Shanghai Bride

Her Tumultuous Life's Journey to the West

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Hong Kong University Press is honoured that Xu Bing, whose art explores the complex themes of language across cultures, has written the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy. This signals our commitment to cross-cultural thinking and the distinctive nature of our English-language books published in China.

"At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed."

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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Everything begins in the east, you know. Now the Western — American — ways are consuming the world, but the sun will always rise in the east. Though I was willingly seduced by this vibrant Western world at such a very young age, the fact remains that my spirit was born in that place of beginnings.

The blood of emperors and silent women with bound feet runs through my veins as I walk these streets of New York. Ancient men in silk robes — silk robes the colors of night — have profoundly shaped my Western life. And I have learned the truths of women. Truths to be found where the sun both rises and sets. Some of these truths came as gifts of my mother — an honorable First Wife. There were also truths shared by a beautiful courtesan. But I learned so very much in the truths and wisdom and love of Jade Wang, my father's favorite — and wise — concubine.

My defining moments came in the East. Destiny is formed in defining moments — those moments in your life when, through choice or circumstance, you reach your core and accept, or change, that destiny with clear eyes.

It was 1933, in Shanghai, China. I was seventeen. I was not married. I was pregnant. And my eyes were clear.

I had brought shame to our entire family. It was raining that day; one of those heavy, steady rains, completely void of wind — rain that feels like it will stay forever. I was crying; over the previous weeks, I would be certain that my body had no tears left, and then the tears would come again.

My parents were in their bedroom, but their angry voices penetrated the walls and surrounded me as I lay on my bed. My most vivid recollection — as I lay on my bed listening to my parents arguing about my future — was the sound of my mother's raised voice. I remember that I stopped crying when I heard that sweet sound of my mother's anger. It was the only time I heard my mother shout at my father, and she was standing up for me. My father wanted to send me to Nanjing, to my mother's family to

be married to a cousin. My mother knew that I would die contained in such unhappiness. She found the courage to raise her voice to my father. It was an unfamiliar sound in China — a woman's angered voice, falling on her husband.

I loved Shanghai and I did not wish to leave my home to live in a rural village, married to a man whom I had never seen. But, as Jade would say, I had found my passion, and my pregnancy was going to cost me that passion. My passion was independence and emergence from this molded life, which had been shaped for me, over thousands of years. My passion was to contribute to the destiny of my future, and to make choices that could not be made in my tradition-saturated East. My passion could only be realized in the West, indeed my passion had become the West — and I had come so close — my future had been so promising.

As I lay on my bed that day, I said goodbye to dreams I had worked for and nurtured for many years. Yes, more than my family's dishonor, more than the fear I felt when I thought of the public humiliation, and more than the frightening prospect of becoming a mother, this goodbye to my dreams — to my way — hurt the most. I remember thinking that it would have been better to have never known my dreams, to have not heard my spirit, to have been complacent and accepting of the role of women in China at that time. Those silent women whom I had rebuked and rejected.

But I have come to learn that those who dream, and those who are seduced by their dreams, really have little choice. It is painful to dream. It is hard work. And there is a price to be paid for dreaming. The passionate ones — those with the courage to find their passion and to inevitably say goodbye to that which is familiar and comfortable, in pursuit of that passion — they experience so much sadness. If that passion, that way, once discovered, is held out of reach, it is like Mozart with no piano, or Matisse with no paints. Yet they cannot choose to let go of that passion. Not really. Some do try and it comes back to haunt them in hollow eyes. My mother had hollow eyes.

Many Chinese follow the teachings of Laozi, the *Dao De Jing*. The *Dao* teaches that peace is found within, in self-knowledge, acceptance and adherence to that knowledge. Jade had taught me to look within to find my destiny, and I had embraced my self-knowledge. It was that loss — the loss of my peace and my inner self — that I grieved most. As I saw, with clear eyes, my life come crashing down around me.

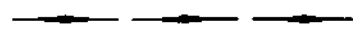
But the *Dao De Jing* also teaches us to embrace our grief. Yes, there would be much to embrace in my life.

The only honorable solution was suicide. I tried to want to be honorable. Suicide would spare my family the disgrace of my pregnancy, and restore some of my honor. If I willed myself to die, I could no doubt complete the task. Mother had always said my will was as unbreakable as the wind. But my spirit did not wish to die, and it did not wish to kill my unborn child.

I suppose that my spirit did not really say goodbye to my passion, although it would be many years before I would be reminded of my way. My Chinese ancestors would say I was weak to choose life that day. And what would they say years later, when I did not make the same choice?

My years in China were exhilarating, turbulent pages of my country's history. Pages of civil wars and Japanese invasions and the victory of the Communists. I was immersed in the politics — the glamour and the turmoil. Oh, the grand parties — the names are all real. Yes, I came of age dancing with the leaders of China. Dancing with a Western spirit and unbound feet.

So much of my story begins that year — when I was seventeen — but, if I am to tell the whole story, I should start with the real beginning. And that would be Shanghai.



My Shanghai was known as the Paris of the East. In fact, it was often said that Paris was the Shanghai of the West.

In the early 1900s, most of China conformed to the foreigner's image — sleepy villages with bamboo groves, willow trees, and pagodas. But as a child, I knew nothing of these rural villages. I had never even seen them. To me, China was Shanghai — the most vibrant city in the world, a bustling trading port on the western bank of the great Huangpu River. I was born absorbing the energy of a city filled with world banks, stock and commodities exchanges, international shipping and travel. There was money in Shanghai. Money from all over the world and the city was as beautiful as it was vital.

It is difficult for Western minds to comprehend my Shanghai; it was actually three independent countries operating within the borders of a city. Yes, Shanghai was divided into three distinct areas: the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the ancient Chinese City. The International Settlement had been governed by the British, who operated as the Shanghai Municipal Council, since the Opium War of 1840–42. The French Concession was governed by the French Municipal Council.

And the Chinese City was in constant turmoil as China's warlords struggled to control the most powerful city in China.

My family was among the elite and we had a lovely home in the International Settlement.

It was all before the Japanese and the Communists came. The people of China had finally won an element of freedom. The Revolution of 1911 was over and the Republic of China had been established; my people — led by Dr Sun Yat-sen — had destroyed the Manchu dynasty ending a feudal system that had controlled the lives of citizens for more than two thousand years.

The Republic was, however, an illusion of freedom. An illusion our people desperately wanted to believe and an illusion we fed the rest of the world. The truth was that warlords ruled Shanghai, and the ruler of Shanghai, in practice if not acknowledgement, ruled China. There was constant civil war as each warlord scrambled for more power.

The truth went even deeper. Inevitably, the victorious warlord had the support and backing of the Green Gang — the Shanghai Mafia. The Green Gang controlled the opium trade in Shanghai, which meant they were some of the wealthiest people in a wealthy city. Of course, money always rules politics. The Green Gang rulers were the most feared and respected among the many powerful men in China — yes, of course, they were all men.

The intensity of the politics of those years in my country's history is staggering. To look back and to read the names of those who struggled to define China's political future, and to recall them as people — real people with smiles, and families, and honor. And to recall them as friends. Even some of those so feared were to be my acquaintances, friends, and more.

In those years, my Shanghai, the heart and pulse of my China, while it reveled in the illusion of the Republic, was in fact, being torn apart piecemeal, by its own people — people I knew — and some of whom I loved, and I feared.

But in those early years, my family — like most Chinese families — was consumed with pride in our Republic. We savored the taste of democracy as though we knew it would not last. My brother was born in the year following the Revolution, in 1912, and was named Kaihua, which means "Opening of the Republic of China."

My parents were intensely loyal to this new Republic, and to its leader, Dr Sun Yat-sen. So you can imagine the excitement in our home when my mother went into labor with me on the birthday of Dr Sun Yat-sen — November 12, 1915.

It was a crisp, fall day. My parents had prayed for the birth of another son, both to honor the birth date of their esteemed leader, and to act as a playmate to my brother. And because in China, everyone prays for sons.

As my mother's labor progressed, eggs were ready to be colored red to announce the joyous arrival of a male child. Dishes of soy-cooked pork, chicken and shrimp with green vegetables were prepared as an offering to the Kitchen God and to Kwanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, who delivered sons to expectant families.

When I — a mere baby girl — arrived, my father, in his disappointment, left our home and did not return for several days. My mother asked our housekeeper, Mrs Ding, to find a wet nurse from the countryside to come in to feed me. She would not give her own milk to a daughter. All celebrations were cancelled.

I was given the name, Zhaohua, which means 'China, the Glorious.' And I grew up nurtured by the beautiful, corrupt city of Shanghai. There were others who cared along the way of course. The Shengs — Madame Sheng — had shown me love, and the opium of China. Old Tutor taught me the words of Confucius, which stay with me today. There was also Jade, my friend, my teacher — my father's concubine. Jade taught me so very much.

But Jade came later. After the Shengs had come and gone. After Grandfather. After Old Tutor and the words of Confucius. And the beginning of wisdom.

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I went into shock when Tommy died. They said that Dr Ge had to pry my arms from my dead baby.

I could not speak or eat or function.

Liankui hired nurses to stay with me. I don't remember those weeks. They are a blur of sheets and bodies, friends trying to be comforting — all I wanted to do was sleep.

The only clear memory came weeks later. It is a memory of hearing Judie and Anthony crying one day — the servants and Margaret and Alice were evidently busy — I heard them both crying from their bedroom. I was too tired to help them, but they kept crying. Eventually, I pulled my leaden body from my bed, and walked to my children's room. When I had last been there, Tommy had been alive. When my children saw me, they forgot their tears and ran to me.

I sat down on the floor of their room, and then I was the one to cry.

At last, I cried.

Now I have another bond — a bond with those who have lost a child. Sometimes I can tell, from the eyes of strangers, that we share that bond. And we know — we know never to speak of 'recovering' from such a loss. One does not recover from the loss of a child. One learns to live with that dead place inside them. One hopefully learns to go on and to find some happiness. But nothing is ever quite the same.

After that day, I knew that I had to go on, in part, for them — for Judie and for Anthony. I could not hide in my bedroom indefinitely. I would try to be there for them. But the truth is, I pretended to be alive — but I felt nothing — for so long. I braided Judie's hair, and I changed Anthony's diapers, and I was as hollow as a log in the forest. I went through motions. I remembered my mother crying behind her bedroom door and I remembered feeling so alone as a child, And I was determined that my children would know that I was there. I tried so hard to feel — anything — for my other two children. But though I loved them enough to get out

of my bed, and to bathe them, and to keep them clean, And to feed and care for them, I could not — for so very long — actually feel anything, I could not bring my dead soul back to life.

Mother and Wanhua came to offer condolences.

Mother met her two grandchildren. Wanhua met her niece and her nephew, and they grieved never having held Tommy. Of course, I was comforted by their presence, as much as one can be comforted when one is numb and hollow. We had tea and we chatted, and they caught me up on the world. The world that was continuing without my Tommy, and seemingly, without me.

I think that when we love another person, we glimpse the face of God. And I think the teachings of Laozi are right when they say that the way — the Dao — is both dark and light. Both painful and beautiful. I saw the face of God in my grief for Tommy, and I saw the face of God in my love for my other children.

I think Mrs Wang, Jade's mother, was also right; laughter is a gift of the gods. Or God. Or Buddha. Or whomever it is you see when you glimpse that face. Laughter is the great healer. People who laugh often do live longer, you know; it is proven.

While my tears, also a healing gift of the gods, were the beginning of my journey back to life after Tommy, the journey would not have progressed without my laughter.

Of course, healing came slowly at first. I would smile at Judie as she furrowed her brow and was so serious as she struggled to read books well beyond her years, at such an early age. Or at Anthony, who enjoyed nothing better than teasing his serious sister with childhood pranks. Then, one day — I still remember it — the first time I really laughed after Tommy … .

Mother and Wanhua were visiting again. Apparently, it was understood that Father did not mind, since I had lost a child. Of course, Father did not come or write himself, and we did not speak of him. They brought pictures of Kaihua and his family; he had married Zhihua — I vaguely remembered her from the Elizabeth school. Of course, Father had forbidden my being invited to the wedding.

Mother's affection for my brother had extended, indeed deepened, toward my brother's children. She chatted endlessly about her grandchildren, going on and on, showing pictures and smiling, and I sat there and nodded and smiled with my hollow eyes, and then I began to hear her words.

"Oh, wait until you see it, Zhaohua. It is lovely. Your father has moved

us all into a large house in Rue Retard. Kaihua and his family — Wanhua will be there when she is not in school — still I do so miss Mrs Ding, my home has not felt the same since her death; and now even Pretty Plum has married. Still, there is plenty of room for Sonya and —"

"Excuse me, Mother. Did you say Sonya? Do you actually mean to say that Sonya — and you — will be living under the same roof?" I could not believe my ears. Or my eyes. My sad, silent mother was sitting here babbling on about the happy home she would be sharing with my father and his new concubine.

"Oh, Zhaohua! Don't be so surprised! You know — better than I — that your father will always be a womanizer. Besides, I am an old woman, now; it will be nice to have another woman around. Sonya can be quite lively, you know." My mother actually laughed as she so lightly told me of her plans. I recalled all the years my mother had spent with her broken heart, and then I looked at her, sitting in my own sad home, so accepting — utterly embracing — the very situation which had caused her so much heartache. Then as I pictured my silent, sad mother and Sonya — yes, lively, colorful, Sonya — living together in the same house; the very picture of them all struck me as hilariously funny.

I laughed at — and with — my mother. And the laughter felt so good. No, I had not really laughed since before Tommy died; and Mother and Wanhua and I laughed until tears rolled down our cheeks.

Though a piece of my sadness at losing my Tommy has never left me, I have learned, perhaps because of my grief over Tommy, the value of laughter. Laughter heals. I have come to know that the essence of a person can be found in their laughter or their tears.

That year also marked a turn in my relationship with my sister. It was the first time I had ever looked at Wanhua as more than a little sister. She was no longer the quiet one. My timid sister had taken up the politics sweeping through China, and had become somewhat of a radical. I saw her, as though for the first time, as she spoke of joining student protests. She had joined other students in lying down on the railway tracks leading from Shanghai to Nanjing, forming a human blockade and demanding the release of the 'Seven Gentlemen.'

Of course, I was familiar with the cause — the 'Seven Gentlemen,' who, in fact included a female lawyer, were a group of intellectuals and professionals jailed by Chiang Kai-shek for criticizing government policies. They had become a cause celebre. News of their imprisonment had filled the newspapers over the past few weeks.

But when Wanhua said to extend her congratulations to Liankui for

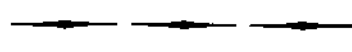
representing the leader of this group, I realized, fully, how deeply I had been engrossed in my fog. Of course, I had heard him speak of the case, but it had gone past me in my daze. Seeing my sister so committed to their cause, and realizing the fervor that was sweeping through Shanghai, I felt like I was suddenly plunged into a cold pool of water and transported back among the living. The intensity of what was going on around me was staggering.

I looked at my sister, the one who had stayed at home, while I was dancing at elegant dinner parties with the political giants of Shanghai, and I saw her with new eyes. Wanhua was simply dressed, and she wore no make-up; she spoke confidently and at length about the political situation in Shanghai. And she was so passionate in her political idealism — she openly opposed Chiang Kai-shek's policy of non-resistance with the Japanese, and was certain that the Japanese were going to annex China province by province if the people did not unite against Chiang Kai-shek.

Then I imagined how my sister — my political activist, university student, dear baby sister — must see her older sibling. I looked so pale and thin and weak. Since Tommy died, I had not taken pride in my appearance. I had not continued my classes with Mrs Lin, and I sat back timidly as my toddlers ruled our home. I knew it was time — time to heal.

I called Mrs Lin that afternoon — that same afternoon I had laughed — after Mother and Wanhua left, and arranged to resume my studies. I showered and dressed carefully and met my husband with living eyes that evening for dinner.

As I resumed my life as the wife of Liankui Ching, my first social engagement was to be the event of a lifetime — the birthday party of Du Yuesheng, now the principal leader of Shanghai's Green Gang.



I recognized the familiar sweet smell of opium as I entered the grand foyer of Du's home — a traditional Chinese-style, three-storied, red brick building on Wagner Street in the French Concession.

In fact, the entrance to the room was a virtual feast for all the senses. As the foyer opened to the grand center hall of the house, my ears were deafened by the Chinese music — *huqin* (Chinese violin), flute, drum, and trumpet, all being played loudly, and mingling with room after room, filled with voices and laughter. There were several large gas chandeliers hanging from the high ceilings, and as my eyes adjusted to the bright

light, I saw beautiful original Chinese watercolors on the walls. I was familiar with the artists — they were some of the most highly regarded and treasured in China.

A large painting of the God of Longevity was hung prominently over a large mahogany table, flanked by two large red candles. Of course, we followed tradition, as did all the guests, and bowed to the God of Longevity as we entered, signifying our respect for the spirits. Elaborately prepared dishes of delicacies and fresh fruits were arranged on the table. Every chair in the house was wrapped with red embroidered covers, symbolizing good fortune and happiness.

The picture of the room could have been taken one hundred years earlier; the men wearing the traditional attire of a Chinese scholar: dark blue silk robes, and black satin jackets. Many were lounging lazily on the opium couches furnished in each room. Most of the women wore traditional embroidered red jackets over skirts; although a few were dressed in modern silk *qipaos*, the fitted dresses with high collars. The men were loud and vulgar, and the women — in the presence of the men — were silent.

Of course, Liankui had given me specific instructions to simply smile.

I watched as my husband greeted everyone as old friends, and I realized how deeply he was immersed with these notorious men. I held my breath as we approached Zhang Xiaoling, Du's partner in leading the Green Gang. Zhang indeed created an elegant appearance — his tall frame draped in a dark blue silk robe and black satin jacket. But his love for extravagance was obvious in his silver water-pipe — inlaid with layers of pearl and jade — and the seven-carat diamond ring on his middle finger of a hand that always seemed to be in motion. No, Zhang was not subtle; and Zhang had never sought the reputation of a gentleman. Liankui had warned me to expect a crude comment upon being introduced — Zhang was known to humiliate and embarrass women. Much to my relief, he simply nodded when my husband introduced me — a polite dismissal. As the evening progressed, and I observed some of the humiliating comments he made to the other women, I realized that his silence with me was a show of respect to my husband.

I was prepared to believe every evil and cruel story I had ever heard of the Green Gang, and to label them all as barbaric and crude, when my husband introduced me to the man of whom I had heard so much, Du Yuesheng. And Du was a vivid contrast to his partner, Mr Zhang.

"Du, may I present my wife, Ching Zhaohua," Liankui's comfort with Du was obvious as he introduced me.

"Happy birthday, Mr Du," I smiled and bowed politely as I met Mr Du, and tried to hide my interest in this mysterious and powerful man.

Du Yuesheng looked into my eyes, most inquisitively, for several seconds, as though he was truly trying to know me, and then a warm smile slowly crept onto his face. His words sounded most genuine — not a trace of stiff cordiality — when he greeted me.

"Thank you, Mrs Ching. It is indeed a pleasure to meet you. And thank you so very much for coming." I think it was his air of humility that impressed me most. In a room full of loud voices and music and extravagance, Mr Du seemed subdued and reserved, yet not aloof.

Over the years, I would come to like Du even more and realize how much he had in common with those individuals in my life, to whom I have afforded great respect. Du Yuesheng was always striving to learn more. Although he was not formally educated, he worked diligently to read the classics of Chinese literature. He practiced the art of calligraphy until he mastered it, and was elected to seats on the Municipal Council of the French Concession, the Stock Exchange, as well as the boards of various financial, educational, and charitable institutions. No, I would never reconcile my fondness for this man with the stories I had heard of his ruthless dealings with his enemies.

After a period of mingling at Du's party — silent mingling on my part — a servant appeared and bowed to me, and asked me to follow him. Liankui nodded his permission and I was led up the winding staircase.

There were three rooms, each with double doors opening into the other, giving the feel of one magnificent, chambered, unfolding room. Each room was set with five mahjong tables and around each table sat four ladies who were enjoying themselves immensely, and were laughing and gossiping — ladies who were most definitely not silent.

As I walked quietly through the room, taking in the energy and the sights of the women of the inner circle, I caught pieces of the conversations at each table, all punctuated by the whacking sounds of the mahjong tiles being shuffled, and the loud exclamations of the game.

"Little Wang was caught naked in bed with Lotus!"

"Old Fong, the old tortoise, shot Small Snake to death when Fong caught him hidden in the bedroom closet at night!" (This remark was met with roaring laughter by the other ladies at the table.)

"Chow, Pung, Kong!" (This meant a full set was on the table.)

"Wu!" (Someone had a complete hand to win the game.)

"Kill you thousands of times little devil!"

"Damn you tortoise eggs!"

I soaked in the unrestrained decadence as I walked through the room; most of these women wore flamboyant dresses with dazzling jewelry. All the diamonds and rubies and jade jewels seemed perfectly at home on these loud, colorful, cheerful women. Most were smoking as they played, and, just as downstairs, there were many opium couches. Only these couches were filled with women. The women were dreamily lounging, in their jewels and colorful dresses, and they seemed to be a natural element in the room.

I was not certain if Liankui's instructions about being silent extended to the presence of these women or not, but I decided that I really didn't care. I smiled as I took a seat on a sofa by the window, and decided to just relax and take it in — every detail of this dream-like place. What a story this would make for my children someday!

I sat there absorbed in my silence, and contemplation, of everything around me. I did not even notice as she approached me, the wife — the Fourth Wife — of Du Yuesheng.

"Hello, Mrs Ching, I am the wife of Du Yuesheng," and then she laughed as she continued, "everyone calls me Mrs Eighteenth Floor because my home is a suite on the eighteenth floor of the building." (The Cathay Building was one of the most glamorous buildings in the French Concession.) "I have heard much about you from your husband; he tells me that you studied at McTyeire. I wonder, did you know a Mrs Han? She is teaching me English now, I should say she is attempting to teach me English — I dare say I am not her most accomplished student!" 'Mrs Eighteenth Floor' smiled warmly as she addressed me. She hardly appeared to be the hostess of such a lavish party, dressed simply in a dark blue, silk dress, and wearing little make-up and jewelry.

Of course, I knew much about Mrs Eighteenth Floor, and had even seen her perform a few years earlier — she had been a famous Beijing opera singer in Shanghai for many years, always playing a male role. Although she would not have been considered a classic beauty — her figure was full, and her features were not particularly striking — I could sense immediately how she and Du would have been drawn to one another. Du admired her immensely. He respected her talent, as well as her intellect and open-mindedness; his other three wives were very quietly traditional. But I think it was her genuine, and down-to-earth warmth which drew Du — and others — to this lovely woman. I felt most honored by Mrs Eighteenth Floor's interest in me, and her obvious appreciation for my previous school.

"Yes, I studied under Mrs Han for two years. I found her to be an

excellent teacher — please give her my regards when you see her for your next lesson." Mrs Eighteenth Floor and I sat quietly, and had a most lovely conversation amidst the whacking of the mahjong tiles and the loud laughter and the gossip and the opium.

I left that day having made a new friend, and marveling at how our perceptions of people — people of whom we read and hear, and think we know — have no validity whatsoever. We think we know people through newspapers and stories and public perception. But it is not true. There is always a real person under that perception.

As our driver drove us home, well past midnight that evening, I chatted happily to Liankui about my new friendship — Mrs Eighteenth Floor and I had planned to meet for lunch in the coming week — when I realized that my husband was deep in thought, obviously concerned about something.

"What is it, Liankui? Did I say something to upset you?" I had thought he would be pleased that I had made a good impression on our hostess.

"It will be made public tomorrow, Zhaohua — it is reported that Chiang Kai-shek is being held hostage by the Young Marshal." The Young Marshal, Zhang Xueliang — son of the old Marshal, Zhang Zuolin — and his large Northeastern Army, had been sent to Xian to fight the Communists. But the Young Marshal and his troops were reluctant to open fire on their fellow Chinese citizens. They met secretly with Zhou Enlai, Communist leader, and forged an alliance, in an attempt to organize a united front against the Japanese. It was an open betrayal of Chiang. Upon hearing of the negotiations, Chiang had immediately flown to Xian to meet with the Young Marshal, who tried to persuade Chiang to unite with the Communists, and to help them oppose the Japanese.

Chiang was not receptive to negotiations and it was rumored that the Young Marshal and Zhou Enlai had ordered Chiang to be held in Xian.

"If the Young Marshal and Zhou Enlai executed Chiang Kai-shek, it would be disastrous for China, Zhaohua. The Japanese hate the Communists as much as Chiang does. They would charge China without restraint if they thought the Communists were actually gaining control. Everything is heating up, Zhaohua — something will have to break soon. And I fear it will be China."

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'Paris Liberated ...' 'Athens Freed by Allies ...' 'USSR Agrees to Friendship Pact with China ...' 'Mussolini Killed at Lake Como ...' 'Hitler Commits Suicide ...' 'Berlin Falls ...'

This was the news that dominated the world. Of course, we heard none of these reports; news in China was tightly controlled, and if the Japanese caught families trying to tune into the BBC, they were executed on the spot. But the Japanese soldiers heard the reports, and with each headline, they became more desperate to annihilate the Chinese people.

And that was all we knew.

Officially, the two parties in China, Nationalists and Communists, were still united against the Japanese. However, everyone in China knew the alliance was false and tenuous, and that it would not last. The Communist Party had continued to grow in numbers and power; they worked from the 'ground up' in their campaigns, focusing their energies on the peasants and the laborers and in the schools. The Nationalist loyalists were primarily composed of those who had been obedient and friends of Chiang Kai-shek, our dictator.

The Japanese, however, had made the mistake of underestimating the tenacity of the Chinese people. True, the Japanese had conquered our eastern coastline, and major ports, with relative ease. But the Chinese, in meticulously simplistic maneuvers, moved inland and took anything of value with them. Businesses dismantled machines, universities dismantled libraries and laboratories, and they packaged each item, each piece carefully, and shipped it by river — inland, where they rebuilt their factories and their universities, and continued as China.

The Japanese controlled all of our enormous lands along the coast. But not our vast interior. Also not our hearts and minds. Anti-Japanese songs were taught in schools, as early as kindergarten. *The March of the Volunteers,* with its bouncy tune and spirited words, was a popular favorite

at the time. Later, it was adopted as the national anthem of the People's Republic of China.

It was a state of anarchy. The Wang puppet regime underwent dissolution. Some banks and schools were closed. People hoarded food and other necessities, such as toilet paper, cooking oil, and fuel. US planes bombed military targets in Zaibei. Some stores refused to use the banknotes issued by the Wang regime.

As the war dragged on, Shanghai continued to crumble. Of course, as more and more Chinese moved out, taking businesses with them, property values plummeted.

Thus, Father, still in Beijing, decided he had no choice but to sell his Shanghai properties. Under Japanese occupation, their value would only continue to decline. If the Nationalists were victorious — which looked possible with Allied assistance — Father would be labeled a traitor, since he had worked for the puppet government — and he would probably be stripped of his property anyway.

At the time, I wasn't aware of all the reasons behind Father's decision — we were so isolated from news in Shanghai and communication was strictly controlled. All we knew was that Father had telegraphed Mother, instructing her to sell all properties immediately at any price. Mother, Wanhua and Honglin were to join Father in Tianjin, where he was being transferred. Our home was being sold, and we would have no place to live. I was faced with a new crisis. I had sold almost all of my jewelry — our last resort as income. Moreover, I would no longer be near Mother, Wanhua and Honglin. Yes, I had come to know the comfort to be found in family. Even a family that had not been particularly close in its beginnings had come together to nurture, support, love and laugh. It is true, you know, family will be there in need and I was still in need.

When I recall that day, watching my family pack and prepare to separate, I wonder when the leaders of nations will realize how barbaric the notion of war is? War kills sons, brothers, fathers, mothers, daughters and babies. And war tears families apart. It is primitive, base and not civilized. War took me from my family that day — and our goodbye was so painful, like each of the millions of goodbyes at the hands of war.

Yes, I know the *Dao De Jing* would say that war was the reason I found my family. Were it not for the war, I would not have had the opportunity to mend our breaks. But no, I can find no justification for what China endured at the hands of war. Though I know that every country has had her taste, those of us who have lived it, we know war is something the human race must outgrow.

As I watched my mother, Little Tiger, my sister and brother-in-law leave the house, I did not embrace my grief. I hated war — and all those responsible — with every fiber of my being.

But people do what they must do.

It is most fascinating how past, seemingly disconnected, acquaintances play into the web of our lives, weaving their way back in to become essential to the pattern.

"My friend Old Li has offered us the use of his house in Suzhou, Zhaohua. There are some tailors who have a shop in the front part of the house, but he says the back half is empty and we're welcome to use it. Besides, I think it's time to leave Shanghai for a while — perhaps the change of scenery would do us all good. Another friend,Yang, a wealthy bond trader, has plenty of room in his second wife's house — it isn't far from here, and he says we can store our furniture there." Liankui's voice sounded so old as he relayed this information. I was reminded of his playfulness just before we left Hong Kong — yes, in Shanghai, watching our beautiful city turn to a wasteland, had aged us all — but I think they gave my husband more years than the rest of us. He had continued to decline in spirit, growing more detached from our family, more hostile and more paranoid. And I found myself hoping that the change would indeed do him some good. So we prepared to leave for Suzhou; there was little left, so it did not take much time.

Suzhou is the Venice of China. The ancient city is situated around canals and lined with lovely stone bridges and garden villas, a picturesque backdrop for the hundreds of small boats filling the waterways. Next to Hangzhou, it was supposed to be the most enchanting city in China, and like Hangzhou, Suzhou held its own legends of magic. The women of Suzhou were said to possess a mysterious element of beauty — their features more delicate, their complexions more fair, and the eyes of the women of Suzhou were known to be enchanting. Many poets had written about the excellence of the eyes of the women of Suzhou.

The images of my family there, during that summer of 1945, feel surreal as I conjure them, like the mood of a sad but lovely poem.

We moved into the back section of Old Li's house — a traditional courtyard separated the back half from the front. Everything in Suzhou had an antique feel to it, and our lodgings were no exception to the mood of the city. The house was partially furnished, and if the dust on the

furniture was any indication, it hadn't been occupied for years. Alice and I immediately set about cleaning the place a bit. The children were filled with the excitement and that wonder which accompanies new surroundings and so they set about exploring. Much to their delight they discovered an obscure pull-up stairway, which led to a roomy attic. Liankui decided the attic would be a good place for all of us to sleep — if the Japanese soldiers came, they might not even notice the attic. So we made nests of down quilts and blankets, and the children and I spent our evenings curled in that antique attic, reading and telling stories and playing games. Liankui stayed to one side of the attic and did not join us in our evening entertainment.

Like our nights, our days in Suzhou also held an element of enchantment. The children and I planted flowers, and played outdoor games in the courtyard, and spent hours just walking the lovely stone streets and visiting the old shops and ancient temples. The people of Suzhou indeed embodied a tranquil element; their spirits seemed to reflect the element of water in which they were surrounded. It was contagious. We all relaxed and absorbed an element of tranquility.

Even Liankui seemed to be more comfortable, spending his days with a couple of associates who had also retreated to Suzhou, Peng and Young. Peng was a collector of Chinese paintings, old books and antiques. Indeed, he had either purchased or helped to sell some of our own paintings in the previous years. And Young had amassed fortunes in the textile and flour industry in Wuxi. The three of them spent their afternoons playing Chinese chess, or frequenting the traditional tea houses lining the canals, or in trading rumors of news of the war. It was an idle existence for men who were accustomed to the fast paced world of finance and business. Under other circumstances, their time in Suzhou might have been savored. At the time, however, in that surreal summer of 1945, it was a solitude and a city to be simply endured.

It was in this enchanting setting, that Liankui brought us the news of the arrival of the dawn.

The arrival of the dawn was the sustaining hope of every Chinese citizen in Japanese occupied territory — the end of Japanese rule. The return of our own Chinese rule, albeit Chiang Kai-shek's distorted version of democracy.

When it was announced, on August 15, 1945, that Japanese Emperor Hirohito had unconditionally surrendered, it became one of those historical moments forever engraved on the minds and hearts of citizens around the world, but especially in China.

I remember that I was preparing dinner when Liankui came home with the news. I can still see every detail in that antique kitchen in the floating city of Suzhou, where I heard the news of the end of the war. I can feel the breeze coming through the window and I can smell the fish I was preparing for dinner. And I can still feel the silent tears as they dripped down my eyes, and from my chin onto the threadbare green dress I was wearing.

We did not embrace and we did not dance. We just stood — stunned — in motionless, exhausted relief, as we absorbed the arrival of the dawn.

We immediately made plans to return to Shanghai. And the kindness of my husband's friends continued; the same Mr Yang in whose house our furniture had been stored, offered us stay in the first floor of that house until things settled. Mr Yang had exercised keen foresight and invested in Nationalist government bonds. With the surrender of the Japanese, he not only amassed fortunes as the Nationalist government was reinstated, but he was also above suspicion of collaborating with the Japanese puppet regime during the occupation.

Others were not so lucky. The dawn for many Chinese was to be simply another storm on the horizon. As if in confirmation of this fact, during the first two weeks of the dissolution of the Japanese puppet regimes and the arrival of Nationalist officials flying from Chongqing to Shanghai, the sky remained covered with dark clouds and every day there were thunderstorms and lightning. The black skies and the storms were a fitting backdrop for the return of Chiang Kai-shek to Shanghai.

The Nationalists behaved more like conquerors than liberators. Chiang's first order of business was to declare 'Traitors' Laws.' A traitor was defined as anyone who had used Japanese-issued banknotes, eaten rice grown in the occupied territories, drunk water controlled by the Japanese, or paid taxes to the Wang puppet regime. Virtually anyone who had lived under the Japanese occupation could be charged as a collaborator. There were thousands of trials; most of those charged were convicted and either exiled or executed. The end result was that large numbers of puppet officials, as well as army officers and their troops, fled in fear of persecution by the Chinese government. Their only refuge was to join the Communists, who were quietly and rapidly dissolving their alliance with the Nationalists now that the Japanese had been defeated.

The arrival of that bleak dawn on Shanghai brought the return of corrupt government, runaway inflation, and critical housing shortages as Nationalists returned to the coast. Those officials would move into the loveliest homes left standing, declaring the owners traitors. The

Communists had no need to actively recruit members — the contempt of the people for the 'victorious' Nationalists accomplished that goal. The Communists simply had to sit back and welcome those thousands who feared their Nationalist 'liberators.'

My husband's refusal to practice law during the Japanese occupation turned out to be a wise decision. Many attorneys who had practiced were denied the right to practice law for the rest of their lives. Indeed, our dear Uncle Sha, who had become my mother's dearest friend, was stripped of his license to ever practice law again. I listened as the wives of those who had worked under the Japanese to feed their families and then been imprisoned as traitors, came pleading for the assistance of my husband, who had quickly resumed his practice in the front sitting-room of Mr Yang's house. Liankui had always practiced law with integrity. This integrity came into conflict with his national loyalty as he repeatedly declined to represent those charged by the Nationalist government. It would have been quite lucrative for him professionally, had he accepted the cases, as payment was being made with gold bars or American dollars. But I can still hear him as he contemplated the appeals of the wives of his friends and former colleagues.

"If I should win the case, I will do my country a disservice; if I lose, I will do my client a disservice. I would prefer to remain poor rather than suffer from a bad conscience."

But my husband did not remain poor. The principal players in the financial, political and legal network of Shanghai sought their familiar business associates and alliances. I watched my ageing husband embrace his work with enthusiasm and fervor. He desperately wanted to believe in the success of the Nationalist government and committed himself to rebuilding his life and his country.

Of course, Du Yuesheng returned to Shanghai and quickly enlisted my husband's legal expertise in re-establishing the new stock exchange. They were successful and Du was named Chairman of the new Shanghai Stock Exchange, and my husband was given a brokerage seat on the exchange, a highly sought-after prize.

In those first few months, we tried with all our hearts to believe in the propaganda of Chiang and the Nationalists. My husband was elected as one of the representatives of the Shanghai Bar Association to draft the new constitution. He often traveled to Nanjing, where the conventions were scheduled. But we both saw the mounting strength and animosity of the Communists. And we both saw the corruption and lack of sound policies of the Nationalists.

Still, we tried to contribute to the rebuilding of our country, in spite of the fact that our position in political circles was difficult. My husband's loyalty to the Nationalist government was never questioned, but the general attitude of those who returned from Chongqing was that anyone who had lived under the Japanese occupation had compromised their national loyalty. Because we had stayed in Shanghai, and survived, we were treated as second-class citizens, despite my husband's connections and his loyalty to Chiang's Nationalist Party.

As our days began to settle into a shell of a resemblance of our past lives, I also set about rebuilding my family, financially and spiritually. Alice resumed studies at Aurora University. The children resumed studies in what was left of their respective schools. And much to our delight, Liankui's other daughter, Margaret, and her husband Henry Ho, returned to Shanghai. But Margaret brought hard news for my husband. Her brother Chiajin, Liankui's second son, had died in a battle with the Japanese in Northern Jiangsu.

My heart ached for my husband as I watched this proud man's eyes cloud with tears. It is a most painful sight to see a man mourn for his son.

I tried to comfort my husband, and though we had reached a new level of partnership and respect, Liankui seemed more distant and unfamiliar to me. I tried to ignore his troubling patterns of behavior, which grew worse when we returned to Shanghai — his fluctuation between being possessive and then respectful, and his often irrational paranoia — attributing it to the residual horrors of war.

Still, as Liankui and I discussed political events, my husband continued to give me measured increments of respect; he even enlisted my help in some of his cases. His practice, with the help of Du and other loyal friends and clients, was quickly revived, giving us enough to live on in the face of sky-rocketing inflation. Still, we could not afford our own home and with four young children, and Alice, and a law office, all functioning out of the generosity of Mr and Mrs Yang's cramped quarters, I tried to save every penny in the hopes of moving within the year.

When Liankui was asked to represent the children of Silas Hardoon in the dispute over the division of their father's estate, I was overjoyed. The famous case marked the return of my husband's professional recognition in Shanghai, as well as an opportunity for us to rebuild financially. I eagerly agreed to help my husband research the history of the case and became fascinated with the family.

Silas Hardoon was one of the wealthiest men to have lived in Shanghai. There were streets and parks and temples named for him — many still

exist. Perhaps my fascination with the Hardoon family had something to do with the fact that theirs was a Western story. Yes, it all took place in the East, but it is the story of a family that achieved so much, against all odds. I suppose those rags-to-riches stories are always fascinating, whether one is in the East or the West, but as I researched and recorded the details of the case, I felt as though I knew the family on an intimate level even though I never actually met them. And the Hardoon family confirmed my conviction, though sometimes an elusive one, that anything is possible. I remember thinking that money can be a sort of freedom, if you are not ruled by it, and that money can also bring so much sadness.

Silas Hardoon arrived in Shanghai as a refugee from Baghdad, fleeing Jewish persecution. He arrived young and quite penniless, and went to work as a night watchman in one of the Sassoon Company's warehouses. He quickly worked his way up and became a rent collector for the many properties owned by the Sassoon family. Silas watched and learned, and he saved and worked. He invested in real estate, then in opium, and made millions.

Then he met the lovely Jialing Luo, a beautiful Eurasian, born in the Chinese City to a French police officer and a Chinese mother. When she was three, her father returned to France, and her mother died when she was nine, leaving Luo to survive in a poverty-stricken area near the Old West Gate. It was rumored that she survived by selling flowers, and also that she sold sexual favors, when Silas met her.

It is said that Silas fell completely in love with Jialing Luo the first time they met and that he married her within weeks. He designed a lovely estate, situated in the heart of the International Settlement and named it Aili Garden — using his wife's Chinese name. It was referred to as Hardoon Park and its twenty-six acres were designed as a miniature of the Empress Dowager's Summer Palace in Beijing. It contained an elaborate, Gothic mansion whose entrance was guarded by two tall, vermilion iron gates. Also beautifully spaced on the grounds were guest houses, a magnificent Chinese garden, pavilions, pagodas, rock gardens, bamboo groves, and arched bridges over artificial lakes and hills. At the many docks were tied graceful, traditional Chinese boats, all painted red and decorated with classical Chinese inscriptions. Yes, it was just as magical and enchanting as it is described.

Silas and Luo had no natural children of their own. They built an orphanage on the grounds and eventually adopted many children from the orphanage. Mrs Hardoon was greatly influenced by a famous Wumu Mountain monk and scholar named Huang who persuaded her to

undertake the printing of the Buddhist canon; it ran 8,416 volumes, with Huang doing the editing. Mrs Hardoon's picture appeared in the first volume. Following the publication, Huang retired to a monastery near Nanjing, but Mrs Hardoon remained a devout Buddhist. Though Silas never abandoned his Jewish faith, he gave generously to Buddhist temples in honor of his wife, while also spending a sizeable fortune on building the Beth Aharon Synagogue, a most interestingly designed structure — combining sharp corners and smooth curves, on Museum Road in the International Settlement.

I learned that Silas Hardoon was a man of contradictory nature, often most eccentric. He had millions and their home and lifestyle was quite lavish; they were always followed by an entourage of attendants, assistants, and servants. Their many adopted children were always surrounding them. He had one of the best curry cooks in Shanghai, an intelligence network, even two bodyguards. Yet his office was the antithesis of wealth. No curtains on the windows or rugs on the floor — even on the coldest days, he would work in his office and refuse to have it heated — he sat there bundled in his overcoat.

When Silas Hardoon died in 1931, his funeral service followed both Jewish and Chinese rituals. He left everything to his wife.

Mrs Hardoon was said to have found comfort in the constant companionship of her chief steward, Ji Jiami. Of course, it was rumored that he was also her lover.

When Mrs Hardoon died a few years after the death of her husband, there was a bitter legal battle waged by some of the adopted children over the division of the estate. The battle had begun before the Japanese occupation, so it involved rulings in various courts — some no longer recognized. Under the Japanese imposed legal system, the adopted Chinese sons had lost their claim in the estate to one of their Caucasian 'brothers' who had collaborated with the Japanese.

The seven Chinese sons who had been adopted by the Hardoons — they all used the Chinese name of their adopted mother, Luo — had hired Liankui. My husband was deeply committed to their cause and took the case without a retainer. He was to be paid with property once his clients' right as heirs was re-established.

I think that when we look closely, there is something we can learn from everyone's life. The many late evenings I spent consumed in the letters and records of the Hardoon family were engrossing.

I learned from Silas Hardoon — a man whom I had never met — or perhaps, I simply reaffirmed what I had always known — that there is a

richness to be found in diversity. He was not intimidated by his wife's different religious values; indeed, he seemed to embody the goodness to be found in both Buddhism and his Jewish faith. As I came to know the Hardoon family, I admired that trait.

As Liankui and I worked together into the long hours of the night, we tried to believe all the indications that everything was going to be fine.

Chiang Kai-shek kept reassuring the people that China was stabilizing. Even as he ran from the Communists, who were marching south.

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I left Sabah, now part of an independent Malaysia, and returned to Hong Kong, the closest place to home for myself and for so many Chinese. The city had been beautifully and aggressively rebuilt following the war and was readying itself to compete with Paris and New York. It was as though the energy of Shanghai, like so many of her people, had floated across the water and taken up residence in Hong Kong.

Without my children, Hong Kong felt alien to me. It bore no familiarity, nor comfort, nor association as home. Frank had gone to the United States soon after I had left for North Borneo, so now they were all there, with the exception of Judie. I did not quite know where she was. I had not heard from her.

I found a job with the Chinese Manufacturers Association, and a lovely apartment in a ladies' hostel on Robinson Road. I resolved to locate Judie, and to make plans to see my other children.

I wrote to the American Consulate for a visitor's visa to go to New York. The Consulate kept denying my request, stating that since my children now lived there, they did not believe I would return to Hong Kong where I no longer had any roots. They advised me to apply for an immigrant visa, but the waiting list for an immigrant visa was incredibly long because, by law, only 105 Chinese could be admitted each year.

I also wrote to Judie at the most recent address I had. It was Paris. Finally, I received a letter from her — it was Taiwan.

I did not immediately recognize the name over the return address: it was Sister Agnes Therese. But as soon as I saw the handwriting, I knew. My hands trembled and I sat down in my apartment, so thankful to be alone when I received her note. I closed my eyes for several moments and regained my composure before I read those lovely words, written by the beautiful and talented hands of my first child.

It was a simple note, but it brought my daughter back into my life. Judie said that she had been studying at the Ursuline House of Sisters in

Washington, DC, and her religious name was now Sister Agnes Therese. She was working, within her Order, toward a master's degree in English, and the Order had sent her to teach English at the Stella Maris Middle School for girls in Hualien, Taiwan. She said that perhaps I could visit her in Taiwan.

I had not seen my daughter in almost ten years. And a couple of tears made tiny ink puddles on the note.

But even though I knew that Judie was in Taiwan, I realized that it would not be easy for me to visit her. When Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan in 1949, his government closed off the island with an iron gate — fearful of Communist infiltration. It was very difficult for any Chinese to be granted a visa. But the friendships I had made in North Borneo helped me overcome this latest obstacle in my life.

I wrote to Mr and Mrs Noether, my friends from Jesselton, who owned an import and export business in Taiwan. I asked them to sponsor me for a Taiwan visa. The Noethers were wealthy and influential and helped me push through the paper work easily.

In April of 1964, I received my precious visa. I wrote to Judie immediately that I would be coming, and then to the Noethers with words of thanks. I also wrote to some first cousins who had fled to Taipei from the China mainland with the Nationalist government.

My two cousins, Helen Liu and her half-brother, Dr Chonghua Ching, who were children of my father's older brother, and whom I had not seen in many years, met me at the airport. They drove me to Helen's home and made me feel as comfortable and welcome as if we had never lost touch. Helen was elegant as ever, and I could see that she had fulfilled her role as a diplomat's wife most skillfully — her late husband was the consul in Saigon and the last consul general in Hanoi. We had a lovely lunch with Chonghua and his lovely wife; they made it feel like a grand reunion.

The Noethers invited me to dinner on the evening of my arrival and took me to dinner at the magnificent Grand Hotel, built beautifully into the side of a lush mountain with a breathtaking view of a deep rich valley. The restaurant was owned by Madame Soong May-ling, President Chiang's wife, and it most effectively relayed the exquisite taste of Madame Soong.

I was delighted to see my old friends, but I felt myself growing anxious over my meeting with Judie the following morning. We had corresponded regularly over the past few years, but her letters did not feel like letters from my daughter. She had embraced her role of sacrifice and a new life

completely. It seemed to mean rejecting her earthly families. I had accepted her decision. But I missed my daughter.

Though exhausted from my trip and the reunion with family and friends, I barely slept that night. I woke early and was dressed when Helen walked into the kitchen. She had also dressed carefully, saying she had decided to accompany me to see Judie in Hualien as she was also anxious to see Judie. But I looked in her eyes and I knew that this woman — this dear cousin who shared my blood — was anxious about my reunion with my daughter. She did not want me to travel alone. And I accepted her company gratefully.

Hualien was a small, sleepy town southeast of Taipei, but across a deep range of mountains. Transportation was generally by bus — eight hours. Or a small plane, which took only 45 minutes if there was good weather. Typhoons were a constant threat on this side of the island and delayed flights, due to winds and rains, were a common occurrence. I had reserved a flight and written Judie of my planned arrival.

After a turbulent trip in a small plane, we approached Hualien. The semi-tropical mountains were breathtakingly majestic. We landed on an unpaved airfield and I looked around anxiously for Judie. We were approached by a young Chinese woman.

"Mrs Ching? Hello, I am Therese Jiao, a friend of your daughter's. I'm here to welcome you on her behalf. She is waiting for you at the gate of the school. Come, I have a car over here."

Helen held my hand as I swallowed my disappointment. I shrugged as we walked to the car and said that I had waited ten years for this day, another few minutes was nothing.

I noticed that the roads were rough and unpaved as we were driven through the terrain we had seen from the air. The varying layers of greenness were even more beautiful when seen from the ground. But it also became more remote and more isolated. I tried to soothe the uneasiness I felt at the thought of my daughter living in this thick and primitive region.

Upon arrival at the school, Helen and I were greeted most formally. The many teachers and the school's Chinese principal were gathered together for our arrival. And Judie was there, lined up with her 'Sisters.' She was wearing her white starched headpiece, her long robe and white cotton shoes.

Judie smiled and said hello with exactly the same impeccable manners as the other nuns. She did not approach me, or hold out her hands, and I could sense that I was not permitted to embrace my daughter. I tilted my

face upward slightly, hoping my tears would not spill from my eyes. Helen looked on. I handed my daughter a few boxes of chocolates and a woolen jacket I had brought as gifts from Hong Kong. She thanked me politely.

The principal invited Helen and me to have lunch with the students — Judie was not allowed to have meals with outsiders, which included her own mother. Our lunch was meager and of poor quality. Helen and I ate quietly, taking in my daughter's chosen life. Stella Maris was a junior high school for about 200 girls, run by French nuns and tightly controlled and isolated from the outside world. The children played on the grounds, which were vibrant with poinsettia bushes and banana trees. But when I looked into the faces of the young girls, all I saw was Judie. And the Judie I saw, but could not even touch, did not resemble my child who had left me ten years ago as a determined young woman. She looked so thin and so pale — her skin had taken on a grayish tint. Her eyes bothered me most, I think. They were tired. I knew tired eyes well. I had seen the hollow exhaustion in my mother and in my own mirror. But to see them in my daughter was more than I could bear.

I could feel it. In my bones, I could feel that Judie was not well.

Before we left that evening, Helen and I were given a brief opportunity for an unsupervised walk with my daughter. I did not waste my few precious minutes with her.

"Are you happy here, Judie?" I looked intently into her eyes, trying to penetrate the emptiness I met.

Judie only nodded.

"Are there doctors? You are not well, Judie, I can feel it. When was the last time you saw a doctor? Answer me, Judie." I could not accept her silence.

"There is someone on staff with medical knowledge, but no doctors. There is aspirin if we have cold or fever. Don't worry, Mom. I am cared for."

"Health is not as simple as that, Judie. Something is wrong. I can feel it, Judie. You must see a doctor. You seem weak and your coloring … if you have … ," and I'm not sure where these words came from, at the time I thought them to be the words of a frustrated, desperate mother, "… if you have a lump on your body, Judie, or persistent pain, or … oh, there are so many things, Judie, but if you are not well, you must report it to Mother Superior at once. Our bodies are a gift of God also; they require care and knowledge and to ignore things can mean life or death. I'm afraid for you, Judie. Please."

"I … I might have an opportunity to go to Rome for tertianship,

Mother. Only four more years, here. It will be different. Don't worry, Mother." Judie handed me a farewell gift. An English book, *The Trapp Family of Singers*, about an Austrian family who had managed to escape the Nazis during the Second World War and now traveled the world performing together.

Then I left her there. My daughter Judie stood with that same group of women who were now her family, and waved goodbye to me from inside the school's iron gate. To me, the iron gate on that school looked like a prison.

Therese Jian, Helen and I were silent as we drove to the airfield. Before she left, Therese held my hands. "Mrs Ching, the Order ... it is very strict. They demand absolute obedience to Mother Superior. And that each nun must sacrifice all for the sake of God. Like ... like the Chinese Communists. Your daughter is ... very loyal." Therese looked away from me. She just got into her car and left. We all knew there were no words.

As Helen and I climbed back into that tiny plane and fastened our safety belts for the bumpy ride back to Taipei, I shook with rage and emotion.

My mind questioned everything. How could the religion into which I had been baptized ask a vibrant, intelligent young woman to deny that she was human? To suppress her joy and her anger, her misery and her sorrow, and her love? These were natural feelings. How could it take my bright-eyed Judie and turn her into the shell I had spent the day with?

There was nothing I could do. Her obedience was to her Mother Superior, but Judie Ching was my daughter. And I prayed the prayers of a mother who has just glimpsed the slow death of her daughter.

Back in Hong Kong, I arrived at that universal realization of motherhood — the moment when we know that our children are no longer ours, when our hands are no longer able to help them to dry their tears or clean their scrapes. Something was wrong with Judie, I knew. More than her vacant look. I had raised my daughter to be a woman who made her own choices. And now both Judie and I must live with those choices.

When I left Hong Kong later that year, I left the East — the East in my bones and the East in my blood and the Eastern traditions that had so shaped my life — and stepped back into my dream, my passion, my own way. Of course, my way would never have been complete without the scars and joys of motherhood. And Liankui. And the wars. But, I knew, as I left Hong Kong, that those were rich elements which had contributed to my life, but they were not the sum, not the purpose. No, there was no

immense sadness at leaving Hong Kong; there had been little left for me there.

Janet and James Woo had moved to Kowloon, but their children had gone to study in the United States. Margaret was in Hong Kong, but, of course, she was busy with her own family. Except for Judie, my other children were all in the United States, and though I was still unable to obtain a visa to even visit them, I was more determined than ever to get there myself.

During an interview at the US Consulate, I was told it could take years to be allowed to visit the United States. Immigration of Chinese was so tightly controlled. I decided to go to London instead. Immediately I applied for a Hong Kong British passport and a work permit, and got both without difficulty. With a passport, a work permit and my English business degree — Corporation Secretary — my immigration visa to England was granted.

When I arrived in London, this Western world city, I felt like I had found a lovely, comfortable old robe and slipped it on, and it fit just right.

London had that familiar energy of my Old Shanghai — that energy to be found only in international cities. But London was so Britishly Western. In this most delicious city I settled quickly, obtaining a job almost immediately on the basis of my previous government work experience. I secured a room in an international ladies' hostel, which served perfectly until I moved into a beautiful studio apartment near Belsize Park in North London, not far from Heath — of which I had read so much in the works of the British poets.

I had written a childhood friend, William Lee, of my arrival and, to my delight, he met me on my first day in London and took me under his wing during my stay. And a lovely wing it was! William was now the head in the London Office of an international shipping company; he and his charming wife, Joy, introduced me to some of the more obscure treasures to be found in London and included me in their busy and 'oh-so-London' social calendar from the first week on.

I reveled in the Western history. Of course, I had to take it all in — St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace. I went to the British Museum and to Hampton Court, where King Henry VIII had lived with his many wives. I strolled Trafalgar Square where the statue of Lord Nelson stood atop a tall column, surrounded by a large gathering of tourists. Big Ben issued his warnings that time passed swiftly and would never return. When I visited the Tower of London, the old ghosts seemed to haunt me. I often smelled the aroma of scotch whenever I passed the

pubs, which were full of people all the time. I was told that if the British stopped drinking, they would lose their sense of humor and inspiration. I looked up old friends, from both Hong Kong and North Borneo.

I settled into London life as though it were familiar. That happens, you know, when we pursue the path we are meant to take. Things fall into place, and our way is comfortable. In my studio apartment, without any family, in a new country, I felt completely at home, And I knew, intuitively, the time would come. I would see them — Frank, Priscilla, Anthony, and Alice. But my intuitions surrounding Judie were shrouded in dark shadows.

Judie's letters were sparse and dry; she suggested that I visit Paris while in London, which I did, making certain to see every site she recommended. Paris was so worldly and yet so soft. London was vital and majestic, but somewhat imposing compared to Paris. As for the people, the French were warm and friendly, the British reserved and helpful. I practiced my French and visited the historical sites. I stood in front of paintings and statues, and tried to imagine Judie, Anthony, Priscilla and Frank standing there in previous years.

I returned to London and decided my time in Europe would be a most wonderful place to tread water — lovely water. I toyed with the idea of settling permanently in London, but I knew that I could not feel settled until I had seen the lives of which my children had written — their completely Western lives. And I would be simply waiting, patiently and happily, but waiting nonetheless.

Unexpectedly, I received a notice from the American Embassy asking me to come for a physical examination, which I passed. President Johnson had changed the immigration law, substantially increasing the quota for Chinese.

On February 11, 1966, I left London by train for Southampton to catch the SS *Queen Mary* on her final voyage across the Atlantic.

The ship provided a luxurious class of travel, including exquisite sterling silver dinnerware, English china, and a live band. I had a beautiful cabin with a gorgeous bathroom. The voyage was a calm one and took about five days. Alone in my room, I wondered how my children had changed after living in the States. I pondered how I would adapt to the new environment. But I had already had the experience of living and working in London for a year, so it would probably not be too difficult. I had heard that America was the land of opportunity. Was it for everybody? Young and old? Male and female? Black and white? European and Asian? What kind of opportunities awaited me there?

On February 16, 1966, I stood with many other passengers on the deck of the huge steamer as it passed the Statue of Liberty, which looked so majestic, as the ship slowly entered New York harbor. My eyes filled with tears upon seeing the new world, and I said a small prayer of thanksgiving. For me it had been a long journey. I was fifty years old. And I felt like I had come home.