

Sine

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Spring 2025

苏格兰中国协会



Sine

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2025 is the Year of the Snake

Front cover: Celtic Serpent by Valerie Pellatt

Back cover: brooch replica of bronze snake, Musée Guimet, Paris

Sine is Gaelic for China

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The Scotland–China Association is a society of people, generally based in Scotland, who have an interest in all aspects of Chinese life and civilisation.

It exists to foster friendship and understanding between the people of Scotland and China to include peoples of Chinese ethnicity worldwide. The Association is non-political and non-sectarian.

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Update: The Scotland China Association in 2024-25

We have enjoyed a variety of meetings since September 2024, starting with a handling session at Lyon and Turnbull auctioneers. We were graciously and enthusiastically hosted by Mr Tsai and permitted, surprisingly, to handle objects dating from the Ming and Qing dynasties, with reserve prices from £500 to £6,000. Each object had symbolic motifs and associations, and some of them were very amusing (see the donkey incense burner pictured below). Attendee numbers were limited owing to the size of the room and the delicacy of the objects, but Mr Tsai's interpretation was informative and entertaining.



Viewing objects at Lyon and Turnbull Auctioneers

In October Dr Molly Silk spoke about China's space programme, and in November members watched the film 'Still Life' (三峡好人). In January we arranged a joint meeting with the Hong Kong Society, inviting Martin Barrow to speak about the current social and political situation in Hong Kong. The presence of both associations meant that the audience was larger than usual, and members appreciated the opportunity for a get-together of

the two groups with inter-related interests. In February we held a New Year lunch at China Red, and we were joined by Consul General Zhang and Deputy Consul Su. In March Bruce Connolly, photographer and old friend of the SCA, treated us to a photographic exploration of Tianjin, former treaty port.

Sadly, we have lost a founder member, Jean Reid, a noted journalist .

Many members will be acquainted with the work of Xinran, originally a presenter on Chinese radio, and now published UK author, mainly on the women of China. In this issue we are pleased to include an article on Xinran by her friend and colleague Wen Diya, translated into English by Sun Youling. Dr Zhu Zhu of Aberdeen University has contributed an in-depth article on the role of translations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories into Chinese at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This is complemented by a short piece on Ann Treherne, whose recent book on Conan Doyle has been translated for a present-day Chinese audience. This issue of Sine concludes with a fat edition of the Reading Room.

The Year of the Snake

The year of the Snake runs from January 29th 2025 to February 17th 2026. In Chinese tradition the snake is regarded as symbolic of beauty and wisdom. It is linked to the element fire, demonstrating *yang* characteristics of warmth, comfort and light, and, at the same time, negative *yin* characteristics of cruelty and intolerance. Those born in the year of the snake, while appearing inactive and calm, may have hidden depths – they are good thinkers and always mentally active. Snakes are linked to knowledge and spirituality, and 'snake people' may be interested in matters of religion, mysticism and the psyche. Mao Zedong and Bob Dylan were born in the year of the Snake.

The use of snakes for culinary and medicinal purposes in China is common. Sloughed snake skin has been used to treat conditions such as eye infections, haemorrhoids and sore throat. The treatment of conditions such as arthritis, and other types of ache or stiffness, is associated with the snake's flexibility and speed of movement. Similarly, the shedding of its

skin suggests curative properties for various skin conditions. See Reading Room for further information.

Snake is considered a delicacy in Chinese cuisine and on menus may be referred to as ‘dragon’ – both belonging to the group of scaly animals.

Until very recently snake restaurants and shops selling snake meat and blood could be found in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Some served a tonic aperitif of snake bile mixed with rice wine.

画蛇添足 *Drawing a snake and adding feet*

A story from the Strategies of the Warring States 战国策, a historical text that records the words and deeds of strategists during the Warring States period, 475-221 BC.

There was a gentleman of the State of Chu making offerings to the ancestors. He gave those who had helped a flagon of wine. They muttered among themselves. ‘There is not enough wine for all of us, but more than enough for one person. Let us all draw a snake on the ground, and whoever finishes first can have the wine.’ One of them finished his snake, and as he pulled the flagon towards him to drink, holding the flagon with his left hand and continuing to draw with his right, he said ‘I can add feet to my snake.’ He had not finished doing this when another of the men finished his snake. He grabbed the flagon and declared ‘Snakes do not have feet – why have you added feet to yours?’ and he drank the wine. So in the end, the man whose snake had feet lost his wine.

The title of the story has entered the language as a *chengyu* metaphor for the superfluous or unnecessary.

Between Black and White: A Hundred Shades of Grey

A profile of the British-Chinese Author Xinran

By Wen Diya, translated by Sun Youling

Through interviews, writing, lectures, and teaching, Xinran has been a devout advocate for faithful representations of history, maintaining a deep respect for oral personal histories and inspiring a greater societal awareness of the complexities of the past.

True human history resembles a Chinese ink painting - between the black and white are countless shades of grey.

Xinran: Journalist, Author, Volunteer

In February this year Xinran's latest work was published. As a result, she would be busy with interviews and book events at bookstores and institutions in the months to come. In early March, I made a special trip to London to attend her book event at the renowned independent bookstore, Daunt Books, where she was interviewed by *The Spectator* editor Cindy Yu. Watching this exchange between two generations of remarkable Chinese journalists left me deeply moved.

As Xinran herself described it, “on stage stood two Chinese journalists, sharing Asian features yet reporters of a different era - one asking questions in fluent, native-like English, the other answering thoughtfully in slower yet steady English”. For Xinran, such conversations are not an issue. Preparing for them is an essential part of her work whenever a new book is published. Over the years, answering various questions from readers and listeners, both domestic and international, has become a source of inspiration and creativity for her. Through the varied questions, she discerns the gaps and asymmetries in information and understanding and, in these moments, she discovers the path she yearns to pursue and fight for. These, of course, are efforts beyond the act of writing itself.



Journalist, author, and volunteer Xinran

Xinran came to the UK two years before I did, and since the publication of her first book, *The Good Women of China*, in 2002 she has released nine non-fiction works over the past 22 years, including *The Good Women of China*, *Sky Burial*, *The Promise*, and *The Book of Secrets*. In this time, she has passionately and energetically built up her charitable organization - 'The Mothers' Bridge of Love' (MBL) - all while serving as a Chinese advisor for British media organizations, contributing as a Chinese expatriate to UK-China relations.

Though Xinran's nine books have established her unique position as a renowned Chinese author in the Western literary world, she is more than just a writer. She prefers three descriptors before her name: journalist, author, and volunteer. These reflect her deep gratitude for her journalism career and her equal commitment to her charitable work.

Like many Chinese students who travelled abroad in the 1980s and 1990s, learning to survive overseas was her first challenge. She worked in restaurants, taught Chinese and, later, lectured at SOAS. These experiences gave her a deep understanding of language and cultural barriers. As a columnist for *The Guardian*, she wrote over 50 pieces over three years, blending humour and incisiveness in her reflections on British-Chinese cultural differences and the misunderstandings created by mutual biases. *The Guardian* and Random House jointly published a selection from her column as *What Chinese Don't Eat*. These achievements are a testament to her resilience and courage.

Her first book, *The Good Women of China*, took four years to be published. Many of the stories in this book stemmed from her late-night call-in radio programme in China, *Words on the Night Breeze*, where countless ordinary Chinese women shared their personal stories. Familiar with the material, she had no trouble in writing the book but bringing a book about real Chinese women into the English-speaking world was a monumental task. Dealing with translation, publishers and endless explanations and background clarification for the editor pushed her to the limits.

I not only understand her resilience and determination but also why today's students abroad don't face the same struggles. Growing up in an era with more accessible information and fewer language barriers, today's students have more economic security and preparation, thanks to the era of opening and reform that their parents - born in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s - experienced. The cultural shocks that once affected earlier generations of students are no longer as impactful and, even if they do experience some degree of culture shock, young people today seem much less inclined to feel troubled by it.

Compared to both earlier immigrants and those arriving today, Xinran's generation experienced some of the most intense inner conflicts, shaped by both a deep grounding in their native culture and a yearning to understand and integrate into the culture of their adopted country.

'In the UK,' said Xinran, 'adapting to local ways feels like chasing a distant mountain that never draws nearer. Beyond the long march through the hurdles of language, traditions, and customs, there's an uphill struggle to understand and follow the rules and norms - at times daunting, at times exasperating.'

Even after 26 years in the UK and with a British husband, she still feels the impact of these challenges and continues to work toward deeper cross-cultural understanding - a testament to the depth and lasting influence that this cultural collision has had on her.

It is precisely because she feels that the mutual understanding between East and West is often as fragmented as the tale of blind men describing an elephant, that she has made ‘building bridges’ her mission. Through the Chinese-British Literary Forum that she founded with her late husband, publisher Toby Eady, and through her charity ‘The Mothers’ Bridge of Love’ which nurtures a sense of cultural identity among adopted Chinese children and provides support for impoverished areas in China), her work is deeply rooted in a profound longing for ‘open dialogue, cultural understanding and a shared sense of connection’.

However, this progress has not brought the world closer together as a harmonious global family. On the contrary, the world we live in today is more turbulent, filled with uncertainty and marked by deep divisions. Perhaps it is because people today are more self-centred for whatever reason, but it seems that the once strong desire to understand and connect with the outside world has been steadily fading. Instead, there is a growing focus on self-expression, coupled with a loss of interest and patience for other cultures and worlds. Could this, perhaps, be one of the reasons for the increasing fragmentation of our world today?

In the present era, I personally believe that we need more than ever to listen to and understand the world outside ourselves. We need more communication and empathy, as well as tolerance and patience. From this perspective, I can see the anxiety and concerns that Xinran has, but I also see her perseverance and efforts. For example, her charity, ‘The Mothers’ Bridge of Love’, has expanded from its initial focus of connecting the adoptive families of Chinese children and collaborating with the Chinese adoptees, to engaging in numerous forms of cultural exchanges. From starting as a children’s book project, it has grown to assist in the creation of 28 rural school libraries by 2023. What began as a small group has since blossomed into a team of volunteers from five different countries. Her steadfast commitment to annual volunteer training in both China and the UK, as well as providing support and psychological guidance to many

overseas students, showcases her dedication. During the 2020-2022 COVID pandemic, 'The Mothers' Bridge of Love' organized 14 cultural forums, with each session featuring prominent figures from various fields. The Charity has also been organising an annual English-Chinese Recitation Competition.

Documenting History for Future Generations

Interestingly, with the exception of her book *What the Chinese Don't Eat*, which was written in English, all of Xinran's works are in Chinese. She believes that since her interviewees speak in Chinese, it's essential to respect their original voices. Another reason she insists on writing in Chinese is to preserve the cultural uniqueness of certain terms and concepts which often lose their essence and beauty in translation, no matter how skilled the translator.

Xinran adheres to three principles in her writing. First, recording oral history. As China undergoes rapid transformation, many traditional cultural elements are vanishing. Xinran sees it as her mission to document the stories of ordinary people during this changing era. Second, respecting regional cultural differences. She values the rich diversity of regional cultures and strives to capture them authentically through her writing. Third, capturing her interviewees' personalities, language traits and responses shaped by their environments and experiences. For instance, when interviewing some villagers years ago, she noticed their frequent one-word responses such as "Whatever" (i.e. all fine with me). She includes such nuances because they reflect a unique part of cultural identity.

Before beginning a book, Xinran typically spends 4-6 months selecting her interview subjects. She constantly questions herself: *Why should I write about this person?* Once she decides on a subject, she delves into their unique traits, historical context and regional cultural significance. She then identifies the most moving aspect of their story. Once this preparatory work is done, she dives into her writing with an intense focus, completing the

process within 6-8 weeks. After finishing, she sets the manuscript aside for three months, allowing herself time to reflect before revisiting and revising it. For her, this period is crucial for personal introspection.

Every author draws inspiration differently. Despite encountering countless remarkable stories, Xinran's most recent book is strikingly distinct from her earlier works. *The Book of Secrets* is a deeply personal account left by a deceased father to his daughter. Through years of collected letters, the father revealed his family history, personal beliefs and emotions - details that he never shared during his lifetime. The letters span pivotal moments: life in Shanghai before and after the Japanese invasion; the enlightenment of love and ideals during his time at Tsinghua University; his passionate involvement in the early years of the People's Republic; the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations; the philosophical solace he sought in Kant during turbulent times; and his redemptive love for his wife, akin to Prince Dmitri in *Resurrection*.

This history moved Xinran deeply, awakening her awareness of her parents' generation - their pursuits, resilience, struggles and genuine affection for their children. Xinran believes that without their sacrifices, modern China would not exist. Yet they are being forgotten in the midst of China's sweeping transformations, fading into the dust of history.

By the time she began writing this book, most individuals from that generation had passed away. The father's letters mention family traditions, the transformations of old Shanghai, the military band at Tsinghua University, the influence of the Soviet Union on the early years of New China and how intellectuals who devoted themselves to building the new nation navigated and reconciled the clashes between their ideals and the system of governance rooted in workers and peasants. These accounts constitute rare Chinese historical records. If, in the future, such histories remain unknown, and no documentary evidence can be verified, will the recording of China's authentic history face the risk of being interrupted?

‘I never see myself as a literary writer,’ Xinran says. ‘I’m just a recorder of oral histories. Every one of my books is written for China’s children. I hope that through my interviews, future generations will understand the struggles, sacrifices, and resilience of their predecessors. I want them to experience the richness of Chinese culture and share my profound love for humanity.’ Who could deny that this sense of responsibility is the hallmark of Xinran’s generation of Chinese writers?

About the Author Wen Diya

Diya is an award-winning broadcast journalist, former TV presenter, producer, and company manager. She worked as a journalist and presenter for six years at China Central Television (CCTV), before moving to the UK in 1998 to pursue an MA in Journalism at Westminster University. She continued her media career with the BBC World Service and Hong Kong’s Phoenix TV in Europe.

After a decade in China’s property and land development industry, Diya returned to the UK in 2014 and now resides in Brighton with her family. A passionate writer, she has been a columnist for various Chinese magazines and authored two books, with a third forthcoming. Currently, she writes for *Ming Pao Monthly* and contributes to *Financial Times Chinese*. Diya also supports local charities and works as a Chinese language tutor.

Holmes Unleashed: With and Without Conan Doyle in China

By Zhu Zhu,

Lecturer in Translation and Language Acquisition, University of Aberdeen

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could hardly have imagined that, while he was still debating whether to resurrect Sherlock Holmes after the detective's dramatic plunge at Reichenbach Falls, his creation was already embarking on a new life in China - through both translation and reinvention in original Chinese fiction and beyond. Even more unexpectedly, Holmes would find himself entangled in political debates and literary revolutions unfolding on the other side of the world.

Holmes's earliest known appearance in Chinese dates to 1896, when *The Adventure of the Naval Treaty* was serialised in *The Chinese Progress* (《时务报》, lit. *Current Affairs Newspaper*), a politically charged periodical launched that year. Rendered in classical Chinese, the translation appeared less than three years after the story's original publication in *The Strand Magazine* in Britain. The translator, Zhang Kunde (张坤德), translated three more Holmes stories for the paper.

This first Chinese translation of Holmes emerged at a moment of profound national crisis. Earlier efforts at national salvation through technological and military development had largely failed, and China's intellectual elites turned to literature, preparing to launch a campaign to reassess the role of fiction - a genre traditionally dismissed as frivolous - and elevate it as a crucial tool for national salvation. The first major public call for this literary redefinition came in 1897, led by the influential reformer Yan Fu (严复) and historian Xia Zengyou (夏曾佑). In late 1897, Yan and Xia published a landmark editorial, "Preface to the Supplementary Printed Fiction Section" (《本馆附印说部缘起》), in *Guowen Newspaper* (《国闻报》), a reformist paper launched earlier that year. The editorial laid the groundwork for elevating fiction's status, arguing that fiction shaped public thought and customs more than classical or historical works, and played a key role in the cultural development of Europe, America, and Japan.

Holmes's debut in Chinese preceded this call by a full year, effectively contributing to the opening notes of what would soon become the Fiction World Revolution (小说界革命), a broader movement to harness fiction for mass education and cultural transformation.

From that point on, Holmes became a fictional companion to a wide range of literary ventures and political movements in China, maintaining widespread popularity through the early decades of the 20th century. The year 1896 was only the beginning: Holmes still enjoys a devoted following.

China at the time of Holmes's Arrival

In 1896, China was still under imperial rule, just 15 years away from the fall of the Qing Dynasty, which had governed for nearly three centuries, and the founding of the Republic of China. The country's future looked increasingly bleak. Only a year earlier, China had suffered a humiliating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (甲午战争, 1894-1895). The loss was particularly devastating, not only because Japan had once been a tributary state looking up to China, but also because it exposed the failure of decades-long efforts to strengthen the nation through technological development and military modernisation. Defeat at the hands of Japan became a profound turning point, intensifying revolutionary thought, accelerating calls for political reform, and shifting attention to mass education as a way to empower the population and broaden their worldview.

By the mid-19th century, translation had already become an important channel for introducing Western knowledge into China. These efforts were driven not only by government initiatives, but also by independent intellectuals eager to expose Chinese readers to Western philosophy, science, and political thought. The early translations had been primarily intended for elite advocacy and debate, with little outreach to the wider population. Translation of Western works progressed, but the focus changed as reformers increasingly targeted the broader public rather than the scholarly elite. They moved away from political and philosophical texts, turning instead to the more accessible form of popular fiction.

China's troubles began long before 1895. Since the 1840s, the country had suffered repeated defeats at the hands of Western powers, resulting in a string of unequal treaties that forced China to cede territory, open treaty ports, and grant foreigners extraterritorial rights. In response, the Qing government launched the Self-Strengthening Movement (自强运动, 1861-1895), an attempt to modernise by selectively adopting Western technology and industrial methods while preserving Confucian political and social structures. This movement prioritised military and industrial development over broader political reform. As part of this modernisation push, institutions such as the Shanghai School of Foreign Languages (上海广方言馆) were established to train translators and diplomats. Zhang Kunde, Holmes's first Chinese translator, was among its students.

The defeat by Japan in 1895 marked the end of the Self-Strengthening Movement and triggered a national crisis. China was forced to cede territory and pay heavy indemnities to Japan, while Western powers seized the opportunity to expand their concessions and economic influence. This humiliating loss shattered the widespread belief that China's weakness could be explained solely by technological inferiority. Losing to another Asian nation forced reformers to reckon with deeper structural problems, including political paralysis and a deeply uneducated populace.

This realisation prompted a radical shift in thinking: mass education became a pressing priority. Reformers increasingly viewed accessible literature as a vital tool for national renewal, capable of equipping ordinary readers with practical knowledge and new ideas. To meet this urgent need, reformers sought ready-made materials that could be quickly translated and widely distributed. In this context, Western popular fiction emerged as an ideal choice - not for its literary merit, but for its accessibility and its ability to convey practical knowledge of Western science, law, and society. Holmes's stories, reflecting contemporary Victorian life - a world both novel and advanced to Chinese readers - and enjoying immense popularity in the West, may have been selected partly by chance, but the choice was far from random.

Holmes Meets Revolution

Due to limited records, it is unclear how much autonomy Zhang Kunde had in selecting which Holmes stories to translate, or whether his choices reflected the views of Liang Qichao (梁启超), a leading reformer of the time, and founder of and contributor to literary magazines. In an editorial in *The Chinese Progress* Liang declared: “To reform society, we must begin with a revolution in fiction. To create new citizens, we must first create new fiction.” This officially elevated fiction into a tool for social reform, challenging its traditional low status. Liang stressed the importance of both accessibility and entertainment value. Regardless of Zhang’s personal motivations, the political agenda of the paper, its modern format and its content, both political and popular, served the dual purpose of promoting reform and enlightening the public.

The defeat by Japan in 1895 had directly catalysed the founding of *The Chinese Progress*. When the Hundred Days’ Reform failed, Liang fled to Japan, where his reform ideas continued to evolve.

Holmes’s adventures appeared in *The Chinese Progress*, alongside reformist essays and international news reports. The paper ran a dedicated section, ‘Translations from Foreign Newspapers’ (域外报译), introducing foreign writings to Chinese readers. Holmes’s stories began appearing there in August 1896 and continued for ten months, with Zhang Kunde translating four stories: *The Naval Treaty* (Issues 6-9, August-September 1896), *The Crooked Man* (Issues 10-12, October 1896), *A Case of Identity* (Issues 24-26, March-April 1897), and *The Final Problem* (Issues 27-30, April-May 1897). All were rendered in classical Chinese.

Zhang, employed by the paper as an in-house translator, also worked on foreign news reports but otherwise kept a low profile, leaving no personal commentary on his Holmes translations and publishing no political essays of his own. Nevertheless, the context in which these stories appeared ensured that from the very start, Holmes was politicised in the Chinese imagination. As Hao (2011: 45) observes, Holmes’s debut in China immediately became entangled in political discourse.

There are no surviving records of the public's reaction to Zhang's translations, but the fact that three more Holmes stories followed the first within a ten-month span strongly suggests a positive reception. What is certain is that Holmes's popularity in China quickly grew. According to Chen, between 1896 and 1916, Conan Doyle's works ranked first in quantity among all translated novels (Chen, 1989: 99). Holmes stories circulated widely in newspaper serialisations, magazine features, and collected editions, often translated by prominent writers of the time. The pace of translation was remarkable: when Conan Doyle revived Holmes in 1903, Chinese translations of these "return" stories appeared within months. By 1916, all Holmes stories published in Britain had been translated into Chinese, many with multiple competing versions. *A Study in Scarlet* held the record for the most translated versions (Hung, 1998a: 174 - 6).

The year 1916 marked a major milestone in Holmes's Chinese reception. That year, Zhonghua Book Company (中华书局) published *The Complete Collection of Sherlock Holmes Cases* (《福尔摩斯探案全集》), printed in a 12-line per page format and including all four novels and 44 short stories. This collection, produced by ten translators, was written in classical Chinese, albeit in a style more accessible than earlier translations. Several prominent literary figures contributed prefaces. The collection was highly influential and widely popular, going through 20 reprints in the next two decades (Chen, 1989: 74).

This 1916 collection also became a milestone in Chinese translation practices. It helped standardise conventions, such as the transliteration of foreign names. Holmes's name, which had previously appeared in various forms, was finally standardised as 福尔摩斯 (Fú ěr mó sī), the name still in use today. The collection had a lasting impact on the birth of Chinese detective fiction. Among its translators was a young Cheng Xiaoqing (程小青), later known as "the father of Chinese detective fiction." At the time, Cheng was in his early twenties, working alongside several of the era's leading writers and translators.

After 1916, nearly all new translations of Holmes stories appeared in vernacular Chinese (*baihua*, 白话), driven by the New Literature Movement (新文学运动). This movement, gaining momentum after 1917 and reaching its peak during the May Fourth Movement of 1919, sought to replace classical Chinese with *baihua*, the everyday language of ordinary people. Advocates believed that only by writing in the language of the masses could literature effectively promote social reform, modernisation, and enlightenment. Subsequently, post-1916 Holmes translations became part of this larger linguistic and cultural transformation.

In 1926, World Book Company (世界书局) published *The Grand Complete Collection of Sherlock Holmes Cases* (《福尔摩斯探案大全集》), with all stories presented in vernacular Chinese and using modern punctuation. However, this edition was still incomplete, omitting six short stories. A truly complete edition finally appeared in 1934, also published by World Book Company, under the title *The Complete Collection of Sherlock Holmes Cases (Deluxe Two - Volume Edition)* (《福尔摩斯探案全集》(精装二册)), including all four novels and 56 short stories.

Holmes Evolves and Endures

Holmes's stories were never merely passive political tools; they evolved and took on a life of their own. The initial translations engaged with existing Chinese literary norms, but over time, these translations helped reshape those very norms, influenced by the broader social, political, and cultural changes of the era. Almost from the moment Holmes arrived in late Qing and early Republican China, he began living independently in the Chinese imagination: appearing in original Chinese fiction, inspiring parodies, entering children's literature, and even lending his name to a popular cigarette brand.

The Instrumental Holmes

The Fiction World Revolution gained momentum largely because it was championed by prominent reformist figures, giving it immediate authority and influence. Translators and writers repeatedly echoed its core message

of reforming society through fiction, reinforcing its significance and accelerating its spread (Hung, 1998b: 72). In this context, practical usefulness outweighed literary aesthetics, making it natural to view Holmes stories and other detective fiction as tools to popularise modern legal concepts, reform investigative methods, and spread Western knowledge.

This utilitarian view was made explicit by Liu Bannong (刘半农), a contributor to the 1916 collection. Liu praised Conan Doyle for using fiction to train future detectives, arguing that stories could convey investigative techniques more effectively than a manual. Similarly, Yan Duhe (严独鹤), another contributor, claimed that Conan Doyle wrote the Holmes stories to compensate for the poor quality of government detectives, explicitly intending them as practical textbooks for aspiring investigators (cited in Hung, 1998b: 74). Cheng Xiaoqing, who would later become the father of Chinese detective fiction, echoed this view, famously describing detective fiction as “a disguised scientific textbook” (cited in Zhan, 2024c). These educational ideals shaped how translators understood and presented Holmes, influencing both their translation strategies and how readers perceived the stories.

Beyond serving reformist goals, Holmes translations directly contributed to the birth of modern Chinese detective fiction, a sub-genre that had no clear precedent in traditional Chinese literature. The closest equivalent was *gong'an* fiction (公案小说), or court-case stories, where upright officials solved crimes using moral authority, supernatural insight, or confessions extracted through torture, a stark contrast to Holmes’s rational deduction and scientific reasoning. This radically new model inspired Cheng Xiaoqing, who in the 1910s created his own Holmes-inspired detective, Huo Sang (霍桑), blending Western detection methods with local cultural references.

Cheng was not the first to create home-grown Chinese detective stories. In 1909, the first full-length Chinese detective novel, *Chinese Detective: Luo Shifu* (《中国侦探：罗师福》), was serialised in the Shanghai-based *Pictorial Daily* (《图画日报》). The author, writing under the pen name Nanfeng Tingzhang (南风亭长), remains unidentified. The name Luo

Shifu itself (Luo “takes Holmes as his master,”) pays direct tribute to the great detective.

The Adapted Holmes

Scholars have closely examined early Chinese translations of Sherlock Holmes stories, particularly Zhang Kunde’s work, to understand how late Qing translators adapted English detective fiction to fit Chinese literary conventions and cultural expectations. These translations were far more than simple linguistic transfers - they were acts of cultural negotiation, shaped by both the translators’ assumptions about their audience and the reformist goal of using fiction to educate and modernise.

One of the earliest adaptations involved narrative structure. In Conan Doyle’s originals, Watson’s first-person narration builds suspense by limiting what the reader knows. In contrast, Chinese fiction traditionally favoured omniscient storytelling with linear plots. To bridge this gap, Zhang Kunde restructured *The Naval Treaty*, replacing Doyle’s layered plot with a straightforward chronological account. This adjustment reveals how translators reshaped unfamiliar narrative forms to fit local tastes. This adaptation process evolved rapidly. When Zhang translated *The Final Problem* a few months later, he retained the first-person narration, showing growing confidence in the Chinese audience’s ability to handle new narrative techniques. This shift reflects the dynamic nature of early Holmes translations, as translators constantly negotiated between fidelity to the original and readability for Chinese readers.

Compromises also extended to characterisation. In *The Naval Treaty*, Ann Harrison, described by Conan Doyle as strong and Mediterranean-looking, became a gentle, fair-skinned beauty in some translations, aligning with traditional Chinese ideals of femininity. Other versions retained her description but interpreted it through a Chinese lens, rendering her stout and unattractive. Both approaches reveal how translators reframed foreign characters to fit familiar cultural moulds.

Another adaptation involved the treatment of mystery itself. In *gong’an* fiction, suspense did not come from discovering the culprit, who was often

revealed upfront, but from the process of investigation and the pursuit of justice. Translators applied this logic to Holmes, often choosing spoiler-like titles that revealed key plot points (Chan, 2001). This shifted the appeal of Holmes stories, focusing attention on Holmes's investigative brilliance rather than the whodunit element Conan Doyle intended.

Ultimately, these adaptations produced a hybrid Holmes, a figure shaped by both Victorian England and late Qing and early Republican China. Cultural adaptation was prioritised over literary fidelity, ensuring Holmes felt familiar and useful to Chinese readers while still serving reformist educational goals.

The Reimagined Holmes

Holmes's influence reached beyond translation. He made a cameo appearance in Liu E's (刘鹗) celebrated novel, *The Travels of Lao Can* (《老残游记》). This novel, known for its scathing critique of corrupt bureaucracy, briefly name-drops Holmes, presenting him as a symbol of Western investigative brilliance. This subtle reference contrasts Holmes's rational methods with traditional Chinese approaches to solving crimes, showing how quickly Holmes entered the broader Chinese literary imagination, even beyond the detective genre.

As Holmes became a household name, Chinese writers began to playfully parody him, placing Holmes in local settings where his famed deductive powers misfired. This began in 1904 with Chen Jinghan's (陈景韩) story *Sherlock Holmes' First Case in Shanghai*, published in *The Times* (时报). Holmes arrives in Shanghai to prove his genius, only to find his methods useless in the face of Shanghai's eccentric customs. His failures became sharp social satire.

Chen's friend Bao Tianxiao (包天笑) joined in, creating a back-and-forth parody series: Chen wrote the first and third cases, while Bao contributed the second and fourth, including *The Hidden Guns Case*, where Holmes mistakes opium pipes for firearms, humorously exposing both linguistic ambiguity and Shanghai's opium culture. These stories, though featuring

Holmes, were not true detective fiction, but rather satirical social commentary. The most outrageous parody appeared in 1916 with Liu Bannong's *The Great Failures of Sherlock Holmes*, a series of five stories in which Holmes is humiliated, tricked, and repeatedly defeated: stripped naked in a bathhouse in one story and forced to clean toilets and swallow purgative herbs in another. Marketed as comic fiction, these stories were hugely popular, embraced as pure entertainment. Liu Bannong's intimate knowledge of the Holmes canon (having served as translator and editor of the 1916 collection) enabled him to layer these parodies with intertextual jokes, referencing Holmes's iconic moments: his cab-ride deductions, Watson's war injury, and Holmes's faked engagement, all reimagined through a Chinese lens. These parodies became both playful homage and a sly reader's guide to the Holmes stories themselves (Zhan, 2023).

The Many Faces of Holmes

Holmes took on many faces as he settled into Chinese cultural life, appearing not only in literature but also in unexpected corners of everyday life, from advertising icon to educational material for children. His adaptability ensured that Holmes became far more than just a fictional character; he became a cultural fixture.

During the Republican era, Holmes's influence spilled beyond literature and into commerce, most notably through a cigarette brand named "Sherlock Holmes", produced by the China Fuxin Tobacco Company (中国福新烟草公司). In 1931, *Linglong Magazine* (《玲珑》) announced a Holmes-themed writing competition sponsored by the brand. Readers were invited to write original Holmes stories, ideally featuring the Sherlock Holmes cigarette itself. Prizes included cash, free cigarettes, and magazine subscriptions (Zhan, 2024b). This inventive campaign cleverly blurred the lines between literature and advertising, transforming Holmes into a commercial icon.

Holmes also found his way into the classroom, becoming a child-friendly figure in Chinese education. In the Republican era, Lü Boyou (吕伯攸), a renowned educator and children's literature specialist, incorporated Holmes excerpts into official primary school textbooks. In his 1939 *Newly*

Compiled Senior Primary School Chinese Reader (《新编高小国语读本》), Lü adapted Holmes's famous deductive reasoning scene from *A Study in Scarlet*, followed by critical thinking exercises designed to help students think logically like Holmes (Zhan, 2024a).

Holmes's adaptability has ensured a loyal fan base that remains strong today. Most recently, in 2022, Zhonghua Book Company published a new translation of *The Complete Collection of Sherlock Holmes Cases - Illustrated Collector's Edition* (《福尔摩斯探案全集(插图珍藏版)》), featuring the entire Holmes canon. This new edition pays direct homage to the landmark 1916 edition, also published by Zhonghua, further cementing Holmes's enduring legacy in China.

A Case Holmes Couldn't Solve

It is well known that Conan Doyle's feelings toward Holmes were deeply conflicted. Would the sheer extent of Holmes's adventures in China have filled Conan Doyle with pride, or only deepened his frustration? After all, Holmes was selected for translation precisely because of his popularity, and because Chinese reformers prioritised practical usefulness over literary aesthetics. If Conan Doyle had known exactly what Yan Fu and Xia Zengyou wrote in their influential 1897 article, would it have stung even more? They openly declared: "Fiction's influence on people, and its popularity, far surpass that of the classics and historical works. It therefore has a hold on people's thoughts and customs". In their eyes, historical fiction, the genre Conan Doyle most wished to be remembered for, was dismissed outright. Ironically, Holmes, the character Conan Doyle had tried so hard to kill off, became a model for reformist fiction, while Conan Doyle's cherished historical novels were left in Holmes's shadow.

And yet, perhaps there was a silver lining. Doyle holds the rare distinction of being the only prolific Western writer all of whose major works were translated into Chinese during his lifetime, including his non-detective fiction (Hung, 1998b: 77). Would this knowledge have softened his frustration? And here's another twist: thanks to Holmes's extraordinary popularity in China, Conan Doyle also became one of the first foreign

writers to receive a biographical entry in turn-of-the-century Chinese literary magazines (ibid).

Would these unexpected honours from the far side of the world have put a wry smile on his face? Perhaps, just perhaps, the great detective might have finally done something to solve his creator's discontent.

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Arthur Conan Doyle: Transforming Chinese Society, Then and Now

Ann Treherne

Medium, author and Founder of

The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre in Edinburgh.

Arthur Conan Doyle is globally celebrated as the ingenious mind behind the legendary Sherlock Holmes detective stories. His intricate tales, rich with scientific and medical insights, have left an indelible mark on forensic science and revolutionized criminal investigations worldwide. When these iconic tales were translated into Chinese, they did more than just entertain—they inspired profound changes in Chinese society. The detective's methods and logical thinking left a significant mark on various fields, including transport and infrastructure, heralding an era of modernization.

But beyond his fame as a writer, Conan Doyle was also a passionate advocate for Spiritualism. In his later years, he dedicated his life to promoting the belief in 'life after death,' traveling the world with unwavering commitment to get the message out to people.

From Finance to the Paranormal: Ann Treherne's Journey

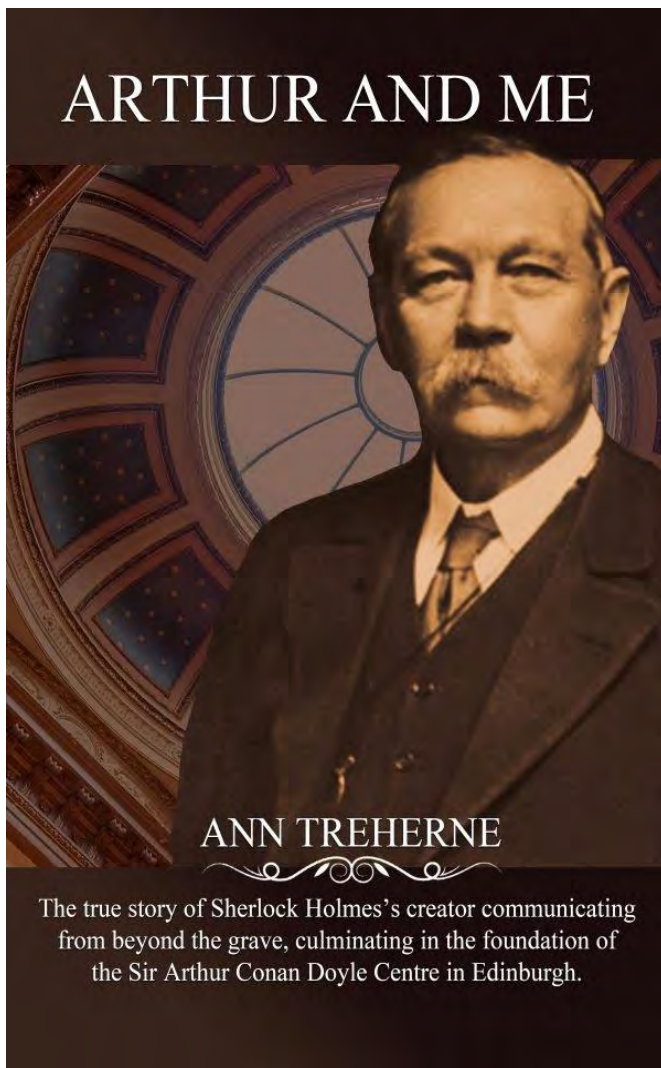
Once a senior manager in the financial sector, in her spiritual journey, Ann connected with a benevolent older gentleman from the etheric realm. Initially unaware of his identity, she soon discovered, through a series of Holmesian clues, that he was none other than Arthur Conan Doyle.

The Birth of The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre

This led to the establishment of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre, dedicated to Conan Doyle's mission of promoting the message of 'life after death' to people of all faiths and none. The outcome was her book, *Arthur and Me*. This was followed by her second book, *The Vortex*. Both books have been translated into Chinese, by Rongrong McLeod. The translation of these books for the Chinese audience highlights their deep interest in

spirituality and shows that Arthur Conan Doyle continues to influence Chinese society.

Arthur and Me and *The Vortex* are available on Amazon and at www.anntreherne.com.



Arthur and Me book cover

Jean Margaret Reid 1931 – 2024



Jean Reid in China

Jean was among the earliest members of the Scotland China Association and travelled as a member of delegations on several occasions. She was a proud Scot and a proud Glaswegian but also an enthusiast for almost everywhere and everything else. An unlabelled feminist and utopian, she travelled worldwide, bringing back objects, information and ideas. In addition to the People's Republic of China, her visits to Socialist or Communist countries included Albania, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Samarkand. Among her Scottish travels, she worked as a conservation volunteer on St. Kilda. Her motivation was not exclusively political.

Opera took her to Luxor, Manaus and Bayreuth. She was a champion of the arts, both visual and performance, and instrumental in the success of a number of ventures, including the Tron theatre and Glasgow's year as City of Culture. Julie Davidson, in her *Herald* obituary, notes Jean's faith in the transforming power of the arts for impoverished communities (Davidson, *The Herald* 31 August 2024).

Born in Pollokshields, Jean grew up in an atmosphere of intellectual inquiry. Her mother was a graduate teacher of French and her father a professional writer – editor of *The Bulletin*, a Glasgow daily newspaper concerned with highlighting Scottish issues, and author of books on the history of Scotland and Glasgow. The family sheltered free French soldiers during World War 2.

Jean studied at Glasgow University, where she made her mark, not least when, as President of the women's student union, she abolished supervision of the women's union decision-making by professors' wives. Following her

father's example she became a journalist, a profession which ideally suited her inquiring, questioning mind. When Jean embarked on her career, expectations were that a woman would work for a 'woman's' publication and write about 'women's' subject matter. She put in a brief stint on *The Glasgow Herald* but, as a young woman, her talents were restricted to the cuttings library. Another short period was spent on the in-house magazine of a Glasgow department store, then a move to Dundee, to work on DC Thomson's *My Weekly*, set her career in motion. Photos from that period reveal Jean entering into the spirit of things as a glamorous photographic model. But she was more often to be found on the other side of the camera, capturing the curious, the wonderful and the shocking, as she mined the truth about various societies and cultures. After several years with *The Times Educational Supplement* she joined the PR department of Strathclyde Region. She was there for its inception in 1978 and its demise in 1996. The high point of her career was as lead contact for Glasgow European City of Culture 1990.

I first met Jean when I was teaching a Chinese extra-mural class at Glasgow University. She was preparing for her first trip to China in 1973, as a member of a delegation of the Scotland China Association. I was also on that tour, and we became friends. Her interest in China remained, and for a time she acted as Treasurer of the SCA. Jean led a very busy life, but always had time for conversation and hospitality. I stayed with her at Eaglesham when snow prevented my getting back to Edinburgh, and enjoyed a family holiday in her flat on Broomielaw, dutifully attending the rain-soaked Glasgow Garden Festival.

In spite of her ageing faculties, she was bright and interested to the end, taking up painting, for which she had a talent and a wish, but which in her busy life had evaded her. My best memory of her final year was in her care home. We were chatting in a rather desultory fashion, against the background of the ever-present TV. Alfred Hitchcock's face appeared on the screen, with the series theme tune. 'Gounod,' said Jean, 'March of a Marionette.' Sharp as a tack, as ever.

Valerie Pellatt

Reading Room

Chinese Canadians: Voices from a Community

by Evelyn Huang with Lawrence Jeffery.

Douglas and McIntyre Ltd, Vancouver BC Canada 1992.

Reviewed by Walter Fung

The book contains interviews with 23 persons together with an essay entitled, 'The Chinese Minority in Canada 1858-1992; A Quest for Equality.' The author Evelyn Huang was educated in Hong Kong and emigrated to Canada in 1967.

All but three of those interviewed were middle aged or older professional people. None were working people, although some of those interviewed had humble beginnings when they first came to Canada and improved themselves. Three of them are of a different generation, young people in their early 20s and 30s. They discuss their aspirations and expectations of life in Canada. They are ambitious graduates - surprisingly, one is apparently uncomfortable being Chinese. They discuss a wide variety of subjects but are glad of the opportunities and choices they have in Canada. Most of the 23 had their origins in Hong Kong and their dialect would be Cantonese; their names are mainly in the Cantonese dialect. e.g., Yip, Lam, Mak, Bik. etc., although two have English surnames. Sixteen are male, seven are female.

Some of their experiences paralleled those of Chinese immigrants in other countries such as the US, Australia and from my own first-hand knowledge, in the UK. Many suffered discrimination and racism: name-calling and mocking the way Chinese spoke English. This was prevalent in Canada and other places influenced by the white supremacy attitude which was especially pronounced in the early 20th century.

All had an optimistic attitude with a determination and drive to improve themselves and to succeed. They hoped that future generations would have a better life than theirs, even though most of them had become successful professionals. All saw Canada as a land of opportunity, a 'wonderful

country', where they could make progress. Some had the choice of settling in other countries, such as Australia, but they chose Canada. They saw Canada as their home, with no intention of moving to another country and no intention of going 'home' to China, although they were all very conscious of their Chinese roots.

What all the Canadian immigrants had in common, in fact with Chinese all over the world, is the Confucian values of education and closeness to family and the influence of parents, yet without any mention of Confucius, Buddha or religion in any of the interviews. In common with Chinese all over the world, Chinese Canadians valued hard work. Like other overseas Chinese children, some went to 'Chinese Sunday School' to learn the Chinese language and culture. These Chinese Canadians, like Chinese all over the world, make an effort to retain their Chinese heritage. Some made an effort to visit their ancestral village and many kept in touch with relatives in China. In common with Chinese families in the UK and probably elsewhere, it is interesting that family members spoke Chinese at home but English outside the house.

Many had their origins in Hong Kong, some were born there and were brought to Canada by their parents. Others were born in Canada and are 'first generation' Chinese Canadians. The identity issue was discussed: are they Chinese or Canadian? This identity issue has been discussed by overseas Chinese in probably every country of the world. Essays and whole books have been written on the topic. The answer - if there can be a simple answer - is that they are neither. They have a separate identity of their own. In Canada they are Chinese Canadians. In the UK, British people of Chinese parents are termed BBCs: British Born Chinese.¹

¹ Editor's note: 'British-born Chinese' (BBC) and 'Scottish-born Chinese' (SBC) are common terms for people of Chinese ethnicity born in the United Kingdom. However, the newer term of 'British Chinese' began to emerge in the 1990s as a way to articulate a bicultural identity, and is used officially in census documents etc.

Many of the individuals interviewed, in common with overseas Chinese all over the world, have a preference to work for themselves. This is possibly influenced by difficulty in finding employment due to racism by the host communities. Self-employment was traditionally in laundries, then the restaurant trade. Some had been involved with laundry, but progressed to more professional occupations. There is little mention of existing operators of Chinese laundries or restaurants in this book, but there were hundreds of laundry businesses in Canada in earlier days. Many had gone by the 1960s and when interviews for this book were carried out. Some of those interviewed had associations with restaurants, but this was not their main activity.

All of the 23 interviewed, at the time of interviewing, were in very diverse but professional occupations which included lawyers, music composers, scientists, journalists, a newspaper publisher, jewellery designer, investment professional, professor of music. Some were making valuable contributions to research in their chosen professions, for example genetics. Some became entrepreneurs. Some entered public service, a number attaining very senior positions, one became a police commissioner, another a lieutenant-governor of British Columbia.

Two examples

Mr Lee Kum Sing, a professor of music. He was born of Chinese parents in Sumatra, Indonesia, where he was a witness to Japanese brutality. Lee's family went through very difficult times and they eventually went to Malaya, where he studied music. He travelled extensively to Australia, France, UK, USA and Germany, and lived in Singapore. He chose to settle in Canada because he believed it was a good place to bring up his three sons: one of the best countries in the world, as it is a young country and stable. Social programmes are good and the crime rate is not high. He said, 'If you work hard, you can do very well.' England was not the best place to bring them up.

Der Hoi-Yin was born in Hong Kong. Her parents were landowners in mainland China who had to leave because of revolutionary land reform.

Her Chinese name Hoi-Yin means ‘sea swallow’ and could imply ‘swallow returning to the nest’. Her father, despite having to leave China, was very attached to his homeland and gave his daughter this name. However, when the family arrived in Canada, her mother gave her the name Amy, in the hope that it would help her fit into an English-speaking environment more easily.

Her great-grandfather had come to Canada in 1890. He worked hard and managed to bring his wife and son to Canada. Their son returned to China to find a wife, but she was not allowed into Canada, because of the immigration laws in force at that time. Amy’s grandfather was an entrepreneur, setting up a supermarket and a restaurant. Amy’s father ran the restaurant, hiring Chinese cooks and Caucasian waitresses. He set up a Chinese cemetery complete with an altar to pray to the ancestors and he also established a Chinese School. Amy did not like going to the school, as it was in addition to the regular education, but now, in retrospect, she thinks it was good for the Chinese children.

As a child, Amy was conscious of being different, but where she was living, in Prince Rupert, there was no racism. It was a close-knit Chinese community and they celebrated the usual Chinese festivals, Chinese New Year, the Moon Festival and honoured the ancestors at Qing Ming (Tomb Sweeping).

When she married, her parents were relieved that she had married a man of Chinese descent. They did not like her dating Caucasian men. They advised her to ‘think of the children’. As a mother, she wants her children to do better than her. She believes children have a great future in Canada and says they should work twice as hard as the others, because, as a visible minority, they stand out, not like Germans or Scandinavians. She wants her children to adjust and assimilate, but remember where they came from. ‘We are all Canadians now. Be proud that you come from a Chinese heritage, but be proud of being Canadian.’

Amy says that her descendants will never be truly Chinese, even though they may look and even speak Chinese. They are Canadian, Chinese Canadian. She declares, ‘there is great potential in this country.’

The last chapter contains two essays which are extremely informative. One is a concise social history of the Chinese in Canada, the other, an account of the long struggle for equality for Chinese Canadians which was only granted in 1947, after World War 2. Chinese arriving in Canada were subject to racism and restrictions not applied to other immigrants. The racism was at government level. Until 1947, Chinese Canadians were second class citizens. In fact they were not citizens at all - not allowed to vote or to live or travel where they wanted to. New arrivals had to register and between 1885 and 1923, a number of laws made life difficult for the Chinese to earn a living. From 1885, on arrival, they had to pay a ‘head tax’ designed to restrict immigration. After 1923, immigration of Chinese, apart from merchants and students was not allowed at all. This led to families being separated for long periods of time.



Chinese association buildings in Vancouver

The restrictions on immigration produced a generation of Chinese ‘married bachelors’ unable to bring their wives or families into Canada. In 1931 there were 1200 Chinese men for every 100 Chinese women. At that time there were 49,519 Chinese in Canada. Of these only 12% were actually born in Canada, despite Chinese being present in the country for 73 years: Chinese had begun arriving in Canada from 1858, almost entirely men who had travelled north, after the Californian Gold Rush was over, to pan for gold at the Fraser River. 11,000 Chinese arrived during 1881-85 to build the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Young Chinese Canadians volunteered to fight in World War 2. It was a difficult decision: to serve or not? Some held the view, ‘Why fight for a country that treats us badly and does not allow us to vote?’ Others held the view ‘Let’s go and serve and when we return, we will have solid credentials to demand our rights.’ Many young Canadians did enlist in the Canadian army and there was a special Chinese Canadian force, termed ‘Force 136’ (sometimes termed the ‘Suicide Squad 136’), which was dropped behind enemy lines in the Pacific war arenas. After the war was over the issue of Chinese who had fought for Canada but were not able to vote was recognised and Chinese Canadians finally got the vote in 1947. As Canadian citizens with the vote they were freed from other restrictions. But this did not solve all the problems they had to face. Even today some face incidents of racism, noting that immigrants are blamed for problems such as unemployment, rising prices and housing costs. In more recent times, especially with the arrival of wealthy Hong Kongers, some white Canadians resent the wealth and economic success of these people and wealthy Chinese in general. Some Chinese Canadians are still conscious of the attitude of ‘white supremacy.’

This is an informative and enlightening account of the Chinese Canadians which shows typical characteristics and outlook of Chinese all over the world, the value of education and hard work and the importance of family. They are making valuable contributions to the arts, medical sciences and the social and civic fabric of Canada. However, the book is the voice of

middle-class Chinese Canadians: only middle-class professionals were included; none were ordinary working-class people.

The Chinese community in Canada has evolved and developed since the 1850s. This book was published in 1992 and the interviews probably took place in the late 1980s. Canada has changed and progressed since then. In 1978, China opened up and reformed and gradually many mainland Chinese from other parts of China, not just Hong Kong, have arrived in Canada: modern ‘voices’ may be different.



Further suggestions for reading on this topic

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Yee, Paul. (2006) *Saltwater City, An illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver*. Vancouver/Toronto/Berkeley: Douglas and McIntyre.

Other Rivers: a Chinese education

Hessler, Peter

(2024) London: Atlantic Books

Reviewed by Valerie Pellatt

Some readers will be familiar with *River Town*, Hessler's previous book, which recorded his time in the late 1990s as a Peace Corps volunteer in Fuling University, a city on the Yangzi River in Sichuan Province. In *Other Rivers* Hessler is back in China, this time as Chengdu correspondent for *The New Yorker*. He also teaches an English course at SCUPI, Sichuan University Pittsburgh Institute. As the book progresses, he describes the changes that have taken place in the two decades since his first spell of teaching. In between these two periods as a teacher, he had spent seven years as Beijing correspondent for *The New Yorker*.

As a seasoned journalist, Hessler knows how to exploit not only his situation, but also the people around him. A large part of the book consists of direct quotation (no doubt copy-edited and proof-read) from his Chinese students. In his acknowledgements he gives credit to these young people – some not much younger than himself, and explains that they agreed to the use of their emails and conversations, and that most agreed to the use of their names in the text. Hessler is canny – it seems that almost all the work that he sets and the discussion in class are aimed at eliciting the students' experiences and views about their own lives as Chinese citizens. At times, I felt I was reading an anthropological study. Personally, considering the sensitivity of some of the material, I would have had reservations about publishing names and direct quotations. Hessler's own children are not excluded from the study: in Chengdu they attend the local school. This means that the Hessler parents are intimately involved in parents' chat groups, parents' evenings and so on, providing more rich reportage.

Hessler's detailed documentation paints a vivid picture of two decades of political, economic and social change in the lives of his students. Better food and living conditions have produced taller, healthier youngsters. The wasteful corruption of the 1990s, when businessmen were obliged to drink

and smoke to excess at banquets, have been replaced under the aegis of Xi Jinping by cleaner living. There is no limit to wealth if one is prepared to seize opportunities and work hard, as in the case of the enterprising former student who sees that elevators are what every flat-dweller wants. On the other hand, there are those who remain poor despite their hard work. Yet in this well-fed, wealthy society, there are political clamp-downs and bureaucratic cover-ups. Many young people are devotees of *'runxue'* – run 学 – the philosophy of leaving China.

So far, so predictable. In Part 2, Covid strikes, and things get interesting. Hessler and his family stay on in China, marooned in their apartment. Hessler takes careful note of what his neighbours are buying during lockdown. Online shopping reveals the extent to which the Chinese consumer has changed in the twenty-first century, for example in the purchase of giant TV screens. The Chinese authorities take advantage of hi-tech solutions: students enter and exit campus by means of facial recognition, robots deliver packages on campus. While critical of many Chinese government practices and policies, Hessler is not sceptical about the low number of cases and deaths with Covid reported in China. He believes however, that the third period of lockdown was unnecessary and over-harsh, and it did lead to public protest.



Hessler book with post-it notes

Hessler and his family brave Covid in China, but in 2021, when his contract is due for renewal, his application is rejected. The Chengdu American consulate has closed, and he is advised to leave China.

This book was recommended to me by a Chinese friend – her copy bristles with

post-it notes. Language-wise it is an easy read. Some of the content is familiar, but the voices of Hessler's articulate students reverberate in their critical assessments of twenty-first century China.

If you are interested in Traditional Chinese Medicine, or snakes, you may enjoy the following:

Dharmananda, Subhuti. (1997) The Medicinal Use of Snakes in China. Institute of Traditional Medicine, Portland, Oregon.

<http://www.itmonline.org/arts/snakes.htm>

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Pig	1911	1923	1935	1947	1959	1971	1983	1995	2007	2019
Rat	1912	1924	1936	1948	1960	1972	1984	1996	2008	2020
Ox	1913	1925	1937	1949	1961	1973	1985	1997	2009	2021
Tiger	1914	1926	1938	1950	1962	1974	1986	1998	2010	2022
Rabbit	1915	1927	1939	1951	1963	1975	1987	1999	2011	2023
Dragon	1916	1928	1940	1952	1964	1976	1988	2000	2012	2024
Snake	1917	1929	1941	1953	1965	1977	1989	2001	2013	2025
Horse	1918	1930	1942	1954	1966	1978	1990	2002	2014	2026
Goat	1919	1931	1943	1955	1967	1979	1991	2003	2015	2027

