides is, in some cases, the only apparent tie that binds Chinese and Anglophone together. Artist friend Liu Dan attributes the failure of all the marriages between Westerners and Chinese in this early post-Mao period, including his own, to the 'unnatural' political environment that forced Chinese to leave their country in order to be free to fulfill their destinies.[45] Consorting with foreigners was a symptom of this desire to have, for a fleeting moment, a sense of self-determination.

Emotional responses to party propaganda include guilt, compliance, anger, frustration, and defiance. While Pomfret, Pellett and Kirkby recall being reminded of their imperialist past, they were not inclined to take responsibility. Kirkby says of himself and his wife: "We carried no personal burden of guilt for the actions of our forefathers. Yet we well understood that a century of humiliation at the hands of foreigners—not least the British—could hardly dispose the average Communist Party functionary to think kindly of us."[46] Schwarcz uses acknowledgement of past 'sins' as an opportunity for self-transformation: to look at 'China' and herself up close in order

---

[44] Ibid., 67.
[45] Liu Dan, conversation with the author, Beijing, 19 May 2016.
[46] Kirkby, *Intruder*, viii.

to see assumptions and prejudices from both perspectives. She wonders, for example, about her response to being deliberately sprayed with pesticide by a worker:

> At that moment, something in me acquiesced, guiltily, to Chinese xenophobia. I ask myself what prevented me from yelling back, 'Hey, what the hell is wrong with you?' Instead, I rode on filled with a vague terror that all Chinese hate all westerners beneath it all. The strange legacy of imperialism? The point is that if and when we dismount as horse riders in China, we are bound to step through some shit. The unsightly things that await us include not only Chinese prejudices, but our own as well.[47]

Some of the authors sought to convince the party cadres in charge that they were 'better' than other bourgeois Western students, colleagues or acquaintances. They did not want to be "tarred with the same brush", an expression Kirkby uses to distance himself from the western "imperialist" engineers staying at the same guesthouse.[48] Barlow and Lowe make it their challenge to mimic 'right behaviours' in their *danwei* in order to build relationships and trust, a practice that is exhausting. On a teaching break in Suzhou, like repressed puritans they confess: "We couldn't help enjoying ourselves."[49] It took Wong more than four years to recognise that attempts to rid herself of the bourgeois rightist label were founded on ideological claptrap. Her desire to be 'red' had led her to inform first on a classmate for requesting help to get to the States, and then on a 'counter-revolutionary' couple who wanted their daughter to study abroad.[50] The classmate, Yin Luoyi, was expelled from the university, and Wong later discovered that she had furthered the suffering of the couple who had

---

[47] Schwarcz, *Long Road Home*, 73.
[48] Kirkby, *Intruder*, 269.
[49] Ibid., 31.
[50] *Red China Blues*, 106-110.

been labelled rightists since the late fifties. When she 'awoke' from her ideological fantasy, the guilt she felt was crushing. Thirty-three years later, she sought to make amends with her classmate Yin, documenting the experience in *A Comrade Lost and Found*.[51]

Compliance works in other ways: while Wong became able to denounce Mao, other authors found it more difficult as I did. Kirkby and Schwarcz, for example, judged the Yan'an period and communist victory as Mao's great contributions. They believed in revolution and did not want western-style capitalism in China.

The authors find themselves supporting dissenting intellectuals who loved freedom and democracy. What none understood then was that these intellectuals were trapped into a Western viewpoint by the Party's claim that intellectuals were Western sympathisers,[52] when in fact many of them, such as journalist and philosopher Wang Ruoshui, wanted a more transparent and humanist Chinese socialist system.[53] Certainly, the Party's authoritarian handling of its citizens through campaigns and clampdowns elicited a keen awareness in some of the authors of their commitment to universal values of democracy (capitalist or socialist), freedom of communication, and humanism (Kirkby, Schwarcz, Pomfret, and Wong).

---

[51] Jan Wong, *A Comrade Lost and Found* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009).

[52] See Chen Xiaomei, "Occidentalism as Counterdiscourse: 'He Shang' in Post-Mao China", *Critical Inquiry*, 1992, 18 (4), 686-712, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343826; Accessed 03-04-2016.

[53] Wang Ruoshui wrote articulate essays on Marxist humanism and socialist alienation in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. He was accused of bourgeois liberalism in the Anti-Spiritual Pollution campaign of 1983, and dismissed from his position as deputy editor of the People's Daily. See David A. Kelly, "The Emergence of Humanism: Wang Ruoshui and the Critique of Socialist Alienation", in *China's Intellectuals and the State: in Search of a New Relationship*, eds Merle Goldman, Timothy Cheek and Carol Lee Hamrin (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1987).

2.3 Transformative interactions

In these memoirs, linguistic and paralinguistic communications with Chinese people occupy a central place. These acts of communication often furnish the basis on which the authors reflect on their transformative experiences, which differ for each according to the different positions they take vis-à-vis their sojourn in China. For example, Pellett's limited grasp of Chinese and her colleagues' refusal to converse with her in anything but New China Newspeak in English raised a maelstrom of unanswerable questions, suppositions and doubts. How could she write stories about China when she didn't have the language to engage with it? She had rolls of photographs she could not contextualise. Brief 'linguistic' relief was found in sexual encounters with three Chinese partners, two of whom could barely speak English, all of whom subsequently avoided her under threat of punishment for consorting with a Western journalist. Pellett attempts to teach herself Chinese, but each encounter with surveillance or passive aggression from her colleagues de-motivates her as does a working day devoted to redrafting propaganda into serviceable English for overseas listeners. Lessons in calligraphy inspire her to pursue what she refers to as a "Zen-like erotic" discipline,[54] until her teacher Yung also withdraws under party pressure. Given that the creative energy she applied to her work in the States is also discouraged, it is not surprising that she leaves halfway through her two-year contract with Radio Beijing. In the rare moments of shared pleasure (in a bath, practicing calligraphy, dancing, discovering in the transcultural other a unique reflection of the self or other characteristics that are attractive or evocative of empathy or exotopy), Pellett reveals the desire in all of us to seek mutual resonance.

---

[54] Pellett, *Forbidden Fruit*, 3869-3916.

Kirby arrives in China with a thorough knowledge of Marxism but no knowledge of China or its languages. In his attempts to engage with his *danwei* in the spirit of the international socialist he discovers that few have any real grasp of Marxism as he knows it. It takes his *danwei* four years to supply him with a language teacher. 'Piggy' Yin's sad sexual obsession quickly dominates the lessons and results in his removal soon after. In this work, Kirkby is the observer interpreting his environment through English-speaking sources. Two important friendships demonstrate the contradictions of living in China: his Shandong minder, party member Li Hua, opened up her home to the Kirkby family and saved Richard from certain deportation for getting caught up in an illegal scam implemented by his other best friend, English Department graduate student Lin. This scam turns out to have been masterminded by the Shandong Party Secretary, described as a fervent Maoist who is convinced that Kirkby is a foreign spy. Li Hua and powerful friends uncovered the plot against Kirkby, and Lin was removed from the university and punished.

While we assume that Donald Lowe is fluent in Mandarin Chinese (though perhaps not in CR rhetoric or early post-Mao Chinese), Tani Barlow has "mostly a reading knowledge of Chinese. Though she follows conversations, she really hates to make mistakes so she tends to avoid talking—much to her own chagrin."[55] We learn nothing more about her language acquisition, although fascinating details about moments of transcultural resonance and dissonance are supplied, in particular through reference to cultural 'artefacts'. Barlow notes, for instance, the difficulty of teaching her students Western-style literary critique. In assessing essays on Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, her hope that students would reflect her view that pre-Modernist fiction was "constructed out of the narrative conventions of American

[55] Barlow and Lowe, *Teaching China's Lost Generation*, 8.

bourgeois culture" was dashed. Instead most gave clichéd accounts of Franklin as a moral exemplar through the exclusive filter of "social, cultural and class background". Many described the emotional impact of reading the text, which Barlow interpreted as "a conventional response indicating that literature exerts a very strong influence on the reader".[56] The couple also documents contrasts in Western sexist and Chinese personal-political readings of the post-Mao film *Contemporaries*,[57] and Chinese generational conflicts sparked by a Chinese play promoting free marriage choice as enshrined in law.[58]

While attempts to 'change the system' characterise foreign expert accounts, student accounts focus on adaptation *to* the system. Jan Wong develops linguistic fluency despite the "pigheaded methods" of her teacher and party member "Fu the Enforcer"[59] so that her Western ideological outlook can be transformed.[60] She becomes fluent in the language of high Maoism, memorised from homilies such as 'Serve the People' and 'In Memory of Norman Bethune'. It takes her longer to grasp *putonghua*, everyday language.[61] Wong thinks she was allocated the most revolutionary of teachers because she is the most bourgeois of students—her father has a string of Chinese restaurants in Canada. Fu compares her with another overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) student: "Erica has a higher level of consciousness than you. Her parents are intellectuals, so they tend to criticize her more. But yours are bourgeois, so they

---

[56] Ibid., 154.
[57] Ibid., 201-204.
[58] Ibid.,185-188.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Wong, *Red China Blues*, 85.
[61] Ibid., 57, 59.

aren't as close to their children." When Wong looks crestfallen, Fu assures her that all the teachers "love both of you equally".[62]

Wong bemoans Fu's insistence on rote learning and her ignorant prejudice about the world outside China,[63] but is grateful for linguistic knowledge that contributed to her understanding of the Chinese psyche.[64] Her examples are notable: no word for privacy; use of the unisex 'Comrade' to replace honorifics and hierarchical familial terms; the removal of potentially servile 'please' and 'thank you' from everyday language; the non-existence of a word for 'Maoist', presumably because everyone was one; non-gender pronouns; eight terms for 'rice'; and a paucity of terms for colours.

Like young Jen in "*Ganyu*", Wong is confounded by her overzealous roommate. It is only in retrospect that she understands why Scarlet restricts her conversations with Wong: "One slip of the tongue could have plunged her into trouble. I was too naïve to know these rules existed".[65] When Wong returned to China in 1974, she went with the entire history department to work on the university farm for two years, during which time there were no formal classes, only political meetings and manual labour. From this period, Wong no longer talks about learning Chinese. Instead her interactions with others reveal a greater depth of understanding; in a sense they become 'unmarked'. By the time she returns as a reporter for the *Globe and Mail*, the reader sees that language acquisition has offered her an ability to clearly separate the party-

---

[62] Ibid., 59. Peter Hessler also describes how his fragile ego was challenged by the endless '*bu dui-s*' ('not correct') from his Chinese language teacher Liao, who nonetheless proved to be loyal to him and praised him in public, in *River Town*, 34.
[63] Ibid., 60.
[64] Ibid., 61.
[65] Ibid., 62.

state machine from individual people, as evidenced in the exotopy reflected in her written descriptions of interactions with others.

Vera Schwarcz was among seven graduate students selected as the first American student exchange cohort to study in China since 1949. She had studied Chinese language and history since 1969, and evaluated her language proficiency on arrival in Beijing as of "moderate competence".[66] She had a room to herself in the student dormitory where she had Chinese lessons and invited Chinese friends for "leisurely talks".[67] Schwarcz attributes a growing sense of belonging to her Chinese language development and the widening of friendship networks. Unlike Pellett, she recognises the importance of patience in effecting "slowly ripening intimacies" predicated on trust.[68] She also feels more of an insider because regular contact with middle-aged and veteran Chinese intellectuals allows her to re-evaluate her occidental view of Chinese history.

Schwarcz records 'respondent' reflections with affection, and we feel the gravity with which she 'holds their words in her 'heart-mind', making associations between their personal and historical experiences, and her own. For example, on a visit to writer Lu Xun's home in Shaoxing she spends considerable time with the museum curator who is a direct descendent of 'Runtu', one of Lu Xun's childhood companions immortalised in the reminiscence "*Guxiang"* or "Hometown*"*. Zhang Gui shares with her the irony of his being raised out of rural poverty by the Party that is intent on championing Lu Xun, a member of the landlord class, as close to the rural masses. We feel the 'romance' in her account of the conversation, the privilege of close listening between the lines.

---

[66] Schwarcz, *Long Road Home*, xv.
[67] Ibid., xx.
[68] Ibid.

After a visit to her room by a final-year *gongnongbing* student, Shen Zhaoyan, Schwarcz takes a moment to appreciate "the qualities that make her strong and focused… unmatched by the chatty cadres' daughters…".[69] While Schwarcz praises Mao's introduction of education for all that allowed Shen to make it to Beijing University, she notes Shen's useless education on the university farm, only brought to a halt after a group of her classmates rebelled and forced the authorities to allow them to return to classes.

Schwarcz ponders the "lack of bitterness and the enduring commitment to socialism [and] the willingness to forgive the Party its excesses…"[70] among the veteran intellectuals, and finds a possible answer in a newspaper review of Brecht's *Galileo*. While Schwarcz believes Brecht is arguing that truth changes according to its claimants,[71] the theatre critic writes that Galileo insists on a new absolute truth in defiance of the institutions of the day. Schwarcz sees this as reflecting the needs of contemporary intellectuals for "absolute, inviolable certainties after the bruising of the past two decades", a "permanent truth",[72] and forgiveness for not standing up to Mao and the Gang of Four during the CR.[73]

---

[69] Ibid., 56.
[70] Ibid., xxi.
[71] Ibid., 85.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Schwarcz now recognises that in the search for 'permanent truth', Chinese intellectuals are following age-old patterns of applying a moral yardstick to measure 'right', in *Colors of Veracity*, 2010. Perry Link, in *Evening Chats in Beijing [Pei-ching yeh hua]: Probing China's Predicament* (New York: Norton, 1992), and Davies in *Worrying about China*, 2007, identify similar patterns of behaviour over centuries, thereby challenging a unique causal link between the Cultural Revolution and intellectual attitudes after the event. In her faithful record of comments made by octogenarian May Fourth intellectuals about their ability to survive multiple cataclysms since the radical movement of 1919, Schwarcz falls just short of reaching this conclusion.

When John Pomfret arrives in China he judges his competence as "pretty primitive".[74] He studies hard over three months at the Beijing Languages Institute and learns to speak by shouting out sentences recorded by friends, and reviewing flash cards of unfamiliar Chinese characters. He finds the many homonyms in the language "marvelously inefficient"[75] and its many idioms useful for impressing friends. Once he has passed the entrance exams to Nanjing University, he appears to have developed the fluency necessary to manage all interactions. The affective process of language learning interests him less than its instrumental capacity to open up gateways into 'un-programmed' China, wherein lies 'truth'. He too notes that "part of me wanted to be Chinese", and that this was best realised through his girlfriend Fay: "By loving her, I was getting into China, just as she was trying to get out".[76] Direct dialogue with his roommates confirms his stated interest in learning slang and interesting expletives.[77]

By writing himself into *Chinese Lessons*, Pomfret shows how he has been made privy to the party-influenced 'transformations' of his roommates and friends. Their intimate stories were shared after he had been a China correspondent for many years and had developed the 'fluency' and grasp of linguistic nuance to write this book, and at a time when his respondents felt able to share their stories. I appreciate Pomfret's ability to record the narratives, and translate and contextualise them, skills that are only available to those who have maintained 'bilingual' relationships over years.

As readers, we are able to measure Pomfret's implied affinity with the experiences of each of the respondents. He is particularly sympathetic to Nanda classmate Little

---

[74] Pomfret, *Chinese Lessons*, 7.
[75] Ibid., 14.
[76] Ibid., 82.
[77] Ibid.

Guan, perhaps because she is brave in the face of enormous hardship, perhaps because she was so generous with her life story, or perhaps because, as Pomfret notes, he makes deeper friendships with women than men.[78] By contrast, roommate Zhou Lianchun's life story is used more to lambast the Party than to invite sympathy or resonance. Zhou's account of the torment he inflicted on his elders as a young Red Guard is described as "blood-chilling" in its "unvarnished honesty".[79] Pomfret does not seem to be implying that Zhou is a psychologically scarred survivor, and any awareness of the ways in which trauma can present itself does not feature in his observations, except perhaps indirectly. For example he offers this blunt assessment of classmate Wu's deadpan delivery about his parents' 'murders' in the CR and the part he was forced to play in denouncing them as 'black hands': "For me his seeming indifference, even after four decades, was incomprehensible. It differed so much from Little Guan's true grit and Zhou Lianchun's in-your-face honesty. It made me wonder whether the Chinese system had robbed Old Wu of his capacity to express or even feel hurt."[80]

His treatment of Ye Hao reflects his frustration at being kept at a distance by an opportunist who chooses the Party over the foreigner. Ye is described as a chip off his party-compliant father's block, a first class "brownnoser" in search of power. He joins the Party and is allocated to the Party's Organisation Department in Nanjing. We take up "Big Bluffer" Ye's story again in 1997: he's a corrupt district developer who takes party paternalism to a whole new level, and believes in the "Great Man theory of history".[81]

---

[78] Ibid., 235.
[79] Ibid., 23.
[80] Ibid., 37.
[81] Ibid., 231.

As I follow the stories of his classmates, I become uncomfortable that they are being appropriated to further Pomfret's own agenda to discredit the Party and any associated dishonourable behaviour. I'm missing the 'human' element, the exotopy that might lead him to try to explain Ye's behaviour for example. Perhaps his classmates felt the same: since publication, he is no longer invited to class reunions.[82] Using the stories of others is fraught with risk.

In summary, these Anglophone memoirs can be described as transcultural in that they reveal the ideological instability of the narrated/narrating 'I' who "is experiencing unfamiliar settings, values and practices that are less than coherent".[83] This is a likely position in autobiographical memoirs that document transition to or sojourn in another 'culture', as in Xiaolu Guo's *Concise Chinese-English Dictionary*, which explores the cultural and linguistic 'anomalies' she experienced during her first two years in London, and Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, which explores the experience of language loss as a result of migration. Whether explicitly or implictly, these Anglophone memoirs reveal the tensions and contradictions that mark Chinese-Western relations in the early post-Mao and late Cold War periods: the dismantling of an idealised attachment to Maoism, and a reassessment of Western-style democratic principles; the clash of value systems that result in 'transformation' of ways of seeing the world; and the desire to inhabit spaces of resonance in which Chinese and Western people can create new harmonies.

While Guo and Hoffman emphasise the linguistic in their search for 'new wholeness', few of the Anglophone memoirs about China in this early post-Mao period dwell on the cultural-linguistic differences between English and Chinese that might impact on

---

[82] Pomfret also notes: "…no one got in trouble with the relevant authorities", email to author 15 May 2015.

[83] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 77.

mutual understanding and transcultural transformation; instead their focus is on impacts of China's politics on their being-becoming in relation to historical, contingent, and significant others. "*Ganyu:* Moving Encounters in early post-Mao China" shows a young Jen whose experience is also 'orchestrated' by the party-state; however it highlights to a far greater extent how her Chinese interlocutors helped to transform her into a bilingual transcultural person. It also emphasises the instability of translation and interpretation that is part of communicating in another language. Further, "*Ganyu*" relies less on diary/journal entries and letters in order to allow for a 'fictionalised' dialogue-driven rendering of transcultural engagement. Extracts from Chinese poetry and fiction are used to demonstrate how learning takes place. In the memoir chapters, the voice is consistent with the 'character' of young Jen, and in most cases hindsight does not feature within the stories, except as a postscript in chapters such as House Arrest, and Divorce. It is The Bridges to Future Past that directly link the past with the present, and the personal with the political. The poems that constitute the Bridges also make use of Chinese poetics, features that will be detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Reflecting transcultural experience

The fragments that have now become "*Ganyu:* Moving Encounters in Early Post-Mao China" reveal the emotional tones and rhythms that accompany 'looking back and forth' at the transcultural experience. This chapter explores how this experience progressed from largely subconscious beginnings to increasingly deliberate crafting with each revision of the memoir. I begin below with an analysis of the memoir's dialogues as a polyphony of voices. I then reflect on the ways in which I found code switching effective for representing bilingual interactions, followed by my exploration of the ways in which characters in the memoir represent 'greater' (collective) and 'lesser' (individual) selves in interaction with dynamic positioning as insider or outsider. Finally, I reflect on my use of images and quotations from Chinese literature and art as devices to honour historical and transcultural legacies.

3.1 A polyphony of voices

An individual's language is ...permeated by other people's words; and those words combine as various discourses in the sociocultural fields that are multiple, contradictory, and 'heteroglossic'.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson[1]

While the stories and essays that constitute "*Ganyu*" are written from the point of view of young narrator Jen using the present tense and the first person voice to simulate 'right here and right now', in the diegetic framing of the stories it is clear that the much older writer Jen has control of the telling: it is she who stretches and concertinas time to highlight moments of illumination or confusion right up into the 'present'; she who wryly recounts young Jen's passions, preoccupations and idiosyncrasies in order to

[1] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 81.

create a character who performs 'what it might have been like' as a young woman learning Chinese in Melbourne and China in the 1970s and 1980s; and she who creates poems out of persistent 'dark' memories in the Bridges to Future Past. The gaps between these narrating and narrated 'I's can readily be observed as "temporal, intellectual, emotional, physical, psychological, ideological, and ethical".[2]

This polyphonous narratorial voice allows for the construction of a more nuanced profile of the subject of the memoir. As noted previously, young middle class Jen is introduced as a 'character' whose "'subject' identities are "multiple, contextual, contested, and contingent"[3]: communist-leaning, feminist, guilt-ridden agnostic (dare she be atheist?), lover of Chinese language, Tang poetry, Taoism, and propaganda art, would-be actor, ex-girlfriend to a rock and roll bass player, would-be hippy, and anti-joiner who's resistant to collectives and tight social groups but needs to be embraced by all. What these different identities, imagined in their idealised forms, offer young Jen are opportunities to explore "intense everyday encounters outside my realm of experience", as she states in Chapter 1 of *"Ganyu"*.[4]

The memoir reveals these identities through an "ensemble of voices" performed by the narrated 'I'.[5] For example, there's the 'I'm so excited I'm in China' voice, marked by generally standard English and exclamation marks. There's the stroppy voice that emerges in moments of dissent, frustration, fear, discomfort or cultural dissonance, shot through with slang and expletives. Her voice of indignation is a reaction to perceived and real injustices, and its expression tends to come across as 'holier-than-thou', which

---

[2] James Phelan, "Teaching Voice of Authors, Narrators and Audience", in *Teaching Narrative Theory*, eds D. Herman, B. McHale, and J. Phelan (New York: Modern Language Association, 2010), 3.

[3] Joan Scott, "Experience", in *Feminists Theorise the Political*, eds Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 36.

[4] Anderson, Chapter 1, I think I'm Turning China Red, "*Ganyu*".

[5] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography,* 80.

is a feature in all the Anglophone memoirs discussed in Chapter Two. It is the voice of those who've inherited all of the 'rights' that accompany membership to a Western white English-speaking middle class, but who are powerless to control the situations in which they find themselves in mainland China.

Young Jen's sentimental 'romantic' voice emerges in conversations with Chinese interlocutors about art, literature or everyday life. It is the voice of a person 'being gifted' by another. Vera Schwarcz has a similar voice when she reflects on some of her more intimate conversations with veteran May Fourth intellectuals and others.[6] The 'gifting' involves a sharing of personal details or impressions that invite the interlocutors into a closer relationship of trust. This voice is best heard in the scene where Jen and her mother are invited to Liao *laoshi's* home for lunch.[7] Further, there's a melancholic voice, one that inhabits Jen when she's unable to do what she believes is right (ignoring Liao's request to sponsor his son to Australia),[8] or when she feels overwhelmed by political and social circumstance (the Party's attack on bourgeois liberalism in late 1980-early 1981) as evoked in Strife Inside and Out,[9] and many of the Bridges to Future Past.

The voice of the witty larrikin from Australia also inflects many of the stories and essays. In addition to tendencies of nationality and gender, the more discerning eye of the older writer leads to humorous accounts that are often self-deprecatory, making even more explicit the co-existence of "the direct intention of the character…speaking and the refracted intention of the author…in a zone of dialogical contact".[10]

As stated in Chapter One of the exegesis, it is through dialogue between the young Jen

---

6 Schwarcz, *Long Road Home*, 1984.
7 Anderson, Chapter 9 *Aiya Mama*, "Ganyu".
8 Ibid., Chapter 10.
9 Ibid., Chapter 8.
10 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 45 and 324.

and the cast of 'characters' that I can best show how relationships impact on the processes and content of my learning acquisition, imitation/adaptation and self-knowledge. If we compare the dialogue between Jen and her mother with those constructed for significant Chinese characters, we notice that "[t]he voices of literal others [are] less individuated or specific than those of loved ones and constitute the voice of a community or other kind of collectivity."[11] In large part, this reflects the fact that these friendships were not sustained after my departure from China, while a close relationship with my mother continues.

An investigation of the dialogues I have created indicates recognition of five distinct speech genres or 'communities' that mark transculturality, those discourses among many that characterise mainland China's rich and diverse language scene. Bakhtin describes heteroglossia as the speech genres "we are primed to use in different settings for different purposes, which mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and [are] interrelated dialogically".[12] Each can be distinguished from the other in terms of the topics and language used.

First, the discourse of the *dangyuan*/*ganbu* (the party member/government cadre) is encapsulated in Geremie Barmé's term New China Newspeak (as discussed in the Introduction). This term denotes language that is authoritative, paternalistic, didactic and opportunistic. Its focus is on China's progress as a nation, and the citizen's moral responsibility to embrace party policy. It stakes a claim as the "proper language [that] cultivates moral character", a correct way of speaking that

---

[11] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 80.

[12] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination,* 292. A more detailed speech genre analysis has been conducted by Peter J. Bowman, in "Fontana's 'Inwielderbringlich': A Bakhtinian Reading", *The German Quarterly*, 2004, 77 (2). http://www.jstor.org/stable/3252121, accessed 11 October 2016.

is "prescriptive, not creative."[13] It seeks to claim the historical past for its own. This speech genre is alienating for many people, including myself, and it is only recently that I came across Perry Link's astute analysis from 1992. He observes that the official language is

> not used to express one's own thoughts or intentions…but through judicious manipulation to advance one's interests or to defend oneself. Ideological terms that still bear the face values of altruism are used as pawns in moves whose real aim is personal advantage. Nearly all aspects of daily living, including work assignment, salary, housing, education, medical care, access to rationed goods, permission to travel, and even political status and therefore social respectability are within the control of the Party bureaucrats and thus bound up in the language game.[14]

Jen is shown to adversely react to being 'fed a line' that brooks no intention to *mutually* negotiate meaning or seek 'resonance'. She resists the leading question, the 'one right answer'. It has been difficult to reproduce this language despite the fact that I recall young Jen reeling off the latest political slogans and campaign rhetoric because of its ubiquity in the media, in political or diplomatic meetings, and in 'conversation' with more rigid party members and cadres. Perhaps it resists reproduction because I have tried to resist its authority, just as I observed Cambodian ministry officials resist adoption of the 'speech genre' used by the Vietnam-backed Hun Sen government in 1989.

Liao *laoshi* demonstrates his ability to play the official language game in his party-commissioned essay reviling Jiang Qing as a latter day 'wolf-hearted',

---

[13] Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing*, 8.
[14] Ibid., 175.

'villainous', 'underhand', 'power-grabbing', 'diabolical' would-be Empress.[15] In conversations with young Jen about modern literature, however, he is shown to use New China Newspeak as an indirect way of contradicting it. Perry Link also observed that the better-known intellectuals in his circle, trained to believe that language should carry moral certitude, had also distanced themselves from this rhetoric, and hence experienced alienation from the Party.[16]

Second, *zhishifenzi* or intellectual discourse can be characterised as emphasising selfless, morally guided China-centric thought. Sentimental and symbolically rich, it is bound to the past through the "historical legacy of words" (*lishi yujing*),[17] but also cosmopolitan in referencing new solutions for China.[18] In "*Ganyu*", teachers Liao, Wang and Ding exemplify *zhishifenzi* discourse and the intellectual *jingshen*. They reference history and poetry to comment on the present and future moral state of the nation, and to create opportunities for bonding through indirect and symbolic associations. Modern Chinese literature teacher Wang *laoshi* is shown practicing the 'oblique arts', another pattern of Chinese intellectual discourse that makes possible active engagement with contentious subject matter.[19]

The speech genre of the *laobaixing* or 'ordinary people' is colloquial in delivery, and tends to the family-centric focus on everyday concerns such as housing and financial security. The tailor Yu Shen, who took immediate advantage of *gaige kaifang*[20] to leave Wuxi and seek his fortune in the provincial capital, exemplifies

---

[15] Liao Kaifei, "Jiang Qing chuipeng de Lü Hou shi hedeng renwu?" in *Ping Qiang Qing de Nühuang Meng* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing, 1977), http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/31559823?q&versonId=38263531.

[16] Link, *Evening Chats*, 175-179.

[17] See Davies, *Worrying About China*, 110.

[18] Ibid., 68.

[19] See Anderson, Chapter 4 Un-making Revolution, "*Ganyu*".

[20] *Gaige Kaifang*, the 'Reform and Opening Up' policy introduced by Deng Xiaoping.

this discourse. Narrator Jen is fascinated by the tailor's lack of constraint—he appears to talk about whatever comes into his mind, and readily answers any questions asked of him. Party policy and its moral rhetoric do not feature in his conversation with her. His is the genre of *xiaoshuo,* the gossip and curious tidbits that filter through the neighbourhood and challenge the myths generated by official discourse.[21] His talk is of the present as preparation ground for the future security and wellbeing of the family, and of its deep connections to ancestral lineage and *guxiang*.[22] This exemplifies him as a member of the non-intellectual masses: unlike intellectual and 'revolutionary' others in the memoir, his efforts are put exclusively to the service of both nuclear and extended families, both of which feature in his conversations; and he is not self-conscious about his family's adherence to practices of ancestor worship, despite party pressure to eliminate the 'four olds'.[23] He tells young Jen that the family buried the book of genealogy and the kitchen god so they could disinter them once the 'troubles' of the CR were over.[24]

Yu Shen is the only person represented in the memoir whose conversation I recorded in translation from immediate memory directly after our fortnightly tailor consultations and tea-drinking sessions. The voice I have given him is colloquial in its English phrasing, and this was how I translated him at the time.[25] I believe this is how I 'heard' him, in part because his attitude was casual and relaxed, in stark contrast to the *jingshen* of intellectuals and party cadres. Further, he barely

---

[21] This is discussed in the introduction. See Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality,* 163.
[22] '*guxiang'* or 'hometown'.
[23] The slogan '*Po sijiu*' or 'Smash the Four Olds: old ideas, culture, customs, and habits' was Mao's directive to the Red Guards in 1966.
[24] Anderson, Chapter 4, "*Ganyu*".
[25] Ibid.. Chapter 12 Diving into the Sea: Reform and opening up, "*Ganyu*".

opened his mouth when he spoke,[26] a phlegmatic style we Australians associate with rural living.

These three discourses are also in dynamic interrelation. Students and teachers switch between intellectual and Party or *dangyuan* discourses, and Yu Shen can just as readily cite a *dangyuan* directive as a Tang poem. Tampon crusader Xiao Jia's voice reflects that of the no-nonsense People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldier, a style of delivery I find difficult to differentiate from the Nanjing person's direct way of speaking, perhaps because Nanjing was a regional army base and a significant percentage of its population were employed by the PLA—Wang *mama*'s husband was an officer in the PLA, Liao *laoshi*'s wife was a staffer in PLA administration, and Bai Ma's father was high up in the PLA, as was John Pomfret's girlfriend's father in *Chinese Lessons*. Xiao Jia shares information with Western women students in the context of the Four Modernisations Campaign. The language she uses is inflected with New China Newspeak, as when she asks Jen to buy her a "scientific bra" in Hong Kong,[27] and it is more marked in discussion with the Women's Federation cadres as she shows affiliation with Party policy and its moral position regarding sex before marriage and hymen protection. And yet I have cast her closing statement as an appeal to our shared suffering for 'being women',[28] thereby framing the Women's Federation as both politically-interpellated *and* personally keen to improve the situation of women.

A fourth speech genre I can identify might be called *liumang*-speak. I believe John Minford's definition of this group as a Chinese version of the Beat generation

---

[26] Pomfret notices the ability of people to speak Chinese without moving their lips, and he tries to mimic this casual delivery in *Chinese Lessons*, 14 and 82.
[27] Anderson, Chapter 6 International Women's Day, "*Ganyu*".
[28] Ibid.

better captures these disenchanted, and in some cases disenfranchised, youth than New China Newspeak's negative portrayal of them as thugs.[29] Artists and other intellectuals demonstrated their disillusionment with the moral guidance of the Party by 'dropping out' and expressing themselves in acts of non-conformity. Echoing Bakhtin's embrace of the peripheral carnivalesque, they danced and made love with 'improper' partners, cavorted and parodied the Party discourse, swore 'liberally' and 'acted up' in the street, and drew on the grotesque to illustrate their opposition to the Party's heavy handed authority. They constituted a "potential counter-power in everyday life…[although] cramped in its potential by the repressive construction of spaces of monologue."[30] Bai Ma's portrayal of the abject and the untamed in his brush paintings, his non-routine way of living and his flippancy accords with this genre type.[31]

Another speech genre shared by Western and African students, and also in conversation between Chinese and Western acquaintances and friends is Chinglish. There were two general types: smatterings of English in Chinese dialogue used in Mandarin Chinese conversations, or English liberally interspersed with Chinese words and expressions in English conversations.[32] I remember the English version as a relatively uniform code across China, though with geographically differentiating additions. Popular English colloquialisms were reframed using *putonghua* approximations: *mafan* for 'hassle', and *meiyou wenti/*

---

[29] See Minford, "Picking up the Pieces", 30-32.

[30] Andrew Robinson, "Bakhtin: Carnival Against Capital, Carnival Against Power", Part 2, *Ceasefire Magazine*, 9 September 2011, 7. http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk /in-theory-bakhtin-2/. Accessed 2 October 2017.

[31] See Chapter 15 Magnetic Disturbances, "*Ganyu*".

[32] We used this term to describe our form of Chinese pidgin, although it is usually reserved for the written direct translations from Chinese into English. See Oliver Radtke, "More than Errors and Embarrassment: New Approaches to Chinglish", in *Chinese Under Globalization: Emerging Trends in Language Use in China*, eds Jin Liu and Hongyin Tao (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2012), 145-170.

mei guanxi/ meishi[33] for 'no worries'. Literal translations from Chinese were also adopted in English, such as 'on a horse' (*mashang*), which means 'immediately'. Everyday food and beverages or items of use (*yongpin*), and imperatives or collective actions such as *zou ba*! (Let's go) or *suanzhang!* (Get the bill) were spoken in Chinese, regardless of the language of the interlocutor. Even though we knew better, many of my Western dormitory friends found the formulaic expressions '*Ni chifanle meiyou?*' (Have you eaten yet?) and '*Ni qu nali*?' (Where are you going?) as intrusive as I did. We would ask each other these questions to trigger resistance and draw laughter. Over time, however, we acculturated ourselves to accepting these social questions as innocuous. As Andrew Robinson notes, "it is the peculiar standpoint of 'outsidedness' that makes something new of the other's perspective by merging it with one's own."[34] Our use of Chinglish also set us apart as an in-group of speakers of communist Chinese (specifically *not* Taiwan or any other form of Chinese), *and* separate from other Anglophone tourists or members of the non-Chinese speaking expatriate community.

This polyphony of voices represented in dialogue not only marks the nature of young Jen's linguistic and cultural immersion; it also celebrates the complexity of social and political layers in a particular historical period.

3.2 The play of language

Through language we 'show off' our imagined identities; in transcultural settings, however, the 'ideal' performance is hampered by limited language proficiency. 'Chinese' Jen, An Zhenni, is a compendium of clumsy, shambling performance acts in roles of student-teacher ('half an expert'), friend, foreign visitor, customer, client of

[33] *meiyou wenti*: 'not an issue'. *meiyou guanxi*: 'no relation (to me)'; *meishi*: 'no event'.
[34] Robinson, "Bakhtin: Polyphony", Part 1, 5.

government/official services, traveller, and unmarried woman. In writing the memoir I found myself highlighting the awkwardness of these attempts to perform a new blended identity. My training as a language teacher and my reading of Bakhtin helped me to focus on the wrestle with language and meaning in dialogic encounters with others, and to 'remember' with some clarity the gradual increase in comprehension and proficiency over time. In the memoir this process is emphasised through strategic uses of code switching between English and Chinese.

In literature, unlike real-life dialogic situations, code switching is consciously constructed so that the "alien language code is glossed, translated, or informed by the context so as to reach the reader,"[35] resulting in activation of the reader's 'internal dialogue', which, in this memoir, is an attempt to create meanings on the boundary between the reader's understanding of the world in English and guessing at its non-equivalence in Chinese.[36]

Literary code switching in the memoir fulfills the six conversational functions of code switching in bilingual situations identified by anthropologist John Gumperz: quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, message qualification and personalisation versus objectification.[37] For example, in a dialogue rich text, there are many quotations as in "…**We are not getting on.** ***Hebulai****…".* Terms of address such as ***laoshi****,* Zhang ***dajie*** and ***tongzhi*** are used, as are interjections such as "***Aiyo!***", "***Suanle!****",* or *"**Fangpi**"*. Reiteration functions as a form of message amplification, which young Jen uses, for example, to repeat in English what she believes she overhears in Chinese: "Yeah right, **learn from the masses, but learn what**?"; or to emphasise a

---

[35] Huihui Li, "Representations of Code Switching in Asian American Women's Literature", PhD Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2001, 17.

[36] See Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 286.

[37] John Gumperz, *Language and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); also see Li, "Representations of Code Switching", 30-37.

particular point: "You didn't ***guyide*** kill your teacher. **Not deliberately**". Message qualification refers to the grammatical construction of verb and complement as in "They can think **I'm *sanba*** all they like". Finally the contrast between the personalised and the objectified can perhaps best be seen in this monologue about rooming with Zhang *dajie*: "It feels as though every time I open my mouth to say something in Chinese she says, '*budong*', which is designed to make my stuttering explanation even more incomprehensible. I've come to think of this as **basketball diplomacy—*budong, budong, budong***."[38]

While most of the dialogue appears as 'translated' into English to avoid reader alienation, many chapters have at least one dialogue or text that alerts the reader to the narrator's progress in learning Chinese. Her increasing proficiency results in fewer translation props for the reader, although translations are offered in the footnotes. This focus on the language is unique to *Ganyu* among the Anglophone memoirs discussed in Chapter Two.

One strategy I have used to show gaps in comprehension in the early stages is via the romanised form of Chinese, *pinyin,* and English cues of non-understanding ('something something'), as in the chapter Nanjing University: *Danwei* describing young Jen's arrival, when a speech from the head of the foreign office presents an interpreting challenge.[39] The memoir uses *pinyin* for frequently occurring Chinese words such as the terms of address mentioned above. This alerts the reader to Chinglish as a form of code switching used by foreign students, not only to cement an in-group identity but also in response to partial immersion in a rich Chinese linguistic setting.

In written text, the language that is the focus of the narrative though not the language in which the story is delivered is frequently italicised. For example, novelist Nicole Mones,

[38] For translations, see the Glossary at the end of the exegesis.

[39] Anderson, Chapter 3, "*Ganyu*".

whose female protagonist is a Chinese-speaking Western ex-pat in Beijing, cues the reader for Chinese language as follows: "'*Mei guanxi*,' he said, It doesn't matter. But of course it did". Mones omits the translation when the context makes meaning transparent.[40] In "*Ganyu*", more extended utterances in *pinyin* suggest young Jen's inability to visualise the Chinese characters as she speaks; it indicates potential challenges to comprehension. For instance, ambiguity in Chinese is intensified by the large number of homophones, such as the '*qian*' *in qiannian.*[41] Jen is 'double-crossed' by this homophone: while a native speaker would immediately identify the correct word because the two *qian* have different tones, Jen stumbles because the linguistic load is high.

Our youthful narrator also engages in monologic feedback about her linguistic performance. Such self-monitoring and assessment are constant during the earlier stages of foreign or other language acquisition, and one of the reasons why communication is so exhausting. We read her resorting to paraphrase when word retrieval fails. We see her beset by doubts: can her interlocutors understand her poor Chinese approximations and can they understand her western-mediated perspectives? Can *she* really understand the intended meanings directed at *her* in Chinese?[42]

In later chapters, dialogue in Chinese characters demonstrates Jen's greater linguistic fluency. The interpreting load for the reader is made heavier by this gesture, but the intention is to reflect the language learner's anxiety of not knowing, and to trigger the attempt to make meaning even with little or no knowledge of how Chinese language

---

[40] Nicole Mones, *Lost in Translation* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), 123.

[41] Anderson, Chapter 13, "*Ganyu*".

[42] For a description of metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies see M. Hogan, C. Dwyer, O. Harney, C. Noone, & R. Conway, "Metacognitive Skill Development and Applied Systems Science: A Framework of Metacognitive Skills, Self-regulatory Functions and Real-World Applications", in *Metacognition: Fundaments, Applications, and Trends*, ed. A. Peña-Ayala (Springer International Publishing, 2015), 76.

works. Taiwanese-American writer Esme Weijun Wang uses this technique sparingly in her novel *The Border of Paradise,* balancing the risk of appearing deliberately impenetrable with her desire to familiarise readers with the idea that most of the world experiences moments of unintelligibility every day, "those 'vaguest' of language spaces where difficulty in communication is its own kind of trauma".[43] For example, her Taiwan-born character now living in the U.S. comments: "I craved the taste of things I couldn't have…a 包子crushed flat between the tongue and the roof of the mouth…"[44] Wang further strengthens Huihui Li's claim that Asian-American writers in particular, such as Amy Tan *(Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*), Maxine Hong Kingston (*The Woman Warrior, Tripmaster Monkey*), Fae Myenne Ng (*Bone*) and Gish Jen (*Typical American*), seek to "discomfort [Anglophone] readers by confronting them with an apparently uncrossable cultural boundary", and thereby establishing their particular Chinese-American identity.[45] Alienating the reader is, however, a risk, especially when the two languages are so distanced from each other in form and structure; this strategy is therefore best attempted when the meaning can be found in the subsequent dialogue, as in "Travel China-Scholar Style" when young Jen interprets teacher Ding Hao's aphorism for friend Annabelle.[46] In addition, I have provided 'subtitles' in the footnotes to ensure that the reader stays with the text.

There is a danger in "*Ganyu*" of over-complicating the text with Chinese language in so many forms. I hope, however, that this complexity will be 'read' not only as the amazing challenge that language learning presents, but in concert with Wang, that it might

---

[43] Esme Weijun Wang, "Why My Novel Uses Untranslated Chinese", *Literary Hub*, 12 April 2016, http://lithub.com/why-my-novel-uses-untranslated-chinese/, accessed 15 April 2016.

[44] Esme Weijun Wang, *The Border of Paradise* (Los Angeles: The Unnamed Press, 2016), 1112/5422. E-book.

[45] Li, "Representations of Code Switching", 19, 135.

[46] Anderson, Chapter 13, "*Ganyu*".

heighten awareness of the creative capacity of so many in the world to dwell in these ambiguous multilingual spaces.

3.3 Exploring *Xiaowo* and *Dawo*, *Nei* and *Wai*

In writing "*Ganyu*", I found myself wondering about the impacts of first language interference on second language acquisition in terms of internalised values and behaviours. I have come to realise that transcultural interactions reflect more complex relationships between people and their societies than are expressed, for example, in declarations of the West as 'individualistic' and China as 'collective', or of foreign students as 'outsiders' and Chinese people as 'insiders'.

While the white foreign students studying in China between 1974 and 1979 might be characterised as individuals, the memoir's representation of them is as a collective, attracted to participating in a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist proletarian-led democracy. We wanted to feel the energy of a mass 'engine' working as one. Our interest in the collective was partly influenced by Judeo-Christian morality, in particular the breathtaking anarchy implicit in the Sermon on the Mount that inspired the back-to-the-earth movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and by the feminist movement in which we women conceived of ourselves as a global sisterhood struggling against patriarchal paternalism. We looked forward to performing manual labour around the university or supporting a peasant brigade to bring in the harvest. Some of us women had been primed to engage in self-criticism sessions by feminist consciousness-raising, by other confessional practices, and by a programmed belief in our personal inadequacies. We looked forward to a sincere engagement in such 'self-cultivation' work, though perhaps not to the extreme level of commitment demonstrated by Jan Wong in her memoir.[47] We

[47] In *Red China Blues*, Wong describes her enthusiastic participation in *piping, ziwo piping*

were disappointed to discover that these acts of collective unity were no longer regarded as vital to socialist construction by our Chinese hosts. In representing Jen's adverse reactions to tokenism and empty rhetoric, I am recalling and recasting my youthful attraction to the idea. Like her, many in this collective are remembered as playing at being 'red'.

I've already described our *liuxuesheng* cohort as identifying as 'special' by dint of speaking Chinese language and being outside the hyper-scrutinised enclaves of the diplomatic and media corps; but we were also a collective in our relatively uniform 'first world' reactions to the vacillating national policies that impacted on our daily lives. It is from within this context of the implied 'we' that I suggest the contradictory and flawed nature of my early mission in China: to do the very best I could to 'be' Chinese—to learn the language, to walk the walk and talk the talk—but in *my way.* This can be expressed as: 'I want to belong as my idealized version of who I am. I want you to look at me and see me as I want to be seen and I want to look at you and see an idealised version of who I expect to see.'

In Chinese translations of the English 'self',[48] however, the word for the individual, *geren*, carries the meaning of 'separate', which infers not belonging or being an outsider, while the self, *ziwo*, can be construed as self-centred, *zisi*. I wanted to present my experience as a transcultural dilemma that shifts in focus and intensity as self-construction and self-transformation occur. Immersion in daily routine practices and interactions are shown to lead to an increase in language proficiency *and* cultural

---

'criticism–self-criticism' sessions.

[48] See Lydia Liu, "Translingual Practice: the Discourse of Individualism Between China and the West", in *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 1993, 1(1), 160-193. She argues: "…the violence of China's encounter with the West forces nationhood upon selfhood, and vice versa, ...Yet the modern self is never quite reducible to national identity. On the contrary, it is the incongruities, tensions, and struggles between the two as well as their mutual implication and complicity that give full meaning to the lived experience of Chinese modernity", 169.

appreciation. The photograph in Figure 1, taken towards the end of my final year in China, reveals Jen modifying her appearance and conduct to fit into the environment. This 'performative' act demonstrates her willingness to identify with the group, in contrast with other wardrobe choices that were deliberately 'disruptive' and theatrical.

Figure 1 Writer-narrator as "textual spectacle". Young Jen and English language teachers at Nanjing Medical College, Autumn, 1983. Image of the author.

My 'official hosts' had a very different understanding of the relationship between self and society. The Party takes the idea of *dawo,* the greater self, seriously. The 'I' of the individual must chain its will to the bigger ideals of nation and state.[49] Janet Ng argues that in early twentieth century China *xiaowo* (the lesser self) and *dawo* (the greater self) were presented as oppositional alternatives: self-existence versus national survival, a dichotomy that was put to lethal effect during Mao's revolutionary China.[50] The Confucian precept of *zhengming*, the Rectification of Names, an exhortation to act according to one's prescribed roles, is, however, an ancient precedent of the modern idea of *dawo.* For instance, the traditional scholar's duty was to model himself on the sages, and to be 'an exemplary subject' of the emperor. Gloria Davies has noted that *youhuan* or "worrying about the problems that prevent China from attaining perfection…as an enduring civilization"[51] continues to be an often unconscious motivation of Chinese intellectual endeavour, and this tendency is driven by the attachment to *dawo*. A

---

[49] See Gloria Davies, "Affirming the Human in China", in *boundary 2*, 2010, 2007, 37(1), 57.
[50] Janet Ng, *The Experience of Modernity*, 3-4.
[51] See Davies, *Worrying About China*, 1.

‘transcultural’ version of this practice of *youhuan* was also observable among the foreign students who worried about the relationship between the Party and the people, between institutions and their members, between locals and foreigners; their unspoken referent, however, was the international sphere, not China for China’s sake.

Figure 2 “Devote your youth to the Four Modernisations”
Propaganda poster, early 1980s. Author’s collection.

In the writing of the chapter House Arrest, for example, I discover retrospectively the patriotic *dawo* role Liao *laoshi* represented in ‘worrying about China’. In the story he is conscious of his responsible attachment to the web of China’s history. Young Jen read his prank to rescue the statue as the act of an ‘activist’ individualist, but now I see it as preserving China’s historical legacy in defiance of an ‘emperor’ who has lost the mandate of Heaven.[52] After his house arrest in 1981, he judges the outcome as inevitable given the alignment of a particular set of circumstances. Jen’s interpretation that he is fatalistic about his arrest belies his clear analysis of political power’s ability to create truth out of thin air.[53]

The personal responsibility she feels for Liao’s arrest and her indignation and empathy for Liao’s situation come straight from the Western individualist’s handbook; however

---

[52] Anderson, Chapter 4 Unmaking Revolution, “*Ganyu*”.
[53] Ibid., Chapter 10 House Arrest.

its genesis can also be located in her partial acceptance of the party line that blamed Westerners for any florescence of perceived corrupt practices. I wanted to show how this exposure to the power of the party-state led me to become cautious about making friends with eager Chinese acquaintances in 1983. Writing as older Jen, I became attentive to young Jen's desire to be party-compliant and so more readily accepted into the 'China family', even if that meant denying herself the possibility of friendships with 'non-approved' Chinese people.

Further, *dawo* suggests a self (sub)merged in connection with others. Bicultural writer Ien Ang has observed that writing about herself in Chinese feels "self-indulgent, [like] resorting to personal experience as a privileged source of authority, uncontrollable and therefore unamenable to others."[54] This choice of words makes a useful link between the proper order of things and social unity. As she explains, a Chinese identity "always involves a distancing from oneself since one's subjectivity is never fully steeped in the modality of the speaking position one inhabits at any one moment".[55]

Thus the Chinese self can be seen as performing a prescribed 'proper' role that is heeded above the individual. For example, in representing the tailor Yu Shen through my recollection of his strong connection to his extended family and hometown (*guxiang*), I saw how I had identified him as more connected to familial and ancestral roots than to the nation. But what of the group of urban youth who were not allocated a *danwei* after graduation? In the economic and social transition of the late 1970s and early 1980s, they became 'floating lost people' as the literal translation of *liumang* suggests. In the Bridge Permission to Speak I create a monologue based on patchy recollection in which the young man, 'floating and lost', poses existential questions about his social purpose. In

---

[54] Ien Ang, "On Not Speaking Chinese": Postmodern Ethnicity and the Politics of Diaspora", *New Formations*, 1994, 24(1), 3-4.
[55] Ibid.

addition to unemployed youth like him were the artists, poets and intellectuals such as Liu Dan and Bai Ma, who actively sought to distance themselves from family and community as a way of determining a new type of identity. Their *dawo* was attached to a loose community of non-conformists.

I have shown young Jen's understanding of *dawo* as informed by a received Christian moral code and I highlight her assumption that the Party's exhortation to 'Learn from Lei Feng'[56] and help fellow comrades came from a similar moral code. In recounting the shock she experiences to discover that the Lei Feng spirit is conspicuously absent when it comes to keeping the dormitories clean, I am also foregrounding how supposed communitarian *dawo* values were trumped by *xiaowo* hierarchical status: the 'intellectual' university students demonstrated their understanding that they were 'above' manual labour unless compelled by a party campaign, in which case they would espouse and even demonstrate its virtues.[57]

The Chinese and Western 'characters' in "*Ganyu*" are presented as hypersensitive to their complex locations inside (*nei*) or outside (*wai*) essential social networks. This representation reflects my remembered understanding of these networks in the early post-Mao period as rigidly dichotomous, but complicated by multiple overlaps: Chinese or foreign, well-placed or less well-placed in terms of *guanxi* or imposed party policy, and more or less privileged (*ganbu* versus *zhishifenzi* versus *gongren* versus *nongmin*, those in a *danwei* versus *liumang* without a *danwei*, female soldiers versus male soldiers, and *waiguoren* with disposable foreign currency, and dubious political

---

[56] This Cultural Revolution slogan was revived in February 1981 to uphold 'socialist spiritual civilisation' while developing a socialist market economy. See Elaine Jeffreys and Su Xuezhong "Governing Through Lei Feng: a Mao-era Role Model in Reform-era China", in *New Mentalities of Government in China*, eds David Bray and Elaine Jeffreys (Taylor and Francis e-Books, 2016), accessed 8 August 2017.

[57] Anderson, Chapter 14 Green and Clean?, "*Ganyu*".

credentials and moral intentions versus *zhongguoren*).

Similar to the memoirs by Kirkby, Pellett, Wong, and Barlow and Lowe in Chapter Two, "*Ganyu*" also addresses the ways in which party-state and culturally imposed 'situatedness' had a significant impact on relationships. Jen is equally sensitive to being 'forced' inside or outside or 'aside', reflecting not only her Western middle class position of privilege but also her lack of cultural understanding. She bristles at the unbridled curiosity of '*waidiren*' outside the Nanjing Department Store who demonstrate just how *nei* they are in comparison to her,[58] and she shows her contempt for exclusive expressions such as '*wo guo*', which even though it translates as 'my country', can never refer to *her* country. These are responses to linguistic expressions that literally distance. Additionally, she is at once embarrassed and secretly relieved by the obvious status, economic and security considerations that privilege her over *laobaixing* and even her teachers, further complicating the *nei-wai* dichotomy.

As noted in Chapter One, I have shown young Jen as aware that most of her Chinese friends are 'allowed' to be her friends because of their relationships with institutions of power: party minder Wang *mama* is an obvious example; artist Bai Ma is 'free' to move outside the constraints of a *danwei*, to court Western women and travel alone through the foothills of the Himalayas because his father is high up in the People's Liberation Army; Xiao Jia is 'safe' because of military connections that are never revealed. The memoir presents Liao *laoshi* as attempting to fulfil his duty as a teacher and straddle the *nei-wai* divide. In fact at Nanjing University he was considered with some suspicion, referred to as a member of the *Fudan bang*,[59] the small group of lecturers who had graduated from the prestigious Fudan University in Shanghai.

---

[58] *Waidiren* are literally 'outside place people' from rural areas or other provinces. While 'outsiders' in the context of Nanjing, they are still more 'inside' (*nei*) than Jen can ever be.
[59] 'Fudan University faction'.

These significant and contingent relationships offered opportunities for communication that reconfigured the *nei-wai* dichotomy and were thus particularly precious. A seminal moment in relationship building is presented in the chapter *Aiya Mama*. It depicts how more senior Chinese friends and acquaintances valued meeting my mother Marg, not only as an opportunity to demonstrate what young Jen means to them, but also to create *ganying* moments inclusive of the family as an intimate collectivity or *dawo*.

3.4 A Cosmopolitan Poetics

I have written my memoir in large part around dissonances and resonances generated in conversations and encounters between Jen and others. Registering the shock of the other is a key feature of all Anglophone memoirs about China. For instance, the 1980s' memoirs of Vera Schwarcz, and Tani Barlow and Donald Lowe, offer analyses of their personal experiences of cultural estrangement from both Western and 'local' perspectives, with hindsight afforded by only a few years. Gail Pellett, like me, has had decades to reflect on her reaction to experiences at Radio Beijing and identify reasons for her feelings of alienation. It would seem that the longer one insists that one's worldview is 'uncontested', the more profoundly it can be challenged by other cultural and linguistic environments.

Chapter One highlights my particular interest in the Chinese ideas of *xing* or evocation, and *ganying* with its focus on mutual intention and co-creation, involving the heart and mind in concert. These two practices are integral to the 'traditional' Chinese scholar's engagement with literature, art, music and conversation. In writing the chapter Travel China-scholar Style, I recount my efforts at emulating Chinese 'readings' of places of 'natural scenic beauty', by tapping into the deeply felt connection Chinese writers express when writing about their experience of famous landscapes. When emperor Kang

Xi carved 'Just so' (*guoran*) into the rock on sacred Mount Tai, he was recording his mutual appreciation of the scene evoked in earlier literature and art. Such literary acts are also instances of *dawo*: social in intention, they are appeals to group unity. Informed visitors will thus want to imbibe Kang Xi's *ganyu* to create their own moment of resonance with it by memorialising the occasion with a photograph. What is memorialised is the sovereign intention immortalised in text (*wen*), which is the function of these human 'civilised' scratchings in the landscape.[60] The physical landscape itself becomes a secondary backdrop.

In the dialogue that begins with Ding Hao's recitation of Bai Juyi's poem that contrasts the pine with the hibiscus, I have also sought to capture something of Ding Hao's evident intention to express his *xin,* a heart-mind resonance between the natural order of things and the poet Bai Juyi, between the poet and Ding Hao as he gazes at the pines, between Ding Hao and young Jen's mother and, by extension, with young Jen and Annabelle. This is an expression of *dawo* mixed with a desire to create an 'inner sanctum' of connection. I 'guess' that he is also challenging the desire for longevity, thereby perhaps mocking the Party's borrowing of the pine to symbolise its own 'upright antiseptic immortality'. It is pure serendipity that in writing to the remembered essence of what happened on the mountain that day, I selected this couplet from Bai Juyi for Ding Hao to quote, because I did not know the poem was called *Fang Yan*, or *Free the Voice*.[61] In my mind, this title further contributes to *ganying*.

Chinese literature is an evident source of transcultural inspiration in the memoir: Han, Tang and Song poetry, May Fourth literature, socialist realist literature, traditional and

---

[60] Anderson, Chapter 13, "*Ganyu*".

[61] Juyi Bai , *Fangyan Wushou* 《放言五首》 https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%94%BE%E8%A8%80%E4%BA%94%E9%A6%96, accessed 23 September 2017.

modern Chinese opera and theatre, and contemporary literature are all shown to contribute to young Jen's construction of 'China', and of herself. Literature that is not referenced but also had a powerful impact are historical commentaries such as Sima Qian's perspicacious *Shiji* (*Historical Records*), and Qing dynasty works of faction such as Cao Xueqin's *Honglou Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*) and fabulist Pu Songling's *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*). Over time and across diverse genres, sentiments such as fatalism, loss, love, the sublime and the awful in binding relationships to China's civilisation, the 'state' and the family, and symbolic connections to seasonal landscapes have evolved and modernised. In particular I feel an affinity for modern Chinese short stories as 'unofficial' and hence potentially more 'honest' versions of history.[62] Of course, state-recognised authors in revolutionary China have been constrained by party dictates that art should serve political ends. This only fires my desire to read between the lines. The writer of fiction or poetry has the intention to seek resonance with the reader, and this is what I seek in the shape, rhythm and tone of a story or poem.

In 1980 after I had 'divorced' my roommate, English student Theresa Munford and I began to spend our evenings translating short stories by women writers from the May Fourth period.[63] After Theresa left China in 1980, we continued translating stories and swapping them for editing and feedback in the mail. In the memoir, I refer to these stories and the issues they generate in order to show their contribution to my transcultural transformation. For example, young narrator Jen offers a translated extract from Feng Yuanjun's short story "The Journey", analyses it in its historical context, and

---

[62] As Lu argues, Chinese fiction (*xiaoshuo*) is an unofficial history that is seen by those in charge as competing with the classical 'official' canon, in *From Historicity to Fictionality*, 1994.

[63] Jennifer Anderson and Theresa Munford, trans and eds, *Chinese Women Writers of the 1920s and 1930s* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1985).

then reflects on its personal impact.[64] One section of the chapter House Arrest reveals the back and forth of learning with Liao *laoshi*: he explains a historical reference in Ling Shuhua's "The Lucky One", which leads to a discussion about a related poem, which in turn leads to ruminations on the peripatetic life of the classical scholar-poet.[65] The tailor Yu Shen is also 'given' a poem to recite, one that relates to his livelihood.[66] I wanted to reflect my experience that many *laobaixing* of that period had a keen appreciation for Chinese poetry and were able to 'meaningfully' recite from memory.

It surprises me that other Anglophone memoirs do not mention or reflect the ubiquity of literary and historical allusions in daily exchanges in China. Is it because I was a student of literature that I was aware of this connection, or was it because the subject of my studies encouraged Chinese friends and teachers to talk to me about literature? When literature has been such an integral part of my life in China and Australia, it is hard to imagine it did not feature in the recollections of others from this period.

Bridges to Future Past

"*The writing of a poem is like a child throwing stones into a mineshaft. You compose first, then you listen for the reverberation.*"
James Fenton

The poems in "*Ganyu*", the Bridges to Future Past, have travelled with me across time as somatic symptoms and feelings with shadowy forms. For a long time they defied my attempts to describe them in detail. In the dark, they were ciphers of unfinished business, of hidden grief. During the day, attempts to write about them with the intensity they needed resulted in an elevated heartbeat and a 'sour' stomach. The ghosts would not leave of their own volition because I had summoned them. These Bridge memories

---

[64] Anderson, Chapter 8 Strife Inside and Out, "*Ganyu*".
[65] Ibid., Chapter 10 House Arrest.
[66] In Chapter 12 Diving Into the Sea: Reform and opening up, Yu Shen recites Qin Taoyu's *A Poor Girl*.

presented themselves in the twenty-first century to older writer Jen as potentially necessary "objects of identification"[67] in the location of her transforming self. The memories are in Avery Gordon's words a 'haunting' that produces

> an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely…singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind field comes into view.[68]

Gordon argues that haunting is different to trauma because it "prompts something-to-be-done" in order to release the blockage that prevents the present from seamlessly becoming the future.[69] In the writing process these hauntings are turned into "a subject of representation and therefore a literary or visual trope".[70] In the case of all the 'trigger' memories bar one, their multilayered representations were best achieved in poetic form.[71] These poems are interspersed throughout the memoir, disturbing any causal or narrative unity the reader may be attempting to construct between the stories and essays, and further complicating the link between narrating and narrated "I"s.

The poetic form of these 'bridges' emphasises their metaphorical function. This self-proverbialising (*ziwoyuyan*) is common in the 'self-writings' of traditional Chinese writers, but the discursive imperative to avoid subjective 'fronting' leads them to mask themselves and turn auto/biography into biography, thereby inviting readers to read

---

[67] Fuchs, *The Text is Myself*, 13. See 1.3 Representation in this exegesis, 44.
[68] Avery Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity", in *Borderlands*, 2011, 10(2), 2.
[69] Ibid., 2-3.
[70] Fuchs, *The Text is Myself*, 13.
[71] Margalit describes poetry as "emotions recollected in the sense of emotions relived", in *Ethics of Memory*, 124. Shirley Lim wonders at autobiography's insistence on prose-driven narrative as the form of truth telling, because it distances readers from the emotional truth that can best be captured in the poetic form. See "The Troubled and Troubling Genre Life On-going Writing or On-going Life Writing, in *Prose Studies*, 2009, 31(3), 307-310.

author subjectivity back into commentaries on the lives of others.[72] In many of my poems, for example, I detect a desire to understand my personal experiences as mirrored in frames of situated subjectivity as a woman, as an outsider, and as a Western construct of the myth of progress promoted since the Enlightenment. For example, the Nanjing Madwoman[73] is portrayed as an abject, lost soul endlessly experiencing her subjection to rape and the murder of her unborn child in the Rape of Nanking. In 2010 it occurred to me I wanted to give poetic expression to the agony this woman was experiencing in order to reveal its timelessness, and its ruthless repetition and distortion throughout history. Without discounting her 'particular' pain, I see how her family (*jia*) and nation (*guojia*) have been attacked through the membrane of her uterus. The accusations she hurls at me form a bridge from my nineteenth century missionary relatives, 'imperialist transgressors', to me. I am guilty by association. But most of all, I share the sorrow of being a woman controlled by the reproductive tyranny of a patriarchal system, an abject form of *dawo*.

In the poem Pro-lapse, I juxtapose an elderly woman's experience with my own and my mothers' reproductive histories, and with the formalin-filled bottles of gynaecological mysteries in the family garage.[74] The politics of reproduction is made acute in her case by the collision of Confucian determinism with the recently instituted One Child Family policy and the Household Responsibility System policy for agriculture, and in my case by a collision with the 'normative' nuclear family. These two poems reveal to me, so late it would seem, that life is not of our individual choosing, and that suffering *is* the core of human experience even as we devise ever more unsustainable interventions to

---

[72] Huang, *Literati and Self-Representation*, 11-12. This technique is possibly driven by a discomfort of the self as subject described by Ien Ang in "On Not Speaking Chinese", 1994.
[73] Anderson, Bridge to Future Past, Nanjing Madwoman, "*Ganyu*".
[74] Ibid., Bridge to Future Past, Pro-lapse.

relieve ourselves from its grip, and in so doing inflict it on others whom we mark as 'outsiders', those 'without entitlements'.

The poem *Yuanwang*[75] is an example of *ekphraisis:* in speaking to a work of art, a poetic imitation speaks out to its source.[76] The rediscovery of André Kneib's calligraphy work 怨望 in 2014 made me curious to remember how I had acquired it. A letter written to Theresa Munford in November 1980 and recovered in May 2016 reveals my embarrassed reaction to his gift. The letter states: "That evening …André walks in… and hands me a sheet of white rice paper on which are written in beautiful calligraphy (his own hand) 欲望, desire! What to make of this I wonder?…I've had a few good talks with him lately about former eras, calligraphy, desire, the strange life here…"[77] I recall that in private young Jen acknowledged the passive 'longing' André and she shared for others who appeared unattainable. It was many years later, after my failed marriage to the person who was the source of my heart's desire at that time (referred to in the memoir as 'the man with spun gold hair' and 'that one') that I read that first Chinese character again and discovered its much darker essence. It was the character *yuan* (怨), which means active 'resentment'; when coupled with the idea of 'longing' (望 *wang)*, I read it as a powerful evocation of the Nanjing foreign student dormitory mood, in part caused by the political tensions that accompanied the early stages of 'Reform and Opening Up' between November 1980 and May 1981, and described in the memoir chapter Strife Inside and Out. These two characters also evoke the frustration and hurt I felt at the collapse of my marriage in 1986.

---

[75] Ibid., *Yuanwang*.
[76] Williams, *Imitations of the Self*.
[77] Jennifer Anderson to Theresa Munford, 19 November 1980.

Figure 3 *Yuanwang.* André Kneib calligraphic work, 1980.
Image of the author, 2016.

In the same work, I describe the circulation of gossip through the dormitory. When I interrogate the text, I recognise that its subject matter and to some degree its rhythm is an echo of a 1994 unpublished translation of the first chapter of Wang Anyi's *Chang Hen Ge*, *Ode to Eternal Regret*.[78] Wang conjures up "the dots and points of light" that mark out Shanghai's alleyways at night:

> …Night falls and the lights come on. These dots and lines of light marking Shanghai's alleyways sit in a sea of darkness, a roaring wave of black that threatens to sweep them away. The alleyways appear to have volume, so that the dots and lines float upon them…This darkness is…deep enough for a falling mountain to drop to the bottom without a sound…Shanghai's dots and lines of light are supported by that darkness…[79]

She describes the function of these alleys as conduits for gossip: "smelling discreetly feminine", "a mix of the boudoir and the kitchen", "hidden in shadows", channels for "gossip swarms". She says, "If Shanghai's alleyways could speak, they would most surely gossip". My translation of Wang has now unconsciously 'tainted' the riff on

---

[78] Wang Anyi, *Chang Hen Ge*《长恨歌》(Beijing: Writer's Publishing House, 1995). A novel about a restless woman failing to find fame and romance, Wang borrowed the title from Tang poet Bai Juyi's account of the romance between Emperor Xuan Zong and his famed concubine Yang Guifei.

[79] Ibid., 1.

dormitory gossip in *Yuanwang*, just as "gossip stains like dye".[80]

In other poems, I reference Chinese philosophers, poets, and singers or their works. The reasons are twofold. First, in keeping with Chinese tradition, I wish to acknowledge resonance with the ideas and rhythms they evoke (*xing*). Second, there is no better way to get across what I'm trying to say. There's no English equivalence, and even if there was, it's not in English that I 'feel' the meaning. In the Bridge to Future Past, Half an Expert (*Ban'ge Zhuanjia*), I lampoon my dubious status as a teacher-scholar without a higher degree, a misfit in the Chinese academic hierarchy. For this purpose I use a 'clunky' rhyme and employ the common Chinese literary device of quoting from the Confucian canon. I've also preserved the Chinese practice of annotated footnotes, as a wink to the 'expert' half of my status.[81]

A more conscious borrowing led to the creation of the Bridge *Fenpei* with a Twist.[82] I had been struggling with this poem for years, trying to commit to words the feeling of impotence and outrage I have felt towards what I understood as the ruthless roundup of innocent unemployed youth caught up in the Severe Crackdown on Crime (*yanda*), and disappeared to labour camps without sentencing. Inspired by a masterclass with novelist and sinologist Nicholas Jose in 2016, and keen to try out other forms of blending past and future, I came across the poem Du Fu's *Dream of Li Bai No. 1*,[83] in which Du Fu

---

[80] Ibid., 7-11.

[81] Anderson, Bridge to Future Past, Half an Expert, "*Ganyu*".

[82] Ibid. *Fenpei* or job allocation determined one's *danwei* after graduation. Political background and *jingshen* (spirit) carried equal weight with academic or technical skills in the *fenpei* process. Uighur friend Zia Amin studied astronomy at Nanjing University only to be allocated a job as a Chinese language teacher back in Urumqi, for her an attempt to further erode ethnic and religious identity.

[83] 杜甫： 梦李白之一：死别已吞声 生别常恻恻 江南瘴疠地 逐客无消息 故人入我梦 明我长相憶 君今在羅網 何以有羽翼 恐非平生魂 路远不可测 魂来枫林青 魂返关塞黑 落月满屋梁 犹疑照颜色 水深波浪阔 无使蛟龙得 See http://baike.baidu.com/

Seeing Li Bai in a Dream 1: At death's final parting we swallow our tears/But life's frequent partings too bring sorrows/From those malaria-ridden southern swamps/You've sent no news of

expresses distress for fellow poet and friend Li Bai's exile to remote Guizhou.[84] Keeping the translated meaning of a few lines intact, and holding to the original poem's tenor of sorrow and fear for the other, I created this Bridge to Future Past. Du Fu and Li Bai belong to the canon of Tang dynasty poets, and it is with a nod to them that 'nobody' young Jen and her 'senescent' writer bear witness to the disappearance of a young nobody, and so memorialise *somebody* in the ritual act of imitating the greats. Du Fu and Li Bai had been close friends and drinking companions, sharing words and shaping evocations of life around them into poetry. The young man in my poem is unknown to me, but I feel the pull of his 'disappearance' and am compelled to write about it. He is China's Everyman, his fate dependent upon state decree. This is a "project of intersubjective ambition…[that] relates the aspirations (*zhi*) of the ancients to elucidate the feelings (*qing*) of the present", or, in this case, about an event 30 years in the past.[85]

The idea of exile to the outermost reaches of known territory holds a universal terror for social creatures such as ourselves, but I felt in early 1980s' China an added depth of fear associated with the recent return of intellectuals to the cities after a decade spent in unfamiliar rural areas, their desperation to rebuild and maintain social networks (*guanxi*), and the deeply held belief that the civilised world was urban *and* Han-centric. To be disappeared from Nanjing or Shanghai and re-appeared in a labour camp in far western Qinghai or Xinjiang speaks of social erasure. Li Bai was a famous exile who no

---

your exile/And so you've entered my dreams, old friend/and I can't stop thinking about you/Now that you're caught in a trap/How can you spread your wings and fly?/I fear you've lost the will to live/Gone so far beyond the pale/Your spirit comes through greening maple woods/And returns to a darker border fortress/The moonbeams on the rafters/Seem to light up your face/The water is deep and the waves vast/Please don't let the storm dragon get a hold of you (My translation).

[84] On the abdication of Tang Dynasty emperor Xuan Zong in 755, Li Bai was advisor to one of his sons, Prince Yong. He and the Crown Prince fell out, so after Prince Yong was defeated in battle, Li Bai was exiled to remote Guizhou. He received a pardon in 759 before he had even reached the destination for his exile. Du Fu was worrying in vain, unless he was using a 'double voice' to protest acts of exile.

[85] See Williams, *Imitations of the Self*, 9.

doubt found 'civilised' comforts among the rural gentry and magistrates on his route; the youth in my poem is destined for the existential abyss.

I close out the poem with modified lyrics from a popular banned Teresa Teng pop song of the time, a verse that mirrors Du Fu's melancholy and longing for his friend. I insert The Three Loves (Love the Motherland, Socialism, and the Chinese Communist Party) that were promoted as a part of the Spiritual Civilisation Campaign, an exhortation it would have been difficult for the young man to follow given his fate, which points to his lack of agency reflected in the title of the piece.

One of the Bridges to Future Past has resisted a poetic rendering: Permission to Speak was the first 'hot stone' of memory that I picked up out of a dream in 2001. A stranger slips into my dormitory room and tells me of his feelings of alienation from his family and the wider community. In writing about his fears of 'ostracism' I was also forced to confront my own repeated acts of 'self-silencing' upon my return to Australia from China or Cambodia or Vietnam, and my feeling of being cast adrift from each and every place. Having left China during the anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, I had felt unable to write to my Chinese friends for fear that contact with me could present a threat to them. Further, while Gail Pellett's return to the U.S. was met with suspicion that she might be a communist because she had worked for the Party's propaganda machine in Red China,[86] quite a few of my friends did not want to be disabused of their faith in socialism, and so refused to hear any talk of party corruption or de-humanising acts. The others just weren't that interested. In 2001, I had just returned from five years in Vietnam convinced that my role as 'foreign teaching expert' was no longer tenable, if it ever had been. I felt that the 'aid industry' was being used to impose Western neo-liberal practices on 'third-world' governments, and interfering with sovereignty through its

[86] Pellett, Epilogue, *Forbidden Fruit*, 6777-6786.

bilateral and multilateral aid programs. I felt bereft, homeless.

Until recently, this Bridge acted as the Foreword to "*Ganyu*", because for a long time I believed it represented the overall 'mood' of the memoir. It has taken time to recognise that most of the stories celebrate transculturally formative relationships. In their telling I have moved beyond the guilt and melancholy that triggered the writing process, and have entered a more dynamic and multivalent vision of China's role in my making. As a consequence, this piece has been 'downgraded' to sit within the memoir. In its place I've put what was the *coda*, a rumination on the calligraphic work presented by teacher Ding Hao to my mother, a rendering of Tang poet Chen Zi'ang's Poem 16 from the collection titled *Ganyu* or 'Moved by Things Encountered'. I wrote this piece in 2014 after my mother gifted the calligraphy to me and I 'chanced' to ponder its aesthetic intention. In the process, it has magically revealed the essence of the memoir itself.

Conclusion

The unconscious wants truth, as the body does. The complexity and fecundity of dreams come from the complexity and fecundity of the unconscious struggling to fulfill that desire. The complexity and fecundity of poetry come from the same struggle".

Adrienne Rich[1]

Recently, I took down Andre Kneib's framed calligraphy from my living room wall. Its powerful presence has influenced the writing of the memoir and this exegesis, but now I am close to completion, it no longer has me in its thrall. In its place I have hung a brush ink scroll by Ru Xiaofan.[2] This painting is one of a series he completed on a 1983 summer pilgrimage to the foothills of the Himalayas where he stayed with Tibetan nomads. Simple black ink outlines washed in greys and soft ochres depict two people engaged in a wild dance. Their upper bodies are naked, having slipped their arms out of thick padded garments that are cinched at the waist. The dancer facing us is female, with cursory circles for breasts. Her rough-sketched face is round and double-chinned like a Dunhuang beauty, but her eyes are unfocused and suggest inner emotional turmoil. She has one naked foot in the air and the heel of the other is dug into the earth with toes pointing upwards. We can only see the muscled back of the other dancer as s/he stamps the earth in cloth shoes.

Ru was a temporary visitor in a culture totally new to him, and the painting raises questions about the dancing couple: who they are, who was watching them in addition to the artist, and what constituted their relationship to Ru himself. What is perfectly

---

[1] Cited in Emily Temple, "Life Advice from Adrienne Rich: On the Fifth Anniversary of Her Death". *Literary Hub*, 27 March 2017. http://lithub.com/life-advice-from-adrienne-rich/, accessed 30 June 2017.

[2] Ru Xiaofan is called Bai Ma in the memoir. I have changed his name in consideration of the people involved in his romantic liaisons.

clear is the vitality and emotional immediacy that speaks of liberation, and places the artistic subjects and the artist beyond the Party's prescribed moral constraints of devotion to China's Modernisation drive.

Figure 4 *Untitled.* Ru Xiaofan, ink and wash painting, 1983.
Image of the author, 2017.

As I ponder Han artist Ru's gaze on a Tibetan-framed world, I see myself again testing assumptions about what it might mean to be 'Chinese', and to be a Western Australian woman asking this question. What young Jen saw in the early post-Mao era and the way in which she interpreted it was influenced by limited linguistic and cultural knowledge and by powerful identity markers. Much older Jen writes about that young person's experience in acts of imagination tempered by decades of transformative experiences, and a yearning for wholeness.

Those memory fragments whose 'soundings' have reverberated across decades have now been re-tuned to offer harmonic representations of the dynamic and complex

process of transculturation, mediated by intersubjective moments of resonance (*ganying*). Remembered roommates, teachers, party cadres in the *waiban* and elsewhere, friends, passing acquaintances and strangers leave their traces in affect, memory and knowledge, reflected in the memoir's poems, stories and theme-based lyric essays, and in this exegesis. Both components demonstrate the affective and the intellectual at work together to make a bridge to the past and its hidden truths. While the memoir reflects my own particular act of *lipu* (a distorted primer for transcultural engagement), it is also intended to be a textual legacy for posterity, one that leaves behind traces of these historical, contingent and significant others in encounter with who 'I' was in that time and place. Teachers Liao Kaifei and Ding Hao have passed away, and Wang *mama* is contemplating death as is my mother Marg.[3] Artist Liu Dan foresees an end to his painting life in seven to ten years.[4] Many fellow Western foreign students are reaching retirement years, and some too have passed away.

My collective of Western students of China from this period exhibit a particular sensibility, grown in a hybrid culture of Western post-war bourgeois capitalism, pacifism, feminism, Enlightenment progress, classical Chinese aesthetics, and the proletarian aesthetics of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. About mainland China we tend to be simultaneously sentimental and cynical, morally uplifted, and offended by the Chinese Communist Party's control over memory and history. At the same time we observe Western nations staggering under the onslaught of a globalising neo-liberal system with its flagrant disregard for 'truth' or 'harmony', and we feel morally unseated, disenfranchised, made mute.[5]

---

[3] Wang Ruigang (Wang *mama*), conversation with author, 10 May 2016; and Margaret Anderson (author's mother), conversation with author, ongoing.

[4] Liu Dan, conversation with author, Beijing 17 May 2016.

[5] See too Schwarcz's search for truth in *Colors of Veracity*.

I'd like to end with three literary insights that writing "*Ganyu*" has given me: first, my representation of characters reveals context and role-specific speech genres from the period, which reflect transcultural intersubjectivity as an interplay between 'greater' and 'lesser selves' in relative positions of insider and outsider; next, that attention to unbidden memories can elicit historical and human connection through the destabilisation of certainties and so give voice to "fragments of veracity";[6] and third, that my multilingual self is engaged in a constant dialogue with the 'stranger' within. These realisations are comforting in the sense that they allow me to sit more peacefully with the idea that there is no perfect resolution to what the past conjures up. My closing line in the memoir echoes Qu Yuan and Lu Xun, suggesting that I am destined to continue searching high and low for those bridges across which truth fragments from history, memory and experience can cross in order to foster the cosmopolitan heart-mind in these globalised, fragmented and morally challenging times.

[6] Schwarcz, *Colors of Veracity*, 335/4339.

Bibliography

Adams, Lorraine. “Almost Famous: The Rise of the 'Nobody Memoir.'” *Washington Post*, 10 April 2002.

Althusser, L. “Ideology and State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation”. Trans. Ben Brewster. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm. Accessed 2 September 2017.

Anderson, J. Jennifer Anderson to Theresa Munford, Nanjing China, 19 November 1980.

Anderson, J. and Munford, T. (Eds and trans). *Chinese Women Writers of the 1920s and 1930s*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Press, 1985.

Ang, I. “On Not Speaking Chinese: Postmodern Ethnicity and the Politics of Diaspora”. *New Formations* 24 no. 1 (1994).

Appiah, K.A. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2006.

Appiah, K.A. “The Case for Contamination”. *The New York Times*, 1 January 2006: 1-17. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/magazine/the-case-for-contamination.html. Accessed 12 September, 2016.

Arana, R.V. “The Aesthetics of Autobiography”. *Biography* 6 no.1 (1983): 53-67.

Attwell, D. and Coetzee, J.M. *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Baena, R. “Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing”. *Prose Studies* 27 no. 3 (2005): 211-217. DOI: 10.1080/01440350500223792. Accessed 25 August, 2017.

Bai J. *Fangyan Wushou.* 《放言五首》 https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%94%BE%E8%A8%80%E4%BA%94%E9%A6%96. Accessed 23 September 2017.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin.* Edited by Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Bakhtin, M.M. “ Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”. In *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin.* Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

Bakken, B. *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control, and the Dangers of Modernity in China*. Studies on Contemporary China Series, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Baldursson, R. *Nineteen Seventy-Six*. Australia: Penguin Group, 2016.

Ballard, J. G. “Look Back at Empire”. *The Guardian*, Saturday, 4 March, 2006. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/mar/04/fiction.film. Accessed 27 November 2015.

Barlow, T. and Lowe, D. *Teaching China's Lost Generation: Foreign Experts in the PRC.* 1st Edition. New York: Praeger, 1985.

Barmé, G. "New China Newspeak". *China Heritage Quarterly* 29 (2012). http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/glossary.phpsearchterm=029_xinhua.inc&issue=029. Accessed 30 January 2015.

Barthes, R. *Camera Lucida*: *Reflections on Photography.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Barthes, R. *Roland Barthes*. Trans. Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Bei Dao. "The Answer". *The August Sleepwalker.* London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1988.

Berg, D. "What the Messenger of Souls Has to Say: New Historicism and the Poetics of Chinese Culture. In *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Edited by Richard J. Lane. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Besemeres, M. *Translating One's Self*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002.

Besemeres, M. "Anglos Abroad: Memoirs of Immersion in a Foreign Language". *Biography* 28 no. 1 (2005).

Besemeres, M. "Involuntary Dissent: The Minority Voice of Translingual Life Writers". *L2 Journal* 6 no. 2 (2014).

Beyer, C. "Edmund Husserl". In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta, 2013. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/husserl/ Accessed 15 Jan. 2015.

Bhabha, H.K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Biddle, J. "The Anthropologist's Body or What it Means to Break Your Neck in the Field", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 4 no. 3 (1993).

Bloom, L.K. "Life Studies: Interpreting Autobiography". *College English* 49 no. 3 (1987). http://www.jstor.org/stable/377932. Accessed 17 November 2015.

Bond, L. and Rapson, J. (Eds), *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014.

Bond, L. "Types of Transculturality: Narrative Frameworks and the Commemoration of 9/11". In *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*. Edited by Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014, 61-80. Accessed 9 February, 2016.

Borges, J.L. "Borges and I". In Borges, J.L., Frasconi, A., Boyer, M. and Morland, H. *Dreamtigers*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964.

Borges, J.L. "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins". In *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952*. Edited by J.F Solem, B.A. Davidson & R. Anderson. Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1964.

Borges, J.L. "The Library of Babel". *Labyrinths*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964.

Bouras, G. *A Foreign Wife*. Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1986.

Bourdieu, P. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2005.

Bowman, P.J. “Fontana’s ‘Inwielderbringlich’: A Bakhtinian Reading”. *The German Quarterly* 77 no.2 (2004). http://www.jstor.org/stable/3252121. Accessed 11 October 2016.

Brockaw, C. “Review: The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China by Pei-yi Wu*”. Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53 no.1 (1993): 174-185.

Buck-Morss, S. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MASS and London: The MIT Press, 1991

Buruma, I. “The Man Who Got it Right”. *New York Review of Books*, 15 August 2013. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/08/15/simon-leys-man-who-got-it-right/. Accessed 1 July 2016.

Butler, J. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Butler, J. *Undoing Gender.* New York and London: Routledge, 2004.

Cannon, M. “Reassembling the Broken Jar”. *New Hibernia Review* 15 no.1 (2011): 9-15.

Castro, B. “Writing Asia”. *Writing Asia and Auto/biography: Two Lectures*. Canberra: University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, 1995.

Chan, T.W. “The ‘Ganyu’ of Chen Ziang: Questions on the Formation of a Poetic Genre, *T’oung Pao*, 87 (2001).

Chen, R. *A Private Life.* Trans. Howard-Gibbon, J. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Chen, X. “Occidentalism as Counterdiscourse: ‘He Shang’ in Post-Mao China”. *Critical Inquiry* 18 no. 4 (1992): 686-712. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343826. Accessed 3 April 2016.

Chen, Z.A. & He/Ho J.H. *Chen Zi'ang Ganyu Shi Jian*. Hong Kong: Xuejin Press, 1978.

Cheng, A. “The Union of Mind and Dao – From Contemplating Liu Dan’s Works”. In Dan Liu, *The Union of Mind and Dao*. Suzhou: Suzhou Museum of Contemporary Art Galleries, 2013.

Chung, H. *Shouting from China*. Melbourne: Penguin, 1988.

Ci, J.W. *Dialectic of the Chinese revolution: from Utopianism to Hedonism*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Clendinnen, I. *Tiger’s Eye: A Memoir.* Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2000.

Coetzee, J.M. *Slow Man*. Sydney: Vintage Books, 2003.

Coetzee, J.M. *Summertime*: *Scenes From Provincial Life.* Sydney: Knopf, 2009.

Coffey, S. and Street, B. “Narrative and Identity in the Language Learning Project”, *Modern Language Journal* 92 no. 3 (2008): 452-464. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00757.x. Accessed 07 September 2017

Coffey, S. “Strangerhood and Intercultural Subjectivity”. *Intercultural Communication* 13 no. 3 (2013). DOI: 10.1080/14708477.2013.804532. Accessed 7 September 2017.

Conceison, C. *Significant Other: Staging the American in China.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.

Couldry, N. *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010.

Couser, G.T. *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Couser, G. T. *Memoir: an Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Dalisay, J. "Keynote Address". *Non-Fiction Now Conference*. Melbourne: RMIT University, Nov. 2012, Personal notes.

Dalziell, R. (Ed.). *Selves Crossing Cultures: Autobiography & Globalisation*. Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002.

Dai, S. *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. Translated from French by Ina Rilke. New York: Random House, 2000.

Davies, G. *Worrying About China: the Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry.* Cambridge MASS: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Davies, G. "Affirming the Human in China." In *boundary 2* 37 no.1 (2010, 2007): 57-90.

Davies, G. *Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence*. Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Davoine, F. and Gaudilliére, J-M. *History Beyond Trauma*. Translated by Susan Fairfield. New York: Other Press, 2004.

de Man, P. "Autobiography as De-facement". *MLN*, 94 no.5 (1979):19-20.

Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, *Expanding Our Horizons: Forty years of Australia-China collaboration and exchange in education, science and research.* Commonwealth of Australia, 2013. https://internationaleducation.gov.au/International-network/china/publications/Documents/Expanding%20Our%20Horizons.pdf. Accessed 28 June 2017.

DeWoskin, R. *Foreign Babes in Beijing: Behind the Scenes of a New China*. New York, London: W.W. Norton and Co., 2005.

Deng X.P. "Implement the Policy of Readjustment, Ensure Stability and Unity". Speech at the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Working Conference, Dec. 1980, in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*. Vol. 2 (1975-1982), reproduced at http://cpcchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-10/18/content_14295051.htm. Accessed 23 February 2015.

Dening, G. *Reading/Writing*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998.

Diski, J. "Why Can't People Just Be Sensible?" *London Review of Books* 37 no.15 (30 Jul 2015): 13-16. Accessed 5 August 2015.

Dott, B.R. *Identity Reflections: Pilgrimmages to Mount Tai in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004.

Duranti, A. "Husserl, Intersubjectivity and Anthropology". *Anthropological Theory* 10 no.1 (2010). Accessed 5 May 2014.

Durrant, S. “Self as the Intersection of Traditions: The Autobiographical Writings of Ssu-ma Ch’ien”. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 no.1 (1986).

Dutton, M. “The End of the (Mass) Line?: Chinese Policing in the Era of the Contract”. *Social Justice* 27 no. 2 (2001): 61-105.

Eakin, P. J. "Living Autobiographically”. *Biography* 28 no. 1 (2005). DOI: 10.1353/bio.2005.002. Accessed 12 Aug 2013.

Eakin, P. J. *Living Autobiography: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.

Eakin, P. J. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves.* Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Eakin, P. J. (Ed.). *The Ethics of Life Writing*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Echlin, K., Kamboureli, S. and McGregor, H. “We Are the Other, the Other is Us”. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 82 no. 2 (2013). Accessed 1 August 2017.

Feng, Y. “Separation”. Translated by Janet Ng. In *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women’s Literature from the Early Twentieth Century*. Edited by Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Felski, R. *Uses of Literature*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

Frankel, H. H. “A Composite Biography”. In *Confucian Personalities*. Edited by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962.

Fitzpatrick, S. *My Father’s Daughter: Memoirs of an Australian Childhood*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010.

Fitzpatrick, S. *A Spy in the Archives.* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013.

Freadman, R. "Recognition and Autobiography". *Partial Answers* 3 no.1 (2005). Accessed 2 September 2017.

Fuchs, M. *The Text is Myself: Women’s Life Writing and Catastrophe*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Gao, R. *The Static Eternity.* 2012. Embroidered installation. White Rabbit Gallery Exhibition. May 2014. http://www.whiterabbitcollection.org/artists/gao-rong-%E9%AB%98%E8%93%89/. Accessed 8 June 2014.

Gao, X. *Soul Mountain*. Translated by Mabel Lee. New York: Perennial, 2001.

Gee, J.P. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. London: Falmer Press, 1990.

Gordon, A. “Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity”. *Borderlands* 10 no. 2 (2011): 1-21.

Greenblatt, S. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England.* Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1988.

Grossberg, L. “Identity and Cultural Studies: Is that All there Is?” In *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: Sage Publications, 1996, 87-107.

Gumperz, J.J. *Language and Social Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Guo, X. *Village of Stone*. London: Vintage, 2005.

Guo, X. *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary For Lovers*. London: Vintage, 2007.

Hadfield, C. and Hadfield, J. *Watching the Dragon: Letters from China, 1983-1985*. London: Impact, 1986.

Hall, S. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Haworth, D. "David Haworth Interviews Gail Jones", *Readings Blog*, 30 July 2015. https://www.readings.com.au/news/david-haworth-interviews-gail-jones. Accessed 1 September 2017.

Hegel, R. *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature.* New York: University of Columbia Press, 1985.

Henke, S.A. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Hessler, P. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtse.* London: Harper Collins, 2001.

Hoffman, E. *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*. London: Minerva, 1991.

Hofmann, B. and Mueller, M. (Eds). "Introduction." In *Performing Ethnicity, Performing Gender: Transcultural Perspectives.* New York and London: Routledge, 2017.

Hogan, M., Dwyer, C., Harney, O., Noone, C. and Conway, R. "Metacognitive Skill Development and Applied Systems Science: A Framework of Metacognitive Skills, Self-regulatory Functions and Real-World Applications". In *Metacognition: Fundaments, Applications, and Trends* 76, (2015): 75-106. Springer International Publishing. Accessed 18 October 2017.

Huang, M. *Literati and Self-re/presentation: Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-century Chinese Novel*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Hubert, J. "Revolution is a Dinner Party: Cultural Revolution Restaurants in Contemporary China". *China Review* 5 no. 2 (2005). Accessed 15 June 2014.

Huddart, D. *Homi K. Bhabha*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Isherwood, C. *Goodbye to Berlin*. London: Hogarth Press, 1939.

James, D. "The 'Self-Positing' Self in Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*". *The European Legacy* 16 no. 5 (2011): 587-598. ISSN 1470-1316. Accessed 9 December 2015.

Jay, P. *Being in the Text: Self-Representation From Wordsworth to Roland Barthes.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Jensen, M. "Getting to Know Me in Theory and Practice: Negotiated Truth and Mourning in Autobiographically Based Fiction (J.G. Ballard, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Jack Kerouac, Louisa May Alcott and Me)". *Literature Compass* 8 no.12 (2011). Blackwell Publishing. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-

4113.2011.00850.x. Accessed 15 August 2015.

Jia, J. "From Human Resonance to Correlative Modes: The Shaping of Chinese Correlative Thinking". *Philosophy East and West* 66 no. 2 (2016): 449-474. University of Hawai'i Press. DOI: 10.1353/*pew.2016.0040.* Accessed 3 July 2016.

Jiang, Q. and Quan, X. "Ideological Impacts on Literary Translation – A Descriptive Study of Translated Literature in 1910-1981 and 1979-1999 in China. *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* 2 no. 3 (2015). Accessed 29 September 2017.

Kamboureli, S. "Writing the Foreign in Literature and Humanitarian Narratives". *University of Toronto Quarterly* 82 no. 2 (2013). Accessed 31 July 2017.

Kapuściński, R. *The Other*. London: Verso, 2008.

Kelly, D.A. "The Emergence of Humanism: Wang Ruoshui and the Critique of Socialist Alienation". In *China's Intellectuals and the State: in Search of a New Relationship*. Edited by Merle Goldman, Timothy Cheek, and Carol Lee Hamrin. Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Keightley, E. and Pickering, M. *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death.* Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Kirkby, R. *Intruder in Mao's Realm: An Englishman's Eyewitness Account of 1970s China*. Hong Kong: Farnshaw Books, 2016.

Kossew, S. "Cross-cultural Conversations: Antjie Krog's Life-Writing in *Begging to be Black". Life Writing* 11 no.2 (2014).

Kramsch, C. *The Multilingual Subject: What Foreign Language Learners Say About Their Experience And Why It Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Kristeva, J. *About Chinese Women*. London: Boyars, 1977.

Kristeva, J. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translated by L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Lai, K. L*earning From Chinese Philosophies: Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualized Self*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

Lane, R. (Ed.). *Global Literary Theory: an Anthology.* New York: Routledge, 2013.

Lao She. *Quanjia Fu*《全家福》3 act 7 scene play. First published in《收获》*Harvest,* 24 March 1959.

Latorre, S. "Creative Memories: Genre, Gender and Language in Latina Autbiographies". *Life Writing* 3 no.1 (2006): 61-79 DOI: 10.1080/10408340308518305. Accessed 28 September 2017.

Lee, L.O. "The Solitary Traveler: Images of the Self in Modern Chinese Literature". In *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*. Edited by Robert Hegel and Richard C. Hessney. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Leng, S-C and Chiu, H. (Eds). *Criminal Justice in Post-Mao China: Analysis and Documents*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.

Leung, L.F. "In Search of Love and Self: The Image of Young Female Intellectuals in Post-Mao Women's Fiction". In *Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical*

Appraisals. Edited by M.S. Duke. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989.

Li, H. "Representations of Code Switching in Asian American Women's Literature". PhD Dissertation. Texas A & M University, 2001. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/docview/304768648. Accessed 17 October 2017.

Liang, H. and Shapiro, J. *Intellectual Freedom in China After Mao: With a Focus on 1983*. New York: Fund for Free Expression, 1984.

Liao, K. "Jiang Qing chuipeng de Lü Hou shi hedeng renwu?" *Ping Qiang Qing de Nühuang Meng.* Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing, 1977. trove.nla.gov.au/work/31559823?q&versonId=38263531. Accessed 20 August, 2014.

Lim, L. "Dangerous Memories of Tiananmen Square". *Washington Post*, 16 May 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dangerous-memories-of-tiananmen-square/2014/05/16/16dfe888-d9de-11e3-bda1-9b46b2066796_story.html. Accessed 12 Dec 2014.

Lim, S.G.L. "The Troubled and Troubling Genre Life On-going Writing or On-going Life Writing". *Prose Studies* 31 no. 3 (2009).

Lin Q.X. *Brushing History Against the Grain: Reading the Chinese New Historical Fiction (1986-1999)*. HK: Hong Kong University Press, 2005.

Lingis, A. *The Imperative*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Link, P. *Evening Chats in Beijing [Pei-ching yeh hua]: Probing China's Predicament*. New York: Norton, 1992.

Liu, E. *The Travels of Lao Can [Lao Can Youji]*. Translated by Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Panda Books, 1983.

Liu, J. & Tao, H. (Eds). *Chinese Under Globalization: Emerging Trends in Language Use in China*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2012.

Liu, L. "Translingual Practice: The Discourse of Individualism Between China and the West". *Positions: east asia cultures critique* 1 no. 1 (1993): 160-193.

Lopate, P. "In the Kingdom of Joyce Carol Oates". *The New York Review of Books*, LXII no.19 (Dec 3-16 2015).

Lu, H. *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Lu, X. "Preface to *Call to Arms* ". *Call to Arms (Nahan)*. Translated by Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2000.

Lu, X. "The True Story of Ah Q". *Call to Arms (Nahan)*. Translated by Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2000.

Ma, J. *Red Dust: A Path Through China.* London: Vintage Books, 2002.

Maftei, M. *The Fiction of Autobiography*: *Reading and Writing Identity*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Malouf, D. *A First Place.* North Sydney: Knopf, 2014.

Margalit, A. *The Ethics of Memory*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Mateer, J. *Semar's Cave: An Indonesian Journal*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2004.

McCooey, D. *Artful Histories: Modern Australian Autobiography*. Oakleigh, Vic: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

McCord, P.F. "'Little Corks That Mark a Sunken Net': Virginia Woolf's 'Sketch of the Past' as a Fictional Memoir". *Modern Language Studies* 16 no.3 (1986): 248.

McCrea, M. "The Interview: Gail Jones". Wet Ink: The Magazine of New Writing 1 no.3, 2006. http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=105215684118942;res=IELLCC> ISSN: 1832-682X. Accessed 16 August 2017.

McGregor, H. "What is there to Say? Witnessing and Anxiety in Karen Connelly's Burmese Trilogy". *Canadian Literature* 222 (2014). Academic OneFile. Accessed 15 August 2017.

McNamara, R.S. *In Retrospect: the Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

Melchior, B. "A Marginal 'I': The Autobiographical Self Deconstructed in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior". *Biography* 17 no.3 (1994): 281-295.

Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. Smith, C. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

Milosz, C. *The Captive Mind.* Trans J. Zielonko. Harmondsworth, New York & Ringwood: Penguin, 1980.

Minford, John. "Picking up the Pieces". *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hong Kong, 8 Aug. 1985.

Mones, N. *Lost in Translation*. London: Fourth Estate, 2009.

Moore, S. "Interview: Chinese Artist Liu Dan". *Financial Times,* 30 October 2015. http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/07e4f894-771e-11e5-a95a-27d368e1ddf7.html. Accessed 8 September 2016.

Moretti, F. *Signs Taken for Wonders*. New York: Verso, 1997.

Nabokov,V. *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1967.

Newton, A. Z. *Narrative Ethics*. Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Ng, J. *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Ng, J. "Autobiography in Modern Chinese Literature (1911-1950): Forms of Literary Expression of the Self in Society". PhD thesis. Columbia University, 1993. Proquest, 9412820.

Nussbaum, M. "The End of Orthodoxy". *The New York Times on the Web,* 18 February, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/02/18/reviews/010218.18nussbat.html. Accessed 30 October 2017.

Olick, J. K. "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures". *Sociological Theory* 17 no. 3 (1999): 333-348.

Olney, J. "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment". *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Olney, J. *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Ondaatje, M. *Running In The Family*. London: Bloomsbury, 1983.

Osnos, E. *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

Parker, D. "Locating the Self in Moral Space: Globalisation and Autobiography". In *Selves Crossing Cultures: Autobiography and Globalisation*. Edited by Rosamund Dalziell. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002, 3-21.

Parker, D. "Narratives of Autonomy and Narratives of Relationality in Auto/Biography". *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 19 nos 1-2 (2004). DOI: 10.1080/08989575.2004.10815325.

Parker, D. "Inhabiting Multiple Worlds: Auto/Biography in an (Anti-)Global Age". *Biography* 28 no.1 (2005). Accessed 8 June 2015.

Pavlenko, Aneta. "Language Learning Memoirs as a Gendered Genre." *Applied Linguistics* 22 (2001).

Pellett, G. *Forbidden Fruit: 1980 Beijing—A Memoir*. New York: VanDam Publishing, 2016.

Pellow, C.K. "Intertextuality and Other Analogues in J.M Coetzee's *Slow Man*". *Contemporary Literature* 50 no. 3 (2009).

Perniola, M. *20th Century Aesthetics: Towards a Theory of Feeling*. New York: Continuum, 2012.

Phelan, J. "Teaching Voice of Authors, Narrators and Audience". In *Teaching Narrative Theory*. Edited by David Herman, Brian McHale and James Phelan. New York: Modern Language Association, 2010.

Pinkerton, P. "Remembering the Future: The Ethics of Absolute Beginning". *Political Perspectives* 3 no.1 (2008). http://www.politicalperspectives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Vol3-1-2009-2.pdf.

Pomfret, J. *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of New China*. Melbourne: Scribe, 2007.

Proust, M. "An Afternoon Tea Party at the House of Princesse de Guermantes". *Time Regained: In Search of Lost Time.* Translated by Peter Hudson. Vol. 7, 1927. https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/proust/marcel/p96t/chapter3.html. Accessed 1 Feb 2016.

Radtke, O. "More than Errors and Embarrassment: New Approaches to Chinglish". In *Chinese Under Globalization: Emerging Trends in Language Use in China*. Edited by Jin Liu and Hongyin Tao. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2012.

Rankin, W.P. "Autobiographical Fiction vs. Fictional Autobiography: Christa Wolf's *Kindheitmuster* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *Comparative Literature Studies* 36 no. 4 (1999).

Robinson, A. "Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia". Part 1. *Ceasefire Magazine*, 2011, https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-1/. Accessed 23 Feb. 2015.

Robinson, A. “Bakhtin: Carnival Against Capital, Carnival Against Power”. Part 2. *Ceasefire Magazine*. 9 September 2011. https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk /in-theory-bakhtin-2/. Accessed 2 October 2017.

Rong, C. *The Subject in Contemporary Chinese Literature*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004.

Said, E. *Orientalism*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.

Sallis, E. “Foster Mother Tongue”. In *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures*. Edited by Mary Besemeres and Anna Wierzbicka. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2007, 150-159.

Santiago, E. *When I was Puerto Rican: A Memoir*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Saunders, M. *Self-Impression: Life-writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature.* Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Schachter, D.L. *Searching for Memory: the Brain, the Mind, and the Past*. New York: basic Books, 1997.

Schaffer, K. and Smith, S. *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=307869. Accessed 2 August, 2017.

Schaffer, K. and Song, X. “Narrative Trauma and Memory: Chen Ran’s *A Private Life*, Tiananmen Square and Female Embodiment”. *Asian Studies Review* 30 no. 2 (2006).

Schaffer, K. and Song, X. “Unruly Spaces: Gender, Women’s Writing and Indigenous Feminism in China”. *Journal of Gender Studies* 16 no. 1 (2007). DOI:10.1080/ 09589230601116125. Accessed 30 June 2017.

Schechner, R. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Schwarcz, V. *Long Road Home: A China Journal.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

Schwarcz, V. *Bridge Across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Schwarcz, V. *Colors of Veracity: A Quest for Truth in China and Beyond.* Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014. E-publication ISBN:978-0-8248-5265-8.

Scott, J.W. “Experience”. In *Feminists Theorize the Political*. Edited by Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Seigworth, G. J. & Gregg, M. (Eds). *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Sheridan, G. “Xi Jinping: China’s Emperor at the Crossroads”. *The Australian*, 16 July 2016. http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/greg-sheridan/xi-jinping-chinas-emperor-at-the-crossroads/news-story/9f2d5d7b34a0d6b746e63ff49d0057ff. Accessed 24 August 2016.

Shields, D. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. London: Penguin, 2011.

Slavova, K. and Phoenix, A. “Living in Translation: Voicing and Inscribing Women’s Lives and Practices.” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 18 no. 4 (2011). DOI: 10.1177/1350506811415190. Accessed 21 August 2017.

Smith, S. and Watson, J. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide For Interpreting Life Narratives.* 2nd Edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2010.

Spence, J.D. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: Norton, 1990.

Spivak, G.C. “The Politics of Translation.” In *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates.* Edited by Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Spivak, G.C. “Terror: A Speech After 9/11”. *boundary 2* 31 no. 2 (2004). Duke University Press. Accessed 13 August 2017.

Steinby, L. and Klapuri, T. “The Acting Subject of Bakhtin”. In *Bakhtin and His Others: (Inter)subjectivity, Chronotope, Dialogism*. Edited by Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri. London and New York: Anthem Press, 2013.

Sun, L.K. "Contemporary Chinese Culture: Structure and Emotionality”. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 26 (1991).

Sundararajan, L. “The Art of Intimacy”. In *Understanding Emotion on Chinese Culture.* Switzerland: Springer International Publishing (2015): 93-109. DO1: ø10.1007/978-3-319-18221-6_6. Accessed 3 July 2016.

Tanner, M.S. “Campaign-Style Policing in China and its Critics”. In *Crime, Punishment and Policing in China.* Edited by Børge Bakken. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Taylor, C. *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity.* Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Trevaskes, S. *Policing Serious Crime in China: From ‘Strike hard’ to ‘Kill Fewer’.* London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

Turnbull, S. *Almost French: A New Life in Paris*. Milsons Point, NSW: Bantam Books, 2002.

Twitchett, D. “Problems of Chinese Biography”. In *Confucian Personalities*. Edited by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962.

The University of Hong Kong. “Introduction: Conceptual and Theoretical Matters”. *Philosophy of Mind in China*. http://www.philosophy.hku.hk/ch/mind.htm. Accessed 20 May 2016.

Wang, A. *Chang Hen Ge.* Beijing: Writer’s Publishing House, 1995.

Wang, B. *The Sublime Figure in History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Wang, B. *Illuminations From the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Wang, D.W. *Fictional Realism in Twentieth Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Wang, E.W. *The Border of Paradise*. Los Angeles: The Unnamed Press, 2016. E-book.

Wang, E.W. “Why My Novel Uses Untranslated Chinese”. *Literary Hub*, 12 April 2016. http://lithub.com/why-my-novel-uses-untranslated-chinese/. Accessed 15 April 2016.

Warsh, L. (Ed.) *Weiwei-isms: Ai Weiwei*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Welsch, W. “Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today”. In *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World.* Edited by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash. London: Sage, 1999, 194-213. http://www2.unijena.de/welsch/papers/W_Wlelsch_Transculturality.html. Accessed 12 September, 2016.

Whitlock, G.L. “Strategic Remembering: Fabricating Local Subjects”. In *Selves Crossing Cultures: Autobiography & Globalisation*. Edited by Rosamund Dalziell.. Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002, 114-125.

Wicomb, Z. “Slow Man and the Real: a Lesson in Reading and Writing”. *Journal of Literary Studies* 25 no. 4 (2009).

Williams, N.M. *Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics.* Brill DOI: 10.1163/9789004282452. http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/9789004282452, 2014. Accessed 16 April 2015.

Wong, J. *Red China Blues: My March From Mao to Now*. Moorbank, NSW: Doubleday, 1996.

Wong, J. *A Comrade Lost and Found*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.

Woolf, V. “Sketch of the Past”. In *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Essays*. Edited by Jeanne Schulkind. London: Chatto and Windus for University of Sussex Press, 1976.

Wu, D. (Ed.) *Remembrance 记忆.* Electronic Journal for email subscribers, see www.prcjournal.org/remembrance. Accessed 19 September 2015.

Wu, Y. (Ed.). 邓小平1983年因何痛下决心要全国“严打”? Why did Deng Xiaoping decide to implement ‘the severe crackdown on crime’ in 1983? Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 29 Jan 2012. http://book.people.com.cn/GB/69398/16958926.html. Accessed 1 August, 2016.

Xie, S.B. “Displacement, Transformation, Hybridization: Translation and Chinese Modernity”. *Neohelicon* 34 no.2 (2007): 61-76.

Yang, F. “Rethinking China’s Internet censorship: The practice of recoding and the politics of visibility”. *New Media & Society* 18 no. 7 (2016): 1364-1381. Sage Publishing. DOI: 10.1177/1461444814555951. Accessed 6 Sept. 2016.

Yao, X.Y. *Li Zi Cheng*. Beijing: China Youth Publishing, 1978.

Figures

Chapter 3	Fig. 1 'Textual spectacle': Young Jen preparing for a presentation at the Western Medical College, late autumn 1983. Image of the author. Fig. 2 Propaganda poster for The Four Modernisations from the early 1980s. Image and collection of the author. Fig. 3 André Kneib, *Yuanwang,* calligraphic work, 1980. Image and collection of the author. Fig. 4 Ru Xiaofan, *Untitled*, ink and wash painting, 1983. Image and collection of the author.

Glossary

Expression	**Meaning**	**Comment**
A		
Aiya!	My God! My goodness!	Interjection.
Aiyo!	Oh dear! Goodness me!	Interjection.
anding tuanjie	stability and unity	Propaganda marking the end of the Cultural Revolution and the transition to a socialist market economy.
Aodaliya	Australia	*Aodaliyawen:* an Australian 'script' in contrast to *zhongwen*, a Chinese script.
B		
budong	don't understand	
bu zhengchang	not normal	
D		
dajie	Lit. big older sister	Form of address to female around your older sister's age.
dangyuan	party member	
danwei	work unit	
da wo	The 'greater I'	The individual in primary relationship with the nation.

F		
fafeng	to go mad	Lit. 'give rise to wind'.
fangpi	You're talking shit Lit. 'release wind'	Interjection.
G		
gaige kaifang	Reform and Opening Up	The policy that announced the end of the CR; aligned with The Four Modernisations.
ganbu	party cadre	
ganying	resonance through mutual intention	
ganyu	moved by things encountered	The title for the memoir taken from a collection of poems by Chen Zi'Ang – see foreword
gaogan	high level cadre	
geren	the individual	
gongnongbing	worker-peasant-soldier	A class of students given preference for university entrance during and immediately after the Cultural Revolution.
gongren	worker	*la guanxi*
guanxi	connections, relationships *La guanxi*: 'to pull strings' Lit. 'to pull connections'	A system of reciprocal relationships developed for individual and family economic and social 'security'
guoran	just so	
gui	Lit. 'ghost, devil' *yang guizi*: a foreign devil	
guojia	country, nation	
guxiang	hometown	
guyide	deliberately	
H		
hebulai	cannot get on	
hukou	residence permit	
I		
iron ricebowl	*tiefanwan*: 铁饭碗 a term used to denote the centralised economy in which people get a wage regardless of their productivity	In the post-cultural revolution period, this system was criticized for diminishing the incentive to work.

J		
jia	family	
jiayou	Come on! 'Go!' Lit. 'add fuel'	Interjection.
jingshen	spirit, consciousness	Also suggests the embodiment of a social function, such as 'intellectual' *jingshen*.
jianzheng	remonstration; an indirect way of criticising the emperor	The scholar-official's 'speech genre' in audience with the emperor.
K		
kaopu	rely on a single code or canon	
kexue de	scientific	
L		
laba	popular name for *suona*, a kind of trumpet	*labakuzi*: 'trumpet trousers' or flared jeans.
laobaixing	ordinary people Lit. ' old hundred surnames'	
laodong	manual labour	
laoshi	teacher	Also a form of address.
laowai	foreigner Lit. 'old outsider'	Informal use.
li	Confucian principle of acting in accordance with the rites appropriate to a given role	
lipu	distance oneself from social norms Lit. 'Leave the script or code'	
liumang	hooligan, thug Lit. 'a floating lost person', implies the 'choice' of ostracism over 'right' social networks.	A 'criminal' category introduced in the Severe Crackdown on Crime in 1983.
M		
mama	Mama, mum.	Form of address.
mafan	annoying, troublesome; hassle	
mashang	immediately Lit. 'on a horse'	
meiyou guanxi	no worries Lit. 'has no connection'	
mei shi	no worries	

	Lit. 'has no event'	
meiyou wenti	no worries Lit. 'has no issue/problem'	
N		
Nanda	*Nanjing Daxue*, Nanjing University	Abbreviation.
nan de hutu	"It's difficult to be muddle-headed"	Where ignorance is bliss, it's folly to be wise. See http://baike.baidu.com/item难得糊涂/3534990
nei	Inside *neiren*: insider	Juxtaposed with *wai* to indicate in-group association, privilege, and status etc.
nongmin	peasant, farmer	
P		
pinyin	mainland China's romanisation system for Chinese characters	
Po jiusi 破旧死	'Smash the Four Olds: old ideas, culture, customs, and habits'	Mao's instructions to the Red Guards at the height of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.
pu	primer, code	
putonghua	Lit. 'common speech', the official language of China	Based on Mandarin vocabulary and Beijing dialect, writing system based on modern Chinese vernacular, written in simplified characters.
Q		
Qi	the vital energy of life Lit. 'air' or 'breath'	
qiannian	*Qian* 千 (tone 1) + 年 '1000 years' *Qian* 前 (tone 2) + 年 'the year before last'	
S		
sanba	March 8 annoying woman (coll.)	International Women's Day and a derogatory term for women.
shanghen wenxue	'wound' or 'scar' literature	Writing after the CR (1978-1982) that highlighted the sorrow and suffering.
shuo xinhua	speak what is in one's heart	
"*Songshu qiannian zhongshi xiu, jinhua yiri ziwei rong.*"	"After 1000 years the pine tree finally withers, while the hibiscus flower has only one	See Ch13, 'Travel China Scholar Style', *Ganyu*.

	day of glory.”	
suanle	forget it	Interjection.
suanzhang	settle accounts	Has both meanings in English and Chinese) ‘pay the bill’ and ‘get revenge’.
T		
ta ma de	Used in similar setting as for the adjective ‘fucking….’ Lit. ‘his mother’s…’	Expletive.
tongzhi *tongzhimen*	comrade comrades	form of address
W		
wai	outside	See *nei*
waiban	Foreign Office	
waidiren	A person from elsewhere, from out of town	
waiguoren	A person from outside the nation, foreigner.	
wenhua	culture *you wenhua:* civilised	Lit. ‘to become patterned or scripted’.
woguo	China Lit. ‘I country’	A term created by the party-state to bind the individual to the nation.
X		
xiaoshuo	fiction Lit. ‘lesser story’	Differentiated from morally/politically-mediated ‘history’, reflecting the potentially dissenting voice of the ‘neighbourhood’.
xiao wo	The lesser ‘I’, the individual	See *dawo*
xin	heart-mind Lit. ‘heart’	Physiological and the emotional interaction with the logical and cognitive functions of the mind.
xing	evocation; elicitation	
xiushen	self-cultivation	A morally-driven action taken by intellectuals for the improvement of China.
Y		
yanda	The Severe Crackdown (on Crime)	A movement ‘that wasn’t a movement’ to eradicate crime, and possibly reduce youth unemployment in the large cities on the eastern seaboard.

yin and *yang*	*yin* is 'dark, passive, yielding'; *yang* is 'light, active, strong'	A 'complementarity of opposites' that characterise the cosmos, forever dynamic and transforming one into the other.
yongpin	Lit. 'utility items'	
youhuan	'worrying about the moral condition of China'	An intellectual tendency connected to *xiushen*.
yuyan	proverb	*ziwo yuyan:* self-proverbs
Z		
zenme shuo?	How do you say…?	
zhengming	Confucian precept: 'rectification of names'	Act according to your prescribed social and economic roles.
zhiqing	educated youth	
zhishifenzi	intellectual Lit. 'knowledge element'	
zhongguoren	Chinese person	
zhongnan qing nü	Regard men as superior to women Lit. 'weighty man, light woman'	
zhongwen	Chinese written script Lit. 'China patterns'	
zhuanjia	expert	Post Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the 'expert' was revived as an essential contributor to modernisation.
zisi	selfish	
ziwo	Self *ziwo yuyan:* self-proverbialise	
zouba!	Let's go.	