



***Volume 1 The Memoir: Bound: An Expatriate's
Journey to China and Beyond***

Christine Velde

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DECLARATION

I certify that both components of this thesis, the memoir and the exegesis, contain no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contain no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Christine Velde

February 2014

PART I: THE JOURNEY: SHANGHAI

PROLOGUE: MEMORIES

Memories

Songs that stop and start again, loveliest, or most tender
 Night, bringing a sky full of stars
 On the stem of memories, who doesn't have
 Two or three elegant flowers, draped with sentiments,
 Nameless, spreading
 The scent of wild lotus,
 Every petal a bright moon in a quiet place.

(Lin Huyin, in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:6)

Adelaide: Summer 2012.

The breeze played across my shoulders as I walked towards the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden in Adelaide where the 2012 Writers' Festival was being held. I stopped in front of a large sandstone and bronze statue of a woman. It wasn't the timeless figure which attracted me, but an open book on the other side of the memorial with words carved in stone: "The hours vanish, yet are they recorded?"

I found the tent I wanted and wriggled myself around on the wooden seat to get comfortable. The crowd hushed as writer Robert Dessaix began his talk: *Pushing against the dark: Writing about the hidden self*. He talked about the concept of "voodoo" which he explained



as an "inner essence", a "soul", something that transcends a bodily existence in the

world. Dessaix said that through writing he was trying to bring hidden things to the surface by “pushing against the dark”. He did not mean our dark sides, but the darkness we feel stealing over us as we grow older, which eventually blots out those whom we have loved and those who we have been.

For Dessaix, writing was an act of resistance against the fact that we are all going to die. He wrote to stave off time and nothingness. Perhaps I too was pushing against the dark to not only shed some light around my foreign experiences in my beloved Shanghai, but also to ensure that they will be remembered through the act of writing.

As his talk came to a close, my tears welled up. I put on my dark sunglasses, stood up and glanced around at the crowd which was deathly quiet in the summer sun. All that could be heard was the rustling of the leafy oak trees and the sound of a church bell from the nearby cathedral.

I walked steadily down King William Street to the city mall to catch a tram home to the seaside suburb of Glenelg. As I gazed up at the leafy green trees on both sides of the street, I felt giddy and my vision blurred. The tall Adelaide buildings loomed above me and seemed to merge into Shanghai skyscrapers – shimmering, dancing before my eyes.



I started like a person awakening from a dream when the tram pulled in to the platform. I glanced around and thankfully noted that there were relatively few passengers. I settled down into my seat and from the books in my bag pulled out one by the Chinese writer, Jianying Zha: *Tide Players*. As I turned the pages, my mind drifted to Shanghai in 2010: it was also summer, back then ...

Shanghai: 2010.

We giggled as we jumped the fence outside the pavilion. It reminded me of being in a sheep paddock in the Adelaide Hills. Amongst the crowds of Chinese people, a mother handed an empty Coke bottle to her small boy who peed into it whilst waiting for the ferry back to Pudong.

My partner Andrew and I stood in line outside the Australian Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo like sheep ready to be shorn. As Andrew took my hand in his large one, I felt the strong muscles tighten around mine. I smiled as I recalled that when we met, he shook my hand and said: “You can guess what I do?” and before I could answer said: “I am a carpenter.” Oh no, I thought, remembering that my ex-partner Tyson was also in the building trade. Not another one! As time progressed, I was pleasantly surprised that the men were as different as “chalk and cheese”. Besides, Andrew had been many other things as well, such as a businessman.

Andrew and I were in Shanghai to attend to the sale of my apartment and had decided to take up an opportunity to visit the World Expo. Chinese people waited patiently, reading brochures and chatting. Some impatient westerners like us who were unused to standing in long lines, particularly when it was so hot, jumped the fence. The Shanghai World Expo, like the Beijing Olympic Games held in 2008, was a high profile event for the Chinese Government. During these times, security

was tighter because any disruption would cause the government to lose face, to be disgraced or humiliated.

We waited in front of a bronze sculpture at Pudong Airport for our flight to Adelaide. I glanced sideways at Andrew who, with his smile broadening across his tanned face, met my gaze. He nudged me and pointed to one of the many large sculptures placed strategically around the airport to mark the Shanghai World Expo. Shanghai was doing her best to show herself off to the world during this event.

I felt curious about the words of the poem and walked around the airport looking at the other statues. The same poem was on each one, headed by two Chinese characters which formed the meaning of the word “Shanghai” (“above the sea”). In the West, an alternative meaning was also assigned to the word “Shanghai” at a time when ruthless captains “shanghaied” or tricked drunken men onto their ships to build their crews.

The city had a message for all of her visitors. The poem *The Spirit of Shanghai* which highlighted the importance of cultural exchanges and of embracing differences resonated with me. I searched in my backpack for a pen and started to copy part of it:

Let cultural exchanges bridge the divide.
Let each smiling face bring hearts closer.
This is the moment we feel the world standing together.
Such is the memory we have of the City
Embracing the diversity and let it be the Spirit of Shanghai.
Shanghai had changed me profoundly in that I was no longer content to be in

one place. My journey to Shanghai was a “turning point” in my life which writer Linda Myers, in *The Power of Memoir*, describes as “a moment of significant change or transformation”.

I wondered why expatriates go overseas. Was it fate, or due to the direction of their job role or a desire to work in another country? For me, it was a mixture of

serendipity and a sustained longing to work in an Asian culture. I liked the respect shown towards me in that work environment, so unlike home. The smiles and warmth of the people fed and expanded my shrivelled heart, like the sun warming a lotus. At the time, I did not think about any risks that it might involve.

Many years later, I looked back and wondered if personal circumstances such as feeling imprisoned in a troubled relationship had been too much for me. I wanted to follow a dream and a call from beyond to re-invent my life. Perhaps I wanted to live a more daring life, become a completely new person and shed my old skin. Julia Kristeva, in *Strangers to Ourselves*, explained that the reasons for going overseas may be unconscious at the time, like a secret wound of which the foreigner is unaware which drives him to wandering.

Chinese poet Lin Huyin's poem about memories which everyone has like ... "two or three elegant flowers, draped with sentiments, nameless, spreading the scent of wild lotus"...suggests that if we probe deep enough, maybe they will rise rapidly to the surface. As Andrew and I walked towards the gates, our flight to Adelaide was called. I relaxed back in my seat and closed my eyes. Andrew took my hand. I shut my eyes and visualised my Chinese name in Pinyin – Kristen, the closest interpretation to Christine. I saw my apartment located in the French Concession area in Shanghai. It had been renovated from a cement shell to a contemporary Chinese-western style apartment, a mix between the East and the West.

Through living in a culture entirely different to my own and overcoming personal challenges, I changed both within myself and in how I would see my place in the world in the future. It was almost as if I had experienced a transformation from a pupa into a butterfly. I loved the vision of a butterfly – motionless on a

flower, then suddenly taking flight. I woke with a jolt as the plane hit the tarmac at Adelaide Airport.

Adelaide: Winter 2010.

For several years after my return from Shanghai in 2007, I experienced a sustained spiritual experience in which I heard an inner voice speaking to me: *Leave, leave your job, go and write about your experiences in Shanghai*. As I procrastinated, the voice became even more urgent – *remember, it said, for God's sake, remember that you only live once*. I felt as though I had experienced a “numinous moment”, one of heightened awareness. I remembered that we only have one life and one share of the action. Also, I did not want to wear my daily mask any more, one that smiled a sort of hollow smile on the outside and ached on the inside.

Writer Annie Dillard had said something about “the interior life [which] expands and fills; it approaches the edge of the skin; it thickens with its own vivid stories; it even begins to hear rumours, from beyond the horizon's rim”. I heard these stories as I remembered how much Shanghai had taught me. Was this why she came into my life? Had she changed me and put me on the right track to rethinking who I might become?

I reflected on my life before and after Shanghai and decided that I would change nothing. Shanghai felt more like home to me than my own country, I thought, as I watched the news about the Sichuan Province earthquake in China in 2008. How do other expatriates feel, I wondered? Had Shanghai changed them? I remembered sitting in a Chinese restaurant enjoying a bowl of noodles at the YuYuan market.

My ex-partner Tyson had questioned me as to why I had taken such a big step as taking a job in Shanghai. I wondered if some people take a risk to do something different whilst others just talk about it. What were the challenges they faced: what were mine? Expatriates seemed to have a problem letting go of their experiences in Shanghai, almost as if the memories were indelible. Time made little difference, wrote an expat friend of mine, two years after her return to Australia:

... it's hard to believe we lived there now, there were so many days I just took for granted and marched around as if I would live in Shanghai forever. We both wished we could re-live it all, even the dark days (Email: 6th April 2010).

Whilst in Shanghai, I often visited Buddhist temples. I loved to watch the monks, in their long colourful robes, walk gracefully around the courtyards. I liked being alone in those mystical surroundings. I felt they had a restorative power, especially experienced when I wrote in my journal. It was space in which my mind could uncurl. It opened the door to possibilities and it was when novel ideas sneaked in. If I didn't have enough space, I became overwhelmed, all at sea and completely lost. I needed to be "above the sea". It was to maintain equilibrium, to be truly present.

Much of eastern thinking has been guided by the mystical, by storytelling, art and poetry. When I wrote, it was almost as if a Buddhist monk from the East had sneaked into my room. He joined up all the broken threads and beaded the string which in India is called "*japa malas*" and is used for meditation practice.

During the summer holidays after yet another sleepless night, I packed up my office and walked out of my career. Montaigne wrote that: "when the soul is without a definite aim she gets lost: for, as they say, if you are everywhere, you are nowhere". I wanted to be somewhere where I was not. I wanted to be free, not "bound".

I could see the weeping cherry tree in the garden of my Adelaide home. It had been grafted onto a different rootstock like a vine or a rose. The tree stood tall amongst the natives, dressed in emerald green leaves in summer and pink blossoms in spring. Did the experience of expatriatism teach one to live in a different or third space? When at home in Australia, my inner world seemed to not only incorporate this hybrid version of myself, but also a strong belief in the essence of place.

Writer Salman Akhtar explains “hybridity” as a mixed sense of belonging to a variety of places which causes anxiety as well as the challenge of an ongoing process. I did not know then that these feelings would consolidate and become an integral part of me. I looked for Chinese faces in public places, listened to and tried to decipher their speech when passing Chinese people in the street. I kept in close contact with my friends in Shanghai, read and listened to stories about China in the media, ate at Chinese restaurants and was pleased that I could still competently use chopsticks.

The attachment was so intense: perhaps my father had had an affair with a Chinese woman in the past and I was the result. I would wonder looking in the mirror at my dark, almond eyes which simply mirrored those of my father.

Many people will discuss doing something different, escaping the limitations imposed upon them but, too often, it remains just talk. As writer Emily Hahn wisely wrote in *China to Me*, you can choose to live a conventional life or one on the other side of the “sword” which attracts opportunities for learning, discovering and becoming. However, an unconventional life may result in a lack of support from family, friends and colleagues.

The grief associated with losing a place and of really having been in touch with its essence may be difficult for an outsider to understand. And words can't tell you what it was like because they are the memory twitching after the reality of Shanghai *dancing, shimmering* in the night. Perhaps the memories were like an exotic lotus flower rising out of the mud. Let us go back a little and get a better picture.

INTO THE EXOTIC**Myriad Stars**

The soul's lantern shines
 In quiescence, goes
 Dark with noises.

(Bing Xin in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009, 23:3)

Shanghai: Winter 2004.

The bullet train lives up
 to its name as it speeds
 towards the city at 430
 kilometres per hour. My
 stomach lurches as the
 train decelerates to 350
 then 200 kilometres per
 hour and then stops



suddenly, catapulting me

into Shanghai. The majestic skyscrapers, moments ago a blur, appear abruptly in the landscape. I get out of the train and step backwards along the platform, away from the crowd. I marvel at this giant white shark which stretches as far as the eye can see. A blue streak, which begins at its nose and follows its length, highlights its sleekness. The distinguishing Chinese characters on its body make it quite clear that I am in China.

Dusk falls on Shanghai as the taxi speeds away from the railway station towards the city of 25 million people, the total population of Australia. One hour later the cab enters Changning District heading towards my hotel on Yan An Lu. Massive skyscrapers of various shapes and sizes mostly representing hotels and

apartment blocks rise to greet me. They shine sapphire, silver, red and gold against a sky deepening from amber to midnight blue.

I am now an expat. I withdrew myself from my native land. I am a foreigner: “foreign” means not belonging to China, not speaking Mandarin or having the same customs. However, I do not feel *foreign*. I feel like I am simply wearing a new coat except that, perhaps owing to my blonde hair and height, I attract stares. Over a relatively short space of time, the staring disappears as if my presence is now accepted by the community. I embrace this exciting city and chaotic lifestyle as though I knew it before.

I tentatively cross the road underneath massive cement overpasses to my workplace located within a Chinese university. Bicycles, motorbikes and cars travel rapidly several lanes at a time, and in opposite directions. There is a sense of purpose in the chaos: I can see that millions of ordinary Chinese people are on the march for a better life. It is as though China in the past took a wrong turn and is now determined to catch up. I muse about an old saying – something about letting China sleep because when she awakes, like a dragon, she will shake the world.

In late January 2004, I rent an apartment in Xinhau Lu. My partner Tyson joins me for a while, spending most of his time in Australia, a bone of contention between us. “Tyson”, derived from an old French name “Tison”, means “firebrand” or a fiery, quarrelsome person. Tyson’s regular episodes of stormy behaviour in Brisbane reflected the meaning of his name. Then, I looked up in fear at his threatening build, smouldering eyes and black, wavy mid-length hair after he had pushed me until I fell to the floor and injured my hand. No apology came from his pursed lips. All I heard on another occasion was the splintering of wood as Tyson

put his foot through our kitchen door. The smile dropped from my face and my stomach tightened like a macramé knot.

Perhaps he bears a likeness to the famous Mike Tyson, a heavyweight boxing champion sentenced for rape in the United States during the early 1990s. I wonder why I even want him to join me. He is a “trailing spouse” who will follow me to Shanghai.

I spend my days working and explore urban Shanghai on weekends. I glimpse the Chinese walled city from a taxi as I explore the French Concession area. On both sides of Xinhau Lu are classic villas built in European styles including Spanish, English and Art Deco. Many are sold to foreigners with high status in Shanghai, for example, to become foreign consulates. A Chinese friend says that Shanghai people call the lane “Waiguo Nongtang” which means foreign lane. Plane trees stretching across the streets form dense, leafy canopies of shade in the summer months.

The architectural styles of pre-war Shanghai show that expatriates tried to rebuild their own worlds on the city streets. Spanish townhouses, Russian churches, German mansions, Shanghainese lane houses and Lilong housing complexes sit behind towering apartment blocks. Large white houses with gabled roofs and chocolate-coloured shutters lie secure behind high brick walls set in beautiful gardens. Streets run in a lane pattern where many dark and narrow alleys branch off on both sides of long wide streets.

Shanghai has markedly varying temperatures during the year which can soar from freezing cold to an uncomfortable 40 degrees centigrade. The gay expatriate



teachers employed as fashion designers at the college where I work bitch more often during the heat. I am regularly called in to help them sort out their arguments. Although my workplace is comfortable during the day, I feel like I am being hugged by an animal during my walk to and from work. The heat is stifling and sweat runs down the back of my dress as if an egg had been broken on my shoulders. It is somewhat a relief when, in winter, the temperatures may drop below zero.

Shanghai is interesting to explore as it has a very old culture and is markedly different to a western one in terms of architecture, food and customs. During another weekend, I shop at a local market for a bag and watch which cost me A\$50: although they are copies, they look like the real thing. The storekeeper chuckles

with glee as I endeavour to keep lowering the price. I explore historic sites, temples, gardens and the old town of Shanghai. I walk through the 16th century YuYuan classical gardens with their cloistered pavilions, rockeries and ponds. I explore the nearby market. I love the traditional Chinese architecture and browse amongst the crowded shops. I really like to visit Taikang Lu, a former Shikumen residential area not far from my home.

I walk down the narrow streets, stopping to browse amongst the jewellery, craft and clothes shops and to study paintings in the art studios. In these areas, many poor Chinese people survive by selling street food. A Chinese friend shakes her head and remarks, “the local people of Shanghai cannot keep up with the sweeping changes moving across their city.” One weekend I observe a Chinese barber attend to a customer dressed in pyjamas on the footpath, cutting his hair and cleaning his ears with cotton buds.

Writer Qiu Xiaolong explains in his novel *When Red is Black* that in the past a Shikumen house was a typical two-storied home with a stone door frame and small courtyard. Unlike Xintiandi which also has a Shikumen past, Taikang Lu feels more natural. I smell and taste warm Chinese dumplings at a restaurant nearby. The street dust clings to my shoes. The relics of old Shanghai are not only material objects; the traffic sounds echo in my ears and the smell of delicious spicy food hangs about my nostrils.

Wherever I look, the Chinese are loading or unloading their bicycles in the streets, bargaining, working in small rundown shops and large, glitzy department stores. Human life is in perpetual motion. It is so relentless that I become swept up by its momentum and begin to feel like an integral component of this vast city.

When the sun shines, I feel every minute of my life in Shanghai blazing before my eyes, surrounding and lighting me up from within. My senses drink in the chaos of the streets and the scenic beauty of the gardens and lakes close to the city. Shanghai, its landscape and people are now my home and Australia seems unfamiliar. Although I find something new and exciting here, in Australia there is little change.

After a few weeks of living in Shanghai, I feel I no longer stop at my skin but extend into the air around me. I toss and turn in my bed at night. I wonder how Tyson will fit into life here. I look for my Chinese poetry book in my bedside cabinet and turn to Bing Xin's poem, *Myriad Stars*. I learn that when it is quiet, the soul "goes dark with noises" perhaps as its memories come alive.

I do not realize then that Shanghai will irretrievably change my life and that it will take me at least a decade to make sense of it. Nor do I understand that no matter how often I visit Shanghai, she changes me like a catalyst, thrusting me forward in time and place. Although later I learn that "turning to the foreign" creates personal and artistic development, I find something else in Shanghai which completely absorbs and dazzles me. Some years later, I find that these feelings are common to other expatriates in China.

EXPAT TRAUMA

Casting and Refining

Sleepless nights, candlelight and dreams
 All being shaken down, all
 Wind around in a night darkened corner, then hover low
 When the chime of a bell strikes down the long night
 Oh weep, fond heart. Already
 The window is quivering with dawn, silvery and white.
 (Chen Jingrong in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:9)

Shanghai: Winter 2004.

I write in my journal:

I find it so hard trying to communicate problems to an owner who cannot talk to me, agent, security guards, etc. – so draining that I get sick with sinusitis from running out in the middle of the night to get help when all the power goes out – sheer frustration. When I use the hot water, the electricity does not work so I am unable to wash my hair. It is freezing cold, so I wash my hair in the handbasin which probably makes me sick. I am dying for a decent shower, my toenails look sick and my skin is drying out with the cold air.

In January 2004, I officially become an expat in Shanghai. I did not live in Shanghai during times of war or the Cultural Revolution and the devastation and persecution these brought to China. Rather, I am extremely lucky because I live in this vibrant city when it is at peace and whilst the country is undergoing rapid change. I don't think about going home, let alone understand that living here may be difficult because I am busy starting a new job, attempting to learn the language and finding an apartment in which Tyson and I will live.

My job role is Academic Director of a large design and business college based in Shanghai, with its head office in Singapore. I am responsible for about 60 expatriate teaching staff and 800 Chinese students, together with having broad-ranging academic operation responsibilities across the sites of Singapore, Beijing and Shanghai. I will need to travel between these three sites with other senior staff on a quarterly basis to monitor the quality of the academic programmes.

During my first week with the college, I meet with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is from the Singapore head office. Mr Chew is in his early 40s,

of a thick build and dressed in a dark suit. As I carefully listen to him, I quickly learn that he does not like me to ask questions but would prefer that I knew all the answers. He informs me that my teaching background in adult and workplace education will be of value to the company in designing quarterly staff induction programmes for the new expatriate teachers. Back at the office, some of the more senior teachers say that Mr Chew gets angry very quickly and that it is better to not argue with him but just to listen. In this way, his anger passes more quickly.

I do not mind. I like the passion shown by Mr Chew for the company. Disillusionment overcomes me when I think of my own experiences as an Australian academic. I am entrepreneurial in my approach and tend to upset the status quo, particularly when I write and my work is published. Often the responses I attract puzzle me. I remember that my father had a social conscience and would stand up for his beliefs. I wonder if this gene had found its way down to me. I really like the respect I receive for my academic achievements whenever I travel to Asia.

I left school at the age of 15. Girls did not have a career at the time when I grew up: I was supposed to get married. After marriage at the age of 20 and a few years at home looking after my two young children, I became bored. So I looked after my sons during the day and studied part-time at night for about 10 years. I acquired several qualifications including a PhD. Government-assisted child care was not available then. My ex-husband Gunars, who was about 10 years older than me, helped me out in the evenings and a neighbour looked after my sons after school, two to three days per week.

Adult learning was my passion and, in particular, eastern and western perspectives of adult education. I recalled studying a course in philosophy and being particularly influenced by the existentialists. Soren Kierkegaard advised that one

carved out his life by the choices he made, like the decisions which must be made when steering a ship in the night. “A choice must be made,” he said, “one needs to steer in one direction or the other.” Philosopher Ivan Tillich’s emphasis on the “courage to be”, or standing up in life even when it was dark, seemed to strike a chord with me. My musing stops as the phone rings in my office. Mr Chew’s secretary asks for a suitable time to meet with their real estate agent to help me to find an apartment.

I really like what I see of our new home – the tall buildings against a clear blue sky, the wide tree-lined streets, the trendy city of Shanghai, people gathering at local markets; a surprisingly clean city for 25 million people. A few days after my meeting with Mr Chew, Tony a tall, slender Chinese man in his early 30s, arrives at my workplace. His job is to arrange for expatriate staff to view apartments to rent. Tony hails a taxi for us both to downtown Shanghai. During our journey, Tony patiently answers my questions about the regulations associated with buying property in Shanghai.

After viewing four apartments, I sign a lease for a brand new one located in Xinhau Lu, the French Concession area of Shanghai at 4,800 RMB (renminbi) (A\$800 per month). I did not know then that Tony would become one of my closest Chinese friends nor that I would, in time, introduce him to his future wife Mia.

My workplace organizes for me to undertake an extensive health check with the Public Health Inspection Agency. I travel by taxi with an expatriate colleague and a Chinese staff member to the Jingnan District in Shanghai. The facilities appear like those in an Australian army barracks. On entry, a health official gives each of us a yellow form and asks us to remove our clothes and shoes and put on a white hospital gown and disposable cotton slippers. A guide takes us routinely from

one booth to another to have a chest x-ray and blood and urine samples taken. When each test is complete, the health official stamps the yellow form.

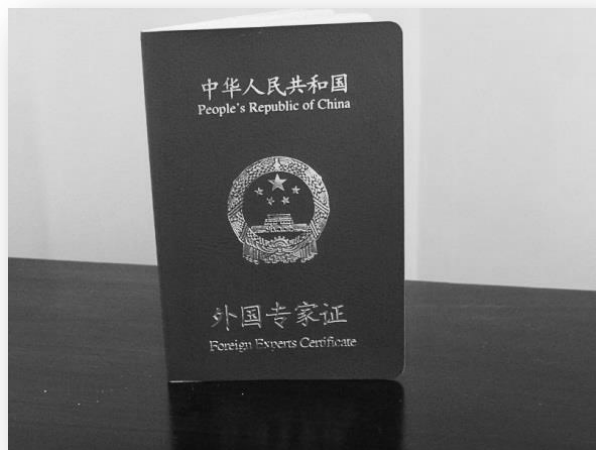
On taking my form back to the office at the entry point, the official notes that one stamp is missing. I repeat the process of putting on the white gown and cotton slippers to complete the final check. I feel my heart beating faster as the official checks my form and gives it the final *chop* (Chinese stamp). We worry that we may be sent back to our home countries as if we were flawed fruit.

My colleague and I smile with relief and chuckle over our experiences as we enter the waiting taxi to take us both back to the college. Later I receive a *Foreign Experts Certificate* in Chinese and English from the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs in China, which enables me to work for 12 months. After that, my company would need to organize its renewal.

Following a community check with the local police station, I am issued with a *Foreign Residence Permit*

which is required to reside in Shanghai. After signing the contract on my new apartment, Mrs Chu, the owner, asks Tony if I would like to go shopping with her to buy furniture. She is in her late 30s, attractive and a

very stylish dresser. Tony informs me that Mrs Chu is very rich and together with her husband owns four other apartments in Shanghai. She is from Harbin in North China and grows herbal mushrooms for Chinese medicine. We manage to communicate by smiling, laughing and making eye contact.



The next day, Mrs Chu arrives in a taxi. She shouts me lunch at a Chinese restaurant and then we go shopping at several large warehouses to buy all new furniture for the apartment. I choose a red lounge, two bedroom suites, a dining table and chairs, and a desk and chair for the study, mostly of dark wood in contemporary Chinese style. I purchase linen and towels from IKEA which arrive at my workplace rather than at my home address due to communication difficulties.

I have nothing to do but wait and watch the snow as it falls softly against the windows and covers the trees outside. I remember running about like a child looking at the effect of snow on vehicles, huge lion statues at the entrance of commercial buildings and the streets as I walk to work. I wait for about six hours for my goods to arrive; otherwise, there would be no linen on the bed that evening. It is still very cold in Shanghai with below zero temperatures. During these early days in Shanghai, my mood swings from feeling happy to being overwhelmed and frustrated.

I go out to have dinner at a local restaurant. I come home and a security guard is sitting on a chair inside my apartment and two others are sitting outside. They are all dressed in military-style uniforms. My heart pounds in my chest and my stomach churns. Using halting Mandarin, many hand gestures and a Chinese-English dictionary, it seems that I left the door open by mistake and they are trying to look after my apartment for me.

Finally, the linen arrives and I carefully make up the beds. I try to communicate the problems to the landlord Mr Chu but he cannot understand me. I run out in the middle of the night to ask the security guards to put the power on again for me. I boil a kettle to wash my hair in the handbasin and become sick with sinusitis. I am now looking forward to going home for Christmas. I wonder if I am

homesick. In the evening, I collapse into bed but cannot get warm. I am unable to sleep and hope that my tiredness is not affecting my new work role.

The next day, I come home to my apartment and it is clean. Gold brocade curtains shimmer in the late afternoon light in the lounge and bedrooms. The red lounge suit gives off a warm glow in the afternoon sun. It feels like home. I ask for the hot water to be fixed and beautiful gold curtains are hung! Is this a cultural difference between expectations in the East and West, I wonder? Perhaps Mr and Mrs Chu are doing their best to provide what they think I need.

One afternoon after work, I walk to the Chinese supermarket not far from my apartment. The checkout girl assists me with the correct money to pay for the few items I have purchased. The following morning, I attempt to pour the “milk” onto my Weet-Bix. I feel frustrated as I shake the carton then realize that I have bought yoghurt instead of milk.

Later in the week, I become tied up with a student problem at work: I gradually become used to parents always being involved in their adult children’s education. In China, parents pay for their children’s post-schooling studies. The student is not happy with the teacher, a common problem. We arrive at a solution and I do not leave the college until about 8 p.m. My office is not yet ready. I smile as I am told it will be built over the weekend. I find it difficult to visualise Australian workers completing a similar task in such a short space of time.

Despite the challenges, I look forward to returning home to Australia for Christmas and start to pack up my belongings. The hot water is still not fixed and Shanghai temperatures remain below zero. I try to book into a Chinese hotel but they say they are full. I walk across the street and book into a more westernised hotel not far from my apartment for three nights. At least they can speak English

there. My plan is to keep in contact with Tony in Shanghai to ensure the electric water heater is fixed before I return. I gradually learn that there is a cultural difference between the East and West in the expectation of when things will be completed. One has to be patient.

Whilst my eastern colleagues sometimes appear slow to address issues, they in turn may feel that, as a westerner, I am unduly concerned with schedules. I recalled reading writer Salman Akhtar's explanations of the time differences between the East and the West in *Immigration and Identity*. He said that whilst the West is concerned with the "time of the mind", the East is considered with the "time of the heart". This appreciation of the cultural differences helped me to understand how important relationships were in getting things done in China.

The sun is shining on a winter's day as I leave Shanghai in a taxi for Pudong Airport on my way to Australia. I like Shanghai, my new job and the people with whom I work. I feel like I fit in.

Shanghai: mid-Winter 2004.

The sky is a clear blue. I walk quickly to work as I do not want to be late to meet the new students for the first time. Chinese workers pass by, chatting happily together in Mandarin. Although I earn less than I did in Australia, I am able to save more because it does not cost me much to live in Shanghai. I wonder where the last week has gone since I returned from Australia. I am so busy trying to integrate everything.

New students flock to the auditorium for the college orientation day. I walk to the Academic Director's office and proceed to rehearse my speech. I join my

colleagues in the lift chatting happily about the holidays as we greet the new students.

“I would like to introduce our Academic Director, Dr Kristen,” the MC says as I step up to the microphone.

“*Nihau*, (hello), *huanying, huanying* (welcome, welcome).”

I speak loudly so all 400 students can hear me. I present my 10-minute welcome speech.

“*Zaijian* (goodbye).”

I hear the sound of loud clapping as I join my colleagues. Later that day, one of my expatriate friends Millie and I have lunch at Xintiandi. I wave to Millie who is tall and elegantly dressed in black pants and a leather jacket. We catch up on our latest news as we walk past the Shikumen (stone) buildings, which now serve as bookshops, restaurants and shopping malls. We choose a Thai restaurant and sit outside as the winter’s day is warm. It is the first time I think about what it might be like to go home at the end of my contract. After all, I am only a new expatriate in Shanghai.

“You know what I would really like, Millie – to live between Shanghai and Brisbane.”

“Oh, you could do that, Kristen. You know I’m scared of going back. Some people keep going from one country to another. They don’t want to go back.”

“Why?”

“It is just too hard, too hard to resettle in Australia.”

I settle into my apartment. Around Chinese New Year, I hear loud firecracker noises which staccato around the building. I walk between my bedroom and kitchen, looking out of the windows. Flashes of light, like lightning, seem to

cascade up and down them. It is mid-January 2004 and the start of the Chinese New Year. The noise goes on for several days as the Chinese celebrate with firecrackers, which they also use to celebrate other happy occasions such as the opening of an office or buying a new home.

A Chinese tailor comes to our workplace regularly to take measurements and construct tailor-made garments from the pictures that the teachers and I cut out from fashion magazines like *Elle* and *Vogue*. The materials are selected from the vast array of silks, wools, cottons and blends of all kinds, together with trimmings from the fabric market near the Bund. The fashion design teachers choose the most interesting designs, particularly the gay male teachers. Annie, a fashion design teacher from the UK whose spiked blonde hair regularly changes from pink to blue, then to green streaks, passes me the business card of a local tailor, Ms Yu. Mr Chew encourages the tailor's visits and expresses interest in the different garments worn by the teachers. We are, after all, employees of a reputable design college.

One afternoon on a weekend, I make arrangements to visit Ms Yu who lives with her husband in an apartment building where she also has an office in the Changning District. I step out of the taxi, enter through the large stone and wrought iron gate and walk towards Ms Yu's office. Some Chinese men are playing mah-jong. I hear snatches of Chinese opera while women are hanging out the washing, chatting or mending. I greet them with a smile, repeating "*Nihau*" as I pass by.

I look up at the sign which reads *Xiao Yu Fashion Custom-Tailor Workshop* and turn right into the entrance of Ms Yu's small office. Woollen cloth and silks line floor to ceiling shelves in her room. Jackets and dresses of different coloured fabrics hang ready for collection. Ms Yu is a petite woman in her mid-40s.

"*Nihau*, Ms Yu, how are you?"

“*Nihau*, Kristen, very good, very good, how are you?” Ms Yu replies in halting English.

I show Ms Yu some fashion illustrations that I have cut out from *Elle*, *Vogue* and other popular magazines. She nods understandingly and carefully measures me for the garments. It is Monday. The five fully-lined “designer label” garments that I order will be ready by Friday afternoon, with a fitting included, at a total cost of 1,800 RMB (A\$300). I wonder why I find such pleasure in fashion. Perhaps it is because as a child, my family could not afford to buy new clothes for each of their four children on a regular basis. My parents gave me *one* new dress each birthday.

It is now the weekend. Tyson continually delays his flight to Shanghai. I become more and more frustrated. He says that he needs money to finish renovating our home and for the flight although I gave him funds before I left. The arguing over the phone escalates as his demands increase. He sells all of our furniture including my son’s television but neither of us receive any money. I feel he is “milking” me. I wonder also if he is “baiting” me with his frequent demands for more funds, hoping I might then say “no, don’t come”, which may make it easier for him.

I remember that he over-quotes on building jobs if he feels the work is too difficult, or does not feel like doing it. I begin to see the benefits of being alone and free, able to make my own decisions. Later that day I write my thoughts down in my journal:

I like the space, excitement and challenge of being overseas, just moving around on my own, doing exactly what I want, when I want to. Not bound by other constraints, for example, Tyson’s need to stop and eat frequently whilst sightseeing, privacy to think my own thoughts, to focus on my new job without worrying what Tyson is doing.

I feel torn between a life with Tyson and one on my own. He is a charming “social butterfly” with our friends and often silent with me. Why is Tyson so kind to

his mother and not to me? Perhaps it is all my fault. He organizes a holiday to the Gold Coast with his son and daughter because he says that they want some time together as a “threesome”. As I was not invited, I made arrangements to see some of my friends. Tyson’s anger then cut deep, like a knife through the flesh.

My upbringing has not prepared me for the situation in which I find myself. My experience informs me that just having a career is not really enough. I continue to persevere with settling into my new position and maintaining the relationship. Tyson finally arrives in March 2004 with no money left as he says he spent it all on renovating our home in Brisbane. He does not think about work until he arrives in Shanghai and only after many subtle reminders. I often feel tense and anxious.

I wonder if I should be more understanding but cannot help feeling resentful. Tyson travels back and forth from Shanghai to Australia visiting family and friends while I support us both. I remember a colleague separating from her husband because she got sick of his expectations that she should carry him. She also felt distinctly odd socially because her friends had husbands who usually supported their wives. The problems between us seem to settle a little, escalate then resolve again in a regular cycle. I travel to Putuoshan, a small Buddhist island about two hours from Shanghai by ferry for a weekend away. I note my feelings whilst travelling on the ferry to Putuoshan:

I have a horrendous time getting to Putuoshan. The Chinese challenge me to the extreme – no clear directions to get to the bus so the taxi driver got lost and I missed the bus to the ferry. Then a mad rush to the port. The agent asks the ferry to wait for 10 minutes and I make it after numerous mobile calls.

Putuoshan is a popular tourist destination for local Chinese people as the weather is cooler in summer. It consists of temples, pagodas, bridges arched over lotus ponds, narrow alleys, fishing boats, monks and artisans. Green hills form a backdrop to the white houses with grey, Chinese-tiled roofs. The monks, dressed in

traditional gold and maroon robes, walk the dusty streets of the small town. The sand is golden unlike the white sand of Australian beaches. A speedboat hums as it speeds up and down the sea. Trees, similar to the Norfolk pines at Glenelg, surround the foreshore and Chinese-style architectural buildings overlook the beach.

To the right, a large Chinese temple overlooks the sea. As I walk along the beach, I notice that no one is sunbathing unlike the beaches home in Australia. The Chinese call this the *One Thousand Mile Beach*. Few people actually sit on the beach or swim but prefer to take photos of each other, splashing in the water or posing on the sand.

Tyson arrives by ferry in the afternoon after his part-time teaching job on Saturday mornings. The next day he refuses to eat the traditional Chinese breakfast. We walk to Puji Temple and down some stone steps to Fayu Temple by the sea. We take a cable car up the mountain to another Buddhist temple. It is a long trip back to Shanghai by boat, bus and taxi. We start or rather continue arguing, so what's new, I think? He says that he tells his mother, "Mum, let me know when you want me to come down to Adelaide again and I will be there." Perhaps the guy is married to his mother.

A passage I read in Jill Ker-Conway's book, *When Memory Speaks*, reminded me of how manipulative Tyson's mother was; it was something about a passive woman who sought power through the manipulation of her children. Tyson often acted guilty in matters relating to his mother. For example, he would want to flee to Australia when his mother called, without taking into account our commitments, or considering an alternative time frame.

When Tyson and I lived in Brisbane and his mother had the flu, he insisted on cooking a daily evening meal at her home whilst I ate alone. If I objected, Tyson

would storm out of our house and not return until late evening. Tyson's mother had found secret ways to use her power without ever acknowledging that she did so.

During our first year in Shanghai in 2004, Tyson and I caught an express train from Shanghai to Suzhou, the home of the Chinese Classical Gardens and silk production for the region. A thick coat of snow covered the roofs of houses and the trees around the canals were bare. As I walked through two of these gardens, the *Humble Administrator's Garden* and the *Garden of the Master of Nets*, my mind felt calm and at ease. Tyson and I visited many different local markets for antiques, fabrics and local Chinese goods. In September 2004, Tyson returned again to Australia. The problems in our relationship were exacerbated. Yet, he never actually said he wanted to go home, although I did ask him. I felt resentful and decided to get on with my life.

I spent Christmas 2004 alone in Hangzhou. Most expatriates had gone home for Christmas but, for the first time, I stayed in China. Hangzhou which is located in the Zhejiang Province is famous for its West Lake and is a popular holiday destination for Chinese people. The train sped past the snow-covered landscape towards Hangzhou, two hours north of Shanghai. I squirmed into my seat and pulled a book out of my bag. Chinese folk, mostly in groups, chattered excitedly to each other. A lady in a military-style uniform walked solidly up and down the aisle. She spoke rapidly in Mandarin as she tried to sell her refreshments.

At the hotel I quickly unpacked my bags, eager to walk around the lake before sunset. Chinese wooden ferry boats graced the distance. Water lilies of all shapes and sizes gazed up at me from the water as I walked around the lake. I purchased some fruit sweets on a stick and munched them as I crossed a Chinese

bridge bordered with pink and white flowers. I drew the parka hood over my head and zipped up the front as the Autumn air blew cold off the lake. I sat down on a seat and took my journal from my bag to capture my feeling of freedom:

The feeling of freedom prevailed whilst I was in Hangzhou alone. Freedom from fitting into another's plans. Increasingly, I found peace in being alone to reflect and think. I liked the idea of secrecy – going away, doing my own thing with no one knowing – almost risky, even dangerous.

I heard a chirping sound as I passed a group of children sitting at a table by the lake. They played with pet cicadas in their little cane cages. The sound of the cicadas reminded me of a poem in my Chinese poetry book called *The Silk Dream*, about China's soul being as "thin and airy as a cicada's wings". To the left, a group of western and Chinese people practised tai chi and, to my right, lotus flowers emerged from the lake. I did not believe that these men and women enjoyed tai chi for the sake of it. Perhaps they just wanted to be in a place as I did then, with the whole world behind them and nothing ahead but emptiness.

To the right of the lake, I saw a statue of a woman in a cement-like boat, leaning gracefully over the edge. Something about her physical characteristics and pose seemed familiar to me. Two brown ducks stood still, perched on the edge of the boat, whilst she filtered the water with her fingers as if looking for something amongst the lotus flowers. I wondered if she would ever find it...



Dusk falls. With masses of bright lights in shades of gold, red and silver cascading down and around, a beautiful Christmas tree stands before me. Chinese people don't officially recognize Christmas Day but the sparkling decorations and carols of a western Christmas still hold fascination for them. On both sides of the street, trees sparkle with fairy lights. A large group of young Chinese boys and girls are singing in English. I wonder if they really understand the words of the Christmas carol,

“Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.”

A few expatriates identifiable with their blonde hair gather amongst the mass of Chinese people. I find a card shaped in the form of a Christmas tree and some sweets lying on the pillow in my hotel room. I lie in bed at night stressing about my deteriorating relationship with Tyson. The words, *what price is freedom*, *what price is freedom?*, reverberate in my head until I fall asleep. I begin to realize then and later how important freedom is to me. Perhaps, by taking risks, I am living outside the time of the traditional lifestyle into which I was born.

Years later, I learn that there is a relationship between being “foreign” and “freedom” from another’s plans or ties in one’s own country. Through “freedom” from home, all things are possible. Heidegger comments that “the possible is the future”. Perhaps this is how I often feel as I walk the streets of Shanghai, very optimistic about the future. That was back then.

The next day I decide to visit the Lingyin Temple (Temple of the Soul’s Retreat). The taxi draws up at the monastery about 10 kms from Hangzhou. I walk through the Chinese arch surrounded by large fig trees and enter the monastery. Many striking Buddha statues and pagodas decorate the area. Groundcover masses around the statues, softening the ground under my feet. Smiling Buddha faces emerging from the rock faces above calm me. Around the monastery, people are in groups and alone, enjoying the experience. A tall, marble Buddha statue stands in the leafy garden. His hands emerge from the embroidered emblems on the draped robe and one is raised. Two small lions sit protectively either side of the Buddha’s feet. The aura of peace and serenity exuded by the Buddhas envelops me.

In the afternoon, I pack my belongings and take a taxi to the Hangzhou train station for the two-hour trip back to Shanghai. I grope in my bag for my Chinese poetry book and search for a poem by Chen Jingrong, *Casting and Refining*, something about dreams all being shaken down and a new dawn emerging. I look up and see a white light through the window as dawn approaches. I feel as though my life is going through a process of casting and refining, casting and refining ...

GHOSTING

A Cat of the Cultural Revolution

My fantasy came true with the Cultural Revolution of being a cat, jumping through the attic window, stalking on the dark roof, staring down into the rooms now peopled with the strangers wearing the armbands of “Red Guards.” They had told me “Go away, bastard, you hear!” I heard, only too glad to come to the roof, where I found, for the first time, that starlight could shine so long in solitude, and that [Father] had changed beside the Red Guards, [his] neck bent by a blackboard like a zoological label. I couldn’t tell the words written on it, but I knew [he’s] in no position to stop my leaping into the dark night ... I ran out wild ... and I jumped into the jungle (Qiu Xiaolong in *When Red is Black*, 2004:301).

Shanghai: Winter 2005.

When Tyson and I are doing the tourist thing, we get on a little better. We see many traces of Old Shanghai whilst walking the city streets, visiting temples and historic buildings. Tyson’s black hair grows longer and curls at the nape of his neck. He gains weight as he is now not doing any physical work. Tyson’s smile seems genuine when we are out and about but I know otherwise. I see his dark moods appear when I do not agree with him in some way. One Saturday, I feel frightened when he abandons me in a street outside IKEA in Shanghai. I do not think a portable island bench will work in the small kitchen in our apartment. Tyson shouts foul language at me and strides to the exit as I cringe with embarrassment. I follow him out onto the street. I am already too late as he climbs into a taxi without me. Later that evening, we make up and the next day continue with our weekend sightseeing.

The taxi stops at the *Jade Buddha Temple* which draws on the tradition of Mahayan Buddhism. I learn that the temple originated from 1882 with two jade Buddha statues imported from Burma. I stare up at them, each carved from a single piece of creamy jade. Tyson and I walk into the temple which contains carved bodhisattvas, Buddhist icons and handwritten sūtras from early times. We pass some Chinese people in the courtyard preparing incense to offer to the Buddhas. Tyson and I enjoy a bowl of noodles for five yuan (less than one Australian cent) at

the public restaurant. Now we are alone, Tyson's moodiness returns and he does not speak to me. I start to feel anxious.

A few weeks later, we visit *Longhua (Dragon) Temple* in Shanghai which is dedicated to the Maieira Buddha and originated in 242 AD. Tyson and I walk in the extensive gardens within an inner courtyard. Peach trees ablaze with pink blossoms form a border around it. The 40-metre high Longhua Pagoda rises above us. It stands tall and serene along the relatively quiet tree-lined street. The pagoda was not always so peaceful: between 1942 and 1945, it was equipped with anti-aircraft guns during the Japanese invasion of Shanghai. Today, Chinese monks in their orange robes walk serenely through the courtyard to the Longhua temple.

I love to walk along the Bund, a stretch of embanked riverfront of the Huangpu River in Shanghai. It looks more European than Chinese with its elegant buildings, banks and trading houses designed by mostly western architects. During the winter, Tyson and I stay at the Peace Hotel which is renowned for its jazz band and rooftop restaurant, and is close to the waterfront. We have dinner at



a restaurant nearby, *M on the Bund*, and admire the magical view across the Huangpu River to Pudong. The river which sparkles with lights of different colours,

seems to curve around Shanghai like a massive dragon. I feel more at peace. Tyson is eating now and commenting favourably on the food.

Shanghai: Spring 2005.

My son Ethan visits us in Shanghai when he attends a conference in the Pudong area. Tyson puts his best foot forward while Ethan is with us. My son and I walk down Nanjing Road, one of the main shopping areas, which is six kilometres in length. However, we do not walk the full length. Ethan and I walk through the gardens of People's (Remnin) Square, a large public place adjacent to Nanjing Road that houses the Shanghai Museum. Ethan likes to read so we hail a cab to the Foreign Language Bookstore in Fuzhou Road.

Ethan saves the deteriorating situation between Tyson and I by just being there as a third party. After Ethan returns to London, I learn from Mia that, in past times, the middle of Fuzhou Road was the "red light" district of the city and housed many brothels. These have now been replaced by artists' materials and paper shops. Mia explains that the "red light" district is no longer open due to changes in Chinese society. In the past when most Chinese marriages were arranged by a couple's parents, perhaps people felt they needed an escape. Today, "romantic love" is more of a consideration in marriage which has probably reduced the desire for brothels. Prostitution is no longer tolerated in China. I think about Mia and her involvement with Tony. I smile as I remember introducing them at an informal dinner.

Shanghai has danced through all the challenges, survived and morphed into something greater than before. It has a dramatic history of battles in which the city has risen, fallen, then risen again, and is further characterized by an influx of White

Russian, American, British, European and Japanese foreigners. In fact, during the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai protected people such as American con men, White Russian touts, Japanese jazz players, Korean tram conductors, Jews fleeing the Nazis and Chinese revolutionaries running from each other.

In her book, *Shanghai*, writer Harriet Sergeant tries to understand the city in moments of crises by describing it in the 1920s and 1930s as "... dense, rank, richly clotted life ... nothing more intensely living can be imagined." A documentary, *Legendary Sin Cities: Shanghai*, illustrates that during that period, Shanghai was the richest and most wicked city in the world for foreigners, where anything could be bought, such as drugs and prostitutes. No passport was required to enter the Shanghai port and many expatriates came.

Shanghai's most powerful foreigners during the 1920s and 1930s were the British, who looked down upon the Chinese. They ruled over the Chinese and plied them with Indian opium in exchange for silks and tea. Foreigners existed in opulence and ease in a sheltered, protected cocoon known as the "International Settlement" within the French Concession area. At that time, Shanghai's population comprised 30,000 foreigners and one million Chinese. Shanghai also offered scores of opium dens.

Foreigners bought up buildings on the streets: many different nationalities lived in Shanghai. Foreigners took over sections of the city and formed their own police, military, courts and architecture which reflected other large cities such as New York, Tokyo and Paris. Rich foreigners had six to seven servants and spent their time playing tennis or cards, participating as members of social clubs, partying at numerous nightclubs and attending the gym. Chinese *amahs* or *ayahs* (the equivalent of British nannies) brought up the children.

The “Green Gang,” led by an infamous gangster “Big Ear Due”, ran opium dens and controlled organized crime in Shanghai. Those who could not repay their gambling debts were tortured by him and his men with knee capping and tendon cutting. In the 1920s, Shanghai was the most gangster-ridden city in the world.

In 1937, Japan was at war with China. The Japanese bombed areas occupied by Chinese civilians, but did not initially touch the International Settlement. Foreigners, looking safely out from their homes or nightclubs, often watched bombs fall on the city, as if they were viewing a fireworks display. Subsequently, European Jews arrived in Shanghai fleeing Hitler as other foreigners escaped from the Japanese. Sadly, during the early mornings of the 1930s, 30,000 Chinese bodies were picked up annually. Some foreigners stepped over the Chinese people who had died from cold, malnutrition and homelessness, as they went to their various sporting clubs.

Writer Emily Hahn writes of her return to Shanghai by ship from Hong Kong with her lover Shao Xunmei following the early days of the Japanese invasion. Although eager to return, she felt that Shanghai was now very different because it stood alone, struggling and besieged on all sides by a greedy and zealous enemy. Although Emily Hahn was renowned for being a prolific writer and a courageous woman, she was an active participant in the seamy side of Shanghai life.

Between the late 1960s and 1970s, Shanghai with the rest of China witnessed scenes of great horror, now not much talked about and almost hidden. “The Chinese people don’t want to remember and the Chinese Government prefers to forget”, said Deng, a Chinese colleague whose father was persecuted and whose own education was curtailed during the 1970s. He was unable to write in Chinese in his own country and now lives and works as a writer in the United States. I shook

my head. It was during this period that I married Gunars and my two sons were born in Adelaide. I do not remember the Cultural Revolution nor did I spare a thought for China back then. I recalled an Australian expatriate saying that she was in China during the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and that they were exciting times because there were a lot of people on the streets.

Deng said that because his father owned a small business, he was persecuted by the Red Guards. While Deng's father was in hospital undergoing eye surgery, a black placard was put around his neck. His name was crossed out because he was considered "black", or a capitalist. Deng, who was referred to as a "black puppy", was summoned to write a confession for his father who had to stand under Chairman Mao's portrait in the hospital and confess that he was indeed evil. Deng read the confession for him and felt very bad. He was only 13 years old. Many years later, he stood at his father's grave in Shanghai, shaking his head about the confusing changing ideologies – all that suffering for nothing.

Unlike Deng who stood by his father, some young people distanced themselves from their parents during these times, just like the cat leaping off a roof into the dark night in Qiu Xiaolong's poem, *Cat of the Cultural Revolution*. For many young Chinese, their shame was so total that they felt their parents had actually died even though they were still alive. Many Chinese people committed suicide by jumping off tall buildings because they could not face the thought of being persecuted. In a society where *face* is everything, fear and humiliation killed thousands of older people. Today, Deng's father would be thought of as "red" or successful because he had a business.

As I walk around YuYuan Garden and antique markets in Shanghai, I am intrigued because Mao's face adorns everything from coffee mugs to t-shirts and

caps. Deng comments that this is because some of the poor people felt that he did help them. As Deng says, the views of a western expatriate and a Chinese expatriate are very different. I now see why. Mine were formed through recent experiences over which I have control. I did not have to go to Shanghai, I chose to. Nor will I have to leave; it will be my choice. My Chinese colleague and others during the 1970s could not choose. They suffered from being unable to obtain an education to better themselves.

As Deng says, he is lucky because he managed to move to the United States, complete his education and become a writer. His friends were not so fortunate as many are still in rural areas as a result of the “Down to the Countryside Movement”: others have no education because all schooling was banned for 10 years. It is too late now for them to better themselves. Deng explains that living in the United States has benefits for his writing because the distance enables him to see things more clearly than if he lived in Shanghai. I wondered if Deng also had mixed feelings. I knew that he loved Shanghai. Perhaps by remaining in the United States, he was able to develop an interior distance from the pain like “fire and ice” that had seared him in the past.

I select Maria Tumarkin’s novel, *TraumaScapes*, from the bookshelf next to the sofa. Do some literary expatriates perceive their experiences as “traumascapes” which are “marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering or loss?” Has the past remained unfinished business for Deng, who was exiled from China? I knew he could never forget his home. I pick up Rebecca Saunders’ book, *The Concept of the Foreign*, in which she explains that: “... the lost world of the exile is not simply removed, but constantly reimagined, a realm of possible pasts and futures ...” I

wondered if things had changed in China since then. Does China still wish to forget the tragedies of the past like the student protests in Tiananmen Square?

Ghost Voice

A haunting ghost voice which is wiser and more knowing. It shadows the points the narrator is making through emphasis, seeking a spiritual meaning or presenting an apparition in order to create a deeper understanding of foreignness.

Brisbane: The Gallery of Modern Art (from my journal: 12th February 2005).

You are drawn to the sound of Chinese people speaking. You see a girl sitting on a seat in front of a screen and position yourself just behind her. Familiar Chinese faces appear on the screen. A Chinese man is interviewing the students in Mandarin outside the front gates of Beijing University. You can't see him, but can hear his voice. Subtitles in English appear on the screen as you lean forward for a better view:

“Do you know what today is?” asks the interviewer.

“June 4th,” replies a Chinese student looking taken aback.

“Yes, but what day is it?”

“Oh, I don't remember,” says the student walking quickly away.

The interviewer does not give up and continues to interview the students:

“Do you know what today is?”

“June 4th.”

“Yes, but what day is it?”

“The day of the students' protest.”

“Don't record please.” The student covers his face and runs away.

The interviewer interviews many students and the result is always the same.

Fear of recognition. In the background, Chinese soldiers are marching along Tiananmen Square as local people follow casually behind them.

The girl has gone. You stand up. Your heart feels heavy as you walk quickly towards the sunlight outside.

TIDE PLAYERS

There is a tide in the affairs of men.
 Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
 Omitted, all the voyage of their life
 Is bound in shallow and in miseries.
 (Jianying Zha, *Tide Players*, 2011:ii).

Shanghai: Summer 2005.

I read about an incident after the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in J.G. Ballard's novel, *Empire of the Sun*. It involved drunken American and British sailors who humiliated a crowd of Chinese people waiting outside. Perhaps their silence also provoked the sailors:

... the sailors began to jeer at the Chinese ... the men unbuttoned their bell-bottomed trousers and urinated down the steps ... the arcs of urine formed a foaming stream that ran down to the street ... the Chinese stepped back, their faces expressionless.

One weekend during the summer, I met with my Chinese colleague Xiao who was employed by an American university and was visiting Shanghai. Xiao was dressed casually in Chinese style: black pants and white shirt. Although he was interested in discussing ideas for collaborative research, we also explored other areas. My work role as Academic Director involved responsibilities for staff training and research.

I was talking to Xiao about the British, the Americans and the Japanese forces who invaded China in the past, yet not so long ago. Many foreigners looked down on the Chinese, exploited them with many incidents of cruelty occurring during the 1920s and 1930s, and in the Chinese Revolution between the 1960s and 1970s.

“You know, Xiao, China never invaded anyone.”

“No, you are right, Kristen. Over time the Chinese have been *so* humiliated.”

“So now they are really fighting back.”

Xiao also spoke to me about the *Misty Poets* of the late 1970s and 1980s. He said they were a group of 20th century Chinese poets who reacted against the restrictions of the Cultural Revolution and he mentioned four important *Misty poets*: *Bei Dao*, *Gu Cheng*, *Duo Duo* and *Yang Lian*. Xiao said that they authored a magazine called *Jintian* which means “Today” in English and is now used as a forum for Chinese expatriate writers. I asked Xiao about the word “misty”. He replied that it means “obscure”, or “hazy”. But Xiao then added that actually the word “misty” means “new moon”. to the Chinese. I made a mental note to learn more about Chinese and western literary expatriates and their contributions, as fodder for the forthcoming induction course for teachers.

The CEO had suggested that the new teachers may be interested in learning about China’s history and challenges. I pondered as to how to introduce this into their forthcoming induction course. The incident that J.G. Ballard described in his novel was an example of the humiliation of the Chinese at the hands of western powers. I think of Chinese and western expatriate writers as “tide player” or, in more contemporary terms, movers and shakers who, at their own peril, shared and communicated their writing passion to others.

I read in Chinese writer Jianying Zha’s, *Tide Players*, that they would surf the currents and hold up their red flags which never got wet. Just like the writers, tide players took risks and could never be judged as not having lived. Shanghai and its people always seemed to survive the battles and tragedies of the past. A smile escaped my lips when western expatriate writer J.G. Ballard wrote in *Empire of the Sun* that “already a sizeable traffic jam blocked the Bund. Once again the crash and clutter of Shanghai had engulfed its invaders”.

Subsequently, the young J.G. Ballard around the age of 11 years was sent to one of the internment camps established for European and American citizens, the Lunghua Civilian Assembly Centre where he stayed for about two years. The camp was located near the current site of the Shanghai Botanical Gardens.

Were these experiences, together with starving and becoming disoriented at such an impressionable age, so traumatic that they overwhelmed him? This may explain the violent nature of much of his fiction. I wondered myself having never experienced war, how life seemed to go on as normal. Perhaps J.G. Ballard never got over the suffering and loss of the past? After the Japanese war ended, the author as a young boy returned to the Lunghua Camp on at least two occasions. Perhaps he felt attached and secure in the “traumascape” that became his home for two years.



I thought about J.G. Ballard’s parents for whom he continually searched. On their return to Shanghai, he wanted to explain everything to them but his mother and father were not interested: they had been through their own war. Perhaps their

experiences were incomprehensible and therefore throughout their lives, the past remained unfinished business. Despite his experiences as a child, J.G. Ballard subsequently remarked in his novel that only part of his mind would ever leave Shanghai, this *terrible* city.

During the incident involving the drunken American and British sailors, J.G. Ballard (“Jim”) was present. He glanced at the Chinese people around him who looked so humiliated and wrote that he knew what they thought! One day, he said: “China would punish the rest of the world and take a frightening revenge.” My reading confirmed Xiao’s comments about the Chinese fighting back. China today is undergoing dramatic change as a major player in world competition and economic growth.

After the weekend, I sit at my desk in the Academic Director’s Office which overlooks the French Concession area of Shanghai. The office furniture is of dark wood and in a contemporary Chinese style. On the wall above, a large picture displays branches covered with cherry blossom. The sun is shining through my window as I look out at the tall skyscrapers from my office on the sixth floor. It is not quite 9 a.m.

I check my incoming emails. I note one from a colleague whose wife works for a film studio in Shanghai. They tell me that they are recruiting extras in Shanghai for a new film, *The Painted Veil*. He asks that I email the expat teachers to see if any are interested. I am also planning a module on “Chinese History and Cultural Awareness”. As I like to engage the new teachers’ interest, I check the film’s details on the Internet. It is a Chinese-American production directed by John Curran, based on the 1925 novel of the same title by W. Somerset Maugham.

I search further for some information about the film which is centred on a couple in a tense relationship who embark on a trip to a small rural village in China. They both experience personal trauma dealing with illness and deaths from cholera. Perhaps this was the real meaning of Shelley's sonnet, *Lift not the painted veil which those who live*: that through experiencing a crisis, one is forced to lift his or her own veil to reveal the true self behind it.

One month after Xiao's visit, I spend more time at the Shanghai Library to plan a staff training session for the new teachers. I come to understand that the literature of Chinese and western expatriates helped to shape Shanghai. This was because many were politically active, forming literary societies to communicate to their government and to progress their writing and poetry.

American writer Emily "Mickey" Hahn lived in Shanghai during the Japanese invasion. She was a tall woman with short black hair and delicate facial features. The most tumultuous years of her life were when she resided in Shanghai from 1935 and during the Japanese invasion in 1941. She had an affair with a renowned Chinese poet Shao Xunmei. During these times, they lived together not far from my home in Shanghai at 1754 Huaihai Lu. Perhaps if I had lived in Shanghai then, we may have been neighbours.

I decide to take a walk and try to locate the literary love nest. I pick up my lacey apricot umbrella as the summer sun is very hot and exit down the lift to the ground floor.

"*Nihau*," says one of the security guards in recognition.

"*Nihau, nihau*," I reply making sure that my speech is understood by repeating myself.

I put up my umbrella to shade my face from the hot sun as I walk out onto the street. I turn right at the corner of Huashan Lu and Huahai Lu. About five minutes later, I easily locate the former residence of Hahn and her lover Shao Xunmei (Zau Sinmay). A high wrought iron fence surrounds the house. Large camphor trees similar to those at the Soong residence border the garden. A row of two-storey white villas with red roofs face me. A large Buddha-like figure stands at the formal arched entrance to the row of houses.

Emily Hahn was a prolific writer who eventually married Charles Boxer, the local head of British army intelligence. Hahn was also in the habit of taking her pet gibbon Mr Mills, dressed in a diaper and a minute dinner jacket, to parties. She wrote of her meeting with Mr Mills who she obtained from the Shanghai Pet Store: “Mr Mills, in a large cage with a little tree in it, looked out at me ... His face was black; his fur was beige. He turned a somersault.”

In her books, Hahn often commented about feeling “livery, impatient and restless and unsettled” just like I often did before taking up a new challenge. Hahn plunged into things and took steps which she could never retrace just to settle herself. She often undid everything and had to start over, just like me. Hahn was courageous and led her life on her own terms, like falling on the shadow of the sword where on one side lies convention and order and on the other, confusion. Perhaps the latter choice attracted a more interesting but perilous existence.

Hahn believed that China had changed her through the Chinese people she met and the stories she heard. She felt she could see through “new windows”. Hahn liked feeling less “American” as a result of the time she had spent in China, and often criticized her own culture for its insensitivity towards the Chinese. What was intended to be a short trip to China lasted nearly a decade. Similarly, my trip to

Shanghai was initially to take up a two-year contract but my stay continued for almost 10 years. Hahn eventually returned to the United States to continue her writing where she died in 1997.

Some years later, I learnt that the length of time that Hahn spent in China had caused her to change. She would often identify discriminatory attitudes and policies against the Chinese in both the United States and Hong Kong. These related to restrictions on buying land in Hong Kong and on membership of clubs in the United States.

I try in vain to find a book from my bookshelf which I read when I first came to Shanghai. Ah! there it is: *Life and Death in Shanghai*, by Nien Cheng. During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, Cheng became a target for attention by the Red Guards due to her management of the foreign firm, Shell, in Shanghai. She was also highly educated and the widow of an official of Chiang Kai-Shek's regime. A group of Red Guards ransacked her home on 30th August 1966 terrorising Cheng and her staff. I recalled Cheng's vivid description of the looting of her home.

The Red Guards' actions, blessed by Chairman Mao, were initially focused on the perceived capitalist class which included foreigners. Day and night, the city resounded with the loud noise of drums and gongs as they marched the streets and looted houses. Many people were humiliated and tortured, and about 10,000 people died during that time.

All was quiet when the Red Guards consisting of 30-40 senior high school students aged between 15 and 20 years pushed open Cheng's front door. "We are the Red Guards, we have come to take revolutionary action against you," they said, smashing valuable items as they took over her home. Cameras, watches, clocks,

silverware, jade figures and other items Cheng had collected over the years were gathered together while their feet smashed many other pieces.

The way in which the Red Guards spoke to those whom they were persecuting was a cruel language in itself, for example, phrases and name calling like: *capitalist-roader; dirty capitalist; exploiter of the workers; running dog; you deserve to die*, etc. The Red Guards would attack people if they did not like their clothing; for example, they would remove their shoes and slit their slacks open in the streets. Foreigners' bank accounts were frozen.

Cheng then endured six and a half years of squalid and inhumane conditions in solitary confinement in prison. She caused conflict with the wardens even though she was often beaten in return, simply because it relieved her social isolation. She stood up to repeated interrogations, poverty and abuse in prison which caused her health to fail, but never her courage. Cheng's daughter Meiping Cheng, a prominent film actress in Shanghai was murdered by the Maoists because she refused to denounce her mother.

Years later when the Cultural Revolution was over, Cheng was invited by the "Bureau for Sorting Looted Goods" to collect some of her remaining items. As she planned to relocate to the United States, she relinquished them to the Shanghai Museum. Cheng learnt to be very diplomatic when dealing with Chinese officials in order to survive, perhaps a type of courage shone through. Meiping's killer was finally brought to justice but only after Cheng left Shanghai. He was out of prison in two years.

Cheng felt sad at leaving the country of her birth and felt "survivor's guilt", in that she should live on whilst her daughter had died. After all, it was the law of nature that the old should die first whilst the young lived on. As writer Salman

Akhtar in *Immigration and Identity* notes, for immigrants from countries of destruction, death and loss, guilt and mourning are linked together. Cheng, therefore, spent the remainder of her life in the United States trying to come to terms with the loss of both her homeland and her daughter.

She continued to feel a haunting sadness after she had left Shanghai because it was “a break so final that it was shattering”. Cheng knew she had failed to remain true to China, but through no fault of her own. I thought of Cheng’s suffering and that of other expatriates. Perhaps the strongest souls emerge out of suffering, seared with scars. She died in the United States in 2009.

Li Cunxin’s memoir, *Mao’s Last Dancer*, is about a Chinese boy from a very poor family of seven brothers. Similar to Cheng’s memoir, Cunxin’s is quite remarkable in that he eventually becomes a prominent ballet dancer and defects to Australia. As a child, Li Cunxin remembers the Red Guards. Although he was only six or seven years old at the time of the Cultural Revolution, his elder brothers kept him well informed of stories of the Red Guards’ activities. However, one day he witnessed a rally which he wished he had never seen. Many people attended the rally. Fifteen landlords, factory owners and business leaders were loaded onto a truck. They had done nothing wrong but were considered “class enemies”, or “black”.

Li Cunxin reported that they wore pointed white hats with their names written on them in black ink and a large red cross struck through each name. They were taken to a nearby field and stood against a mud wall. Some of the men screamed: “Let me live, I have a family to feed” and “I am innocent”. As Li Cunxin heard guns fire, the sound ripped through his heart. He saw blood spatter everywhere as the bodies fell down. Li Cunxin screamed and ran home as fast as he

could. He wished he had never witnessed such a scene because it haunted him in many of his dreams.

It seems that in the past both western and Chinese literary expats experienced sustained trauma, and many were able to rise above it. Some Chinese writers were considered by the government to be dissidents. Writers such as Wang Shih-Wei (writer and journalist); Ai Ch'ing (poet); Dai Qing (journalist); and Lu Xun (one of the major Chinese writers of the 20th century) who remained in China between the late 1940s and 1960s experienced restrictions and significant personal trauma.

Wang Shih-Wei was reportedly chopped to pieces and his remains thrown down into a dry well. Ai Ch'ing (1910) was regarded as one of China's finest modern poets. Similar to Wang Shih-Wei, Ai Ch'ing was politically involved and therefore imprisoned. Like Wang Shih-Wei, Ai Ch'ing believed that another equally important function of a writer was to look after the spiritual health of the Chinese. The *Crescent Moon Society* was a Chinese literary society founded by the poet Xu Zhimo in 1923 and was part of a larger "New Culture Movement".

My interest in learning more about Shanghai's history deepens together with planning for the staff induction. I hail a taxi to the Shanghai East Normal University to undertake some research about Chinese literary expatriates. I recall an expatriate colleague telling me that he stayed at the university during the 1980s in a guest house for students and teachers. He said that the university was much more basic then. During those times, there was limited electricity and street lighting at night. My colleague added a note of caution when he said that, "things can change very quickly, Kristen. Australia must look after its relations with China."

I read about *The Hundred Flowers Campaign* in which some Chinese writers were involved during the late 1950s. It seemed that the Communist Party under Chairman Mao Zedong encouraged a variety of views and solutions to national policy issues. “Let a thousand flowers bloom” was later perceived in the West as alleged deliberate attempts to flush out dissidents. They were encouraged to show themselves as critical of the regime; they were then persecuted.

Students and writers spoke out and wrote letters about control over intellectuals and proscription of foreign literature. Chairman Mao considered that many letters violated the “healthy criticism” level and therefore reached a harmful and uncontrollable stage. A halt was called to the campaign in July 1957 because Chairman Mao and the Communist Party perceived that it was too difficult to control. Many years later, I remember the irony in Mao being hailed as a national hero on a local television programme despite the physical destruction and loss of human lives in China.

Dai Qing was a journalist and activist. Together with her husband Wang Deji, they were sent to the countryside to be “reformed through labour” by working as peasants. After the Cultural Revolution, Dai was unable to return to her former career. She made a passionate speech during the hunger strike at Tiananmen Square encouraging students to leave to avoid bloodshed. However, obviously they did not heed her as the crackdown occurred on 4th June 1989, when many lives were lost and Dai was arrested about one month later.

Some contemporary Chinese writers such as Liao Yiwu were imprisoned. Liao Yiwu is now under police surveillance and Liu Xiaobo not only suffered a similar fate but was also denied the right to collect the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize. Liu Xiaobo’s wife Liu Xia is a photographer whose work in China has been censored

and she is under house arrest. Some years after I had returned from Shanghai, I met Jianying Zha at the Adelaide Writers' Festival. She had completed several interviews with entrepreneurs and intellectuals for her book, *Tide Players*. Jianying explained that since the 1990s, artists and intellectuals in China had been encouraged to reinvent themselves to make money in business.

What she said next was even more unsettling and interesting. She commented that there were many mixed undercurrents or a type of darkness in Chinese people like those she interviewed for her book. For example, an entrepreneur wanted to avenge the death of his mother who had criticized Chairman Mao and remained defiant in public. His mother, who was executed in a truck for her actions, left behind seven children, humiliation and a huge family stigma.

As Jianying was talking to the audience, I thought about how Chinese people never wanted to *lose face*. Jianying said that the Chinese Government paid each child 1,000 yuan (A\$150) as compensation. The entrepreneur used his 1,000 yuan to set up a very successful business. Writer Kooshyar Karimi in his memoir, *I Confess*, said that humiliation was a type of trauma. Those who experienced it fantasized about revenge against those considered responsible for their suffering, "blinking out reason or mercy". People who have been humiliated through revolutions or wars did not have any recourse because they were imprisoned or feared persecution. Perhaps their only emotional release was through the fantasy of revenge for their suffering at some later date.

Jianying said that many Chinese people have stories like this: they have a dark side they want to avenge but who could really blame them? I read in the newspaper not long after that the crackdowns on dissidents seemed to be escalating.

Perhaps there was a coordinated campaign to lock up, torture and make leading dissidents disappear.

Another writer I met at the Adelaide Writers' Festival in 2012 was quite critical in his comments about the Chinese Government which he perceived as a dictatorship. He said that having grown up in Europe, democracy, human rights and freedom were taken for granted. I felt that his remarks were very "black and white" with no shades of grey. In my view, western democracy has not always involved the people in political decision making about who should lead a "democratic" country like Australia.

In recent times and within a few years, political parties have changed their leaders three times in the dark of night. The last time in June 2013, the faceless men's hands dripped with blood, following the demise of Australia's first female Prime Minister: no election was held nor were Australians given an opportunity to vote. Not only did I wonder about the meaning of democracy then, but I felt ashamed that I was living in a country which seemed to be characterized by misogyny.

It is late afternoon when I return from the library at Shanghai East Normal University. I now have enough material and insights to prepare a module on "Chinese History and Cultural Awareness" to help induct the new staff, commencing next term. I lay down on the bed. My mind fills with questions: what are the personal traumas that western expatriates experience, are these similar to those I may encounter, how do they feel about their life and work in Shanghai?

Tony said he will take me to see some apartments in Autumn when the weather is cooler. The thought both excites and confuses me. I understand that

buying an apartment in Shanghai is very complex. Also, how would it work with Tyson? My friend Phillip, a lawyer, had raised the idea with me when I was last in Brisbane.

“You know, you should buy a property while you are in Shanghai; it would be a superb investment with China growing so rapidly.”

“Not sure yet, I don’t know how long I will be staying in Shanghai.”

My mind did not let go of the idea but, rather, during times of solace and reflection, nurtured it.

THE APARTMENT**Derailment**

A door

Opens and shuts

That's all

Is that all?

(Shu Ting in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:61)

Shanghai: Winter, 2006.

“Well, this is a surprise,” Tyson says through lips which look as thin as anchovies. I watch his thick fingers, their surface covered with wiry black hairs, tap and then begin to drum. I cringe in my seat at the café and push the eggs away from me. I can no longer eat.

In January 2006 after about 18 months of living in Shanghai, I purchase and renovate an apartment near the corner of Huaihai Lu and Huashan Lu, two of the busiest residential and shopping streets in Shanghai. The streets are wide and lined on both sides with large, elegant plane trees. My apartment is located in Hai Si Tower which consists of two tall apartment blocks located in the French Concession area and built in the late 1990s. The purchasing process takes about two months.

Tyson is still in Australia. I feel excited about my new purchase and call my youngest son Jake in Brisbane. I see his brown hair and ready smile, a little like Tom Hanks, the American actor I think as we speak. Jake works as a microelectronic engineer with a small company which installs solar systems for farmers in rural Germany and Australia. He expresses concern that I may be taking a risk buying property in the relatively unknown but rapidly expanding Chinese market, adding, however, that it may be a good investment for me. As I gaze out the window of my new acquisition where I had come for just another look, the winter sun shines and the sky is blue.

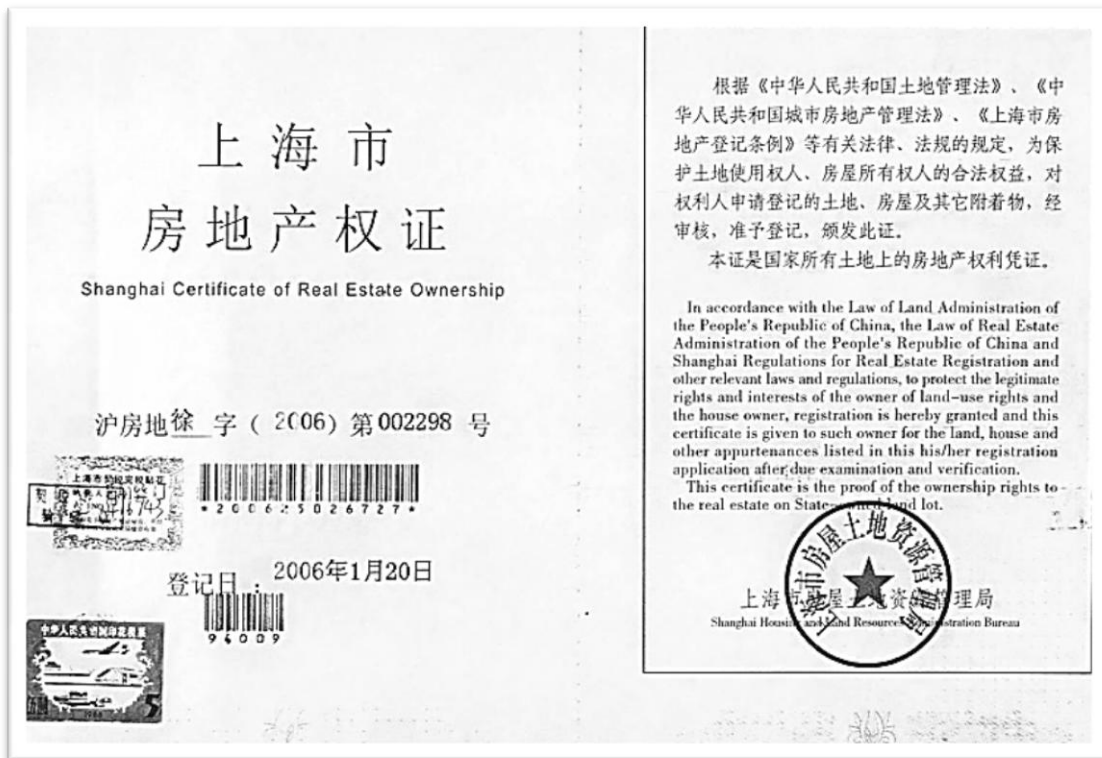
I stride confidently through each room thinking about the renovations which need to be done. The apartment is quite large with three bedrooms, a combined lounge and dining room, main bathroom, small kitchen and a tiny shower room in between the third bedroom and kitchen. It is sadly in need of a total renovation as buildings deteriorate in China more quickly. This may be due to the weather and the fact that building standards and skill levels were lower for residential apartments than in western countries at the time when it was built.

As I walk through each room, I make a note of the changes I would like to make: painting all the rooms, floating wooden floors throughout, extending and renovating the tiny shower room into a second bathroom, tiling both bathrooms and kitchen, new light fittings and air conditioners, a new kitchen, furniture and furnishings for all rooms, and enclosing and tiling the Juliet balcony. I feel happy that I can make all of these decisions without needing to comply with anyone else.

I do not feel daunted about renovating the apartment alone because Tony says he will help me to find a decoration company and will translate where necessary. At that time, I do not know how or even when I will tell Tyson about it. Tony assures me that my property will increase in value because of the growing Chinese market and the closeness of my house to the Shanghai city area.

It takes almost two months to finalise the purchase and the renovations so I apply for some leave over the Christmas period. Tony and I travel across urban Shanghai in a taxi to meet with representatives from banks, government departments and notary agents (like lawyers in Australia). All transactions are face to face and bank documents are *chopped* with a Chinese stamp. I receive a green booklet with an embossed Chinese stamp which is my house certificate: the *Shanghai Certificate of Real Estate Ownership*. Inside the document is my name

both in Chinese and English, a plan of the house and photographs of the former owners.



Mia, my Shanghainese secretary, patiently translates the renovation budget from Chinese into English. I desperately needed Tony and Mia's translation skills which gave me immediate access to managing all the details associated with the purchase and renovation of my apartment. I learnt then that, as a foreigner, I needed someone as a go-between who was capable of translating and mediating between the plethora of Chinese institutions and myself.

I walk relentlessly up and down the streets of Yishan Lu in the Xuihui District with Tony and a Chinese project manager who cannot speak any English. I see my apartment being renovated to reflect my vision of the East and the West, a mix of contemporary Chinese and western designs. Yishan Lu continues to amaze me as I make many trips there. It is the place to go in Shanghai for anything to do

with renovating or furnishing a new house. There are shops which display a variety of kitchens and furniture and others where one can select bathroom fittings. Shops selling wooden flooring and Chinese furniture abound.

Tony conscientiously translates everything. We select the type, style and colour of all materials, furnishings and equipment for each room of the apartment: the three bedrooms, the kitchen, the two bathrooms, dining and lounge room and the balcony.

My mind feels quite weak after a visit to Yishan Lu with all the thinking and translating and my body is tired from walking through the streets and its many stores. Then, I feel excited thinking about how the finished apartment may look.

It is mid-Winter when Tyson returns from Australia. Snow covers the city like a white blanket – the lawn in front of my home, the streets along which I walk to work and the university campus. Snow changes everything and even Shanghai is almost hushed. Tyson seems to accept my decision about buying the apartment but keeps asking questions about it.

We are having breakfast at a local café when I tell him and proudly put the keys on the table. I had also thought of not saying anything. I try to be honest but it is like putting the last nail in the coffin. The next day Tyson screams at me demanding a share in the apartment and I shout back and ask him to make a contribution.

“If you want a share then you must contribute something, and you are never here. I have paid for everything.”

He does not reply. My intestines knot like the macramé I use to make, perhaps waiting for my heart to drop into it. My desire to be alone strengthens daily

as Tyson demands that the selection of materials and budget be redone. Some of my former decisions about colour, design and furnishings are over-ruled. I am too frightened not to obey him. Again we stride down Yishan Lu with the Chinese project manager and Tony. I wonder if their patience is wearing thin. They don't complain nor ask questions of us. I feel relieved that they do not seem to understand the veiled remarks we make to one another nor the tensions between us. The budget is amended. At the end of the renovations, I receive a two-year guarantee.

I did not know then how much I would like living in my new home in Shanghai, the surroundings and even the Chinese security guards who would greet me each time I left for and arrived home from work. The arguments between Tyson and I escalate after we move from our rented apartment into my new one. He frequently bullies me to include *his* name on the title of *my* apartment. I remember that we are alone in Shanghai, and I begin to feel as though I am living in a vacuum. Tyson's behaviour worsens and becomes more irrational. I ask him if he is taking something but he angrily denies it, slams the front door and storms out of the apartment. It is not the first time. He has promised me that when he comes to Shanghai he will never do drugs.

I am mostly pleased with the finished apartment. I learn to live with the fact that there will not be a walk-in robe in the main bedroom as originally planned. Bronze-coloured bedding dresses the Chinese-style bed and silk brocade curtains furnish the décor in the main bedroom. The main bathroom is tiled with large bronze tiles which I feel are a little dark making the bathroom look smaller although, at that time, I had no choice. The small Japanese wooden bath-tub gleams in the light. Years later, Andrew and I attempt to bathe in it and collapse in laughter



as both can barely get in or out. We are only able to sit down with our knees clasped close to our chests.

The wrought iron Juliet balcony is decorated with black and white floor tiles and enclosed so that it creates more space and can be used in the Winter months. The second bathroom is tiled from floor to ceiling and the new kitchen has an orange and grey theme.

The wooden floors gleam in the sunlight and together with the Chinese red and gold curtains set off the room. The blue hanging lights tend to make the room look too busy and do not really fit in with the colour scheme of earthy tones. The Japanese Shoji screens of wood and rice paper allow light into the apartment and, at the same time, screen the bedrooms at both ends of the passage from the living areas.

My apartment overlooks a beautiful spacious garden surrounded by large camphor trees about 20-30 metres tall. The tree leaves look glossy and waxy in the afternoon sun. The garden which consists of a patch of lawn presents an atmosphere of elegance and peace. Tony warned me after I purchased my apartment that “someone may check me out because I can look down on the house of a famous

Chinese family.” I shook my head then and took no notice. After all, in Australia, one did not have to be careful about such things. At most times, the streets below my apartment fill with cars, taxis and bicycles. In spring, the camphor trees in the garden below are covered with bright green foliage and masses of small white flowers.

At dusk, I walk onto the balcony and look at the sparkling skyscrapers which flank the garden below while the ruby-gold sun disappears behind them. To the left, I can see the intersection of two main city streets, Huashan Lu and Haihai Lu. Central Haihai Lu, formerly known as the *Avenue Joffre* and heart of the White Russian community known as “Little Russia”, stretches across the French Concession area from east to west. Hengshan Lu which runs in the same direction as Central Haihai Lu, formerly known as the *Avenue Petain*, was a major boulevard linking Xujiahui with the centre of the French Concession area.

I wonder who lives in the white boat-shaped house, characteristic of a European-style home of the 1920s, located at No 1843, Huaihai Lu. I visit the Shanghai Library to do some research on the intriguing house near my home. The house belonged to two famous Chinese politicians: Madam Sun Yat-Sen (Soong Ching-Ling) and her husband, Dr Sun Yat-Sen. In the early 20th century during the Chinese Revolution, Madam Sun Yat-Sen and her two sisters together with their husbands were amongst China’s most significant political figures. Dr Sun Yat-Sen was perceived by some Chinese as “lacking certain things” in that he was southern Cantonese from Hong Kong and therefore not representative of the whole of China.

Dr Sun Yat-Sen fought as a revolutionary to overcome the oppressive Qing Dynasty. In a speech given in Penang in 1908, he wrote:

The Qing dynasty oppresses us and treats us brutally. However, when they face a foreign country, they become cowardly and incompetent ... China became weak and lost its lands to foreign powers. For example: lost Hong Kong to Britain and Taiwan to Japan. The Qing has become the servant of foreign powers and we are the servants of the Qing, and that makes us the servant of a servant ... (Cheng, Yeap Kok in *Dr Sun Yat-Sen and the Penang Philomatic Union*).

Soong Ching-Ling married Dr Sun Yat-Sen, founder of the Republic of China, her parents opposing the match because he was 26 years her senior. It was in this house close to my own that Dr Sun Yat-Sen reshuffled the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party. He then formulated his plan for the “International Development of China”. Dr Sun Yat-Sen died of cancer in 1925, leaving a power vacuum in Shanghai. In the early 1950s, Soong Ching-Ling founded the magazine, *China Reconstructs*, now known as *China Today*. She was the first female President of the People’s Republic of China and worked closely with her husband on his revolutionary activities both during their married life and after his death. I did not know then that some years later, I would learn more about Dr Sun Yat-Sen’s history whilst on holiday in Penang. I longed for a wiser and more knowing voice to help me to understand China’s past.

My neighbour’s door slams shut. I wondered then if this was a sign – doors closing on the past and re-opening to a different life, like being derailed for a while.

I jolt upright in my chair
on the balcony. I look
down into the garden. The
sky is black and although
the garden is bare, it is lit
up from below so that the
leaves of the camphor



trees glisten in the evening light. Two security guards stand erect and silent as they man the gates of Hai Si Tower. I shower and jump into bed, pulling the bedclothes tight around me dreaming of the lovely Soong women, the thugs and mobsters like Du Yuesheng, known as “Big-Ears Du,” of old Shanghai.

Ghost Voice

Penang, Malaysia: Dr Sun Yat-Sen Museum Research Centre (my journal: 12th May 2006).

It is hot and humid as Andrew and you finally step into an air-conditioned taxi.

Andrew argues heatedly with the taxi driver who has arrived early and insists that you both leave before the scheduled time. After Andrew suggests that he may speak to his boss about the matter, the driver quietly takes his seat. You both then proceed on your tour of Penang Hill, Ke Lok Si Temple and a Malaysian batik factory. You pick up the brochure and read about the Dr Sun Yat-Sen Museum Research Centre in Penang. A strong, unfamiliar urge to visit the centre almost takes your breath away:

“Andrew, it would be great to visit the Centre. Remember, Dr Sun Yat-Sen’s house was close to my former apartment in Shanghai. He was the first President of the Republic of China.”

“Ok, why not?” says Andrew, pointing to the picture of the centre of the brochure as he passes it to the taxi driver.

It is late afternoon as the taxi driver pulls up in front of the centre. A large bronze statue of Dr Sun Yat-Sen’s three compatriots, who funded his revolutionary activities for the purchase of guns and ammunition, stands in the centre of the courtyard. You both enter the building and a middle-aged woman explains the different displays. A large bronze statue of Dr Sun Yat-Sen stands at the entrance.

You learn that, in 1884, the incompetent and corrupt Manchu Dynasty lost the war with Japan. Dr Sun Yat-Sen became a revolutionary with the aim of overthrowing the Manchu Government and returning China to China. Although a trained medical doctor, Dr Sun Yat-Sen was a revolutionary for 20 years. In 1905,

Dr Sun Yat-Sen came to Penang and established the “Allied Association of Revolution” where he made many speeches to raise funds.

You walk to the back of the centre and notice a large bronze plaque above. It outlines *The Three Principles of the People* (nationalism, democracy and livelihood of the people) which Dr Sun Yat-Sen elaborated upon in his revolutionary speeches during his political life. For Dr Sun Yat-Sen, democracy was the top expression of the nationalism that would save China and should be built from the bottom up. He believed that the Chinese people should have a share in the profits of the nation. Dr Sun Yat-Sen’s ideals were based on the writings of Abraham Lincoln. As the middle-aged woman explained, he founded the Penang Philomatic Union in 1908 which set up and runs this research centre today. You purchase a biography of Dr Sun Yat-Sen, compiled by the Penang Philomatic Union, and flick through the pages. You learn that at the *Penang Conference* on 13th November 1910, Dr Sun Yat-Sen said:

... we have a war to fight and our country to save. We must destroy the incompetent and corrupted Manchu immediately. The Qing government will not only make China hopeless but will cause China to be subjugated and separated by foreign powers ...

On your way towards the exit of the building, you observe two familiar photographs among many of Dr Sun Yat-Sen’s life. One shows his home in Shanghai which you recognize as being close to your former apartment and the other is of his wife, Soong Ching-Ling. You feel particularly drawn to the photograph of Soong Ching-Ling as though you knew her before. She wears a long black dress with a white collar and a velvet hat with a wide brim framing her dark, almond-shaped eyes which appear to smile warmly back at you. Are you a whisper or trace of her in a different era?

The sky is overcast and the humidity high. You feel rather faint. Andrew suggests that you sit down on the front step of the building. You wipe the sweat from your brow and lean against Andrew's shoulder. You are startled when you hear a loud bang like a bomb being dropped and exploding. You gaze up towards the sky which now blazes with black smoke and orange lights. It is filled with planes sounding like locusts. Parachutes drop to the ground. Stocky Japanese soldiers armed with guns and creeping around like cockroaches pour into the grounds of the research centre. You feel puzzled because they don't seem to notice Andrew and you sitting on the step.

The three bronze figures in the courtyard suddenly come to life. They open the base of the statue to collect guns and ammunition and together run into the centre and hand a gun to Dr Sun Yat-Sen. You stand up, quickly brush the dust from your long black dress and adjust your hat. You too pick up a gun and run to join your husband Dr Sun Yat-Sen for you are Soong Ching-Ling and much younger and fitter than he.

Andrew nudged you. You realize you had dozed off. It was like a tsunami had swept across your mind and taken you back in time. The large bang was from a nearby construction site. As you both walk towards the taxi, you wonder if Dr Sun Yat-Sen's revolutionary activities in Penang were publicly known in Shanghai and what would have happened to China and its people if they had not been successful?



Christine Velde Bound: An Expatriate's Journey to China and Beyond

HOMEBOUND**To Return Again**

I cannot follow the original road
 To go back again, you are
 No longer there
 I must pull out my ID card to see
 Who I am ...
 I must hold tight to the scrap of paper
 It will prove
 Who I am
 (Yang Liuhong in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:89)

Shanghai: Spring 2006.

I feel down and isolated, fragmented and can't seem to come out of it. Life with Tyson has become so difficult. He snores, kicks and farts in our bed at night. I feel so turned off. He is not happy either. "My mother is dying," he repeats. "And my father is dead," I retort bitterly. This morning he threatened to leave me if I talk to him like that. Tyson has not said that to me before.

I become jumpy and irritable, sleep badly, suffer lower back pain and often feel overwhelmed. I keep a small suitcase behind the bedroom door with my passport and some clothing, in case I need to leave in a hurry. I feel alone and afraid. Tyson makes contact with a friend near Cairns and organizes some work. I feel guilty that I encourage him to leave and pay half his airfare back to Australia. He is not grateful because he thinks I should pay all of it. I think I can continue to work but the tension between Tyson and I affects my health. Around June 2006, our relationship breaks down completely. Our agreement to live together as life partners is now broken. The pain is unspeakable like a loud scream in the silence, almost as though it is too terrible to speak about. I feel violated in some way, as I did once before ...

I close my eyes, sit down on the bed and think of another incident which I have found very difficult to communicate to anyone. Snowfields in northern New

South Wales come into view. I shiver at the memory: I should have learnt back then. I could see Tyson in his red ski jacket striding down the ski-slope leaving me behind where I have fallen. A sharp cracking noise ripped through the frosty air as my left knee twisted back at a sharp angle under me. I limped behind Tyson all the way down the slippery ski-slope to the bus. It was only then that he decided to assist me, as he helped me up onto the step of the bus.

My screams pierced the hospital room as the doctor straightened and bandaged my knee. Tyson gave the remainder of my ski lessons to his daughter and they spent the next few days skiing together while I lay in bed. I had torn the back and front ligaments in my knee as well as rupturing the kneecap. The specialist said my leg would never be the same again. I wore a brace for three months and was off work for six weeks.

One Saturday in June 2006, Tyson steps into a taxi with his suitcase and guitar and drives away, together with seven years of our life and an imagined future. I raise a limp hand to the strange figure whose dark, wavy hair shimmers in the morning sun. I don't feel relieved like I thought I would. The toll for me is anxiety and insomnia, underpinned by a deep sense of insecurity. My legs feel cold and the ordinary world seems to recede. I start to feel unsure of who I am.

I now do not need two of everything. It is too difficult to try to sell second-hand furniture and I am not ready for a removalist. My Chinese friend Jenny happily accepts a black desk. I organize for two maintenance men to remove the desk and reorganize my study. "Knock. Knock." The two men enter, take off their shoes and put on disposable ones.

As I move books around in the bookcase, a small lumpy parcel falls towards me. I raise my hand and surprise myself as I neatly catch it. I recognize its familiar smell because Tyson has used it before. No one in the room seems to notice as they are busy with the furniture. The full meaning of its contents becomes rapidly clear. I feel anger rising in my chest. How dare Tyson, how dare he be so stupid and put us in danger and in China, of all places! Later I dispose of its contents in a public rubbish bin but not before I photograph them so that he can never deny it.

My contract will finish at the end of 2006. I organize some consultancy work in Hong Kong for the coming year. I am not ready to go back home to Australia. Also, I do not really have a home there because the home I own jointly with Tyson is to be sold. During the remainder of 2006, Tyson and I keep in regular contact on the phone. We try to work out conditions for a future together in Cairns. I am finding it difficult to say "I love you". I become ill with sinusitis and visit the local Chinese hospital. The doctor prescribes Chinese medicine together with western antibiotics. During a work conference in Beijing, I visit *The Great Wall of China*. It is magnificent, solid, curving up, around and down the mountains like a massive dragon.

Shanghai: Summer 2006.

My brother Paul and his wife Maggie visit me in Shanghai. I travel by taxi to pick them up at the station where the Maglev (magnetic levitation) train comes in from Pudong Airport. Paul looks very familiar: his relaxed gait, distinguished appearance and the gentle smile on his face. I don't say that he looks like our late father because he will not like it. Maggie wears three-quarter pants and a casual top. My lower back aches as I limp painfully towards them. Maggie asks many questions about

why Tyson is no longer with me. My face flushes. How does one begin to explain the abrupt end of a relationship?

When we arrive back at my apartment, Paul, also a medical practitioner, asks me to lie down on the bed as he examines me. He diagnoses sciatica, from stress he says. I recall my friend Millie saying to me that, “back pain means you are not getting the support you need.” Later Paul and Maggie express concern that I am stuck in the relationship and now alone in Shanghai. “You need to manage your situation and protect yourself or it could become a crisis,” says Paul. I feel my heart constrict in my chest. I do not know how to protect myself.

They encourage me to come home to Australia. I don't feel ready to leave my new home. I feel listless and apathetic when I think about returning home. I wonder if I am starting to experience reverse culture shock. I am carrying out a senior role with the college in Shanghai. I feel as though I am developing as a professional due to my wider experiences in a management role. I had many more opportunities than I did in Australia. I remain in Shanghai until the end of my contract. The Executive Vice-Dean and the CEO of the college write positive references which will help me in my search for a job back home.

I see an Australian counsellor at the Shanghai Community Centre because I desperately need some clarity around my difficulties. She feels that Tyson does nothing to repair our relationship despite my efforts in calling and trying to talk to him. I ask her to write an email about the difficulties I am experiencing. I feel it may help me if I decide to end the relationship. It is through outside help that I finally see through the fog and make a decision:

Specifically, Kristen reported countless experiences of emotional abuse as well as threats of physical violence, and intimidation, from her defacto partner ... who was living with her in Shanghai. The status of the relationship was under question when Kristen's partner left Shanghai. The year culminated ... with Kristen feeling she was clear about a decision to end her relationship and return back to Australia to re-establish alone, but with the support of her family ... (November 2006).

My two sons Ethan and Jake ask me to come home as they feel I need support and are concerned that I am now alone in Shanghai. I begin to feel overwhelmed at the thought of returning home. I know I will need to find another job and a place to live. For a few months, I wrestle with making a decision about my relationship with Tyson. Finally, I write him an email:

I have decided not to come and live with you. I feel that our relationship has deteriorated over the last six months, since you left Shanghai and moved to North Queensland to take up work there. I felt unsupported emotionally and financially during this time. I have experienced considerable stress and some minor health problems. I suggest that we both spend Christmas with our respective families. I understand that my message to you will be upsetting, and I am really sorry for this. I do not see any future in our relationship. It may be better therefore, for both of us to move on with our lives ... (December 2006).

I toss and turn in bed while shadows dart about in my mind like bats in the Queensland night sky. I cannot sleep, thinking about my imminent departure to Australia. During the day I feel fragmented because my life is in complete upheaval and is no longer in one place. Am I experiencing some sort of personal trauma? I do not mean political or domestic trauma which may result, for example, from catastrophic events associated with the Cultural Revolution in China. I am also not referring to such devastating loss as that of the death of a child or injury from a serious accident.

I mean the difficulties associated with the breakdown of my relationship, career and finances which, together, may impact on my mental health as I readjust to life in Australia. Only my expatriate friends seem to understand. It took at least two years for some of them to settle back into life in Australia. Millie said that it took ages for her to re-engage with family and friends.

There were some gaps in my memory about relationships that I had blocked out. Twice, relationships have been so intense that they threw my then-conservative life into upheaval. Each time it was though I was someone else. This bohemian woman, why was she doing these things? These crises occurred with the dissolution of my marriage with Gunars in 1997 and the beginning of my relationship with Tyson in 1999. Some years later, I wondered why I did not talk about our relationship problems with my family. Perhaps I felt it was disloyal to do so: as “husband and wife”, we should not reveal our differences in public.

Jill Ker-Conway in *When Memory Speaks* explained that the western tradition of romance makes people believe that there really is a life partner who would provide the ecstatic happiness depicted in many movies and films. Such a belief was often unknown in many eastern countries where marriages were arranged. Although I had learnt to operate very independently, part of me believed in finding a life partner.

I realized that my father’s sudden death from cancer on Australia Day in the summer of 1996 had a substantial impact on the life decisions I had made. I don’t remember taking time to grieve like they do in eastern cultures. There was no cult of mourning; no wearing of black for extended periods. Australians like myself just seem to get on with work and life. Yet my father was the person I always consulted about any problems. I sometimes cried in the middle of the night as a young child. I dreamt my father had died in some terrible accident and woke relieved to find him consoling me in his arms.

I think about leaving Shanghai, going home to Australia, finding a job and a place to live. Not to mention being involved in a lengthy mediation process with my

ex-partner, dealing with lawyers and selling our home. I felt very alone in handling all of these challenges. Yet, when I look back I cannot remember any that I did not manage well. Like a catalyst, Shanghai seemed to catapult me into a different mindset and direction.

TRANSITIONS

... There is a Buddhist saying: 'You must close the book' ... You must carry two objects: a book for genius, and a knife to cut things off ... the way a forest fire destroys the barren ground [and], prepares it for new growth. The way you close the book [and] make the cut affects whether there will be a continuing story. (Harriet Rubin, in the *Princessa: Machiavelli for Women*, 1997:123)

Brisbane: Summer 2006.

I looked out of my window at the clear aqua sea below, mirroring the clouds above Queensland. The black shape of the aircraft hovered like a giant eagle waiting to land. In contrast, the Chinese landscape has its own beauty of rich browns and greens which seemed more austere, as though a dimmer switch had turned the light down a few shades.

The aircraft swooped down and glided gracefully to a halt. I unfastened my seatbelt and straightened my clothing. I picked up my bag and jacket then joined the rest of the passengers as they queued to exit the plane. The Queensland sun was shining brightly through the windows of my son's Land-Rover. Lush tropical plants lined the streets as Jake's car headed towards the western suburbs of Brisbane. Jake, dressed in khaki shorts and a red t-shirt with a cap shading his tanned face, turned to me smiling:

"How was your trip, Mum?"

"Tiring, Jake, but good to be home."

Jake drove into the outskirts of West End about two kilometres from Brisbane. I observed the Bohemian character of the suburb I knew so well. Men wore casual shorts or trousers and often hats which were fashionable and for sun protection. Women tended to wear long dresses accessorised by beads and earrings, or casual shorts and brief tops. Restaurants, coffee shops and bars lined both sides of the main street. I thought the area was just like Tyson; it reflected him. I liked his

Bohemian side but his dislike of work frustrated me. His overspending on renovating our home and “laid-back” attitude angered and infuriated me. Oh well, perhaps it was my fault, too. I should have just had a relationship with Tyson rather than live with him. I remembered having a coffee with my friend Phillip, a lawyer, who remarked:

“Just enjoy the relationship, Kristen, but don’t live with Tyson. He is not really your type, too laid back. It won’t work, you know.”

My thoughts came abruptly back to the present as Jake drove up the driveway to a large two-storey Queenslander which had been renovated by Tyson and me. The original tiny three-bedroom cottage had been raised up high on stilts and built in underneath, doubling the size of the home. It towered above the other houses in the dead-end street. A long wooden staircase curved its way up to the front doors of the Federation-style house.

I followed Jake as he walked up the stairs struggling with my heavy suitcase. I looked up fondly at the kangaroo crest decoration which was inlaid into the double wooden doors at the top of the landing. Memories flooded back as I remembered Tyson being thrilled with this find from a second-hand shop.

“Here’s your room, Mum. Tomorrow we’ll go to the storage facility at Albion. I’ll help you to sort out the boxes.”

“Okay, Jake, thanks. I’ll email Tyson tonight to make arrangements for him to get his stuff so there are no disagreements.”

I rose early the next morning, showered and dressed in black shorts and a grey t-shirt. I poured a cup of coffee and walked onto the large deck at the back of the home. Lush palms met my gaze as I looked down to the garden below. I wished I could buy Tyson out. I looked around at the newly renovated home. The stainless

steel fans hung low from the ceiling in each room. The polished wooden floors glistened in the morning sun.

I could see the skyline of Brisbane city from the lounge window. I entered the Japanese-style bathroom. It was large with a square handbasin and modern tapware. The floors were tiled with taupe tiles and had a black mosaic trim. I turned back to the kitchen which looked out to the deck and the palm garden below. I had not lived in the house when it was like this. I remembered the home as a small cottage when I purchased it, then living on a construction site during the renovations which took almost three years. My musing was suddenly disturbed as Jake walked into the room.

“Come on, Mum. Are you ready yet? I’ve hooked up the trailer.”

“Okay, I’m coming. I’ll just get my bag and the house keys.”

The sun was hot as it beat down on the car windows. Jake drove towards the northern suburbs of Brisbane. We entered the reception area of the storage facility.

“Hi ya. Come with me – I’ll show ya where your storage bin is. Ya got ya code?”

“Yes, here it is,” I replied, fumbling in my pocket to retrieve it.

Jake keyed in the code outside the storage bin and opened the door. The floor of the large room contained a cane sofa and chairs, a large red Chinese cabinet with a decorative lock and key, two oil heaters, lamps and other small items of furniture. A large dining room table of dark wood with a glass top was placed at the back of the storage bin. Forty to 50 boxes stacked on top of the furniture lined each side of the walls, almost to the ceiling.

“Oh, Jake, how are we going to manage sorting all of this out? There is so much stuff. Why on earth did we store all of this junk?”

“It’s fine, Mum, we’ll do it. You tell me what you want, what belongs to Tyson and what you’ve each agreed to keep.”

I pulled out a chair from the storage bin and sat down. I went systematically through each box throwing out items which I would no longer need. I placed small items of furniture, linen and various items to one side to discard. Jake stacked these one by one into the trailer which he had backed up close to the storage bin. It was hot and stuffy. I wiped away beads of perspiration from my brow and passed a bottle of water to Jake.

“Drink this. Keep your fluids up, Jake.”

The mobile phone rang. I started and groped in my bag for the phone.

“Hi, Kristen how are you? asks Tyson in his deep masculine voice which I once found attractive. “You want to go through with this? You could come and live with me in Cairns.”

“You have not treated me well, why?”

“I don’t know. I really don’t treat anyone else like that, just you.”

“We have talked about this before. It won’t work, Tyson. I’ve decided to live in Brisbane.”

The line went dead with a click. Tyson had characteristically hung up yet again. He did this even when I thought we were getting on, whenever he didn’t get his own way. Jake and I repacked all the boxes. Jake put my boxes on the *right* side of the storage bin and Jake’s on the *left* according to the agreement we had made. Later, Jake drove me to the rubbish tip. The load was weighed at the entrance. Jake backed the car up to the tip. I felt a large part of my life disappearing with a loud thud to the bottom of the tip.

“We’ll give Tyson some time to get his stuff, Mum. I’ll leave the key with Henrik.”

I remembered Henrik fondly, an Austrian friend. He used to visit Tyson and I frequently at our West End home. His blue eyes twinkled in his tanned face whenever I saw him. Henrik’s boyish figure belied his age of around 50 years. He also had a Bohemian nature but, unlike Tyson, worked part-time running a successful knife-sharpening business at West End. Henrik was into mystical meditations and readings which I never really understood but I liked to listen to him. The sun shone across the Brisbane River as Jake wove in and out the suburban streets looking for Henrik’s house. He got out of the car and put the storage key into his letterbox.

“Perhaps we should go back at the end of this week before I leave to take up the consultancy work in Hong Kong. There may be a few things I could use.”

“Yes, Mum, sure we can do that, how about Friday?”

“Sure, that’s fine, let’s get it all sorted.”

It was mid-afternoon on Friday. I felt a refreshing cool breeze on my bare arms through the open windows of Jake’s car. The car sped towards the storage facility at Albion. Jake keyed in the code to open the door. As it opened, Jake’s arms dropped suddenly to their side. He gestured wildly to me:

“Mum, look at this, you won’t believe it!”

I felt my heart racing as I entered the small room which seemed far larger than before. There were only a few boxes left in the room. Their contents spilled out onto the floor, obviously unwanted. I felt the strength I had maintained since being home suddenly ebb away.

“How could he, Jake, how could he do this? We had agreed on email about what we both wanted. My boxes were on the *right* and his were on the *left* of the room.”

I leant against the wall. I remembered the photo albums; my university graduation gown of royal blue cloth trimmed with red; a dinner set which was a wedding gift from my parents; and my teaching resource books. Most of the boxes were gone, but the memories would forever linger.

“Come on, Mum. There’s nothing we can do about it. I’ll take you for a drink at Breakfast Creek Hotel nearby. It’s near the water.”

I sipped a glass of white wine and gazed out over the Brisbane River as the sun set. Jake sat beside me on a wooden bench seat. The water was calm and still. A cool breeze wafting across the water soothed me.

“What a wanker! He really showed his true colours in the end,” said Jake.

I mused about Harriet Rubin’s philosophy in *The Princessa: Machiavelli for Women*, something about cutting off dead-ends and preparing for new growth; like knowing when to end a relationship with a lover who did not respect or even hear you. This was a good ending, said Rubin. Jake nudged me back to reality.

“Perhaps it’s a sign, Jake. Now it may be time for a new beginning.”

The anxiety still persisted. It was not so easy to let it go. I thought about the short-term consultancy job which I was to take up in Hong Kong after Christmas, another change. I needed to pack up my belongings and rent out the apartment in Shanghai before leaving for Hong Kong. I did not realize then that my time in Hong Kong would be very short indeed, despite all the effort I had put into the move. Let me tell you of my experience in Hong Kong with a couple of religious fanatics ...

ANXIETIES**Anxieties**

A telephone call is suddenly cut off

His address has changed ...

How's his life under another rosy cloud

Will he be coming back

Will he be able to see me

Will we have a life together?

All are anxieties ...

(Li Xiaoyu/Li Hsiao-Yu in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Women's Poetry*, 2009:45)

Hong Kong: January 2007.

I engaged a property management company to find a tenant for my Shanghai apartment. I packed up all my belongings into 22 boxes which were then air freighted to Hong Kong.

There was little space so it took me many hours to find a home for each item. My back ached as I stood on a chair to stack the boxes on the top of wardrobes and kitchen cupboards. I did not realize then that all this effort was for nothing and that I would have to reverse it as my stay would be brief. I shuddered as I recalled how scared and alone I felt then.

The rental apartment was in Discovery Bay which was about a 30-minute ferry ride from Hong Kong, supposedly to save costs. As it took me almost one and a half hours by ferry and bus, I would have preferred a rental apartment on the mainland. However, I came to enjoy the daily ferry trips between Hong Kong and Discovery Bay.

Tall buildings defined the shape of beautiful Victoria Harbour. Ferries of all shapes and sizes sped across the water. At night, the buildings surrounding the harbour lit it up just like Christmas lights. Although a magical sight, Hong Kong was not close to my heart like Shanghai: it was just a place where I currently worked.

The large Chinese ferry bumped up and down the waves as it headed out of Discovery Bay, gaining speed across the harbour towards Hong Kong. Settling down into my seat, I gazed out the window thinking about the meeting with my employers, Katie and her husband Wong. My consultancy job in Hong Kong was not going well due to the fact that my employers had been tardy in applying for a work visa and were now worried about intervention by the Immigration Department. My job which involved preparing a funding application for an information technology (IT) project had become a farce because the template never left Katie's computer.

The daily morning prayer meetings instigated by my employers became an increasing source of frustration for me. Although a Christian, I resented the evangelical-style prayer meetings which had been forced upon staff, some of whom were Buddhists.

The air was warm and dense as I stepped off the ferry in Hong Kong and walked across the road to a bus stop. I brushed the hair from my eyes as I entered the bus for a short ride to my workplace about 20 minutes from the city. I noticed that the door to the staff meeting area was closed. I knocked on the door. Katie, a plump Hong Kong Chinese woman in her early 50s, rose from her chair. I felt the stern gaze of Katie's husband Wong who sat beside her:

“Oh, you are here. Please wait, Wong and I are in prayer at the moment. We will call for you.”

After about 20 minutes, Katie came out and gestured for me to take a seat.

“So what do you think? We can't continue to pay you a salary because you do not have a work visa.”

I felt my heartbeat as the anger rose in my chest. I took a deep breath and straightened my back against the chair.

“I will resign if you pay my fare back to Brisbane.”

“Yes, alright then, we will do that,” said Katie, “as long as you do not talk to the Immigration Department about the work visa.”

Dusk fell over Victoria Harbour as I stepped onto the ferry heading for Discovery Bay. After a light tea, I fell wearily into bed. I woke up and looked out of my window to the bay below. The sun sparkled across the ocean. It was Tuesday. I picked up the phone and booked a removalist for the following day and my flight to Brisbane on Friday. Time was short. I sat down on the sofa and started to assemble the packing boxes which the removalist had delivered. I worked for several hours sorting out my clothes and other belongings.

Hong Kong: February 2007.

Friday had come too soon. I showered and changed into my black track pants and a casual top ready for the long flight to Brisbane. Buses dropped off passengers from the ferry to the apartment building as I waited for the charter bus to take me to Hong Kong Airport. I felt conspicuous as I stood alone with my luggage. I placed one large suitcase full of clothing and a small carry-on bag packed with crockery near the entrance to the high-rise apartment building. I felt frustrated about leaving some items in the apartment because they were too large and I had no time to dispose of them.

I ruminated over my departure from Discovery Bay. Why had I assumed that a new job would work out in Hong Kong? Why did I not just arrive with a suitcase which would make it easier to leave? Why did I take such a risk? As I asked myself

these questions, I already knew the answers. I had no choice. My relationship had fallen apart, a joint property in Brisbane had to be sold and the Shanghai apartment rented. I had no place to live. Taking up a short-term consultancy job in Hong Kong seemed to be the perfect answer at the time, to allow me some breathing space.

The headlights of the charter bus shone through the glass front door of the entrance to the apartment block. I felt startled like a rabbit caught by torchlight. The apartment receded into the black velvet sky behind me, as the bus sped towards Hong Kong Airport. My fears about bringing too much luggage with me were confirmed at checkout:

“Oh, *Mam*, your carry-on bag is much too heavy. You must make it lighter,” said the airport assistant.

I bristled inwardly. “I can’t do that.”

“You will have to, *Mam*, or you will need to pay costs for excess baggage.”

I headed towards a small airport restaurant pushing a large trolley of cases and boxes. I carefully unpacked the new crockery from the carry-on bag. I walked towards a young Chinese man serving coffee in a restaurant nearby:

“Hello, would you like a nice dinner set for your restaurant?”

“Oh yes, *Mam*, thank you so much,” he replied in perfect English.

Brisbane: Summer 2007.

It was early morning in Brisbane as the sun shone through the airport windows. Looking ahead, I walked quickly towards a tall man with brown hair and tanned skin. Jake, dressed in casual shorts and a red t-shirt, waved excitedly:

“Hi, Mum, welcome back, did you have a good flight?” said Jake throwing his arms around me.

“Yes, Jake, it’s great to be home.”

Jake drove up to the entrance of a large Queenslander in the western suburbs of Brisbane. The green and white house loomed large behind a small garden, scorched brown from the summer sun. A large water tank lay on its side nearby. Jake was minding the house for his boss who was working overseas.

“I’m having the water tank installed for my boss soon, due to the drought. There are now water restrictions in Queensland. You need to watch how long you have showers here, Mum.”

Jake carried my suitcases up the wooden stairs to the entrance of the home as I followed closely behind. Small beads of perspiration appeared on my brow and forearms from the warm humid air.

“Here is where you’ll live, and the key. Your area is upstairs, Mum, and mine is downstairs.”

I felt suddenly anxious. He still looked and sounded like Jake. Maybe he now saw me as a potential burden. Jake told me about his new relationship with a German girl, Anita. I felt happy for him as he had been lonely for some time since a former long-term relationship had not worked out. I recall that Jake broke up with his ex-girlfriend overseas. When he arrived in Paris, Jane had told him that the relationship was over. On his return to Brisbane, Jake had put on a lot of weight and had developed high blood pressure. Yet he was only in his early 20s. He confided in his grandmother Roma then, because I was in Shanghai. Later Jake learned that Jane had met someone else.

It was late afternoon as I struggled with a trolley of groceries from the supermarket near my new home. I dialled for a yellow cab. It was about 4 p.m. as I sank into the back seat. It had been a very long day. Looking out the window of the

cab, my stomach churned as I thought about the changes sweeping through my life. I sank down into the cab seat further, weighed down by choices and decisions yet to be made about finding a job and a place to live. I recalled my brother Paul's words of caution over a coffee when he and his wife Maggie visited me in Shanghai:

“Be careful, Kristen. You are at a crisis in your life right now. Watch how you handle things. Your situation can either become a crisis or an opportunity.”

Now home, I felt disconcerted by the space and the silence that surrounded me. I kept looking for the people but there were few. I felt as though I was still in transit and my life bound up in Shanghai. I called my Australian friends who were happy to see me but they asked little about my life in Shanghai.

Over the new few weeks I started to settle into Jake's home. The sun beamed through the small bedroom window as I looked out over the deck to the pool below. Palms flanked each side of the house and the large square pool sparkled blue in the sunlight. The bedroom furniture which consisted of a wardrobe, single bed and chest of drawers was painted blue and white befitting a small boy's room.

I rose early. The Brisbane sun was hot as I caught the bus into the city to meet with my lawyer. In the days and weeks which followed, I regularly drove my car to a nearby employment agency. I met with the real estate agent who organized for the joint property to be put on the market. During the day, I searched Internet job sites seeking employment. The jacaranda trees burst into purple flowers signalling the arrival of spring. I was now familiar with my new neighbourhood as I toured the streets looking at rental properties. I was aware that my stay with Jake was only short term. At dusk, I walked out onto the deck. I pulled a wooden seat towards me and sat down. Jake joined me. A slim, tanned girl with blonde hair falling over her shoulders joined us. I relaxed and enjoyed the evening meals with Jake and his

partner, Anita. My new-found peace was interspersed with regular telephone calls from my ex-partner, Tyson.

“Kristen, come up to Cairns and live with me. We will work it out. Let’s go down the coast for a weekend and talk.”

I stifled a sigh also realizing that not much talking would be done.

“I don’t want to right now.”

I cast my mind back over our relationship of seven years. I lined all my memories up: paying rent and working long hours while Tyson spent his time travelling back and forth to Australia visiting family and friends. In fact, I had always done this even when we were living in Brisbane.

“You woke up one day and decided to take a job in Cairns, remember? We were in Shanghai.”

“Then I will take you to court. I want half of everything including the apartment in Shanghai and your superannuation.”

“How can you do that?”

“Everything is 50:50. You’ll see.”

The line went dead. I put the phone down. I remembered a few lines of a poem by the Chinese poet Li Xiaoyu, something about a telephone call that was cut off, then felt anxious about whether or not we would have a future life together. My limbs froze, stomach churned and heart raced. Dusk eventually fell, but I still felt the pain. Feeling dizzy, I walked to the top of the stairs and cried out, like an animal in pain:

“Jake. Please come. Help me. I can’t do this.” Tears ran down my face. I realized I was sobbing.

Jake ran down the hall towards me. “You look a bit white, Mum. I’ll stay with you.”

I feel Jake’s arms around me. “I’ll postpone my flight to Sydney to see Ethan. I’ll make you a barbeque and we can talk.”

Night fell. I slid into the small bed, pulled the bedclothes up over me and shut my eyes. I was desperate to move on from my current life but I felt stuck. I dreamt that bright yellow paint covered the walls around me and one of my legs:

“I don’t like the colour, it’s too bright, Tyson. Why did you do this? You never ask me what I think.”

I spoke to Millie, my friend, about the meaning of the dream.

“Yellow, yellow. It means moving on; a bright colour means moving forward.”

As I awoke, I too grasped the full meaning. I desperately wanted to move on but was not able to. This was because Tyson had painted only one of my legs a bright yellow. The rest of my body was still the same and stuck. Several months later, I realized how much Tyson had exploited me. I was naïve and lonely after my divorce and his bohemian lifestyle seemed exciting. I had stayed in the relationship for about seven years. Tyson was supposedly in charge of the renovations of our home. I could not see how we could just stop. I became too used to his bullying ways and they became a normal part of our life. Several months after Tyson had left Shanghai, it was like the mist cleared before my eyes. It was then that I realized the relationship must end.

RETROSPECTION**Lost on the Way**

Tree limbs
cut
my line of vision
into golden
shreds
floating down their tips
One
mysterious
Summoning
echoes in the valley –
Don't be afraid
being lost is
fortune's
brief stopover
in adversities.

(Zhang Ye in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:37)

Shanghai: Autumn 2007.

During the Autumn of 2007, I visit Shanghai to check on my apartment, meet with the tenant Helene and the property agent Angela. There is a problem as the wooden floors in the lounge and dining rooms have been flooded, causing the floorboards to lift. I need to check the damage for myself. I hear from the Chinese grapevine that the tenant's friend left the tap on which also flooded a fax machine in a room below my apartment. I also need to pay the cost for its repair.

However, I welcome the break after the continual day-to-day dealing with difficulties associated with the drawn-out mediation process, selling a home and looking for a job. My sojourn in Hong Kong is fast becoming a memory. The familiar landscape speeds past as the taxi heads towards my hotel near the busy Yan'an Lu not far from the French Concession area. The neon lighting and streets become familiar as we draw close to the Chinese hotel where I am staying in the Changning District.

I enjoy a Chinese breakfast of egg, fried rice and dumplings and relearn my chopstick skills. Adjacent to me is a lone monk in traditional robes. Many of the

guests seem to be Chinese businessmen and women, most of whom are dressed in black suits. I feel out of place in my western attire. I have forgotten how to dress the Chinese way. Looking around the room, it all feels familiar, yet the décor is very different. The restaurant has been moved to another location from a higher level to the ground floor.

The décor of the restaurant, once quite elegant, is now the most garish I have ever seen. Large shell-like lamps provide some light. The black and white linoleum floor is scratched and dirty. The sofas, decorated in a red Chinese pattern, slope towards the floor forcing a person of my height to secure oneself on the table and by the elbows to eat. Blue glass vases with an array of plastic flowers form the floral arrangement for each table. Two lanky boys with spiked hair and expressionless faces mechanically clear the tables each morning.

Later that day, I visit my Chinese tailor, Ms Yu. I take my brown cashmere coat which Ms Yu made me, so it can be altered. Ms Yu quickly pins in the side seams and shortens the length.

“I’ll give you a new cut.”

Ms Yu repeats the procedure with the five or six dresses that she is altering so I can wear them in the Brisbane summer.

“You lose weight, much better.” I welcome Ms Yu’s honesty. I had lost about 10 kilos since being home in Brisbane.

“How long?”

“Ok, clothes ready Friday, next Friday.”

“How much?”

“Oh, you my friend, 100 yuan (A\$20).” I give Ms Yu a gift from Australia and also one to the button lady, a young girl who carefully selects buttons for tailor-made clothes.

“Ok, thank you, Kristen, is very beautiful.”

After a small snack at a nearby coffee shop, I hail a taxi and head towards the dentist located in the Gubei area of Shanghai. Dr Dai, who speaks perfect English, greets me:

“Ah, Kristen, how long are you here for?”

“About 10 days.”

“Let’s have a look and see if we can fix a crown by then for you.”

The procedure will cost me about A\$450 but in Australia it would be approximately A\$2,000. It is cheaper for me to pay for a return flight to Shanghai and get my teeth fixed than to get the procedure done at home. As I am on a budget, the savings in dental treatment are of benefit to me.

Back at the hotel, I check my emails and find a response from my lawyer about a letter of offer from Tyson. There is also an email from the university about setting up an interview for a lecturing position. My initial response is “no”, not Adelaide which is my birthplace and where I grew up. Wow, if this job eventuates, I will have come full circle!

Shanghai is confronting as a city: the traffic and the pace of life are so fast compared to home. It is difficult to get around on a daily basis due to the language difficulties and the size and complexity of the city. Yet, it is vibrant and the people are friendly. I remember my friend James commenting about how he felt about Shanghai:

“It’s the personal touch I like in Shanghai. I grew up in a small country town in Australia. I walk to work and the newspaper man has my paper ready for me, each morning.”

The next day I make arrangements through Angela from the property management company to visit my apartment. I plan to remove some of my things from the large wooden chest in my Shanghai home and send them back to Australia. As I walk towards the apartment block, the security guards greet me:

“Oh, *nihau, nihau*, Kristen,” they chorus as I pass them at the front entrance gates.

I step into the elevator and get out at the fifth floor of the apartment building. I turn the key in the lock and walk into the living room. I carefully inspect each room and take a few notes about minor repairs which need to be carried out. I note that one of the walls in the study needs painting due to some water damage, a common building problem in Shanghai. A new shower screen has been installed.

I grope in my backpack for the key to the large chest and eagerly open it. Everything is packed in neatly to its brim. A silk rug lays folded on the top of the pile. I open a bag containing silver ethnic jewellery. A teddy bear dressed in a red and navy jumper lays tucked near the top of the chest. “Oh Jack, I almost forgot you; come back to Australia with me.”

Later in the week, I make arrangements to meet Jenny, a Chinese friend, who has offered to help me take the boxes I have packed to the post office. I exit the lift and enter the street outside my apartment. My mobile phone rings.

“*Nihau, nihau*, I am running late,” says Jenny.

I wait for Jenny outside my apartment. I wave as I see her in the distance walking quickly towards me. Her face lights up as we greet each other. We enter the building and take the lift to the fifth floor. I struggle to open the front door of my apartment. On the dining room table, I notice a letter opened and a black cardigan thrown on the sofa.

“Oops, the tenant is back,” I remark.

Jenny and I move quickly to store the two quilts which had been looked after by one of my expatriate friends. Jenny organizes for four boxes of my belongings to go downstairs. We clear the room. I check the wall in the study which has now been painted.

“Painting is good, it matches the rest of the wall.”

We enter the bathroom.

“Oh, Chinese people will like this,” says Jenny pointing to the new “Winnie the Pooh” shower screen.

“It will keep anyone from harming themselves because of the picture on the glass,” adds Jenny.

I decide it is best to not respond as I had no say in the choice of screen. As we move forward with the boxes, I gaze fondly through the door of my apartment, now bare of quilts, boxes and looking neat and tidy. I write a quick note to Helene, the tenant.

“Sorry for any disturbance,” I scribble down.

Jenny is moving quickly ahead of me and I must help her with the boxes. I make a quick call to Tony and ask him to organize a company to carry out an appraisal of the property in case I decide to sell it in the future. I close the door, turn the key in the lock, all the time wondering when I will be back. I have my Shanghai

apartment set up now. All I have to do is move back in, put the bedding on the beds, the books in the shelves, take the ornaments out and I could continue my life here one day.

“*Nihau, nihau,*” say the two security guards as they lift the three heavy boxes into the taxi. Jenny directs the taxi to the post office in Xinhau Lu. I could not do this by myself as forms need to be filled out, boxes weighed and checked, and questions answered about the contents.

The next day I wake around 7.45 a.m. I realize I have slept in a little more than usual. Looking out onto the street below, I see a few umbrellas and realize it must be raining. The weather has changed over the last few days and become much cooler as Shanghai enters Autumn. I am thankful I have my cashmere coat which the tailor has carefully altered to fit me.

I hail a taxi to a hairdressing salon in the city centre for a blow-wave for 35 RMB (A\$6) before returning home. Later, I enter the Vietnamese restaurant next to my apartment where I am taking Helene and Angela out to lunch. I sit down and wait for them. Helene, who is petite with short hair, enters first. She speaks perfect English.

“Hello, Kristen, nice to meet you,” she says offering me her hand.

“Hello, Helene, good to meet you also.”

Angela enters the restaurant. She is a little taller than Helene. Both are young, maybe in their 20s. Angela is from Nanjing, a large city of 10 million people. Helene is from Paris, and originally from Cambodia. We have a pleasant lunch and learn about each other’s work and lives as we share a meal. I hand them each a small gift.

My flight leaves around midnight from Pudong Airport. The taxi speeds past the tall buildings, lit up against the darkening sky. Neon lights flash against the blackness. I am in a safe haven of massive shapes, which seem to represent a protective barrier against the night. The vibrancy of the city soothes my soul, like walking on a beach at sunset. Chinese poet Zhang Ye's poem about not being afraid to be lost on the way comforts me. What direction will my life take now? I had no idea, back then.

PART II: ADELAIDE

RESTLESS**Longing**

is like the plum rains in May
 relentless, happily
 drizzle deep into
 the heart

(Xiao Xiao in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:203)

Brisbane to Adelaide: Summer 2008.

Jemma, my daughter-in-law, picked me up from Brisbane Airport. Although petite, Jemma, with her cropped blonde hair, looked much taller. She was wearing her usual three-inch heels because she liked to appear closer to Ethan's height of over six foot. We chatted about the arrangements for Ethan and Jemma's forthcoming engagement party. Despite her size, Jemma is strong and easily lifted my heavy suitcase up two flights of stairs.

I unpacked my belongings slowly. I started to feel alienated in this place. It was hot in Brisbane with a cool summer breeze. Too bright, I thought, as though someone had turned on a light. I longed for the coolness of Shanghai, the dull Autumn sky and Chinese faces; the noise of the traffic. I did some shopping at a supermarket in North Brisbane. I felt a pain in my back as I struggled alone with the parcels. My apartment in Brisbane was so quiet. Although I strained my ears, I could not hear the sound of the Shanghai traffic.

I picked up my much loved Chinese poetry book and turned to a poem, the words of which seemed to drizzle into my heart. I longed for Shanghai like the continuing sound of the rain against a window. It felt quiet at night. Restaurants and everything else are open in Shanghai until the early hours of the morning. One of my expatriate friends commented that, at home, everyone dresses and looks alike. I felt fed up and frustrated in Brisbane yet I had only been home a few hours.

Two days passed. I did not feel any better. I was not sleeping well at night. In Shanghai, I slept like a baby and was physically tired. It was mid-Summer in Brisbane. From my balcony, in the distance, the jacaranda trees bloomed with their purple blossoms. The sky was dull but storming up. I was thinking about taking the job in Adelaide, but the thought of moving again overwhelmed me. I felt weak. If the job doesn't work, I asked myself, then what?

My son, Jake, called me later that day on his mobile. He sensed I was not happy as he always did.

"I feel like a retiree in Brisbane, Jake. I need an income; the Adelaide job would provide this."

"Mum, you underestimate yourself. You need to make a go of setting up the consultancy that we talked about. Why move again?"

"But, Jake, what sort of life do I have here? No income and you and your brother Ethan have your own lives."

My former life in Shanghai was growing distant as I settled back into life in Brisbane. Initially, it felt as though I had been wrenched from Shanghai, and part of me had been left behind. I must create new connections. I talked to my expatriate friend, Millie, about the job in Adelaide:

"It's a good college, Kristen. You don't have to go forever, just give it 12 months or two years; you can always come back."

"But the stress of moving and leaving my family, the boys and my mother; we are all here together now after so long away from each other."

"Yes, but you won't be gone long and will come back before they have kids."

“It won’t be like Shanghai. That was hard, it won’t come again. You need to build on your international experience. Some people may be threatened by you,” Millie adds wisely.

“The longer you are out of full-time work, the harder it will be to get back in. You need to get back to earning again. It will be ok, you managed to move back from Shanghai with grace, you will manage to move to Adelaide.”

It is November 2007. The telephone rings later in the afternoon.

“Hello, Dr Kristen, Dr Kumar here. We would like to offer you the teaching position.”

My heart leapt. Perhaps it was what I needed.

“Congratulations, congratulations,” he continued, as we spoke about the commencement date in January 2008.

Adelaide: January 2008.

Having grown up in Adelaide, it was like *déjà vu* when I eventually moved back. I saw my home city with different eyes and could feel its essence creeping within my skin: the well laid-out streets, the green parklands, the four seasons, the arts and writers’ festivals, the sunny beaches and the smells from the different restaurants. I rented an apartment in Gilles Street in the city. I then tried to replicate my former life by purchasing a home in Brighton near where I had grown up.

It was all so very familiar: the Brighton jetty where my father took us fishing; the beach where he worked as a volunteer beach inspector; the home where my siblings and I grew up; and the schools where we were educated. I recalled my father taking my sisters, brother and myself on a tour of the Advertiser Newspapers

where he worked as a linotype operator. Six of my uncles on my father's side were also employed there.

It was only after I moved into my own home and established a garden that I began to notice the seasons once again. I heard the blackbirds nesting in the roof of my home, planted many trees, watched my tomato plants multiply in the hot summer sun and grieved when a number of my shrubs turned a scorching yellow and died during the drought of 2008.

Adelaide had always been my home city and now it *is* where I live. To really know a place means to understand it from your childhood and within. Although I did not know Shanghai from childhood, I did walk its streets, fall out of love and buy, sell and renovate an apartment. I also spent many happy times with both Chinese and expatriate friends.

I experienced memory flashes when I saw a particular film or documentary about China, tasted Chinese food and overheard Mandarin spoken in the street. At times, I became livery and restless. I did not know then, that despite my best intentions, the job in Adelaide was not for me. I failed to understand at that time how stressed I would often feel and that on a regular basis my heart would race, my breathing become shallow and my chest tight.

Simultaneously, with my move to Adelaide, I continued to struggle daily with the mediation process. Finally a mediation conference was organized. It was a weird process with Tyson in one room and me in another. I saw him peer out of the office to see if he could get a glimpse of me. I, of course, pretended not to notice. I talked to my mother Roma often and reflected back on my childhood. "Oh, the webs we weave," my mother Roma would often remark over the stories my sisters and I

told her when we were growing up. It was comforting to look into the face of a woman in her mid-80s and see the girl she once was smiling back at me.

Tyson continued to try to obtain a share of my Shanghai property. My friend Phillip, a lawyer, advised me to obtain some letters which supported the fact that I owned the apartment in Shanghai to substantiate my claims. Tony, my close friend and real estate agent, and Jenny, the former manager of Hai Si Tower, established the following facts:

On 12th December 2005, I acted as Kristen's real estate agent ... to purchase an apartment in Shanghai. The transaction took place at a Chinese bank in Xinhau Road with the former owners, Kristen and myself. Between December 2005 and February 2006, I assisted Kristen to find an interior design company and translated for her ... she signed on 6th January 2006. Kristen received the title of the property on 20th February 2006. Kristen carried out all of these negotiations alone, and with myself as her real estate agent and translator (signed: Tony, 5th January 2008).

And Jenny wrote:

I have known Kristen since December, 2005 when she purchased her apartment. At that time, I was Manager of Hai Si Tower. All residents are required to lodge documents relating to the ownership of the apartment at Hai Si Tower office. A copy of the title Kristen gave me clearly shows that she is the owner of the apartment in Shanghai. Kristen informed me that her ex- partner Tyson left Shanghai for North Queensland in June 2005. On 11th June 2005, at Kristen's request, I organized for the locks to be changed on her front door. Together with two of my staff, I organized for some reorganization of furniture in her apartment (signed Jenny, 13th January 2008).

In order to bring the matter to a close, I was advised by my lawyer to be generous in relation to the division of our Queensland property. The mediation process was almost postponed when Tyson insisted that I should return several paintings and items of clothing to him. He also wanted the "lying down" Buddha which was still in Shanghai. I had thrown out most of his clothes or given them away. After all he just left: what was I supposed to do with them? If I had not complied with his request then we would have been in court, so of course I said "yes".

I managed to return the paintings and clothing to him through Tyson's friend, Henrik. At the mediation, I did not raise the issue of the "substance" which dropped out of a wardrobe in my Shanghai apartment after Tyson had left in 2006. I felt ashamed that I had lived with someone who took marijuana on a regular basis. He told me before we lived together that he seldom used it.

I learnt much later that if one had a habit such as Tyson's, its effects caused changes in a person's behaviour, such as frequent mood swings, apathy, loss of short-term memory and decreased empathy. I thought then that perhaps I attracted Tyson's abusiveness, for instance, when he stormed out of our home, put his foot through a door and pushed me to the floor following an argument. I look back now and realize that his behaviour not only destroyed our relationship, but also what he could have achieved in his life, at least during the time when I knew him.

All was resolved between my ex-partner and myself in February 2008, with about half an hour to spare before my lawyer was scheduled on a flight interstate. Tyson's lawyer had one last attempt at making contact about the return of one of the Buddhas. My usually calm and gracious mother Roma in whom I had confided said to tell him in so many words to "bugger off" so I did, in legal terms of course. We had all had enough by then.

Let me speak now about the *unwelcome visitors* to my home. Let me also tell you how I became "bound" in university politics; then, after a "numinous moment", walked out. And through all of this, I did not realize how much I would miss Shanghai. Nor did I understand that my foreign experiences would lead me in a different direction and, thus, transform my life forever.

THE DEPARTURE**Looking Back**

I leave

Towing what you see

I walk up the stone steps

Into the noisy hall, with you

left behind.

... Shadows weave in and out the hall

In light like a crystal and wine that is amber

What you see ...

Seeps through the layers of a glass

and pours like water into me.

(Zhong Ling/Chung Ling in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:166)

Adelaide: Winter 2010

It was early morning on a Winter's day when I arrived in Adelaide. I felt the cool air on my face and pulled my coat around me. I noticed that one of my shrubs had turned white with the cold. The screen door was wide open and the front door ajar. All outer and inner doors to my home were left flung open. I had locked them all carefully before I left for Shanghai three weeks previously. I gasped as Andrew followed closely behind. I sobbed as I looked down the hall at my belongings strewn all over the floor. I found it difficult to breathe and the sinusitis was making it worse. Andrew's arms fastened around my shoulders. "Don't worry, I'll call the police." I broke free and ran into each room like a mad woman.

One of the pillowcases had been used to take all of my jewellery. My laptop, television and sound equipment were gone. Documents kept in a filing cabinet were strewn all over the floor. Andrew called the police who took a record. He helped me to tidy and vacuum the house. We fell wearily into bed: any ideas of a romantic catch-up after about three weeks apart were put aside. As the days passed, I realized that the police would not follow up a crime of little importance. Andrew and I checked a couple of pawnshops near my home to see if we could identify any of the jewellery, without success. I felt sad because much of it was purchased in China. I

spent hours trying to find documents and photos to identify the jewellery and equipment, so that I could make an insurance claim.

I know that my challenges could not even be compared with J.G. Ballard's childhood experiences where, in a hallucinatory state during the Japanese invasion of Shanghai, he felt his soul leave his body. I felt overwhelmed. I closed my eyes and lay down on the bed. I heard a ghost voice speaking to me as I imagined myself hovering over Shanghai amongst the fairy lights of the city, and before the burglary.

Shanghai: mid-Summer 2010.

I think that this will be my final departure from Shanghai. It is early morning as I look down from the balcony of my apartment to the streets below. The air is still, and the sky filled with a grey haze. Bushy trees appear to cascade down from the fifth floor to the ground. Tall apartment blocks form a barrier in the distance.

To the left, traffic lights await the morning rush. Chinese houses with red roofs and white exteriors fill the distance. To the right, lies the intersection of Haushan Lu and Huai Hai Lu. A few taxis, interspersed with some motor scooters and bikes, glide along the streets heralding the morning rush. It starts to rain heavily. Cyclists decked out in colourful raincoats cycle down the streets. There are sounds of different types of traffic – buses and taxis start to fill the streets as the rain beats down on the roof. I drink in the sights and sounds, like a soothing glass of red wine.

Yesterday, the contract was signed by the new owner, notary agent and real estate agents and *chopped* with the relevant Chinese stamps. I feel a strange peace as though my life is moving in another direction, yet very sad, as the chapter of my life in Shanghai is slowly and painfully closing. The practicalities of dealing with

maintenance and tenancy problems stress me. On receiving a good offer, I decide to sell. I feel comfortable that Sam, a young Taiwanese man, and his father, a dentist, have bought my apartment. I know they will treat it well but I have mixed feelings.

A stranger will soon occupy my apartment and there will be no trace of my life there. There will be nothing to signify the effort that went in to purchase and lovingly renovate it; no evidence of the relationship between Tyson and I, which may be a good thing; and no record of all the trips I made to Shanghai over the years. My fears have come to fruition because there won't be any reason to come back. It will be the end of an era just like the death of a relationship.

I shower and dress, and eat a light breakfast. It is now late morning. The sky is still hazy, a bright pale grey reflecting the pollution on a summer's day in Shanghai. The taxi speeds down Xinhau Lu where the plane trees form a leafy arch for several kilometres. I go by taxi to the Minsheng Bank to meet with the manager Brandy who is tall, attractive and in her early 30s.

“Hi, Brandy, how are you? I am glad to see you again.”

“Good morning, Kristen, good to see you also. Come into the VIP room. It is a little easier for foreigners to transfer funds currently, because of the World Expo.”

Brandy carefully explains the multitude of steps one needs to go through to transfer funds to Australia. These include involvement of the tax department and foreign exchange branch in Shanghai. I thank Brandy, bid her goodbye and step outside the Minsheng Bank where I hail a taxi. I make arrangements to visit my tailor Ms Yu in Shanghai as well as some other favourite places. First, I meet with Ms Yu, a petite woman in her mid-40s.

“*Nihau*, Ms Yu, how are you?”

“*Nihau*, Kristen, good, how are you?”

I show Ms Yu some fashion illustrations that I have cut out from magazines. She nods understandingly and carefully measures me for the garments. It is Monday. The five garments I order will be ready, fully-lined by Friday afternoon, including a fitting in between. I step outside the grey stone apartment block where Ms Yu and her husband, who is also a tailor, work.

Later, I cross the road to the Bird, Plant and Fish Market. Crickets chirp noisily in small woven reed baskets. A young girl purchases one for her large green cricket. They are well-loved pets for local Chinese people and suit the small spaces in which they live. As I walk up and down the aisles of the street market, I see puppies, kittens, turtles in tanks and fish of many varieties and colours. Several stores proudly display bonsai of intricate designs. The humid air vibrates with the sound of crickets chirping, people talking and the hum of traffic outside.

In the evening, I sit on the balcony and look out into the distance. It is now dusk. The sun is a deep red, shining through the grey polluted haze. I sit there until the sun has long gone. I know that time is now short before my apartment is handed over to Sam and his father. I wait for Tony and his wife Mia because we are having dinner together to celebrate the sale of my apartment. “Knock, knock.” Mia and Tony, who were married in 2009, enter the room. I feel pleased that I had introduced them at a dinner. Mia’s long thick hair cascading down her shoulders shimmers under the light.

“*Nihau*, Tony, *Nihau*, Mia, how great to see you both.”

“*Nihau*, Kristen.”

“Tony, the exchange of the title and international transfer of funds must all be completed by July 12th when I will hand over the apartment to Sam and his father.”

“It’s ok, Kristen, I think all will be finished by then.”

“Tony, I really cannot come back after July 12th because of work commitments.”

I don’t feel entirely confident that all processes will be complete but time will tell. What I did not know back then was that Tony and Mia would have a daughter a few years later, and ask me to give her an English name. I did after all have something to do with the arrival of little *Scarlett*. I felt like a close member of a much larger global family.

It is Saturday on a June Summer’s day in Shanghai. The packers are coming at 10.00 a.m. I shower, dress and pack my belongings. There is a knock. I open the door and greet four Chinese men dressed in black pants and yellow t-shirts. They enter carrying boxes, tape, bubble wrap and scissors. Each man places a pair of

disposable boots on his shoes. After greeting me, they immediately start to wrap and pack. Besides the furniture, they carefully wrap my two wooden Buddhas, one a lying down Buddha and the other a



Buddha in a meditation pose. The Chinese supervisor, who can speak good English, frequently checks the work.

About midday, my Chinese friend Jenny arrives. I motion to the workers to have lunch whilst we make arrangements to meet. Together Jenny and I walk down Huai Hai Lu for a last coffee together. Jenny kindly checks the timetable for the

Maglev bullet train. I have chosen to take it to the airport as I want to experience the speed of the train again. After coffee and a few snacks, we walk back to the apartment.

It is about 2 p.m. The packers are almost finished and are busy sweeping the floors of my apartment. The oak floors shine gold in the afternoon light. Two items of furniture remain – a double bed in the guest room and a blue and red leather L-shaped sofa in the lounge. I am too tired to think about how I will dispose of them when I decide not to include them in the removal due to the additional costs. I ask the removalists to sweep the floor again. I want it clean for Sam when he moves in. He called in earlier and gave me some Chinese sweets for my trip home. I make up my bed in the spare room for the next visit in July. I place “Little Jack”, a small well-worn travelling bear that my son gave me, on the pillow. I leave some coffee and tea in the kitchen.

Jenny calls a taxi. She insists on coming to the Maglev train station to help me. I pick up my suitcase. Jenny carries my hand luggage. I step out of the door and look back. I see a slim mauve book on the sofa. I run back into the room, pick up my Chinese poetry book and put it into my bag. The shadows of the tall buildings seep through the windows and pour into me. I stop still a moment almost startled by the beauty of leafy foliage from the house below which greets my gaze. As I shut the door on my life in Shanghai, I tow the memories with me.

“Goodbye Shanghai! Just for now, see you very soon,” I say so softly, that only I can hear.

Jenny and I take the lift from the fifth floor to the ground floor where a taxi is waiting to take us to the Maglev station. She helps me with my luggage up the escalator and up onto the train station. I enter the carriage whilst Jenny waves

goodbye. The journey home seems quick as I manage to get some sleep after a few bourbon and Cokes on the plane. On arrival at my home in Adelaide, I keep busy – unpacking, washing, shopping and getting ready for work the following day. The thought that I will go back to Shanghai very soon to finalise the sale comforts me.

About one month later, I return to Shanghai for the handover of the apartment. The mortgage needs to be paid out and more cheques signed. I worry that I may need to come back to Shanghai a third time, which is becoming difficult due to work and personal commitments. The rain beats against the aircraft windows, as it thuds down onto the tarmac at Pudong Airport, interrupting my anxious thoughts. My frustration at not hearing from Andrew subsides as I receive several messages which were banked up on the phone.

I feel the humidity in the air as I take the Maglev bullet train full of Chinese people and foreigners to Pudong. Although I am very tired, I feel I am home. The chaos of the traffic envelops me as the taxi heads towards my apartment. During the afternoon I travel to the Minsheng Bank to deposit the two cheques that the owner has given me into my account. I am aware that it may be difficult to transfer funds from my account to Australia with no hassles. However, I am confident that Brandy will be able to assist me:

“Nihau, Kristen, come with me, I will fix for you.”

One hour later the mortgage account is closed and the cheques banked into my account. I discuss the procedures to transfer the funds to Australia with Brandy. We decide that I will leave Tony with my keycard and inform Brandy of the password when I am back in Australia, just prior to the international transfer being carried out. This will mean that I do not need to pay for yet another trip to Shanghai.

However, it also means that I need to put a lot of trust into two of my Chinese friends.

I shower, change and then walk to the local supermarket to get some drinks. On my return, the apartment bell rings, signalling Tony's arrival. He hands me two cheques which together make up the final payment for my apartment. We sit down and sort out all of the invoices which I have asked Tony to provide so I can pass them to my accountant on my return.

After Tony leaves, I pour myself a drink and sit out on the balcony. I look down onto the streets below. It is still raining. Taxis jostle at the traffic light intersection. I get up to close the balcony door to the traffic noise below. I have not slept for two days. The streets are lined on both sides with trees shining with blue and red lanterns. The traffic hums and the lights flash to the beat of the city.

I lie down on the bed and shut my eyes. I am sitting in a taxi, speeding down HaiHou Lu, one of the most popular shopping streets near my apartment. The trees lining each side of the street are lit up with purple lights and bright, red lanterns. My soul is dancing in and out of the trees as the lights shine and flicker. The familiarity of Chinese faces and their comforting smiles lie deep within. I hear the hum of the traffic like the beat of a drum. Shanghai is dancing just like the crickets which chirp to the staccato beat of the traffic – *the Spirit of Shanghai*.

Ghost Voice

Shanghai “Voodoo”: (*Writer Robert Dessaix refers to “voodoo” as an inner essence or soul that transcends our bodily existence in the world*) (my journal: 25th July 2010.

Your soul hovers above the sandy beaches and looks out to the tall buildings lining the distant shores. It finds peace in the wide expanse of the sea, waves crashing onto the shore and the softness of the sand. It is dreaming of a different time in Shanghai where it lives in the ether of the city. At night, it dances amongst the fairy lights in the large plane trees lining the streets. It envelops Shanghai and its people like a huge woven cloth. During the day, your soul enters the hearts of Chinese people who it meets and touches them lightly.

Your soul is not confined to the body, nor enclosed in the houses in which you live. Instead the houses are like masts of a ship that balance and steady you. Your soul lifts the clouds that veil your eyes and the clay that fills your ears, as your body weaves in and out of the traffic across Shanghai city. It learns the purposes of things and blesses the darkness and the light.

During times of darkness, your soul sees and dreams of different lives which eases the pain. It misses and dreams of Chinese faces, the sounds of their language and sight of their gestures. At night, it cries out for these and dreams of times past. Your soul has looked out from the steps of great temples in China and danced amongst the Buddhas in gardens and grottos. It sees from a great distance and understands that to learn, it must also be far away.

Your soul has learnt that if it drinks from the river of silence, it shall indeed sing the tune of a meaningful life. It thrives hovering above sandy beaches and Shanghai city. It does not need talking which constricts its flight. Your soul has

learnt that thought is a bird of space which enables it to fly or to live in the ether. In a cage of words, it may unfold its wings, but cannot fly.

Your soul is dealing with pain in the physical world. It is the bitter potion to treat a sick self by the physician within. It often feels anxious and stressed, but needs to learn to be quiet and take the remedy of pain in silence. It knows that pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses understanding. Your soul dreams of a different world, hovering above Shanghai city.

As your hand reaches for the pen, the soul springs into motion. The pain subsides and your soul starts to dance and to break free. It sees the future, comes to know it will not stay confined in this present space. It may fly to another place for a while in preparation for a life not yet formed. In this life, it will emerge as a global soul. Then, and only then, will it be at peace and at home. Your soul knows that one must experience pain to be able to give birth to new growth.

BOUND**The Soul That's Bound**

All paths lead to you
 but nothing reaches you
 You locked the door
 And tossed out the key ...
 Heard are sighs and hand-clappings
 as of soft sedimentary rock
 before being transformed to amber
 in that lush leafage,
 that cicada of yours,
 cries out

(Shuting in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry*, 2009:64)

Adelaide: Spring 2010.

The cool sea was refreshing as Andrew and I lowered the small metal boat into Outer Harbour. A large ship named *Jupiter Leader* with a navy and white hull, loomed high above us at its mooring. I zipped up my red jacket and pulled the hood close around my head as the breeze was still chilly, a remnant from a cold Winter. Andrew steered the boat out to the blue line where he cast two lines into the sea and dropped a crab net over the side.

He motioned to me to lie down and relax across the width of the boat while he watched the fishing lines. I stretched out feeling the warmth of the sun as I listened to the lapping sound of the sea. As we both shared an apple, I realized that it had not taken us that long to achieve this happiness and ease like children sharing a snack, the complete abandonment of self.

I woke suddenly as Andrew rapidly pulled in the two lines. A garfish squirmed as Andrew skilfully pulled out the fishing hook. I grabbed a yellow rope and yanked the crab net quickly to the surface. Two small blue crabs were caught in the net:

“They are too small, we must throw them back,” said Andrew. “Let’s go to see the pelicans. Last time we saw them they were very small. They are probably quite big by now.”

Andrew turned the boat towards the small island. He helped me into the shallow water near the shore as the mud was soft and slippery. To the left of the boat, seals basked in the sun on the rocky breakwater. Screeching ibises and grunting pelicans greeted us as we neared the scrubby bush signalling that we were close to the breeding ground. Nests laden with eggs and baby ibises littered the scrub. The pelicans that Andrew had seen on an earlier visit had grown and were nesting. A large group of pelicans flocked together protecting their young while others sat on their eggs.

Together we walked over the sand hills to the beach beyond. Flocks of pelicans gathered their young and scurried through the scrub over the sand hills towards the sea as we approached. The expanse of chalk-white sand littered with shells seemed to spread from one end of the beach to another. The calm sea glistened in the afternoon sun. It was late afternoon when Andrew and I headed towards the boat ramp. I left Andrew to wash down the boat as I headed home to prepare a meal.

Weariness overcame me as I lay down on the bed for a short rest. As I drifted off to sleep, I saw Ethan with his blonde-haired bride Jemma next to him. They were standing at the entrance to a small church in Rye, Sussex, UK. As I looked up, rose petals fell softly amongst the crowd, blurring my vision. The image faded and a bound, bronze figure filled my senses. “Why?” I wondered.

London, Germany and Shanghai: Summer 2010.

I attended my eldest son Ethan’s wedding to Jemma in Sussex, UK. Later I visited my youngest son Jake and his fiancée Anita and her family in Southern Bavaria. A trip to Shanghai to handle the sale process of my apartment followed. It was the

visit to Germany and an intriguing bronze figure that I saw which filled my mind. Andrew did not come to Southern Bavaria due to work commitments. We had not known each other very long then and were living in our separate homes.

I walked with Anita and her mother Elizabeth to the entrance of the old city of Wurzburg. The city was surrounded by beautiful green hills and vineyards. Later we visited a castle, an old church and a palace, and walked across a bridge spanning a large river which divided the town. We then sat down in the shade to have a short break from the hot sun.

“We are going to meet my uncle in the village square. Let’s go for an ice-cream on the way,” said Anita.

“Sounds wonderful.”

The enjoyment of savouring an ice-cream in Southern Bavaria was quite different from eating a plain ice-cream cone in Adelaide. There were many varieties and flavours: they mixed different fruits, nuts, biscuits and cake together with ice-cream and cream and served the treats in large dishes. It was like eating a trifle and almost a meal in itself. As I walked towards the village square, I stopped suddenly at the sight of a life-like bronze figure at the top of the stairs near the town centre. It was bound from the neck to feet in a semi-sitting position. The head tilted slightly backwards and gazed towards the sky. Something drew me to the figure as I remembered a poem by Shuting about a soul that was bound. I pushed away the feelings of connection to a life I knew so well:

“Oh, Kristen, it means a person bound within itself,” Elizabeth explained softly in halting English, whilst focusing on finding her relatives.

I took some photographs and later joined Anita’s relatives who were waiting in an ice creamery. The bound figure was forgotten for a while as I immersed

myself in conversation. I returned home with Elizabeth and Anita and lay down on the bed in the guest room for a short nap before a dinner dance at a German restaurant.

As I rested, the bound bronze figure in the hot Bavarian sun loomed before me. “Bound” – I understood the meaning too well. “Bound” – constrained in my professional life by a work environment that exuded character assassination, tetchiness and political bastardry similar to the events often played out in Australian politics. I felt unable to break free.

Sydney poet Christopher Brennan’s life as portrayed in Brian Castro’s novella, *Street to Street*, touched a chord in me. “Oh the humiliation of intellectual life in Australia,” Castro writes of Brennan adding that, “the country was famous for giving one the overturn” (98). University life seemed to reward teaching and superficially encourage research because it attracted funding. However, if one was successful in the research sphere, then jealousy often reared its ugly head and you could turn around and find your workload markedly increased. Each year, I was instructed to run a large teaching conference in addition to considerable teaching and administrative workloads and denied the resources to do it. Perhaps I had been “smacked”. I learnt as Christopher Brennan had in a different era that universities had not changed, as Castro writes:

In reality it was a world of bull-nosed sharks and petty managers, without an idea between them, without invention, without the brilliance of risk.

As I digested these words, like the dawn breaking in the early morning, I knew why I felt bound. As I sat beside the bound figure, I too looked up to the sky seeking answers to questions and solace, repeatedly. The bound figure and I merged

to become one. Although we could not speak, my voice cried out like a cicada in the night.

I turned my face from the sky and saw a knife on the ground beside me. I picked it up and cut through the ties. My limbs felt loose as I shook my legs and hands and wriggled my body free. I turned and repeated the same procedure for my new “bound” friend. He too stood up tall, raised his hands high above his head and reached towards the sky. The bandages dropped to the ground. I put out my hand and he took it. We looked towards the village square and heard a band playing German music. People sat outside under large umbrellas. They laughed and drank wine. Some started to dance in the late afternoon sun. My new friend and I walked towards the wooden dance floor and then we danced. *At last, free.*

I heard a knock and suddenly awoke. I straightened my clothing, and then opened the front door. Andrew greeted me with a big hug and a smile. It was then that the revelation that I had told my friend Lucy about started to consolidate in my mind. I remained caught on the images of my apartment, the city streets where I walked and my Chinese friends in Shanghai.

As my daily world swept by, I saw it in my imagination more intensely as the months passed. I yearned for it. I realized I could not talk about my experiences because I felt I could express them more intensely and intimately in words. I wanted to be lifted out of the buzzing, confusing politicized environment where I worked. I had to write a book about Shanghai. I wanted to pluck my memories from the Huangpu River curving around the Bund, as it went careering by in the passage of time, to save them, or at least the feeling of them, forever.

The way ahead was now clear. It was time now for change and renewal. Perhaps like writer Emily Hahn, I was becoming experienced at building a new life. I chatted happily with Andrew about the afternoon's fishing trip and later we walked out onto the deck.

UNBOUND**Freedom**

I want to focus my mind
 upon you
 hold you so much
 move your body and spirit
 with one touch
 Then *fly away*
 through the midnight air
 to the island across the sea
 where body and spirit mesh
 at last free
 for eternity.

(Christine Lavender in *Relay*, 2012:91)

Adelaide. Summer 2011.

I opened the laundry door, stepped outside and took the bandages off the line. They were snow-white, the blood had gone. I slowly folded the bandages and stored them in the linen cupboard just like the memories I wanted to forget. Sometimes my mother Roma would tell me when we were young, not to “hang our dirty washing on the line”. I felt that to contain my feelings was the right thing to do then. I had been told since that it was also because I was always in my head, perhaps thinking about feelings instead of just understanding them. Andrew would try to console me then:

“Don’t worry, it’s your job, that’s why you are like that.”

I awoke from a restless night, and remembered that this was the end of my career after about 20 years and 10 years of study before that. I had felt a funeral coming on in my mind for some time. Universities are very politicized environments. It takes a particular kind of person to survive within them. Castro in *Street to Street* comments that “unproductives”, as Brendan Costa were mistakenly perceived to be, will often be singled out. For example, he had not achieved a grant so he was “smacked” by the Dean, who increased his workload.

Similarly, I recall being “smacked” for writing an academic book which threatened the status quo. Perhaps I never failed to do so, because I had a considerable publishing record in comparison to some of my colleagues. Many did not seem interested in research or writing. The Sydney poet Christopher Brennan believed in his own worth and gave up trying to be popular within the Australian university environment.

I stayed in bed longer than usual to nurse my wounds. As I ran my hands slowly over my body, I massaged the skin where the bandages had been when the bound figure and I had become one. It was raw in some places with red weals across my flesh. We had gathered the bloodied bandages from the evening before and put them in the laundry sink to soak. I felt free then, but my heart was heavy like the sodden bandages.

“There is blood on the wall. It is unprecedented and surreal, not to mention unfair and unjust,” said Carol, a colleague. I felt the warmth of Carol’s hand on my shoulder as she motioned me towards the coffee machine in the staff room.

Carol was my only close friend within the department. It was a small organization of about 10 educators and a few administrative staff. Even prior to my appointment, many colleagues complained to me that the department was rife with political issues. I thought about the manager who had organized my appointment, Kumar, a tall Indian man with a wide smile and white teeth. My colleagues and I quickly learnt that the ready cobra-like smile could swallow any of us whole if we dared to question anything at all in the department.

Apparently Kumar had upset a lot of people so there was a review and he was relieved of his position as manager. A new manager was appointed, a woman with whom I had worked previously at another university. I had even been stupid

enough to strongly support her for the position. I did not know then that the knife would go in my back and twist and turn many times. Day and night, I was haunted by thoughts about the events leading up to my resignation.

The appeal process was difficult enough although I felt that I had done well at the interview. They interviewed my manager who recommended that I should not be promoted based on trumped-up accusations relating to a book I had edited. It reminded me that *words matter, words count, they have lasting import.*

“The problem in these cases is professional jealousy and unfortunately a manager has a lot of power,” said Carol. “Furthermore, you had a book published.”

I thought that this was where the problems started as I remembered the tetchiness of some of my colleagues when trying to organize a book launch. In the end it became too hard so I cancelled it. I rubbed my lower back where I felt moisture oozing from a deep wound. During the whole ordeal, all I could do was smile. I smiled the way a skull smiled, all teeth and no flesh. I really felt as though the shell had cracked and I had escaped. It was mid-morning on a Summer’s day when I went to see my doctor. He insisted that I go on sick leave:

“You must take some leave. I am quite worried about your anxiety levels,” said Dr Harvey, his kind blue eyes staring firmly at mine. He shook his head:

“Bastardisation, bastardisation; that’s what they are doing to you, bullying you out of your job, Dr Harvey remarked. My father-in-law went overseas and when he came back, his office had been taken up by another colleague during his absence on leave. He never got promoted.”

My manager and a colleague had encouraged a group of students to sign a petition which would help to ensure I did not get promoted. I found it hard to

understand their actions except that I knew my manager was trying to get a colleague into my position. Carol questioned me about the manager's character:

“What is your new manager like?”

“Very unattractive, fat. Her face is full of lines like deep cracks in the dried mud of the Tibetan desert.”

“A lot of people don't understand these hidden influences on behaviour. You are a lot younger in appearance. Women of a similar age and one more attractive than the other; it does have an impact, unfortunately. The sisterhood is not always supportive,” she said, with a touch of irony.

Many years later, I found that those insights which ignored any attempts I made to block them out repeatedly occurred in other Australian education contexts. Perhaps someone should research this aspect of female behaviour. I couldn't deal with it although I would try to make things right. Mostly it did not work so I just withdrew. The hardest thing of all was telling Andrew that I would be leaving my job. It was also easier to take my mind off work problems if I did not speak about them.

“Tell him or you will lose him,” said my friend Lucy whom I had known for many years prior to leaving Adelaide.

Despite her slender build, I knew Lucy could be very assertive because she had some tough times herself in the workplace. I told Lucy that Andrew had often commented on his experience of some women who were just looking for a man to support them.

“You are not like that. You have had a successful career. You are demeaning yourself,” Lucy retorted almost angrily.

“Don’t worry. Think of this as an opportunity. You will either have to learn to be hard and political like them or they will give you hell if you stay,” continued Lucy.

I spoke to Carol about my conversation with Lucy.

“You are not the only one. A lot of people are leaving universities because they are not collegial, the way they used to be. People stab each other in the back to get ahead.”

“You must take time off. Get strong again. Work out what you would like to do,” said Carol.

The sun shone during the drive into the city about two weeks later. I planned to do some shopping and then go to the office to pack and collect my things. Carol and her daughter had offered to help. I carefully packed the books into shopping bags. No one approached me to do a handover. I had walked out of my career so what could I really expect? Most of my colleagues pretended that there was nothing wrong and generally ignored me as if I had the plague. They didn’t seem to know what else they could do with a colleague who had helped them with their teaching and listened to their boyfriend and family problems. About one hour later, Carol and her daughter arrived.

“The manager has not communicated with you about a handover. Amazing, so surreal,” said Carol, picking up two of the bags.

As I turned to do the same, I knocked over the remains of a cup of coffee which spilt neatly over the desk.

“Leave it. They can’t do much more to you now.”

I attempted to wipe up the spill then left it, picked up the bags and followed Carol and her daughter out of the office. It was late afternoon when I arrived home. I felt the hot sun on my shoulders as I carried the heavy bags into the house. I slowly found a place for my things in the study. Some of the books were packed into a plastic carton to store in the garage. Friends wanted me to tell my story but I could not even frame it. I felt detached from the things which were once central to my professional life – the students, my qualifications on the wall and books. I saw all of these things now as meaningless or worse, burdened with sadness.

I spoke to very few people then. Safety seemed to lie in privacy. Once my situation was openly acknowledged, it would become real and terrifying because I felt a keen sense of loss associated with the loss of my career. As I went about the tasks of finding a place for my professional things, I sighed deeply, more than I had ever before; a habit which became ingrained for a while.

As I grew up, I had been trained to see the trajectory of my life as “romance”, towards becoming a wife. I turned all major decisions over to be made by the prominent males in my life. At too young an age, I agreed to undergo a small operation so that I could not have any more children. As I lay on an operating table being prepared for the birth of my second child, I looked up at my doctor’s kind eyes and said, “don’t forget to tie my tubes.” He hesitated and looked down at me with a puzzled expression on his face. I wondered if the doctor had forgotten the conversation with my ex-husband and me, or if he thought that this woman in her mid-20s was much too young. Years later I wondered what it would have been like to have also had a daughter.

When I met Tyson, I continued along a similar path. I remembered accepting the fact that only Tyson's name appeared on the house plans for our Brisbane home. Yet I had secured the contract on the home: Tyson was working interstate at the time.

I undertook my academic role at the university with intense motivation and passion, always trying to achieve some benchmark I had often set myself. Although I was capable of decisive action and a high level of intellectual analysis, I was very slow to recognize these qualities in myself. I realized that I had an inability to recognize what I had achieved and had become – an accomplished academic who held several qualifications and had published widely. I did not perceive that I might threaten others nor take into account the sexism rife in some workplaces. I learnt much later that I was just another “tall poppy” who must be lopped. I was not the only one to suffer such a fate.

The weather was a little cooler as I strode down the beach. Summer was drawing to a close. I felt freer now than I had the previous month. I no longer had to survive another day “in the whirlpool of university politics, rumour and gossip”, as writer-academic Brendan Costa did in Castro's *Street to Street*. The waves rushed and splashed onto the shore. I had always loved being near the sea. It gets into your head as it moves freely and catches the light. It would allow me to immerse myself or would slip through my hands. Like love, it could also embrace me or sweep me away. My walks along the beach were never a fragile euphoria but a steady and ongoing sense of happiness. I loved the beach in the mornings when the sunlight, streaked in gold, slanted shadows across the sand and the jetty. Buddhist monks believed you could learn a lot from the natural world.

The sun was warm and my spirits lifted as I remembered the poem that Andrew and I had written. It was after we had been out on his boat and had made love on the warm sand, something about being free and sailing off together into the horizon.

I drove home slowly and deep in thought about what must be done to renew my life once again, just like a lizard losing its tail and growing another. I picked up the phone and dialled Andrew's number. His familiar voice answered. I said that I would like to go out on his boat on the weekend and told him about a story I had written.

I knew that I would tell Andrew then but not in an emphatic way because I really wanted the topic to be a "dead duck". I would probably tell Andrew in the slightly offhand way that I was developing in which to present the story. Besides, I knew I could leave my life if I wanted to for a simpler one in an eastern culture less complex than mine. And one day, Andrew may join me. Perhaps I could not continue to live in my home city *all* the time. Since my return from Shanghai, it had bound me so tight that it was difficult to breathe. Shanghai had changed me forever. My soul was just not in one place any more.

NEW GROWTH**New Beginnings**

The sea calm
 glistens like glass
 Ripples bubble onto the shore
 Waves carved from sand
 rub against feet
 Tinnies grace the distance
 black dog chases gulls
 Wind softly blows as
 tears dry
 Salt heals
 Soul emerges, opens up
 like a lotus in the mud
 Rises like a phoenix
 from the ashes.
 (Christine Lavender, 2012 unpublished).

Please God, please make it work this time, I begged over and over again. God didn't seem to answer, but I knew he heard me. I remembered a short poem about walking along a beach, looking back and seeing two sets of footprints. Then turning around and noticing only one set of footprints. "This was when I carried you," said God, "and don't ever forget it." And I never have. What began then was the bare stroke of a dream that I desperately tried to hold onto.

Adelaide: January 2011.

After a holiday in Bali, Andrew and I purchased a house together in the seaside suburb of Glenelg, about 20 minutes from the centre of Adelaide. It was a hectic few months while we both packed up and Andrew sold his home and I found a tenant for mine. We planned to move into our home in April to coincide with the Easter break. As the days passed, I felt torn. I knew I would miss my Adelaide home which I had established and lived in for about 18 months.

I tried to explain my feelings to Andrew late one afternoon as we lay in bed after making love:

"Don't you see, a house is more than a house, it has 'soul'."

“No, it’s just bricks and mortar; I don’t see it like that.”

Of course, I am never one to give up: “But remember my house – I chose the plants, established the garden, put in a water feature. There isn’t another home around here that has an Asian tropical garden.”

“I suppose I hadn’t looked at it like that before.”

I wondered then, if it was part of being a woman, wanting to put down roots, establishing a home, no matter where she was in the world or in her life. But it was more than that; I had created what I longed for, an Asian garden to remind me of China. I would sit outside on the wooden deck and smell the scent of the frangipanis, the hibiscus and the magnolia flowers.

I listened to the soothing sound of the Chinese fountain and the rustling of the blackbirds as they poked about the dirt looking for worms. I dreaded the packing up and resettling as I had done this many times for the move to Shanghai, Hong Kong and then back to Adelaide.

While sorting through a whole pile of photograph albums, I came across a photograph of a Chinese friend, her baby and myself outside a Shanghai café. The woman looking back at me was slimmer then, her hair cropped short and a too-pale blonde. She was still going through the mediation process. Her face was deathly pale and a little austere. It did not look at all like me. I showed it to Andrew who said reassuringly, “don’t worry, you look much happier now.”

I woke most nights absolutely terrified while Andrew calmly and in his practical way focused on selling his home. After my divorce in the mid-1990s following a long marriage and the relationship breakdown with my ex-partner Tyson, I knew I could not afford yet another break-up either emotionally or financially. If Andrew and I had not met, I would have kept my apartment in

Shanghai and gone back there to live. I had no real choice. It was a matter of the heart, after all. My furniture came back from Shanghai and I found a place for it in my home.

Andrew told me later after a visit to see his 94-year-old mother Helen that she had commented: "I'm glad you met Kristen, it is meant to be, part of God's plan."

My vision of the world, the way I saw others and myself fitting into it was so much broader since living in Shanghai. Life in Australia was so easy. I always had to carry business cards in Chinese and English to make a shopping trip in Shanghai. Nowadays I strove towards visions about the future in my mind that in most cases actually became real. I rarely spoke about my experiences or achievements. I did not like to appear too different to others.

"It's ok, I understand. Don't worry, you are just 'outside the square' which is one of the things I love about you," said Andrew after I told him how I felt.

I did not know then that, about one year later, my mother Roma would pass away. Because of her passing, my three siblings and I remarked that we felt like "orphans". *I* was an orphan, but not *them*. I missed my mother and my friend. Now that she was gone, I felt sidelined because I was the "black sheep" of the family. My parents, siblings and I had a weekly Sunday lunch as we were growing up. My father would talk about what my brother Paul would do in the future: "a doctor probably," he said. Katie would probably get into teaching. He would turn to me then. "Kristen, well she would probably be a secretary like her mother, or just get married." Another theme was sport. Paul was good at football and Anne played netball very well. My father would look in my direction and comment that "Kristen has no interest in sport."

I felt resentful for many years and was determined to succeed over and over again, in my academic career. I learnt over time that when I grew up in the late 1960s, girls were just supposed to get married. It was the son who would be destined for a career. I heard other women of my vintage talk about similar experiences.

After my mother had passed away, my son Jake said that as the eldest, I would become the matriarch of the family. I was questioned about whether or not I could actually handle the task. I was not quick enough to make a timely retort. Perhaps, living a life outside the square was, in fact, interpreted as being unstable. Just as Robert Gray remarked in his memoir, *The Land I Came Through Last*, I wondered if the sibling in the family who wanted to become a writer was like an only child. The memories of my relationships with my parents were many and infinitely deeper and more intense than those of my siblings.

I lay on my back at night with fists clenched across my chest praying so hard, almost like Elizabeth Gilbert did in her memoir, *Eat, Pray and Love*, except she did it on the floor. I remembered something spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi wrote: that prayer was not asking, but rather a longing of the soul. I felt calmer after I had prayed, and then went to sleep. Time passed and settlement day eventually arrived. We moved into our new home. Despite our plethora of possessions and having two of everything, we were relatively settled after a few days. My furniture from Shanghai fitted perfectly, yet again.

Our home was about 10 minutes' walk from the beach. I walked regularly, sometimes with Andrew but mostly on my own. I thought about the woman I had become lately. I meant this happy and balanced me, walking along the beach,

sharing my life with Andrew, writing, travelling to Asian countries and enjoying time with family and friends. I wondered if we were aliens to ourselves and whether the only way we gained a sense of who we were was through another's eyes.

Andrew and I were completely different in the way we operated in the world, his practical life and mine which focused on ideas. Yet we seemed to understand each other very well. I thought of the difficulties I had endured before getting to this space. Now I had Andrew to help sort out any challenges that confronted us:

“We will do it together, don't worry,” he would say.

I wrote a poem about walking beside the calm sea and my soul opening up like a lotus in the mud, welcoming a new beginning. Once I had thought that all that mattered was a career and, after the break-up with Tyson, just wanted to live alone in peace. I could never be in one place any more. One day while sunning myself sleepily on the boat, I sat up suddenly as Andrew excitedly pulled in a double-header of whiting. I waited patiently while he took out the hooks and placed the writhing fish into a bucket of sea water:

“You know, perhaps we could buy a place in Bali one day. We both love it there.”

“Yes, we could set up a small import and export business between Bali and Australia.”

I knew we could never live together in Shanghai because it would be too difficult. I slowly realized that I was trying to put into practice what I already knew, that I could not live solely in one place any more. Once an expat always an expat, I thought then.

One of my Australian expatriate friends felt that she could always travel to other places in her mind. Sometimes before I went to sleep and particularly when

feeling stressed, I would close my eyes and walk the streets of Shanghai. Another friend felt that Shanghai had formed her and her views on life. Others perceived Shanghai as a catalyst towards living in another different country. Most did not want to go home because they felt that there was nothing much going on in Australia. I could not imagine moving on from Shanghai and becoming attached to another place, just yet. Had Shanghai been a catalyst catapulting me into another direction? Was Bali calling me as Shanghai had done? Andrew's voice brought me back to reality from my musing:

“I love you; you are my lifelong partner,” said Andrew fondly.

“Me too, I will never leave you.”

Later that year, Andrew and I attended my son Jake's wedding to Anita in North Queensland. Anita's German relatives travelled from Southern Bavaria and my siblings and their partners came up from Adelaide to attend. The wedding took place on a grassy knoll above a surf beach. Anita wore a long ivory dress, embellished with silver beading at the neckline and a flower in her blonde hair. Jake, dressed in a navy blue suit, stood next to her. The celebrant conducted the ceremony whilst competing with the waves which crashed noisily to the shore.

My ex-husband Gunar's hair looked very grey in the sunlight. He spoke to me but hardly glanced in Andrew's direction. Friends had remarked that unlike his ex-wife, Gunars did not seem to have done a lot in the intervening years, except to retire. I was pleased that we were now able to communicate in a friendly manner, much different to the early years after our divorce in the mid-1990s:

“Well, Kristen, our job is now over.”

“I guess it is, Gunars, I guess it is.”

Gunars was right for once. I looked at my two tall sons. Ethan, dressed in a pink shirt and navy suit, stood adjacent to Jake. We had done well: our sons have turned out just fine.

Adelaide: December 2011.

It was a sunny morning with clear, blue skies as Andrew and I walked to the beach. We could see the jetty reaching out to the sea ahead of us. People milled around the cafés and sat together enjoying their morning coffee. We stopped suddenly in front of a grand hotel overlooking the beach. A group of people were gathered together. We realized it was a small wedding party and easily picked out the groom in a dark suit and the bride in a long cream dress:

“What a lovely idea, an early morning wedding.”

“Yes it is, and they will probably have a breakfast reception at the hotel.”

“What a wonderful way to get married. Once the guests go, the bride and groom have all day to take off for their honeymoon.”

We continued walking along the beach in silence. I chuckled as Andrew said something about arriving in a boat for the wedding ceremony. When we returned from our walk, the wedding party had gone.

“Probably having breakfast now,” said Andrew.

“Yes, it looks like it.”

I am not sure why, but something warm and fuzzy moved inside me then. As time passed, I could not forget the image of the morning wedding party near the beach.



After the walk, I lay down on the bed and closed my eyes while Andrew busied himself in the garden. Another vision appeared of white sand, a Balinese-style villa and tropical foliage. A golden moon shone above, almost as bright as the sun. Buddha statues at local temples, monks striding across courtyards in their orange robes and a sea of smiling faces blinded my sight like something of extraordinary beauty, a divine inspiration.

I awoke suddenly to the white of dawn breaking across the windows. Magpies chirped and green parrots screeched as they flew in and out of a gigantic palm tree across the road. I badly wanted to rush towards a happy ending to this “bare stroke of a dream”, that I held close to my heart. I looked fondly across at Andrew, lying peacefully asleep next to me. I knew now that life was just not like that.

Philosopher Ivan Tillich in *The Courage to Be* said as my fellow expatriates had echoed: “We must stand up, even in the dark.” Perhaps Shanghai had taught me that. But she had done much more; she had irretrievably changed me: although essentially the same, I was a much different person than I had been before the city and I had met. Shanghai thrust me into the potter’s wheel, then moulded me like a potter does the clay.

PART III: THE SHADOW JOURNEY: SHANGHAI

INTRODUCTION**Shadow**

My close companion
 Is now long, now short, now invisible
 Wherever it comes, light
 Creates a many-shaped me
 At times I drag it along when I walk
 At times stomping at it
 I stomp at my heart, my head,
 My own thought ...
 (Dou Si/Tou Ssu in Julia C. Lin, ed., *Twentieth-Century, Chinese Women's Poetry*,
 2009:126)

Adelaide: Autumn 2012.

Shadow, I thought, yes, this will be my *shadow journey* to Shanghai, like an inseparable companion to all former visits. I would not have to think about it any more, dragging the memories along with me as I walked the streets at home. I would be there. Perhaps distance from my former journey to Shanghai would provide me with new insights.

As I packed, I felt excited about meeting some fellow expatriates, catching up with my Chinese friends and planning which familiar and new places I would visit. That was before we heard the news which made my stomach cramp and my left knee give way. It was before I saw Andrew's smile, not his usual one which spread readily across his face, but a brave strained effort.

The shadow journey was a conscious and deliberate visit to Shanghai which I undertook for research purposes, but also because I felt compelled to go. In a way, it was like the equivalent of a writing retreat where one could expect some transformation to occur. I wanted to go back in time and remember what it was like to live in Shanghai. My feelings about living in Shanghai and how I felt when I returned this time should be recorded; otherwise, they would be irrevocably lost.

Let's first go back to the real world ... I remembered a sunny Autumn day one week before my departure as I drove to the hospital to pick Andrew up after a

colonoscopy. He would be fine, I thought then, just a polyp. This was before his specialist said on 30th April 2012, “it’s likely to be a malignant cancer, I am so sorry for the news.” I had not slept well since Andrew’s diagnosis. I did not know what to do – to stay or to go?

My right knee was bandaged with a support stocking under my jeans. I made a last-minute check of my bags to ensure that I had all the documents required for the research interviews I would be conducting with Chinese and western expatriates in Shanghai and Hong Kong. I had not visited Shanghai since June 2010, I mused while waiting for an evening flight to Sydney. Tears fell silently as I said goodbye to Andrew at Adelaide Airport. His eyes were moist and he said, as he had insisted many times:

“You must go. You must go to Shanghai. It is important for your book. I will be very disappointed if you don’t go.”

“But, I ...”

“There is nothing you can do, nothing.”

I knew that my protests would be useless. The day after I left Adelaide, Andrew underwent bowel surgery. We had put in place a plan to cut my trip short if the news was not good. His brother Robert and his wife Jayne would look after Andrew after the operation. Of course, although grateful, it compounded my guilt. *I should* be there, I thought then, *I should* be there.

I felt as though I was falling apart inside and tried to focus on the interviews ahead, to calm myself. I think some friends thought I should cancel the trip: they did not understand the effort put in to set up the interviews nor how integral they were to the research I was doing. They also did not realize how hard it was for me, feeling torn in half and sick in the middle.

Sydney: May 2012.

The sun shone as I looked out of my son Ethan's home at North Cammeray. He and his wife Jemma were holidaying in the United States and had offered me a place to stay prior to my connecting flight to Shanghai the following day. From the balcony, I could see an ancient stone bridge rising out of the green hills which led towards Sydney. To the right, large palms flanked the garden of the house next door. I sat down on the deck chair. I thought about seeing my eldest son Ethan when Andrew and I had been to Sydney for a weekend. We were waiting at the airport for Ethan to collect us. As he walked towards us, I could not believe that this tall man in a suit, with his dark hair curling back in the front, was my now grown-up eldest son.

But he was much more than that. Ethan is more sensitive than one would pick up based on appearance. He liked to present as a "cool" guy. But I remembered when Ethan really needed me – when, for example, he crashed his car into a tree; our Rottweiler "Brunis" died of cancer; a relationship broke up; and he had difficulties settling back to life in Australia after coming back from London. I felt he was very happy with Jemma whom he had met in London and known for several years. After all, a mother knows these things.

The sun had gone down. It was almost Winter and the evenings were cold. I went inside the house and took one of my son's t-shirts from the wardrobe to put over my nightie to keep me warm at night. I tried to call Andrew again but he had not had surgery. Later I called and managed to speak to him in recovery. His voice was gruff, with no tone. The surgery had gone well, but we did not yet know the results. I slept soundly cuddled up in Ethan's t-shirt and with one of his bears that I found on the bed.

I woke around 7 a.m. The sun shone through the bedroom windows. I showered, put on my knee bandage and dressed warmly. As I sat down to a breakfast of toast, jam and coffee, I heard a text on my mobile phone: “It will be keyhole surgery,” Andrew’s text read. Relief flooded through and over me. I did thank God then as I had many times over the previous days. I tried not to think about what the outcome may be but just kept focusing on what I had to do. The days ahead were difficult but Andrew improved daily. My fellow Chinese and western expatriates who I met on the shadow journey gave me strength although they knew nothing of the burden I carried.

I did not tell them. I tried to be professional. I did not know then that Andrew would recover fully. I look back now and think that we did it; we got through the challenges as a team, stood up in the dark. Things could have turned out very differently. I recalled writing down my feelings about being in another country while Andrew had surgery and during his early days of recovery. Somehow it helped to write a poem about the “shadow journey”.

I interviewed 11 people: one teacher (Australian); three entrepreneurs (Australian); two strategists (Australian and English); one artist (Australian); three writers (Australian and Chinese); and one architect (Dutch). I admired the entrepreneurial abilities and creative works of these “movers and shakers”, as I listened carefully to their stories about life in China. I saw them as the Chinese version of *Tide Players*, as described by writer Jianying Zha in her book. Tide players take risks in living their lives according to their beliefs. The expatriates’ stories may shed light on how their experiences in a country which is now experiencing unprecedented transformation would change them forever. In most

cases, they did not want to go home, but were motivated to go to another foreign country.

I appreciated their honesty in talking to me about the challenges they faced in China and at home, how they perceived themselves as global citizens and their plans for the future. Rebecca Saunders in *The Concept of the Foreign* commented that globalization shuffles identities and “realigns the borders of belonging”, so that the expatriates seemed to be much more at home in Shanghai, than in their own countries.

Whilst in Shanghai I caught up with some of my Chinese friends and learnt how they had moved on in their lives. I visited old haunts and my former apartment to observe any changes. I found other interesting places to visit and took many photographs so that I could remember the detail, attest my experience and promote realism for the reader. Of course, these activities ensured that my fellow expatriate experiences, together with mine, would never be forgotten, nor would our memories of Shanghai.

EARLY DAYS: 2012**The Shadow Journey**

How close I feel to you
 at this time and before.
 as if joined by an imaginary tie
 that stretches across oceans, landscape
 and the sky ...

As one: pulls, the other tenses.
 wakes, the other dreams.
 walks in a strange, but familiar land,
 the other merges with those held close.

As one: texts, the other opens.
 goes under the surgeon's knife,
 the other is cut free.

As one heals,
 the other thanks the one above; repeatedly.

They as their parents before them, stand tall,
 even in the blackest of nights ...

(Christine Lavender, unpublished, May, 2012)

Shanghai: 11th May 2012.

The flight to Shanghai is packed as is the airport on arrival. Massive cone-like towers litter both sides of the road as the taxi speeds towards downtown Shanghai. I do not remember seeing them before and assume they are something to do with powering this rapidly expanding city. I feel apprehensive on entering the city again after two years. The language barrier hits home like a brick wall.

I showed the hotel's business card to the taxi driver to ensure that he knew where to go. The traffic seemed even busier than before and, in some places, was bumper to bumper as we neared downtown Shanghai. Over one hour later, I realized that the taxi driver was lost. I remembered where we were, pointed to the opposite side of the road and directed him to take the turn-off to the Changning District.

The young girl at the hotel reception insisted that I pay more than the cost of my total stay for a deposit. After I threatened to talk to the manager, she reluctantly agreed to me paying the hotel bill in advance. I felt weary and my right knee ached as I unpacked my suitcase. It was now 7 p.m. in the evening in Shanghai. The haze

of the late afternoon had disappeared. I wondered why, when daily living was so challenging for a foreigner, that I had chosen to come back.

I looked out of the window on the 20th floor to the tall buildings lit up in different colours across the velvet sky. The streets were full with cars, taxis and bicycles. I shut my eyes and heard the familiar hum of the traffic. My body relaxed. I realized that this may be my last visit and felt anxious about how I would say goodbye to Shanghai and my good Chinese friends when the time came for me to leave.

12th May 2012. The Fabric Market and the Tailor.

As the taxi stopped at the address the hotel had given me, I realized that I was at a different location but could not explain this to the driver. The Fabric Market is now called *The Fabric, Silk and Wool Spinning Market* and had shifted to near the Bund. I walked through the entrance of the three-storey fabric market. I loved the bolts of cloth divided into silks, cottons, linen and wool. I recalled having a cheongsam made when I lived in Shanghai. I sauntered from table to table gazing intently at the variety of fabrics. I selected some Chinese silk, printed corduroy and a charcoal jersey fabric. I then hailed a taxi to Ms Yu, the tailor at Tianshan Lu.

When in Shanghai, I always took the opportunity to have some clothes made because it was less expensive than at home, the quality was better and the tailor could copy clothes of my choice from a fashion magazine. Of course, part of the reason for me now was that, over the years, Ms Yu had become a good friend.

I walked through a large stone and wrought iron gate and past the tall apartment blocks. A group of men were playing mah-jong under the trees. I entered an old apartment building and located Ms Yu's office to the right. To the left of her office, several employees were busy sewing fabric in a tiny workshop:

“Hi, Kristen, how are you?”

“Great to be here and to see you again.”

“I am so glad you are in Shanghai.”

Ms Yu with her new short cropped hairstyle looked much younger than before. Her husband also a tailor joined her, shaking my hand several times. Ms Yu was keen to know why I was in Shanghai so she called her American friend who translated for us: I could then explain that I was there on a research visit. Ms Yu passed me a copy of a magazine, *That's Shanghai*, and helped me to locate the recent article in which her story was published as one of seven stories about Chinese people who “made something from nothing”:

Ms Yu, aged 43 years, made 10 RMB (A\$1.50) a week in her first year as a tailor. Today she owns two homes in Shanghai and a flourishing business. Ms Yu grew up on a farm, graduating from middle school at 16 years. Her parents paid a tailor 10 kg of rice per month to teach her to sew. After her apprenticeship, she mastered making thick winter clothes from an uncle who was a tailor. She made about 500 RMB (A\$80) per year. In 1986, in Shanghai she worked for a hotel from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. and earned about 7 RMB (A\$1) per day. She felt she could not give up then, because she would have to go back to the countryside. After about two years, she set up a table in a fabric store for business and met another tailor. They married and combined their businesses. Today, she has five employees who do most of the sewing. While her husband cuts and designs, Ms Yu concentrates on sales and marketing. With 26 years' experience, Ms Yu can make almost anything from tailored suits to wedding dresses, fur coats and traditional Chinese garments. Her clientele consists of 40 per cent foreigners. (Excerpt from *That's Shanghai*, January 2011:37).

13th May 2012. The Apartment and Soong Ching-Ling's Residence.

Shanghai was overcast and drizzling with rain as I walked down Huai Hai Lu to Dr Sun Yat-Sen's and Soong Ching-Ling's residence at Number 1843. A guard manned the entrance. A large marble statue of Soong Ching-Ling seated in a chair marked the entrance to the large European-style villa. The garden was more beautiful than I could have seen from the fifth floor of my former apartment. Besides the camphor trees, it included camellias, magnolias and many varieties of lush plants.



I walked through the European-style villa which somehow felt familiar. Perhaps because I now knew something of Soong Ching-Ling's life and the fact that she had lived it very close to mine but during another era. The garage displayed two of Soong Ching-Ling's limousines which she called "Hongqi" and "Jim" respectively. The latter vehicle was presented to her by Stalin in 1952. I tried in vain

to locate my former apartment from where I stood, but the majestic camphor trees successfully blocked my view. Maybe it was better that way, I thought.

Later, I strolled past my former apartment on the corner of Haushan Lu and Huai Hai Lu. The former street was blocked off from traffic as major construction work was taking place. I observed bulldozers in the street nearby. Later, Tony informed me that an underground train station was being built. I asked Tony if this would affect the selling price of the apartment because of the noise.

Tony looked at me in surprise: “Oh no, Kristen, Chinese people like a train station to be very close to where they live; it adds to the value of the apartment and they can get to their workplace very quickly.”

Shanghai: 14th May 2012. Dong Tai Lu Antique Market and the Bird, Fish and Flower Market.

I woke around 7 a.m., somewhat later than normal. As I drew back the curtains, I noticed that Shanghai looked misty with humidity and perhaps pollution which tends to be worse in the Summer months.

Although I had the market address in Chinese, the taxi driver could not find it. I got out of the cab in frustration and paid him slightly less than the fare. He insisted Dong Tai Lu was in Pudong but I knew it was not. “*Mei, mei* (no, no),” I said loudly. I have been there before. I hailed another taxi, showing the driver the address who then nodded in recognition. The streets around Dong Tai Lu looked pretty with green trees forming an arch over the market stalls.

The shoe-shine man who seemed to appear from nowhere motioned me to sit down and have my boots cleaned. The man’s face was tanned and marked with lines, but his eyes twinkled as he smiled up at me from a kneeling position. I will

never forget that face. I could see the Red Guards as they banged gongs, marched the streets and looted houses in Shanghai, reflected in his eyes. I put my feet up on his small wooden stool which was cracked and lined from repeated use. I smiled as the shoe-shine man tried to extract more money from me while he cleaned my boots. Several months ago, Andrew had his shoes polished at this market and probably by the same man. I purchased four photos of old Shanghai to use in my research – three of the Bund area and one of Soong Ching-Ling and Dr Sun Yat-Sen on their marriage day in Japan.

During mid-morning, I walked across the road to the *Bird, Fish and Flower Market* which I located easily although I had not been there for two years. I heard the crickets chirping and shuddered as a Chinese man bought a very large cricket in a purple cage, proudly showing me his purchase. Crickets are considered very lucky in China. Another man was selling tortoises and held one out for me to touch. I patted its smooth shell and held one of its clawed feet. As a child, I had always wanted a tortoise.

At one end of the market, a group of Chinese men and one woman were playing a card game at the back of one of the stalls. Strings of honeycomb-shaped cricket cages cascaded from the walls. The noise of the resident crickets, dogs, birds, cats, fish and people chatting was deafening. The mix of smells clung to my nostrils as I exited the market.



Later in the afternoon, I enjoyed a coffee at a shop in downtown Shanghai. It was crowded with Chinese people and expats – all youngish between mid-20s and 40s. Shanghai is a young city. I felt more at home. I turned my thoughts to the interviews which would begin tomorrow.

THE TEACHER: Grace

Shanghai: 15th May 2012.

It was mid-morning as I waited for Grace in a small café in Xian Xia Lu. We had not met before but recognized each other immediately. Grace, an Australian expatriate, was Head of Department in English at an international school in Shanghai. I looked up to see her smiling down at me. She was of medium height, around late 40s, and wore her long fair hair up.

Grace had lived in Shanghai for almost four years. Twenty years ago she had studied at Fudan University in Shanghai, and has also lived in Harbin (North China) and Beijing. Grace said that she was in China during the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. “Lots of people were on the streets protesting, exciting times until the crackdown in 1989 and then a sobering experience afterwards. People repressed their feelings.”

She spoke fluent Mandarin. Grace did not see herself as an expatriate but just “as living somewhere else”. Grace said she appreciated the opportunities to be an English teacher, teach the international baccalaureate curriculum and subsequently be promoted to Head of Department. She commented that it would be difficult to obtain similar opportunities in Australia. Grace has two teenage children who were studying at the school where she worked. She felt that her family unit was tighter and that there were greater expectations by parents for students to do well in Shanghai than in Australia. Grace had been married to a Chinese husband who was the father of her two children and who had now remarried. One of the reasons she came to Shanghai was so her children could spend time with their Chinese family. She therefore felt attached to both China and Australia. She said that there was a lot of poverty in the outer suburb of Shanghai where she lived.

Grace said that she could live anywhere, but was aware also that some people couldn't. She felt fortunate to have had the experience of living and working in China and would like to have had a greater impact on the country. Grace said that pragmatically this was not possible for her. She indicated that she was looking forward to going home mid-year (2012) to Sydney but found the thought of finding work and a home again overwhelming.

15th May 2012. Good Chinese Friend.

I waited for Jenny on a street corner near Yan An Lu not far from the hotel where I was staying. We planned to have lunch in a Chinese restaurant in the nearby Gubei District. It was a hot Summer's day. Jenny who is of medium height and in her late 30s waved as she strode towards me. She chatted while spending most of the time over lunch trying to get a Chinese SIM card to work in my mobile phone. We did not have any success so Jenny gave me her spare phone to use whilst in Shanghai. I wondered if any of my Australian friends would be so generous. Jenny now managed a large block of 130 apartments and villas, mostly owned by the Japanese. She was also in charge of a new sales office which sold houses in Tokyo. These were much less expensive as a result of the tsunami in Japan in 2011. Jenny sold the houses to Chinese people at an average price of A\$10,000. I thought then, "where was Australia in all of this?" It seemed like a very good investment for Australian investors.

16th May 2012. Shanghai Library.

I typed up my first interview transcript in the morning at the hotel and planned a research visit to Shanghai Library in the afternoon. The hot sun shone as I climbed

the steps to the library entrance. I found it difficult to get a brochure in English, let alone to join the library as the fees were expensive. After trying to communicate my intention to a librarian, I gave up and ordered a coffee and cake from a Chinese girl who spoke very good English. I mused about the level of English in Shanghai whilst having a coffee. It did not seem to have improved since I first arrived in 2003.

My frustrating day was topped off, when back at the hotel restaurant, a young girl could not understand that I just wanted a meal in a box from a selection on the menu. I went away with a small tub of steamed rice. Oh well, I was in China and very aware that my level of Mandarin should be a lot better.

When I arrived back at the hotel, I noticed that a new microwave had been placed on top of the fridge in the kitchenette. I had asked Isaac, the manager, if I could have one during my stay. It would definitely help with daily meals. I knew that my request would not be met by a manager in an Australian hotel. In fact, it would be considered most unusual.

THE ARTIST: Isla

Shanghai: 17th May 2012.

Over a cup of Chinese tea in a teashop in the French Concession area, Isla told me her story. She was a self-employed artist, musician and yoga teacher and the mother of two children, a boy and a girl. Isla who was of medium height with dark, medium length hair described herself as half Irish and from Byron Bay, New South Wales. She was casually dressed in black leggings and a top because she had just come from teaching yoga to 30 pregnant Chinese women.

“A lot of people from Europe come to Shanghai because they can’t survive the collapsing economies,” said Isla.

I wondered if this situation was similar to Shanghai’s past when people of many different nationalities fled from wars and revolutions to the city. Shanghai was a safe haven for them. Isla expressed disappointment that her husband’s business in resource environments had folded in Shanghai and they had suffered a lot financially. She felt that there was not enough understanding about how to implement a business in China.

In contrast, her work had really come together in Shanghai. She found people accepting of the projects that she put forward but had experienced the opposite in Australia. She had also obtained a contract for three years with one of the largest yoga companies in Shanghai. Isla felt that her expatriate experiences in Shanghai were a wonderful combination with her past study. She liked to help others through yoga by connecting to their health and well-being.

Isla felt that being an expatriate had positively influenced her different projects. In the last 12 months she had put together a CD of *Slow Songs for a Fast World*. These were songs about emotional storytelling, resilience and the extremities

of climate in China, street names and directions home, experience of places, wishes and wishbones; for example, when looking at a wishbone after an Australian Christmas, making a wish with a sibling and transferring these ideas into another culture. She showed me a charcoal drawing of a series of wishbones.

Isla commented on the high fees to send their two children to international schools, that is, 65,000 RMB (A\$11,000) each year. They now attended a Chinese school. However, both Isla and her husband expressed concern that their children's English now lagged behind their Chinese and that they would have to do something about this in the future.

Isla said that she questioned the nature of "home" because the world had become global which was more obvious when away. She felt that "home" in Australia was disconnected from the rest of the world and that Shanghai was now her home. When she went back to Sydney, there were times where there was no one in the city area whereas, in Shanghai, there were always people around. She added that she was now more accepting of other cultures. Isla said she had some knowledge of China's past history and added that her husband's employees would often assert that either they did not remember Tiananmen Square or that it had not happened in 1989.

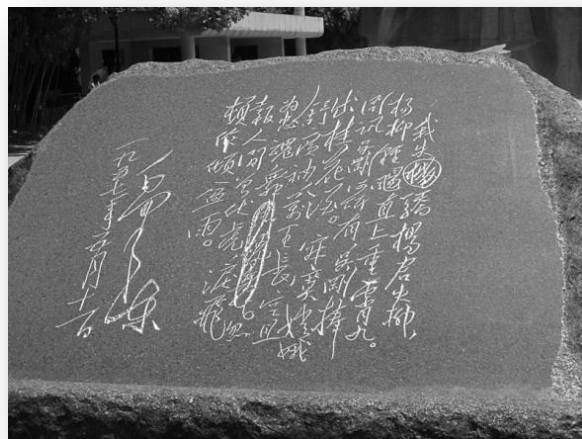
Isla perceived herself as a "global nomad" and felt that home was in more than one place. "The internet and technology have made the world smaller," she said. She described her work as global and that, although her physical presence was currently in Shanghai, the way that she expressed herself through art, music and yoga was global. She felt that Shanghai was where she and her family were supposed to be at the moment and that the "world" supported that decision:

I have a self-designed life. I can live here comfortably or somewhere else. I have an enhanced faith of where I am meant to be. My husband is happy and the lessons for our family unit are profound. It is much tighter in Shanghai than Australia. My husband is now helping me to expand my yoga business in Moganshan.

After we finished the interview, Isla invited me to her home which was once a mansion and looked down onto a lovely, unruly garden. I met her husband who was on his way out and the two children who had just come home from school. An *ayi* (Chinese housekeeper) was busily preparing dinner. Isla gave me some samples of her work and a book of paintings. I did not leave without a warm hug and invitation to come and listen to her play one evening at a local club in Shanghai. I felt that Isla's life as an expatriate had not been easy yet she had benefited in many ways. Isla represented someone who I perceived as a contemporary tide player in her creative life.

17th May 2012. Longhua Pagoda, Longhua Martyrs' Cemetery and Longhua Temple.

The afternoon was warm as I set out armed with a map. I took several photographs of Longhua Pagoda which was used as a lookout during the Japanese invasion of Shanghai. Longhua Pagoda was part of the Longhua Temple complex. The temple grounds were used as both a site for internment and for executions. I then walked across the street to the Longhua Martyrs' Cemetery which incorporated a museum for revolutionists, within a park which covered 200,000 square metres. There were works



carved in stone, including a poem by Chairman Mao Zedong. Mao's calligraphy was etched in gold, scrawled elegantly across the brown rock. Around 1,700 martyrs were murdered in the temple grounds.

In 1927, the Kuomintang carried out a purge of suspected communists in Shanghai who were brought to the temple grounds to be executed. Many of these were commemorated by the Longhua Martyrs' Cemetery behind the temple. The memorial was near the site of the Longhua Civilian Assembly Camp, where J.G. Ballard, author of the novel *Empire of the Sun*, was imprisoned as a young boy during the Japanese invasion.

As I walked around the park, I observed Chinese people practising tai chi and playing cards. Several massive marble sculptures which gleamed in the morning sun and seemed to emerge out of the lawn halted me in my tracks. Soldiers with rifles supported large objects like anchors. I realized that they represented the martyrs and the burdens they carried in their attempts to liberate China. Although some figures were depicted as angels and others' faces were distorted in pain, the statues appeared to be marching forwards.



I entered the museum. Pictures of the martyrs who had fought for the freedom and liberation of China since the 1840s, hung on the walls from floor to ceiling. The museum walls depicted the history of the Chinese Communist Party in July 1921 and the fight for freedom by the Chinese people against many nations,

including the Japanese. I realized that the revolutionists also fought against the “white terror” which included westerners like the British, Americans and Europeans to resist the taking over of the treaty port of Shanghai.

An embossed bronze picture covering a whole wall stopped me in my tracks. Suddenly a battlement opened. A wide, open Chinese face stared back at me. The tall man dressed in black pants, vest and white shirt carried a sharp instrument in his right hand as if to protect those upright and fallen, receding in a mass behind him. If I kept staring, I feared the face would fix itself to mine. The face insolent and clearer at every turn gazed too closely. What could it mean? Was he like a martyr demanding a response from a westerner, or did he want to justify an important cause?

I slunk around the gallery amongst some Chinese people. I felt my cheeks flush as I remembered that I was also a westerner. I recalled how many foreigners had treated the Chinese so poorly in the past. Not only that: thousands were injured and killed during its wars and revolutions. I felt very “foreign” then and distant as though I did not belong. I knew that, if it were not for the revolutionists who fought to ensure that China remained with the Chinese, they may have been slaves in their own country. The sun was shining as I exited the museum. At least in this instance, China had chosen to recognize its past. Something deep within me like a ghost voice told me that if China did not own *all* of its past, this may impact on future generations.

I walked slowly back through the exit from the park onto the street searching for a taxi. I heard snatches of Chinese opera. A middle-aged Chinese woman dressed in black trousers and a rust-coloured top had decided she had something to sing about in the street. Some Chinese people and a lone expatriate had gathered

around her to listen. As I walked further down the street, a Chinese woman sat reading on a stool, a book in one hand and an umbrella in the other. She smiled at me as I passed. That was what I loved about Shanghai: it was so outside the square, just like me.

THE STRATEGISTS: Sophie

Shanghai: 18th May 2012.

I arrived at Sophie's office located on Yan' An Lu and was asked to wait until the meeting finished. It was a very hot Summer's day in Shanghai so I was thankful to sit down and cool off in the air-conditioned waiting room. Sophie, a woman in her early 40s and executive director of an Australian expatriate organization, came out of the meeting room, took my hand and smiled warmly. She wore a grey tailored suit and white shirt. Her black heeled shoes finished the corporate look. We had met through different events that her organization held for Australian expatriates when I worked in Shanghai in the early 2000s.

Although Sophie had lived in Shanghai for a relatively long time (six years), she and her husband (an executive chef) had no plans to go back to Australia. Their two-year-old son was born there and they loved Shanghai. Sophie felt that it was important to be involved in the Australian community through linking up to her own culture and sharing frustrations about living in China with other expatriates.

She said that Shanghai was much more western than she had thought and that, in comparison to Australia, she found the pace of change very fast, business more open, there was a higher degree of risk taking and that moving through approval processes was much quicker. She perceived some of the challenges associated with living in Shanghai as being changes in regulations and in human resources (HR) recruitment and retention. She found that Chinese employees tended to jump around between jobs for little pay and that their parents often influenced the decision making. Sophie added that most of her employees were not comfortable talking about China's past history, for example, the events of Tiananmen Square.

Sophie has experienced difficulties with the language barrier and confessed that, at times, she got lost in taxis. She felt that the quality of western food products was not as good as in Australia, particularly for a child. Sophie's father had passed away about four weeks prior to the move to Shanghai which put her on an emotional roller-coaster. This was because she was required to simultaneously settle into a new position as well as deal with her father's affairs.

According to Sophie, being an expatriate had enriched both her husband's and her own career, compared to being in Australia where they would not get the same opportunities. She said that the scale of operations was quite different; for example, her husband may need to cater for 350 guests at a function in Shanghai. Sophie valued being able to connect with the multicultural population amongst expatriates in Shanghai and did not feel that this was possible to achieve in Australia. Sophie said that there were a lot of Europeans living in Shanghai who did not intend to go back to their home countries because of the collapsing economies. She gave an example of a large European company having had 10,000 redundancies. Shanghai felt like "home" for Sophie and although she knows her roots are in Sydney, she always wants to come home to Shanghai.

She indicated that she was very respectful of the Chinese and understood how the culture and exposure to China affected the rest of the world. Sophie was concerned about poverty amongst construction and migrant workers who left their families to work in the city for poor pay and often lived in containers on construction sites. She expressed an attachment for Shanghai and had no time frame as to how long her family might stay. She was looking forward to starting a new job with a larger company in Shanghai. Sophie admitted that she did have "China days" when she felt frustrated and needed to get out and take a break. She was now open

to living in other major cities in Asia in the future. She felt that she was more accepting of other cultures than prior to her expatriate experiences in Shanghai. Sophie said she had gained skills in trust building and in dealing with different personalities at a corporate level.

THE STRATEGISTS: Thomas

Shanghai: 18th May 2012.

I had met Thomas at the Adelaide Writers' Festival in March 2012 and we arranged to meet in Shanghai. It was a sunny day as I strode across the mall in Xiantindi to meet him at a Thai restaurant for lunch. I was early so I sat at a table outside. I stood up as Thomas arrived and we shook hands. He was dressed in black trousers, white shirt and tie which reflected his position as a strategist with a large private company in Shanghai. He was much taller than I remembered. Thomas is also a writer and has had a crime book published recently in which the plot is centred in Beijing.

Thomas has lived in Shanghai for 16 years and met his Chinese wife there. He was not posted to China but chose to live and work in Shanghai after being a student of Chinese language and history. His writing focuses upon contemporary Chinese consumer society and pre-1949 history. He said that being an expatriate has financial advantages in that he was more secure than most other artists and writers.

Thomas commented that China identified everyone foreign as "*loawai*" or an outsider. Thomas believes that his home is still in the UK because China did not welcome him as a permanent resident, so he did not connect with the country in that way. Of course, I did not interrupt Thomas. However, I could not help thinking that history dictates that China, both in the past and currently, has welcomed many different nationalities.

As Thomas visited the UK about three times per year, he did not find living in Shanghai to be as problematic: "it's not as if I have been away in a jungle for 20 years." As Thomas had grown up in a multicultural environment in London, he was already accepting of other cultures when he arrived in China: "for me with my upbringing, China is the most mono-cultural place I have ever lived." I wondered

why Thomas did not perceive China to be unique and a more challenging place to live as had been commented by other expatriates.

Thomas asserted that he is a Londoner first and attached to Shanghai only through his intellectual and writing interests. He described himself simply as “just an English guy who works and lives in China”. Thomas commented that his beliefs in democracy, human rights and freedom were much stronger than before, because he had now experienced living under communist rule:

... obviously growing up in Europe, these were givens and taken for granted – I am now more aware of the evil of one party states, communist parties and dictatorships.

After Thomas and I parted, I walked back across the mall to hail a taxi to the hotel. It seemed that Thomas did not want to identify himself with China or the Chinese but wanted to distance himself. I wondered if he had had some negative experiences which he did not want to disclose, or was it because he was a little stuck in the past? He obviously had a deep understanding of China’s past revolutions and tragedies with which one could not argue.

Were Thomas’s views too black and white in that he could not now see the “shades of grey?” Did western democracy have all the answers? After all, the Communist Party today has lifted millions of its people out of poverty and moved the country forward to being the biggest global economy in the world.

19th May 2012. To Zhouzhuang Water Town.

I looked out of the window of the 20th floor of my hotel to check the weather. The road below looked dark and shiny as did the rooftops of the buildings. I realized it was raining quite heavily. Jenny arrived about 30 minutes early with her friend Zhang and 10-year-old daughter Annie. Zhang was shorter than Jenny and quite stocky. They did not look “right” together and I became more convinced of this as

the day passed. He did not greet me when I got into the car and seemed quite aloof in contrast to Annie who had thrown her arms around me in delight.

Zhouzhuang was about a two-hour drive from Shanghai. After getting lost several times, we arrived at our destination late morning. Annie who loves pink – hair ties, jacket, shoes and backpack – played with her mother’s iPad in the back seat. Zhang parked his car near the town and we walked along a muddy path to the entrance. The town consisted of ancient buildings with traditional Chinese roofs which were surrounded by a maze of canals. It reminded me of what I had seen of Venice in photographs. Chinese bridges which formed arches over the canals were gradually becoming crowded with visitors.

Willow trees gracefully arched over the edge of the canals. Wooden boats steered by Chinese men and women dressed in blue mackintoshes glided up and down the water. The cobbled streets were filled with a maze of brightly coloured umbrellas bobbing up and down as the rain continued to pour down. Traditional handicrafts dominated the stalls within the old houses. We walked past several large birds which were sitting on the edge of a boat. A Chinese woman dressed in the traditional garb of blue raincoat and bamboo hat stood nearby. She appeared to be watching over them.

“Quick, quick, get a picture. I will hold your umbrella for you,” said Jenny.

“Are these special birds?” I asked.

“They are trained to catch fish. Quick, get a picture before you are asked to pay,” laughed Jenny.

As we walked away Jenny told me a little more about the birds.

“Cormorants are very clever birds. Each has its own character – some are hard workers, but others are very lazy. Fishermen train the cormorants using throat

twine, which allows the birds to guzzle smaller fish, but prevents them from eating the larger ones. They understand many commands – a few of them even know how to swear,” laughed Jenny.



During the day Zhang did not hold Jenny’s hand nor walk close to her but was often several metres behind. Jenny seemed to initiate conversation with Zhang most of the time. I wondered if it were a difference in culture or if he were shy. I remembered Jenny saying that they broke up before because she had a daughter. I wondered if he had a problem with commitment. Zhang reminded me of Tyson who, when we first met and even after we lived together, would walk ahead, leaving me trailing behind, or would actually disappear in public places. I felt insecure then as though he did not really want to be with me.

Jenny commented that she thought I was lucky in life which made me feel uncomfortable. She had little idea of what I had been through with Tyson, the recent loss of my mother or my concerns about Andrew’s health. She would have been more enlightened had I been in Shanghai. Emails failed to adequately convey grief, loss or stress.

After a traditional Chinese lunch in a restaurant overlooking the canals, we walked towards a large Buddhist temple surrounded by a lake. Jenny purchased two fish, made a wish and then set them free in the water. We then purchased some incense which she lit and then made further wishes: “for good health,” she said. We were all quite damp but happy as we headed back towards Zhang’s car in the mid-afternoon with Annie grasping my hand in her small one to help me over the muddy puddles.

Shanghai: 20th May 2012. Good Friends.

I woke around 7 a.m. and sent Andrew a text for his birthday. I felt the tension of a long distance relationship then. Andrew seemed very “black and white” in his thoughts lately. He did not want to discuss anything with me relating to his health. He told me that it was all under control and that I must not worry. Andrew’s voice was different – flat and kind of rough. I thought that this was probably as a result of the anaesthetic and that, in time, it would get back to normal.

The rain had finally stopped and I stayed in bed a little longer because it was also Sunday. Later I rose and worked on my laptop. The phone rang just before 2 p.m. to let me know that Tony whom I had arranged to meet was waiting for me downstairs. I gathered the gifts I had purchased for Tony and Mia’s new baby girl. As I got into the lift, I mused about the fact that she would be the only child they would ever have due to China’s “one-child” policy. In Shanghai, if the man or woman had another sibling, they could only have one child. If not, they were allowed to have two children. Tony and Mia both had siblings.

In the lobby, I found Tony, my close Chinese friend who had helped me over the years in buying, renovating and eventually selling my apartment in Shanghai. As we hugged, I realized he was taller than I remembered and had filled

out a little. Marriage and family life obviously suited him. He was much more settled in his life than when I had first met him as a student in Shanghai. Tony had now completed his MBA as had his wife Mia, my former secretary. The traffic was less busy today as Tony drove me to a ticket office in Xinhau Lu to purchase a train ticket. I planned to go to Hangzhou next weekend.

Tony also had plans for this weekend: “Kristen, would you like to come to our house and see Mia and our new baby?”

“Oh yes, that would be great; but we must stop at a bakery so I can get something for afternoon tea.”

“Oh no, Kristen, don’t worry. In China, the mother is confined for one month after a new baby and has to be very careful about what she eats. It is Chinese tradition.”

As Tony drove towards their apartment near Hongquiao Airport, he told me about his new research position with a real estate company. We reached their apartment on the 14th floor. Tony opened the door and introduced me to an elderly couple, Mia’s parents, who would stay with them for about six months to help with the new baby. Tony directed me towards their bedroom. Mia who was half lying on her side stood up awkwardly, with one arm supporting her back, to greet me. As she straightened her flannelette pajamas and swept back the glossy black hair from her face, I recognized her as the Mia I knew so well.

“How are you going, Mia?”

“I can’t sit, only stand or lie down.”

“Why?”

“The doctors cut me to have the baby. When it was the first child, they always did this in China.”

“But why?”

“Because it was quicker. There were 10 other mothers waiting to have their babies the day I had mine. I was the first one. They all had caesareans. I was the only one to have mine naturally,” explained Mia proudly.

“Did the doctors or nurses give you anything to soothe the pain?”

“No, nothing, nothing at all,” said Mia as I helped her to lie down on the sofa.

I began to sense that her smile which might have been masking her true feelings of physical pain and hurt was a sort of protective detachment that Chinese people needed in order to survive. Perhaps it had been passed down through the generations. I guess there were just too many babies being born in China, although I also understood that the Chinese could be very tough in some instances.

Before I left, Tony and Mia discussed a name for the baby. They had previously asked me to suggest an English name. After some research, I emailed a few names, one of which was *Scarlett*. Tony said they both liked the name but had to follow Chinese tradition in their choice. I was not sure if they meant they needed to refer to the Chinese Zodiac calendar. Tony and Mia did, however, decide on Scarlett as the English name for their baby girl, together with a Chinese name. I looked down at little Scarlett in the crib which had been set on the dining room table. Although only about three kilograms in weight, her limbs were long as were her fingers, which curled tightly around mine.

As Mia was unable to go out, Tony took me to a Chinese restaurant near their home for dinner. It was in an unusual hexagonal-shaped building and very popular because it filled quickly with local Chinese people and their families. Tony

and I relaxed over a beer because it was easier to talk then in “Chinglish” or a mixture of Chinese and English.

THE ENTREPRENEURS: Amelia

Shanghai; 21st May 2012.

It was a sunny afternoon as I hailed a taxi to Fuzhou Lu, once a “red light” district in downtown Shanghai. I visited the Foreign Language Bookstore and purchased a memoir by author Tim Clissold, *Mr China*. I wanted some good reading at night, particularly when there was only one English channel on the hotel television. I walked up and down the street and took some photos of the artists’ shops and of a Chinese man singing and playing an unusual traditional instrument on the street.

Later in the afternoon, I went to a restaurant located in the Bund area to meet with Amelia, a well-known entrepreneur in Shanghai, who was also closely involved in its literary community. I took the lift up to the restaurant and then selected a seat outside on the rooftop to wait for Amelia. One of the senior staff informed me that she would be a little late and brought me a black cashmere shawl because it was quite fresh and windy outside. He also set some fresh coffee and sweets on the table.

I looked out at the magnificent view across the Huangpu River to the buildings on the opposite side – the Pearl Tower, the Shangri-La Hotel and others. I heard a loud hoot as a ship glided down the calm river. As I took in the view, I remembered that I had been to the restaurant before. I closed my eyes and could see Tyson sitting next to me. I shut my eyes again and saw my eldest son Ethan, smiling widely back at me in the sunlight, as I took his photo against this grand view. He was attending a work conference in Shanghai back then in the mid-2000s.

Amelia flounced in and apologized profusely for being late. She wore a deep green top which flattered her auburn hair and was taller than I had imagined. She was not unlike me, in that her views of Australia were that some of its inhabitants

were parochial, narrow and racist towards developing countries and developed ones like China. Amelia lives between three cities: Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing and has been a semi-resident of Shanghai since 1996-97. She has also lived as an expatriate in Athens, the United States and Europe.

Amelia did not really see herself as an expatriate because she left Australia about 35 years ago and only went back for brief periods to visit her family. She said that the last time she went home, she felt like a “fish out of water”. She felt that no one was doing very much which was fine for them, but certainly not for her.

Amelia explained that establishing a business in Shanghai in the late 1980s when there had been no high-end restaurant was difficult. Her challenges were compounded by the fact that there was no precedent and because she was female. She felt that she was at a pioneering stage and it was stressful. Amelia has also found having a public face very difficult. She disliked people putting her on a pedestal or inviting her to events just so they could say they had asked her. Amelia found it difficult to fit regular things into her life, such as going to the dentist or the hairdresser because she lives between three cities.

Amelia said that she had learnt a lot about Chinese history through being involved in particular projects, the most recent being concerned with building bath houses in rural China. Her face lit up when she talked about them. She expressed amazement at the trauma Chinese people over 50 years of age had experienced. Whilst working on a recent project, Amelia was surprised to meet an elderly woman with bound feet and wondered how she had entered poverty. Only the wealthy Chinese had bound feet.

Amelia perceived that Tiananmen Square was a western construct and only one episode in China’s history. She believed that: “westerners imposed their

colonial views of prejudice and racism on other countries and that these were rife in the first world.” She was involved with networks and groups in Shanghai, but only those in which she felt she could make a real difference. Amelia has made a valuable contribution to the international literary community through establishing an annual festival and a literary residency programme in Shanghai.

Amelia said that as she had left Australia many years ago, her expatriate experiences had not only changed her but had also formed her. She thought that living in a place that you knew well was very different to knowing it as a visitor who could not really get a grip on it. Amelia always wanted to do something different and to not have her life mapped out for her, for example, a traditional marriage, home, children and grandchildren.

Despite Amelia’s relaxed “Aussie” style, she felt that she no longer belonged in Australia but was now just a visitor. In Amelia’s view, “home” was not in one place and that for her this notion did not include Australia. Amelia was attached to lots of places that she had visited and spent some time in, for example, Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong.

She thought that a new breed of people was emerging who would live in a couple of cities and that working across different countries brought people together. Amelia perceived herself as a global citizen and said that increasingly more people would become global citizens who identified and felt part of the world. She said she did not remember herself as the 20 year old she was when she left Australia and felt alien from that person now:

As a grown-up, I have always been an expatriate. I was once a terrified young girl who left Australia with a ticket to London and had about two friends. Now I know people all over the world.

Amelia armed me with a number of gifts associated with her restaurant and projects. The sun shone brightly as I walked outside. There was a spring in my step and a smile on my face. I had at last met a kindred spirit.

THE ENTREPRENEURS: James and Millie

Shanghai: 21st May 2012.

I had known both James and Millie during my expatriate experiences in Shanghai. James was CEO of an education company and Millie, at that time, was a “trailing spouse”, but only for a while! Both had previous expatriate experience in Fiji. One of James’s former roles was as a television producer for Channel Nine in Adelaide. James was in his early 70s: Millie, a little younger in her mid-60s, wore tailored black pants and a grey and cream top.

They now live in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales but still have connections with Shanghai and visit periodically. They were on one of these visits when I met them for coffee in Xiantindi. I stood up to greet them as they approached the restaurant. Jim, tall and thinner than I remembered, wore dark trousers and a checked sports jacket. Together they formed a strong couple.

Both James and Millie said that they had experienced personal trauma when they were required to go back to Australia when their parents passed away. James also had an operation in a Chinese hospital and although he found this a challenging experience, he had nothing but praise for the doctors. They found living in Shanghai exciting but sometimes difficult. It was important to be able to understand the culture and social mores, and to have the skills to adapt to a different environment.

James said it was particularly important for an expatriate to be able to adapt to the business practices in China which were bound by regulations and societal expectations. He found it difficult to cope with Australians who did not understand the culture and were ignorant about how to go about business in China.

Millie said that she went to Shanghai with James as a “team” and that they probably came back still the same and knowing more about each other. Although

she went to Shanghai as a trailing spouse, Millie then set up a successful manufacturing business of her own and worked part-time as a teacher. She felt totally in control of her life then, as opposed to James who had to deal with the dramas of being responsible for an “ignorant western organization”. James preferred to operate under a Chinese organization rather than a western democratic government because things got done. In Australia, there were repeated meetings and preparation of planning documents which took a lot of time.

They felt that their expatriate experiences had changed them in that they were more accepting of other cultures and had a better understanding and consideration of all people. James felt that in Shanghai there was a level of honesty and that it was now a harmonious society unlike home. James and Millie admitted feeling alienated, out of place or out of kilter on their return home and that it had been very difficult to adjust back in the first two years. Millie added that: “it took ages to re-engage with family and friends, work colleagues and resulted in some casualties, in that some relationships never recovered.”

Millie said that she became frustrated when hearing judgments and ill-informed opinions about the culture and politics of other countries, particularly China. Both distrusted the media and believed that there was no doubt that it had the power to hide or to distort information. James, in particular, felt that Australia was over-dominated by commercial media and that 24 million people were being brainwashed. He added that, in Australia, there was greater media intensity than in any other country with too much focus on personalities. Both Millie and James perceived that it was difficult to be a global citizen and that this was also dependent on other factors. James said that, “up to the age of 50-55 years, you think you can

live anywhere, but something seems to kick in between the ages of 60-70 years when searching for the more familiar seems more attractive.”

Millie and James were due to go back to Australia a few days later. I felt that they missed Shanghai and the life they had there as expatriates. In some ways, their life in Australia seemed a little harder. James still kept an eye out for senior jobs in Shanghai. I was tired when I returned to my hotel. I recalled the happy times when James, Millie and I had talked over dinners in Shanghai. I remembered well a trip that Millie and I had taken to Suzhou, a water canal town about one hour out of Shanghai. We were happy as we bargained for the purchase of some fresh water pearls for her retail business and fabric for ourselves to keep Ms Yu busy.

Shanghai: 21st May 2012: Reflections

I thought about what Amelia had said about feeling she did not fit in at home in Australia. Millie said that it took a long time to settle back with her family and friends. A number of comments were made by other expatriates to whom I had spoken that there was nothing much happening in Australia. I wrestled with these thoughts while pouring a glass of wine at the end of the day. I realized that I felt the way they did. Back at home, people just got on with their traditional lives. They seemed happy and did not take risks but perhaps they didn't know any different. I wondered what made some people take risks which seemed the more difficult path, while others would take an easier road by not taking risks.

Although I was attached to my birthplace, I believed that now I had lived and worked in a foreign country I would never really fit in again, no matter how hard I tried. There was always a yearning to go back there or even somewhere else just as foreign. Although Adelaide was my birthplace, I did not fit in. I was “outside

the square”. I felt more comfortable in Shanghai. Yet realistically and for practical reasons, I could never live there long term again. Also, perhaps this was because there was some truth in an old Chinese saying: “you can never step into the same river twice”.

THE ARCHITECT: Damian

Shanghai: 22nd May 2012.

I dressed with the interview in mind in smart casual attire. I felt the cool breeze through my hair as I hailed a taxi for Haiting Lu in the French Concession area. It was mid-morning when I entered a compound through a large iron gate on my way to meet with Damian at his office. A Chinese man knelt beside his child saying “*whoosh, whoosh*”, as he encouraged him to pee on the accumulated vine leaves along the edge of the laneway. I peered into a couple of offices looking for Damian and wondered how we would recognize each other. A tall man dressed in grey trousers and a white shirt came out of one of the offices.

“You must be Kristen. Welcome to Shanghai,” said Damian.

“Thanks, Damian, great to meet you.”

Damian and I shook hands and then sat outside his office in the sun. He did not see himself as a foreigner and had not been sent to Shanghai with a package by a company and, therefore, described himself as a self-initiated expatriate. Damian had been in China for about seven years, initially in Beijing and Hong Kong, then in Shanghai. Due to the world financial crisis in 2008, his contract as an “expensive foreigner” was terminated at the end of the three-month probationary period.

Later he met a Dutch colleague in Shanghai and together they set up a research studio. He and his colleague who subsequently returned to Amsterdam wrote a book about architecture in rural China. Damian saw himself as a research architect who could bring ideas from China to Europe and vice versa through different projects.

He said that it was a big challenge for him to pick up from the termination of his contract because he had to reorganize his life. Damian communicated regularly

with his parents at home in Amsterdam and had no plans to return. As well as his research interests, Damian presented lectures at a centre in Shanghai which was part of the School of Architecture at Hong Kong University.

He believed that being an expatriate had an enormous impact on his career. A Chinese client would also use foreigners as experts to speak to government groups. Damian considered that his expatriate experiences had changed him in that he was much calmer than before he came to Shanghai, for example, when facing personal challenges. He had learnt not to underestimate Chinese people.

Damian said he felt at home in Shanghai and was now married with one young child. He felt alienated when he returned home to Amsterdam the last time. He observed a lot of people looked and dressed alike and also that it was quiet at night. He was now much more accepting of other cultures and supported the concept of the “Pacific Rim” which he felt was more focused on Asia than the United States. Although Damian expressed a deep love for Amsterdam, he admitted to being very attached to China.

However, after his move to China and the subsequent loss of his former job, he did not take anything for granted. He said that, as establishing himself in China had been so difficult, it was therefore good preparation for a move to another place as nothing could be more challenging.

He has a friend whose life goal was to be a “global nomad”. Damien felt that this concept should serve a purpose and not be a goal in itself. He perceived the future as being unpredictable or unstable which he felt was very liberating and exciting. He thought that such a context created lots of opportunities and challenged him to get the best out of it:

Being an expatriate challenges you to redefine yourself, the direction you want your life and family to go, to decide whether the emerging situations would suit you or not.

Damian's recently published book on architectural work in rural China also aptly portrayed the lives of its people. I wondered too if Shanghai in the future would be a catalyst for Damian to live with his family in yet another Asian country.

Shanghai: 25th May 2012. To Yishan Lu.

I woke up around 7.15 a.m. and pulled back the curtains. Shanghai greeted me with a little sunshine and an overcast sky. I worked in my room for a couple of hours and transcribed yesterday's interview. Around lunchtime, I hailed a taxi for Yishan Lu, the shopping street for all building materials, furnishings, equipment, furniture and white goods associated with renovating a house in Shanghai. I had known Yishan Lu well when I had been renovating my former apartment.

I found some shops which looked familiar and which displayed flooring, and kitchen and bathroom fittings in their windows. Six years ago I was in the same place with Tyson, Tony and the project manager, purchasing materials and furniture for my apartment. It was Winter then in Shanghai and the streets were as busy as they were now with shoppers, taxis and bicycles. Tyson strode down the street, his steps becoming louder as he gained pace whilst I trailed behind him. I tried in vain to keep up with his purposeful stride but I could not. At the time, Tyson was on a mission to overturn any decision making involving the materials that I had chosen to renovate my apartment during his absence in Australia.

I can't believe that I am back in the same place and how my life has rapidly changed. It was almost like a giant wave had swept over me; it had seemed so powerful and overwhelming then. I wondered what Tyson would think if he could see me now in the same place where we were once together. He would still be angry because that was the way he was most of the time. I decided I did not want to go

there; it was history now. After all, I was now with a lovely man who was like a breath of fresh air and who took me fishing!

Shanghai: 26th May 2012. To Hangzhou.

I woke around 4 a.m. I was worried about Andrew as he now had a wound infection. I wondered if I needed to cut my trip short. He said last night that he had too many things to do in his life with me and that everything would be ok. In my heart I knew that if Andrew were gravely ill, it would be a tragedy for us both. Even in 10 years' time when we would be older, we may have been able to accept a poor outcome better. Andrew would get his results from the surgery on the following Monday. I lay flat on my back with my hands clasped across my chest and prayed to the one above again as I did most days.

I tried to put my concerns behind me as I prepared for a day trip to Hangzhou to take some photos. I hailed a taxi to the Shanghai train station which was about 25 minutes from the hotel. Tony had booked me onto the fast Maglev (magnetic levitation) train. Just prior to alighting, I took a couple of photos of this impressive sleek train. I had not travelled to Hangzhou since 2006 when the trip took at least two hours. On board, the train was meticulously clean with white reclining bucket seats and red carpet on the floor. A conductor proudly handed me some information in English about the train. It was quite different from the standard high-speed trains that run on rails. It functions instead by using electromagnets which replace the rails and wheels to suspend the train over a guide-way.

I settled down into my seat with a book and a coffee as I gazed out the window at the landscape flashing by. I thought that I could have heaps of like-minded friends in Shanghai. I had already been invited out to professional events, a

music evening; a trip to Xiabo. Perhaps I am out of sync in Adelaide. Many people my age are focusing on life with their grandchildren.

Shanghai is such a young, vibrant city. Adelaide, in contrast, seems older, conservative and judgmental. Perhaps this is why I don't seem to fit. After about 45 minutes, my musing was brought to a halt. An announcement is made in both Chinese and English requesting that all passengers prepare to alight for arrival in Hangzhou. A strong alkaline odor enveloped me as I moved through the station towards the exit. I realized I was near the public toilets. Unlike the Shanghai train station, this one was quite old and dirty.

Later I took a cab to the West Lake. Hangzhou was so busy with people everywhere – riding bikes, in taxis, honking horns, eating and milling around the lake. I was cautious as I enjoyed a walk around the boardwalk because there were no safety fences. I smiled to myself as I could not believe I was back. The weather was warmer and more humid than in Shanghai and my long boots became heavier as the day wore on. I took quite a lot of photographs of the lake: I then hailed a taxi to Quing HeFan, a market street where I purchased some souvenirs. I remembered being at the same market with my brother Paul and his wife Maggie. It was much less crowded then.

THE WRITERS: Deng

Shanghai: 28th May 2012.

I first met Deng in Adelaide when he visited the university to give talks to postgraduate students in creative writing. We planned to meet in Shanghai at a coffee shop downtown, not far from the university where Deng was doing some research for his next book. When Deng (a tall man in his mid-50s) entered the coffee shop, he greeted me in perfect English. He was casually dressed in cream trousers and a navy shirt. Deng's books have been translated into English, French and German.

Deng had lived in Shanghai for 30 years. He left as an exile during the Cultural Revolution. Subsequently, he commenced a Ford Foundation Fellowship in the United States. He now lived permanently in the United States with his wife and daughter. Deng said that "he can't see the wood for the trees", in Shanghai and needed to observe it from afar in order to write about it. In this way, he benefited from being able to incorporate both an inside and outside perspective into his writing. Deng added that even Chinese people now see him as an outsider or foreign visitor.

He missed Shanghai a lot because he grew up in the city and had lots of memories. He visits once a year to do research for his books and poetry. Deng felt that society in China was now more materialistic and that in his generation this was not so important. Back in the 1950s, the meaning of life was accorded a higher priority. Deng experienced language difficulties when he first arrived in the United States which was related to not fully understanding American humour. He added that his daughter appreciated Chinese language and history more now that she was older (in here 20s) than when she was younger.

Deng said that before 1949, Chinese people were very poor and many became revolutionists. His father who owned a small business was perceived as “black” or the enemy by the Chinese government. Deng was summoned to write a confession for his father while he was in hospital. Deng felt very bad about it particularly as he was only 13 years old at the time. The Red Guards who organized the confession were young people from a “red” or good family.

He felt that, as a Chinese expatriate who resided in the United States, expatriatism gave him a different perspective on language. He could write bilingually which was different from writing in English, because he subconsciously included a Chinese meaning in his writing. Deng added that his expatriate experiences had changed his philosophy of life.

While Deng missed Shanghai, he now perceived the United States as home. He felt “culture shock” when he returned to Shanghai because it was changing so much, including the landscape. He felt emotionally attached to Shanghai but rationally to the United States. He perceived that living in the United States had changed his world view. There was no opposition party in China. As he had lived in China during the Cultural Revolution, he said corruption was everywhere and that absolute power meant that it was out of control.

Deng supported the concept of global writing where readership was not confined to one country. He felt that because we lived in a global age, we should write in a global way all over the world. He said that Chinese writers often complained that their work was not translated properly. This was because they wrote solely for the Chinese reader. They presumed that all readers understood China historically and socially. However, if they tried to attract readers outside

China, it was a different matter. Deng asserted that cross-cultural communication was important and that Chinese writers could not blame the translators.

Deng passed me the details of his new book. The sun was disappearing behind the tall buildings as the taxi sped back to the hotel.

THE WRITERS: Liam

Shanghai: 28th May 2012.

I first met Liam in Adelaide when he visited the university. He is a quietly spoken intelligent man in his late 50s and had written many books about China. He was born in London to Australian parents and lived as an expatriate in the UK, Beijing, Shanghai and the United States. Liam was a self-initiated expatriate who went to China to study the language and Chinese literature and to write about it. Whilst in Shanghai, he had lived in a guest house at a Chinese university where he taught Australian studies.

Liam subsequently took up a position as Cultural Counsellor with the Australian Embassy in Beijing during the late 1980s to early 1990s when he visited Shanghai monthly. In this position, Liam was responsible for cultural exchanges between Australia and China in education, sport and other areas. He said that the infrastructure in the late 1980s was limited and he often travelled “rough”. This had consequences for his health and he became very ill in a Chinese hospital.

His expatriate experiences had a significant impact on his writing and he has written several books, non-fiction essays and translated stories. Liam said that expatriate experiences were determined by a specific situation and place, context and time. He explained that Shanghai was very cosmopolitan and foreigners of all kinds have lived in Shanghai. China had always welcomed westerners because they could help to train the Chinese so they could move forward.

Understanding the language has helped Liam to express himself and to perceive things differently. China has had a much deeper impact than his other expatriate experiences because it is a significant culture, long and now powerful. He

believed that he now has a much broader perspective and that the challenges associated with living in China brought out different qualities in people.

Liam was very close to the events of Tiananmen Square and knew many leaders of the movement. As his apartment in Beijing was nearby, there was a period of time after the crackdown when the tanks' guns were pointed in the direction of his apartment. During that period, he had specific tasks to do to keep the cultural exchanges going. He felt he had support because he was able to share his experiences with others involved. Liam said there were also huge demonstrations in Shanghai and that people, for example, writers and other educated persons were arrested or punished which meant they were sent away to a province. Their career prospects were therefore blighted.

Liam said that today, China has changed so much which has shown how much the world could alter. He added a word of caution in that: "we need to be aware because China is way too important to ignore." I think Liam perceived himself as a transnational writer and academic whom he described as having "the ability to live in one place and to engage actively with other cultures and nations".

After the interview with Liam, I hailed a taxi to YuYuan Lu, one of my old haunts. It was part of the older city of Shanghai and contained a large Chinese garden and market for local goods and furniture. The market was very crowded and the sun hot. I purchased some souvenirs and decided to take some time out for myself to have a pedicure after the busy days interviewing. I got out of the taxi near Ms Yu's workshop.

A Chinese manicurist expertly applied false nails to my two large toenails which were thin and failed to grow. This was despite the fact I had regularly applied

an expensive lotion called *Loceryl*. I could not ascertain whether or not the new nails would be a healthy addition to my tired feet. When I looked down at my sparkling blue toenails, I did not care. Andrew would like them when I got home to Adelaide.

It was late afternoon when I arrived back at the hotel. It was a relief to be in the air-conditioned room as I packed my belongings. I had been in Shanghai for quite a long time, almost three weeks. Before I left for Shanghai, I thought that this would be my last visit, “closure” to my previous life there. Now I was not so sure.

I had become more attached to Andrew through these past days and weeks with our daily text messages and phone calls. The phone rang as I was packing. Andrew told me excitedly that he had been to see his doctor. It was a good outcome. As well as the cancer they took out 23 lymph nodes and everything was clear. I put down the phone and lay down on the bed. I felt a huge wave of relief rush over and through me.

It was about 8 p.m. and the traffic had slowed a little after the rush of the day. I looked forward to seeing Andrew again. I picked up my pen and started to write the first few lines of a poem. Something about imaginary ties that stretched across oceans, landscapes, the sky and beyond. I called it the “Shadow Journey”. After about an hour, I put down my pen and turned my thoughts to leaving Shanghai and completing the final interview in Hong Kong.

Shanghai to Hong Kong: 29th May 2012.

It was almost 9 p.m. when I reached the hotel located in the Hung Hom area. The lights were very pretty during the drive from the airport. The view over Victoria Harbour from the 19th floor of the hotel was beautiful. The rippled expanse of water mirrored the tall buildings of various shapes and sizes. Tugboats, ferries and turboJETs glided across the water ferrying passengers to and from the Hong Kong and Kowloon sides of Victoria Harbour.

I searched for the interview papers from my briefcase and put them on the desk for the next morning and set up my computer. I ordered a hot chocolate and then finally fell asleep after a long day.

Hong Kong: 30th May 2012

The alarm rang at 7 a.m. I scurried around dressing and checking that I had all the documents ready for the interview with Siri. Later I went down to the ground floor of the hotel for breakfast. I chose a table near the window and selected some cereal and fruits from an enormous variety of Chinese and western foods.

I checked with the hotel for the location of the university where Siri worked. It was only one stop away from Hung Hom station ...

THE WRITERS: Siri

Hong Kong: 30th May 2012.

Siri's office was located at a university quite near to the hotel where I stayed. Her detailed instructions ensured that I would find it quite easily. Siri was petite: I found it difficult to assess her age. She wore casual pants and a top and, because the air conditioning was cold, had draped a colourful shawl around her shoulders. She was a resident writer at the university and taught master classes.

Siri was born in Hong Kong and has lived there on and off for 35 years. Her parents were born in Indonesia. She has lived as an expatriate in Singapore, Greece and the United States. She did not see herself as an expatriate because she was strongly connected across Asia and has always lived in different places. Siri finished a Master of Fine Arts in the United States and married a jazz musician. She also has an Indonesian surname which her family adopted because there were anti-Chinese sentiments in South-East Asia after the Cultural Revolution.

Siri had a sophisticated intellectual life as a student but found it difficult to work in the United States due to the "black/white split" in the 1980s. Her mother was a pharmacist and very good at sport: mother and daughter did not get on. Her father was a trader or merchant in manganese ore. Siri said that now that her mother, who is 93 years of age, has Alzheimer's and lives with her, they get on much better. She did not like conflict and felt more comfortable now that she had a good relationship with her mother.

She divorced her jazz musician husband about 12 years ago and now has a partner in New York. Siri said that she got sick of carrying her ex-husband financially and that it became expected of her. She described him as a "trailing spouse" who followed her to Singapore and New York where she was employed in

jobs. Siri said that she felt distinctly odd socially because her friends usually had husbands who carried them and they were the trailing spouses who did not work. She said that her ex-husband and herself grew apart and did not have a lot in common.

On reflection, Siri felt that she had never wanted to get married. She preferred to be independent and to travel alone. Although she perceived herself as a sociable person, Siri admitted that she also liked her space and did not need a regular schedule.

Siri said that she did consider living in Shanghai or Beijing but did not like the anti-intellectualism there with writers and artists. She felt that there was also a lot of hypocrisy where Chinese kids were sent to universities, yet dissident writers were locked up. Her books had not been translated because she wrote about Tiananmen Square and other political events.

She expressed concern about some of the young Chinese people who she taught. They professed that they knew nothing of Tiananmen Square or the Cultural Revolution which she felt was a “frighteningly naïve” approach, shutting out knowledge. Siri said that they should not be afraid to know the past, to learn what someone’s endeavor in life had been. She perceived this backward attitude as “anti-intellectualism”.

Siri was very active in literary festivals and writers’ circles in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai and throughout Asia. She has edited two anthologies and perceives herself as a “literary activist”. Siri has taught creative writing at many universities and has mentored writers. She felt that it was easier to write about Hong Kong when she was not there and removed by distance. She felt that nothing was that foreign and that a lot of people would not take risks if something was strange or

alien. She did not find particular situations risky as others might. She had worked for an airline company for many years and liked travelling a lot.

Siri had grown up with a global outlook and informed me that her parents were expatriates. She had matured with the belief that the world was yours; you could always travel in your mind; and that language barriers were not difficult to overcome. She did not believe in nationalism and felt that boundaries were unnecessary. She believed that all cities were essentially the same and that people lived in mental villages. She understood the idea of expatriates coming together to form their own community and to work out how to manage in their daily lives.

Siri said that the world had become more transnational and multicultural and that technology has opened it all up. “Home was in your head and heart, you can live anywhere,” said Siri. She was not attached to any one place, but to the idea of certain places and memory. She grew up in Tsim Sha Tsui in Hong Kong as a child until the age of 15-16 years. Siri described her house as being “like a penthouse apartment which overlooked Victoria Harbour and was a fabulous place to be in the 1950s”. Siri said that she was not a global nomad because she liked to put down roots wherever she was located.

Siri added that she has trained herself to write anywhere. Although she perceived herself as a social being, she felt that later in life she may become a recluse because she did not really need people. She felt that she had found her purpose in life through writing and teaching. Siri admitted to being fascinated by people but not by people per se, and has a large network of friends around the world. Siri’s approach was to look inward, then outward and, to her, this made more sense, than the other way around.

Siri indicated that she was more interested in the differences than the similarities between people. She was interested in global experiences rather than local ones. The way in which Siri described herself reflected a writer's personality, that is, the need for space, to travel and to withdraw to write, despite the fact that many writers were also social beings. As I left her office and walked out into the hot Summer's day in Hong Kong, I did not feel so alone or "outside the square" any more.

HONG KONG AND MACAU

Hong Kong: 1st June 2012. To Macau.

I decided to take a day trip to Macau, about one hour by turboJET from Hong Kong. I had always liked this city and visited it often when I worked in Hong Kong around 2000. On arrival, I took a cab to the city square and tried to find the antique shops which Tyson and I had visited while I was undertaking consultancy work. We had purchased several Chinese scrolls of old kings and queens, together with other scenic ones. I asked directions at a shop to try to find the correct street. I only found one shop and gave up because of the heat.

I went to a small café in the city square where Tyson and I had had some lunch. I remembered desperately wanting him to make a commitment. Just to say he loved me would have been enough, back then. Instead, he borrowed my Visa card to purchase some scrolls for himself because he did not have enough money. I can't remember if I got it back or not. You couldn't see out of the window of the *Flying Cat* on the return journey to Hong Kong. I felt as though I was in a moving tomb.

Andrew called me at the hotel. He said something about getting married and that it was a natural progression. I remembered smiling as I put down the phone. Perhaps I should stay away longer, I thought.

Hong Kong: 2nd June 2012. Stanley Market.

It was a warm Saturday in Hong Kong. I caught a bus to Stanley Market. I relaxed in my seat as the bus climbed slowly up the steep hills around Victoria Harbour. The sea below sparkled in the sunlight as boats of different shapes and sizes graced the distance.

In the evening, I met with a Chinese colleague with whom I had worked in Hong Kong. We had kept in regular contact over the years through working on collaborative research projects. Kristina was well dressed in black three-quarter length pants and a bright green top. She had lost weight, grown her hair long and looked much younger than before.

As Chinese people like to do when you are their guest, Kristina chose the restaurant where we would eat. It was close to the hotel and in a large mall with a lot of other restaurants. There were many banquets and, as Kristina explained, it was a popular season for weddings. Later, we took a walk to a night market. The Chinese stallholders seemed quite rude and refused to bargain. They pushed and shoved at the train station and on the trains to and from the market. So unlike Shanghai, I thought. Kristina said that people were not as happy in Hong Kong as they were before. The economy was tougher and they were more out for themselves. She said many were worried about the forthcoming elections in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong: 3rd June 2012: Last Days.

The wind was cool as I sat on a sun lounge by the hotel pool. I spent the time editing the transcript from the interview with Siri. My mind wandered as I thought about packing up and getting a flight to Kuala Lumpur tomorrow, then home to Adelaide.

It was almost one month since I had left Adelaide and Andrew had undergone surgery. I was now looking forward to going home and getting back to our normal life. I would miss Shanghai of course. I did not feel the same way about Hong Kong.

About 6 p.m. I hailed a taxi to meet Kristina at the China Ferry Port for a dinner cruise. The ferry lights sparkled as it sped towards us across the harbour. We climbed the steps to the top deck to see the laser lights sweeping their brilliant colours like a rainbow across the harbour. I could not think of a nicer way to finish my short stay in Hong Kong. I tossed and turned in bed at night thinking about packing up and going home the next day.

Hong Kong to Adelaide: 4th June 2012.

I woke around 8 a.m., showered, dressed and started to pack for the flight back to Adelaide. The day was overcast and a little cooler as the taxi sped towards the Hong Kong Airport on Lantau Island. I recalled going to see an immense golden Buddha on the island and the huge number of steps that Tyson and I climbed to get to the top. I was anxious to get home now. I badly wanted to see Andrew.

PART IV: THE RETURN

CLOSURE

Hong Kong to Adelaide: 5th June 2012.

Was I really home, I wondered as the plane thudded down onto the tarmac at Adelaide Airport? It was late morning. I felt as though I had been away for such a long time. I could feel the cold air as I exited the aircraft into Winter in Adelaide and a temperature of 10 degrees, about one-third of the temperature in Hong Kong. I had had little sleep because my seat was adjacent to an Indian family who seemed quite calm about their screaming child unlike the other passengers and myself.

I spotted Andrew's smiling face as I exited customs with my luggage. His face was a little thinner and paler than before from being indoors recuperating, instead of working outside. After a big hug, Andrew picked up my bags while I filled him in on the remainder of the trip in Hong Kong and the flight home.

I felt "foreign" and unreal as I went about unpacking my belongings as though part of me was still in Shanghai. Andrew thought I was just tired but I knew it was more than that. I don't know when I will go back to Shanghai again. It seemed so quiet in Adelaide except for some birds twittering and the lone bark of a dog. I tried to see what my future might hold but I was too tired. I didn't want to write then. My motivation had been left behind with the rest of me in Shanghai, dancing even in the dark.

Adelaide: 9th June 2012.

It was a cold Saturday morning in Adelaide as Andrew and I walked to the bank near our home. A Greek woman in front of Andrew started chatting to him. She smiled as I moved forward to join them. I was surprised at what she said next:

"Oh, you have had a hard time. Done a lot of crying in your life."

Her words touched me somewhere deep inside. I knew my life had not been easy. I rarely complained, just got on with it. While I struggled for a response, she reached out and took my left hand in hers:

“You have children?” the Greek woman asked me.

“Yes, two sons.”

“One has had issues,” she says.

My mind wanders. I think immediately of Ethan. I know he has not found it easy resettling back in Australia from London where he worked for seven years. The Greek woman draws my hand closer in an attempt to identify the lines.

“The lifeline is very strong; you will have a long life,” said the Greek woman.

She then took Andrew’s hand: “Yours may not be as long,” she said, looking up at Andrew.

We said goodbye, then walked out of the bank. I could not forget what the Greek woman had said, but thought best not to dwell on it. Perhaps it will make sense in time. In the afternoon, I lay down on the bed to rest. The Greek woman’s face loomed before mine. I started to think about a sad event which occurred in my life a few months before I departed on my shadow journey to Shanghai.

Bali: January 8th 2012.

I want to tell you about this time when closure fell with a thud as dawn broke, and as sharp as an executioner’s blade ...

It was 5 a.m. A text came through on my mobile phone. The room was dark with a little filtered light as morning approached. I looked over at Andrew who was lying peacefully asleep. I could hear the rustling of the palm leaves and smell the

sweet scent of the frangipanis, wafting through the windows. The rain had finally stopped. It was the wet season and it had been raining heavily since we arrived.

Suddenly, the text message from my brother in Adelaide came into focus. As I forced open my sleepy eyes and recognized the words, loud sobs rose from somewhere deep inside and almost choked me. Andrew rushed quickly to my side, sat on the bed and clasped my shoulders tight.

“What’s up, what’s up?” he asked.

“My mother, my mother, she’s gone,” I sobbed.

We thought she was handling it well, the radiotherapy being used to treat her throat cancer. Later as I showered, I slipped in the bath. Andrew heard me and almost broke down the door which I had locked.

We could not make it back to Australia in time. Ethan rang a little later. He was not happy that I had been informed of my mother’s death by a text message. My dark sunglasses and large hat helped then when the tears dropped down just like the tropical rain. It did not matter where I was, having breakfast or just walking down the street trying to fill in the last few days in Bali. I sat on the plane and drafted a speech about my mother while Andrew slept. We unpacked on our arrival home in Adelaide then repacked for our flight to Coolangatta for the funeral the next day.

I spoke at my mother’s funeral held in southern New South Wales, where my parents had retired. I did not start well. I opened my mouth but no words came out, like a fish gasping for air as it was brought onto a boat. Paul’s firm arms around my waist and his reassuring signs bolstered me a little. I shut my eyes for a moment and imagined that my mother could hear me. She would expect me to be strong when

the occasion called for it. So I spoke loudly and clearly about her contributions in life, the main one being her large family of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

After the funeral, we went back to my mother's house. My middle sister Katie with her cropped brown hair and ready sense of humour found a note from my mother amongst her things: her sense of fun was absent then. "I want my ashes to be scattered together with my husband's (undated and unsigned)." My mother had kept my father's ashes for about 15 years. We thought the note may have been written in recent times, just before she had gone into hospital.

The day after the funeral, I noticed the river outside my mother's home sparkling in the sunlight. Paul carried my father's ashes up on his shoulder so that they would not get wet. We giggled a little when he almost tripped over as he walked towards the water's edge. Ethan walked behind Paul carrying my mother's ashes. Ethan hung back a little because he was afraid of the sharks that had been observed in the river before, when my parents were alive. I could see that my youngest sister Anne was already in the water holding a long wreath of flowers. Katie and I had swum out to join her.

There was no expression on Anne's usual happy face. Paul and Ethan emptied my parents' ashes into the river and Anne slowly let the flowers follow behind them. Katie took some photos and sent them to me. I could not look at them for a while. Later, I stored the photos carefully with other mementoes of my parents. Even while writing this memoir, I have been unable to look at them. Perhaps this is because I often feel that my mother is still living in her home at Tweed Heads and not really gone.

I felt “foreign” and distant then from everyday life. I thought about the pain my mother must have experienced over the past few months. It became clearer later that such intense pain must have robbed her of “presence” in the world. Prior to Christmas when I last saw my mother, she looked much smaller than before as she lay in her hospital bed. Roma’s sense of humour never left her. Paul and I laughed as she pointed to the sign above her bed which categorized her dietary requirements as “fasting”. Our mother thought it should read “starving”. At that stage she could neither drink nor eat and was fed intravenously.

I often thought about when I had visited my mother at her home, staying overnight. The next morning I would take a walk down the beach, and then share breakfast with her afterwards. It was then we would really talk and I would seek her advice on handling problems with my past relationship with Tyson, challenges in moving on after returning from Shanghai, and bringing her up to date with events in Jake and Ethan’s lives. Often we just shared our views about local news or what was happening in the broader world.

In the afternoon, my mother and I would go to the local cinema which was usually followed by a coffee and muffin afterwards. As the months went by, this was how I would often think of the precious time spent with Roma, my mother.

REFLECTIONS**Four Quartets**

I said to my soul to be still and wait without hope
 For hope would be hope of the wrong thing
 Wait without love
 For love would be love of the wrong thing
 Yet there is faith
 But the faith and the love and the hope
 Are all in the waiting.
 (T.S. Eliot, in *Four Quartets*, 1979)

Adelaide: 10th June 2012: Reflections

I woke up feeling more refreshed and positive as I gathered my research papers together to take with me to the university. I understood a lot more about Chinese culture and had learnt about other expatriates' challenges. There were similarities between their views and mine and the way in which we lived our lives. We were global citizens after all.

I learnt something about myself. I realized that I was not odd because I liked my space; lived inside my head; and had conducted my life differently to the traditional path. Somehow, that thought was quietly comforting. On returning to Australia, however, I still felt as though I did not really belong and was often misunderstood. Over time, I began to accept these feelings because "foreignness" had become an integral part of me. I felt much less Australian than before and I probably always will.

People go to places like China to experience the culture and visit different places. I think that of all the countries in which I have travelled, China is the one that forces you to develop inside yourself at a more rapid pace. I remember that when I encountered the shoe-shine man with his brush and small stool at the antique market, I studied his lined face as he polished my shoes. Yet the twinkle in his eyes belied the hardship he must have faced during the Cultural Revolution.

That one encounter caused me to think about the strength of the human spirit in surviving such odds. I wondered about the stories that the shoe-shine man could tell. It would cause me to question my own values. Could I have survived under such a system without bitterness or hate? These glimpses and encounters occurred daily in China and caused one to develop and change much more quickly than in the everyday life of one's home country.

As time went by, I better understood my experiences in Shanghai and what they meant. I realized that, as philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote, "life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards" which was why some distance was required before a memoir could be written. My colleague Deng said that he was able to write about Shanghai much more effectively from a distance in the United States.

Writer Nan Merrick Phifer described "spiritual" as the essential and intangible essence at the centre of your being. I felt that my soul and physical self often moved together during the shadow journey to Shanghai. For example, one of the expatriates may have said something to me about being a global citizen or that Shanghai had "formed" her. Or I may have gained fresh insights from a visit to the Longhua Martyrs' Cemetery when I recalled the destructive role of the "white terror" or westerners on the city of Shanghai.

So how had Shanghai changed me? Perhaps the question was how could she not? Shanghai was like a breath of fresh air after life with Tyson and his moody and sometimes abusive behaviour which impacted negatively on my life. Shanghai felt like an integral part of the world whereas Australia was so foreign and distant from it. I recalled going to Shanghai for the first time. The traffic coming and going in all different directions overwhelmed me. I quickly immersed myself amongst its

25 million residents and learnt to navigate my own way around it. The buzz of the city completely absorbed and dazzled me as I walked up and down the wide tree-lined streets alone or with my Chinese friends.

The foreignness of the city and the culture bled into my skin and changed me irretrievably. Just like Emily Hahn, I would often observe discriminatory attitudes against different cultures including the Chinese whilst at home in Australia, for example, those associated with foreign investment or a fear that the Chinese would take “our jobs”. I learnt over time not to offer an opinion.

I looked forward to going to work each day and I learnt from the responsibilities of looking after the academic programmes and teaching staff. I did not have these same senior responsibilities in Australia which were usually afforded to the male staff. On a sunny Spring day as I sat in a city office with Tony and Mia negotiating to buy my apartment in Shanghai, I felt strong and independent. I walked repeatedly through my new home, making decisions about the renovations. I had not been solely responsible for making a financial commitment about property before and particularly not in a complex country like China.

I learnt many new skills, handling negotiations with the renovation company and transactions with the bank, and communicating in a gracious but persuasive way to get things done. The Chinese taught me well whilst I interacted with them on a daily basis. I worked closely with the management company of the apartment and later with staff who managed the rental of my Shanghai property for me.

Some years later on a dark and cloudy day, I packed up my office and walked out of my academic career. I had seen the light. I had to write about my experiences in Shanghai.

I felt as though I had never left Shanghai when I returned in May and June 2012. A few days later, it felt like “home”. My Chinese friends had moved on with their lives – getting married, having children, finishing university and changing jobs.

Andrew and I have a dream of living together in another Asian country. I guess I talked him into it. I can only cope with the loss of Shanghai and living in Australia if we have an opportunity to live part of the time in Asia. I missed the buzz of Shanghai, the people and the culture. Alice Pung commented in *Her Father's Daughter* that her father realized that “she needs to see the world through a much larger lens”. I wondered if that had become true of me. The words of T.S. Eliot's poem about the need to have *faith and love and hope* whilst waiting for a new direction to take shape comforted me.

EPILOGUE: SHANGHAI AS A CATALYST AND WHY THEY DON'T WANT TO GO HOME!

Tide Players

Tide players surf the currents,
The red flags they hold up do not even get wet.
(Jianying Zha, *Tide Players*, 2011:vi)

Adelaide: Summer 2012.

I was on the tram on my way home from the university to Glenelg. I reached in my bag for a book by Chinese writer Jianying Zha, *Tide Players*, which depicted a new generation of movers and shakers who were transforming modern China. Jianying Zha profiled a varied range of entrepreneurs and intellectuals. I settled down in my seat, thankful that the tram was not crowded today because it was so hot. I read that Jianying Zha's brother Zha Jianguo was in a Beijing prison serving a nine-year sentence for being an activist as a member of the Chinese Democracy Party. In his youth, he was influenced by Mao Zedong and became a Red Guard. On reflecting on his life in his late 40s, Zha Jianguo wrote a letter to his sister while in prison:

For the ideal of democracy, I quit the party; for the ideal of freedom, I quit my job ... for the ideal of love, I divorced ... to this day I am intellectually, professionally, financially and emotionally, a 'vagabond' ...

Jiangyan despaired for her brother. She felt that revolutionaries like him were "heroic precisely because most other people are not". She felt sorry for him as he sat in his tiny cell whilst the rest of the world moved on. Zha Jianguo was released in June 2008 and kept under daily surveillance. His time in prison had affected his health. He was amongst the thousands of signatories for "Charter 08", an influential manifesto that called for democratic reform.

As I reflected on Jiangyan Zha's brother's life, I thought about the western and Chinese expatriates I had met. In their different ways, they were also *tide players*, and as he did, moved the world forward. Some did so living in

contemporary China whilst others' lives bridged the revolutions and dramas of China's past with that of a much brighter present and future. As my shadow journey revealed, one thing they all had in common was that their foreign experiences in China had irretrievably changed not only their lives, but their philosophy of life. They were not content to go home or to live in one place any more but saw themselves as contributing to a global world.

Living in Shanghai had its challenges and frustrations and I recall one expatriate saying that on "China days", she really needed to get out. Shanghai, however, seemed to be very good at nurturing both the expatriates and their projects. It was perceived as a more open and supportive environment in contrast to Australia where, surprisingly, there was more red tape, it took more time to implement things and there were less opportunities. Through turning to the "foreign" in Shanghai, the expatriates had not only developed their art but also themselves.

A number of the expatriates said in different ways that Shanghai was a *catalyst* which prepared them well for a move to another country. As one expatriate commented, "if you can successfully live as a foreigner in China, you could live anywhere in the world."

Australia from my own personal experience and from what I have read did not nurture "tall poppies" or risk takers but had a tendency to either remove them or to injure and halt them in their tracks. In this way, it supported the status quo. Some of the expatriates also indicated that living in Shanghai nurtured a stronger family unit in that families were thrown together to sort out their challenges and to make it work. There was less leisure time and more study time for kids than in Australia.

Shanghai in the past was a safe haven for a whole range of nationalities and types of people running from wars, financial disasters and the law. I learnt that she was tolerant of other cultures. For example, Europeans fleeing from economic crises in their own countries have come to Shanghai to start their lives again. This was one of the characteristics of the city I loved most in that she unconditionally welcomed and helped others.

Most expatriates who had been in Shanghai for at least two years did not want to go back to their own countries, Shanghai was now their home. They felt disconnected from the rest of the world in Australia and often like a “fish out of water”. Their home cities in Australia seemed lonely. They felt that there was no one on the streets at night and venues were shut early, unlike Shanghai where there were always people around and restaurants were always open.

The majority of the expatriates felt like they no longer belonged in their home countries. In other words, they felt “foreign”. Writer Rebecca Saunders in *The Concept of the Foreign* perceives the primary meaning of “foreignness” as not belonging. Another expatriate commented that she did not want to live a traditional life of marriage, children, home and grandchildren and, therefore, in Australia she would probably be perceived as not belonging to the group.

All of the expatriates understood a lot of China’s past history and as a result felt a deep respect for the courage and resilience of its people. The level of honesty and sense of calmness in contemporary Shanghai was often commented upon in contrast to living in one of the Australian cities. The expatriates also expressed a greater acceptance of people from different cultures. One expatriate professed that he liked the future being unpredictable. He saw it as a chance to redefine himself

and his family unit which would create lots of opportunities and challenges for them.

Expatriates perceived themselves as global citizens in different ways. Some expressed that they did not like the term “global nomad” because there should be some goal or purpose in life. Also, a global citizen still likes to put down roots. Other expatriates preferred the term “transnational” as an apt expression of their lives and work. Although located in one place, they worked globally through technology. Some of the expatriate writers talked about their need for space and withdrawal from society to write. However, they were also very much grounded in the world with their families and friends and through their writing. The need to write globally not just for China or one’s home country was seen as essential.

Some expatriates revealed how difficult it was to come back and resettle in Australia, together with their frustrations in dealing with “western ignorance”. China has changed dramatically and has shown the world how much a country can alter. China today is much too important to ignore and not to understand.

Today, people around the world are worried about the implications of China’s emergence as a global power. They question whether China would be a responsible great power that might offer an alternative and attractive set of values and harmonious strategies. Alternatively, would it be a selfish, threatening great power which may accelerate the depletion of natural resources and challenge world peace? My own view is that China is evolving into a very positive and strategic global power.

I turned the pages of writer Jianyang Zha’s book, *Tide Players*, which provides some insightful comments about China’s achievements to date. The economic reform since 1978 has been peaceful and successful, and this period will

go down as an age of great industrialization and urbanization in Chinese history. The Communist Party has changed gradually and regained a level of credibility both nationally and internationally.

The Communist Party has been resourceful and responsive to circumstances. For example, it has lifted millions of people from poverty, laid foundations for modern infrastructure and changed China into the largest manufacturing centre in the world. Its biggest challenge in the future is to move from a Party that has ruled by coercion and threat to one that respects personal freedom and individual rights which may take many years.

The former Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating asserted in *The Weekend Australian* that western countries and particularly the United States have frequently criticized China by being “quick to invoke human rights and values as though the human condition had not improved dramatically across the Chinese landscape”. Keating added that such comments mistakenly discounted the success of the Chinese Communist Party. Political commentator Hugh White in *The China Choice* remarked: “over the past 30 years, the Chinese Government has achieved by far the largest, fastest increase in human material welfare in history.”

It is important for Australia to maintain and further its relationships with China. I wondered to what extent this would be possible. Australian mining magnate Clive Palmer, in the White Paper *Australia in the Asian Century*, questioned Australia’s capability for taking advantage of the opportunities associated with China’s growth. In his view, there were inconsistencies in the Australian Government’s policies, approach and prejudice towards people of different countries, for example, in matters relating to foreign investment.

Similarly, writer Adele Ferguson reported in her autobiography of *Gina Rinehart* that “the richest woman in the world” experienced problems with the Australian Government, in fulfilling her deceased father’s (Lang Hancock) dream of establishing iron ore projects in Western Australia. She fought many battles in her attempts to consolidate innovative partnerships with China and to introduce Asian labour to help build mines, ports and railways. Gina Rinehart has also challenged the science of climate change and the introduction of the carbon tax.

I was also conscious that many countries in the western world including Australia have events in their histories that they would prefer to forget. However, as emphasized by at least one of the expatriates, it was important that China acknowledge and not block out or disregard the past because it would shape the future. China was now irretrievably connected to the rest of the world through its economy and technology.

Whilst in Shanghai, I listened to a television broadcast on CCTV. It was an interview between a Chinese reporter and an African politician who commented on 17th May 2012 that China was a friend because she offered help and got in there and did it, for example, assisted with major construction projects. Other western countries just talked about it. Yet they said they were friends of Africa.

China has shown a desire to be a responsible global citizen in other ways, for example, through joining the World Trade Organization and hosting the Olympic Games in 2008. I felt proud that China was one of the top countries in winning the most gold medals during the 2012 Olympic Games in London. I was puzzled as to why Australia did so poorly in comparison.

The *Sunday Mail* reported that perhaps it was due to complacency and the attraction of social media to some of our athletes. I knew that the Chinese

competitors would be 100 per cent focused in their training and during the games. I did not even have to question whether or not they would go directly home afterwards to celebrate with their families and friends. They could not afford a European holiday after the Games.

I looked up out of the window to see how far along I was on my journey, about half-way home. I turned back to Jianying Zha's book and read about two celebrated pop culture icons from the past: the poet *Bei Dao* who wrote that "he did not believe" what could happen in China and a rock singer *Cui Jian* who said that "he had nothing to name". Both were disillusioned and angry as they stood on the ruins of the passionate and revolutionary era of the Cultural Revolution.

Jianying Zha cites anthropologist Margaret Mead as saying, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Today China seems to be more prone to adopting an incremental approach to change. *Revolution?* I read somewhere that China was now *paralysed* with fear at the very thought of it!

My contemporary tide players took risks in their lives in today's peaceful China. They were incrementally changing and moving the country forwards in their own positive ways. The benefits of living in a foreign country were obvious. They seemed to have transformed themselves both in their personal and professional lives. Writer Rebecca Saunders in *The Concept of the Foreign* explained that "xenotropism" or a "turning to the foreign" created many opportunities. However, one must have the inner resources to benefit from it. It seemed to me that xenotropism produced tide players.

The bond between my Chinese friends and myself was strengthened with other new friendships emerging on the horizon. My visits to known and unknown

haunts welded me even closer to Shanghai. They increased my understanding of Chinese history, together with a deep knowledge of what the country and its people have been through.

I have no desire for closure now. I closed my eyes and visualised the words of a short poem, something about the tide players who surf the currents, take risks and still seem to rise above all of the challenges. I am glad I undertook this shadow journey to Shanghai even though it was personally difficult to leave Andrew because of his sudden illness. We did, however, work it out as a team. I put the book down and closed my eyes. I saw a tall Balinese-style villa with white painted walls and shuttered windows. As I looked closer, it came into focus ...

A tanned woman dressed in white shorts and a black top was enjoying a coffee, while a tall, fair-haired man in bathers cleaned the pool. The woman looked out at the tropical garden. The vanilla scent of the magnolias drifted past her. To her left was an incense temple attached to the wall, with the remainders of an offering from the day before.

The woman heard a clicking noise high up on the wall. She could see a small spotted gecko slowly making its way to the left over the offering remainders. Although the morning sun shone brightly, the cool breeze was fresh. "*Beep, beep.*" The woman observed a Balinese man driving slowly past on his motorbike which was laden with a variety of cakes and pastries.

Once an expat, always an expat, she wondered again. Shanghai, now Bali, or will it be Shanghai and Bali? Was she now a global citizen? Had her foreign experiences transformed her? She thought about the expatriates she had met. Where would they be living in the future with their families and partners? Would they still

be in Shanghai or would they have moved on to another country? But it was only early days. There would need to be some purpose to their life here in the future. She was not a “global nomad” because she always needed to put down roots and set goals. And first there was a book to finish, and a wedding in Bali to be planned ...



The Glenelg tram rocked gently as it slowed down. I jolted awake and then put the book back in my bag. I felt a deep respect for these kindred spirits, the tide players whom I had met on my shadow journey to Shanghai. I did not know when or even if I would see them again. It was fine, I thought, I could travel in my mind to Shanghai and meet with them anytime I wanted to but I knew I was fooling myself. It would never be the same as “being there”.

Rebecca Saunders explains that a return to physical space is not commensurate with going “home”. She makes the point that an artist is unable to cancel the distance that has been overcome both in the geographical and spiritual

sense. One simply cannot separate the spiritual journey from the physical one; not once foreignness has bled into one's skin, I thought.

I did not realize how “bound” I once was and that, through my foreign experiences and the subsequent writing of my memoir, the bandages would dissolve. Freedom is about awakening to adventure of the mind or spirit and not just conforming. These aspirations involve risk. I do not mean that people should drop what they are doing and head for the other side of the world. I mean that one can choose to do something “outside of the square” or non-traditional, even in the most ordinary of circumstances. The most difficult part is taking the first step as writer Robyn Davidson asserts in her memoir, *Tracks*:

The two important things that I did learn were that you are as powerful and strong as you allow yourself to be, and that the most difficult part of any endeavor is taking the first step...(254).

Passengers moved towards the door ready to alight from the tram. I stood up, straightened my clothing and joined them. As the tram doors opened, I smelt the salty air playing across the seaside town. The breeze brushed my face as I walked towards my “home” at least for now. I looked forward to going fishing in the “tinnie” up the Port River at Outer Harbour over the weekend.

Andrew said he would take me to see an Australian battleship – the *Parramatta* – moored in the harbour. At least we would not have to queue. Even better, maybe the seals and their pups will be there sunning themselves on the brown rocks, or basking in the sunlit water.



